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Le deuxième souffle (Second breath), Melville, Jean-Pierre, 1965
Le cercle rouge (The red circle), Melville, Jean-Pierre, 1970
Léon Morin, prêtre (Leon Morin, priest), Melville, Jean-Pierre, 1961
Le chagrin et la pitié (The sorrow and the pity), Ophüls, Marcel, 1969
The Driver, Hill, Walter, 1978
La mort en direct (Death watch), Tavernier, Bertrand, 1979
Les enfants terribles (The strange ones), Melville, Jean-Pierre, 1949
Thief, Mann, Michael, 1981
The asphalt jungle, Huston, John, 1950
Un flic (Dirty money), Melville, Jean-Pierre, 1972
Le trou (The hole), Becker, Jacques, 1960
L'armee des ombres (Army of shadows), Melville, Jean-Pierre, 1969
Bob le flambeur (Bob the gambler), Melville, Jean-Pierre, 1956
Point blank, Boorman, John, 1967
Touchez pas au grisbi (Grisbi), Becker, Jacques, 1954
Du rififi chez les hommes (Rififi), Dassin, Jules, 1955
An Unsuitable job for a woman, Petit, Chris, 1982
Quand tu liras cette lettre (When you read this letter), Melville, Jean-Pierre, 1953

JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE In Context

FRENCH CINEMA •THREE•

Jean-Pierre Melville makes the most moving films I know. This may seem a strange claim for a film-maker whose relatively small output almost all deals with the fast, hard-nosed action of the thriller world; but whatever delight Melville takes in attending to the flinty realities of how to crack a safe or how to rub out an unwelcome enemy (and he takes a very large delight in them all), it's clear that his real interests lie further below the surface. Whether it is a solitary Alain Delon, hunted down like a lone wolf in *Le Samourai*, or Lino Ventura pondering upon the meaning of his own future death in a Gestapo cell in *L'Armée des ombres*, Melville's constant ground-bass is the emotional well-springs of action. In a loose category like 'action' film, there are many directors (Peckinpah, Walter Hill) who are good enough to show the *why* of violent action, but there are very few who, like Melville, can demonstrate the passionate feelings that action generates.

Melville's historical importance to cinema is two-fold. At a time in the early 50s when *film noir* was dying in the States, he kept the torch alight with films like *Bob le flambeur* and *Le Doulos*, where he lovingly resuscitated a world in which laconic men in trenchcoats came through the door with a gun in each hand; and he then handed back the flame to the Americans when Hollywood entered its modernist phase of *noir* with films like *Point Blank*. Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that he is universally acknowledged in France as the father of their new wave, in spite of strenuous denials on his part that such a thing existed. His entrenched position as a fiercely independent film-maker, writing, producing and shooting in a fast, breathless way, pointed the way to a new generation of directors anxious to storm the establishment on few resources.

That such a man could switch successfully from such supercharged gangster films to the emotional minefield of the Bressonian *Léon Morin, prêtre* is a slap in the face to the sloppy shorthand psychology that suggests men and women of action are deficient in feeling. There's a line in Raymond Chandler in which a woman asks how a tough man like Philip Marlowe could be as tender as he is. It gets the reply: 'If I wasn't tough I wouldn't be alive. And if I wasn't tender I wouldn't deserve to be.' A little slick out of context perhaps, romantic certainly, and I doubt if Melville would have approved – but it fits. —Chris Peachment.

Chris Peachment is a film critic who writes for The Times and Time Out amongst other publications.

Melville's favourite film. He claimed that there were exactly 19 possible variations on his favourite 'cops and robbers situation' and that this was the only film to use all 19. Small-time crook Sterling Hayden finds himself fighting the city as much as the syndicate and the cops, while dreaming all the while of horses in a green field. Surely Huston's finest film; 'If you want fresh air, don't look for it in this town,' might stand as the summation of *film noir*. USA 1950/Dir John Huston. With Sam Jaffe, Marilyn Monroe.

Sat 5 Mar
6.15 8.30

**The Asphalt
Jungle**



Melville's first feature, made completely independently, is about a German officer billeted in the French countryside who falls in love with a French girl. The Occupation and its effects upon people's emotional life are recurrent Melvillean themes. David Thomson calls it a 'concentrated, sensitive, interior film... important to the development of Bresson, Astruc, Resnais and possibly Rohmer.' France 1947/Dir Melville. Plus *Vingt Quatre Heures de la vie d'un clown* (1946), Melville's first and only short, a showcase for the clown Bèby.

Sun 6 Mar
6.15 8.30

**Le Silence
de la mer**



Surely the definitive documentary on life under the German occupation. By concentrating on the local neighbourhood of Clermont Ferrand (the seat of the Vichy government) Ophüls automatically draws us into projecting how we too might have behaved. Melville, a Jew who served in the Resistance, admired the film greatly, for it summoned back his own wartime emotions: 'Grief of course... the pity later... but above all there was shame.' France-Switzerland-Germany 1971/Dir Marcel Ophüls. 260 mins. All seats bookable at £3.00.

Mon 7 Mar
6.10

**The Sorrow
and the Pity**
(Le Chagrin et la pitié)



Directed at Cocteau's request, Melville's version of Cocteau's novel, about the dark, erotic games played out in retreat from the world by a pair of twins, is arguably much better than any of Cocteau's films. The fantasy and sense of magic gain immeasurably from being firmly anchored in Melville's lucid realities. Melville and Cocteau appear briefly together as diners on a train. France 1949/Dir Melville. With Nicole Stéphane, Edouard Dermithe.

Wed 9 Mar
6.30

**Les Enfants
terribles**



Interesting to compare *Les Enfants terribles* with Cocteau's own direction in *Orphée*. Better than any film-maker, Cocteau realised the possibilities for fantasy that lie at the very heart of cinema. His modern version of the Orphic myth about the poet who pursues his love into the underworld is a thrilling fusion of the real and the fantastic involving dead people with live emotions. Melville remembered Cocteau: 'I loved that man. He was intelligence, charm, talent itself... one of the elite.' France 1950/Dir Jean Cocteau. With Jean Marais.

Wed 9 Mar
8.45

Orphée





Thu 10 Mar
6.15 8.30

When You Read This Letter

(Quand tu liras cette lettre)

Every film-maker is allowed a *film maudit*, although they are usually more revealing about their creator than many more accomplished works. This story, about a young girl who foregoes her vocation to be a nun in order to nurse her sister, is the one that Melville liked least. However it offers the irresistible attraction of Juliette Gréco, that spirit of all things Gallic, as a remembrance of the great days of post-war Saint-Germain-des-Prés, when Django Reinhardt played at the Club Saint-Germain. *France 1953/Dir Melville. With Philippe Lemaire.*



Sun 13 Mar
4.15

Bob the Gambler

(Bob le flambeur)

Currently enjoying a prestigious revival in New York, this is the crux of Melville's career: his first original script and his first essay into the *noir* world of laconic men in raincoats who keep their hats on indoors, treacherous women and dirty money. Bob is the aged gangster, possessed by gambling fever, who has designs on both the roulette wheel and the vaults of the casino. Shot between dusk and dawn, a love letter to Paris. *France 1955/Dir Melville. With Roger Duchesne, Isabelle Corey.*



Sun 13 Mar
6.30

Grisbi

(Touchez pas au grisbi)

A great French gangster film, initiator of the *série noire*, and included here because Jacques Becker played an important role in Melville's life as friend and mentor. The robbery is already completed at the start of this story of dishonour among thieves; what remains is the fight to the death for the loot. Lino Ventura, a true Melvillean hero, appears in his first film role (Becker spotted him wrestling), opposite Jean Gabin in usual avuncular form. *France 1954/Dir Jacques Becker. With Jeanne Moreau.*



Sun 13 Mar
8.45

The Hole

(Le Trou)

Jacques Becker's final film, and undoubtedly his greatest, was shot at Melville's own studio and apparently held a special place in Melville's heart. Four prisoners tunnel their way out of jail and thus achieve a bond through common purpose. The claustrophobia of cell life lends a Bressonian intimacy to the emotions of courage and idealism, although Melville was probably more interested by the inevitable betrayal of close friends. *France 1960/Dir Jacques Becker. With Philippe Leroy, Marc Michel.*



Tue 15 Mar
6.30

Deux hommes dans Manhattan

Melville's love letter to New York. Two journalists, one played by Melville himself, set out to trace the French UN delegate in New York, only to find that he has died at his mistress's apartment and there is the danger of scandal. Parisian interiors are cunningly matched with New York exteriors ('Except for Times Square . . . New York is as dark as it is beautiful'). The shot of a packet of Boyards cigarettes is a nod to Godard's favoured brand, from the days when Melville still liked Godard. *France 1958/Dir Melville.*

Godard's return compliment to Melville was to give him the role of Parvulesco, the novelist interviewed by Jean Seberg. He played it like Nabokov ('subtle, pretentious, pedantic, naïve') and then instructed Godard to remove the scene. It stayed and Melville thought the result excellent. The film is of course a classic, a combined parody and *hommage* to the American thriller, and initiated what came to be called the 'nouvelle vague.' *France 1959/Dir Jean-Luc Godard. With Jean-Paul Belmondo.*

Melville's conscious bid for a wider audience, cunningly uniting two of his perennial themes, the Occupation and matters of the spirit. As the Germans march into her town, Emmanuelle Riva is just as decisively invaded by God. Behind the closed doors and unheated rooms of the Occupation, her sacred and profane love affair with her priest, Belmondo, is dissected with a delicacy that has nothing to do with restraint. *France 1961/Dir Melville.*

Spiritual cinema at its purest. A young priest fails in his attempts to resolve the problems of the community; assailed by self doubts, he dies of stomach cancer, murmuring 'Tout est grâce'. An interior speculation on the operation of grace in our daily lives. Melville claimed that Bresson did not become 'Bressonian' until after his own *Le Silence de la mer* (1947), a claim that it should now be possible to verify. *France 1951/Dir Robert Bresson. With Claude Laydu, Jean Riveyre.*

One of the most famous French gangster films; in fact Melville was first assigned to direct it, but claimed he was very pleased with Dassin's final product. A tale of dishonour among thieves, the film is drenched in the sleazy world of Montmartre and is famed for its long, realistically detailed sequence of a silent bank raid – a very Melvillean touch. *France 1955/Dir Jules Dassin. With Jean Servais, Carl Mohner.*

An ex-prisoner uses a known informer in order to commit one more crime; interrupted by the police he sets out to revenge himself on his betrayer. Typical of Melville is the theme of trust and betrayal, set in a world where sudden death can be a solution. The film contains one shot of 9 minutes 38 seconds, one of two long takes of which Melville was especially proud (the other is the opening of *L'Armée des ombres*). *France 1962/Dir Melville. With Jean-Paul Belmondo, Serge Reggiani, Michel Piccoli.*

Tue 15 Mar
8.45

Breathless

(À bout de souffle)



Thu 17 Mar
6.20

Léon Morin, Priest

(Léon Morin, prêtre)



Thu 17 Mar
6.15 8.30

Diary of a Country Priest

(Le Journal d'un curé de campagne)



Sun 20 Mar
4.15 8.45

Rififi

(Du rififi chez les hommes)



Sun 20 Mar
6.30

Le Doulos





Mon 21 Mar
6.00

Magnet of Doom

(L'Ainé des Ferchaux)

Faithful in spirit to the Simenon novel, but deviating completely from its storyline the film is about an unprincipled old banker who has made a dubious fortune, flees to America to avoid reprisals but is double-crossed by his young secretary (Belmondo). The film contains the first boxing match that Belmondo did on screen (in which the French champion Auzel actually knocks him out), which was intended as an *homage* to *The Set Up*. France 1962/Dir Melville. With Charles Vanel.



Mon 21 Mar
6.15 8.30

The Set Up

Pace *Raging Bull*, which is about masochism rather than fighting, this is one of the best boxing pictures of all time. Robert Ryan, fighting in an odd crouching style, is superb as the battered old professional, waiting for one last victory before retiring with his girl. The alleyways, training gyms, changing rooms all smell of defeat; *noir* at its very greatest. Robert Wise occupied a place alongside Huston in Melville's pantheon. USA 1949/Dir Robert Wise.



Wed 23 Mar
6.00

Second Breath

(Le Deuxième Souffle)

A gangland killing in Paris, a heist in Marseilles, and the only connection between the two is escaped convict Lino Ventura, a nemesis in a trenchcoat. The first of the films of the late 60s when Melville was at the height of his powers and produced four films of incomparable excitement. The lengthy preparation and execution of the hold-up on a winding mountain road is a brilliant set-piece of sustained tension: Ventura is as strong as a hill. France 1966/Dir Melville. With Paul Meurisse. 150 mins.



Wed 23 Mar
8.45

Violent Streets

(Thief)

James Caan is the independent safe-cracker, a man who has walked through hell in jail and now wishes to pursue his highly technical craft alone. However, both the local mafia and the police are leaning on him. Modernist *film noir* at its very best, full of Chicago's rain-soaked waterfronts and dives; the debt to Melville is plain throughout, not just in the extended details of the heists, but in the whole mood. There is a fitting electronic score from Tangerine Dream. USA 1981/Dir Michael Mann. With Tuesday Weld.



Thu 24 Mar
6.30

Point Blank

The great US *noir* of the 60s, which virtually reinvented the genre for Hollywood and introduced a modernist vein to sustain itself. Lee Marvin, the lethal 'Walker', double-crossed and left for dead on Alcatraz, comes back from the grave to collect his money and can find only faceless executives and plastic cards. A fabulous, vicious allegory for modern corporate America, filmed in a dreamlike, sensuous style, all of which may be the last few seconds of a dying man's thoughts. USA 1967/Dir John Boorman. With Angie Dickinson.

Surely Melville's greatest: a contract killer who has a watertight alibi from his mistress, yet is picked out from a line-up by a man who has never seen him. Alain Delon, the man with the coldest face in Europe, is the solitary psychopath, executing his contracts in white gloves with the meticulous ritual of a high mass, and falling for a black chanteuse in a chromium night club. A fallen angel on a dark street. France 1967/Dir Melville. With Nathalie Delon.

Thu 24 Mar
8.45/
Fri 25 Mar
6.30

Le Samouraï



A virtual remake of *Le Samouraï*, which should point up the excellence of the original. Hill's version also revolves around an alibi, but for a getaway driver in Los Angeles whose trademarks are an extreme cool, silence, and ace driving. The chases are the very best ever seen, Ryan O'Neal wears dark glasses at night and, as *Time Out* remarked, everyone looks like they haven't slept for weeks. A fine genuflection to the master. USA 1978/Dir Walter Hill. With Isabelle Adjani.

Fri 25 Mar
8.45

Driver



Undoubtedly Melville's one from the heart. Subtly transforming the life of the underworld into the wartime Resistance, he recounts an almost unbearably moving tale of acts of secret courage. Central to Melville's vision is the loyalty that springs from bonds of professionalism, and the concomitant terror of betrayal. The opening shot of a German column marching down the Champs-Élysées was shot clandestinely at six in the morning and is a heart-stopper. France 1969/Dir Melville. With Lino Ventura, Simone Signoret. 140 mins.

Mon 28 Mar
6.00

The Army in the Shadows

(L'Armée des ombres)



Made by Melville's one time assistant Bertrand Tavernier, and shamefully underrated when released, the film is set in a near future when no one dies; Harvey Keitel, with cameras set in his eyes, is assigned to watch Romy Schneider die from the last fatal illness for TV. A bizarre mixture of American and Continental actors, Glaswegian and Highland settings, cold voyeurism and love, which is haunted, like so much Melville, by the spectre of death. France-W Germany 1980/Dir Bertrand Tavernier. With Harry Dean Stanton.

Mon 28 Mar
8.45

Death Watch

(La Mort en direct)



A film which revolves almost completely around the preparation and execution of a robbery, an unmistakable Melville stamp. Note the meticulous construction of each scene, the ingenious ideas for the heist and Melville's delight in allowing the robbery's inherent drama to unfold at its own pace. Yves Montand, in his only role for Melville, is the marksman, tormented by an alcoholic haze of rats and spiders crawling all over him. Bourvil is the cop tracking him and Delon. Sublime excitement. France 1970/Dir Melville. 150 mins.

Tue 29 Mar
6.00

The Red Circle

(Le Cercle rouge)





Thu 31 Mar
6.30

Dirty Money
(Un flic)

Melville's valediction has a near total disregard for continuity of time and place, but an absolute coherence in terms of mood. Delon is the morose *flic* pursuing his alter ego across a darkening urban landscape, and falling for Deneuve's impenetrable beauty en route. A bitter meditation on disenchantment and defeat, its mood belongs more to the blues than *noir*. It's like watching someone's dying testament, gasped out in brief phrases; as cold and hermetic as Deneuve's face. *France 1972/Dir Melville.*



Tue 31 Mar
8.45

**An Unsuitable
Job for a
Woman**

Like *The Draughtsman's Contract*, Petit's film looks at a very English theme in a very unEnglish way; country house murders will never seem the same again. The suicide of a rich architect's son yields up a cruel tale of warped sexuality, perverted inheritance and murderous sins within the family; definitely Melville country, quite aside from the use of model shots that strongly echo *Un flic*. A rare refutation of Truffaut's dictum that England and cinema are mutually exclusive. *GB 1981/Dir Chris Petit. With Pippa Guard, Billie Whitelaw.*