

## Document Citation

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# L'ARGENT

(NR)

(CINECOM INTERNATIONAL)

Color/1.85

90 Mins.

Cast: Christian Patey, Sylvie van den Elsen, Michel Briguef, Caroline Lang, Jeanne Aplekman.

Credits: Written and directed by Robert Bresson. Directors of photography: Pasqualino de Santis, Emmanuel Machuel. Art direction: Pierre Guffroy. Produced by Marion's Films, FR3 and EOS Films (Switzerland).

French director Robert Bresson's latest—an austere, minimalist, stylized, downbeat tale about the circumstances surrounding the material and moral ruination of a decent young man—is an exquisite example of the control a filmmaker can exercise over his work. This is quintessential Bresson and essential viewing for his acolytes, but there's probably not much audience beyond that specialized circle.

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Screenwriter/director Robert Bresson adapted *L'Argent*, the despairing story of a decaying human spirit, from a short Tolstoy piece. The plot's dire chain of events envelops a young truck driver who loses his job after unwittingly circulating some counterfeit bills. Needing money for his family, he becomes involved in a bank heist which lands him in prison. While serving time, the hero (really an "anti-hero") learns that his young daughter has died and his wife has deserted him. Things go from bad to worse and his life takes a decidedly violent and ugly turn.

In spite of these heavy dramatic elements, the narrative is not nearly as important as Bresson's pessimistic theme and his poetic, contemplative, astringent style—both of which have been consistent throughout his long career. Again Bresson rarely moves the camera but holds on empty rooms as characters enter and exit frame. (Indeed, *L'Argent* has more opening and closing doors than a Feydeau farce). The acting, too, is stylized but convincing. Bresson's cast of unknowns are like dream figures delivering their lines matter-of-factly, without a betrayal of emotion. *L'Argent* is terribly serious because humor just doesn't exist in Bresson's world. Pacing and tone—rigidly controlled—never vary, even when violent acts rudely jolt the narrative. Like so much of Bresson's oeuvre, *L'Argent* can be appreciated in both Marxist and existentialist terms, but the overall message seems to be that we mortals are too often the hapless victims of inevitable forces beyond our control. This is a familiar and tenable point of view, but Bresson has a unique and very personal way of conveying it.

The bottom line: *L'Argent* is only for those who know an "auteur" when they see one and have the patience and inclination to savor Bresson's hermetically sealed-off celluloid universe.

—D.T.