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PICKPOCKET

Director: Robert Bresson

France 1959 75 minutes

Cast: Martin Lassalle, Marika Green

PICKPOCKET

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Bresson's masterpiece was voted the greatest postwar French film by *Cahiers du cinéma*, which somehow doesn't do it justice. As René Prédal has argued, it is one of four films, along with Resnais' HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR, Antonioni's L'AVVENTURA, and Godard's BREATHLESS, that "constitute the quartet of germinal films of the modern cinema." PICKPOCKET has exercised an enormous influence on directors as disparate as Fassbinder, Akerman, Scorsese, Aki Kaurismäki, Malle (who called it "one of four or five great dates in the history of cinema"), and Schrader (who pronounced it "an unmitigated masterpiece" and lifted its ending for the denouement of his own AMERICAN GIGOLO). Loosely based on Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Bresson's intense portrait of a compulsive pickpocket who believes himself above the moral constraints of common humanity turns the mechanics of theft into a ritual both erotically and spiritually charged. The "ballets of thievery," as Cocteau called them, are among the most beautifully choreographed and edited sequences in cinema. "A film of dazzling originality. On its first viewing, it risks burning your eyes. So, do like me: Go back to see it again every day. . . . If you deny this film, it is cinema itself as an autonomous art that you call into question" (Louis Malle).