

Delon/Gabin/Verneuil: Modernity within Tradition

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Delon made his film debut in 1957 playing a young hit man in Yves Allégret's *Quand la femme sans mêle/Send a Woman When the Devil Fails*. After a string of internationally recognized performances in René Clément's *Plein soleil/Purple Noon* (1960), Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and his Brothers* (1960), and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'eclisse/The Eclipse* (1962), in 1963, Delon returned to French cinema and to the crime film of his debut appearing opposite Jean Gabin in Henri Verneuil's hugely successful *Mélodie en sous-sol/Any Number Can Win* (1963). Delon was keen to achieve popular stardom in French cinema at a time when Jean-Paul Belmondo's appearance opposite Gabin in Verneuil's comedy *Un singe en hiver/A Monkey in Winter* (1962) had granted him mainstream star status. Delon hadn't yet established the tough guy persona that would become his trademark and this return to the gangster genre marked the beginning of a transition in his star persona, between Clément's *Plein soleil* and his tough gangster image of the later 1960s, notably in *Le Samouraï/The Samurai* (Jean-Pierre Melville, 1967), *Le Clan des Siciliens/The Sicilian Clan* (Verneuil, 1969), and *Borsalino* (Jacques Deray, 1969). Given Gabin's status as the godfather of French cinema, it is important to examine the significance of this cinematic couple and what this reveals about the tensions between modernity and tradition, which are the crucible of the Delon persona.

This chapter explores the pairing of Delon and Gabin in the popular heist movies *Mélodie en sous-sol* (1963) and *Le Clan des Siciliens* (1969), both directed by Henri Verneuil, one of the most successful French popular auteurs of postwar cinema. *Mélodie en sous-sol*, the first film uniting the young Delon with the

mature Gabin, is a seminal crime film of the early 1960s, both in terms of its box-office success and in terms of the formation of Delon's popular tough guy image, marking a turning point in his career (Brassart 2004, 180). Similarly, *Le Clan des Siciliens* was successful as a vehicle for both stars, this time alongside Lino Ventura, yet another iconic figure of French on-screen masculinity. Verneuil's films reiterate a similar scenario with Delon as the surrogate son offering Gabin, the symbolic father, a narcissistic (and nostalgic) mirror image of masculinity. However, as we shall see, in *Le Clan des Siciliens*, the father-son relationship has evolved. Delon is not an inexperienced young apprentice anymore and is totally isolated from the clan. He is killed by the patriarch.

This chapter examines how Delon's projection of an increasingly wounded melancholic masculinity is constructed in a dialectical opposition to the bourgeois patriarchal figure incarnated by what Ginette Vincendeau has described as "the Gabin paradigm" (Vincendeau 2000, 70). Detailed attention will be given to the contradictory values these two masculine archetypes incarnate and how they yield "both connections and oppositions" (Brassart 2004, 186) that reflect on some of the tensions and contradictions of postwar French society. Reference will also be made to their final pairing in *Deux hommes dans la ville/Two Men in Town* (José Giovanni, 1973) in order to account for the specificity of this cinematic couple.

Considering the pairing of Gabin and Delon is helpful in order to elucidate the specific representation of masculinity that has underpinned Delon's star persona and allowed him to build such a long lasting career in popular French film. Although he has been paired with many international male stars, the duo with Gabin offers an illuminating insight into the articulation of the Delon persona when confronted with the structuring figure of dominant French masculinity represented by the older star. In all their films together, the staging of masculinity is shaped through the aforementioned father-son relationship and I argue here that it is possible to read them together in terms of the changing configuration of a filial bond which is organized according to a three act structure; the establishment of their relationship and the world they live in; the antagonism and crisis; and finally the reconciliation and the resolution of their story. While *Mélodie en sous-sol* and *Le Clan des Siciliens* differ in terms of their narrative dramatization of generational conflict, with *Deux hommes dans la ville*, they provide a setting for the unraveling of symbolic relationships centered on the figure of an aging criminal patriarch and his unruly gangster "son."

Henri Verneuil and popular French cinema

Between 1962 and 1963, Verneuil directed two films based on the same premise: pairing Gabin, the doyen of French cinema, with an emblematic figure of the emerging generation of French film actors. Gabin appeared opposite Jean-Paul Belmondo in *Un singe en hiver* (this was their only partnership). In contrast to Belmondo's comic persona, Delon developed an ambiguous *homme fatal* image through his association with the thriller genre, which had begun his career. *Mélodie en sous-sol* was Delon's first French mainstream film after his interlude in prestigious Italian auteur films and, as mentioned, it also marked his return to the *policier* after his debut in *Quand la femme sans mêle* where he played Jo, a cold-blooded but also sentimental and vulnerable young hit man who comes to a tragic end. A character blending both feminine and masculine traits, this role fashioned his star persona (Brassart 2004, 150). Both Delon and Gabin played an important role in the popularity of the *policier*. *Touchez pas au Grisbi/Hands Off the Loot*, Jacques Becker's 1954 landmark film about aging gangsters set in the Parisian milieu, has been credited with marking both the flourishing of the genre in postwar French cinema and with reviving Gabin's postwar career. Discussing the evolution of the Gabin persona, Ginette Vincendeau shows how the star had moved on to occupy the place of a patriarchal father figure, "a reassuring point of identification in a time of great change and modernization" (Vincendeau 2000, 76). In the majority of his postwar films, Gabin is placed within a male group where his manhood is structured by a dynamic where the narrative contrasts his virility with one or two masculine doubles which are either pale copies or frightening symbols of otherness. Vincendeau also observes that the narcissism of the glamorous proletarian hoodlum associated with the prewar Gabin persona is deflected away from his person and relayed through the figure of a young handsome hero positioned as a symbolic son "who is nevertheless a pale 'shadow' of himself" (1995, 256).

Verneuil was known for his popular thrillers, frequently featuring some of the biggest stars of French cinema, and enjoyed a career spanning forty years and over thirty films. Verneuil was born Achod Malachian and his Armenian refugee family had arrived in France in 1924, settling in Marseilles. Verneuil entered the film industry in 1949 after having successfully convinced Fernandel, one of the biggest stars of the era, to appear for free in his first short film. Fernandel subsequently appeared in Verneuil's first six features, all of which had immense box office success. After traditional comedy, Verneuil moved on to thrillers

and psychological dramas and the commercial success of his films opened the doors of Hollywood to him, as well as a number of big budget international productions, though they were not as successful as his French thrillers.

Most of Verneuil's films were big budget, commercial successes, often adapted from popular literary classics, featuring some of the biggest stars of the moment. In addition to the harnessing of star power, which made his films massively popular with French audiences, Verneuil also often chose to work with a regular set of scriptwriters and dialogue writers such as Michel Audiard. The reason why his films have not sustained critical acclaim is due in part because of the lack of general interest for French popular filmmakers (both in and outside France) and because he was at some point the *bête noire* of the French New Wave, a perfect manifestation of what they wanted to dislodge—a technically brilliant craftsman whose work often offers challenges to the notion of authorship. In addition, one could argue that rather than the director, the source of meaning and signification in the films of Verneuil are the stars. While much work on the French crime film has focused on Jean-Pierre Melville (see, for example, Vincendeau 2003), with whom he is often negatively compared, Verneuil has been largely ignored by film history and apart from a largely biographical study of his life and work (Vignaud 2008), little scholarly attention has been paid to the masculine world of Verneuil's thrillers. Like Melville, and in the tradition of French crime cinema more generally, Verneuil's noir thrillers are male stories and the male characters in his films inhabit a homosocial milieu that mostly exclude or marginalize women. However, in contrast with Melville's "abstract, generic noir space" (Vincendeau 2003, 146), in the films of Verneuil, the social background of the characters is often carefully sketched. One difference between the two directors also lies in the way that they use the Delon persona. For instance, in contrast with Melville's view of autistic masculinity and male existential loneliness where Delon plays an asexual tragic hero who has renounced sexuality (Pillard 2011, 91), in his Verneuil films, as we will see, he is both a gangster and a playboy who fails because of his sexual desire for and association with women.

Generational tensions in postwar France: *Mélodie en sous-sol*

Mélodie en sous-sol was the first in a series of high budget crime thrillers directed by Verneuil (his seventh collaboration with Audiard and his fourth with Gabin after *Des gens sans importance/People of No Importance* (1956), *Le Président/The*

President (1961), and *Un singe en hiver* (1962)). Partly produced by MGM, the second role (to Gabin as protagonist) was initially intended for Jean-Louis Trintignant. However, Delon, keen to appear in a big budget mainstream French film with Gabin, managed to get the part by agreeing to receive the distribution rights for Japan, China, and the USSR instead of a salary. With more than three million viewers in France, it was a big commercial hit though critics were divided about the film. Drawn from the American roman noir *The Big Grab* by novelist John Trinian, the film is a classic heist movie and a prime example of the French *policiers* of the postwar period, such as *Touchez pas au Grisbi* and *Bob le flambeur* (Melville, 1956). The film was loosely adapted by two of the best known scriptwriters of the era—Audiard and Albert Simonin—whose colorful dialogues foreground a highly recognizable form of vernacular slang that sets the tone of the narrative and establishes a tough masculine ethos as well as working to anchor the film's identity in French popular culture.

The film tells the story of Charles, an aging criminal just released from prison who returns home to the northern Paris suburb of Sarcelles, to find that his neighborhood has been converted into a high-rise council estate. Gabin/Charles is reunited with Viviane Romance/Gina of *La Belle Équipe/They Were Five* (Julien Duvivier, 1936), who plays his wife Ginette. Ginette wants them to settle down and become a respectable couple by buying a small restaurant in the south of France, but Charles has other plans. To purchase his projected retirement in Australia, Charles wants to commit one final heist—the vault of the Palm Beach hotel in Cannes. He enlists his ex-cellmate Francis (Delon) as well as Louis Naudin (Maurice Biraud), the latter's brother-in-law, a mechanic. However, though they are able to pull off the crime, they are not allowed to escape with the money because Francis botches the job.

Delon's films with Gabin belong to the sub-genre of the heist film where skills, practice, and perfect timing are used as a remedy against masculinity in crisis, showing how the old social unit of family or clique can rise to defeat the manifestation of the new, impersonal social structure (see Kaminsky 1974). In French cinema of the postwar period more specifically, Thomas Pillard has pointed out that the crime film is marked by two major preoccupations: the confrontation of a patriarch with the figures of otherness of contemporary French society and the questioning of the compatibility between tradition (Frenchness) and modernity (American) (Pillard 2013, 576). French noir, observes Pillard, articulates a complex discourse on postwar French society by setting up a series of confrontations between a patriarchal protagonist and his others; the legendary

figure of the aging gangster embodies “a certain idea of France and a cultural memory which needs to be preserved and transmitted.” French noir thus “insists on raising the issue of the difficulty of preserving the continuity of this memory in contemporary France by setting up a series of oppositions between the old generation and the young; French and foreigners; men and women; archaism and modernity” (Pillard 2013, 576). In the crime film of the 1950s, Pillard notes further, it is “Gabin who is the custodian of a communal heritage that threatens to disappear faced with the mutations of the post-war period” (Pillard 2013, 532).

Verneuil begins *Mélodie en sous-sol* by deploying a quasi-documentary approach to immerse the spectator in the social world of the protagonists, carefully establishing their social background. The film can also be read as a commentary on postwar modernization by setting up an opposition between two social worlds, contrasting the suburban Parisian milieu of the first half of the film and its brutal urban modernity with the glamorous and fashionable ambiance of the French Riviera in its second half, its lavish setting underscored by widescreen compositions around Cannes and along the French Riviera where we observe a fashionably dressed young Delon, in dark glasses and riding an open top car. The film opens with a shot of Gare du nord and the suburban Parisian setting is then carefully established by the use of location shooting in Sarcelles. The first sequence and opening credits immerse the spectator into the urban alienation experienced by Gabin's character and hints at a critique of postwar urbanization. Reflecting Gabin's tense relationship with the new, modern France, his character is etched as the aging alienated victim of a world gone cold in the push toward modernization. The next sequence, in which he is wandering lost in the Sarcelles *banlieue*, also works to underline the clash between the old and the new and indeed some critics saw the film as a satire of a contemporary French society where individual gain and greed have replaced the working-class ethos of hard work (Chapier 1963).

Shot on location in Sarcelles, previously a small village surrounded by farm land north of Paris, the opening of the film thus registers the shifts that France is experiencing during the new era of state-led modernization by showing us through Charles's eyes the largest and most notorious prototype of the industrial housing of the so-called *grands ensembles* built throughout the 1960s. Lost in this concrete jungle, Charles can't find his modest detached house, a symbol of the popular dream of the inter-war period, which is now surrounded by inhuman, gigantic tower blocks, a reminder that the world has passed him by. Thwarted by the monolithic uniformity of the collective housing, his figure is

rendered minuscule by high angle shots that register his dismay. An alien in his surroundings, there seems to be no place for Charles in the emerging Sarcelles *banlieue*. The conversations of the travelers on the train that Charles had taken to Sarcelles earlier revealed the new preoccupations of French workers: holidays on credit in Greece, camping, and new automobiles, and the sequence aligned us with the aging gangster as his voiceover commentary conveys the intensity of his contempt for the new lifestyle and preoccupations of the average French man. Thus begin the opening credits, setting the scene to the sound of the hot jazz soundtrack by Michel Magne, which will underscore the narrative by alternating between kinetic energy and ominous tension.

We are then introduced to Francis Verlot (Delon), a typical *blouson noir* delinquent of the youth subculture, which was emblematic of the increasingly strained relations between the generations produced by the forces of modernization (Dubet and Lapeyronnie 1992, 49–65). Clad in a black leather jacket, we see Francis idle in bed listening to jazz, establishing his outsider status and his rebellious nature. Francis is unemployed and has been to prison. Like Charles, he is constrained by a female figure, his mother in this case, who scolds him for not having a job. After this heated conflict, which exposes the problematic bond between mother and son, Francis leaves home and walks the streets of Montmartre, therefore anchoring his character within the traditional old-time territory of the French gangster films of the 1930s and 1950s. The film connects him to the prewar masculine values of Montmartre and the Gabin of *Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier, 1937), a site of memory, which underlines the continuity of tradition and the survival of the past. However, the film also links with the new cinema of the late 1950s/early 1960s; in a scene reminiscent of Godard's *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (1960), Francis pauses in front of a local theater displaying the posters of American B-movies *The Enforcer* (Raoul Walsh, 1951), *The Great Sioux Uprising* (Lloyd Bacon, 1953), and *Back to God's Country* (Joseph Pevney, 1953). Francis thus acts as a bridge between the old and the new, reflecting the mutations of a France embarking on a process of rapid modernization. These mutations are largely played out in the terrain of masculinity. As Pillard has noted, one of the key characteristics of 1950s French gangster films such as *Touchez pas au Grisbi* or *Bob le flambeur* is the formation of a masculine group dominated by a symbolic father figure who has authority over a family of men (Pillard 2013, 532). In his postwar films, Gabin is a patriarchal tutelary figure, the nostalgic embodiment of pre-Second World War French cinema and of 1930s France; Gabin's performance, thus

"functions as a measure of what has changed, what is changing and what also has disappeared" (Pillard 2013, 532). In *Mélodie en sous-sol*, Charles dominates the dull, settled, and emasculated family man represented by Louis, who acts as a foil to the sense of mutual respect between Francis, the inexperienced son, and his symbolic father (Charles). The trio is thus crucial in setting up a parallel that underscores the similarities and differences between Charles and Francis and the notion that the young Francis/Delon offers an updated image of the old, merging a certain modernity with the traditional French values represented by Charles/Gabin. In the original source novel, the aging gangster reflects on the fact that "several times and not without irritation, the young hood had felt like a double of himself" (Trinian 1961, 104).

In *Mélodie en sous-sol*, the aging gangster hands over his experience to the young thug by educating him into the art of criminality. Though concealed by the minimalist performance of the two actors, *Mélodie en sous-sol* thus provides a metaphorical link between two generations and establishes the filial relationship that will be expanded upon in later films. We hear in voiceover Charles teaching Francis how to dress and speak, guiding him on how to proceed with the heist and indeed Roberto Chiesi contends that "Gabin can be compared to a film director who has found the ideal actor for an intricate mise-en-scene" (2003, 24). The preparation of the hold-up is marked by a constant suspense stemming from Gabin's doubts (and through him of the viewer) about Delon's ability to carry out the heist, a testing of his masculinity, which comes to a crux during the final sequence. The two poles of French masculinity defined by the duo, which is thus a key concern of the film, comes to a climax in the final scene as they face each other across the swimming pool, surrounded by the police. Delon is tense; Gabin's face is cold and impassive. Francis has been undone by his youth, arrogance, and inexperience and, more importantly, by his failing to retain the cool self-control required of the tough gangster during his seduction of the showgirl which they need to get access to the casino and by his decision to hide away the loot in the water. This new "feminized" masculinity is set as a contrast to Charles' traditional macho virility, re-established once he had moved away from the "castrating" feminine space of the home where his wife had tried to remind him, in vain, that it might be time to retire. Throughout the film, Louis, the third member of this "family of men", is, as suggested, completely emasculated by being associated with the bland masculinity of the average middle-aged working-class family man derided by Gabin on his train ride to Sarcelles. Louis is represented as a weak character (he has qualms about the

heist) and contrasts with both Delon's erotic charisma and Gabin's monumental mentor figure. The film overall is thus in a sense emblematic of the ambiguous inflections of the Delon persona in its reflection of the contradictions of French society at the beginning of the 1960s, torn between fascination for and rejection of modernity; as Brassart has pointed out, "Delon embodies these contradictions" (Brassart 2004, 218). The ending is particularly revealing of the importance of the tension between symbolic father and son, tradition and modernity, as they stare at each other across the pool. Despite offering an ending that implies ambiguity, however, the reconciliation between the two generations is nevertheless marked by the dominance of the traditional virility embodied by Gabin and set against Delon's vulnerability and youthful failure.

The postwar period saw the extraordinary rise of crime narratives both in literary fiction and French cinema and, in an attempt to explain this popularity, Claire Gorrara has argued that in the context of rapid postwar reconstruction, crime's valorization of violent working-class criminal masculinities provides "a site of countercultural politics, challenging the myths of a seamless and a-historical process of modernization" (2007, 158). Interwoven with this concern for capitalist expansion and technocratic modernization broader socio-cultural shifts were at play in relation to gender roles. The early 1960s were marked by the social prominence of the young *cadre*, a young male manager or engineer who served as a new model of masculinity and a symbol of the values of modernization and consumer society. Kristin Ross notes that this is a being whose "adaptability bordering on passivity ... amounted to a distinct loss of virility" (1995, 175) and, in *Mélodie en sous-sol*, both Charles and Francis can be seen as the other side of the coin of the economic and social mutations of the postwar period. Deborah E. Hamilton has also observed that in the French new *roman noir* "the character of the anti-hero challenges the vision of a reconstruction and modernization of postwar France associated with the United States, depicted as portended by unequivocal prosperity and progress" (2000, 233). For Hamilton, "inherent within the roman noir's impulse as a supposedly progressive genre, then, is its attempt to reconcile change within tradition by setting its innovations in the context of established gender relations" (2000, 234, 239). Modernization, then, does not challenge structural forms of male privilege and the hard-boiled male ethos of the *policier* can thus be read in the context of broader social and cultural shifts with regards to gender roles; the threat to traditional masculinity represented by the growth of a feminized consumer society and its technocratic new *cadre* who, as mentioned, rose to prominence in the transition to modernization after

the Second World War and the decline of the strong paternal figure as the social changes of the 1960s unfolded.

Honor among thieves: *Le Clan des Siciliens* and *Deux hommes dans la ville*

In *Le Clan des Siciliens*, the second meeting of Delon with Gabin, three symbolic masculine bodies of 1960s French noir are united, a legendary casting of three generations of major stars which this time was made possible by Twentieth Century Fox. Like subsequent others in the genre such as *Le Cercle rouge* and *Borsalino*, *Le Clan* can be considered as the epitome of the French blockbuster, designed to counter the "crisis of French cinema of the 1960s—genre films displaying cinema's attractions of a massive scale, in terms of color, landscapes and stars" (Vincendeau 2003, 191). Lino Ventura plays tough *commissioner* Le Goff who is determined to find convicted cop killer Roger Sartet (Delon) who has escaped from custody and is enemy number one. Jean Gabin plays Vittorio Manalese, head of the Manalese crime family. With help from Sartet, the clan plans an airborne jewel heist that they pull off. However, Sartet's seduction of Jeanne, the wife of Manalese's eldest son, upsets the Sicilian clan's family decorum and leads to his death at the hands of the godfather. The film draws on the 1966 crime novel by noir novelist and scriptwriter Auguste Le Breton (1913–1999), who was the author of several iconic *polars* adapted in the cinema such as *Razzia sur la Chnouf/Razzia* (Henri Decoin, 1954) and *Du Rififi chez les hommes/Rififi* (Jules Dassin, 1955) and a writer whose work "highlights the fatalism of those trapped in the margins of society" (Hamilton 2000, 233). *Le Clan des Siciliens* was extremely successful at the box office; marketed on the basis of Delon's stellar casting, Delon's link to the scandal of the Markovic affair raging in the press at the time in which his former body guard was found murdered also brought the film further publicity and an additional layer of authenticity to his ambiguous star persona. From the opening sequence onward, the modern soundtrack by Ennio Morricone establishes an elegiac and mournful tone, mixing both suspense and melancholy. Though *Le Clan des Siciliens* plays on Delon's iconic image in *Le Samourai* (Delon had already appeared in Melville's film which had cemented his iconic *homme fatal* image, mythologizing his persona of wounded nostalgic masculinity as a social type), its dominant concern is with the codes and values of patriarchy, foregrounding the problematic of honor among thieves

while the fatalism of the noir narrative is channeled through the crisis of the anti-hero Sartet.

Though it is important not to underplay the crucial impact of *Le Samourai* on Delon's star persona, there are some significant differences in terms of the staging of masculinity in his Verneuil films, not least because of the symbolic filial relationship introduced by his pairing with Gabin but also because of the sexual tensions generated by the introduction of female characters. For, if, as Vincendeau argues in the Melville films, Delon's autistic, melancholy masculinity is associated with a loss of libido and withdrawal from Eros (2003, 179, 185), in Verneuil, Delon's hoodlum doubles as a romantic lead and it is this involvement with women which leads to the failed trajectory of his doomed noir hero, most emblematically in *Le Clan des Siciliens*. Thus, while the centerpiece of the film, as in *Mélodie en sous-sol* is the spectacular thirty minutes long heist itself, the narrative is also concerned with sounding out the psychology of the main three characters. Here Sartet/Delon is confronted by two older symbolic father figures: the agent of the law represented by Le Goff (Ventura) and the primal totemic father represented by Vittorio Manalese (Gabin). Sartet has to assert his masculinity against both, though the narrative is more concerned with setting up a clash between young Sartet and the powerful and dominating patriarch. A lone professional, cold-blooded and excessive in his violence, Sartet is the emblematic new face of criminality. The clan's insistent humanitarian refusal of killing, which is mocked by Sartet, contrasts with the narrative's emphasis on his association with guns and killing; the young inexperienced Francis/Delon of *Mélodie en sous-sol* has mutated into a lone, hardened killer (hence the obvious intertextual reworkings of his character of Jef Costello in *Le Samourai*).

The opening scenes of the film establish this construction of Roger Sartet as a tough but wounded character, thus playing into the contradictions of Delon's star image. At the start of the film, we learn through the judge that Sartet had been brought up by his father and only attended school until the age of eleven. We are also informed that, although as a young child, Sartet never ceased to smile, he had obtained a criminal record by the time he was fourteen. The course of the narrative is then inaugurated by Sartet's spectacular break from prison, helped by the Sicilian clan. The dominating patriarch (Gabin) is then introduced by a point a view shot as Sartet looks up when he makes a grand entrance descending God-like from an upstairs lift. This entrance emphasizes his metaphorical role as the authoritarian oedipal father defined by a sturdy physique that dominates the space of the encounter.

Although on the surface the film looks like a repetition of a successful formula pairing Delon and Gabin, with a story line that pits the wisdom of age against youthful rebellion, the themes of filiation and transmission are also mapped onto the aforementioned thematic of honor among thieves, which is typical of the mafia film. The hostility and lack of trust that exists between Sartet and Manelese at the beginning of the film is eventually transformed into hatred once the don has been humiliated by Sartet's romantic relationship with his son's wife Jeanne (Irina Demick). Sartet is an outsider who does not belong to the clan; his only family is his sister Monique (Danielle Volle). He is presented as a wounded man suffering a crisis of masculinity; twice during the course of the film we are given an insight into his traumatic past, which he hides behind the icy smile, and dangerous look that fascinates the don's daughter-in-law. In a symbolic spectacle of virility and sexual potency, which is repeated twice, Sartet points a gun at Jeanne and we consequently see him battering an eel to death on a rock after seeing her sunbathing in the nude. Delon's cop killer character doubles as a romantic lead, who is both seductive and dangerous. His involvement with a forbidden female will prove fatal, setting in motion a narrative of masculine testing between him and the godfather. From the outset, then, the film has isolated Delon from the social matrix of both the law and criminality. The ultimate outsider, he is a marked man who is pursued by both the police and mob.

Beyond the heist, the narrative is concerned with the dissolution of the relationship between Sartet and Vittorio Manalese, a relationship that grows from initial distrust on the side of the don to revengeful hatred once Sartet has attempted to affirm his power through possession of Jeanne. The film thus sets Manalese and his old-world masculine values of honor and solid tradition against Sartet's lone angel of death, a killer on the loose with seemingly no such values. Manalese is distrustful of the outsider from the outset and sees him as a threat to the realization of the upcoming heist (he specifically tells Sartet that he does not trust him because of his sexual restiveness) and his traditional gender values are underlined when he asks his son to tell his wife Jeanne to stop wearing short skirts. The transgressive woman is thus aligned with Delon's modernity in two ways: through costume (by wearing fashionable mini-skirts) and metropolitan French identity (by being French as opposed to Sicilian). At the same time, Sartet is all too clearly Manalese's heir since both characters are tough yet vulnerable, doomed heroes who cannot control their fate and whose trajectory is blocked in the tradition of the Gabin persona of the 1930s. This doubling suggests the

enduring potency of certain aspects of the dominant paradigms of masculinity epitomized by Gabin and extended through Delon in the 1960s.

In a self-reflexive moment commenting on Delon's pretty boy image, we are offered sympathetic fragments of his past and an insight into his existential malaise and "melancholy masculinity" (Vincendeau 2000, 178), as Sartet muses that he started killing because "people were walking all over him; even with a gun in his hand, he didn't look the part." In the original novel, Sartet is also an ambivalent character: a figure of both desire and fear, a marked man with "a destructive power, a latent cruelty ... he was a man who had killed and who would be fatally killed in his turn" (Le Breton 1967, 142). Delon's performance is central to the meaning of the *homme fatal* and the scene in which Sartet points his gun at Jeanne and they exchange desiring looks is significant in that it seals their fate. Delon, then, once again, is feminized by his association with a woman and cannot sustain the detached and dispassionate subjectivity, required of the tough hard-boiled killer, showing as Frank Krutnick has pointed out in the context of American film noir that, the hero's masculinity is undermined by the desire for a forbidden woman. As Krutnick observes, "the sexual drama—the hero's desire for the 'forbidden' woman (the 'mother') often serves as a microcosm of a drama of transgression, which has broader ramifications. The hero of such films is a male overachiever who seeks, through his defiance of the law, to put himself above it and to set himself in its place, as omnipotent" (1991, 143). However, with this attempt to set himself against or above the law, "he also alienates himself from the structuring framework of masculine identification, and thus from the possibility of finding any secure identity which is actually livable. There can be no identity beyond the law" (1991, 146–7). Finally, this transgression of the law by the hero seeking to convince himself and others of his own masculine identity means that "he is irrevocably drawn towards an idealization of the 'phallus incarnate' against which he can be measured and through which he is defined and can recognize himself" (Krutnick 1991, 147). It is in the light of such readings then that we can say that Sartet's relationship with women, his liaison with Jeanne and his love for his sister Monique, leave him vulnerable, exposed and, as argued, feminized (the outsider status of all three characters is also underlined by their ethnic otherness to the clan).

The association with the feminine is the crux of the film's thematics and leads to the duel between the patriarch and the son that ensues and the hateful relationship that develops between them. Sartet's resistance to the paternal figure of authority and the traditional standards of manliness he embodies

will lead to his death. Sartet's transgression represents a challenge to symbolic paternal authority and power and his outsider status is underlined in the way that he neither belongs to any social realm nor to the family of men whose rules he will eventually transgress. Foreshadowing the myth of honor among thieves dramatized in Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy, we see the don rule over the dinner table. Here, though, the patriarch's locus of power is firmly grounded within the private realm of the family home—patriarchal space displacing the traditional homosocial spaces of the French *policier* such as the bars and the street. The figure of the aging don thus also presents a nostalgic construction of ethnic fatherhood, which is contrasted with the younger generation, embodied by Sartet, marked by violence and the abandonment of tradition and community values. As in *Mélodie en sous-sol*, this is one last elegiac heist for the father, who dreams of a time and place, his native Sicily, he will never see.

The film concludes with the don reaffirming patriarchal law by killing Sartet through the Sicilian ritual of revenge in order to return order to the community, which has been disrupted by the outsider. Yet, although the film appears to be a moral fable about what happens when the Law of the Father is transgressed, it also reveals the extent to which the patriarch's tight grip on the family leads to destruction and loss. Hence, although the "honor among thieves" element in *Le Clan des Siciliens* maximizes the masculine potency of the don, at the end of the film his family is dismantled by his own doing. We see him arrested and handcuffed by Le Goff through a high angle point-of-view shot from the perspective of his doting little grandson who looks down on him as he is being led away by the ultimate representative of the law (Le Goff). Manalese, the imposing monolith, is defeated and his loss of power is symbolic as well as material as the film closes in on the bleeding wound he has sustained during his duel with Sartet. Thus, while traditional standards of propriety have been protected and the breach of the ethic of loyalty which is fundamental to the patriarchal cultural order that underpin the family has been punished, the killing of Sartet has also devastating consequences (given that the patriarchal family is destroyed and the don caught by the police). Indeed, Vincendeau notes how, despite being seemingly a figure of great authority from the 1950s onward, Gabin's patriarchal power was constantly threatened and in crisis (1995, 254). Intergenerational struggle and the tension between modernity and tradition are here dramatized through the clash between loner Sartet and the close-knit clan. However, these figures are still doubles of each other since they are both representative of masculinity in crisis. In the context of modernity, the morose

ending of the film offers an image of traumatized males who, despite the advent of modernity are still under the same traditional pressures and norms.

The difference between the two characters, a repetition of the themes of the old versus the new or tradition versus modernity in their previous film together, is exacerbated in *Le Clan des Siciliens*. Set against the Gabin paradigm, both films offer a problematizing of Delon's masculinity, though the patriarch is not left unscathed. In *Mélodie en sous-sol*, Francis seems a definite potential heir to Charles but as a result of his youth and involvement with a woman, the heist fails and Gabin retains narrative dominance. In *Le Clan des Siciliens*, Sartet's challenge to patriarchal authority ends in death at the hands of the patriarch. In other words, despite certain superficial distinctions, Delon, in these films, can be seen as an updated version of the Gabin persona, hero and victim, though in line with the social changes triggered by postwar capitalist modernization, Delon is almost completely isolated from the world of men, stripped of the mythical prewar community that surrounded Gabin during the 1930s.

Such narrative structures must also be seen in the light of the discrediting of the paternal figure and the questioning of the dominant fiction of masculinity that accompanied the social changes of the 1960s. Hence, these figures of masculine suffering can perhaps be seen as part of a backlash—an "unconscious desire for a renewal of authority" (Brassart 2004, 352). The rebellion of the son and his killing by the father can thus be read using Krutnick's analysis of *film noir*: "rather than simply giving voice to a frustration with the cultural parameters of masculine identity [film noir] can be seen to represent a desire for reassurance, a desire to have demonstrated in an unequivocal manner the inescapability and inviolability of identification through, and subjection to, the Law of the Father" (Krutnick 1991, 147). However, the structure of patriarchy has also been wounded, suggesting that Gabin's position as the godfather of French cinema is in its final throes (he is also veering toward the end of his career).

Deux hommes dans la ville reflects the intergenerational passing of a torch even more acutely than Delon and Gabin's previous pairings. Giovanni's film seals the reconciliation between father and son, with Delon literally being adopted by the aging star who this time plays social educator Germain Cazeneuve, while Delon plays Gino Strabliggi, a reformed character who after having spent ten years in prison for robbery is finally released thanks to Germain's influence. Gino is determined to reinsert himself into society but is thwarted by the mob who tries to lure him back into crime and by a vicious representative of the law who refuses to believe in his social reinsertion. Again, we are offered three generations of

French stars with Gérard Depardieu in a small role as a young hoodlum who tries to lure Delon back into crime and the narrative is strikingly similar to the gritty noir thriller *Once a Thief* (Ralph Nelson, 1965), Delon's Hollywood debut under contract with MGM. Based, like *Mélodie en sous-sol*, on a noir novel by John Trинian, the plot is very close to *Once a Thief*, as Delon once more plays a criminal who is unsuccessful in trying to escape from a life of crime.

Deux hommes dans la ville is a prime example of "the familiar territory of French victim males" and what can be summed up as "the active/passive duality in paradigmatic French masculinity" (Vincendeau 1995, 257). Delon's victimization and eventual death in this as in most of his gangster films provides a definite link to the persona of a young Gabin. Gino, like Lucien in Jean Grémillion's 1937 *Gueule d'amour/Lady Killer* is a typographer recalling the fate of numerous 1930s films such as *Le Jour se lève/Daybreak* (Marcel Carné, 1939) or *Pépé le Moko*, a film that is archetypal of the French gangster film, setting the agenda for the *policier* genre for decades to come (Vincendeau 1998, 30). Delon's character reproduces the same mixture of traits that characterized Gabin in the 1930s; a doomed hero with striking blue eyes who combines feminine and masculine characteristics and whose fatalistic trajectory is violently thwarted.

Conclusion

In this corpus of films, Delon is both hero and victim in the tradition of male victimhood that marked masculine French star images and harks back to the star persona of Gabin in the 1930s, despite modernity and generational differences. This would explain, in part, the appeal of the Delon persona as a marked man who is seductive but dangerous, given the centrality of the Gabin myth in French film culture. If these figures bring into focus a crisis of masculinity, registering the anxieties and tensions about gender and national identity brought about by the onset of consumer society and capitalist modernization, they also display a striking continuity with the dominant, paradigmatic masculinity in French cinema, embodied by Gabin, and the appeal of doomed male figures, which are made all the more authentic by their marginal and isolated status.

Alain Delon, International Man of Mystery

Mark Gallagher

Alain Delon has earned a significant, if at times controversial, place in European and global film cultures. As a social actor, his activities and statements since the 1970s have tied him particularly to political and artistic currents in his native France. He has served as an unofficial spokesman for nationalist French politics and culture, acquiring prominent artifacts from the De Gaulle era, claiming longtime friendship with National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen and loosely endorsing Le Pen's xenophobic politics.¹ Delon also came to decry Hollywood's "colonization" of French cinema, though he had previously scorned the French press by invoking his own international popularity. Thus, the actor who claimed, in 1964, that "France doesn't count in the global market for cinema. I don't care about France! I'm the one they know in the USA and Japan" would by 1979 take the nationalist view that "France is colonized by American cinema."² While screen stars' off-screen activities inform viewers' attitudes toward them, many of us disengage stars from their biographies in our viewing practice. Nonetheless, Delon's visibility in French culture strongly informs academic writing on him, which has emphasized his embodiment of a particular kind of Frenchness and French masculinity. Contrarily, this chapter argues that Delon in fact is quite easily detached from exclusively French contexts. In the industrial makeup of films in which he stars, in their settings and locations, and in his casting as characters of multiple nationalities and social classes, Delon belongs indisputably to inter- and transnational film industries and screen cultures. His own contradictory statements about his relationship to French and global film industries show the ways star personas expand and contract based on textual representations and extra-textual discourses. As an actor who earned a transnational reputation early in his career, Delon allows his star persona to be pulled in multiple directions, and he and industries use it across decades for different representational and commercial ends.