



***A Man Escaped* (*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*).**
Directed by ROBERT BRESSON, 1901-1999 (1956, French. 100 min.)

As you know from your reading in *Movie Wars*, the films of Robert Bresson were not readily available in this country for many decades. His reputation as one of the great cinéastes of the 20th century was more of a critical/theoretical position than a reality for many audiences.

A Man Escaped (his fourth feature) was the film where he firmly established his commitment to the use of non-actors (or as Bresson would say, *models*) in his work. Much of his writing in *Notes to a Cinematographer* is referenced by this film and indeed, looking for these connections would be a great strategy. Review some of his statements and see if you can find his mind and hand at work here.

Bresson based the film on a book (*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*) by Andre Devigny who was a Catholic French Resistance fighter in WWII. The book and film recount Devigny's true-life escape attempt from the Gestapo's Fort Montluc prison in occupied Lyon in 1943. One of the few widely known details about Bresson's own life is that he himself spent 16 months as a German prisoner of war.

Many writers and critics have published books and essays on Bresson's transcendent style, his mysticism, and his cinematic aesthetic (including but not limited to his use of a shallow depth of field in many camera compositions, intentional use of sound effects that often occur off-screen, economical dialogue, precise editing decisions, and underplayed or very neutral acting styles). You might wish choose one or two of these stylistic or thematic elements to track when you view the film and then write in your film journal. In this film the inexorable build of suspense is also a key element: how is this achieved?

"[...] I don't know what you mean by mysticism... I think that in a film, there is also what you did not put in it. You have to put things without putting them; I mean that everything which is important must not be there at the start, but end up there in the end. So what you just called mysticism must come from what I feel in a prison, as the second title [of *A Man Escaped*] says, *the wind blows where it wishes*. It is those extraordinary currents, the presence of something or somebody, call it what you want, or a hand that controls everything. Prisoners are very sensible to this strange atmosphere, which is not a dramatic one: it is on a higher level. There is no apparent drama in a prison: you here people getting shot, but nobody grins for it. It's normal, it's part of life in prison. The drama is inside.

Robert Bresson, interviewed in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 75, October 1957