

**ely  
film  
society** = **the  
notes**

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**latest news**

Many thanks to those who stopped by our market stall. These included our new webmaster, longstanding member Paul Redhead who has done a great job of revamping the EFS website after the departure of Ed to a new job. Your committee will be standing for re-election en bloc at the AGM - feel free to offer any comments on the society's progress at that meeting - it's what it's for.

# The Exterminating Angel

Luis Buñuel,  
Spain 1962

written by Luis Alcoriza and Luis Buñuel from the unpublished play *The Castaways of the Calle de la Providencia* by José Bergamín

Silvia Pinal ..... "The Valkyrie" Leticia Enrique Rambal ..... Edmundo Nobile Claudio Brook ..... Julio, the steward José Baviera ..... Leandro Gomez Augusto Benedico ..... the doctor Antonio Bravo ..... Sergio Russell Jacqueline Andere ..... Alicia de Roc César del Campo ..... the colonel Rosa Elena Durgel ..... Silvia Lucy Gallardo ..... Lucía de Nobile Enrique García Álvarez .. Alberto Roc Ofelia Guilmáin ..... Juana Avila Nadia Haro Oliva ..... Ana Maynar Tito Junco ..... Raúl Xavier Loyá ..... Francisco Avila Xavier Massé ..... Eduardo Ofelia Montesco ..... Beatriz Luis Beristáin ..... Cristián Ugalde Patricia Morán ..... Rita Ugalde Patricia de Morelos ..... Blanca Bertha Moss ..... Leonora



Luis Buñuel could justifiably be called the father of Spanish cinema: he is the first director from Spain to have found international recognition, and in the twilight of his career continued to excite both critics and the general cinema-going audience. However, for most Spaniards he is their *enfant terrible*. Educated in a repressive Jesuit school, he spent most of his life rebelling against stifling bourgeois attitudes. Born in 1900, he found a natural outlet for his anger in Surrealism .

His early work, the short *Un Chien Andalou* [1929] , opens with what is still considered to be the most shocking scene in the history of cinema. Made in collaboration with the artist Salvador Dalí and the poet Federico García Lorca, it marked the beginning of a career that continued to shock: *Viridiana* [1942] was banned in Spain and reviled by the Catholic establishment for its blasphemous portrayal of the Last Supper; *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* [1967], which deals with a similar

theme to *The Exterminating Angel*, is still baffling audiences fifty years on. Hitchcock later admitted to being influenced by Buñuel's films.

*The Exterminating Angel* depicts what might happen to a group of well-educated, upper middle class citizens when they are subjected to events beyond their control, events which even the audience cannot comprehend, events which are in themselves surreal. People viewing it on DVD have been known to rewind repeatedly to check that they really did see what they thought they saw first time. But the viewer doesn't need to rewind; Buñuel does that for you. Bourgeois social cohesion depends on us not varying our behaviour too much; if we do, we risk not being able to recognise each other – or even ourselves. Furthermore, the fabric of society itself will come crashing down on top of us. So we continue to do the same things over and over again without considering their relevance. It stifles our creativity and spontaneity. Buñuel had already explored this idea in *L'Age d'Or* [1930] and Alain Resnais explored it so again in his even more baffling *Last Year in Marienbad*.

In response to a journalist, he explained:

*I am against conventional morality... Morality – middle class morality, that is – is for me immoral. One must fight it. It is a morality founded on our most unjust social institutions – religion, fatherland, family culture – everything that people call the pillars of society.*

What starts off as a pleasant evening *soirée* in a house contained behind impressive wrought-iron gates and railings on Providence Street, portrayed with an apparent realism which belies its 'fabulous' nature, degenerates into chaos. And while some of the guests welcome the breakdown of social obligations: 'You are more interesting than ever. It suits you to be dishevelled.', others try to re-establish their polished image. The fable has elements of Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (which Buñuel had planned to film in 1957) and Orwell's *Animal*

## LUIS BUÑUEL

**Born Feb. 22, 1900, Calanda, Spain  
Died July 29, 1983, Mexico City**



**1929 *Un Chien Andalou* 1930 *L'Age d'Or* 1933 *Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan* 1947 *Gran Casino* 1949 *El Gran Calavera* 1950 *Los olvidados* 1951 *Susana ; La hija del engaño* 1952 *Subida al cielo ; Una mujer sin amor* 1953 *El bruto; Él* 1954 *La ilusión viaja en tranvía ; Abismos de pasión; The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* 1955 *Ensayo de un crimen ; El río y la muerte* 1956 *Cela s'appelle l'aurore; La mort en ce jardin* 1959 *Nazarín; La fièvre monte à El Pao* 1960 *La joven* 1961 *Viridiana* 1962 *El ángel exterminador* 1964 *Le journal d'une femme de chambre* 1965 *Simón del desierto* 1967 *Belle de jour* 1969 *La Voie Lactée* 1970 *Tristana* 1972 *Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie* 1974 *Le fantôme de la liberté* 1977 *Cet obscur objet du désir***

*Farm*, though Buñuel's intention is not political. Surrealism was born out of an intention to shock – *pour épater la bourgeoisie* – and based much of its ideology on the work of Freud, especially his revelation of the importance of the subconscious and dreams: in particular his essay 'The Uncanny'. Buñuel was among a group of artists and writers who explored these ideas in their work: friends such as Max Ernst, Man Ray, André Breton and Charlie Chaplin and Henry Miller, as well as Dalí and Miró. Many of them associated Surrealism with a heightened sexuality, which in *The Exterminating Angel* is suppressed by the formally dressed bourgeois, whose passionate relationships are covered up by chatting coolly. A further feature of the film which reflects contemporary preoccupations is that of the isolation of the individual

(even within society), our inability to really know another, to connect with others. As Ana says about a rail crash 'What carnage!.. .but the misfortune of those poor people didn't have much effect on me.' This isolation is an idea Buñuel explored in two other films in which the protagonist is totally alone: *Robinson Crusoe* [1952] and *Simon in the Desert* [1965]. Despite all this, the film is humorous – blackly humorous: the inconsistencies give rise to mirth; the bourgeois make figures of fun of themselves: look out for the Freemasons, the lovers *fou d'amour*; the imagery: especially those which occur in the solitude of the WC; the ironic use of language.

For the technician, the camerawork is as important as the content: the camera is extraordinarily mobile, following twenty people around the room for an hour, and foregrounds objects and ornaments in such a way as to reflect the values of their owners.

Both critics and the general public were mystified when the film received its premier in Cannes in 1962: 'Was there an explanation, a key to this delirious, irrational film, made up of *non sequiturs* and hallucinating visions?' If there was, Buñuel didn't say. Although it did not receive any of the official awards at Cannes, the critic Robert Benayoun thought it was a certainty for the Palme d'Or, and FIPRESCI (the international critics group) and the Film and TV Writers did honour it. It appears that only Spanish, Italian and French audiences appreciated the film 'like a Beethoven symphony', whereas English and American audiences needed to 'understand' it, and demanded more narrative coherence. As one of the characters in the film says: 'In the end, nothing explains anything.'

**NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS  
THE SMALLEST SHOW ON  
EARTH**  
(Basil Dearden, UK 1957)  
**Monday 15 June**

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