

Document Citation

Title	L'age d'or
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Soho Weekly News</i>
Date	1980 Apr 23
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	L'âge d'or (The golden age), Buñuel, Luis, 1930

The newest, funniest, most radical and exhilarating French film in town (starting next Tuesday at the Public Theater) was made in 1930 by that surrealist jackanapes Luis Bunuel, and goes by the name *L'Age d'Or*. It will be paired with *Un Chien Andalou*, made a year earlier and still, with the possible exception of *Citizen Kane*, the most startlingly appropriate debut of a major filmmaker. A man (Bunuel) walks onto a balcony where a woman sits. We see the full moon and his not-quite-empty hands: in one is a straight razor. He stands behind the woman, opens the razor and, with a stroke as masterly as his later films, slits her eye. Ladies and gentlemen . . . Luis Bunuel!

L'Age d'Or has been written about often and eloquently (and one piece I would recommend your chasing down, if I may, is by Mary Corliss for *MoMA*, the Museum of Modern Art magazine for Spring 1975). Only a few notes are needed here, as a goad for anyone who hasn't seen Bunuel's adolescent masterpiece. The plot of the film fits with surprising snugness into a standard mold of romantic comedy: two lovers try desperately to consummate their passion, only to have every possible circumstance and calamity come between them. And though *L'Age d'Or* occasioned right-wing riots upon its release, it's closer to the Marx Brothers anarchy of *Horse Feathers* and *Duck Soup* than it is to the Stravinsky-Nijinsky *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Indeed, Bunuel had been asked by the sponsors of his film, the **Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Noailles**, to set it to a score that would be written by Stravinsky. It was the only condition; **Bunuel refused; the Noailleses gave him the money anyway.**

It's worth remembering that *L'Age d'Or* was a film made by radicals, and financed by the aristocracy, to *epater la bourgeoisie*. You can't help thinking, during the sequence in which two grubby peasants in a horse-drawn cart ride through a dining hall filled with elegant members of the upper class, that Bunuel is shocking his audience with the connivance of some generous noblefolk. Today, for all the social aggression that *L'Age d'Or* contains and proclaims (kicking a dog, shoving a blind man in the street, slapping an old woman, sucking the toe of a statue), Bunuel's conspiracy looks jolly and good-natured. The film scampers along at the pace of a teenager hurrying to tell a good blasphemous joke to his friends. It's a joke Bunuel has shared with his audiences for 50 years now, in almost as many films, and the it's still funny.

While shooting his greatest film, *Belle de Jour*, Bunuel expressed dissatisfaction with an actor's movement in one scene. "OK," the actor asked, "what shall I think about?" Bunuel replied, "Think about your aunt." It's a thought almost no one watching a Bunuel film has ever had. But more and more American moviegoers are going to French films to think about their aunts, and their parents and children and lovers — about the ordinary, inevitable things of middle-class life. French movies have become sitcoms for the subtle set. Bunuel must be truly, and grievously, shocked. ●