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Dartmouth Film Society Film Notes

EL (THIS STRANGE PASSION) (1952)

Francisco
Gloria
Raul
Padre Velasco

Arturo de Cordova
Delia Garces
Luis Beristain
Carlos Martinez Baena

Pablo
Beltran
Mother
Ricardo

Manuel Donde
Fernando Casanova
Aurora Walker
Rafael Banquells

Story and screenplay by Luis Buñuel and Luis Alcoriza from the novel El by Mercedes Pinto. Music by Luis Hernandez Breton. Photographed by Gabriel Figueroa. Edited by Carlos Savage. Produced by Oscar Dancigers for Producciones Tepayal-Noel Meadow-Omni Films.

Directed by LUIS BUÑUEL

The official premiere of today's film was an unmitigated disaster. The Mexican entry at the 1953 Cannes festival, it was almost laughed off the screen. Of all the critics present, only Lindsay Anderson seems to have appreciated its importance, and he wrote in Sight and Sound, "It is sad to report that this film, so unlike any of the others I saw in its combination of technical authority with a vivid and uncompromising personal style, was received with a general lack of appreciation." Eight years later, Gavin Lambert put it among his ten favorite films (number two, to be exact), a formidable judgement by one of the cinema's most astute critics.

The best background on El can be found in an article written by Buñuel himself. Apparently the film was very dear to his heart and he was extremely annoyed by the Cannes reaction.

"I have been called a purveyor of deliberate sensationalism, a rabble-rousing avant gardist, an artist sans viewpoint, a practitioner of the occult. To such critics I say, take your pick, but stick to your choice once it is made.

I was born in the province of Aragon, Spain, about a half-century ago (February 22, 1900 ed.) My first film was made in 1928 in Paris, in association with Salvador Dalí. We called it UN CHIEN ANDALOU. Two years later I made L'AGE D'OR, which, like UN CHIEN ANDALOU, was surrealist. Insofar as surrealism is concerned, I stand on these two films.

Thereafter my life, with the exception of LAND WITHOUT BREAD, which Pierre Unik and I filmed in Spain five years later, had little of cinematic interest. I spent some months in Hollywood, some in New York, and years later returned to the US to work on technical films.

My renaissance in cinema began after World War II. I went to Mexico mainly with the idea of producing a film version of Garcia Lorca's play The House of Bernarda Alba, but the project never materialized. My old companero, unemployment, smiled at me. Then I met Oscar Dancigers, the producer, and things began to look up.

Our association brought forth some strictly commercial pictures, and a few labors of love, including EL and LOS OLVIDADOS. The former, thanks to the industry of Noel Meadow, has been prepared for distribution to the English-speaking public. I believe the English titles, by Aaron Sloan, faithfully point up the sadomasochistic relationship between the two principal characters. EL may seem to some like a Grand Guignol tale of revenge. When it was shown at Cannes there were those who implied that Luis Buñuel had become a follower of the Black Arts. Others claimed I had repeated a lot of L'AGE D'OR.

The hero of EL interests me as a beetle, or a disease-carrying fly does. I've always found insects exciting. In EL I was consciously trying to make a film about extreme, non-conventional types of Love and Jealousy. But, of course, one is attracted to the same sources of inspiration, to the same dreams, and so I did some things similar to L'AGE D'OR.

In some of the more none-conventional scenes of EL, despite what the critics inferred, there was no precise intention of imitating the Marquis de Sade. It's possible, though, I may have done it without realizing it. The most natural thing for me, when working in a dramatic form, is to see and think out a situation from a Sadique or sadist point of view. I found myself asking: what should the character take -- a revolver? a knife? a chair? I finished by choosing some more disturbing objects. That's all.

I want always to transfer situations to the screen with the love I bear for the instinctive and the irrational. I think I've always been attracted by the strange side of

things, which fascinates me without my knowing why. That is why I've never disowned surrealism as a valid artistic movement. Surrealism showed me a discipline to follow in my beliefs. It was one of the great lessons of my life. I haven't been in the group, officially, though, for a long time.

But rather than end with an erroneous impression, I must point out that, in practice, I'm not the least sadistic or masochistic. Between film assignments in Mexico I take my rifle and go hunting, but I shoot only at stones. Never, under any circumstances, would I kill an animal." (printed in Films in Review October 1955)

Below is printed a complete list of Buñuel's films. Those marked with an asterisk have been shown by the Dartmouth Film Society in the past. Buñuel enthusiasts will be pleased to hear that VIRIDIANA will be shown next week at the Nugget; L'Age D'OR and NAZARIN will be screened during the spring term, the former having one of its first American showings and the second its East Coast premiere through the society.

During the period 1926-1927 Buñuel served as assistant to Jean Epstein in Paris on many films including THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER. *UN CHIEN ANDALOU (1928); L'AGE D'OR (1930); *LOS HURDES (1932); GRAN CASINO (1946); EL GRAN CALAVERA (1949); *LOS OLVIDADOS (1950); SUSANA (1950); LA HIJA DEL ENGAÑO (1951); UN MUJER SIN AMOR (1951); SUBIDA AL CIELO known in America as MEXICAN BUS RIDE (1951); EL BRUTO (1952); *EL (1952); WURTHEERING HEIGHTS (1952); *ROBINSON CRUSOE (1953); LA ILLUSION VIAJA EN TRANVIA (1953); EL RIO Y LA MUERTE (1954); THE CRIMINAL LIFE OF ARCHIBALDO DE LA CRUZ (1955); CELA S'APPELLE L'AUREORE (1956); LA MORT EN CE JARDIN (1956); LA FIEVRE MONTE A EL PAO (1957); NAZARIN (1959); THE YOUNG ONE (1959); VIRIDIANA (1961); THE EXTERMINATING ANGEL (1962).

SHORT SUBJECT

LOS HURDES (1932). (Also known as LAND WITHOUT BREAD). Scenario by Luis Buñuel. Commentary by Pierre Unik. Music adapted from Brahms. Produced by Luis Buñuel in Spain.

There has probably never been a more horrifying documentary than this crystal clear "study in ethno-geography"; the most horrible situation to which man can sink is viewed with the utmost detachment. At the same time, the film is violently anti-religious although some of the original narration is edited in the English version. The sound is not good on any prints, but the pictures speak grimly for themselves.