

Document Citation

Title	Two notorious classics from the golden age of surrealism
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Source	<i>Village Voice</i>
Date	2004 Jan 28
Type	review
Language	English English
Pagination	C58
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Buñuel, Luis (1900-1983), Calanda, Spain
Film Subjects	Un chien andalou (Andalusian dog), Buñuel, Luis, 1928 L'âge d'or (The golden age), Buñuel, Luis, 1930

Two notorious classics from the golden age of surrealism

L'AGE D'OR/UN CHIEN ANDALOU

Directed by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí

Kino

January 30 through February 5, Film Forum

Luis Buñuel began his movie career with the most notorious opening sequence in movie history. *Un Chien Andalou*, which Buñuel and his then pal Salvador Dalí first sprang on the world in late 1929, begins with the apparent close-up of a razor slicing open the eyeball of an impassively seated actress.

Buñuel and Dalí were young punks hoping to impress Paris's ruling surrealist clique. With *Un Chien Andalou*, they succeeded beyond their wildest fantasies. What to do for an encore? The pair was commissioned to write a script by a wealthy nobleman. As with *Un Chien Andalou*, Dalí provided Buñuel with a number of fantastic images and outrageous notions; once more, Buñuel directed and edited the movie himself. But this time he raised the stakes by making *L'Age d'Or* (*The Golden Age*) at once more banal and more shocking than *Un Chien Andalou*—privileging politics over poetics (much to Dalí's dismay).

From a surrealist perspective, the movie couldn't have been better. *L'Age d'Or* sparked a riot and was banned by the Paris police. The aristocrat producer



Kino International

Banal and shocking: *L'Age d'Or*

was threatened with excommunication, and although a print was smuggled to Britain, the camera negative was locked behind seven seals for nearly 60 years. Why? A collage of modes, *L'Age d'Or* begins as a documentary, shifts to an entropic costume drama, turns blatantly allegorical, pretends to be a travelogue of imperial Rome, drops in at a snooty garden party, and winds up cribbing the conclusion of the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*. Ten minutes

into the action, *L'Age d'Or* declares its subject: A pompous nationalist religious ceremony is disrupted by the noisy lovemaking of a passionate couple who are forcibly separated and will spend much of the movie trying to get back together.

Although Buñuel would write that *L'Age d'Or* was about "the impossible force that thrusts two people together [and] the impossibility of their ever becoming one," he scarcely idealizes the lovers, who, having been introduced rolling in the mud, are no less self-absorbed than their fellow bourgeois. Together at the garden party, they resume their lovemaking with thrilling ineptitude—biting each other's hands, falling off the lawn furniture. When the man is called away to take a telephone call from the minister of the interior (a transmission from his unconscious?), the woman consoles herself by fel-lating the toe of a marble statue.

L'Age d'Or climaxes with murder rather than sexual release (inviting Jesus Christ to the orgy). Despite this and several instances of blatant scatology, however, the movie refuses to be as visceral as *Un Chien Andalou*. Thanks to his mastery of montage, Buñuel naturalizes Dalí's images into a duplicitous rhythm of normality and outrage. The film suggests instances of sex and violence far more extreme than any actually represented while contriving effronter-ies so offhanded you can't believe you've actually seen them. **J. HOBERMAN**

VV, 1/28/04-2/3/04, PC58