

The discreet charm of the bourgeoisie(1972) movie review examples

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Ideological Film Theory in The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972)

Movies by definition, toy with us, but few films actually admit this. Movies frequently propose stories as real, and subsequently we are obliged to take them seriously. Some films genre's can break these rules, comedies for instance, most of Luis Bunuel's films are more or less comedies which I imagine is so that he can get around and/or play with film structure and essentially do whatever he wants. On the other hand his comedy is not wet; it's very dry and stark. In *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) the plot focuses on a group of well to do people who are trapped in an endless cycle of arriving for dinner but when they eventually sit down for dinner, they are interrupted and never actually get a chance to eat. They come to dinner on the wrong night in one occasion, they are interrupted by the military then they try to eat at a restaurant but one of the people working there has died and they refuse to eat in the presence of death. The premise Bunuel is touching on is that dinner is a ritual central to the middle classes. They use it as a way of displaying wealth and power and manners but more importantly it is something to do, something to talk about as it becomes apparent that the Bourgeoisie actually don't have that much to talk about and more of which they wish to keep secret.

Most of the jokes in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* in fact come from the individual diner's secrets coming to light and thus interrupting their meals. The secrets of the European aristocracy range from adultery, perversion, boredom, drug dealing and military coups. The main characters in the film are the rich, a bishop who enjoys dressing up as a gardener, working in the gardens of wealthy people; this is an obvious attempt by

Bunuel to mock the church which he often does in his films. Other characters are military personnel and politicians. To date Bunuel most successful film is The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie. The film was released when the Vietnam war was in full swing a time of great social unrest. It won the best foreign film Oscar and made even more money than his famous Belle de Jour. At the time the upper middle class were seen as great targets for hatred now we might say that affluence is once again praised and envied. We now see this film as an attack on itself In 1972 audiences would have seen it as an attack on the upper middle class. With the current financial climate we can definitely appreciate it's targeting of that financial class. Luis Bunuel was a Spanish film maker who worked in Hollywood, Mexico and Spain. He was a surrealist who worked with Salvador Dali on Un Chien Andalou in the 1920's. For a great deal of time he lived in financial and political exile for the nature of the subject matter he chose to portray in his films which was usually to do with the dark side of human nature, they were quite anarchistic and showed great disrespect for the church and authority figures in general. Most of his characters are not very likeable; often they're very selfish and are constant seen as compromising their own beliefs for instant gratification. It becomes clear from the first scenes of The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie how the characters see themselves, it's evident in how they carry themselves, they exude a status. They wear their status like a badge. Bulle Ogier is the bored alcoholic sister, Stephane Audran is the rich hostess and Fernando Rey's is a puffed up pigeon of an ambassador. The Bishop is probably the best display of characteristic costume because he initially presents himself as the gardener. As the gardener he is rejected but

when he returns dressed in the robes of a bishop he is accepted. Literally Bunuel is stating that clothes are the man, they don't make up the man, one minute he's the gardener, a nobody. The next he's a bishop, a powerful and influential ambassador to god himself, all with a change of costume. The lusts that lurk beneath the bland surface of polite society is what the film is trying to depict; it does so by breaking the scenes up into self contained sequences. For instance one of the guests escapes enemy fire by hiding under the dinner table after soldiers decide to open fire on the dinner party unfortunately he tries to steal food from the table and is caught. This is a metaphor the uncontrollable greed or passions of the bourgeoisie. Another example is the couple who want to have sex but when the guests arrive for dinner they cannot because the woman makes too much noise, of course the husband is not happy and they sneak off into the woods. Returning to the house with grass in their hair, this is to display how thin bourgeoisie manners actually are, they present themselves as more than they are but in actual fact they're no less animalistic in their passion than a regular person. Bunuel intentionally tries to disrupt flow, that it feels not so much that you're watching a story unfold but more or less you're watching a series of dreams. An example of this disruption of flow is when there are some women drinking in a café and a soldier begins to tell them a sad tale of his childhood which is relayed to us through a flashback. After he's finished he leaves.

Everyone eventually sits down to dinner but the roast chicken and the servants are all props and they're actually all sitting down to dinner on a stage. The curtain then goes up and the dinner guests find themselves in front of an audience. It's almost like we're lost in a dream within a dream, as

if we come out of one dream sequence and we believe we're in reality but it's just another dream. The intent of the movie is not vicious, just confused and cynical, I think if the film was too savage the point might be lost or become too apparent, I think the point is we're meant to decide for ourselves what we think the moral of the story might be, or if there even is one. The film is intended to be subtle and suggest hypocrisy is the biggest joke of all. Bunuel's films are incredibly distinctive his cynical yet oddly whimsical upbeat take on the fact that society often says one thing and does another is very poignant. He points out that although all people that have beliefs or a fixed view of themselves and the world around them are hypocrites and one time or another, that doesn't make them evil. He's sometimes referred to as a cruel film maker but I think his portrayal of hypocrisy as something everyone does is more about the acceptance of human nature than actual scorn for it. It's as if he just wants people to get over it.

Buñuel, Luis. (1972) *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*