

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE / Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie (1972)

Luis Buñuel (1900-1983)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Luis Buñuel is known as one of most influential surrealist filmmakers of the mid-twentieth century. Although he was born and raised near Zaragoza, Spain, he spent a large portion of his life and career as an exile in Paris and Mexico City. One of his earliest short films, *Le chien andalou* (1929), or the *Andalusian Dog*, became an iconic representation of eerie surrealist art in which Buñuel presented the audience with a series of unsettling, violent, and even erotic images plucked from a dream. Buñuel would continue in his surrealist style with such films as *L'Age D'or* (1930), or the *Age of Gold*. Later in his career, the director adapted novels and short stories to film and used the narratives to criticize the Francoist regime and expose the Catholic repression of the era. Buñuel's production in Mexico in the 1950s and 60s included *Nazarin* (1959), in which the title priest attempts to administer to a rural Mexican community, as well as *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), which in many ways acts as a precursor to this film. In the last phase of his career, Buñuel returned to his hyper-erotic and surreal style, including the subject of this essay, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972).

Film *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) is one of the few Buñuel films in color and one of several films in French. Buñuel co-wrote the screenplay with Jean-Claude Carrière. As the "plot" concerns failed attempts to eat dinner, smuggling heroin, and dreams within dreams, the settings range from interiors of embassies to country gardens to urban restaurants. The city scenes were filmed in Paris, especially the Passy-La Muette district that is close to Renlagh Gardens and is known for its embassies. Buñuel's shooting style also changed on this film due to his use of playback monitors and his inclusion of more travelling shots than in his earlier films. The majority of the cast is composed of established French actors, but Buñuel also cast one of his favorite Spaniards, Fernando Rey, as the lascivious diplomat Don Rafael.

Background After a long period filming in Mexico, followed by a return to his native Spain, Buñuel spent much of the 1970s rediscovering the Paris of his youth. *Discreet Charm* won several awards, most notably Best Foreign Film at the 1973 Academy Awards. This is considered one of Buñuel's masterworks and a highly influential avant-garde film of the 1970s, hence its inclusion in the famed Criterion Collection. In particular, Buñuel excels in using his surrealist tricks to create a black comedy and class satire. Critics often frame this film as a thematic "sequel" to *Exterminating Angel* (1962), or as part of an erotic triptych of Buñuel's last three films (with *Phantom of Liberty* in 1974 and *That Obscure Object of Desire* in 1977).

CHARACTERS

<i>Don Rafael Acosta</i>	The South American diplomat smuggling heroin
<i>Francois Thévenot</i>	Rafael's friend and colleague
<i>Simone Thévenot</i>	Francois's wife and Don Rafael's lover
<i>Florence Thévenot</i>	Simone's sister
<i>Alice Sénéchal</i>	The hostess of several of the dinner parties
<i>Henri Sénéchal</i>	Alice's husband who is in on the cocaine smuggling
<i>Monsignor Dufour</i>	The bishop who replaces the Sénéchals' gardener
<i>Inés</i>	The Sénéchals' maid
<i>Female Terrorist</i>	An attractive woman who attempts to assassinate Acosta
<i>Lieutenant</i>	A member of the French army who tells the ghost story

Colonel The military leader who invites the guests to his house for dinner
Inspector Délécruze The police commissioner who arranges the arrest of the ambassador

SYNOPSIS

A group of upper middle-class friends in 1970s France attempt to have dinner with each other, but they never actually manage to eat--until the roasted lamb is served at the film's climax. The French bourgeoisie consists of the Thévenots (Simone, Francois, and Florence) and the some-time hosts of various dinners, the Sénéchals (Alice and Henri). In addition, there is the Monsignor Dufour, a local bishop turned gardener, and the South American diplomat, Rafael Acosta. Early in the film, we see Rafael, Henri, and Francois at the embassy plotting a drug deal.

During the first half of the film, the various attempts at having dinner are thwarted by miscommunication, sexual trysts, and interlopers who regale the group with ghost stories. In the second half of the film, the dinners are interrupted by more violent means: assassination attempts of the ambassador, the French army running drills, unfounded arrests, beatings, tortures, and finally, the murder of all the guests by gangsters with automatic weapons.

Most of the failed dinners in the second half of the film are revealed to be nightmares of the main characters. Ultimately, the characters walk along an abandoned country road in perpetuity (and it is this shot that is repeated several times throughout the film).

SCENES

Driving to Dinner The Ambassador and the Thévenots drive to the Sénéchals' house in the dark. We see the highway from an interior shot of the car. When the group walks up and rings the bell, they are greeted by Alice. The group announces that they have come for dinner, Alice is confused and admits that she has no food. The guests invite the would-be hostess to a restaurant at a nearby inn.

Funeral in the Restaurant Once the guests arrive at the inn restaurant, the doors are locked. Eventually, the waitress lets them in. They are given menus and notice that the prices are suspiciously cheap. There are no other customers, so Alice surmises that the quality will not be good. They hear an odd noise, and when they get up to investigate, they see a funeral in progress: an old man is lying out in a coffin with two women crying over him. The waitress explains that the owner has died and they are waiting for the undertaker to pick up the body. The diners all agree to leave.



Dealing Drugs and Shooting Toys The next morning, Rafael, Francois, and Henri meet in the ambassador's embassy office on a busy Parisian street. At first, they discuss the misunderstanding about dinner. Rafael reveals heroin that he smuggled in his satchel, and they all discuss the profit from selling it. Rafael explains that he was almost caught at the airport, and there was a crackdown recently in which a U.S. ambassador was arrested for smuggling. Francois suggests they find another method of getting the drugs into the country. The ambassador also shows off his rifle. When Henri notices an attractive woman pacing outside of the embassy with stuffed animals, the ambassador shoulders his rifle and takes aim at her. Henri and Francois protest, but Rafael only fires at a stuffed animal that the woman has placed on the sidewalk. He hits the target, and the young woman walks away. Rafael surmises that the woman is a member of a Maoist terrorist organization in Miranda, and he believes she has been sent to assassinate him. The men return to examining the heroin, and they test its quality by rubbing liquid drops into the powder. Francois opens up a briefcase with cash—the first payment.



Lunch at the Sénéchals The Thévenots return to the Sénéchals' country estate to have lunch with them. When they enter the house, Inés, the housekeeper, greets them, but Alice and Henri are not in the dining room. The camera cuts to the bedroom where the host couple is engaged in foreplay and partially undressing. Henri stops kissing Alice and tells her to get dressed. As the guests wait, they climb down the trellises on the outside of the house and run towards the garden; Inés sees them "leaving." Alice pulls Henri into the long blades of grass and they have a quickie. Meanwhile, the guests inside become more nervous when Inés explains that the hosts just left. Rafael and Francois suspect that the Sénéchals disappeared because they knew the police were coming for a drug bust. The ambassador and Thévenots hurry out the door and drive away in the car, just as the bishop is coming up the drive.



The Bishop Turns Gardener The bishop enters the house and inquires after Henri and Alice. Inés explains that the Sénéchals and all of the guests just left. The bishop notices that the gardener just quit, so he leaves the house and enters the shed. He changes clothes and surveys the garden tools. Henri and Alice enter the house covered in leaves of grass and are astounded that everyone has left. They decide to clean themselves up. The bishop enters the house again to introduce himself to the Sénéchals, but they do not believe he is the bishop. Henri throws him out, shuts the door behind him, and he and Alice proceed to scold Inés for letting in a scam artist. A minute later, the bishop re-enters with his cassock asking "Do you believe me now?" The Sénéchals apologize profusely and accept the bishop's offer to act as their new gardener (even though he insists that they pay him a union salary). When asked about his qualifications, the bishop relates his personal tragedy: his parents were poisoned, and the murderer was never caught. The camera cuts to a deserted country road where all six bourgeois characters are walking briskly. Eventually, they form a horizontal line across the asphalt, alternating men and women. There is a brief shot of all them from the back.



Attempted Lunch at the Café The women gather at an urban café to have lunch, and they order wine, coffee, and milk. The women notice a young soldier seated at another table who is making eye contact with them. He approaches and asks if he may tell them a story.



The Young Lieutenant's Ghost Story The young soldier starts to tell the story of his boyhood, and there is a flashback to an office in an old house. The boy converses with his father in the office, and the soldier narrating explains that his father was about to send him to military school. That night, the boy sees his dead mother's ghost walk by a window, and he follows her. The ghost of his mother tells him to murder his father that night by drugging his milk. She instructs him to take a blue vial of poison from the kitchen shelf and pour it into the glass by his father's bedside. He commits the patricide. The camera cuts back to the café where the women are listening intently. The waiter comes back and reports that they are out of everything. Florence asks if they even have water, and the waiter agrees that that, indeed, would be the last line of defense. Simone gets up to leave and declares that she has an appointment.

Tryst at Don Rafael's Apartment Simone enters Don Rafael's apartment, and they immediately go into the bedroom. When they start foreplay, Simone hears a noise. Rafael leaves the bedroom in his robe and answers the door. Francois enters to invite Rafael to a make-up dinner that evening. Simone enters the living room, now fully dressed, and nonchalantly greets her husband. Francois asks why she is there, and she replies that she came by to make arrangements for dinner that night, as well. Francois asks if she wants to leave with him, and she says yes.



Don Rafael grabs her and says that he would like Simone to stay. She agrees, and Francois says that he will wait for her downstairs. The moment Francois leaves, Don Rafael tries to have sex with Simone on the couch, but she stops him and warns that Francois may enter again.

Failed Assassination Attempt After Simone leaves, Rafael walks to the window and watches his friends depart. A few seconds later, he sees the young woman from in front of embassy approaching. He leaves with his gun, and when she arrives at the door, he approaches from behind and tells her to put her hands up. He pats her down for weapons but also squeezes her breasts, then tells her to go inside. Rafael searches her purse at the dinner table and notices that she has lettuce along with her gun. The ambassador switches out the guns, and the young woman smashes a lamp. When Rafael offers her a flute of champagne, she throws it behind her back. Rafael attempts to seduce her by caressing her inner thigh and saying that they are not as opposite in ideology as she believes. The woman protests, jumps up, and proceeds to give a speech about Maoist ideals. The viewer cannot hear her voice, however, as there is a loud noise that sounds like a train pulling in. Rafael says he disagrees, and when he gets up and turns his back, she grabs the gun and pulls the trigger. Rafael turns around and reveals that he has her gun and he could kill her in that moment. Instead, the ambassador lets her go. He goes to the window and signals to his bodyguards, and they grab her and drive away in a white vehicle.



Dinner Interrupted by Gendarme The guests have reunited once again at the Sénéchals for dinner, but just as they sit down, a group of French soldiers storm in and proclaim that they must do drills. Henri protests, saying that they were scheduled for the following night. Alice offers to feed and shelter the troops. She goes into the kitchen to scrounge for enough food for everyone, and she tells the group to sit where they can find seats. The bishop, Simone and Florence sit in and around the couch, and the colonel offers them a joint. Henri refuses to smoke, saying that he read recently about the high number of addicts among American soldiers in Vietnam. Florence accepts the offer and starts puffing immediately. The bishop chimes in by describing his own traumatic experience in Verdun in World War I, where the soldiers would drink barrels of red wine. Even with the extreme drunkenness, the bishop explained that the French soldiers would desert when given the opportunity.

Another Ghost Story Everyone finally sits down to eat, but the Colonel suddenly declares that they all have to leave to do their drills. Before they leave, the colonel relates that one of the soldiers wishes to tell a story. Once again, the soldier tells of an incident in the past, but this time as an adult. As he narrates, there is a flashback of the soldier in a deserted street. He approaches another man and asks him why he is so pale. The man replies that he also looks weak and that they both need to eat. When another man appears to the soldier, he asks after the pale man who disappears, and the new man explains that the pale one died six years ago. The ghost of the mother from the story in the café reappears, and the man asks if it is she. She replies yes. The soldier explains that he yearned to spend more time with his mother.

The Colonel's Invitation The camera cuts back to the dinner, and one of the soldiers asks for another story. The Colonel replies that there is not enough time, and they all leave quickly. The drills start outside, causing an enormous, disruptive noise. The Colonel re-enters to invite everyone to his house for dinner in a week, and they all accept. He gives the address, there is a quick cut to the street sign, and the action jumps ahead a week to the supposed dinner at the colonel's house.



Dinner and a Show The group arrives for dinner at the colonel's house, but neither the Colonel nor his wife is there to greet them. Henri and Florence try on Napoleon's hat (a historical object) that is on display in the Colonel's living room. They sit down at yet another white table, and a waiter appears with whole chickens on a tray. He trips and the chickens roll on the floor, yet he picks them up and serves them anyway. Several of the guests



notice that the chickens are rubber props. Suddenly, bright lights come on and the dining room turns into a stage set. The curtain opens to a full house. The guests look out at the audience, panicked. One by one, they get up and exit the stage. The bishop and Henri stay seated, and the prompter in the box feeds them their lines. The bishop repeats the prompts and Henri freezes, murmuring "I don't know my lines." The crowd whistles and jeers, and Henri starts awake on his couch. He tells Alice that he had a strange dream about dinner at the Colonel's house.

Dinner with a Political Duel The group arrives for dinner at the colonel's house again, and this time, they are greeted by several bourgeois guests and the colonel's wife. The ambassador mingles with several guests, all of whom ask him about the culture and politics of his native Miranda. When the Colonel describes a report he read about the high murder rate in Miranda, Rafael asserts that the statistics are incorrect. The Colonel keeps insisting that he is correct, and the ambassador says that he would challenge him to a duel if he weren't the host of a dinner party. The fight keeps escalating, and the Colonel slaps the ambassador. The Colonel walks away, but when his back is turned, Rafael takes out a pistol, calls his name, and shoots him in the chest. Francois starts awake, and the viewer understands that this is yet another dream. The camera cuts to a deserted country road. The three Thévenots walk briskly in a line (side by side) and the Sénéchals run after them to catch up. All six bourgeois (with the ambassador in the middle) walk side by side down the street. They pass the camera, and there is a close up of the pavement that then becomes a close-up of the rose garden at the Sénéchals' house.



The Bishop Confronts his Parents' Murderer The bishop is working in the garden when Alice approaches him and invites him for lunch with her friends. He resists initially, but eventually agrees to join then when his work is done. A simple woman appears at the gate and asks for a priest. The bishop asks her follow-up questions and learns that she wants a priest to give last rites to a dying old man. The bishop agrees to accompany her, and they ride in the carriage to the poor man's house. Upon walking to the deathbed, the woman confesses that she has always hated Jesus. The bishop wants more information, but he tells her to leave him and they will discuss it later. When he enters, the old man on his deathbed confesses to murdering his bosses. He explains that they treated him like an animal and he couldn't bear it any longer. The bishop realizes that the man is his parents' murderer and reveals this to the dying man. The bishop suggests that it was divine providence that they have come together. However, just before the bishop leaves the room, he picks up a rifle and shoots the dying man in the face.



Dinner with Unlawful Arrest Back at the Sénéchals' house, the guests sit down to lunch and discuss whether they should wait for the bishop. They decide to go ahead with the meal when the police burst in and arrest the men. The police cuff the ambassador first for drug crimes, then they proceed to arrest Henri. The women huddle behind the dining room table. Simone protests the arrests, and the police agree that the women should be arrested, too. They take all seven out in cuffs with Florence kicking and resisting the whole way.



Bloody Sergeant's Day Two policemen are discussing their cases. One policemen remarks that June 14th is Bloody Sergeant's Day, which involves an urban legend about a ghost who comes back every June 14th. The younger policeman is not familiar with the tale, so the other one explains that the ghost was an over-zealous detective who performed violent acts on suspects.

Beatings and Torture in Prison While the bourgeois wait in the pen together, the inspector brings in a young man who is suspected in a bombing. They question him lightly for a minute or two, but when he refuses to talk, the sergeant slaps him. Then, they place him on an open piano. They attach wires to the piano and turn on a switch, and he yells continually in pain. The implication is that the youth is being shocked and gradually electrocuted. There is close-up of the piano keys with several brown cockroaches crawling around as the young man continues screaming.



Bloody Nightmare The camera cuts back to the policemen discussing Bloody Sergeant's Day, and both cops decide to leave the station before the ghost makes his annual appearance. There is a strange scene in which the camera floats to different empty rooms in the station. Then, we see the living sergeant who performed the interrogation with the piano emerge with a bloody face. He proceeds to open all of the cell doors. Suddenly, Inspector Délécruze starts awake in his office chair, and we understand that the bloody sergeant episode was his nightmare.

The Minister Calls The sergeant, now normal and living, enters the inspector's office, and Délécruze relates his odd dream. The phone rings, and the inspector realizes the call is from the Interior Minister of France. The minister confronts him about arresting the ambassador and his friends, and he warns him that such an action will damage international relationships. The minister demands that they let the prisoners go. We cannot hear his command or reasoning, however, because there is a deafening noise that sounds like a plane landing. The inspector hangs up and tells the sergeant to release the prisoners and starts to explain the reasoning, but his discourse is interrupted by another deafening noise—loud typing from a typewriter. There is a sudden cut to an exterior shot of the Sénéchals' house at night with the lights on inside.

Dinner with Lamb Back at the Sénéchals' house, Rafael brags about his pull with the Interior Minister. The guests take their seats and about to eat soup and lamb. Alice goes into the kitchen to check on the lamb, and she brings it out on a serving tray. Francois brings up the news that a Nazi commander who ran a concentration camp is hiding out in Miranda, and Simone denounces him as a monster. Rafael retorts that he met the Nazi in exile and he was actually quite civilized. Inés starts to serve the soup, and Alice inquires whether she will marry her boyfriend. Inés replies that he left for two years military service, and he thought she was too old to have children. Everyone finally gets to each a slice of lamb, and the ambassador even asks for seconds. As the men eat, Florence observes Rafael from across the table and asks him when his birthday is. She determines that he is Pisces with Sagittarius rising, and she gives him an astrological reading. At the end, she stresses that he needs to put more emphasis on "a personal code of ethics." Rafael replies that he always does what his conscience dictates.



Firing Squad Suddenly, the dinner is interrupted yet again by three gangsters carrying assault rifles. The ambassador recognizes the danger when the gangsters break the windows, and he quickly hides under the table. The gangsters push the guests into the living room and open fire. The camera cuts to a pile of dead bleeding bodies. We see a hand creeping up from under the dinner table to grab a remaining slice of lamb, and the hand belongs to Don Rafael. He is still hiding under the table, and he proceeds to chew the lamb until the gangsters shoot him, too. Rafael starts awake in bed, and he realizes he is safe in his embassy apartment. He walks to the kitchen and munches on leftovers.



Walking Down the Road Once Again The last shot is the guests walking down the road, side by side. This time, however, the camera pulls out to a side panoramic shot from a great distance. We see Simone out in front, walking slightly ahead of the group. The credits roll as they continue walking.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

RAFAEL ACOSTA

Rafael is the ambassador from the fictional South American country of Miranda. He is well-versed in the French language and culture and has managed to infiltrate the Parisian bourgeoisie. In addition, he knows how to use his position to his advantage.

Lustful Along with his apparent greed, the ambassador is often distracted by his sexual desire to the point of putting his own safety at risk. He carries on an affair with his friend's wife, and he attempts to seduce the female terrorist in the midst of her assassination attempt. His brazenness is indicated by attempting to have sex with Simone on the couch and caressing the female assassin's inner thigh.

Opportunistic The ambassador uses his connections to smuggle drugs and attend fancy parties. His affair with Simone is born partly out of convenience. When his friends are gunned down in the final dream dinner, Rafael hides and makes a point of grabbing the last piece of lamb before he, too, meets his end.

ALICE SÉNÉCHAL

Alice attempts to be a good hostess, but ends up being thwarted by numerous interruptions. She lives a comfortable life and enjoys the company of her rich friends.

Gracious When the interrupted dinners take place at her home, Alice goes the extra mile to create an inviting dinner party for her friends. She manages to find extra food for the French guard, and she painstakingly cooks the lamb (for the massacre dinner) so that it is not too rare or overdone. She also invites the bishop to join the lunch party. Of course, her efforts always end up failing.

Snobbish For the meals in which the guests go out to a restaurant, Alice is the first to judge the atmosphere and the quality and price of the food. In addition, she admonishes the help and throws out the bishop when he presents himself in overalls.

Lustful When Alice and Henri are engaging in foreplay, it is Alice who refuses to release Henri and pulls him into the grass. Alice and the ambassador prove to be the most impetuous when it comes to their sexuality.

FLORENCE THÉVENOT

Rebellious Among the bourgeois characters, Florence is the most questioning and least accepting of the sociopolitical beliefs of the others. During the discussion on Vietnam, she openly smokes a joint in front of her brother-in-law (despite his aversion to drugs). Right before the climactic massacre of the dinner guests, Florence confronts the ambassador's unethical behavior. In addition, she is the person who fights back most aggressively when the guests are arrested.

Immature Florence is constantly getting drunk to the point of throwing up. Simone frequently admonishes her for partying too much, saying the wrong thing, or ordering incorrectly.

MOSIGNOR DUFOUR

Although the bishop is invited to nearly all of the interrupted dinners and lunches, he is not wholly part of the bourgeoisie. On one hand, he is the son of rich landowners and holds the prestigious position of

bishop. On the other hand, the bishop partially transforms himself into the working class and he is a veteran of World War I. He takes on the work of the gardener, thereby shifting classes and positions.

Philosophical Along with serving the community, the bishop often speaks wisdom at the lunches and dinners. He understands the value of nature and takes pride in his new work as a gardener. Before he snaps and shoots the dying man, he describes his encounter with the murderer as not only god's plan, but an opportunity for him to exemplify the virtues of his position.

Compassionate The bishop is gracious and forgiving of the Sénéchals when they throw him out of the house. He also shows patience and kindness as he administers to the townspeople. As a veteran of Verdun, the bishop empathizes with the French soldiers and with the American addicts fighting in Vietnam. When he realizes that the dying man was his parents' murderer, his initial reaction is to forgive him and continue with the last rites.

Vengeful In the end, the bishop cannot refrain from avenging his parents' murder. The last time we see him, he shoots a dying man in the face.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class

Bourgeoisie The French couples engage in pretention and gracious hosting. Behind this glossy surface, however, lies the desires and immorality of human nature. The ambassador, in particular, acts outside of an ethical code and manages to get away without punishment. In addition, the bourgeois characters focus on consumption to the extent that they exist in a closed loop.

Working Class In nearly every scene, there are workers serving or laboring for the bourgeois characters, yet they are not respected or acknowledged. Francois and Rafael call in the ambassador's chauffeur just to point out the driver's gauche way of drinking a martini. Inés (the Sénéchals' servant) must keep working despite the revelation that she is 52 and too old to get married. The Sénéchals' gardener quits inexplicably. When the Monsignor presents himself in overalls, the Sénéchals do not believe he is a man of the cloth. This dismissal suggests an overall disdain towards the working class and the the clergy.

Consumption As members of the bourgeoisie, the main characters want to consume food and each other (sexually). However, their appetite is not always slated. This desire to consume constitutes their most bourgeois characteristic, and the fear of not having food or sex motivates them to keep trying. According to critic Sheldon Penn, the main characters substitute visual consumption (that is, travelling and seeing new people and landscapes) for their lost ability to eat.

POLITICS

War In almost all of his films, Buñuel nods at the Spanish Civil War or the Mexican Revolution (or both). In this film, the characters bring up specific wars and discuss the trauma associated with being a soldier. In one pre-dinner discussion, the French women note that a third of American troops in Vietnam are addicts. The Monsignor chimes in by saying that the World War I soldiers who fought at Verdun were extreme alcoholics. The implication is that the only way to bear the horrors of war is through substance abuse.

Fascism in the 1960s and 70s Along with the specific discussions about World War I and Vietnam, Buñuel also alludes to the wave of Fascist dictatorships and corruption that dominated much of Latin America in the late 60s and early 70s. Although Franco's power had waned in the last years of his life, Buñuel continued to emphasize the lasting effects of 30+ years of dictatorship. This period also marked a turbulent time throughout Latin America, from the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City in 1968 to Pinochet's rise in Chile. According to the political conversations before several dinners, the fictional country of Miranda suffers from the quintessential Latin American corruption of this period.

Terrorism The inclusion of the nameless female assassin suggests that the Mirandan government is as corrupt and Fascist as its real South American counterparts. In addition, Buñuel may also be commenting on the terrorist factions that bombed and attacked cities in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, such as ETA in Spain or the IRA in Ireland and England.

Military and Secret Police The military and police throughout the film engage in violent and oppressive acts, and usually without just cause. The female terrorist is taken away forcefully (and likely tortured or killed), and the youth in prison is shocked repeatedly in order to force him to confess. In addition, the police keep arresting or killing the main characters without cause or due process.

RELATIONSHIPS

Sexuality

Desire In the first half of the film, it is often the sexual desire of the characters that prevents them from gathering at the table and eating. The Sénéchals are so erotically charged at their country home that they sneak off to the bedroom while they are supposed to be hosting their guests. Despite getting dressed, the couple ends up humping in the grass in their yard. There is a similar impetuous sexual drive with Don Rafael. He insists on intercourse with Simone even with her husband right outside, and he inappropriately touches and ogles the female assassin even in the moments where she is about to kill him. Even though the characters are hyper aware of their status and etiquette at the dinners, they are unable to repress their desire.

Adultery Simone and Rafael are having an affair, and they even attempt to have sex after Francois catches them together at the ambassador's apartment. The lovers' brazenness suggests a hypocritical attitude in which the rich perform morality but do what they want in secret.

LIFE STAGES

Youth Aside from Florence, the young characters are not fully fleshed out. However, they are framed as more idealistic (and perhaps more moral) than their bourgeois elders. Florence often contradicts or challenges the politics of the dinner group. The female assassin and the teen bomber, although possibly members of terrorist groups, are willing to sacrifice themselves for their group's causes. Given the ambassador's self-serving behavior and the supposed corruption in Miranda, there is the temptation for the viewer to side with the assassin.

PHILOSOPHY

Performativity and Metafilm Critics often cite Buñuel's tendency towards meta dialogue, references, and shots / editing. The repetition of the same line, shot, or sequence underscores the filmic process and takes the audience out of the world of the film, and jarring cuts or references to performance also remind the viewer that they are watching a movie. The "meta" quality of this film is especially overt. When the guests attend dinner at the Colonel's house, they realize that the chickens are rubber props. This dinner turns into a play: Henri dreams that the dining room has become a stage set for a theatrical production complete with curtain, prompter, and a full audience in an actual theatre.

Absurdism As a vanguard of French and Spanish surrealism, it is little wonder that Buñuel incorporates other avant-garde movements into this film. Along with the absurdity of empty dinners, Buñuel also plays with the absurdist tropes of repetition and circular movement. Although each dinner setup and interruption is different, the attempt at eating is futile repetition, particularly when the action is suspended in multiple dream sequences. In addition, Buñuel repeats the shots of the group walking side by side on the country road. There is no indication of an actual destination; thus, it is a journey without end.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is Buñuel's style in this particular film surrealistic? What is the effect of the ghost story flashbacks?
2. Consider the "meta" moments throughout the film. What is the effect of so many variations on the interrupted dinner?

3. Is this film absurdist? Why or why not?
4. How does Buñuel criticize and satirize the military, dictatorships, and police throughout the film?
5. What is the meaning of the title? Are the bourgeois characters *actually* charming and discreet?
6. What is the effect of the booming sound effects that obscure the assassin's and the minister's speeches?