



**MICHEL PICCOLI: A FEARLESS TALENT**

# La Mort en ce jardin (Evil Eden)

## La Mort en ce jardin (Evil Eden)

Director: Luis Buñuel

Production Companies: Film Dismage,  
Producciones Tepeyac \*

Executive Producer: Léon Carré \*

Presented by: Jacques Mage

Presented by/Producer: Óscar Dancigers

Production Manager: Alberto Ferrer

Administrator: Alberto Salazar

Assistant Directors: Dossia Mage, Ignacio Villareal

Script Supervisors: Colette Crochot, Javier Carreño

Adaptation: Luis Alcoriza, Luis Buñuel,

Raymond Queneau

Dialogue: Raymond Queneau, Gabriel Arout

Based on the novel by: José-André Lacour

Director of Photography: Jorge Stahl Jr

Stills Photography: Othón Argumedo

Editors: Marguerite Renoir, Denise Charvein

Assistant [Editor]: Sylvie Blanc

Assistant Editor: Alberto Valenzuela \*

Art Director: Edward Fitzgerald

Costumes: Georgette Somohano

Key Make-up: Román Juárez

Colour Laboratory: Franay LTC

Opticals: Lax

Music: Paul Misraki

Sound Recording: Maurice Laroche

Sound System: Western Electric

Sound Re-recording: Galdino Samperio \*

Filmed at estudios Tepeyac

Cast:

Simone Signoret (*Djin*)

Charles Vanel (*Castin*)

Georges Marchal (*Chark*)

Michel Piccoli (*Father Lizardi*)

Tito Junco (*Chenko*)

Raúl Ramírez (*Alvaro*)

Luis-Aceves Castañeda (*Alberto*)

Jorge Martínez De Hoyos (*Captain Ferrero*)

Alberto Pedret (*Jimenez*)

Marc Lambert, Stefani (*miners*)

Michèle Girardon (*Maria Castin*)

France-Mexico 1956

104 mins

\* Uncredited

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When political unrest hits a South American diamond-mining community, a motley group make their escape, only to fall foul of the many dangers of the jungle, not least their own conflicting personalities. Piccoli, in the first of his six films for Buñuel, relished the role of a flawed missionary priest; though an adventure-thriller, this is also one of the director's piercing critiques of Christian dogma.

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A rarefied head-scratcher from the exhumed outlands of Luis Buñuel's world-class filmography, *La Mort en ce jardin* is a sweaty, politically radical *Wages of Fear*-style jungle drama that segues into a lost-in-the-wilderness survival saga reminiscent of Herzog decades before the fact. It was shot in eye-popping colour during Buñuel's supposedly 'overlooked' Mexican period, with a famous French cast (Simone Signoret, Michel Piccoli, Charles Vanel).

It is a forgotten film, but not an anomaly – by 1955 Buñuel had left the ghetto of Mexican cinema to become an intercontinental figure, making films in France as well as Mexico before finally returning to Spain, temporarily, for the career-spike begun by *Viridiana* in 1961. One of many early Buñuels rarely if ever seen or made available since its scattershot release, *La Mort en ce jardin* hums with the master's jaundiced love of irrationality, seeping out of what is an ostensibly orthodox adventure tale, set in an unnamed South American craphole where diamond mines are the only industry and French the only tongue, and exploring the suffocating wilderness for the difference between it and the domains considered fit for human society.

The action begins when the local government declares ownership of the region's individual miners' stakes, instigating a full-on (and gun-toting) insurrection that sucks in a wandering American tough guy (Georges Marchal), a malcontented hooker (Signoret), her old but goodhearted miner-beau (Vanel), and a naive priest (Piccoli). Nearly everybody except Vanel is a mercenary bastard, with the additional exception, surprisingly, of Piccoli's reverend, a man so reasonable and humane that he may be the only cleric in the world's most famous atheistic filmography who isn't a vicious hypocrite. When the rebellion heats up and the authorities clamp down, the four hijack a boat and head downriver through the rainforest, into proto-Herzog wilderness (the characters gripe about the density and ceaseless appetite of the jungle in virtually the same terms as Herzog does in *Burden of Dreams*, and Michèle Girardon, as Vanel's mute daughter, is a startling analogue for *Aguirre's* Helena Rojo).

The 'garden' of the title is Edenic only ironically. It turns out that Buñuel was no slouch in on-location action staging: nature becomes a malevolent character as it rarely did at the time, and it pays to remember that Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* didn't mark this path in postwar movie-making until the following year. But all the same, Buñuel will out, especially once the travellers begin to go mad in the wild and discover the ruins of a crashed plane, littering the bush with inappropriate and useless objects.

Michael Atkinson, *Sight and Sound*, February 2010

Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

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