



## SILENT CINEMA

# Human Law

### Human Law (aka Tragödie Einer Ehe)

Director: Maurice Elvey

Production Companies: Astra-National Productions, Maxim-Film-Gesellschaft

Screenplay: Ruth Goetz, Maurice Krol

Original Novel: E. Ehlert

Photography: Mutz Greenbaum

Art Directors: Ernest Stern, Artur Günther

Cast:

Isobel Elsom (*Louise Radcliffe*)

Alfred Abel (*Radcliffe*)

Paul Richter (*Mason*)

Ernst Verebes

Frieda Richard

Eduard von Winterstein

UK-Germany 1927

91 mins

35mm

With live piano accompaniment

### + Intro

Isobel Elsom gives a strong performance as a wife deprived by her child by having technically 'deserted' her husband, despite being morally justified in doing so. Her husband, who spent three years in prison for assaulting a man in a jealous rage, finds on release that his wife has fallen in love with his lawyer. The 'Human' Law enables him not only to abuse her with impunity, but to gain custody of the ensuing child. Maurice Elvey was having a good year, having just directed *Hindle Wakes*. This German co-production is in a similar, socially progressive vein, while featuring some impressionistic camera work in the German style.

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**Maurice Elvey** was born William Seward Folkard on 11 November 1887 in Stockton-on-Tees. He left home while still a child, seeking his fortune in London, where he worked variously as a kitchen hand and hotel pageboy, and later as an actor and stagehand. Ambitious and hard-working, Elvey rose quickly to directing and producing plays, establishing his own theatrical company before switching to films in 1912. He directed an array of comedies and dramas for the Motograph company and British and Colonial, most of them starring Elizabeth Risdon and Fred Groves, including the melodrama *Maria Marten: Or the Murder in the Red Barn* (1913), an adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Suicide Club* (1914), and a version of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, more plainly titled *Love in a Wood* (1916).

By the end of the First World War, Elvey was making popular features in a variety of genres. Best known are his biographical films, of Florence Nightingale, Nelson, and Lloyd George. These reveal a Janus-faced director, working firmly in a tradition of Victorian hagiography, but clearly searching for contemporary relevance. They show some startlingly modern touches of associative editing and a facility for location and crowd scenes. Indeed it has been argued that if his *Life Story of David Lloyd George* (1918) had not been suppressed for political reasons, British cinema may have taken a different direction. The rediscovery of this remarkable film has forced a re-appraisal both of British cinema in this period generally, and of Elvey's (largely lost) output in particular.

By the early 1920s Elvey had become the chief director at Stoll, a studio that gained a reputation for swift, unimaginative literary adaptations, but was one of the first to model itself as a major producer with a distinctively national output. In 1924 he went to America, where he made five films for the Fox Film Corporation. He returned in 1925, putting his experience to especially good use on the psychologically sophisticated Anglo-German melodrama *Human Law/Tragödie Einer Ehe* (1926), and *Hindle Wakes* (1927), *Roses of Picardy* (1927), *Palais de Dance* (1928) and *High Treason* (1929): films that display an awareness of visual storytelling and spectacle often lacking in his later work.

## REGULAR PROGRAMME

**Projecting the Archive: Murder in the Family + intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National Archive Curator**

Tue 18 Jun 18:20

**The Epic of Everest + intro**

Sun 23 Jun 11:30 BFI IMAX

**Relaxed Screenings: The Machine That Kills Bad People** La macchina ammazzacattivi + intro and discussion

Mon 24 Jun 18:35

**Restored: The Lighthouse** Mayak + intro by Giulia Saccogna, Programme & Research Coordinator

Thu 4 Jul 18:20

**Silent Cinema: The Light of Asia + intro by Cary Rajinder Sawhney, Director of London Indian Film Festival**

Sun 7 Jul 15:10

**Projecting the Archive: Action for Slander + intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National Archive Curator**

Tue 23 Jul 18:15

**Experimenta: Snakeskin + intro by by Hyun Jin Cho, BFI London Film Festival programmer**

Thu 25 Jul 18:20

**Relaxed Screenings: Eraserhead + intro and discussion**

Mon 29 Jul 18:10

## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

**Alice in the Cities** Alice in den Städten

Sun 9 Jun 20:20; Thu 13 Jun 12:00; Fri 28 Jun 12:20

**Badlands**

Mon 10 Jun 12:20; Wed 26 Jun 18:15 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions) **Sullivan's Travels**

Mon 10 Jun 20:50; Fri 14 Jun 14:45; Mon 24 Jun 12:10

**The Wages of Fear** Le Salaire de la peur

Tue 11 Jun 20:15; Wed 19 Jun 14:20; Sun 30 Jun 14:40

**The General + Cops**

12 Jun 12:10

**Gun Crazy**

Wed 12 Jun 18:20 (+ intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National Archive Curator); Mon 24 Jun 20:30; Thu 27 Jun 12:20

**Cléo from 5 to 7** Cléo de 5 à 7

Fri 14 Jun 20:50; Fri 21 Jun 12:10

**Apocalypse Now: The Final Cut**

Sat 15 Jun 19:40; Sun 23 Jun 19:20

**Easy Rider**

Sun 16 Jun 20:35; Sat 22 Jun 13:20

**It Happened One Night**

Mon 17 Jun 12:10; Tue 25 Jun 20:30

**North by Northwest**

Tue 18 Jun 14:30

*Hindle Wakes* is a particularly successful example of Elvey's blend of realism, melodrama and sense of location.

During the 1930s Elvey's tireless energy led him to work across the spectrum of British production, on 'quota quickies' as well as on ambitious productions such as *The Tunnel* for Gaumont-British. At Ealing he made Gracie Fields' first film, *Sally in Our Alley* (1931) – notably more realistic and downbeat in tone than her later vehicles – and subsequently *This Week of Grace and Love, Life and Laughter*. During the Second World War he worked with Leslie Howard on the critically praised *The Gentle Sex* (1943) and took over direction on *The Lamp Still Burns* (1943) after Howard's death. *Medal for the General*, his wartime production for British National, and his big-budget post-war melodrama *Beware of Pity* are also worthy of consideration. Elvey continued to direct a wide variety of dramas and comedies until failing eyesight forced his retirement in 1957.

With such a massive output, and working at such speed, it is inevitable that many of Elvey's films have a perfunctory flavour. But the best of his work, particularly from the silent period, reveals a sympathetic and imaginative craftsman whose role in shaping British cinema has been unjustly neglected in favour of more flashy and less experienced contemporaries. He died in Brighton on 28 August 1967.

Lawrence Napper, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)

**Where Is the Friend's House?** Khaneh-je Doost

Kojast

Wed 19 Jun 18:15 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Wed 26 Jun 21:00

**The Searchers**

Thu 20 Jun 12:10; Sat 29 Jun 15:20

**Wild Strawberries** Smultronstället

Mon 1 Jul 11:50; Tue 9 Jul 20:50; Sun 21 Jul 14:20; Tue 30 Jul 18:20

**Point Blank**

Tue 2 Jul 12:20; Wed 17 Jul 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Sat 27 Jul 18:30

**Pierrot le fou**

Tue 2 Jul 18:10; Fri 12 Jul 20:40; Mon 15 Jul 12:10; Mon 29 Jul 20:45

**Taxi Driver**

Wed 3 Jul 17:50 (+ intro by Chantelle Lavel Boyea, BFI Assistant Curator of Television); Sat 13 Jul 18:00; Tue 16 Jul 12:15; Tue 23 Jul 12:20

**The Passenger** Professione: reporter

Thu 4 Jul 20:40; Sat 6 Jul 12:00; Mon 15 Jul 18:10; Fri 19 Jul 12:20

**Au hasard Balthazar**

Fri 5 Jul 12:20; Wed 10 Jul 12:20; Fri 19 Jul 20:45; Wed 31 Jul 18:10 (+ intro)

**The English Patient**

Sat 6 Jul 17:15; Sun 21 Jul 19:20

**The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie** Le

Charme discret de la bourgeoisie

Sun 7 Jul 17:10; Thu 11 Jul 12:20; Sat 20 Jul 16:10

**Theorem** Teorema

Mon 8 Jul 12:20; Wed 10 Jul 18:15 (+ intro); Wed 17 Jul 12:30; Sun 28 Jul 20:30

**Gloria**

Sat 13 Jul 13:10; Tue 16 Jul 20:35; Sat 20 Jul 13:30; Tue 30 Jul 20:30

**Unforgiven**

Sun 14 Jul 19:50; Tue 23 Jul 20:30; Thu 25 Jul 14:40

**Bitter Victory**

Thu 18 Jul 20:45; Sun 28 Jul 12:00

**Daughters of the Dust**

Mon 22 Jul 12:20; Wed 24 Jul 18:10 (+ intro by Arike Oke, Executive Director of Knowledge, Learning and Collections); Sat 27 Jul 20:45

**F for Fake**

Mon 22 Jul 18:20; Wed 24 Jul 12:40; Fri 26 Jul 20:50