



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

THE BRUTE (EL BRUTO) (12A)

Director: Luis Bunuel

Starring: Pedro Armendariz, Katy Jurado, Adres Soler

Mexico, 1953, 1 hour 21 minutes, Spanish/French with English subtitles

After his incendiary start with the surrealist classic *Un Chien Andalou* in 1929 and a fruitless spell in Hollywood during the Second World War, Spanish director Luis Bunuel became world famous in the 1960s and 1970s with films like *Belle de Jour* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. But in between, the director spent over a decade working in Mexico where he made some of his finest, if least known, films. *The Brute* is one of the best, a steamy social satire about a callous landlord (Adres Soler) who decides to clear out some awkward tenants. When they refuse to be moved, he hires a brawny slaughterhouse worker (Pedro Armendariz) as some added muscle but doesn't count for the man's appeal to his much younger wife (Katy Jurado).

Bunuel seemed unsure whether he was making a no holds barred melodrama or political allegory and the film has echoes of the Frankenstein story as the landlord creates a monster who runs out of control. Both Katy Jurado and Pedro Armendariz would go on to have major Hollywood careers, Jurado in westerns like *High Noon* and Armendariz in the James Bond movie *From Russia With Love*, but they never matched the intensity of these performances.

What should have been a sentimental populist fable about a dim-witted muscleman (Pedro Armendariz) who becomes an enforcer for an evil landlord (who may be his father) only to see the error of his ways is transformed by Buñuel and his screenwriter, Luis Alcoriza, into something far more complicated and perverse. As the landlord's ambitious young wife, Katy Jurado introduces a countervailing force of anarchic female energy. "The film's two most memorable scenes are one in which Miss Jurado teases her old father-in-law by letting him have his tequila only by sucking it off her index finger and, at the very end, a scene in which Miss Jurado has a very mysterious encounter with a rooster." – **Vincent Canby, *The New York Times***

"It is what it is. I don't know if I did or did not want to make a melodrama," said Luis Buñuel of *El Bruto (The Brute)*. If Buñuel was uncertain as to whether he was consciously making melodrama, his two leads knew exactly what they were doing. Buñuel may have been correct in cautioning against reading *El Bruto* as a film specifically about social problems if only because the film reads entirely better as a Frankenstein allegory.

Slant Magazine

Screened in collaboration with Film Noir UK

Notes compiled by Steve Freer

If you like **THE BRUTE**, you may also enjoy:

THE CRIMINAL LIFE OF ARCHIBALDO DE LA CRUZ (15) - Wealthy Mexican, Archibaldo de la Cruz (Ernesto Alonso) is a would-be serial killer.

THE PROMISED LAND (15) - A 18th-century Danish western set on Jutland Heath with the equally "**hard...rugged and forbiddingly beautiful**" (*Variety*) Mads Mikkelsen in the good guy saddle.