



# LA TERRE

Société Cinématographique des  
Auteurs et Gens de Lettres (1921)

Directed by André Antoine



Père Fouan ....Armand Bour  
Jean ....René Alexandre  
Françoise....Germaine Rouer  
Buteau ....Jean Hervé  
Jesus-Christ....Milo  
La Trouille....Berthe Bovy  
Lise....Jeanne Briey  
La Cognette....Jeanne Grumbach  
Shepherd....Emile Desjardins  
Becu....Max Charlier  
Nenesse....René Hieronimus



Scenario .... André Antoine after  
a novel by Emile Zola  
Cameramen....Rene Guychard,  
René Gaveau  
Assistant Director....Georges  
Denola, Julien Duvivier



Print with French titles only  
Duration: 98 minutes  
Projection speed: Variable  
Aperture: Full

**Score by Adrian Johnston  
(6 players)**

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André Antoine was a distinguished actor and director working at l'Odéon and l'Académie Française where he established the concept of Théâtre-Libre. In 1914 he took up an offer to direct a film. At a time when cinema was considered to be beneath artists of the legitimate theatre. Antoine did much to break down this barrier although he himself claimed that cinema had nothing to do with the scenic art. He filmed mainly on location, liberating the camera and focusing on real life. He made *La Terre* in the Cloyes region near Chartres where he and his company of actors from the Comédie Française worked alongside local peasants from 1919-1920. In this way he managed to capture the essence of Emile Zola's great novel *La Terre*, the relentless brutality of peasant life.

Growing old, Father Fouan, shares his land between his three children, the brutish Buteau, the drunken Jésus-Christ and the mean-spirited Fanny. The particulars of the division causes such acrimony that Buteau pushes his mother downstairs. She dies leaving her husband prey to their merciless children. First he lives with Fanny but leaves because of her hard-heartedness. At Jésus-Christ's comfortable abode he realises that his son is trying to steal his money. Buteau's home is more comfortable but his ruthless son steals Fouan's pension and throws his father out. It is mid-winter and Fouan wanders desperately through the village and fields searching for refuge. The following morning he collapses, his final resting place being the bare earth.

Alongside Fouan's Lear-like tragedy unfolds a tale of two young couples. The sisters Lise and Françoise have shared ownership of the house and land left to them by their parents. Buteau flirts with both sisters but Lise has borne his child. He marries her and moves into the sisters' house. Françoise falls in love with Jean, an itinerant farm-worker. They marry and he moves in with her. Considering his territory to have been violated, Buteau is furious. He and Lise argue with Françoise and push her to the ground. She falls on a scythe and is fatally wounded.

Antoine's work was at odds with the direction of French cinema at the time. He felt that the subject of a film should be the most important factor. He also felt that the cinema in France had been reduced to the craft of photography. In retrospect, his ideas can be seen later in the work of the Italian neo-realist cinema of the 1940's and the nouvelle-vague cinema of France in the 1960's. Adrian Johnston's harsh orchestration and relentless themes reflect the bleak subject and landscape of Antoine's film.