

Luis Buñuel: *El Ángel exterminador/The Exterminating Angel* (1962, 93m)  
*Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.*  
*Cast and crew name hyperlinks connect to the individuals' Wikipedia entries*



[Bruce Jackson & Diane Christian video introduction to this week's film](#)

**Zoom link for all Fall 2020 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions:**

<https://buffalo.zoom.us/j/92994947964?pwd=dDBWcDYvSlhPbkd4TkswcUhiQWkydz09>

Meeting ID: 929 9494 7964

Passcode: 703450

**DIRECTOR** Luis Buñuel

**WRITING** Luis Alcoriza (story), José Bergamín (play *Los Naufragos*), Luis Buñuel

**PRODUCER** Gustavo Alatriste

**MUSIC** Raúl Lavista, Domenico Scarlatti

**CINEMATOGRAPHY** Gabriel Figueroa

**EDITING** Carlos Savage

**PRODUCTION DESIGN** Jesús Bracho

The film won the FIPRESCI Prize and was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the 1962 Cannes Film Festival.

#### CAST

Silvia Pinal...Leticia "La Valkiria"

Jacqueline Andere...Alicia de Roc

José Baviera...Leandro

Augusto Benedico...The doctor

Luis Beristáin...Cristián

Antonio Bravo...Russell

Claudio Brook...Majordomo

César del Campo...The colonel

Rosa Elena Durgel...Sylvia

Lucy Gallardo...Lucía de Nobile

Enrique García Álvarez...Augusto Roc

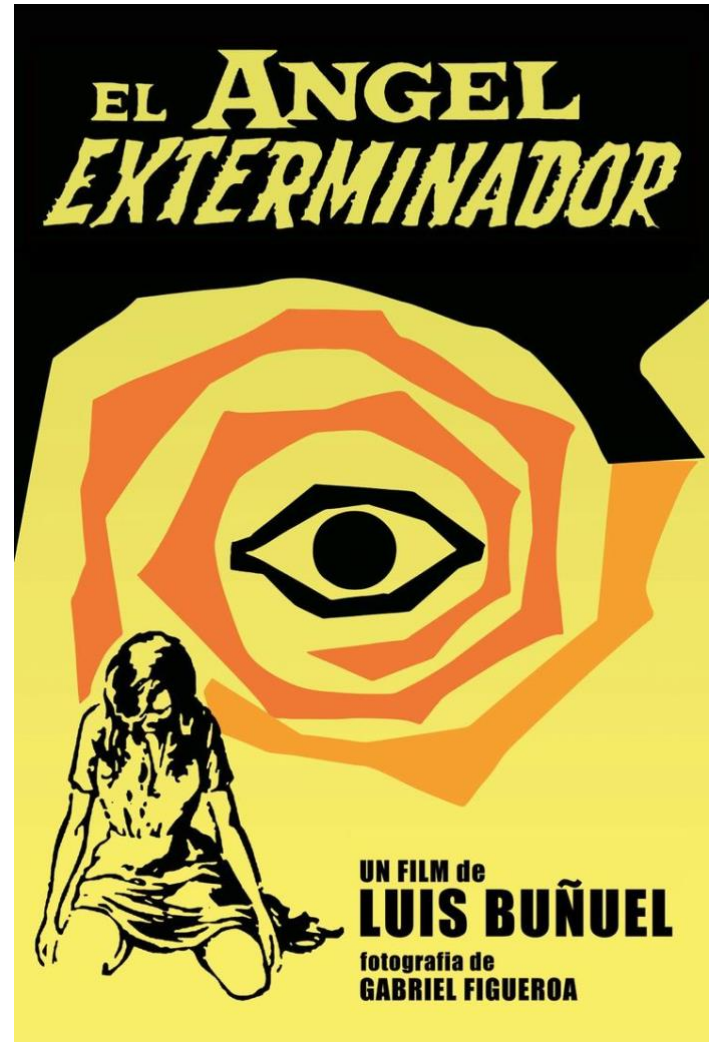
Ofelia Guilmáin...Juana Avila

Nadia Haro Oliva...Ana Maynar

Tito Junco...Raúl

Xavier Loya...Francisco Avila

Xavier Masse...Eduardo



Ofelia Montesco...Beatriz

Patricia Morán...Rita

Patricia de Morelos...Blanca

Bertha Moss...Leonora

Enrique Rambal...Edmundo Nobile

**LUIS BUÑUEL** (b. February 22, 1900 in Calanda, Aragon, Spain—d. July 29, 1983 (age 83) in Mexico City, Distrito Federal, Mexico) claimed that his project was to “pierce the self-assurance of the powerful.” Buñuel was a “singular figure in world cinema, and a consecrated auteur from the start.” Buñuel’s career spans early experimental work in the 1920s, including “the most analysed 17 minutes of film ever,” the “surreal, violently disjunctive” classic *Un Chien andalou*\*\*\* (1929) to a “postmodernist cine d’art,” such as *Belle de jour*\* (1967) and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) in the 1960s and ’70s (Russell, *Senses of Cinema*). *Un Chien andalou* manages to still shock audiences. Buñuel co-wrote the film with Salvador Dalí “based on their dreams” (Russell). Buñuel says they followed “a very simple idea” to not “accept

any idea or image that might give rise to a rational, psychological or cultural explanation.” To Buñuel and Dalí’s surprise, the film did not get the negative reaction they expected in Paris, the film being “well received, however, by Surrealists and bourgeois alike.” This led Buñuel to be determined that his next film would not “have its sting be subverted by praise.” Buñuel and Dalí’s next film, *L’Age d’or*\*\* (1930) managed to provoke a violent reaction from extreme right elements who “attacked the movie theatre, tore up the paintings in the surrealist exhibit that had been set up in the foyer, threw bombs at the screen, and destroyed seats,” leading to the film being banned (Russell). Buñuel had broken with the Paris surrealists in 1932 in a growing dissatisfaction with the left. After a brief spate working in Spain and then being reluctantly exiled in the US after the Republican loss of the Spanish Civil War, being unable to work in film because of his stated “bad grades from Hollywood,” he relocated to Mexico where he began making a string of films that were recognized at Cannes, such as *Los olvidados*\* (1950), for which he won Best Director and was nominated for the Grand Prize of the Festival; *Subida al cielo*\* (1952) and *El*\* (1953), for which he was nominated for the Grand Prize of the Festival. In 1959, *Nazarín*\* (1959) won the International Prize and was nominated for the distinguished Palme d’Or. The following year he won Special Mention and was again nominated for the Palme d’Or for *The Young One*\* (1960). In 1961, he finally won the Palme d’Or for *Viridiana*\* (1961). His final Cannes win was the FIPRESCI Prize for *El ángel exterminador*\* (1962), for which he was, once again, nominated for the Palme d’Or. His final trilogy of films, presenting a polyglot assemblage of French, Italian, and Spanish cinema, brought Buñuel high marks in Hollywood, earning him and Jean-Claude Carrière Oscar nominations for Best Writing for *Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie*\* (1972) and *Cet obscur objet du désir*\* (1977). He wrote for 42 films, directed 35 films. He also acted in 12, produced 8, and edited 7 films. These are the other films he directed: *Land Without Bread*\* (1933 Documentary short), *¿Quién me quiere a mí?*\* (1936), *¡Centinela, alerta!*\* (1937), *The History of the Vatican* (1940 Short), *Gran Casino* (1947), *The Great Madcap* (1949), *Susana*\* (1951), *Daughter of Deceit* (1951), *A Woman Without Love*\* (1952), *El bruto*\* (1953), *Illusion Travels by Streetcar* (1954), *Wuthering Heights*\* (1954), *Robinson Crusoe*\* (1954), *The River and Death*\* (1954), *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz*\* (1955), *That Is the Dawn*\* (1956), *Death in the Garden*\* (1956), *Fever Mounts at El Pao*\* (1959), *Diary of a Chambermaid*\* (1955), *Simon of the Desert*\* (1965 Short), *The Milky Way*\*\* (1969), *Tristana*\* (1970), and *The Phantom of Liberty*\* (1974).

**\*Writer**

**\*\*Writer and composer**

**\*\*\*Writer and editor**

**GABRIEL FIGUEROA** (24 April 1907, Mexico—27 April 1997, Mexico City) was Buñuel’s cinematographer on seven films: *La Fièvre monte à El Pao* (1959, *Fever Rises in El Pao, Republic of Sin*) *La Joven* (1960, *Island of Shame, White Trash, or The Young One*), *Nazarín* (1958), *Los Olvidados*, *Simón del desierto* (1964), *El Ángel exterminador* (1962), and *El* (1952). He was cinematographer for 120 other films, most of them never seen this side of the border. Some that were: *Under the*

*Volcano* (1984), *The Border* (1979), *The Children of Sanchez* (1978), *Two Mules for Sister Sara* (1969), *The Night of the Iguana* (1964), *The Pearl* (1947), and Sergei Eisenstein’s *¡Che viva Mexico!* (1932).

**SILVIA PINAL** (b. Silvia Pinal Hidalgo, September 12, 1931 in Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico) appeared in 106 films and television shows, some of which are *The Last Call* (2013), *A Woman of Steel* (2010, TV Series), *Mujer, casos de la vida real* (1989-2006, TV Series), *Guns for San Sebastian* (1968), *Simon of the Desert* (1965), *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), *Viridiana* (1961), *Goodbye Mimi Pompon* (1961), *The Follies of Barbara* (1959), *The Man That Pleases Me* (1958), *La adúltera* (1956), *Mortal Sin* (1955), *El amor no es ciego* (1950), *The King of the Neighborhood* (1950), and *El pecado de Laura* (1949).



**Miriam Rosen: LUIS BUÑUEL, in *World Film Directors V*. I. Ed. John Wakeman, The H.W. Wilson Co., NY, 1987.**

Luis Buñuel, Spanish director, scenarist, and producer, was born in the village of Calanda in Aragon. His father, Leonardo, a native of the province had gone to Cuba in his youth with the Spanish military and stayed on to make his fortune as a hardware merchant. Returning home in 1898, at the age of forty-two, he met and married Maria Portoles, a seventeen-year-old girl from a wealthy aristocratic family. Luis was the first of their three sons and four daughters; four months after his birth, the family moved to the town of Saragossa but retained a country house in Calanda, and the atmosphere of this “completely feudal village” as Buñuel referred to it, is often reflected in his films. (In later years, Buñuel liked to point out that although he had been born in Calanda, he had been conceived in Paris.)

Buñuel’s education, though thoroughly religious until he reached the age of fifteen, included a year with the French order of the Sacred Heart, followed by seven years at the Jesuit

Colegio del Salvador; an excellent student, he willingly immersed himself in scripture and other religious writings, but his greatest interest was study of insects and animals. Around the age of fourteen or fifteen, he began to have serious doubts about the faith, and during two years of study at the secular Instituto Nacional de Enseñanza read Spencer, Rousseau, Marx and above all, Darwin, whose *Origin of the Species* particularly affected his thinking.

In 1917 Buñuel, eager to break away from the enclosed environment of Saragossa, he went off to Madrid to enter the university. His own inclination was to study music but his father set him on the more practical course of agricultural engineering; when it became clear that he was not good enough in math for such a program, he switched to the natural sciences and pursued his long-standing interest in entomology by working as an assistant to a distinguished insect specialist at the Museum of Natural History. But the decisive education that Buñuel received during his first stay in Madrid came not so much from the university as from the circle of writers and artists that he encountered at Residencia de Estudiantes (student residence), including Ramón Gómez de la Cerna, Rafael Albertini Federico García Lorca. Juan Ramón Jiménez (the founder of a 1927 group of Surrealist poets) and his future collaborator Salvador Dalí. In their company he contributed to the review *La Gaceta literaria*, became a supporter of the anarchist movement, and definitively switched from science to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, with a concentration in history.

In 1925 after completing a degree and fourteen months of military service, Buñuel seized an opportunity to go to Paris as secretary to a diplomat. As was to be the case over the next few years, his path was smoothed by financial assistance from his mother (his father had died two years earlier), and he made his way into the city's café culture, already a home for Spanish intellectuals and artists. Two major developments followed in short order: he met his future wife Jeanne Rucar (an Olympic gymnast ten years his junior), and he realized that he wanted to become a filmmaker. As Buñuel recalls in *My Last Breath*, the memoirs he dictated at the end of his life, he saw his first film at the age of eight—an animated cartoon featuring a singing pig, whose song came from a phonograph behind the screen. In the years that followed, he saw the comedies and adventures of Max Linder and Georges Méliès imported from France romantic melodramas from Italy, and his favorites, the American comedies of Mack Sennett, Ben Turpin, Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, and Charlie Chaplin. Once in Paris he immersed himself in the city's rich cinema offerings. On the basis of articles he wrote for *Cahiers d'art*, he obtained a movie pass and began spending entire days and nights at the cinema—attending private projections of American films in the morning, neighborhood theatres in the afternoon, art theatres at night. It was Fritz Lang's *Der müde Tod* (*Weary Death*, 1921) that finally jarred him into a realization of what film could do: 'I came out of the Vieux

Colombier [theatre] completely transformed. Images could and did become for me the true means of expression. I decided to devote myself to the cinema.' ”

Making his way to the avant-garde filmmaker Jean Epstein's academy of cinema (where he found himself in a class of nineteen, with eighteen White Russians), he convinced Epstein to let him work as an assistant on *Mauprat* (1926). Around the same time he also served as an assistant to Henri Etiévant and Marius Nalpa on *La Sirène des tropiques*, starring Josephine Baker, and played a small role in Jacques Feyder's *Carmen*. In 1927 he had a brief go at a theatrical career, first as a scriptwriter for a Spanish *Hamlet*, performed in the cellar of the Select Café, and then as director of a production in Amsterdam of Manuel de Falla's *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*.

Buñuel's inroads into cinema continued apace when



he became Epstein's first assistant for *La Chute de la Maison Usher* (*The Fall of the House of Usher*), but he wound up quitting the production after an argument with the director over Abel Gance (to whom Buñuel refused to be civil, dismissing him as a hack [pompier]). The incident, which reflected basic differences in orientation between Epstein and Buñuel, was not without repercussions: as Maurice Drouzy points out Buñuel was now not only out of work but was labeled

as a troublemaker in Epstein's avant-garde circles. In any case, it was at this point that he once again involved himself with the Residencia des Estudiantes in Madrid, "organizing the first series of avant-garde films ever presented in Spain. The screenings—of René Clair's dadaist *Entre'acte* (1924), Alberto Cavalcanti's "city symphony" *Rien que les heures* (1926), and Alan Crosland's pioneering talkie *The Jazz Singer*, among other films—were a tremendous success and gave rise to the establishment of the first Spanish cine-club."

By this time, Buñuel was also thinking about films of his own: he wrote a scenario on the Spanish painter Goya (whose imagery later turns up in his films) and worked with his friend Ramón Gómez de la Cerna to adapt one of the latter's short stories. Neither of these projects got very far, and in January 1928, while visiting Salvador Dalí at his home in Fugueras, Buñuel suggested that they do a film together. They talked about their dreams and decided to use them and other images in a film that would be constructed by free association. According to Buñuel they wrote the scenario in eight days: "We identified with each other so much that there was no discussion. We put together the first images that came into our heads, and conversely, we systematically rejected everything that came to us from culture or education."

The money for production came from Buñuel's mother; it was, he explains, the equivalent in intention though not amount of the dowries she'd given two of his sisters. He promptly went off to Paris and squandered half on soirées with friends, then realized he'd better get on with the film "because I was a responsible man and didn't want to cheat my mother." In March he gathered together a cast and crew, mainly friends



(including Epstein's cameraman Albert Duverger), rented space at the Billancourt Studios, bought the film stock, and shot the script in ten days; Dali arrived from Spain in time for the final scenes only. Neither the cast nor the crew knew quite what they were working on, although Buñuel himself followed the scenario quite closely, a practice he continued throughout his career.

The result of this venture was *Un Chien andalou* (An Andalusian Dog, 1929), the archetype of surrealist cinema. The film was originally to be called *Es peligroso armarse al interior* (Danger: Do Not Lean Inside)—a play on the warning posted next to the windows of European trains—but the two authors decided this was too literary and, at Dali's suggestion, adopted the title Buñuel had selected, equally at random, for a collection of his own poems: *Un perro andaluz* which became in French *Un Chien andalou* (An Andalusian Dog, 1929).

The seventeen-minute film begins with the famous prologue where a man on a balcony slits a young girl's eye as a

cloud passes over the moon. This was Buñuel's dream image, and it is Buñuel who wields the razor, thus opening both the film and his filmmaking career with one shocking gesture. (The woman was Simone Mareuil; the eye, filmed in closeup, was actually that of a dead calf.) After this gruesome introduction—"I filmed it," Buñuel declared, "because I had seen it in a dream and because I knew it would disgust people"—the scene switches to a rainy street "eight years later," according to the intertitle. A man incongruously dressed in frills and carrying a small striped box around his neck (Pierre Batcheff) arrives on a bicycle and tumbles to a halt. The woman of the prologue (eye intact), watching from upstairs, runs down to him, then returns upstairs to engage in a kind of ritualistic display of the contents of a box. The man reappears in the room for the second well-known segment of the film (Dali's dream): he stares at his hand as ants pour out of a hole in his palm. After a brief cut to the beach and then back to the street, where androgynous-looking figure is seen poking at a severed hand with a long stick, there is a sequence of sexual pursuit. The man (of the bicycle) grabs the woman's clothed breasts; these fade to naked breasts, then to buttocks. The man's face becomes ghoulish, corpse-like; he tugs at two ropes lying on the floor and hauls in two bizarre but identical linkages—cork floats, calabashes, Marist brothers, and finally two grand pianos, each propped open to reveal the rotting carcass of a donkey.

Another intertitle indicates that it is "around 3 a.m.": the same woman in the same room receives another man at the door; the newcomer—the double of the cyclist—orders the latter to leave. "Sixteen years earlier" (intertitle) the cyclist shoots the newcomer with two books that become revolvers in his

hands. As he falls, the victim touches the bare shoulder of a woman seen to be sitting in a park. After a few more abrupt cuts from one setting to another, the man and the woman appear on a beach, buried in sand up to their chests; a burning sun beats down on them, and they are attacked by a swarm of insects while the incongruously idyllic words *au printemps* ("in the springtime") appear in the sky above.

In its evocation of dream states, its forceful expressions of sexuality and sexual frustration, and the resulting affront to bourgeois morality, *Un Chien andalou* exemplifies surrealist cinema. In fact, Buñuel's personal connection with the surrealists came only after the film was completed. But both he and Dali were intrigued by the movement from what they had heard and read from a distance. The poems of Benjamin Peret in particular, Buñuel recalled, "made us die laughing." As a number of researchers have pointed out, it is probable that the two aspiring filmmakers were also aware of a previous venture in the domain of



*Bunuel by Dali*

surrealist cinema, *La Coquille et le clergymen* (The Seashell and the Clergyman), directed by Germaine Dulac from a scenario by Antonin Artaud, and first shown publicly at the Studio des Ursulines on February 9, 1928. Like *Un Chien andalou*, *La Coquille* was intended to shatter the conventions of narrative and bridge the gap between the conscious and the unconscious, with a mix of eroticism and violence. If of nothing else, Buñuel and Dali would certainly have heard of the film's uproarious screening at the Studio des Ursulines, where a band of surrealists, believing that Dulac had betrayed the scenario, caused a near-riot. At any rate, having created a surrealist film, Buñuel and Dali were themselves ready to become surrealists. The connection was made when Buñuel was introduced to Man Ray at *La Coupole*, a Montparnasse café; Man Ray's own film, *Les Mystères*

*du château du Dé* was scheduled to be screened at the Studio des Ursulines, and he invited Buñuel to bring *Un Chien andalou* to show to André Breton and the other surrealists who were expected to attend. Unsure of how the audience would react—and doubtless aware of the pandemonium created by the same crowd at the screening of *La Coquille* the year before, Buñuel came armed with a pocketful of rocks and stood behind the screen ready to launch a counterattack. As it turned out, the film was a grand success, and the surrealists immediately welcomed him into the fold.

*Le Chien andalou* soon reached a wider audience as well: when the Studio des Ursulines declined to project it publicly for fear of a ban by the censors, it was purchased by Studio 28, where it enjoyed an eight-month run. Jean Vigo, in his remarks before the first projection of *À propos de Nice* in June 1930, hailed *Un Chien andalou* as "a capital work, from

every point of view: sureness of mise-en-scene, skill in the lighting, perfect knowledge of visual and ideological associations, solid logic of the dream, admirable confrontation of the subconscious and the rational” Ironically, even the bourgeois public that Buñuel and Dali sought to affront “appropriated” the film for themselves.

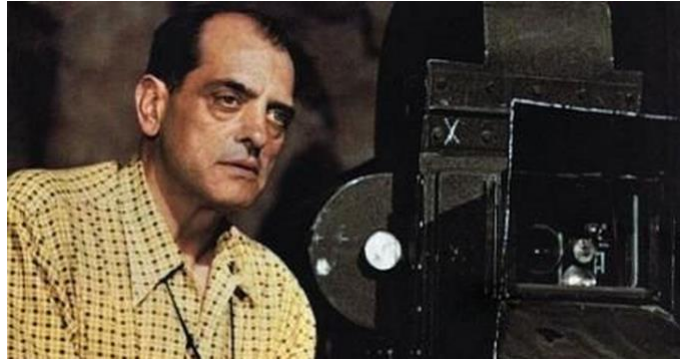
Likewise, *Un Chien andalou* has been subjected to precisely the kind of rational analysis that Buñuel sought to discourage. As Buñuel told José de la Colina and Thomas Perez- Turrent in the late 1970s, “a cavalry captain from Saragossa, a German professor, and a bunch of others have reached the same conclusions. “The man going toward the woman represents the sexual drive; the ropes are moral constraints; the two corks, the frivolousness of life; the two dry gourds, testicles; the priests, religion, the piano, the lyricism of love; and the two donkeys, death.” But for Buñuel, the significance of these images lay outside of narrow symbolism: “They should accept them such as they are, [asking] do they move me? Disgust me? Attract me? They should leave it at that.”

In the wake of *Un Chien andalou* Buñuel threw himself into the surrealist movement and its guerilla campaign against the conventional and repressive....

As for filmmaking, Buñuel apparently considered abandoning his career altogether: the commercial cinema he explains in *My Last Breath*, was not an option, and he couldn’t continue asking his mother for money. But on this score too, surrealism saved the day. His friends put him in touch with a wealthy patron, the Vicomte de Noailles, who had taken to commissioning a film for his wife’s birthday every year—this was also the origin of Man Ray’s *Les Mystères du château du Dé* (1929) and Jean Cocteau’s *Le Sang d’un poète* (1930-32). In short order, Buñuel had a million old francs to make his second film. He and Dali had originally planned to incorporate some of the leftover images from *Un Chien andalou* in a sequel called *La Bête andalouse*, but after a brief attempt at working together in Spain, it became clear that the two men were moving in different directions, and the collaboration (along with their friendship) came to an end.

Buñuel returned to France to write the scenario on the estate of his patron, de Noailles. At one point Dali wrote to him with additional suggestions (and is credited as co-scenarist), but the making of *L’Age d’or* was Buñuel’s work and his great achievement.

The repertoire of themes in *L’Age d’or* is much the same as that of *Un Chien andalou*—frustrated love and sexuality, physical violence, attacks on the clergy and state—and there is even some repetition of imagery, not to mention the overriding intent to shock the bourgeoisie. But *L’Age d’or* is at once much more complex (and almost four times as long) and much more deliberately structured. As Buñuel himself remarked, “In *Un Chien andalou* there is no conducting thread, while in *L’Age d’or*, yes, [there is] a line...that runs from one thing to another via certain detail.”...



In his autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali* (1942), Buñuel’s former collaborator claimed that his conception of *L’Age d’or* had been a thoroughly religious one, expressing the love and passion “imbued with the splendor of the Catholic church.” As a result he was “terribly disappointed” with Buñuel’s film which, he insisted after the fact, was “a caricature of my ideas.” Dali was not the only one to attack the film. After a premiere on their estate and a second private screening at the Pantheon cinema, the Noailles found themselves thrown out of the exclusive Jockey Club, and the vicomte’s mother was apparently obliged to travel to the Vatican to dissuade the Pope from excommunicating the couple.

On December 3, 1930, the day after the film opened at Studio 28, two right-wing vigilante groups, the Patriot’s League and the anti-Jewish League, stormed the theatre, hurling ink and rotten eggs at the movie screen, setting off tear gas and stink bombs, and clubbing members of the audience to cries of “Death to the Jews!” and “You’ll see there are still Christians in France!” Two days later, the police instructed the theatre director to cut “the two scenes with the bishops,” and although the film had already been cleared by the censors, this was done....On December 10 police commissioner Chiappe banned the film and ordered all copies confiscated.

For the next fifty years, *L’Age d’or* remained largely a tantalizing memory....As Marcel Oms points out in *L’Age d’or* “Buñuel established his entire personal problematic and initiated a veritable revolution in cinematographic language that he would never cease to amplify right up to his last film.” In its form and in its themes and motifs, *L’Age d’or* is significant as the harbinger of Buñuel’s subsequent work. Raymond Lefevre notes, for example, how the juxtaposition of documentary and drama prefigures Buñuel’s constant play on the continuum between reality and fiction. Similarly, in terms of themes, the repressive “friends of darkness”—the clergy, the bourgeoisie, the army, and police—were to appear again and again, as were the frustrated lovers, the domineering mothers, the unsympathetic blind man, all manner of animals, and the literary creations of he Marquis de Sade....

When *L’Age d’or* came under attack in 1930, the surrealist published a manifesto condemning the incident, and the leftist press came to Buñuel’s defense as vigorously as their rightist counterparts denounced him. One of the film’s more unlikely fans, though, was the European agent of MGM who indicated that although he didn’t understand it, he was impressed. As a result he offered Buñuel a six-month contract in Hollywood: for \$250 a week, the budding director was to sit on the sets and learn how American movies were made. Buñuel accepted immediately and left for the United States in December 1930 (which meant that he missed the *L’Age d’or* controversy entirely, and by his own account, never saw the film again).

Once in Hollywood, he quickly made contact with a group of illustrious expatriates—Chaplin, Eisenstein, Sternberg, Feyder, Brecht—but his visit ended abruptly after he



flatly refused to screen a film that starred Lili Damita as a Spanish-speaking courtesan, declaring he didn't want to "hear the whores." He was back in France by March 1931 and in Madrid just days before the end of the Spanish monarchy and proclamation of the Spanish Republic. He began working on an adaptation of Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican* to be filmed in the Soviet Union, but this fell through, and he turned to a less costly project, a documentary. The idea for the film came from a 1927 study by Maurice Legendre on the human geography of Las Hurdes, an extremely isolated and backward region of western Spain. With no producer in sight, Buñuel's friend Ramón Acín, a militant anarchist, promised to finance the film if he won the lottery—which he did—and despite objections from fellow anarchists, he turned over twenty thousand pesos for the project. Borrowing a camera from Yves Allegret, Buñuel set off for Las Hurdes in April 1932 with his friends Pierre Unik (a fellow surrealist and communist) and Eli Lotar and spent just over a month filming. By the time they got back, there was no more money, and Buñuel edited the footage on his kitchen table with a magnifying glass. ("Undoubtedly," he writes in his memoirs, "I threw out some interesting images that I couldn't see very well."). At the first screening, the commentary, written by Unik and Julio Acín was spoken by Buñuel; it was only two years later that a grant from the Spanish embassy in Paris enabled him to record the soundtrack.

Notwithstanding these constraints, *Las Hurdes* (*Tierra sin pan*, *Land without Bread* 1932) became the most famous documentary of the Second Republic." It was conceived, according to the intertitle at the beginning, as "a cinematographic essay in human geography," but the result is shockingly consistent with the surrealist vision of *Un Chien andalou* and *L'Âge d'or*.

The camera traces the increasingly desolate route to Las Hurdes by way of one church after another, while the commentary explains that until 1922 there was no road, and the area was unknown even to most Spaniards. A "curious detail" is noted when the film crew finally arrive: "In the villages of Las Hurdes we never heard a song." Grotesque images of a malnourished, mentally retarded, and physically deformed population are accompanied by a chillingly dispassionate account of their afflictions—goiter, snakebite, malaria, cretinism. Death is everywhere: a donkey is attacked by a swarm of insects and eaten alive; a little girl bitten by a snake dies on camera; an infant is buried. There is only one image of well-being—the interior of a church. "The only thing of luxury we encountered in Las Hurdes were the churches. This one is located in one of the most miserable villages."

*Las Hurdes* was the most explicitly militant of Buñuel's films. Unlike the study that inspired it, which took the misery of Las Hurdes as a given and proposed charity as the only solution, Buñuel's film sought to expose the underlying causes of the situation—indifference and exploitation at the hands of the same old "friends of darkness," the state and church. Indeed, in

an epilogue added to the film after the election of the Popular Front in 1936, he cited the example of other Spanish peasants, mountain dwellers, and workers who had succeeded in improving their lot by uniting to demand their rights. Noting the menace of Franco's royalist forces, he expressed the belief that "with the aid of anti-fascists throughout the world, tranquility, work, and happiness will supercede the Civil War and dispel forever the centers of misery you have seen in this film"

"The implications of *Las Hurdes* had not been lost on the Second Republic, which had banned the film at home and tried to prevent its being shown outside as well; only in the upheaval of Civil War was Buñuel able to find a European distributor. During the war, according to Buñuel, a friend in the

Republican government came across his police file, which described him "as a dangerous libertine, an abject morphine addict, and above all as the director of this abominable film, a veritable crime against the homeland."



As André Bazin pointed out in a 1951 article, *Las Hurdes*, despite its documentary form and politicized content, hardly constituted a repudiation by Buñuel of his earlier films: "On the contrary, the objectivity, the impassiveness of the reportage surpassed the horrors and the

powers of the dream. The donkey devoured by bees attains the nobility of a brutal Mediterranean myth that equals the power of the dead donkey on the piano." And Buñuel himself clearly shared this view; a few years later he told *Cahiers du cinéma*, "I made *Las Hurdes* because I had a Surrealist vision and because I was interested in the problem of humankind. I saw the reality in a different way than I would have seen it before Surrealism."

The years that followed the filming of *Las Hurdes* and its release in France were difficult ones for Buñuel. In 1932 he broke with the surrealists: "I left the group as simply as I joined it," he recalls in his memoirs. He also decided to give up directing and took a job dubbing films in Spanish for Paramount in Paris and Madrid. In 1934 he had a serious bout with sciatica and nearly quitting filmmaking altogether, but he wound up accepting an offer from Warner Brothers to supervise the dubbing of their films in Spain. He and Jeanne Rucar were married that year and their first child, Juan- Luis, was born shortly afterwards.

At this point Buñuel joined his long-time friend Ricardo Urgoiti in a commercial production venture known as Filmofono Films. Urgoiti had started out distributing foreign films, but decided to launch his own productions and turned to Buñuel for help. Over the next two years Buñuel was involved with four Filmofono productions...Because of Buñuel's political notoriety after *L'Âge d'or* and *Las Hurdes*—and probably because of the crass commercialism of the Filmofono productions as well—his name appears on the credits as

executive producer, but as was determined years later through interviews with his co-workers, in each case Buñuel actually directed the film as well. In the lagging Spanish film industry, his knowledge of modern production techniques and his insistence on disciplined work habits were very welcome. But as Marcel Oms points out, the experience was equally important for Buñuel as his first exposure to the demands of commercial production. Filmofono came to an end with the fascist coup in July 1936, and, as Buñuel writes in *My Last Breath* “Although I had ardently hoped for subversion, for the reversal of the established order, when



I was suddenly placed in the center of the volcano, I was afraid.” He accepted a post as cultural attaché for the Republican government at their embassy in Paris, where he was responsible for preparing propaganda materials. In 1939 he was once again invited to Hollywood, this time to work as historical and technical advisor on *Cargo of Innocents*, a film about the Spanish Civil War, but after he got there, the Association Of American Producers, yielding to pressure from the US government, suspended all productions dealing with the current situation in Spain.

Stranded in Hollywood with his wife and son Buñuel was rescued by Iris Barry, head of the film department at the Museum of Modern Art who found work for him on various war-related projects at the museum. “The first of these involved reediting two Nazi films recently smuggled out of Germany (Leni Riefenstahl’s 1935 *Triumph des Willens* and Hans Bertram’s *Feldzug in Polen*) to show their impact as propaganda. Buñuel then began supervising the dubbing of anti-Nazi films for distribution in Latin America. But his already precarious existence in exile was totally disrupted in 1942 with the publication of Salvador Dali’s autobiography, in which Dali characterized his former friend as a communist who had perverted the original idea for *L’Age d’or* to suit Marxist ideology. This accusation was picked up by the right-wing *Motion Picture Herald*, and The Museum of Modern Art was soon under pressure to get rid of Buñuel. Although Barry and others stood behind him, Buñuel opted to quit his job and once again headed west with his family (now including a second child, Rafael, born in 1940).

Another two years went into working on Spanish language versions of films for Warner Brothers; he wrote an uncredited sequence for Robert Florey’s *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1945) and saw various projects come to nothing, but the main fruit of this third Hollywood stint was enough money to allow him to take a year off. At the invitation of Denise Tual, the former wife of Pierre Batcheff (the man in *Un Chien andalou*), he went to Mexico to work on an adaptation of Garcia Lorca’s last play, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*. Once again the plan fell through but the trip turned out to be decisive: Buñuel renewed his acquaintance with Oscar Dancigers and

signed up to make a film for him in Mexico. After a decade of inactivity—and fifteen years since he’d made a film under his own name—he entered most prolific phase of his career.

The beginning of this Mexico period was inauspicious at best. *Gran Casino* (1947) was a musical melodrama rather inappropriately adapted from a novel about the oil industry in Tampico....It was a commercial success in Mexico in 1949, and as a result, with Oscar Dancigar’s backing now assured, Buñuel was able to make a film of his own conception.

*Los Olvidados* (*The Forgotten/ The Young and the Damned*, 1950) shows the impact of Italian neo-realism on a surrealist imagination.

...“In the words of J. Hoberman “no film has ever been less equivocal than *Los olvidados* in suggesting that suffering does not ennoble.’ It was directly inspired by Vittorio de Sica’s *Sciuscia* (*Shoeshine*, 1946), the pathbreaking treatment of poverty and crime among young shoeshine boys in Rome; in the neorealist tradition, Buñuel developed his story among the people who lived it, spending four or five months in the slums around Mexico City, sometimes alone, sometimes with his coscenarist Luis Alcoriza or his set designer Edward Fitzgerald. ‘My film is entirely based on real cases,’ he said. ‘I tried to expose the wretched conditions of the poor in real terms because I loathe films that make the poor romantic and sweet.’ But at the same time, he insisted that “I absolutely didn’t want to make a propaganda film....I saw things that moved me, and I wanted to bring them to the screen, but always with the sort of love I have for the instinctive and irrational, which can turn up anywhere....

*Los Olvidados* managed to shock its viewers. Even the production crew was hostile, he recalled, and one of the writers refused to allow his name to appear on the credits. The reaction was even more negative after the film was released: it was attacked by Mexican public, the press and the labor unions for its brutal portrayal of the underclass; it closed after only four days and there were demands that Buñuel be expelled from the country. This groundswell of negative opinion was abruptly reversed after *Los Olvidados* was shown at Cannes in 1951 and received both the award for best direction and the International Critics Prize. Buñuel was effectively rediscovered on the international scene, and the film was recognized in all its dimensions. André Bazin, for example, wrote of *Los Olvidados* that “at a distance of eighteen years and five thousand kilometers, it’s the same inimitable Buñuel, a message faithful to *L’Age d’or* and *Las Hurdes*, a film that lashes the spirit like a red-hot iron and leaves the conscience no possibility of rest.” Bazin linked it not only to Buñuel’s surrealist past but to Spanish traditions in the visual arts: “This taste for the horrible, this sense of cruelty, this search for the extreme aspects of the human being, all of this is also the heritage of Goya, Zurbarán, Ribera” (and as Marcel Oms was to point out later, there is also no small measure of Spain’s picaresque literary heritage in the

film, notably from *Lazarillo de Tormes*). *Los Olvidados* was always one of Buñuel's favorite films, and its place in the history of cinema is still unchallenged. "Three decades after its jolting appearance at the 1951 Cannes Film Festival," J. Hoberman wrote in 1983, "the film remains absolutely contemporary; if anything, it is a prototype whose full impact has yet to be felt."

Buñuel followed *Los Olvidados* with three commercial melodramas....After these rapid-fire money-making ventures, Buñuel was approached by an old friend from Madrid, the writer Manuel Altolaguirre, who wanted to produce an adaptation of one of his own short stories. The result of this temporary break with Oscar Dancigers was a freewheeling and much more successful social comedy, *Subida al cielo* (*Climbing to the Sky*, released in 1953)....*Subida al cielo* brought Buñuel back to Cannes in 1952 and earned him the avant-garde film award, but those who expected more of the harsh violence of *Los olvidados* were surprised at this revelation of the director's lighter side.

Nonetheless, as Marcel Oms suggests, the film was not without a serious message: "under the guise of a pleasant comedy, Buñuel talks about freedom of love and desire: conscious of the ambiguity of each, he makes every effort to do away with guilt in demystifying the original sin."

Returning to Oscar Dancigers in 1952, Buñuel turned out three more films in the course of the year: *El bruto* (*L'Enjôleuse/The Brute*). *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, and *El* (*Him/Torments*)....*The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was an American-Mexican co-production and Buñuel's first film in color...Buñuel's *Robinson Crusoe* is no longer an exemplar of righteous individualism and free enterprise, but a man who can't stand being alone, whose faith in God proves useless, and whose master-slave relationship with Friday (Jaime Fernandez) evolves into a mutual friendship....In his 1954 interview with *Cahiers du cinéma*, Buñuel explained that "I wanted to show man's solitude, man's anguish in human society."...For Paule Sengissen, who compared Buñuel's tone to that of Voltaire, "*Robinson Crusoe* is without a doubt the first great atheist film of value that the cinema has given us."

With the last film of 1952, *El*, this fairly benign atheism yields to a violent attack on established religion....According to Buñuel, *El*, like the rest of his Mexican productions, was the result of a conscious grappling with the dictates of the producers on the one hand and his own inclinations on the other....Buñuel continued along much the same line with *Abismos de pasión* (*Wuthering Heights*, 1953), a fairly daring adaptation of Emily Brontë's romantic novel....

Buñuel followed *Wuthering Heights* with *La ilusión viaja en tranvía* (*Illusion Travels by Streetcar*, 1953), a social comedy about two transit workers who learn their streetcar is to be retired from service and decide to make one last junket to the city....

In a 1963 interview with Wilfred Berghahn [Buñuel] explained that in Mexico, "I became a professional. Until then I made a film the way a writer writes a book, and with money from friends. I'm very grateful and very happy to have lived in Mexico and to have been able to make each of my films as it would not have been possible in any other country. It's true, that in the beginning, limited by necessity, I had to make films cheaply. But I didn't make one film that contradicted the dictates of my conscience and my convictions; films that were artificial and without interest I didn't make."...

After *La vida criminal* he accepted an offer to go to France and collaborate with an old friend from the surrealist circle, Jean Ferry.....

"Where do these people dig up what they write? I like *Nazarin* because it's a film that lets me express certain things I care about. But I don't think I've renounced or fore sworn anything at all: thank God, I'm still an atheist."...



When Buñuel completed *The Young One* [(1960) an American-Mexican coproduction and Buñuel's only film in English] he was sixty years old, and he had spent nearly twenty-five years in exile because of the Franco dictatorship in his native Spain. While the time spent in Mexico had reinforced the political break with geographic distance, his international coproductions—and his reputation—brought him back in contact with Europe. The 1960 Cannes film festival, in particular, allowed him to meet a new

generation of Spanish filmmakers, and in the course of extended discussions with Carlos Saura, Buñuel was persuaded to embark on a Spanish-Mexican coproduction to be shot in Spain. The decision had tremendous repercussions—along with Pablo Picasso and Pablo Casals, he had been one of the three symbols of cultural opposition to the Franco regime, and his apparent concession was strongly condemned by his fellow exiles in Mexico. But as might have been expected, the real shock was to come with the film he went on to make.

*Viridiana* (1961) was a direct assault on the pillars of the Spanish dictatorship. Significantly, Buñuel himself wrote the story upon which the screenplay was based; his dual point of departure, he recalled, was the fourteenth century Spanish saint (*Viridiana*), and the image of a girl drugged by an old man. "I proceeded from there," he explained, "and the work flowed out like a fountain." As Marcel Oms points out, *Viridiana* is essentially a film of return. It is in effect a work in which characters come back to where they've left, others come back to places they've been chased from, events return to the memory of those who lived them, and finally, the trap closes in on everyone."

The first return is that of *Viridiana* (Sylvia Pinal, the wife of the film's Mexican producer Gustavo Alatriste), a young novice sent to visit her uncle before she takes her vows. Upon her arrival, the uncle Don Jaime (Fernando Rey), is shocked by the resemblance she bears to his wife who died on their wedding night. During her stay, *Viridiana* goes along with his request to try on the dead woman's wedding gown, but



when her uncle asks her to marry him, she insists on returning to the convent the next day. Aided by his servant, Ramona, Don Jaime drugs her, with the idea of making love to her while she sleeps. Though he fails to go through with the rape, he tells Viridiana that he did, in hopes that she'll abandon her plans.

But she flees his house, and the remorseful Don Jaime hangs himself. The second cycle of return begins when Viridiana decides not to reenter the convent but to pursue her

religious vocation out in the world—she will convert her uncle's estate into a hospice for beggars. Along with a crew of undesirables worthy of Goya, she is joined by Don Jaime's natural son, Jorge (Francesco Rabal), a practical man who comes back with his mistress, to superintend the farming operation. Like Nazarin, Viridiana soon learns the futility of her mission: when she and Jorge are away, the beggars invade the house and revel their way into an orgy. In the film's most

notorious sequence, a dirty old woman "photographs" the banqueting beggars, and the fame obligingly freezes on a travesty of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" (accompanied by "The Hallelujah Chorus"). The reappearance of the two would-be benefactors only channels the violence of the event—one of the beggars attacks Jorge while another tries to rape Viridiana. Saved by her half-cousin at the last minute, she undergoes a second profound transformation, discovering her own sexuality and deciding to give herself to Jorge. When she enters his room, he is playing cards with Ramona, who has now replaced his previous mistress. Confident of his impending conquest, Jorge invites her to join the game: "I'm sure you'll like it," he tells her. "You won't believe this, but the first time I saw you, I told myself, 'My cousin Viridiana will wind up playing cards with me.'"

When Buñuel decided to return to Spain with Viridiana (he had been planning to film it in Mexico), he made his political position clear by choosing to coproduce with the anti-Franco UNINCI. From there on, he played by the rules of the game, submitting his scenario to the censors and following their directive to change the ending (originally Viridiana was to have entered Jorge's room to find Ramona in his bed—he later acknowledged that the card game was a great improvement).

Apart from the main roles, he selected his cast from a pool of old friends and unemployed actors, mostly on the basis of appearance. The shooting was done with great speed—Carlos Saura recalled that Buñuel generally did each scene in one take, with two or three linking shots to be edited in.

Leaving a work print with the censors, the director quickly went off to Paris to complete the editing and mixing. The film was to be premiered at Cannes, but was not in the official competition because the producers did not want it connected with the government. But once the film was screened (on the last day because of a delay in the printing), the jury insisted on awarding the first prize jointly to Viridiana and Henri Colpi's *Une Aussi Longue Absence*. At this point the

director-general of the Spanish cinema claimed the film as his government's official entry, but Madrid overrode his enthusiasm, not simply banishing Viridiana, but retroactively revoking the authorization to make the picture and destroying the out-takes Buñuel had left behind. Viridiana was not shown in Spain until 1977; it was reclaimed as a Spanish production in 1983 with its inclusion among the best films of that year.

Outside of Spain—and the Vatican, where

Osservatore romano denounced Viridiana as blasphemy and sacrilege—the film was recognized as a masterpiece, "one of the gems in Buñuel's oeuvre," according to Marcel Martin, who also considered it one of his craziest works, one of the most surrealist, and "one of the most brilliantly revealing with regard to his morals and humanism." Like many other critics, Martin expressed appreciation for the "treasury" of symbols, the formal beauty of the picture, and the simplicity and "necessity" of the *mise-en-scène*. At the same time,

Martin elaborated on the two dominant themes of religion and violence. "He's a great social moralist who has no illusions about human nature but who understands and makes us understand (like Brecht) that people are too often corrupted by the conditions of their lives and that you have to reform society before you can hope to transform human beings." Buñuel's next film, *Angel exterminador* (*Exterminating Angel*, 1962) deals with very similar social preoccupations, but pointedly rejects the surface narrative of Viridiana and the Mexican films in a manner that recalls his first surrealist ventures and at the same time marks the direction he was to follow for the rest of his career....

When he presented *Exterminating Angel* in Paris, Buñuel prefaced the film with an explicit warning: "If the film you are going to see strikes you as enigmatic or incongruous, life is that way too. . . . Perhaps the best explanation for *Exterminating Angel* is that, 'reasonably, there isn't one.'" Like his Mexican producer, Gustavo Alatrste, who told him, "I didn't understand anything; it's marvelous," critics were quick to declare the stunningly inexplicable film a masterpiece. Shown at Cannes in 1962, it received the International Critics Prize and the prize of the Society of Writers and Television Artists as well as the André Bazin Prize at Acapulco, and the grand prize at Sestri- Levanti. . . .

*Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (*Diary of a Chambermaid*, 1964), the first of Buñuel's six French productions, marked the beginning of his collaboration with producer Serge Silberman and scenarist Jean-Claude Carrière.... Despite a certain enthusiasm for Jean-Claude Carrière's dialogue and Jeanne Moreau's acting, *The Diary of a Chambermaid* was not a great success in France, and Buñuel retreated somewhat from the Parisian scene. He had an offer from David O. Selznick to do a Hollywood film starring Jennifer Jones, but he turned this down and rejoined Gustavo Alatrste for a final Mexican production. *Simon del Deserto*



(Simon of the Desert, 1965), a thoroughly Buñuelian evocation of an early Christian ascetic who spends thirty-seven years sitting on top of a column, took up an idea from the director's student days when Garcia Lorca had drawn Buñuel's attention to the life of Simeon Stylites. The film was intended to be feature length but it was cut off at forty-five minutes when the money ran out; abruptly abandoning the remaining sequences, Buñuel ended the story by showing Simon (Claudio Brook) on a junket to New York City in the company of a woman devil (Sylvia Pinal) who condemns him to remain in this "hell on earth" (echoing Garcia Lorca's observation, "Hell is a city much like New York

After Simon, Buñuel resumed the collaboration with Jean-Claude Carrière that was to last, in work and friendship, to the very end of his life....Buñuel had another bout with the censors before *Belle de Jour* was released—he wound up cutting a scene of necrophilia from one of Séverine's fantasies—but when the film was shown at Venice in 1967, it received the grand prize....Buñuel had made *Belle de Jour* with the idea that it was to be his last film; he was sixty-six years old and had been suffering from deafness and dizzy spells for a number of years. But after the success at Venice, he turned to Jean-Claude Carrière with an idea he'd been thinking about since he first went to Mexico twenty years earlier—a film on Christian heresies. The two men spent six weeks in Spain piecing together a scenario, which Buñuel then took to Mexico and reworked in the same hotel where he had written all the scenarios since 1948. The resulting film, *La Voie lactée* (The Milky Way, 1969), invites what Raumont Lefevre calls "a Surrealist promenade in the Christian zoo of heresies."...

Still declaring that *The Milky Way* was his last film, Buñuel proceeded to take up another project that had been on his mind—and in the works for a number of years. His was an adaptation of Benito Pérez Galdós' *Tristana*, which Buñuel had first undertaken in 1961....

Declaring *Tristana* in its turn his last film, Buñuel duly geared up for another round with the status quo, this time in the form of an original scenario that he wrote with Jean-Claude Carrière. *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, 1972) brings *L'Age d'or* into the 1970s, in terms of its social preoccupations as well as its cinematic form....For Buñuel, *The Discreet Charm* involved an element of search on more than one level. Like *The Milky Way*, it was one of his rare original scenarios, and one that, he took pains to point out, had been reworked five times. filming, he demanded what his assistant Pierre Lary called a "terrifying exactitude."

Wherever the juncture of the private man and his public oeuvre lay (and according to his collaborator Jean-Claude Carrière, Buñuel himself had little interest in finding out, rejecting psychological analysis as "arbitrary, useless"), his legacy of themes, forms, and inspirations has been enormous: "This supposed filmmaker," wrote Carrière, "was in reality a personality of greater stature, monumental for some." The records of Cannes or Venice speak clearly of his European trajectory, but his impact in the Third World, and particularly Latin America, is probably even greater. As Glauber Rocha observed even in 1966, with the first stirrings of Brazil's cinema novo, "In the absurd framework of the reality of the Third World, Buñuel is the possible consciousness: in the face of oppression, the police, obscurantism, and institutional



hypocrisy, Buñuel represents a liberating morality, a breaking of new ground, a constant process of enlightening revolt."

**from Gwynne Edwards: *The Discreet Art of Luis Buñuel: a Reading of his Films***

The mental world of Luis Buñuel—the turbulent unconscious given to eroticism, violence, the ways of chance—is well-documented in the thirty-six films that he directed over nearly half a century. But in a body of work that is nothing if not ironic, perhaps the greatest irony of all is the fact that Buñuel's personal life was so remote from the inner world of eroticism, violence, and chance that he brought to the screen. In the words of his friend Michel Piccoli, "he was like a monk!" He remained married to one woman for all of his life; he preferred reading a book to going to the movies, and the only indulgence he allowed himself was alcohol, which he consumed for one hour a day (with his watch on the table according to Piccoli) late in the afternoon, and never to the point of drunkenness. Disciplined in his work as well, he wrote and rewrote his scenarios and then filmed them with care and precision: he only shot what was in the scenario and would do a single take if that was at all possible."

**from Buñuel: 100 Years. Ed. MOMA. Instituto Cervantes/MOMA, NY, 2001**  
**from an interview with director Carlos Saura**

Luis's work was a revelation: to see that in Spain, there could be a Different kind of cinema, much more imaginative, much more in touch with the culture that Luis knew so well. He knew all of Spanish culture: Quevedo, Calderón, Gracián, all had a fundamental influence on his films. He took images and phrases from Gracián's *El criticón*, and translated them to the screen. He assimilated all of our classical culture and transported it to the contemporary world, the world of modernity and surrealism. Of all the forms of Surrealism, he was most nourished by the French.

**Where would you situate Buñuel in the history of world cinema?**

During the period in which he worked—and I'm talking only about Europe, not America—I believe there were three extraordinary filmmakers who, each in his own particular way, profoundly influence cinematic history: Buñuel, Bergman, and Fellini. The three maintained close relations, and admired each other intensely. Luis had great respect for the other two, perhaps most of all for Bergman. I know that in Madrid, one of

the few times he went out to the movies, he saw *Persona*. He was overwhelmed to the point of exclaiming, "That Bergman! What a phenomenon! What nerve! He does a close-up on the girl's face, and the camera doesn't move for ten minutes!"

Luis knew everything about cinematography. It's my personal opinion, but I think that his work follows two very different paths. One is narrative, where he's trying to be a narrator telling a story, like, for example, John Ford or Kurosawa. In this category I'd put *Diary of a Chambermaid* and a few of the Mexican films. It is the "other" Luis I personally find much more brilliant: the one who wrote his own scripts, in collaboration with others. Those scripts have less dramatic structure, but are much more inventive, extravagant, even crazy. *Viridiana*, for example. To put it another way I prefer the Buñuel who gets from here to there by taking detours and circling around...The *Exterminating Angel* comes immediately to mind. And so do *The Phantom of Liberty* and *The Milky Way*.



#### from an interview with Jean-Claude Carrière

I met with Buñuel over lunch....I knew the project had to do with *Diary of a Chambermaid*, so I'd read the book several times and even had an idea for how to adapt it. When we met, he asked if I liked wine, which I understood immediately to be an important question. He wanted to know if we belonged to the same world. I told him that I not only enjoyed wine, but that I came from a family of vintners. His face lit up. Many years later, referring back to that meeting, he confessed, "I knew right away that if the work wasn't going well, we'd at least have something to talk about." We wrote nine screenplays together, and six were made into movies. We had eighteen or nineteen years of close collaboration.

Our work on the first film also deserves a brief commentary. After three weeks of work, Silberman came from Paris and invited me to dinner. It was extremely unusual that Buñuel didn't come with us, I remember he even made up some pretext, that he had something else to do...Over dessert, Silberman told me that Luis was pleased with my work, that he appreciated how serious and conscientious I was. Then Silberman added, "But, now and then, you must learn to contradict him." I realized then that Buñuel had asked Silberman to make the trip solely to give me that message. I

admit that I had some trouble contradicting him, but by the end of that first script, I think I did learn. We each had the right to veto something we objected to. By the second screenplay, he had written into his contracts that he had to work with me....He taught me to go to the very limit of the imagination...that is to say, to bash through any prejudgments, preconceived ideas, reserve, all of that....It's also true that in every case Silberman was with us all the way. In *That Obscure Object of Desire*, for example, he gave the same role to two actresses.

#### from My Last Sigh. Luis Buñuel. Vintage Books NY 1984

While we're making the list of *bêtes noires*, I must state my hatred of pedantry and jargon. Sometimes I weep with laughter when I read certain articles in the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, for example. As the honorary president of the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica in Mexico City, I once went to the school and was introduced to several professors, including a young man in a suit and tie who blushed a good deal. When I asked him what he taught, he replied, "The Semiology of the Clonic Image." I could have murdered him on the spot. By the way, when this kind of jargon (a typically Parisian phenomenon) works its way into the educational system, it wreaks absolute havoc in underdeveloped countries. It's the clearest sign, in my opinion, of cultural colonialism....

When I made *The Phantom of Liberty*, I was seventy-four years old and seriously entertaining the idea of a definitive retirement. My friends, however, had other ideas, so I finally decided to tackle an old project, the adaptation of Pierre Louls's *La Femme et le pantin*, which in 1977 became *That Obscure Object of Desire*, starring Fernando Rey. I used two different actresses, Angelina Molina and Carole Bouquet, for the same role—a device many spectators never even noticed. The title was prompted by Louls's beautiful phrase "a pale object of desire." Essentially faithful to the book, I nonetheless added certain elements that radically changed the tone. And although I can't explain why, I found the final scene very moving—the woman's hand carefully mending a tear in a bloody lace mantilla. All I can say is that the mystery remains intact right up until the final explosion. In addition to the theme of the impossibility of ever truly possessing a woman's body, the film insists upon maintaining that climate of insecurity and imminent disaster—an atmosphere we all recognize, because it is our own. Ironically, a bomb exploded on October 16, 1977, in the Ridge Theatre in San Francisco, where the movie was being shown; and during the confusion that followed, four reels were stolen and the walls covered with graffiti like "This time you've gone too far!" There was some evidence to suggest that the attack was engineered by a group of homosexuals, and although those of this persuasion didn't much like the film, I've never been able to figure out why....

According to the latest reports, we now have enough nuclear bombs not only to destroy all life on the planet but also to blow the planet itself, empty and cold, out of its orbit altogether and into the immensity of the cosmic void. I find that possibility magnificent, and in fact I'm tempted to shout bravo, because from now on there can be no doubt that science is our enemy. She flatters our desire for omnipotence—desires that lead inevitably to our destruction. A recent poll announced that out of 700,000 "highly qualified" scientists now working throughout the world, 520,000 of them are busy trying to



streamline the means of our self-destruction, while only 180,000 are studying ways of keeping us alive.

The trumpets of the apocalypse have been sounding at our gates for years now, but we still stop up our ears. We do, however, have four new horsemen: overpopulation (the leader, the one waving the black flag), science, technology, and the media. All the other evils in the world are merely consequences of these. I'm not afraid to put the press in the front rank, either. The last screenplay I worked on, for a film I'll never make, deals with a triple threat: science, terrorism, and the free press. The last, which is usually seen as a victory, a blessing, a "right," is perhaps the most pernicious of all, because it feeds on what the other three horsemen leave behind....

Filmmaking seems to me a transitory and threatened art. It is very closely bound up with technical developments. If in thirty of forty years the screen no longer exists, if editing isn't necessary, cinema will have ceased to exist. It will have become something else. That's already almost the case when a film is shown on television: the smallness of the screen falsifies everything....

Today I have come to be much more pessimistic. I believe that our world is lost. It may be destroyed by the population explosion, technology, science, and information. I call these the four horsemen of the apocalypse. I am frightened by modern science that leads us to the grave through nuclear war or genetic manipulations, if not through psychiatry, as in the Soviet Union. Europe must create a new civilization, but I fear that science and the madness it can unleash won't leave time enough to do it.

If I had to make one last film, I would make it about the complicity of science and terrorism. Although I understand the motives of terrorism, I totally disapprove of them. It solves nothing; it plays into the hands of the right and of repression. One of the themes of the film would be this: A band of international terrorists is preparing a severe attack in France, when the news arrives that an atomic bomb has been detonated over Jerusalem. A general mobilization is declared everywhere; world war is imminent. Then the leader of the group telephones the president of the Republic. He informs the French authorities of the exact location, in a barge near the Louvre, where they can recover the atomic bomb the terrorists have placed there before it explodes. His organization has decided to destroy the center of a civilization, but they renounced the crime because world war was about to break out, and the mission of terrorism had ended. Henceforth it is assumed by governments, which take up the task of destroying the world....

In the film I'm thinking about, I would have liked to shoot in the hall of the Reichstag a meeting of fifteen Nobel

prize-winning scientists recommending that atomic bombs be placed at the bottom of all the oil wells. Science would then cure us of that which feeds our madness. But I rather think that in the end we'll be borne off by the worst, because since Un

Chien andalou the world has advanced toward the absurd. I am the only one who hasn't changed. I remain Catholic and atheist, thank God.

**from *An Unspeakable Betrayal:*  
*Selected Writings of Luis Buñuel*  
(U Cal Press 2000)**

From an address delivered at the University of Mexico, Mexico City, December 1958



The cinema seems to have been invented to express the life of the subconscious, the roots of which reach so deeply into poetry, yet it is almost never used toward

that end. Among modern film trends, the best known has been "neorealism." Neorealist films present the viewer with a slice of life, taking characters from the street and even showing actual buildings and interiors. With a few exceptions, among which I would cite in particular *The Bicycle Thief*, neorealism has done nothing to bring out that which is distinctively cinematic, namely, the mysterious and the fantastic. What is the point of all the visual trappings if the situations, the motives that drive the characters, their reactions, and even the plots themselves are drawn from the most sentimental and conformist literature? The only interesting contribution—brought to us not by neorealism but by Zavattini—is the raising of the commonplace act to the level of dramatic action. In *Umberto D*, one of the most interesting neorealist films, an entire ten-minute reel shows a maid in a series of actions that only a short while ago would have been considered unworthy of the screen.

... Neorealism has introduced elements into cinematic expression that have enriched its vocabulary, but nothing more. Neorealist reality is incomplete, conventional, and above all rational; poetry, mystery, everything that completes and enlarges tangible reality is entirely missing from its works. Neorealism confuses ironic fantasy with the fantastic and black humor.

... Nevertheless, do not think by what I have just said that I favor a cinema exclusively devoted to the expression of the fantastic and the mysterious, an escapist cinema that spurns everyday reality and aspires only to plunge us into the unconscious world of dreams. I have indicated, albeit briefly, the great importance I attach to the film that addresses the fundamental problems of modern man, not considered in isolation, as an individual case, but in relation to others. Let me borrow a few words from Emerson. He defined the function of the novelist (and here read filmmaker) in this way: "The novelist has acquitted himself honorably of his task when, by means of a faithful rendering of authentic social relations, he has destroyed the conventional view of the nature of those relations, shattering the optimism of the bourgeois world, and

has forced the reader to question the permanency of the status



quo, even if he does not directly point us to a solution, even if he does not ostensibly take sides.

**Marcia Kinder: “The Exterminating Angel: Exterminating Civilization” (Criterion Essays)**

Luis Buñuel’s ferociously brilliant *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) is one of his most provocative and unforgettable works. In it, we watch a trivial breach of etiquette transform into the destruction of civilization. Not only does this story undermine our confidence in our social institutions but it challenges our powers of cognition and perception, which are shown to be easily distorted by unreliable narratives. Perhaps most threatening, despite the emotional distance from the characters that Buñuel’s satiric vision grants us, is what we are ultimately forced to see: that we in the audience are also objects of his attack.

The plot of *The Exterminating Angel* is easy to summarize, though its characters’ motivations remain mysterious. Buñuel described it as “the story of a group of friends who have dinner together after seeing a play, but when they go into the living room after dinner, they find that for some inexplicable reason they can’t leave.” For equally inexplicable reasons, after preparing dinner for the guests, all but one of the servants feel compelled to flee the mansion. Trapped in the living room, the guests soon begin to panic. The narrative places us in the same position as the guests, puzzling over why they can’t leave, how they might escape, and what it all means.

Buñuel made this daring film at the end of his eighteen years in Mexico, and it was his only work from that period on which he had complete artistic freedom. In 1946, when he was hired by Russian émigré producer Óscar Dancigers to direct a film in Mexico, Buñuel was already a middle-aged man with a wife and two sons and no job. Though on the verge of getting his American citizenship, he had just been fired by New York’s Museum of Modern Art for allegedly being a communist. He moved his family to Mexico and, from 1946 until 1964, made twenty films within the commercial industry there, all on small budgets and tight shooting schedules and with other constraints.

*The Exterminating Angel* was another story, however, a more personal work, coming at a key point in Buñuel’s

career, right before his final return to Paris and immediately following the scandalous reception of *Viridiana* (1961), his first film made in Spain (although a Spanish-Mexican coproduction) since he had gone into exile. *Viridiana* was chosen as Spain’s official entry for the Cannes Film Festival, where it won a major award, but it was condemned by the Vatican for sacrilege and was subsequently banned in Spain. To get distribution elsewhere, the film’s nationality had to be changed from Spanish to Mexican, as Buñuel’s had been. These traumatic circumstances help to explain why Buñuel was so determined to demonstrate what could be achieved with artistic freedom in Mexico, even as an exile.

He was granted that freedom by producer Gustavo Alatriste, the husband of Silvia Pinal, whom Buñuel had cast in *Viridiana* and put on the world stage. (Buñuel also gave her a key role in *The Exterminating Angel*.) Alatriste, Buñuel would later recount, had total confidence in him and did not interfere with the production at all. Buñuel, significantly, chose satire for this film, a narrative decision that both departed from his other Mexican works, which were mostly melodramas, and anticipated what he was later to do in Paris in his final masterworks, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) and *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974). Although in one interview Buñuel lamented that he had not pushed the savagery of the guests all the way to cannibalism, in his autobiography he claims his only regret was that *The Exterminating Angel* was made in Mexico rather than in Europe. ....

*The Exterminating Angel* was already looking toward Europe, but, as a pivot, it also looked back to *Viridiana* and to Buñuel’s roots in the avant-garde. Building on *Viridiana*’s most sacrilegious sequence (the mocking of the Last Supper), *The Exterminating Angel* is totally structured around a devastating dinner party, which takes place on Providence Street. In both films, the dinner party functions as one of the civilized rituals used, by the church and the bourgeoisie, to disavow man’s animal nature. Buñuel transforms it into a subversive means of exposing human savagery, which helps explain the presence, in *The Exterminating Angel*, of the live bear and sheep that the hostess has prepared as a surprise but that prove far less bestial than her guests. This satiric use of the dinner party would recur later in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* and in the hilarious sequence in *The Phantom of Liberty* where the significance of the two ends of the digestive process is reversed—turning defecation into a charming social ritual, and dining into a shameful act performed in private. In all four films, Buñuel emphasizes the contrast between the dinner party’s primary function of satisfying a need we share with all other animals and the bourgeois ritual that is used to separate the rich from the poor, the sacred from the profane. The dinner party is not the only sacrilegious element shared by *Viridiana* and *The Exterminating Angel*. Both films mock religion by showing how fear and desperation spawn a belief in false myths and fetishes: in this case, the kabbalah, chicken feet, and a “washable rubber virgin,” as well as the comical Masonic codes and brutal rituals of human sacrifice. Perhaps even more sacrilegious, *The Exterminating Angel* demonstrates how religion provides an underlying justification for some of the worst injustices of the bourgeois social order. That’s one of the reasons the embattled bourgeois living room inevitably leads to the church.

But unlike *Viridiana*, which retains a traditional linear narrative, *The Exterminating Angel* has the kind of experimental structure that Buñuel would push to its limits in his final works and that can also be found in his early surrealist classics. Like *Un chien andalou*, *The Exterminating Angel* creates a tension between sensory perceptions and narrative coherence—a dialectic Buñuel had learned from Freud’s dream-work theory, where the narrative drive is distrusted as a form of censorship (or secondary revision) and the underlying images valued as a source of discovery and subversion. In *The Exterminating Angel*, we spectators are constantly confronted with continuity errors—repetitions, inconsistencies, contradictions—which can be missed if we focus too exclusively on narrative drive. According to Buñuel, “There are around twenty repetitions in the film, but some are more noticeable than others.” Yet an attentiveness to sensory perceptions enables us to see that something is terribly wrong with this narrative, and empowers the character played by Silvia Pinal to propose an ingenious way of escaping the trap.

*The Exterminating Angel*, like *L’âge d’or*, emphasizes the extremes of class conflict, which may prove deadly but are treated with comic absurdity. Not only are the bourgeois guests and their servants radically separated by the narrative, which intercuts between insiders and outsiders, but they also appear incapable of identifying with each other. For example, one of the bourgeois characters describes a train wreck in which “the third-class compartment, full of common people, had been squashed like a huge accordion,” and then calmly remarks: “The suffering of those poor people didn’t move me at all.” Yet she also reports how she fainted away with grief “before the grandeur of the death . . . of that admirable prince, who . . . [had] such a noble profile!” Buñuel could already see that disaster brings out the worst in most people.

Like Buñuel’s surrealist documentary *Las hurdes* (1933), *The Exterminating Angel* seems to be parodying a genre (this time the disaster film rather than ethnography) before it became fully established. The original title of Buñuel’s screenplay for the film was *The Castaways of Providence Street*, which evokes a shipwreck. Of course, there were some earlier examples in both genres before his prophetic parodies—Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) in the case of ethnography, and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Lifeboat* (1944) in the case of the disaster film. Yet only Buñuel clearly saw the ideological problems at the core of those genres that would be discussed decades later: the biased cultural stance of the

ethnographer and his own complicity in colonizing and exploiting his subjects, and the invested judgments of the godlike filmmaker who decides which characters are worthy of surviving the disaster. He realized that they usually prevent us from perceiving the larger patterns of systemic corruption and injustice, and the power relations between insiders and outsiders, which are the primary focus of his satire in *The Exterminating Angel*.

Buñuel and his brilliant cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa, spatialize the trap in *The Exterminating Angel*. Cutting between the interiorly trapped guests and those surrounding the mansion, who are equally incapable of acting, the film also spatializes the sharp class division between insiders and outsiders. Draped with black curtains, the doorway between the living room and the darkened space beyond draws

our attention like a proscenium arch. The camera is frequently positioned at the far end of the empty salon, exaggerating the lonely distance to the crowded room, where the guests mill about like souls in limbo. As the camera pans along a row of guests lined up across the arch as if determined to walk through but who then become distracted, it emphasizes the power of the invisible barrier. Yet trash can be thrown into the adjoining empty space, transforming the rest of the house into an uninhabitable territory. This vast wasteland is left to the lumbering bear, which swings from the elegant chandelier, and to the sheep, which are lured into the living room, where they become sacrificial lambs. To perform their own animal functions—sex, excretion, and death—the guests retreat into small closets, enclosures that function as an underworld. These closets are so dark that we can see little of their interiors; like the guests, the camera is confined primarily to the living room.

When the thin veneer of civilization disintegrates, Buñuel’s bourgeois guests descend into brutal savagery, breaking down walls to get at water pipes; committing suicide and demanding the sacrificial death of the host; and turning to magic, dreams, and narrative for consolation and release. Their mysterious inability to leave the room is experienced as a failure of will—perhaps no more mysterious than the one that prevents citizens from changing the totally corrupt economic, social, and political systems on which their own privileges (and the miseries of the servants and other have-nots) are based.

Like the guests, we long for a rational explanation that will free us from the anxiety aroused by such disturbing behavior. This cognitive struggle is dramatized in the plot as one of the guests (nicknamed the Valkyrie and the Virgin) commands everyone to stand still, for she “perceives” that they are all positioned in





precisely the same spot as when this strange condition first emerged. But how could they all be in the same place when some of them have already died? Nevertheless, through a communal “faith” in this absurd narrative premise, the guests are miraculously released from the living room, only to have the same kind of entrapment reimposed in another setting. Just as the guests have been trained by their culture to pursue ritual and narrative coherence, we spectators have been trained by earlier sequences that repetition is the key. As in *Las hurdes*, though the insiders at first seem to be the only ones who are trapped, the film eventually reveals that the trap extends outward to encompass outsiders (including us spectators), who are all caught in the same network of bourgeois corruption, but on a much larger scale.



#### **“Surrealism” (Wikipedia)**

**Surrealism** was a [cultural movement](#) which developed in Europe in the aftermath of [World War I](#) and was largely influenced by [Dada](#).<sup>[1]</sup> The movement is best known for its [visual artworks](#) and [writings](#) and the [juxtaposition](#) of uncommon imagery. Artists painted unnerving, illogical scenes, sometimes with [photographic precision](#), creating strange creatures from everyday objects, and developing painting techniques that allowed the [unconscious](#) to express itself.<sup>[2]</sup> Its aim was, according to leader [André Breton](#), to “resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality”, or *surreality*.<sup>[3][4][5]</sup>

Works of surrealism feature the [element of surprise](#), unexpected [juxtapositions](#) and [non sequitur](#); however, many surrealist artists and writers regard their work as an expression of the philosophical movement first and foremost, with the works themselves being an artifact. Leader Breton was explicit in his assertion that Surrealism was, above all, a revolutionary movement. At the time, the movement was associated with political causes such as [communism](#) and [anarchism](#). The term “Surrealism” is said to have been coined by [Guillaume Apollinaire](#) as early as 1917. However, the Surrealist movement was not officially established until October 15, 1924, when the French poet and critic [André Breton](#) published the [Surrealist Manifesto](#) in Paris.<sup>[6]</sup> The most important center of the movement was [Paris](#), France. From the 1920s onward, the movement spread around the globe, impacting the visual arts, literature, film, and [music](#) of many countries and languages, as well as political thought and practice, philosophy, and social theory.

([Full Wikipedia entry here.](#))

#### **Luis Buñuel said:**

“Give me two hours a day of activity, and I’ll take the other 22 in dreams.”

“God and Country are an unbeatable team; they break all records for oppression and bloodshed.”

“[The surrealists’] aim was not to establish a glorious place for themselves in the annals of art and literature, but to change the world, to transform life itself. This was our essential purpose, but one good look around is evidence enough of our failure...Like the earth itself, devoured by monumental dreams, we were nothing.”

“Salvador Dalí seduced many ladies, particularly American ladies, but these seductions usually consisted of stripping them naked in his apartment, frying a couple of eggs, putting them on the woman’s shoulders and, without a word, showing them the door.”

“[The cinema] is an instrument of poetry, with all that that word can imply of the sense of liberation, of subversion of reality, of the threshold of the marvelous world of the subconscious, of nonconformity with the limited society that surrounds us.”

“None of the traditional arts reveals so massive a disproportion between the possibilities it offers and its achievements.”

“If you were to ask me if I’d ever had the bad luck to miss my daily cocktail, I’d have to say that I doubt it; where certain things are concerned, I plan ahead.”

“Nothing would disgust me more morally than winning an Oscar.”

“Tobacco and alcohol, delicious fathers of abiding friendships and fertile reveries.”

“Age is something that doesn’t matter, unless you are a cheese.

“The two basic sentiments of my childhood, which stayed with me well into adolescence, are those of a profound eroticism, at first sublimated in a great religious faith, and a permanent consciousness of death.”

“Morality—middle-class morality, that is—is for me immoral. One must fight it. It is a morality founded on our most unjust social institutions—religion, fatherland, family culture—everything that people call the pillars of society.”

“The thought that continues guiding me today is the same that guided me at the age of twenty-five. It is an idea of Engels. The artist describes authentic social relations with the object of destroying the conventional ideals of the bourgeois world and compelling the public to doubt the perennial existence of the established order. That is the meaning of all my films: to say time and time again, in case someone forgets or believes otherwise, that we do not live in the best of all possible worlds. I don’t know what more I can do.”

“In the hands of a free spirit the cinema is a magnificent and dangerous weapon. It is the superlative medium through which to express the world of thought, feeling, and instinct. The creative handling of film images is such that, among all means of human expressions, its way of functioning is most reminiscent of the work of the mind during sleep. A film is like an involuntary imitation of a dream. Brunius points out how the darkness that slowly settles over a movie theatre is equivalent to the act of closing the eyes. Then, on the screen, as with the human being, the nocturnal voyage into the unconscious begins. . . .The cinema seems to have been invented to express the life of the subconscious.”

“Personally, I don’t like film music. It seems to me that it is a false element, a sort of trick, except of course in certain cases.”

#### **Buñuel on martinis:**

“Connoisseurs who like their martinis very dry suggest simply allowing a ray of sunlight to shine through a bottle of Noilly

Prat before it hits the bottle of gin. At a certain period in America it was said that the making of a dry martini should resemble the Immaculate Conception, for, as Saint Thomas Aquinas once noted, the generative power of the Holy Ghost pierced the Virgin’s hymen “like a ray of sunlight through a window – leaving it unbroken”.

Another crucial recommendation is that the ice be so cold and hard that it won’t melt, since nothing’s worse than a watery martini. For those who are still with me, let me give you my personal recipe, the fruit of long experimentation and guaranteed to produce perfect results. The day before your guests arrive, put all the ingredients – glasses, gin, and shaker – in the refrigerator. Use a thermometer to make sure the ice is about twenty degrees below zero (centigrade). Don’t take anything out until your friends arrive; then pour a few drops of Noilly Prat and half a demitasse spoon of Angostura bitters over the ice. Stir it, then pour it out, keeping only the ice, which retains a faint taste of both. Then pour straight gin over the ice, stir it again, and serve.”

#### **COMING UP IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, FALL 2020, SERIES 41:**

- Oct 13: Jean-Pierre Melville, *Le Samuraï* (1967)  
Oct 20: Sergio Leone, *Once Upon a Time in the West/C’era una volta il West*, (1968)  
Oct 27: Andrei Tarkovsky, *Solaris/ Солярис* (1972)  
Nov 3: Werner Herzog, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God/Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (1972)  
Nov 10: Richard Rush, *The Stunt Man* (1980)  
Nov 17: Wim Wenders, *Wings of Desire/Der Himmel über Berlin* (1987)  
Nov 24: Krzysztof Kieslowski, *Three Colors; Red/ Trois couleurs: Rouge/ Trzy kolory. Czerwony* (1994)  
Dec 1: Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator* (1940)

#### **CONTACTS:**

email Diane Christian: [engdc@buffalo.edu](mailto:engdc@buffalo.edu)...email Bruce Jackson [bjackson@buffalo.edu](mailto:bjackson@buffalo.edu)...  
for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>...  
to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to [addtolist@buffalofilmseminars.com](mailto:addtolist@buffalofilmseminars.com)....

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