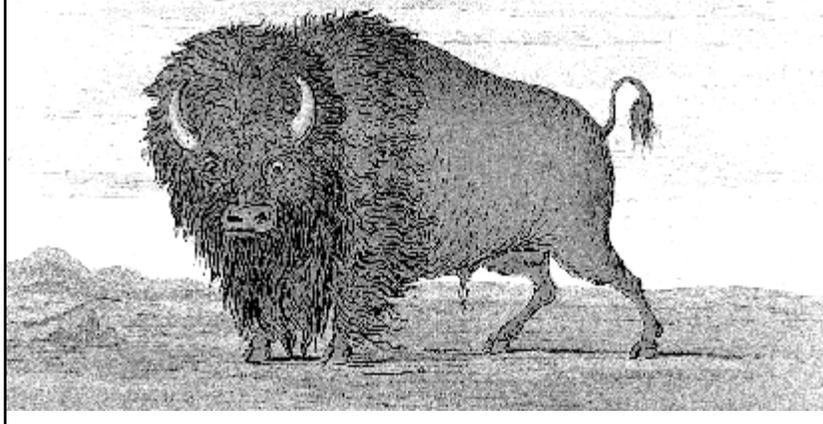


The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films with Diane Christian & Bruce Jackson

LUIS BUÑUEL (Luis Buñuel Portolés, 22 February 1900, Calanda, Spain—29 July 1983, Mexico City, Mexico, cirrhosis of the liver) became a controversial and internationally-known filmmaker with his first film, the 17-minute *Un Chien andalou* 1929 (*An Andalusian Dog*), which he made with Salvador Dali. He wrote and directed 33 other films, most of them interesting, many of them considered masterpieces by critics and by fellow filmmakers. Some of them are : *Cet obscur objet du désir* 1977 (*That Obscure Object of Desire*), *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* 1972 (*The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*), *Tristana* 1970, *La Voie lactée* 1969 (*The Milky Way*), *Simón del desierto* 1965 (*Simon of the Desert*), *El Ángel Exterminador/Exterminating Angel* 1962, *Viridiana* 1961, *Nazarín* 1958, *Subida al cielo* 1952 (*Ascent to Heaven, Mexican Bus Ride*), *Los Olvidados* 1950 (*The Young and the Damned*), *Las Hurdes* 1932 (*Land Without Bread*), and *L'Âge d'or* 1930 (*Age of Gold*). His autobiography, *My Last Sigh* (Vintage, New York) was published the year after his death. Some critics say much of it is apocryphal, the screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière (who collaborated with Buñuel on six scripts), claims *he* wrote it based on things Buñuel said. Whatever: it's a terrific book.

Leonard Maltin wrote this biographical note on Buñuel in his *Movie Encyclopedia* (1994):

"One of the screen's greatest artists, a director whose unerring instincts and assured grasp of cinematic technique enabled him to create some of film's most memorable images....After the sardonic documentary *Las Hurdes* in 1932, Buñuel took a 15-year layoff from directing. During a stay in the U.S. he worked for the Museum of Modern Art, preparing documentaries for export to foreign countries, and as a dubbing supervisor of Spanish films at Warners....

"His directing career began again in Mexico in the late 1940s; many of his films from this period, mostly assignment jobs, are undistinguished but bear interesting touches. Some, however, are genuinely excellent; the best remembered are *Los Olvidados* (1950), an unflinching look at Mexican poverty and juvenile delinquency, and *Nazarín* (1958), the story of a humble priest that was one of Buñuel's harshest critiques of Christianity. Buñuel's real renaissance as a filmmaker began in 1960, when he returned to his native Spain to direct *Viridiana* the deceptively simple tale of a novice pulled from the convent to tend to a family tragedy, unprepared for the corruption of the outside world she meets. The Franco regime in Spain banned it on release. Buñuel followed with one great work after another, attacking the most sacred of cows, particularly the Catholic church and the complacency of society-with remarkable energy and little mercy: *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), a savage assault on the bourgeois mentality, with guests trapped at a dinner party; *Diary of a Chambermaid* (1964), a costume picture updated to encompass the rise of fascism in the 1930s; the short religious parable *Simon of the Desert* (1965); a full flowering of surrealism in *Belle de jour* (1967), with Catherine Deneuve as a respectable wife who enjoys working at a whorehouse; *The Milky Way* (1969), a viciously funny, intricate trip through Catholic dogma; and *Tristana* (1970), with favorite Buñuel actor Fernando Rey as the guardian of Deneuve, and their-to put it mildly-odd relationship.



BELLE DE JOUR (1967)101 min.

Directed by Luis Buñuel
Writing credits Luis Buñuel, Jean-Claude Carrière based on the novel by Joseph Kessel
Produced by Henri Baum, Raymond Hakim, Robert Hakim
Cinematography by Sacha Vierny
Film Editing by Louise Hautecoeur
Production Design by Robert Clavel
Costume Design by Yves Saint-Laurent

Catherine Deneuve....Séverine Serizy
Jean Sorel....Pierre Serizy
Michel Piccoli....Henri Husson
Geneviève Page....Madame Anais
Pierre Clémenti....Marcel
Françoise Fabian....Charlotte
Macha Méril....Renee
Muni....Pallas
Maria Latour....Mathilde
Claude Cerval and Michel Charrel....Footman
Iska Khan....Asian client
Bernard Musson....Majordomo
Marcel Charvey....Professor Henri
François Maistre....L'enseignant
Francisco Rabal....Hyppolite
Georges Marchal....Duke
Francis Blanche....Monsieur Adolphe

When *Tristana* was nominated for a Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, the great anarchist, typically, commented, "Nothing would disgust me more, morally, than receiving an Oscar." His next film, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972), a marvelous, surrealist odyssey about a group of dinner guests unable to finish a meal, did win the Oscar. Buñuel's reaction is unknown. He followed it with the equally bizarre, if less well-received, *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974)... Buñuel also had a good deal of fun with erotic obsession; his last film, the hysterical *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), chortles mightily at an old patrician's love for a frustratingly virginal beauty (played by two different actresses)."

CATHERINE DENEUVE (Catherine Dorléac, 22 October 1943, Paris, France) appears as Madame de Merteuil in the 2002 made-for-tv version of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. She was in nearly 100 other films, among them *8 femmes* (2002), *Le Temps retrouvé* (1999), *The Hunger* (1983), *Le Dernier métro* (1980), *Tristana* (1970), *Mayerling* (1968), *Repulsion* (1965), and *Les Collégiennes* (1957).

JEAN SOREL (Jean de Combault-Roquebrune, 25 September 1934, Marseille, France) was most recently in a 1998 made-for-tv film, *À nous deux la vie*. Some of his other 78 theatrical and tv films were *Bonnie e Clyde all'italiana/Bonnie and Clyde Italian Style* (1982), *The Aspern Papers* (1981), *The Day of the Jackal* (1973), *La Ronde* (1964), *Germinal* (1963), and *La Giornata balorda/ From a Roman Balcony Love Is a Day's Work/Pickup in Rome* (1960).

MICHEL PICCOLI (Jacques Daniel Michel Piccoli, 27 December 1925, Paris, France) was in *Je rentre à la maison/I'm going home* (2001) and was the narrator of *Nouvel ordre mondial ... quelque part en Afrique/New World Order: Somewhere in Africa* (2000). He was also in *La Nuit de Varennes* (1982), *Atlantic City* (1980), *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (1972), *Topaz* (1969), *Le Voie lactée/The Milky Way* (1969), *Paris brûle-t-il?/Is Paris Burning?* (1966), *La Guerre est finie/The War is Over* (1966), *LeMépris/Contempt* (1963) and nearly 200 other films.

SACHA VIERNY (10 August 1919, Bois-le-Roi, Seine-et-Marne, Île-de-France, France—15 May 2001, Paris) did only 56 theatrical films but he was one of the great cinematographers. His last film was *The Man Who Cried* (2000); his first was *Pantomimes* (1954). It was his second that put him in the world of cinema's players: *Alain Resnais's Nuit et brouillard/Night and For* (1955). He was principal cameraman for Resnais and Peter Greenaway. Some of his other films are *The Pillow Book* (1996), *Prospero's Books* (1991), *The Cook the Thief His Wife & Her Lover* (1989), *Drowning by Numbers* (1988), *The Belly of an Architect* (1987), *A Zed & Two Noughts* (1985), *Stavisky* (1974), *La Guerre est finie* (1966), *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) and *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959).

from *An Unspeakable Betrayal. Selected Writings of Luis Buñuel. U Cal 2000. Foreword by Jean Claude Carrière*

He said that García Lorca, without any doubt, had opened the doors to another world for him, an expanding world. When he went to Paris at twenty-five, the discovery of Russian and German films (above all those of Fritz Lang and Murnau) showed him his true path. That was what he was born for: that explosion on a white screen.

“Cinema as an Instrument of Poetry”

Cinema acts directly upon the viewer in presenting concrete beings and things, isolating him in silence and darkness from what we might call his normal “psychic habitat.” For that reason film can captivate him like no other form of human expression. But it can also dull him like no other.

Unfortunately, that seems to be the sole mission of the majority of films today: our movie screens make a show of the

Anyone who hopes to see good films will rarely be satisfied by the big-budget productions or by those that come with the approval of the critics and popular acclaim. The personal story, the private individual drama cannot, in my opinion interest anyone who is truly alive to his time; if the viewer participates in the joys, the sorrows, the anguish of a character on the screen, it can only be because he sees reflected in them the joys, sorrows, and anguish of society as a whole and, therefore, his own. Unemployment, the uncertainty of daily life, the fear of war, social injustice, and so on are the things that affect all people today, and thus they affect the viewer. But that Mr. So-and-So is unhappy at home and looks around for a girlfriend to distract himself, then finally abandons her to return to his self-sacrificing wife, is undoubtedly moral and edifying, but it leaves us completely indifferent.

...

In the hands of a free spirit, the cinema is a magnificent and dangerous weapon. It is the best instrument through which to express the world of dreams, of emotions, of instinct. The mechanism that produces cinematic images is,

moral and intellectual emptiness in which cinema thrives, confining itself to imitating novels and theater, except that its means of psychological expression are less rich. It repeats ad nauseam the same stories that the nineteenth century tired of telling, and that are still repeated in contemporary novels.

A moderately cultured individual would reject with scorn a book with one of the plots recounted in the biggest films. Yet, seated comfortably in a dark movie theater, dazzled by the light and movement that exert an almost hypnotic power over him, fascinated by the faces of people and instantaneous scene changes, this same nearly cultured individual placidly accepts the most disparaged clichés.

Thanks to this sort of hypnotic inhibition, the filmgoer loses a significant percentage of his intellectual faculties. . . .

among all forms of human expression, that which most closely resembles the mechanism of the human mind in the way it works, or better yet, that which best imitates the workings of the mind during sleep. . . .

The cinema seem 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 to that end.”

“Pessimism”: 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 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. Though I understand the motivations of terrorism, I totally disapprove of them. It solves nothing; it plays into the hands of the right and of

repression.

from *Belle de Jour*. Luis Buñuel. Ed. Adkinson. Simon & Schuster NY 1971. Interview w/LB 1967

Q. Are you pleased with your latest film, *Belle de Jour*?

BUNUEL: I don't like Kessel's novel at all, but I found it interesting to try and turn something I didn't like into something I did. There are some scenes in the film which I am very pleased with, others which I'm not at all. I ought to say that I enjoyed total freedom during the shooting and I therefore consider myself entirely responsible for the result. . . .

You know of course that it's a pornographic film? No, no, by that I mean a chaste eroticism. Even if the censors look at it differently; I never try to scandalise people, but they sometimes scandalise themselves.

Q. It's your third film in colour. . .

BUNUEL: This time I had a remarkable cameraman—Sacha Vierny, who reconciled me to colour.

“Buñuel's Golden Bowl” Elliot Stein 1967

Belle de Jour is a masterpiece, technically Buñuel's most accomplished, free-flowing work. It is unique, the only one of his films in which his obsessions, his purity and his convulsive spirit have all been fully, satisfactorily organised into an architectonic whole. It unfolds so smoothly, with such sustained legato that there is no chance to catch a breath. *Viridiana* was a step in this direction, the underrated *Journal* a near-arrival. *Belle* is the many-faceted and perfect Golden Bowl, which crowns a life's work. When released in Paris recently, it was greeted with shock, reticence and disappointment by most of the critics for the daily and weekly papers. The great man, tired, deaf, sixty-seven years old and alcoholic (his own admission), now only wants to return to Mexico and rest.

None of the film's 'fantasies' are in the book.

“Belle de Jour” Andrew Sarris

There are several possible interpretations of Buñuel's ending, but the formal symmetry of the film makes the debate academic. Buñuel is ultimately ambiguous so as not to moralize about his subject. He wishes neither to punish Séverine nor to reward her. He prefers to contemplate the grace with which she accepts her fate, and Buñuel is nothing if not fatalistic.

The Discreet Art of Luis Buñuel. Gwynne Edwards. Marian Bovars, London, 1982

Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* has, clearly, the narrative line of Kessel's book, much as *Nazarín* retains the framework of Galdós's novel. On the other hand Buñuel seized on the surrealist threads, the sexual and psychological implications of the novel, and proceeded to weave them into one of his richest and most complex tapestries. Before making the film, he drew attention to the source of his real interest in the story:

This novel of the twenties, of the period of Paul Morand, done in a realistic style, is about the masochistic impulses of a woman who, fearing that she is frigid, ends by working in brothels. I hope I can save such a stale subject by mixing indiscriminately and without warning in the montage the things that actually happen to the heroine, and the fantasies and morbid impulses which she imagines. As the film proceeds, I am going to increase the frequency of these interpolations, and at the end, in the final sequence, the audience will not be able to know if what is happening to her is actual or the heroine's subjective world—reality or nightmare.

. . . For all its glittering façade, its plush and elegant surface, *Belle de Jour* is as corrosive and subversive as any of Buñuel's earlier films.

BUÑUEL. John Baxter. Carroll & Graf, NY 1994

In Mexico, Buñuel's Paris agent had sent him Joseph Kessel's 1928 novel, *Belle de Jour*, asking if he would be interested in directing it for Robert and Raymond Hakim, with Catherine Deneuve. Luis had doubts, mostly about the producers. Since the 1930s, the Egyptian-born Hakims had specialized in discreetly salacious films by directors who, though well-established, were out of the mainstream. They had produced Duvivier's *Pepe Le Moko*, Renoir's *La Bête Humaine*, Becker's *Casque d'Or*, Chabrol's *A Double Tour* and Losey's *Eve*—which notoriously, they recut and dubbed into a version so bad Losey disowned it. Their last film before *Belle de Jour* was, characteristically, Roger Vadim's oh-so-naughty remake of *La Ronde*. The Hakims were known never to send out a franc until it was unavoidable, nor pay salaries except as a last resort. In *Belle de Jour*, Luis needled them by having Marcel and Hippolyte steal the payroll from 79 Champs-Élysées, the Hakims' own office. . . .

Buñuel packed *Belle de Jour* with old friends, and even appeared twice himself as an extra, in conversation with one of the Hakims in the café scene where Séverine meets the Duc, and as a pedestrian in the robbery sequence on the Champs-Élysées

. . . Given the tensions on the set, it is astonishing that *Belle de Jour* is a masterpiece. In it, Jean-Luc Godard remarked, Buñuel seemed to be playing the cinema the way Bach played the organ. Rare among erotic films, it both analyses and evokes

sexual obsession. The book gives Séverine no fantasy life, but in the film her head seethes with dreams, all redolent of a masochism that likewise is not mentioned in the book. Buñuel worked more extensively than usual on the post-production of *Belle de Jour*, enriching the sound track in particular with the near-subliminal use of bells and animal sounds. So dense was its texture, in fact, that he was convinced the film would elude most audiences completely.

He also cut and shortened a number of sequences in expectation of censorship. Even so, the film ran into immediate trouble. The authorities demanded the religious overtones of Séverine's visit to the chateau of the necrophiliac Duc, with a mass being said in the background, be removed. Two appearances of blood were also cut; one where Mathilde thrashes the gynaecologist Professor's buttocks, and a second where, as Séverine lies satiated after the Asian, Pallas picks up a blood-stained towel.

More would have been cut or modified had not André Malraux, then Minister of Culture, been persuaded to intervene by his old friend Kessel, who, after he got over Buñuel's slurs on the novel, liked the film. 'I was nervous about going to this screening,' he wrote a friend. 'I came out of it filled with gratitude. Buñuel's genius has surpassed all that I could have hoped. It is at one and the same time the book and not the book. We are in another dimension; that of the subconscious, of dreams and secret instincts suddenly laid bare. And what formal beauty in the images! And beneath the severity, the

most contained and most moving pity.’

SOME THINGS LUIS BUÑUEL SAID:

"Sex without religion is like cooking an egg without salt. Sin gives more chances to desire"

"To compare me with Goya is a nonsense. Critics speak of Goya because they don't know anything about Quevedo, Teresa of Avila, the picaresque literature, Galdòs, Valle Inclàn and others.... Today's culture is unfortunately inseparable from economic and military power. A ruling Nation can impose its culture and give a worldwide fame to a second-rate writer like Hemingway. Steinbeck is important due to American guns. Had Dos Passos and Faulkner been born in Paraguay or in Turkey, who'd read them?"

"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 Cinematografica in Mexico City, I once went to visit 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."

"I have always been on the side of those who seek the truth, but I part company with them when they think they have found it. They often become fanatics, which I detest, or if not, then ideologues: I am not an intellectual and their speeches send me running. Like all speeches. For me, the best orator is the one who from the first phrase takes a pair of pistols from his pocket and fires on the audience."

"Cinema had always been seductive for me, because it is a complete means of expression, alternately realistic and oneiric, narrative, absurd, or poetic. "

"In my films I grant particular importance to the action and strive constantly to create surprises. The point of departure is often a very simple idea: people who can't manage to eat (*The discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*) or who are unable to leave a room (*The Exterminating Angel*) . . . I like surprises to provoke laughter. And I've made much use of objects, and of the fetishism they inspire, to create a comic effect. It's certainly true that fetishism bothers me in reality."

" . . .The glut of information has also brought about a serious deterioration in human consciousness today. If the pope dies, if a chief of state is assassinated, television is there. What good does it do to be present everywhere? Today man can

FROM ANDRÉ BRETON, "LE MANIFESTE DU SURREALISME," 1924:

...We are still living under the reign of logic, but the logical processes of our time apply only to the solution of problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism which remains in fashion allows for the consideration of only those facts narrowly relevant to our experience. Logical conclusions, on the other hand, escape us.

...The mind of the dreaming man is fully satisfied with whatever happens to it. The agonizing question of possibility does not arise. Kill, plunder more quickly, love as much as you wish. And if you die, are you not sure of being roused from the dead? Let yourself be led. Events will not tolerate deferment. You have no name. Everything is inestimably easy.

"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—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."

"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."

never be alone with himself, as he could in the Middle Ages.

"The result of all this is that anguish is absolute and confusion total."

" . . .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 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."

"Filmmaking seems to me a transitory and threatened art. It is very closely bound up with technical developments. If in thirty or fifty 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."

"I am the only one who hasn't changed. I remain Catholic and atheist, thank God."



buñuel, Dai

...Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all other psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for them in the solution of the principal problems of life.

A NOTE FROM THE IMDB BUÑUEL ENTRY:

“Bunuel liked to play tricks to his friends and, in Mexico, one of his favorite victims was the Spanish screenwriter Luis Alcoriza. During a hunting party Alcoriza saw an eaglet on a tree and knocked it down with the first shot but then he found a price tag on a paw: it was a stuffed bird put there by Buuel. One evening the two were dining in a Mexico City restaurant and Alcoriza saw a beautiful and all alone woman that from her table shot to him passionate glances. Of course he began to apologize with his friend for leaving him but Buuel rejected the excuses and seemed really angry. Alcoriza, a little embittered, eloped with the unknown belle and a little later, in a hotel room, saw these words written on her belly: ‘Happy night. Luis Buuel’. The woman was a high-class prostitute engaged by the director.”

Join us next week, Tuesday, November 12 for Gena Rowlands and John Marley in John Cassavetes' **Faces**, 1968.

Check out the other films, past films, and all the goldenrod handouts at <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>.

Write Diane at engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu. Write Bruce at bjackson@buffalo.edu.

Check out Buffalo Report at <http://buffaloreport.com>.

There's a free presentation in UB's "Fresh Films in French, Italian & Spanish" series this Saturday, Nov. 9, 8:00 pm, Screening Room, Center for the Arts, North Campus: Benito Zambrano's highly-regarded **SOLAS** (Alone), 1999 (Spanish with English subtitles). For info contact: Elizabeth Scarlett: 645-6000 ext. 1197, scarlett@acsu.buffalo.edu