The film won an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film and was nominated for an Oscar for Best Writing, Story and Screenplay Based on Factual Material or Material Not Previously Published or Produced for Luis Buñuel (screenplay/story) and Jean-Claude Carrière (collaboration).

CAST
Fernando Rey...Don Rafael Acosta
Paul Frankeur...François Thévenot
Delphine Seyrig...Simone Thévenot
Bulle Ogier...Florence
Stéphane Audran...Alice Sénéchal (as Stephane Audran)
Jean-Pierre Cassel...Henri Sénéchal
Julien Bertheau...Monsignor Dufour
Milena Vukotic...Ines
Maria Gabriella Maione...Guerrilla
Claude Piéplu...Colonel
Muni...Peasant
Pierre Maguelon...Police Sergeant
François Maistre...Inspector Delecluze
Michel Piccoli...Interior Minister
Ellen Bahl
Christian Baltauss...Lt. Hubert de Rochcahin
Olivier Bauchet
Robert Benoît...(as Robert Benoît)
Anne-Marie Deschott ...(as Anne-Marie Deschott)
Jean-Michel Dhermay...(as Michel Dhermay)
Georges Douking...Gardener

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...

*Writer  
**Writer and composer  
***Writer and editor

JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE (b. September 19, 1931 in Colombières-sur-Orb, Hérault, France) is a French novelist, screenwriter, actor, and Academy Award honoree. He was an alumnus of the École normale supérieure de Saint-Cloud and was president of La Fémis, the French state film school. Carrière was a frequent collaborator with Luis Buñuel on the screenplays of Buñuel's late French films, such as Diary of a Chambermaid (1964), Belle de Jour (1967), and The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972). At Cannes, he won the Grand Prize of the Jury – Best Short Film and was nominated for the Palm d’Or – Best Short Film for La pince à ongles (1969). At the Academy Awards, he won an Oscar for Best Short Subject, Live Action Subjects for Heureux anniversaire (1962) and was nominated for Oscars for Best Writing for Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie (1972), Cet obscure objet du désir (1977), and for The Unbearable Lightness of Being (1988). He was also awarded an Honorary Award at the 2015 Academy Awards. He has written for 146 films, including: The Suitor (1962), Viva Maria! (1965), Hotel Paradise (1966), The Thief of Paris (1967), The Milky Way (1969), Borsalino (1970), Taking Off (1971), The Outside Man (1972), The Phantom of Liberty (1974), Jack the Ripper (1976), That Obscure Object of Desire (1977), The Tin Drum (1979), Every Man for Himself (1980), The Return of Martin Guerre (1982), Godard's Passion (1982), Danton (1983), Swann in Love (1984), Valance (1989), The Mahabharata (1990 TV Mini-Series), Cyrano de Bergerac (1990), At Play in the Fields of the Lord (1991), Le retour de Casanova (1992), The Horseman on the Roof (1995), Golden Boy (1996), Les paradoxes de Buñuel (1997), Salsa (2000), Goya's Ghosts (2006), The Artist and the Model (2012), The Petrov File (2012), and A Faithful Man (2018). He has acted in 35 films, including L'Odge d'Oor, which is currently filming and in which Carrière plays “God.”


fernando rey (b. September 20, 1917 in A Coruña, Galicia, Spain—d. March 9, 1994 (age 76) in Madrid, Spain) was a Spanish film, theatre, and television actor, who worked in both Europe and the United States. Though his career began in the 1930s, it was his work with Orson Welles and Luis Buñuel during the 1960s and 1970s that made Rey internationally prominent; becoming the first “international Spanish actor.” Rey starred in Buñuel's Viridiana (1961), Tristana (1970), The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie) (1972) and That Obscure Object of Desire (1977). For Welles, Rey performed in two completed films, Chimes at Midnight (1966) and The Immortal Story (1968). He also lent his voice to a 1992 redub of Welles’s famously unfinished Don Quixote. Rey appeared in 4 adaptations of the Cervantes novel throughout his life, perhaps making the actor appealing to Buñuel's surrealistic aesthetic. He is also famous for appearing as a drug lord in the 1971 action classic The French Connection. He won Best Actor at Cannes for Elisa, vida mia (1977). He has 243 acting credits, including: Fazenda Fitas (1935), Escuadrilla (1941), Eugenia de Montijo (1944), Don Quijote de la Mancha (1947), Mare nostrum (1948), Cabaret (1953), Don Juan (1956), Main Street (1956), Le chanteur de Mexico (1956), Faustina (1957), The Last Days of Pompeii (1959), Goliath Against the Giants (1961), Fantasmas en la casa (1961), The Savage Guns (1962), Scheherazade (1963), The Running Man (1963), Weekend (1964), El señor de La Salle (1964), The Amazing Doctor G (1965), Chimes at Midnight (1965), El Greco (1966), Return of the Magnificent Seven (1966), The Viscoun (1967), Villa Rides (1968), Guns of the Magnificent Seven (1969), The Light at the Edge of the World (1971), Antony and Cleopatra


**Delphine Seyrig** (b. April 10, 1932 in Beirut, French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon—d. October 15, 1985 (age 58) in Neuilly-sur-Seine, Hauts-de-Seine, France) was a Lebanese-born French stage and film actress (61 acting credits), a film director (4 films), a screenwriter and a feminist. As a young woman, Seyrig studied acting at the Comédie de Saint-Étienne, training under Jean Dasté, and at Centre Dramatique de l'Est. In 1958 she appeared in her first film, the 1959 short Pull My Daisy. In New York she met director Alain Resnais, who asked her to star in his film, the inescapable and esoteric, Last Year at Marienbad (1961). Her performance brought her international recognition and she moved to Paris. Among her roles of this period is the older married woman in François Truffaut's Baisers volés (1968). Amajor feminist figure in France, she used her celebrity status to promote women's rights. She directed the 1977 Sois belle et tais-toi (Be Pretty and Shut Up), which included actresses Shirley MacLaine, Maria Schneider, and Jane Fonda, speaking frankly about the level of sexism they had to deal with in the film industry. She also co-directed an adaptation of the SCUM Manifesto by the controversial Valerie Solanas. In 1982, Seyrig helped establish the Paris-based Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, which maintains a large archive of women's filmed and recorded work. These are some of her other acting credits: Muriel, or the Time of Return (1963), Hedda Gabler (1967 TV Movie), The Milky Way (1969), The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972), The Day of the Jackal (1973), Le cri du coeur (1974), India Song (1975), Faces of Love (1977), On the Move (1979), Grain of Sand (1983), The Image of Dorian Gray in the Yellow Press (1984), Joan of Arc of Mongolia (1989), and Sentiments (1989 TV Series).


**Jean-Pierre Cassel** (b. October 27, 1932 in Paris, France—d. April 19, 2007 (age 74) in Paris, France) performed in many TV movies and TV series, as well as many feature films,

*Director and writer*

**Dominique Russell: “Buñuel, Luis”** *(Senses of Cinema, April 2005)*

Luis Buñuel was a singular figure in world cinema, and a consecrated auteur from the start. Born almost with cinema itself, his work moves from surrealist experimentation in the 1920s, through commercial comedies and melodrama in the 1950s, to postmodernist *cine d’art* in the 1960s and ’70s. Claimed for France, where he made his celebrated early and late films, for Spain, where he was born and had his deepest cultural roots, and for Mexico, where he became a citizen and made 20 films, he has more recently been seen as a figure in permanent exile who problematises the very idea of the national in his films.

A surrealist, an iconoclast, a contrarian and provocateur, Buñuel claimed that his project was to pierce the self-assurance of the powerful. His work takes shape beneath the “double arches of beauty and rebellion”, as Octavio Paz put it. Recently, his sons have reasserted Buñuel’s view of *Un Chien andalou*, as “a call to murder” against the “museum-ifying” of the celebrations of his centenary. While this exaggerates somewhat his radicalism and outsider status, there is considerable consistency in his attacks on the bourgeoisie, whose hypocrisy and dissembling both amused and enraged him. “In a world as badly made as ours,” he said, “there is only one road – rebellion.”

Buñuel is in fact satirising his own class, to which he comfortably and unabashedly belonged. He understood the neuroses and pettiness of his middle class Catholic upbringing well. “I am still an atheist, thank God”, he famously said. It is one of his many paradoxes: he was both inside and outside. While a ferocious critic of the ideologies of the powerful in his films (the unholy trinity of bourgeois complacency, religious hypocrisy, and patriarchal authority), he enjoyed the fruits of this social order in his personal life. His wife’s memoirs *Mujer sin piano* (*Woman without a Piano*), written to fill out Buñuel’s own, in which she and her children are mentioned hardly at all, reads like the remembrances of a Stockholm-syndrome afflicted captive. Jeanne Rucar, who met Buñuel in 1926 and married him in 1934, tries to tell a love story but the pain and losses he inflicted on her, including that of her beloved piano, to a bet made by Luis without her consent, constantly shine through.

Without going as far as Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, who asserts that the “he” of the title is Buñuel himself, it is safe to say the director of *El* (1953), adapted from a novel by Mercedes Pinto, knew the material intimately. Part of his genius was this ability to stand outside his cultural self, dissecting desire and the torturous routes of its suppression in bourgeois, patriarchal Catholic societies. His films focus on male desire, and his female protagonists are often mere projections of it. But the characterisations of Viridiana, Tristan, and Sévérine in *Belle de jour* most notably, also reveal the way in which bourgeois society distorts and represses these women’s basic needs and desires “conspiring to keep them in a position of subservience and servitude.” The bourgeoisie interested him particularly because its good manners demand the repression of desire. His readings of Freud inspired him to study his class as a laboratory for the twisted return of the repressed. But it was the social and economic power of the bourgeoisie that made him want to implode it from within. If Henry Miller was right when he stated that “Buñuel, like an entomologist, has studied what we call love in order to expose beneath the ideology, mythology, platitudes and phraseologies the complete and bloody machinery of sex,” Luis was also, like an entomologist, interested in the relationships of power in sex, politics and everyday life; not just the mating dance, but the dance of homosocial power disguised beneath it, and all the other forms of power that can be exercised as violence and more subtle forms of repression.

Miller’s reference to the study of insects is apt; Buñuel did in fact consider becoming an entomologist. It also situates his directorial perspective. His sometimes unlikeable characters are engaged at a distance that wavers between pathos and bathos. We see their humanity, but he “blocks the pleasure of psychological identification […] by disturbing the aesthetic framework that solicits and guarantees it.” Buñuel’s stylish witticisms, or rather, witticisms of style, establish a relationship with the viewer over the heads of his characters. This relationship is free of concessions; there’s no effort at being liked or even understood. Commenting on *The Exterminating Angel*, Joan Mellen shows how he parodies the tracking shot by not allowing sufficient space to complete it. “Such overt intrusions of style”, she notes,
Buñuel: THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE—5

“announce the real hero of Buñuel’s films, his the only consciousness we can respect”.

Yet this supremely individualistic, uncompromising director was always supported and surrounded by other talents that let his own flourish. Buñuel always wrote in collaboration: initially mostly with Luís Alcoriza, then Julio Alejandro, and finally Jean-Claude Carrière. This aspect of the “Buñuel apparatus” has been underexplored; perhaps these other writers were in fact just the midwives to Buñuel’s talents, and it is hard to quantify their contribution.

More than other directors, Buñuel has etched indelible images into film culture. The “Buñuelian” can refer to shots of insects, a sheep or other farm animal appearing in posh settings, cutaways to animals eating one another, bizarre hands, odd physical types and, especially, fetishistic shots of feet and legs (said Hitchcock of Tristana: “That leg! That leg!”). The term also implies the confusions of dream and reality, form and anti-form, an irreverent sense of humour, black, morbid jokes that hint at the constant presence of the irrational, the absurdity of human actions.

Buñuel shares this sensibility with the Spanish esperpento, the distancing black comedy that has been considered an authentic Spanish film tradition.

He also shares with the esperpento an acid view of the powerful and their excesses, as well as a sense of sexuality as debasing and enslaving. Desires, sexual and political, are continually intertwined in his films. More than a call to murder, his best films are a call to an attempt at anarchist freedom, however futile, both in love and society.

The early trilogy

Buñuel was born in Calanda in 1900. He would immortalise his hometown’s Easter Week drumming through repetition that would make it almost a “biofilmographic signature”. (9) The first born of a rich landowning family, he studied with the Jesuits in Zaragoza, where his father owned a stately home, and spent his summers in Calanda. At 17 he moved to Madrid where he lived at the prestigious Residencia de estudiantes until 1925. This extraordinary pedagogical and social experiment was driven by Giner de los Ríos’ ideal of bringing together the best of Spanish and European creative thinkers, artists and scientists, into a kind of cultural cauldron. Buñuel made the most of these conditions, reading poetry, writing, performing in plays, boxing, dressing up as a nun, knocking over blind people and founding the “Order of Toledo”, admission to which required adoring the city, aimlessly wandering its streets and drinking all night. There he met and became friends with Federico García Lorca and Salvador Dalí. Though they ended unhappily, these friendships would profoundly mark Buñuel’s life and work.

After his father died in 1925, Buñuel headed to Paris, another, more cosmopolitan, artistic forge. He knew and loved the silent comics, Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton especially, from his time at the Residencia, but it wasn’t until he came to Paris that he focused his creative energies on directing films. In 1926 he met Jean Epstein and became his assistant. It was his mother, however, who provided the funds for his first film, Un Chien andalou in 1929. This short is said to be the most analysed 17 minutes of film ever. A surreal, violently disjunctive story of desire, gender confusion and the unconscious, it still retains its power to shock. Dalí and Buñuel wrote the film together, based on their dreams, in what Buñuel describes as perfect symbiosis:

“We wrote the script in less than a week, following a very simple idea, adopted by common agreement: not to accept any idea or image that might give rise to a rational, psychological or cultural explanation.

The bond between them would soon break down however, and the contribution of each to L’Age d’or (1930) is still contested today. Un Chien andalou was Buñuel and Dalí’s entry card into the Paris Surrealist group. Buñuel expected an adverse reaction to the film, and allegedly came to the first screening with rocks in his pockets to “respond to the audience”. It was well received, however, by Surrealists and bourgeois alike, and Buñuel was determined that his next film would not have its sting be subverted by praise. L’Age d’or, funded by the Vicomte de Noailles, turned out to be more of a film maudit than he bargained for. As Buñuel describes it

The extreme right 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. It was the “scandal” of L’Age d’or. A week later, Chiappe, civil governor, purely and simply banned the film in the name of public order.

He would later have his revenge on Chiappe, who was in fact the police prefect, using his name in Diary of a Chambermaid to represent reactionary forces. At the time, Buñuel, and the film, were accused of everything detestable: “Judeo-Bolshevik devil-worshipping Masonic wogs did this” went the moral panic. While Buñuel and the Noailles were distressed at the reaction, the Surrealists made the most of the scandal, publishing a tract that included a provocative questionnaire by Louis Aragon and Paul Eluard alongside photos of the wrecked cinema.

In many ways an expansion of its predecessor, L’Age d’or is a story of l’amour fou and its social and psychic impediments. Beginning with a prologue of found footage on scorpions, the film is a collage of six segments, loosely following the impossible love of a man (Gaston Modot) and woman (Lya Lys). They begin their love rolling ecstatically in the mud as Rome is founded. Thereafter social forces intervene and they are left frustrated, with sly winks to masturbation occurring throughout. When they finally do get together, they can’t seem to
get into position, in a brilliant bit of physical comedy that pays homage to the silents Buñuel admired. Paul Hammond calls the epilogue “a sixth vesicular joint, the poison sac”, and remarks that the provocation of having Jesus stand-in as the Duke of Blangis from Sade’s 120 Days of Sodom seemed an archaic blasphemy in the ’80s, when the film became easily obtainable. “Now that religious fundamentalism has returned to plague the world it resonates again.”

Where Un Chien andalou plays with vision through eye-line mismatches and an emphasis on looking and exchanges of glances, L’Age d’or is concerned with the ear. In some sense, Un Chien is about editing – the splice “in a blink of the eye”, while L’Age d’or explores the filmic possibilities of sound. If the first invents the “tragic gag”, as Jean Cocteau would have it, the second initiates the “sound gag” that Buñuel would develop throughout his career. In fact, he would spend the next few years, after a brief stint in Hollywood, between Paris and Madrid, supervising dubbing at Paramount and Warner Brothers. As Marsha Kinder notes, he was “mastering the conventions of film sound, to subvert them more effectively.”

His next film, Las Hurdes (1932), a 27-minute documentary, was the result of chance. Ramón Acín, a Spanish anarquist and friend, told Buñuel that if he won the lottery he would finance his next film. Luck struck both of them, and Buñuel assembled a crew to film a “surrealist documentary” in the remote region of Las Hurdes, which before and after was used as a watermark for progress.

What resulted is a documentary that posits the impossibility of the documentary, placing the viewer in the uneasy situation of complicity with a cruel camera probing the miseries of the urdanos for our benefit. These miseries are piled on in what Ado Kyrou termed a “yes but” structure that is desolate and grotesque (“When a viper bites them, the bite itself is rarely fatal, but in trying to cure it with herbs, they infect the wound and die.”) Written with the French surreal poet Pierre Unik, the commentary – in the 1937 English version, using the tone of American newsreels – is often subtly at odds with what we are shown. The tension between image and sound is brilliantly exploited to undermine the very authority posited by the documentary genre. Buñuel dismantles the propagandist method of authoritarian telling as truth-making. As Mercé Ibraz puts it, Buñuel opted for “radicalism in sound”.

She also describes the sequence of the death of the goat as the leitmotif of the film’s strategy of communication:

The story highlights the impossible living conditions in Las Hurdes. Even goats throw themselves off mountaintops. The camera follows a goat that [as revealed in the cut footage] was savagely pursued by the crew. Buñuel ended up shooting the goat himself, which falls from a position where we can see the smoke from his revolver in the middle-right hand of the screen – a decision that reflects Buñuel’s radical style in mise en scène composition.

This killing of the goat also implies that the crew is adding to the indigence of the urdanos, whatever the notoriety of the film might have done for them down the line. In an article for Viu in 1935, Unik reports an old woman saying the crew should be gotten out at gunpoint.

Las Hurdes was banned by three successive Republican governments, and definitively by Franco. In 1936 Buñuel allowed a pro-Republican epilogue to be added, the surrealist documentary thus becoming Republican propaganda. If it did serve the Republican cause, however, it was outside of Spain. The film remained banned and retained much of its discomfiting power despite the alterations.

Interlude (1934–1946)

Buñuel had broken with the surreal group in May 1932, dismayed at the intrusion of politics and snobbery. He had never been, as Hammond notes, one of the “pacemakers of the group”, though Surrealism was “tantamount to a religious conversion” for him. (18) One of his biographers, John Baxter, comments that in the increasing polarisation of the 1930s, Buñuel “stayed on the fence. Intellectually, he supported the left, but his family and education, not to mention the growing excesses of the Republic, inclined him to the moderates.”

Between 1934 and 1936, Buñuel worked at Filmófono, Spain’s Republican experiment in commercial filmmaking, making films as “executive director” (or producer, depending on the source) that he later wanted to forget. He participated in four films, including La hija de Juan Simón (Juan Simón’s Daughter) (1935) and ¿Quién me quiere a mi? (Who Loves Me?) (1936), with José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, later famous for directing Raza (Race) (1941), Franco’s fictionalised autobiography. It was the first volley in an experiment to “make popular commercial cinema, but with cultural dignity” that would continue in Mexico. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), however, cut short Filmófono’s production, and rent the fabric of Spain’s “Silver Age” in half.

The end of the war caught Buñuel in Hollywood, where he became a reluctant exile. This was a much more painful exile than his time as a “météque” – as foreigners were disparagingly called—in Paris. The Republican loss made a return impossible. Though in 1939 he planned to “stay indefinitely, intensely attracted by the American naturalness and sociability,” he could not make a place for himself in the American film industry.

Remembering this time,Buñuel commented wryly:

I could not work in the movies because I had bad grades from Hollywood. My previous experience, as you will remember, was not recommendable.

Mexico (1946–1964)

In 1946, Buñuel was invited to adapt Lorca’s La casa de Bernarda Alba to be filmed in Mexico. The project never materialised, but Buñuel found other opportunities in Mexico, and decided to move his family there. While exile in Mexico was still difficult, Buñuel was surrounded by a language and a culture closer to his own, as well as a community of Spanish émigrés. His entry into Mexican cinema was not easy: his first effort Gran
**Casino** (1946) was a flop. Buñuel considered his next film **El gran calavera** (1949) equally banal, but it helped him establish a craftsman’s discipline and technique. As Baxter describes it:

> Each of his films had about 125 shots, which he planned in details beforehand at home, complete with measurements and durations [...] He seldom needed more than two takes of a shot, and never covered himself with additional shooting. He never looked at rushes. Pierre Lary, his assistant on his last films, nervously called it ‘working without a net’ but admitted that it worked.

**Los olvidados** (1950), produced by Oscar Dancingers, his most consistent backer in this period, was the beginning of his return to the international stage, and a turning point in Mexican cinema. Buñuel won the Best Director prize at the Cannes Film Festival, though he was attacked by critics for turning Mexico’s sacred national myths inside out — precisely what would later make the film so important to the national cinema. It follows the story of Ojitos (“Little Eyes”) abandoned to the streets of Mexico City, and the other homeless boys he takes up with. In his characterisation of the blind beggar who exploits Ojitos, Buñuel continues to explore how the disenfranchised fight for whatever scraps of power left to them. Its brutal lack of sentimentality and flashes of black humour mark its influence by the Spanish picaresque; and its famous dream sequence, in which one of the boy’s mother offers her son raw meat, shows how Buñuel, a surrealist to the end, continued to find creative fodder in the oneiric. **Los olvidados** is one of Buñuel’s great films, and one of Mexico’s as well. Though its formal antecedent is **Las Hurdes**, it anticipates the New Latin American cinema’s turn away from the studio sets towards reality in the streets.

Buñuel continued to work in Mexico until 1964, making 20 films that vary in quality and interest. Though critics have combed them all for every possible Buñuelian — or surrealist — moment, it seems more reasonable to approach films like **A Loveless Woman** (1951), **Illusion Travels by Streetcar** (1953), **River of Death** (1954), or his adaptation of **Wuthering Heights** (1954), as Mexican films that respond (more or less creatively) to the generic conventions of the studio system. Seen as “Buñuelia”, they might be disappointing, but they are well crafted, populist films that, as Acevedo-Muñoz comments, might “upset our image of Buñuel as the European surrealist phenomenon who was always ill-at-ease within a national film industry.” While he often pushed at the conventions, he also worked within them. Indeed, these Mexican films can be seen as an extension of Buñuel’s exploration of commercial filmmaking at Filmófono.

The best of the Mexican studio films, (or perhaps more exactly, the films made for a Mexican audience) are the ones in which Buñuel’s personality, interests and wit have freer reign within the constraints of narrative convention. The previously mentioned **El** portrays the paranoia of Francisco, a madly jealous upper class Mexican. An almost clinical psychological study, it questions the power dynamics between the long-suffering wife, threatened at one point with having her vagina sewn shut (the first Mexican audience laughed at the huge cord proposed for the deed) and the husband, unhinged by sexual desire — whether for his wife or his butler remains somewhat ambiguous. It’s also a black joke, in which the paranoid lover driven mad might just have been right all along. Buñuel said of the film:

> I was moved by this man with so much jealousy, so much internal loneliness and anxiety and so much external violence. I studied him like an insect.

Archibaldo Cruz, the protagonist of The Criminal Life of Archibaldo Cruz (1955), is also an upper class effete enslaved by desire. A would-be-murderer of women, his crimes never quite come off, since his intended victims die before he has a chance to kill them. Unlike Francisco, Archibaldo is cured, and the film ends with him walking straight, and saving the life of an insect. Another scerzo, as Buñuel would have it, light-heartedly turns the power of the rich macho inside out.

Buñuel, despite his relative freedom and success within the system, found it constraining and looked for opportunities outside Mexico. **Los olvidados’** acclaim opened the door for international projects. He made five co-productions in all during the Mexican period: two with US producers, **Robinson Crusoe** (1952); **The Young One** (1960); and three with French producers, **Cela s’appelle l’aurore** (1955); **La Mort en ce jardin** (1956); **La Fièvre monte à El Pao** (1959), all of which are hard to find and generally not considered Buñuel’s best. They address, rather indirectly, Buñuel’s exile. The English language films, both set on islands, bring together two men, one powerful, one not, in an isolated setting.

**The Young One**, though slow-paced and rather stilted, is nevertheless interesting in the way it frames racism and sexism as parallel discourses. It is based on a short story by Peter Matheson about a black man accused of rape. He takes refuge on an island, only to find himself caught by the racist gamekeeper who considers the island his domain. The title refers to the girl, not insignificantly named Evie, who is claimed by the gamekeeper as his property, but the essential relationship is between the men. In a technique he would repeat in **Viridiana** (1961), the camera implicates the viewer in the sexualisation of the child, with shots erotically framing her legs and feet. **The Young One**, unlike **Robinson Crusoe**, didn’t do well at the box office. Buñuel commented in My Last Sigh: “one of the problems [with it] was its anti-Manichean stance, which was an anomaly at the time, although today it’s all the rage.” Nevertheless his tone suggests that he is quite proud of these American productions, as if to say he could have been a Hollywood filmmaker like other European exiles, had chance not sent him to Latin America.

Buñuel, like many critics, seemed to consider Mexico as a long parenthesis between European films that form an otherwise stylistically and thematically interconnected body of work. This undervalues his adaptability, as well as his connection to Mexican cinema. By the time he made his last, and best, Mexican films, the studio system was in collapse, and Buñuel’s
progressive independence had spurred a younger generation of Mexican directors to find ways to make more personally inflected and critical films.

**Religion**

_Nazarín_ (1958) is one of Buñuel’s quartet of adaptations of the great 19th century Spanish writer Benito Pérez Galdós, and, with _Simón of the Desert_ (1965), though unfinished, forms the best of his explorations of religion. _La Voie lactée_ (1969), a kind of free-flowing essay on Catholic heresy, is more biting in many ways, but lacks the dramatic force and magnetic ambivalence of these earlier works. He was both embarrassed and pleased, it seems, when _La Voie lactée_, and belatedly _Nazarín_, were accepted by the Church, the latter receiving a prize from the US National Catholic Film Office.

Ed Gonzales recently characterised Buñuel as a “spiritual fetishist” and certainly, though he asserted his atheism, he shows a fascination for the questions and paraphernalia of religious devotion similar to Unamuno’s agonised belief. Likewise, Baxter points out an affinity between Graham Greene and Buñuel’s Mexican–French co-productions of the ’50s. “Both were remote, ascetic, misanthropic, Catholic/atheist,” he comments, adding, “the films are scattered with quasi-devotional fetish objects that Greene might have relished.”

The eventual acceptance of _La Voie lactée_ and _Nazarín_, however, didn’t quite remove the “whiff of sulphur” created by _Viridiana_. Meant to signal Buñuel’s return and reconciliation to the Francoist homeland, it was depicted by Mexican cartoonist Alberto Isaacs as a gift-wrapped bomb going off in Franco’s hands. The story of a novice who returns to visit her protector uncle one last time before taking her vows turned out to be just that. Buñuel was given a great deal of freedom with the script and rushed the film to Cannes before the final version was seen by officials. When the film was screened, its combination of necrophilia, rape, suicide and mockery of Christian charity proved too much. It was, however, the blasphemous re-creation of Leonardo Da Vinci’s _Last Supper_ in the beggars’ banquet that made it a scandal. But Buñuel knew the value of scandal from _Virginity_. Meant for a Mexican shoot with Silvia Pinal, who had starred in _Simon of the Desert_ and _Nazarín_, was planned for a Mexican shoot with Silvia Pinal, who had starred in _Simon of the Desert_. With the change in producer, however, the Mexican star was no longer appropriate. Silberman introduced Buñuel to Jeanne Moreau, who was cast mostly on the basis of the way she walked and ate. She proved to be one of his favourite actresses, though it was their only collaboration.

Equally idiosyncratic, it seems, was his choice of his new co-screenwriter, Jean-Claude Carrière, from a number of candidates proposed by Silberman. Carrière realised that Buñuel’s query as to whether he drank wine was less innocuous than it seemed. He said he did and they went on to write ten screenplays together over many bottles of wine. Carrière brought a French sensibility to Buñuel’s films, which seemed to unlock a greater freedom in the treatment of sexual perversion, always one of Buñuel’s favourite topics. _Diary_ has Moreau as Célestine, the servant of provincial bourgeois family who is desired by Monteil _père_ and _fils_ (Michel Piccoli), the first with a foot fetish, the second with a sexually repressed wife. Rejected by Célestine, the son tries to seduce an older, unattractive servant (Muni) in what Buñuel describes as a profanation of _l’amour fou_. “It’s vivifying to blaspheme what one believes in,” he notes.

An atmosphere of sexual decadence also pervades _Belle de jour_ (1967), Buñuel’s adaptation of the Joseph Kessel novel, produced by the rather disreputable Hakim brothers. Sévérine (Catherine Deneuve) is a bored housewife with an asexual marriage who takes up prostitution a few hours in the afternoon (hence her moniker) to awaken her sexual self. Buñuel spent more time than usual in post-production, carefully working the soundtrack to blur the lines between Sévérine’s masochistic dream life and her reality. As in _L’Age d’or_, bells are a key sound effect, ringing in the heroine’s suppressed desires.

At this point in his life, Buñuel was very nearly deaf, but his understanding of the possibilities of sound remained intact. The technique of using noise – never music, which Buñuel avoided – to first establish a plane of reality and then confuse it would be further developed in _The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie_ (1972) where dreams fit into one another like china boxes and sound gags are layered into the (non)narrative.
With *Tristana* (1970) Buñuel would return to Spain. It was a project he had long wanted to do, but Franco’s officials always found an obstacle to prevent him filming it as he wanted. This adaptation of Galdós is a sort of bookend to *Viridiana*. *Tristana* is raised by her uncle, who takes her as his mistress when she becomes an adolescent. Though she detests him, she eventually becomes his wife. Where Viridiana was quietly rebellious and eventually submissive, *Tristana* progresses from submission to poisonous rebellion. In this later period Buñuel would allow his female protagonists to reverse the patriarchal power structure, eventually dominating their diminished men.

*Tristana* stars Fernando Rey, Buñuel’s faithful alter ego. He preferred to work with the same actors and crew, especially in his later years, when Rey, Piccoli, Muni, Pierre Clementi, Claudio Brook, George Marchal and Carrière formed what amounted to a stock company. *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), his last film, would take advantage of this recognisability, casting Rey as Mathieu, with Piccoli’s voice. This sound-image mismatch suggests the sort of French/Spanish amalgam that the public Buñuel had become.

His last trilogy – *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974), *That Obscure Object of Desire* – a kind of gathering up of creative threads, plays with the myths of the national, using stereotype to show up their absurdity. Addressed to a French audience, they discreetly insert Franco–Spanish relations into their rich tapestry. *Phantom*, for example, begins with a recreation of Napoleon’s invasion of Spain, with images from Goya’s painting of the second of May. *That Obscure Object* has the French-voiced Spaniard in thrall to Conchita, a woman who appears in two different forms, one a dark-haired firebrand played by Angela Molina, the other a cool French beauty played by Carole Bouquet.

In *Discreet Charm* Rey plays Rafael Acosta, ambassador to the Latin American republic of Miranda, who gets on famously with his French bourgeois cohorts until they turn on him with smug clichés about his homeland. None can distinguish his country from any other Latin American ones, inquiring about the pyramids and other landmarks from elsewhere. Their eurocentrism is further underlined as the colonel hosting one of their impossible dinner parties comments that he’s heard that in Miranda “on tue pour un oui ou un non” (“they kill for a yes or a no”). When Acosta responds with a very French insult, the colonel slaps him. Acosta then shoots him in retaliation, confirming the cliche. Thus, as Marie-Claude Taranger notes, through Buñuelian paradox national myths are satirised, asserted and finally undermined.

Less narrative than anti-narrative, these films play with chance, happenstance, dreams and repetitions. Still under the “double arches of beauty and rebellion,” Buñuel’s late films have a lighter touch. The bourgeoisie is attacked, but the tone is more of amusement than outrage.

Still there is darkness in the jokes. The silent walking of the bourgeois friends of *Discreet Charm* is an unnerving interruption: almost, perhaps, an entomological insert. Both it and *The Phantom of Liberty* end with executions, and *That Obscure Object of Desire* with an explosion: political violence closing off what might be a happy ending.

The love story that precedes it, however, is a cat and mouse exercise in frustration and humiliation in which the power balance is continually shifting. What Mathieu narrates to a group of polite bourgeois, including a dwarf who is a Freudian analyst, might just be a cover for a less romantic story of rape, if we consider the clues at the film’s opening. Mathieu’s valet comes upon a bloodied pillow, a pair of shoes, and a pair of wet panties in a disordered room where glasses and vases have been broken. The valet picks up each item, as if it were the clue to a mystery. “Elle a saigné” (“she bled”), he says regarding the pillow. “Elle a eu peur” (“she was afraid”) he says regarding the panties. It is curious that Mathieu responds to only one of these comments, significantly the blood, which he underlines as having come from her nose. The emphasis on the origin of the blood links it through denial to both sexual violence and a loss of virginity. “Ce n’est rien” (“it’s nothing”) says Mathieu, setting off a chain of disavowals throughout the film. And so, once again, beneath the platitudes of love, sex, and beneath that, power.

The political and the sexual are not so far apart for Buñuel, as arenas for power and repression. As in *Discreet Charm*, the “bad manners” of politics – gunshots and explosions – finally invade the soundtrack and the screen, displacing all other desire. The explosion cuts off an impossible narrative that can have no end. Yet given how fond Buñuel was of literalising turns of phrases, he might just have wanted to go out with a bang.

In any case, it was a fittingly enigmatic last frame for Buñuel, as arenas for power and repression. As in *Discreet Charm*, the “bad manners” of politics – gunshots and explosions – finally invade the soundtrack and the screen, displacing all other desire. The explosion cuts off an impossible narrative that can have no end. Yet given how fond Buñuel was of literalising turns of phrases, he might just have wanted to go out with a bang.

In any case, it was a fittingly enigmatic last frame for the masterpiece that would close Buñuel’s career. That career’s arc is so wide, his films so varied in location, means and audiences that Buñuel in himself constitutes an introduction to film history. His masterpieces are essential viewing, but even his lesser works are worth a look.

Though Silberman tried to coax another film out of him, Buñuel spent the last years of his life being old, as he jokes in *My Last Sigh*. In 1983, he died, his wife at his side. Paradoxical to the end, he chose Mexico as his resting place, having spent his last few months in the company of a Catholic priest.

Roger Ebert: “The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie” (June 25, 2000)

All movies toy with us, but the best ones have the nerve to admit it. Most movies pretend their stories are real and that we must take them seriously. Comedies are allowed to break the rules. Most of the films of Luis Bunuel are comedies in one way or another, but he doesn’t go for gags and punch lines; his comedy is more like a dig in the ribs, sly and painful.

Consider two of his best films side-by-side. “The Exterminating Angel” (1962) is about a group of guests who arrive for dinner, enjoy it and then cannot leave. They’re mysteriously compelled to spend days and weeks squatting in the house of their host. Civilized behavior erodes as the press and the police gather helplessly outside. Now look at “The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie” (1972), about people who are trapped on the other side of the mirror: They constantly arrive for dinner and sometimes even sit down for it, but are never able to eat. They arrive on the wrong night, or are alarmed to find the corpse of the restaurant owner in the next room, or are interrupted by military maneuvers.

Dinner is the central social ritual of the middle classes, a way of displaying wealth and good manners. It also offers the convenience of something to do (eat) and something to talk about (the food), and that is a great relief, since so many of the bourgeoisie have nothing much to talk about, and there are a great many things they hope will not be mentioned. The joke in “The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie” is the way Bunuel interrupts the meals with the secrets that lurk beneath the surface of his decaying European aristocracy: witlessness, adultery, drug dealing, cheating, military coups, perversion and the paralysis of boredom. His central characters are politicians, the military and the rich, but in a generous mood he throws in a supporting character to make fun of the church—a bishop whose fetish is to dress up as a gardener and work as a servant in the gardens of the wealthy.

“The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie” was Bunuel’s most successful film; it made more money even than his famous “Belle de Jour” (1967), won the Oscar as best foreign film and was named the year’s best by the National Society of Film Critics. It was released in a year when social unrest was at its height, the Vietnam War was in full flower, and the upper middle class was a fashionable target of disdain. How different to see it again in 2000, when affluence is once again praised and envied. The primary audience for the film in 1972 saw it as attacking others; the primary audience today will, if it is perceptive, see it as an attack on itself.

Bunuel (1900-1983), a Spaniard who worked in Mexico, Hollywood and Spain before returning at last to his homeland, was a surrealist in the 1920s (he collaborated with Salvador Dali on “Un Chien Andalou,” probably the most famous short film ever made). He spent years in political, financial and artistic exile, and many of his Mexican films were done for hire, but he always managed to make them his own, with his anarchic disrespect for authority and his jaundiced view of human nature. His characters are often selfish and self-centered, willing to compromise any principle in order to find gratification. Even when he makes a movie like “Simon of the Desert” (1965), about the saint who lived for 37 years atop a pillar, he finds him motivated by his ego; Simon likes the crowds he draws.

From the first shots of “Discreet Charm,” we are aware of the way his characters carry themselves. They exude their status; they are sure of who they are, and wear their position in society like a costume. Fernando Rey’s little peacock of an ambassador, Stephane Audran’s rich hostess, Bulle Ogier’s bored and alcoholic sister—all act as if they’re playing roles. And consider the bishop (Julien Bertheau), who appears at the door in gardener’s clothes and is scornfully turned away, only to reappear in his clerical garb to “explain himself,” and be embraced. In Bunuel the clothes not only make the man, but are the man (especially true for a director with lifelong fetishes involving clothes and shoes).

The movie is broken into self-contained sequences, showing the bland surface of polite society and the lusts that lurk beneath. A couple expects guests for dinner. In the bedroom, they are overcome by lust. The guests arrive. Now they cannot make love in the bedroom because the wife “makes too much noise,” the husband complains, so they sneak out a window and passionately couple in the woods. Then they sneak back into the house, leaves and grass in their hair. Bourgeoisie manners, Bunuel believes, are the flimsiest facade for our animal natures. Another example: After soldiers open fire on dinner guests, a man escapes death by hiding under a table, but betrays himself by greedily reaching up for the meat still on his plate.

The film’s narrative flow is cheerfully shattered by Bunuel’s devices. As women have drinks in a garden cafe, a lieutenant walks over and begins a harrowing tale of childhood. We see his story in flashback. He finishes, bids them good day, and leaves. A dinner party develops strangely when the roast chickens are dropped by the servant and turn out to be stage props—and then the curtain goes up and the guests find themselves on stage before an audience. Dreams fold within dreams, not because the characters are confused, but because Bunuel is amusing himself by using such obvious tricks.

The movie is not savage or angry, but bemused and cynical. Bunuel was 72 when he directed it. “It belongs both to his old age and to his second childhood,” says A.O. Scott.

Backed by the French producer Serge Silberman, he was free at last to indulge his fancies, and “Discreet Charm” is liberated from any commercial or narrative requirement. A few years later, with “That Obscure Object of Desire,” he actually had two actresses play the same role, without any explanation. All of these later films were written by Jean-Claude Carriere, who also
helped on Bunuel’s autobiography, and who shared the master’s conviction that hypocrisy was the most entertaining target.

The year 2000 is Bunuel’s centenary. Rialto Pictures is marking the milestone with releases of restored prints not only of “Discreet Charm” (which also has new subtitles) but also “Diary of a Chambermaid” (1970), with Jeanne Moreau; “The Milky Way” (1970), with its pilgrims on a perplexing spiritual odyssey; “That Obscure Object of Desire” (1977), and “The Phantom of Liberty” (1974), with its famous scene where dinner guests defecate in public but sneak off alone in order to eat--Bunuel wickedly suggests that the two activities are, in some fundamental way, equivalent.

Of all the things he found hilarious, Bunuel was perhaps most amused by fetishes. To him, sex was something we take seriously when it involves ourselves and ribald when it involves others. What’s more hilarious than someone saddled with a fetish that is absurd, inconvenient or not respectable? Consider the situation in “Tristana,” where the woman with one leg (Catherine Deneuve) cruelly and knowledgeably toys with the servant boy who is fascinated by her disability.

His films constitute one of the most distinctive bodies of work in the first century of films. Bunuel was cynical, but not depressed. We say one thing and do another, yes, but that doesn’t make us evil--only human and, from his point of view, funny. He has been called a cruel filmmaker, but the more I look at his films the more wisdom and acceptance I find. He sees that we are hypocrites, admits to being one himself and believes we were probably made that way.

Noel Rothenbaum: How Luis Bunuel Made a Perfectly Surreal Martini (Daily Beast)

The ground-breaking surrealist movies of director Luis Buñuel are staples of art house cinemas and film student dissertations—the eyeball-slicing in Un Chien Andalou remains an infamous classic cinema moment. Now, Buñuel’s Academy Award-winning work, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, is attracting a new type of student: bartenders.

At the center of the 1972 movie is a fantastical phenomenon that “a group of friends keeps trying to have dinner together but can’t seem to manage it,” explained Buñuel in his autobiography My Last Sigh.

But the scene in the film that attracts cocktail lovers, naturally, involves a character holding forth on the proper way to fix and drink a martini as he makes a round.

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Buñuel’s Martini

*Ingredients:* 2 oz Gin, 2 drops Noilly Prat Dry Vermouth, 2 dashes Angostura Bitters,

*Glass:* Martini

*Garnish:* Olive

*Directions:* Fill a cocktail shaker with ice and add the vermouth and bitters. Shake and then strain off any liquid. Add the gin to the seasoned ice and shake again. Strain into a cocktail glass and garnish with one olive.

**PS from BJ:** James Bond’s famous martini—“Shaken, not stirred”—first appeared in Casino Royale (1953). His recipe was 3 ounces of Gordon’s gin, 1 ounce of vodka, ½ ounce of Lillet, and a bit of lemon peel. Buñuel would have quailed at the vodka (tasteless dilution), sniffed at the lemon peel, and laughed at the “shaken not stirred,” a bit of physical activity which makes not an iota of difference into what is poured into the glass.

**COMING UP IN THE SPRING 2019 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS (SERIES 38)**

Mar 12 David Lean *Dr. Zhivago* 1965
Mar 26 Arturo Ripstein *Time to Die* 1966
Apr 2 Michelangelo Antonioni *Blow-Up* 1966
Apr 9 Michael Cimino *The Deer Hunter* 1978
Apr 16 Terry Jones *Monty Python’s The Meaning of Life* 1983
Apr 23 Stanley Kubrick *Eyes Wide Shut* 1999
Apr 30 Frederick Wiseman *Monrovia, Indiana* 2018
May 7 Alfonso Cuarón *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* 2004

CONTACTS:...email Diane Christian: engdc@buffalo.edu...email Bruce Jackson 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 addto list@buffalofilmseminars.com....for cast and crew info on any film: http://imdb.com/

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