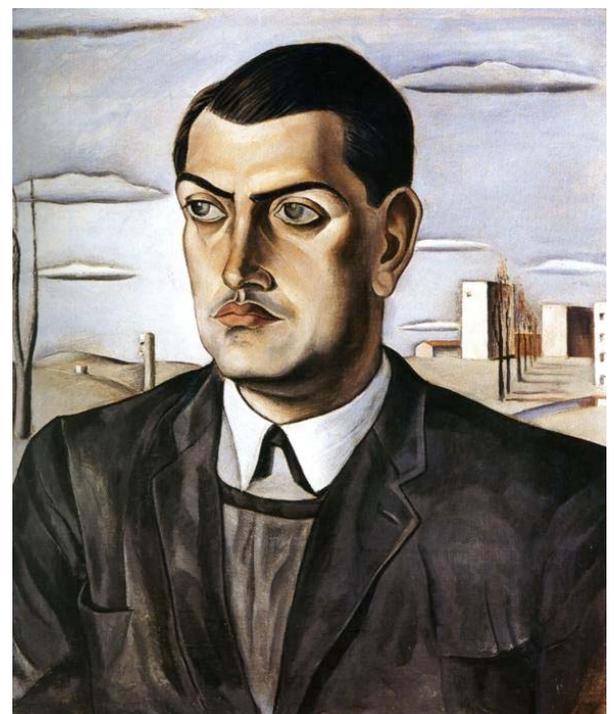
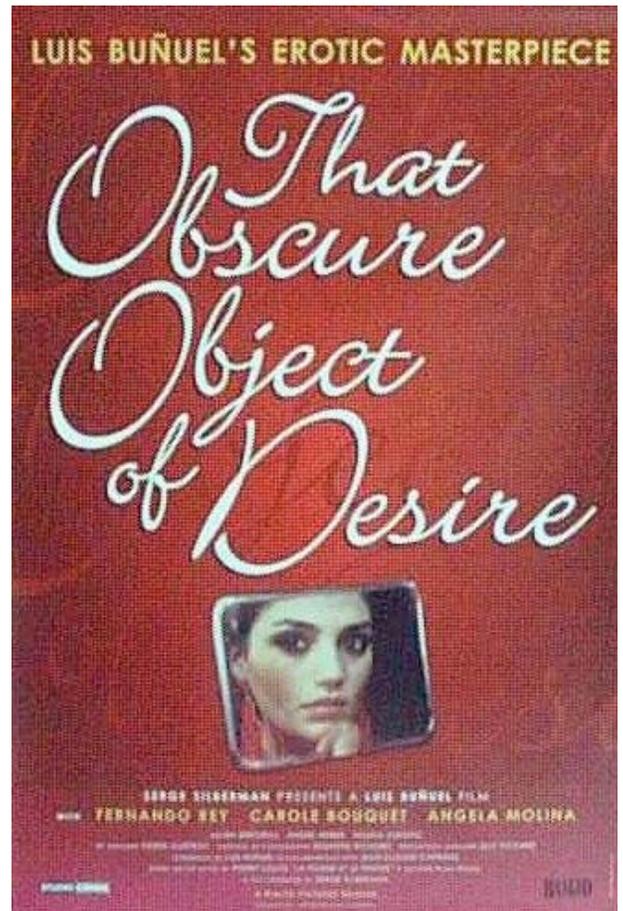


Fernando Rey...Mathieu
 Carole Bouquet...Conchita
 Ángela Molina...Conchita
 Julien Bertheau...Judge
 André Weber...Valet
 Milena Vukotic...Woman in train
 María Asquerino
 Ellen Bahl...Manolita
 Michel Piccoli...Voice of Mathieu

Directed by Luis Buñuel
 Written by Luis Buñuel, Jean-Claude Carrière
 Based on Pierre Louÿs' *La femme et le pantin*
 Produced by Serge Silberman producer
 Cinematography by
 Edmond Richard

LUIS BUÑUEL (22 February 1900, Calanda, Teruel, Aragón, Spain—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*), *Belle de Jour* 1967, *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 *Nazarin* (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,

October 23, 2007 (XV:9)
 Luis Buñuel *That Obscure Object of Desire/*
Cet obscur objet du désir 1977 102 minutes



Buñuel by Salvadore Dali

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. 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)."

JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE (9 September 1931, Colombières-sur-Orb, Hérault, Languedoc-Roussillon, France) has written or co-written 131 screenplays, among them, *Ulzhan* (2007), *Salsa* (2000), *Golden Boy* (1996), *Som mersby* (1993), *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (1991), *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990), *Valmont* (1989), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988), *Danton* (1983), *Le Fantôme de la liberté* (1974), *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (1972), *Borsalino* (1970), *La Voie lactée/The Milky Way* (1969), *Belle de jour* (1967), and *Viva Maria!* (1965).

FERNANDO REY (20 September 1917, A Coruña, Galicia, Spain—9 March 1994, Madrid, Spain, cancer) acted in 237 films, the last of which was *El Cianuro... ¿solo o con leche?* (1994). Some of the others were *Moon Over Parador* (1988), *Saving Grace* (1985), *Quintet* (1979), *Voyage of the Damned* (1976), *French Connection II* (1975), *Pasqualino Settebellezze/Seven Beauties* (1975), *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie*, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1972), *Tristana* (1970), *Villa Rides* (1968), *Return of the Seven* (1966), *The Running Man* (1963), *Viridiana* (1961), *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1947), and *Eugenia de Montijo* (1944).

Carole Bouquet (18 August 1957, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France) has acted in 48 films. *Obscure Object of Desire* was the first. Some of the others are *Si c'était lui...* (2007), *Un ami parfait* (2006), *A Business Affair* (1994), *Spécial Police* (1985), *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), *Buffet froid* (1979), and *Il Cappotto di Astrakan/The Persian Lamb Coat* (1979). She is perhaps best known as Catherine Deneuve's successor as the model for Chanel No. 5.



ÁNGELA MOLINA (5 October 1955, Madrid, Spain) has appeared in 99 films, the most recent of which is *Tú eliges*, which is currently in production. (2008). Some others are *Fabian Road* (2007), *Los Borgia* (2006), *Carnages* (2002), *Nowhere* (2002), *Sagitario* (2001), *One of the Hollywood Ten* (2000), *Le Baiser sous la cloche* (1998), *Gimlet* (1995), *L'Homme qui a perdu son ombre/The Man Who Lost His Shadow* (1991), *Río Negro* (1990), *Lola* (1986), *Gli Occhi, la bocca/The Eyes, the Mouth* (1982), *Nunca es tarde/It's Never too Late* (1977), *La Ciutat cremada/The Burned City*, and *No quiero perder la honra* (1975).

from World Film Directors V. I. Ed. John Wakeman, The H.W. Wilson Co., NY, 1987

Buñuel was born in the village of Calanda in Aragon but insisted he was conceived in Paris. His father, Leonardo, had gone to Cuba with the Spanish military in his youth, made his fortune as a hardware merchant and at 42 married Maria Portoles, 17-year-old from a wealthy aristocratic family. Buñuel's mother would later help finance his filmmaking. Luis was the first of 3 sons and 4 daughters. His family moved to Saragossa shortly after Luis' birth but retained the house in Calandra, a "completely feudal" village often reflected in Buñuel's films.

His education was thoroughly religious to 15, including a year with French order of the Sacred Heart and 7 years at the Jesuit Colegio del Salvador. Buñuel was an excellent student of religion but his greatest interest was study of insects and animals. At 14-15 he had doubts about faith, read Spencer, Rousseau, Marx and especially Darwin at the secular Instituto Nacional de Enseñanza Media.

In 1917 Buñuel went to Madrid to enter university, wanted to pursue music but his father put him to agricultural engineering where he didn't do well enough in math and switched to natural sciences and his love entomology. Worked as an assistant to a distinguished insect specialist at the Museum of Natural History. Decisive education came from writers and artists he encountered at the student residence—including Lorca, Juan Ramón Jiménez (founder of a 1927 group of surrealist poets) and his future collaborator Salvador Dalí. Buñuel wrote, became an anarchist movement supporter and switched from sciences to Philosophy and Letters with concentration in history.

In 1925 after completing degree and 4 months military service went to Paris as secretary of a Spanish diplomat, his way eased by financial support from his mother (his father had died two years earlier). He met his future wife Jeanne Rucar an Olympic gymnast ten years his junior and realized he wanted to become a filmmaker. In Paris he immersed himself in rich cinema offerings. Wrote for *Cahiers d'art* and got a movie pass. He "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 Mude 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.'"

Buñuel made his way to avant-garde filmmaker Jean Epstein's academy of cinema (class of 19, 18 were White Russians), worked as assistant on *Mauprat* (1926), also on *Sirène des tropiques* starring Josephine Baker. Played small role in

Feyder's *Carmen*. Did some theatrical work, became Epstein's first assistant for *La Chute de la Maison 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 [pompiér])." The incident, which reflected basic differences in orientation between Epstein and Buñuel, was not without repercussions: Buñuel was labeled a troublemaker. B again involved himself with the Student Residency 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."

Buñuel wrote a scenario on Goya whose imagery turns up in his later films. Worked on adapting a short story of his friend Ramón Gómez de la Cerna—neither project was successful. In January 1928 Buñuel visited Dalí and suggested they do a film together. They talked about their dreams and decided to use them and other images in a film constructed by free association. Buñuel says they wrote the scenario in 8 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."

Production money came from his mother (he explained it was the equivalent in intention though not in amount of dowries she'd given two of his sisters). He promptly went 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." He shot the script in 10 days with cast and crew of friends including Epstein's cameraman Albert Duverger). Dalí arrived for the final scenes only. Cast and crew didn't know what they were working on "although Buñuel himself followed the scenario quite closely, a practice he continued throughout his career." Result was *Un Chien andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, 1929), the archetype of surrealist cinema, 17 minutes beginning with a man on a balcony slitting 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." In the second well-known segment of the film (Dalí's dream) ants pour out of a hole in the palm of the man's hand.

"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."

"Intended to shatter the conventions of narrative and bridge the gap between the conscious and the unconscious, with a mix of eroticism and violence." . . ."At any rate, having created a surrealist film, Buñuel and Dalí were themselves ready to become surrealists. . . .In the wake of *Un Chien andalou* Buñuel threw himself into the surrealist movement and its guerilla campaign against the conventional and repressive."

In 1930 MGM's European agent didn't understand it but was impressed and offered Buñuel a 6-month contract in Hollywood at \$250 a week. Buñuel accepted and left immediately, missing the incredible controversy the film caused.

Buñuel made contact with 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." 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. The project fell through and Buñuel turned to a less costly documentary on an isolated and backward region of Spain, Las Hurdes. 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."

In an epilogue added to the film in 1936 after the election of the Popular Front Buñuel noted the menace of Franco's royalist forces and 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.’

In 1932 Buñuel broke with the surrealists, decided to give up directing and took a job dubbing films in Spanish for Paramount in Paris and Madrid. In 1934 after a severe bout of sciatica and nearly quitting filmmaking altogether he took a job dubbing for Warners in Spain. He and Jeanne Rucar married and their first child, Juan-Luis, was born shortly after.

Buñuel joined his long-time friend Ricardo Urgoiti in a commercial production venture known as Filmofono Films. His name appears as executive producer on credits for 4 films but he directed as well. Filmofono came to an end with the fascist coup in July 1936. 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 once again invited to Hollywood 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 US government pressure, suspended all productions dealing with the current situation in Spain.

Stranded in Hollywood with his wife and son he was rescued by Iris Barry head of the film department at MOMA 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 Dalí’s autobiography, in which Dalí 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).

He spent another two years working on Spanish language versions of films for Warner Brothers and saved enough to take a year off and went to Mexico to work on a Lorca play adaptation. The play fell through but Buñuel renewed acquaintance with Oscar Dancigers and signed to make a film for him in Mexico. After a decade on inactivity—and 15 years since he’d made a film under own name—he entered most prolific phase of his career.

Beginning of Mexico period was inauspicious—*Gran Casino* (1947) a musical melodrama.

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.’”

He shocked people. Even the production crew was hostile. The film was attacked by Mexican public press and labor unions for its brutal portrayal of the underclass. It closed after 4 days and there were demands to expel him from Mexico. The groundswell was reversed after it was shown at Cannes in 1951 and received awards for best direction and the International Critics Prize.

Bazin wrote “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 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.”

“Subversive black humor and obsessive themes, serving up continual affronts to good taste.”

Buñuel, along with Pablo Picasso and Pablo Casals had been one of the three symbols of cultural opposition to the Franco regime.

“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 Alatriste, who told him, “I didn’t understand anything; it’s marvelous,” critics were quick to declare the stunningly inexplicable film a masterpiece. Won prizes at Cannes, Acapulco, grand prize at Sestri-Levanti.

In *My Last Breath* Buñuel indicates it was one of the rare films he saw after it was completed.

“The underlying idea, he said, was the same one that runs throughout his films; the inexplicable impossibility of satisfying a simple desire.”

Exterminating Angel takes place in an unspecified locale—most likely Mexico, possibly Madrid, and yet, according to Buñuel, he ‘imagined it in Paris or London instead.’ The time period also remains ambiguous, for the characters as well as the audience, and the spoken references to “yesterday evening” or “three or four days ago” are somewhat akin to the fictive intertitles of *Un Chien andalou*.

In any case, Buñuel seemingly went to the opposite extreme with his next film, a detailed period piece set in the French countryside of the late 1920s. *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. The story was based on Octave Mirbeau’s famous novel about the landed gentry of Normandy seen through the eyes (and the diary) of the title character. While Mirbeau had sketched a portrait of the late nineteenth century, Buñuel chose to move the action forward to the

period that corresponded to his own arrival in France, which was also the rise of fascism in Europe.

In Buñuel's adaptation, Célestine (Jeanne Moreau) arrives at the estate of Monsieur and Madame Monteil (Michel Piccoli and Françoise Lugagne) in 1928. She is not slow to observe the peculiarities of the landed gentry—Monteil's lust; his wife's frigidity; the foot fetish of the father-in-law, Rabour (Jean Ozenne); along with the pronounced racism of the gardener, Joseph (Georges Geret), and the fierce antiroyalist pride of the neighbor, Captain Mauger (Daniel Ivernel). Affronted and abused by all of them, she finds her sole ally in the free-spirited servant-girl Claire (Dominique Sauvage). After Rabour is found dead in his bed (clutching a woman's boot in his hand), Célestine decides to return to Paris, but on the same day Claire is raped and murdered in the woods. Célestine, suspecting the gardener of the crime, stays on and embarks on a bizarre course of her own, promising to marry Joseph in order to trap him. Once he is under arrest, she marries Captain Maugar and retires to a comfortable life. But the larger menace of fascism is on the horizon: Joseph is freed for lack of evidence and opens a bistro in Cherbourg. In the street, the Right is demonstrating with cries of "Down with foreigners!" and "Long live Chiappe!"

As was generally the case with Buñuel's adaptations, *The Diary of a Chambermaid* greatly condensed the literary source, focusing on character far more than narratives. According to his sister Conchita, the film contains many elements from their childhood at the country house in Calanda, and quite obviously, with the "Viva Chiappe!" at the end of the film, Buñuel was finally getting revenge against the Paris police chief who suppressed *L'Age d'or* in 1930. But at the same time—and this is also common for Buñuel—much of the "Buñuelian" detail in the film comes directly from the novel; citing the example of the foot fetishist, Robert Benayoun commented, "Buñuel has chosen his characters so well that he will undoubtedly be accused of having 'Buñuelized' to the utmost episodes that are quite consistent with the original."

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 Alatríste for a final Mexican production. *Simon des 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 García Lorca had drawn Buñuel's attention to the life of Simon 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 (Silvia Pinal) who condemns him to remain in the "hell on earth" (echoing García 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. They developed a scenario for Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*, but the production fell through and Buñuel lost interest....He was then approached by the Hakim brothers in Paris to do an adaptation of Joseph Kessel's 1923 novel, *Belle de Jour*, the story of a doctor's wife who decides to deal with her boredom, as well as her masochistic tendencies, by working in a brothel during

the afternoons. Buñuel frankly admitted that he didn't like the novel, "but I found it interesting to try and turn something I didn't like into something I did."...

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. Among those who enthusiastically praised it was Joseph Kessel: "Buñuel's genius," he declared, "went far beyond anything I could have hoped for. It's the book and it's not the book. We're in another dimension, that of the subconscious, of dreams, of secret instincts suddenly bared."...

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."

And while he was always very considerate of people he worked with, as well as the people who lived in the places he was 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 and Marion Boyars: *The Discreet Art of Luis Buñuel: a Reading of his Films*

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.

It's no good telling people that all's for the best in this best of all possible worlds. . . . I believe that you must look for God in man. It's a very simple attitude.

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.

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 Louÿs'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 Louÿs'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 or 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.



That Obscure Object of Desire by William Rothman

All of Luis Buñuel's films, from his early surrealist classics to the masterpieces he made in Europe late in his career, are compelling, seductive works about the mystery and perversity of human desire. They celebrate human freedom, even as they provoke us to acknowledge how unfreely we actually live—how we conspire with society to keep ourselves from satisfying our natural desires.

That Obscure Object of Desire, made in 1977 when Buñuel was almost eighty, is a seductive work that exemplifies, even as it studies, the perversity of human desire. It is the director's last word on this, his great subject. It is thus a fitting conclusion to his illustrious career.

Adapted from the Pierre Louÿs novel on which Josef von Sternberg based *The Devil is a Woman* four decades earlier, *That Obscure Object of Desire* tells the story of Mathieu, an aging aristocrat, who pursues the young Conchita through a series of amorous encounters in which she arouses his desire but denies his sexual satisfaction.

Mathieu is Fernando Rey, starring in his fourth Buñuel film. Already in *Tristana*, critics found it natural to refer to the urbane Rey, whose placid expression seems to mask a seething erotic imagination, as Buñuel's alter ego. In *That Obscure Object of*

Desire, this connection is enhanced by the fact that the Rey character doubles as a storyteller. Most of the film is a series of flashbacks illustrating the story Mathieu tells fellow passengers on the train to Paris to explain why he poured a bucket of water on a woman at the Seville train station.

In telling his story, Mathieu is an obtuse narrator who patronizes the film's subjects without recognizing his affinity with them. Mathieu expects his story to vindicate him. Initially, his listeners seem to accept his view that the woman at the train station is a devil incarnate. By the time Conchita punctuates the climax of Mathieu's story by dumping a bucket of water on him, however, we have become fed up with his claims to authority. We can't help but feel that he deserves his comeuppance. While we do not find ourselves rooting for Conchita, but neither do we accept, simply on his authority, that she is evil.

Like all great Buñuel characters, Conchita is an ambiguous figure. Her ambiguity is conveyed by the brilliant device of having her played by two strikingly different actresses: Carole Bouquet, reserved, elegant and *très* French, and Angela Molina, a dark, sensual Spanish beauty. Conchita can be viewed as a devil of a woman. But she can also be viewed as a modern heroine who refuses, on principle, to be reduced to an "object of desire."

"I don't belong to anyone," Conchita declares. "I belong to myself." She would happily give herself to Mathieu, she tells him. But like Jean Arthur in Howard Hawks' *Only Angels Have Wings*, Conchita is hard to get—Mathieu has to ask her. That is, he has to ask her in a way that respects her freedom to say no. Mathieu, who is privileged—but also constrained—by his wealth and by the power a patriarchal society accords to men, is unwilling or unable to treat Conchita as an equal. Instead, he repeatedly tries to obtain sexual favors from her by (literally or figuratively) buying them. Every time he treats her as an object, she walks out on him. To have sex with her, she insists, he has to win her. To win her, he has to change his outmoded way of thinking. But changing our ways of thinking, Buñuel reminds us, is what human beings find the most difficult thing in the world to do. Mathieu, failing to change, perversely keeps doing the one thing that guarantees that Conchita—whether out of perversion or principle—will refuse to satisfy him.

With each new cycle, the violence implicit in their relationship comes closer to surfacing. Finally it does. When Mathieu hands Conchita the keys to the house he bought for her, she locks him out, tells him she has always found him repulsive, and—in front of his

eyes but out of view of the camera—allows a young man to have sex with her. Later, she tells Mathieu that this whole scene was merely play-acting; she is still willing to give herself to him, but only on her terms. He is so enraged, though, that he hits her again and again until her face is a bloody mask. What makes this moment so disquieting is the care Buñuel takes to assure that despite (because of?) the marks of violence on her face, Angela Molina looks breathtakingly beautiful in this carefully composed close-up. Is this violence what Mathieu desires? What Conchita desires? What Buñuel—and we—desire?

This moment, shocking as it is, perfectly exemplifies the sense of cinema Buñuel had articulated a half-century before when he wrote that "in a well-made film the fact of opening a door or seeing a hand—great monster—taking possession of an object, is capable of enshrining an authentic and unexpected beauty."

As *That Obscure Object of Desire* nears its conclusion, there is another image that captures this notion, and reminds us of the relationship between Buñuel and his narrator. Mathieu, with Conchita at his side, is drawn to a Paris shop window to watch a woman mend a torn dress. Buñuel cuts to a close-up of the lace, bloodied and stretched across an embroidery hoop, as stitch after stitch narrows the gaping hole. He holds the shot until no traces of the tear remain. In his autobiography, Buñuel speaks of being unexplainably touched by this strange and seemingly hopeful vision.

This was the final shot on the shooting schedule, hence the final shot of the filmmaker's illustrious career. Surely, at one level this vision of closure is a statement by the artist about his art, about his lifelong commitment to "enshrining" the beauties his camera can discover. But it is not the last shot of the film. After the lace is mended, Mathieu and Conchita walk on. Suddenly, in the foreground of the frame, a terrorist sets off a bomb. Flames engulf the screen, blocking the couple from our view. Are they consumed in this apocalypse? If they survive, do they move on to new, ever crueler, cycles of violence, or will their desires—at last—be satisfied? Buñuel offers no answers.

As Buñuel films these flames, they are beautiful, too. The shot, however, is a vision of destruction, not of redemption. But it too makes a statement. The world whose destruction he is envisioning is the world of his own creation. In Buñuel's art, what is principled, and what is perverse, cannot be separated. Buñuel is a moralist. He is also a terrorist.

FALL 2007 SCREENING SCHEDULE:

Oct 30 Werner Herzog, **Aguirre: the Wrath of God** 1972

Nov 6 Charles Burnett **Killer of Sheep** 1977

Nov 13 Stanley Kubrick **Full Metal Jacket** 1987

Nov 20 Woody Allen **Crimes and Misdemeanors** 1989

Nov 27 Elia Suleiman **Divine Intervention/Yadon Ilaheyya** 2002

Dec 4 Ang Lee **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon** 2000

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