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Belle De Jour

The open barouche, horses at a mild canter, moves slowly through a formal XVIII Century park. The elegant couple speak in polite, muted voices; the handsome young husband attempts an affectionate gesture — rebuffed, he chides his beautiful blonde wife on her coldness. The carriage stops. The woman is seized by the coachmen, stripped and whipped by her husband—then turned over to the sinister lackeys as a prelude to a suggested multiple rape.

A direct cut from Severine Serizy's (Catherine Deneuve) perfectly realized fantasy places her in her other world — the luxurious, monotonously tasteful Paris apartment she shares with her successful, conventionally understanding husband Dr. Pierre Serizy (Jean Sorel).

"Suggested for Mature Audiences," Luis Bunuel's film of Joseph Kessel's novel details with hallucinatory clarity Severine's empirical solution to her problems of overprotection and stony-eyed existential boredom — she goes to work in Mme. Anais's (Genevieve Page) brothel in the afternoons.

Christened "Belle de Jour," Severine overcomes her initial diffidence and scores an unqualified success with clients and co-workers, amid scenes of sexual play-acting brilliantly staged and observed. Acting out the hunger for degradation her fantasies reveal, Severine carries on her search for a second valid life until Marcel (Pierre Clementi) — a particularly ugly, brutal, and satisfying young gangster — falls in love with her. In a fit of jealousy Marcel follows "Belle" home and pumps three bullets into the unsuspecting Pierre. A passing *flic* pursues the killer — after a Godardian street chase Marcel is gunned down as he wrestles with his jammed .45 automatic. Pierre sur-

vives as an invalid; he is carefully tended by Severine, tastefully costumed in a severe little black dress.

With the rehearsed inevitability of a ritual of the unconscious, a dissipated aristocratic friend Severine encountered at work informs the helpless Pierre of his wife's activities. The film's ending is ambiguous. Pierre commits suicide; perhaps he recovers and takes Severine off on a long holiday. No resolution is possible or desirable; Severine's present mental state and and future actions are unpredictable — the carriage, horses at a mild canter, rolls serenely through the formal gardens of Severine's fantasies.

In "Belle de Jour" as in so many past films, Bunuel dramatizes the natural fascination of evil, his characters' need for the perverse. Using Catherine Deneuve as a blonde abstraction of sensuality, Bunuel masterfully constructs his anti-morality play, a stunning rejection of conventional emotional economics. Commercial film production (for Robert and Raymond Hakim, releasing through Allied Artists) simplifies and controls, but does not weaken, the classic Bunuel obsessions — the audience gets, but may not wish to understand, his message.

Although he easily transcends the chic television commercials that pass for fantasy in the work of the "now" directors, Bunuel's continuing relevance is not based primarily on style. In "Belle de Jour" he uses cinema to erase the artificial dividing line between conscious and unconscious, correctly insisting on the equal validity of interior fantasy and physical reality. The result is a disturbing, entertaining film — the work of a master director asserting the truth of the erotic. . . and the awful power of the dark.

— Spartacus



Catherine Deneuve

Pierre Clementi



Marie Latour