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VIRIDIANA

In 1960, Mexican resident Luis Bunuel returned to Spain to shoot a film after 25 years of voluntary exile. Bunuel obediently submitted his scenario to the censors, and altered details according to their suggestions. He even changed the ending of the film to satisfy them. ("It is a magnificent ending," said the surrealist later. "Much better than the original crude one."). Shooting was completed in the spring of 1961. Bunuel showed an unfinished print to the censors, received their approval, and left for Paris to do the sound mix and final cut. The completed Viridiana was shown on the last night of the Cannes Film Festival--May 17, 1961--and was awarded the prestigious Palme D'Or. The director remained in Paris, while the official Spanish film industry representative, a Sr. Munoz-Fontan, accepted the award. Viridiana touched off a livid scandale, involving a condemnation from the Vatican, a total ban in Spain, punishment of bamboozled bureaucrats including the unfortunate Sr. Munoz-Fontan; legal entanglements about the nationality of the film (finally Mexican), seizings in Italy, secret screenings in Paris, and, then, a profitable world-wide commercial release accompanied by extensive critical appreciation. "...All these anarchist and surrealist nobodies deserve nothing better than a straightjacket," declared a Swiss socialist paper. Bosley Crowther called the film "grim...tumorous... ugly...depressing...old-fashioned." Bunuel told an interviewer: "I was not trying to be blasphemous, but then Pope John knows more about blasphemy than I. It was chance that led me to project the impious. If I had any pious ideas, perhaps I would express them too... I refuse to mix in the scandal. Viridiana follows a tradition, a line

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that has been mine ever since L'Age D'Or; they are 30 years apart, and I can say that these are the two films which I directed with the greatest freedom. It's been my experience to succeed sometimes more and sometimes less with my films, and also to make routine films in order to make a living. However, I have always refused to make concessions." At 76, Luis Bunuel now lives in Mexico City, and is acknowledged by critics to be--along with Hitchcock--the oldest working master. He has been deaf for years ("...To be deaf is the ultimate in lon^eliness...the last, splendid simplicity."), and has threatened that each film since Belle de Jour would be his last. A lifelong revolutionary artist of uncompromising integrity and dedication, Luis Bunuel is not a violent, irrational, profane pain-oriented misanthrope; on the contrary, he is one of the century's great humanists. His best films, and Viridiana is surely one, positively glow with an unpius, fervent unity which characterizes only the most truthful works of art. This acuity of insight would be impossible had not Bunuel opened up a free channel into the general human psyche. ("The work just gushes forth like a fountain."). Simultaneously lucid and mysterious, at once anguished and exaltant, ~~the cinema of~~ Bunuel deliriously transcends the dominant hypocritical realism of ~~the~~ ^{cinema's} endless linear melodramas, ~~and plunges toward the libidinous revelation of momentary ecstasy in a fearfully insane context, or, likewise, a coherent, determined design overriding relentless daily horror.~~ The imagery of Luis Bunuel will always haunt the philistines. His work cannot be co-opted. Overall, although it suffered a few detractors, Viridiana was immediately acclaimed as a modern treasure. Variety called it "a perfect whole...Brilliantly

carpentered offbeat pic is sure to be controversial, but it looms an early theater possibility on this alone besides its excellent conception." Andrew Sarris called it "one of the imperishable landmarks of the personal cinema." Critic Freddy Buache summarizes the main theme of Viridiana: "Good and evil are fallacies that lead to dead ends. All acts are tinged to an equal degree with ambiguity, and nothing will change so long as we still live with our present moral system, i.e. the denial of l'amour fou and the affirmation of mystifying abstract forces."

--Bill Lopez