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MOVIES IN PARIS

Buñuel's Latest Among His Best

By Thomas Quinn Curtiss

PARIS, Aug. 16 (IHT).—At 77 the Spanish-born Luis Buñuel remains as dexterous a director as is now in active practice. Fellini and, occasionally, Ingmar Bergman are his only peers.

It is almost half a century since he made his debut as a cineaste, introducing surrealism in his experimental "Un Chien Andalou" and "L'Age d'Or," which, called indecent and blasphemous by the censors, caused a scandal of major proportions.

His work thereafter, some 23 motion pictures, has been notable for its distinctive personal style and its smooth blend of ironic humor. Buñuel seems to derive from no one. He is a complete original and his latest contribution, "Cet Obscur Objet du Désir" (at the Normandie, the Miramar and the Odéon), is in his very best manner.

"Cet Obscur Objet du Désir" is a screen version of Pierre Louys's "La Femme et le Pantin." The celebrated novel has been filmed before, most notably by Josef von Sternberg as "The Devil Is a Woman" with Marlene Dietrich as its mischief-making siren. In silent days, Geraldine Farrar, the opera singer, mutely enacted the impetuous nuisance and more recently Brigitte Bardot appeared in this role. But Buñuel, needless to say, has not turned out a remake. What he has done is to take the Louys theme and fashion it to ends of his own.

The setting is not the picturesque Spain of the nineties; it is starkly of today. The tempestuous Concha is not just a capricious wanton profiting from her sado-masochistic relation with an older man. In the Buñuel adaptation she is a member of a terrorist gang.

In reconstructed form, the Louys tale begins with the wealthy Frenchman boarding a Paris-bound express in Seville with his inescapable tormentor in pursuit. He douses her with a pail of water when she tries to climb aboard and the passengers in his compartment, scandalized by his act, await an explanation. During the course of the journey he tells them of his affair and it is

materialized in a series of flashbacks.

Concha is a Spanish refugee who has been engaged as a servant in his Parisian mansion. He falls in love at first sight. When, however, he makes amorous overtures she disappears, leaving him frantic. Chance brings about many reunions and at each of them she submits him to horrible humiliations, always refusing to surrender.

The bizarre incidents have a splendid theatrical verve and a sinister glow as they are related by Buñuel. Always ingenious in his methods, he has selected two young actresses—Carole Bouquet and Angela Molina—to alternate in the single role of Concha. They bear no particular resemblance to one another, but the suggestion is that to the passion-ridden protagonist the object of his desires is of infinite variety. This bit of inventive trickery produces rewarding results.

Both young ladies—Miss Bouquet, a beauty akin to Candice Bergen, is still a student at the Conservatoire and Miss Molina, a stunning brunette, is a dancer from Madrid—succeed in making the nonheroine doubly interesting. They are both novices but under Buñuel's direction they achieve accomplished interpretations.

Fernando Rey, less surprisingly, gives a performance of compelling histrionic strength and unity as the doomed masochist. "Cet Obscur Objet du Désir" is another distinguished photoplay from its veteran creator, a film of characteristic sardonic overtones and one that casts a hypnotic spell.

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One used to pity the studio-chained stars who were unable to choose material worthy of them and were obliged by contract to appear in anything handed them by their bosses. The list of studio-system victims is long and includes almost every eminent player from Greta Garbo and John Barrymore to Elizabeth Taylor and Peter O'Toole. It is therefore astonishing that Alain Delon, who has his own production company, can rarely find scenarios above the common run for his starring vehicles.

Delon is a popular idol and a charming actor, but his script judgment appears to be singularly

bad. He makes—usually financing the ventures himself—as many as three films annually, but the catalogue of his recent output reveals only "Mr. Klein," directed by Joseph Losey, as a motion picture of any distinction. He seems inevitably to be in gangster thrillers in which he plays either hoodlum chieftain or a shrewd police inspector. It is high time that he rose above such routine roles.

In "L'Homme Pressé" (at the Gaumont Ambassade, the Français and the Saint-Germain Studio) there is some evidence that he is seeking an escape from typecasting and trashy plots. He has selected a story by Paul Morand, an author certainly far superior to movie hacks. But, unfortunately, he has drawn one of Morand's poorest stories, the thin and obvious one about a man, blinded by ambition, who in his pursuit of worldly goods rides roughshod over the affection of those close and dear to him.

It is quite possible that this morality tale, banal as it is, might under more subtle handling prove an exciting screen drama. It is, alas, realized with an accent on breathtaking chases rather than on any probing of the psychology of the participants and it emerges as just another mechanical movie.

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"The Arabian Nights," a gold mine for cinematic possibilities, is drawn on in "Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger" (at the Cluny Palace and the Paramount Elysées in English) to fairly acceptable



Fernando Rey and Carole Bouquet in Luis Buñuel's film.

results. The acting, under the direction of Sam Wanamaker, is scarcely above that of a B-Western, but the transformation scenes are skillfully executed, far more neatly than they were in the Russo-American "Blue Bird." For the special effects, though not for the quality of the dreary dialogue, it deserves high marks.

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How old was Lady Chatterley?

Though the lascivious noblewoman's age may not be disclosed by D. H. Lawrence, most readers assumed that she was relatively youthful in her sporting days, certainly not a moment over 65. It is therefore something of a shock to come on a film entitled "La Jeune Lady Chatterley" (at the Studio Jean Cocteau, the Paramount Opéra and the Para-

mount Montparnasse). This new erotic product does not concern the Lawrence lady, but her niece, a London shop girl who inherits her late aunt's estate and goes to the stately mansion to hunt for gamekeepers or their replacements. This latest film of quite needless literary references demonstrates that the niece can match her aunt at her most emotional moments.