

Document Citation

Title	Viridiana
Author(s)	Phillip Lopate
Source	<i>Columbia Daily Spectator</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Viridiana, Buñuel, Luis, 1961

ABSOLUTELY CONTROLLED

Viridiana

By Phillip Lopate

Luis Bunuel's "Viridiana" is a grotesque and beautiful film in the best tradition of expressionistic art. Unlike "La Notte," "La Dolce Vita" and other movies whose meanings seem to expand indefinitely, "Viridiana's" message is perfectly explicit. The action takes place within a specifically enclosed universe. With great control and the distance of an expert story-teller, Bunuel takes the viewer along the inevitable path of the story to its shattering conclusion.

The director's contradictory attitude towards his heroine, played brilliantly by the beautiful Silvia Pinal, sets up conflicting emotions in the spectator. First, there is a sense of outrage at the corruption of Viridiana. Bunuel must have an immense reserve of idealism and innocence for him

to react with such indignation at the vicious nature of man. His films are like a child's fresh discovery of sin.

In contrast to this reaction, Bunuel tries to destroy his heroine. He develops the spectator's own desire to rape Viridiana by showing her bare legs in a shot which characterizes the salacious undercurrent of the film. Her innocence and chastity barely cloak a deeply sexual nature. Then the spectator is introduced to the beggars whom she houses and feeds in her attempt to be a devout Christian — they are perhaps the most loathsome examples of humanity ever assembled. They are hypocritical, thieving, physically warped, filthy, ungrateful — yet I couldn't help identifying with them against the virtuous Viridiana. Bunuel knows the overpowering attraction depravity has for man. He depicts evil with so much relish that one can well imagine the almost pathological fascination it holds for him. The attraction of evil and the equally universal resentment of virtue (the

desire to see innocence sullied) — these two factors combine to make the spectator enjoy Viridiana's near-rape and her final surrender to the ways of the world.

The dirty, feverish and unnatural mood of the film may account for its effectiveness. Bunuel is also a master of irony, so much so that "Viridiana" was, for me, one of the funniest and most enjoyable films I have ever seen. A career of brilliant film-making has given Bunuel enormous technical mastery over his medium. He has an almost uncanny ability to coordinate camera movement with the emotional effect he is looking for. His visual style is brilliant and completely individual — any sequence of shots will immediately establish the movie as Bunuel's work. With all the young, talented film-makers around, it is a distinctive experience to see this mature, absolutely controlled film which caps a lifetime of creativity. What is most interesting about "Viridiana" is the honesty and sincerity of Bunuel in forcing his vision of humanity to its unpleasant conclusions.