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Dartmouth Film Society

LOS OLVIDADOS

(U. S. title: THE YOUNG AND THE DAMNED)

Mexico (1950)

With Estela Inda, Miguel Inclan, Alphonso Mejia, Roberto Cobo, Hector Lopez Portillo, Salvador Quiros and Victor Manuel Mendoza.

Scenario by Luis Bunuel and Luis Alcoriza. Photographed by Gabriel Figueroa. Music by Rodolpho Halffter after themes of Gustavo Pitaluga. Sets by Edward Fitzgerald. Sound by José B. Carles. Edited by Carlos Savage. Produced by Oscar Danzigers for Ultramar Films. Prize for Best Direction, Cannes Festival 1951; International Critics' Prize, Best Film, Cannes 1951.

Directed by LUIS BUNUEL

The following is an excerpt from a conversation between Luis Bunuel and the great French critic André Bazin. It appeared in translation in Sight and Sound, Spring 1955.

A. B. : How do you see the relation between surrealism and the documentary standpoint?

L. B. : I see an important relation. I made LAND WITHOUT BREAD because I had a surrealist vision and because I was interested in the problem of man. And surrealism made me look at reality in a completely different way.

A. B. : It's often said that you work under very "commercial" conditions in Mexico. Is production there organized in such a way that you have to make thrillers or very trivial films?

L. B. : Yes--and I have always yielded to that.

A. B. : But LOS OLVIDADOS?

L. B. : With LOS OLVIDADOS it was different. After the failure of my GRAN CASINO and two years of doing nothing, the Mexican producer Dancigers asked me to submit an idea for a film for children. Timidly, I offered him the treatment of LOS OLVIDADOS, which I'd already written with my friend Luis Alcoriza. He liked it and told me to work on it. Between times, an opportunity came to make a commercial comedy, and Dancigers suggested I do that first, in exchange for such he promised me a degree of freedom on LOS OLVIDADOS. So, in sixteen days I made GRAN CALAVERA which had a big success, and I was able to start on LOS OLVIDADOS. Certainly Dancigers asked me to take out a number of things I wanted to put in the film, but he left me with a certain freedom.

A. B. : What kind of things?

L. B. : Everything I took out had a uniquely symbolic interest. Into the most realistic scenes, I wanted to introduce some mad, completely disparate elements. For instance, when Jaibo goes to beat up and kill the other boy, a camera movement reveals, in the distance, the framework of a huge eleven story building under construction. I wanted to put an orchestra with a hundred musicians in that building. One would only have seen it in passing, vaguely. I wanted to put in many elements of that kind, but it was absolutely forbidden.

A. B. : What you've just revealed is very important... it seems to run counter to the kind of realism that many people have stressed about the film.

L. B. : For me LOS OLVIDADOS is, in effect, a film of social struggle. Because I believe, in a simple way, I'm honest with myself, I had to make a social type of work. I knew I was moving in that direction. Apart from that, I had no wish to make a film that stated a particular case. I had observed some things which moved me, which I wanted to transfer to the screen--but always, with the kind of love I bear for the instinctive and the irrational. I've always been attracted by the unknown or strange side of things, which fascinates me without my knowing why.

A. B. : After what you've said, I can see you've never broken your ties with surrealism--if you're no longer with the movement in an official, orthodox sense, its inspiration remains. You wouldn't disown the formative influence of surrealism--on the contrary, it's a living and purposeful memory for you?

L. B. : I don't disown it at all. It was surrealism which revealed to me that, in life, there is a moral path man cannot refuse to take. Though surrealism I discovered for the first time that man isn't free. I believed in the total liberty of man, but surrealism showed me a discipline to follow. It was one of the great lessons of my life, it was a marvelous, poetic step forward. I haven't been in the group for a long time.

Director Luis Bunuel was born in Spain in 1900. He came to Paris in 1924 and soon was writing film criticism. He became an assistant to the French director Jean Epstein (1897-1953) in 1927 on two films, and in 1928 directed his first and most famous film, UN CHIEN ANDALOU, in collaboration with Salvador Dali. His highly controversial L'AGE D'OR (1930) followed, making him the enfant terrible of the French movie world. He returned to Spain to make LOS HURDES, a horrifying documentary on the residents of a remote, impoverished community. Unable to get work as a director, he served as a dubbing editor for Paramount and Warner Brothers in France and Spain and produced some films which do not carry his name. In 1938 he went to America and worked at the Museum of Modern Art editing documentaries until the history of L'AGE D'OR was revealed and he was fired. Between 1940 and 1946 he had various jobs at M.G.M., Warner Brothers and for the United States government film division. He returned to direction in 1947 in Mexico, where he has made most of his film since that date. An excellent interview with Luis Bunuel can be found in the March issue of Holiday magazine. At present he is completing what he says will be his last film; he is almost totally deaf and feels he can no longer direct.

Films of Luis Bunuel. Underlined titles have been screened in Hanover by the Film Society, other College film groups or the Nugget. UN CHIEN ANDALOU (1928); L'AGE D'OR (1930); LOS HURDES (1932); GRAN CASINO (1946); EL GRAN CALAVERA (1949); LOS OLVIDADOS (1950); SUSANA (1950); LA HIJA DEL ENGAÑO (1951); UNA MUJER SIN AMOR (1951); SUBIDA AL CIELO (1951); EL BRUTO (1952); EL (1952); CUMBRES BORRASCOSAS (WURTHERING HEIGHTS) (1952); ROBINSON CRUSOE (1953); LA ILUSION VIAJA EN TRANVIA (1953); EL RIO Y LA MUERTE (1954); ESSAYO DE UN CRIMEN (1955); CELA S'APPELLE L'AURORE (1956); LA FIEVRE MONTE A EL PAO (1957); NAZARIN (1959); THE YOUNG ONE (1959); VIRIDIANA (1961); L'ANGE EXTERMINATEUR (1962); DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID (1964); film on the life of St. Simon in production.

Of the many films listed above, most are purely commercial projects which Bunuel directed in order to subsidize his more esoteric and personal works. The important films are those underlined with the addition of WURTHERING HEIGHTS, ESSAYO DE UN CRIMEN, LA FIEVRE MONTE A EL PAO and all his works following 1957. However, even his most commercial films have at least one sequence which is pure Bunuel.

For example GRAN CASINO, a musical potboiler, has a scene in which the heroine engages in a vicious fistfight in a mud-puddle. CELA S'APPELLE L'AURORE is a lumbering melodrama until Bunuel inserts a scene in which a prisoner escapes from jail by poking out the eyes of his jailer.

Bunuel's world is a very cruel one. The words of the Marquis de Sade, an important influence on the surrealists, come to mind: "One must be cruel in order to live in this cruel universe." Virtually every theme introduced in his first two films appears in his later work. Blindness is equated with evil, foot-fetishism abounds as does a streak of cruelty to animals and virulent anti-clericalism. Because these personal marks are seldom inserted with much subtlety, it is easy to make fun of Bunuel's work, but one can be sure that Bunuel will always have the last laugh.

David Hull

Our next film is the full 2½ hour version of Kurosawa's THE SEVEN SAMURAI, which will be shown Saturday at 10:30 pm and Sunday at 3:00 pm. Please note that the Sunday performance begins an hour earlier than usual due to the length of the film. THE BIRTH OF A NATION will be presented Thursday, May 6 rather than Tuesday, May 4 as previously announced.