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Buñuel and Tristana

IN THE SUMMER, 1963, issue of SIGHT AND SOUND I reported the banning of Buñuel's *Tristana*, when the production was already advanced. Luis was bitterly surprised. After *Viridiana* he honestly intended to make films for Spanish audiences. But the producers, Epoca Films, never gave up the project, in which they had invested capital and many hopes. Last year they went to Mexico to get Buñuel back to Madrid, since they thought the movie was now possible. Buñuel wasn't very interested, but early in 1969 his mother died in Zaragoza, thus bringing him back to Spain. In 1963 Buñuel had been given a credit of thirty thousand dollars, which he could keep if filming proved impossible, though the contract foresaw his return to work if there was a chance. He tried to give the old cheque back to the producers, but it was not accepted. So he had to start *Tristana*. 'I am weak,' he groaned. 'Why more films? Cinema is a nuisance both for filmmakers and for audiences...' Such dismays before he starts work are characteristic.

Then, in September, the film was again forbidden. Since it was a co-production, it was decided to shoot exteriors, and perhaps interiors as well, in Portugal. Buñuel went there for the first time in his life and found satisfactory locations. In view of these prospects, the film was suddenly authorised in Spain.

Tristana has a lot of exteriors, and throughout last November the film was shooting in Toledo. The old city was flooded with international pressmen and photographers. Luis can be quite polite, but to most of them he just replied, 'Movies, well, yes, I make them. But talking on cinema, oh no. I'm not that much of a professional.' But indeed he is a splendid professional. Four days after starting he was already excited with his job. Everything went quickly and easily and the staff, many of whom had worked on

Viridiana, were happy with him. It is an almost entirely Spanish film. Italy wanted to contribute the director of photography, and suggested the great artist of Fellini's *Satyricon*. Buñuel replied, 'All right, send me a director of *sound* photography,' and he took Aguayo again, one of Spain's best but most conservative lighting cameramen. The foreign stars, Catherine Deneuve and Franco Nero, were part of the co-production arrangement, and there the great surrealist felt miserable enough. Not that he has anything against these particular ones: he just abhors them all. 'What's boring about actors is that they've got such actors' faces,' he says. The central character of *Tristana* is Fernando Rey, who played the aged uncle in *Viridiana*.

December was spent at the new Siena studios, near Madrid, and January at the laboratories. Technically, *Tristana* is one of Buñuel's best productions, with a minute care for ambience and reconstruction of 1929 in a Spanish provincial town. By national standards, it is a rather expensive picture. Buñuel has rewritten the script four times, with Julio Alejandro, a Spaniard living in Mexico, who was his co-writer on *Viridiana*. It's based on a novel by Perez Galdós, known as 'the Spanish Dickens', and author of the original of *Nazarin*.

In an interview which I published seven years ago, Buñuel told me that 'the novel was Galdós' worst, but very able to accommodate my observations about some anachronistic Spanish customs and my usual theme of eroticism and religion. It will be a film about old age, ugliness and decrepitude.' So, if any critic is malicious enough to deduce that Luis' new film expresses feelings connected with his own actual age (he is now seventy), he will be mistaken; among many other reasons because really only the project is old. When I suggested that some people might find it 'academic', Buñuel said: 'Let critics say what they like. The film will be as personally mine as any other. Don't worry about that. And then, watch and see how during filming I will improvise some additional nice nonsense to dear old Galdós....'

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