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Viridiana, Buñuel, Luis, 1961

Ensayo de un crimen (The criminal life of Archibaldo de la Cruz),
Buñuel, Luis, 1955

El (This strange passion), Buñuel, Luis, 1952

Los olvidados (The young and the damned), Buñuel, Luis, 1951

The Retrospective

Luis Bunuel's work was like no other's: blackly comic, scrupulously irrational, ruthless yet fiercely loving in its portrayal of humanity. Over a period of fifty years and thirty-two films, he never strayed far from his three principal interests: religion, sexuality, and the bourgeoisie. And each time the angle of approach was the same: stunningly and uniquely perverse. Whether lampooning religion as fanaticism (*Simon of the Desert*, *The Milky Way*), shoehorning sexuality into various fetishes, (*El, Viridiana*), or mirroring the hypocrisies of the bourgeoisie (*Diary of a Chambermaid*, *The Exterminating Angel*), Bunuel always came across as a compassionate exile observing life through a viewfinder held before the eyes of his subconscious.

The realities of commercial filmmaking in Mexico taught Bunuel the art of plotting - a skill he never denigrated, and later applied with surreal virtuosity in works like *The Phantom of Liberty* as often as he had earlier in potboilers like *The Young One*. The melo-dramas had soft curves and razor-edges, however. Both *Tristana* and *That Obscure Object of Desire* seduce the viewer with the allure of their leading ladies, only to curdle the feeling with a cruelly angled mirror.

But there was more to Bunuel than the marriage of Goya and Swift. Perhaps as a result of his youthful association with Breton and the Parisian surrealists, dreams and dream imagery were central to his perceptions from the start: "I told Dali about a dream I had in which a long, tapering cloud sliced the moon in half, like a razor blade slicing through an eye... " They figured in the most disparate of his work, from the otherwise neo-realist *Los Olvidados* to *The Phantom of Liberty* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, where the narrative's gossamer thread winds seamlessly through the dream.

The York Theatre's Bunuel Retrospective is the most ambitious, and comprehensive, ever attempted in the United States. It includes every commercially-available title, from his surrealist beginnings to his triumphantly mature final works. Of special note, however, are three films - *Daughter of Deceit*, *The Young One*, and *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, that to our knowledge have never been screened theatrically in the Bay Area. These films, created during his long Mexican "exile", exhibit to a remarkable degree the theoretical and stylistic consistency that made this iconoclast immune to critical carping, and capable of constructing an oeuvre more than equal to his time.

Luis Bunuel (1900-1983)



Born with the century in Calanda, Spain, Bunuel was educated at the University of Madrid, where he befriended Salvador Dali and Garcia Lorca. Within a year of arriving in Paris in 1925, he became a member of Andre Breton's surrealist circle - perhaps the greatest single influence on Bunuel's artistic development.

In 1928, Bunuel collaborated with Dali in a filmic exchange of dreams and irrational images called *Un Chien andalou*. Two years later, he followed it with his surrealist masterpiece, *L'Age d'or*: the intelligentsia applauded, but the theaters in which these films played were firebombed by fascist thugs.

After a scathing, surreal pseudo-documentary about a poverty-stricken region of Spain, Bunuel was prevented by shifting political winds from making another film for 15 years. Bunuel moved to the United States and worked at various times for the New York Museum of Modern Art and Warner Brothers.

Bunuel exploded back onto the international cinema scene in 1950 when *Los Olvidados* won the Best Film Award at Cannes. Working almost without exception in Mexico for the next 16 years, he developed a reputation as a filmmaker who could satisfy the public taste without compromising his own vision.

Beginning with *Diary of a Chambermaid* in 1964, Bunuel began a collaboration with scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carriere and producer Serge Silberman that would take him to France, provide him with world-class actors and budgets, and result in the creation of his greatest films. When he died this summer in Mexico City, he left behind a body of work more fiercely personal and independent than perhaps anyone in the history of the cinema.

Bunuel on Bunuel

ON SURREALISM

I'm often asked whatever happened to surrealism in the end. It's a tough question, but sometimes I say that the movement was successful in its details and a failure in its essentials. There's no doubt that surrealism was a cultural and artistic success; but these were precisely the areas of least importance to most surrealists. Their aim was not to establish a glorious place for themselves in the annals of art and literature, but to change the world, to transform life itself. This was our essential purpose, but one good look around is evidence enough of our failure.

ON IMAGINATION

Fortunately, somewhere between chance and mystery lies imagination, the only thing that protects our freedom, despite the fact that people keep trying to reduce it or kill it off altogether. I suppose that's why Christianity invented the notion of original sin. When I was younger, my so-called conscience forbade me to entertain certain images- like fratricide, for instance, or incest. I'd tell myself these were hideous ideas and push them out of my mind. But when I reached the age of sixty, I finally understood the perfect innocence of the imagination.

ON DEATH

I'd like to die knowing that this time I'm not going to come back. When people ask me why I don't travel more, I tell them: Because I'm afraid of death. Dying itself doesn't matter to me, but not while I'm on the road. I don't want to die in a hotel room with my bags open and papers lying all over the place. I must know whose fingers will close my eyes.

Only one regret. I hate to leave while there's so much going on. It's like quitting in the middle of a serial. I doubt there was so much curiosity in the past, since in those days the world didn't change quite so rapidly or so much. Frankly, despite my horror of the press, I'd love to rise from the grave every ten years or so and go and buy a few newspapers. Ghostly pale, sliding silently along the walls, my papers under my arm, I'd return to the cemetery and read about all the diasters in the world before falling back to sleep, safe and secure in my tomb.

From *My Last Sigh* by Luis Bunuel, Alfred Knopf, 1983.

Notes: Jorge Saralegui
Design: Mary Koneff

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Buñuel



The
Retrospective
October 30 - November 8

York Theatre
2789 24th Street
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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30

The Phantom of Liberty 1:00, 5:00, 9:00

Michel Piccoli, Jean-Claude Brialy, Monica Vitti
Bunuel's penultimate film - and one of his favorites - effortlessly winds in and out of dreams, tales, and actuality, creating a vision so deft and wise it more than suggests the director already had one foot in another world. (1974)

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie 3:00, 7:00

Fernando Rey, Delphine Seyrig, Stephan Audran
This is the French social stratosphere 30 years after Renoir: people repeatedly sit down for dinner, only to be interrupted by a stream of dreams and hallucinations literally overflowing from their toilet seats. Winner of the Oscar for Best Foreign Film. (1972)



MONDAY, OCTOBER 31

The Exterminating Angel 7:15

Silvia Pinal
The guests at a high society dinner party discover that some unseen force is preventing them from leaving the room. Shirts come off, drinks are spilled, blows exchanged, and no amount of make-up can cover the sores of this mysterious microcosm. (1962)

Diary of a Chambermaid 9:00

Jeanne Moreau, Michel Piccoli
Bunuel's first collaboration with scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carriere features Moreau in a wickedly delightful role as a servant who takes a position with a smug French country family, and observes fascism rise in 1939 France. (1964)



TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1

The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz 7:15

Ernesto Alonso, Rita Macedo
Ostensibly a placid burgher, de la Cruz leads a secret life of crime aimed at only one intent: to relive a childhood incident in which death, erotic pleasure, chance, and the absolute fulfillment of desire were united with surreal intensity. (1955)

El (This Strange Passion) 9:00

Arturo deCordova, Delia Garcés
This portrait of a fetishistic husband whose jealousy descends into paranoia and murder understandably caused a furor in Mexico when it was released. Not for the first time, Bunuel shows how sex and religion combine to create betrayals where none exist. (1952)

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2

Daughter of Deceit 7:20

Fernando Soler, Alicia Caro
Soler, the Fernando Rey of Bunuel's early Mexican films, stars here as a man whose frenzied jealousy leads him to disown his own daughter. This rarely seen comedy helped Bunuel establish the clout he would need to make his forthcoming masterpieces. (1951)

Los Olvidados 9:00

Estala Inda, Miguel Inclan
Bunuel returned from the cinematic "dead" with this explosive, unflinching look at the homeless children of Mexico City's slums. Hardcore realism merged with the famous surreal dream sequence at the film's center to garner Bunuel the Best Film Award at Cannes. (1950)

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3

The Great Madcap 7:15

Fernando Soler, Rosario Grandos
Obviously influenced by deSica, this extremely likeable work stars Soler as a rich man whose cavalier attitude towards money puts him at odds with his tight-fisted family. Already Bunuel can be seen transposing popular beliefs to comic effect. (1949)

The Illusion Travels by Streetcar 9:00

Lilia Prado, Carlos Navarro, Domingo Soler
The filmmaking-as-bloodsport that Bunuel is often accused of is nowhere in evidence in this warm-hearted account of two mechanics who commandeer a junked streetcar, providing one wild, free ride through the city for all who decide to come aboard. (1953)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4

Tristana 6:45, 10:30

Catherine Deneuve, Fernando Rey
Hitchcock delighted in the macabre introduction of Deneuve's leg... but this film, perhaps the blackest in the Bunuel canon, goes much further in its dismantlement of 1920s Spain's suffocating moral corset. (1970)

Viridiana 8:45

Silvia Pinal, Fernando Rey, Francisco Rabal
Invited back to Spain to make a film, Bunuel promptly got himself thrown out with this irreverent masterpiece about a beautiful nun-to-be who is systematically assaulted by her sincerely lusty uncle. Winner of the Best Film Award at Cannes. (1961)



SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5

The Milky Way 2:45, 6:30, 10:25

Paul Frankeur, Laurent Terzieff
Based on historical accounts, this "journey through fanaticism" follows two contemporary pilgrims who, while walking to a distant shrine, meet a series of characters from all ages and places- representing the principal heresies of Christian culture. (1968)

That Obscure Object of Desire 4:40, 8:30

Fernando Rey, Angelina Molina, Carole Bouquet
In Bunuel's final, transcendent film, Rey plays a wealthy Parisian obsessed with possessing a lovely and indigent Spanish girl. The balance that is struck in this quintessential battle between the sexes is flawlessly comic, erotic, and mysterious. (1968)



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6

Un Chien andalou (1928)

L'Age d'or (1930)

Land Without Bread (1932)

COMPLETE SHOWS AT 1:00, 3:00, 5:00, 7:00, 9:00

Bunuel's first three films - two surrealist masterpieces and a biting "fake" documentary - ensured his place in the annals of film, and prevented him from working in the medium for the next 15 years. The first two were collaborations with Salvador Dali based on one precept: "no idea or image that might lend itself to rational explanation of any kind would be accepted." *Land Without Bread* takes the Theater of Cruelty on location as it examines the self-perpetuating poverty of the Las Hurdes region of Spain.



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7

Nazarin 7:15

Francisco Rabal, Rita Macedo
A man sets out to lead a life of Christian purity, but meets only with hostility, indifference, and confusion. This picaresque pilgrim's progress, Bunuel's favorite among his Mexican films, won the Best Film Award at Cannes. (1958)

Simon of the Desert 9:00

Silvia Pinal, Claudio Brook
Based on a 15th-century saint who spent 40 years perched atop a pillar in the Syrian desert, this fable receives a surreal treatment as the ascetic St. Simon is endlessly tempted - and taunted - by a beautiful, shape-shifting devil. (1965)

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8 7:15

The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe

Dan O'Herlihy, Jaime Fernandez
One of Bunuel's two English-language films, this faithful adaptation of Defoe's novel manages to transform the epic of individual enterprise into a quietly skeptical critique of bourgeois society. (1952)

The Young One 9:00

Zachary Scott, Kay Meersman, Bernie Hamilton
Part swampy spectacle and part fall from innocence, this is the story of a black musician - fleeing from a trumped-up rape charge - who arrives on an island game preserve and shatters the peace of its lonely caretaker and his lovely teenaged ward. (1961)