

Document Citation

Title	Belle de jour
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Belle de jour, Buñuel, Luis, 1967

FRANCE
1967

BELLE DE JOUR

CREDITS: Director: Luis Buñuel; producer: Henri Baum, for Paris Film Production (Robert and Raymond Hakim), screenplay: Buñuel and Jean-Claude Carrière from the novel by Joseph Kessel; photography: Sacha Vierny; art director: Robert Clavel; film editor: Louissette Hautecoeur; sound: René Longuet; assistant director: Pierre Lary, Jacques Fraenkel; shooting: Oct 10 to mid-December, 1966; premiere: May 24, 1967, Paris; color, French with English subtitles, 100 minutes.

CAST: Catherine Deneuve (Séverine), Jean Sorel (Pierre, her husband), Michel Piccoli (Husson), Geneviève Page (Anaïs, the madam), Francisco Rabal (Hyppolite), Pierre Clementi (Marcel), Geroges Marchal (the duke), Françoise Fabian (Charlotte),



Maria Latour (Mathilde), Francis Blanche (M. Adolphe), François Maistre (the teacher), Bernard Fresson (pock-marked man), Macha Méril (Renée), Muni (Pallas), Dominique Dandrieux (Catherine), Brigitte Parmentier (Séverine as a child), Iska Khan (Asiatic client), Marcel Charvey (Prof. Henri), Marc Eyraud (bar man), Pierre Marcay (doctor), Bernard Musson (butler), Michel Charrel (servant), D. de Roseville (coachman), Adélaïde Blasquez (maidservant), Claude Cervat, Luis Buñuel (drinking coffee in hotel garden).



SYNOPSIS: Pierre and Séverine are recently married, and though she is reluctant in matters of sex, he is willing to await her acceptance in that area. Pierre is a surgeon who spends much time at the hospital, and Séverine is left with time on her hands. A couple close to them is Renée and Husson. The latter is desirous of having Séverine, while she can't stand him. One day, she learns that a mutual friend works regularly in a brothel for money and presumably to take up time. Séverine is intrigued with the idea and learns of an apartment owned by Anaïs, run to satisfy men. She reluctantly applies to her for a job afternoons only, so that she can be home to meet Pierre. She eventually becomes a favorite in the Anaïs household, and at the same time, she gives more to



her relationship with Pierre. One of her visitors is Marcel, a hot-tempered member of the underworld, who wants to see more of her and follows her home. He tries to blackmail her into spending more time with him, but she refuses. Meanwhile, Husson shows up at the Anaïs apartment and is surprised to see Séverine there. She begs him not to tell Pierre. Marcel thinks that Pierre stands in the way of his obtaining more permanent possession of Séverine and shoots him in front of his home. Marcel is killed by police bullets as he tries to flee. Pierre is paralyzed, and when he

returns home, Husson informs him about Séverine. The future is left in doubt.

COMMENT: Georges Sadoul in *Dictionary of Films*: "Buñuel stated this would be his last film, and a greater testament to his cinematic genius could not be imagined. A hypnotic and exquisite film into which he poured the quintessence of all his beliefs on the nature of good and evil, of eroticism, love, and morality. Buñuel's refusal to judge his characters allows the viewer to go beyond moral distinctions and reach, with Séverine, a sense of liberation."

Raymond Durgnat in *Luis Buñuel*: "So far [up to Husson's telling Pierre the truth about Séverine] the film has developed its story in a straightforward, linear narrative, interspersed with obviously relevant daydreams, nightdreams and flashbacks.



Fantasies are clearly signalled, either by their intrinsic improbabilities, or by the jingling of carriage bells. But after Husson's departure, Séverine goes into Pierre. His face is bedewed with tears; his hand opens, and falls back, in the conventional screen gesture for death. But abruptly he rises from his chair, miraculously cured, and ever-loving. The jingling carriage of Séverine's fantasies passes under the window, empty, and, it seems, no longer needed.

"The equal realism of these climactic contradictions -- Pierre dead, Pierre well -- seems to place both in the same order of reality, and cannot but throw doubt on the reality or otherwise of every scene in the film. Buñuel, with one twist, has rendered his whole film as riddled with alternative realities as Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle*....

"Many a critic has seen Pierre as Marcel's innocent victim. But there is a significant

scene when Séverine, already working for Anaïs, asks Pierre to confide in her about his premarital experiences in brothels. Immediately he launches into the classic 19th-century line that gentlemen, unwilling to corrupt nice girls, go to certain women for a purely physical relief, and feel melancholy for the rest of the day. Not only are his delusions about Séverine as grave as her fantasies about him, but he wants to keep her in a fantasy world. When she puts him off, pleading frigidity but dreaming of rape, he suffers, yes, but just turns his back on her...

"And Séverine's sisters-in-sin could never forget the fact that she was from a higher class than theirs. It's significant, too, that, though she sends Marcel away, she lets Husson in, for Husson is of her class. The film asserts the astonishingly intricate tenacity with which, even in what appears to be a purely erotic obsession, class is intimately mingled with Séverine's sense of identity. Considered as a Freudian character-analysis, the film's conspicuous omission is the nexus of ego-formation and unconscious guilt. Séverine seems, indeed, to be beautifully schizophrenic about actual guilt -- shame worries her more....

"[One] described it as a fairy-story -- a fairy-story which Séverine is telling herself, as so many young women tell themselves romantic fairy-stories. It has the simplicity of a fairy-story; throughout it, Séverine is seeking to put herself in situations in which she is a child, in which she has no choice. Even the bright, enamelled color is childlike. By liberal standards, the film is a fairytale, its psychology is strange indeed. But its serene indifference to liberal notions is the condition of its insidious freshness. It can treat a psychopathic case in the Lubitsch style because bourgeois manners are psychopathic anyway...."