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LUIS BUNUEL
Mexican Bus Ride (SUBIDA AL CIELO) **AZ**
~~The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz~~
 (ENSAYO DE UN CRIMEN)

Luis Bunuel is one of the greatest directors the cinema has produced. He is also one of the most prolific. Since his first film, *Un Chien Andalou*, which he made with Salvador Dali in 1928, Bunuel has directed about 27 features in Spain, France and--mostly--in Mexico. Only a handful of these have received any sort of commercial release in this country. His films have been seen a little more extensively in Europe, but even there much of his work remains unseen. That most of the films of such a widely acknowledged master would, by and large, remain widely unseen is, indeed, a curious situation. The reasons for it are not simple, but they have to do with the complex course of Bunuel's own life and career as a film maker--a course widely divergent from the normal channels of film making within the motion picture industry.

After having made his two independently financed avant-garde classics, *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age D'Or* by the age of thirty, Bunuel spent the next seventeen years of his life in a frustrating search throughout France, Spain and the U.S. attempting to find backing for a feature film. Unsuccessful, in 1947 he went to Mexico, where the strangest liason between an artist-director and toally commercial oriented producers was consummated.



Bunuel discovered that he could make cheap comedies and melodramas, destined for unsophisticated, heavily rural Mexican audiences, with considerable facility and even satisfaction. He also discovered that his producers showed surprisingly few objections to whatever Bunuel cared to put in his films, as long as they made money. Bunuel turned them out right and left, and in short order all the old outrageous manifestations of the demonic Bunuel of *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age D'Or* emerged--only this time within the framework of the commercial film.

His younger themes are all there: His hatred for authoritarianism--be it the church, Franco or the reactionary bourgeois morality that had led to a riot, a ban, and a scandal over *L'Age D'Or* in France. There is his bitter searing condemnation of sexual victorianism and his continual fascination with the negative image of beauty-blackness. The legless man of *Los Olvidados* flailing helplessly about after having been tossed into the street; the 40 year old virgin of *El* about to sew up the vagina of his new bride; the layers of ants devouring the skinless boa constrictor in *Death in This Garden*; the uncle with the lust of a necrophiliac nearly raping the unconscious body of his niece dressed in the wedding gown of his dead wife in *Viridiana*; the charming foot fetishist of *Diary of a Chambermaid*--these are the images that give Bunuel's films their trademark. These two Mexican films are not exceptions. They were never produced with foreign "art-house" consumption in mind, and so have been rarely seen outside Mexico. But they are pure Bunuel.

Mexican Bus Ride (1951) is a joyous, near-surrealistic hymn to paganism--the picaresque adventures of a young bridegroom on a highly improbable bus ride over the mountain pass, Subida al Cielo, on his wedding night.