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Booking Inquiries:
booking@janusfilms.com
212-756-8822

Press Contact: Courtney Ott
courtney@cineticmedia.com
646-230-6847

janusfilms.com

VIRIDIANA

Banned in Francisco Franco's Spain and denounced by the Vatican upon its premiere, Luis Buñuel's irreverent vision of life as a beggar's banquet is regarded by many as his masterpiece. In it, novice nun Viridiana (Silvia Pinal) does her utmost to maintain her Catholic principles, but her lecherous uncle (Fernando Rey) and a motley assemblage of paupers force her to confront the limits of her idealism. Winner of the Palme d'Or at the 1961 Cannes Film Festival, *Viridiana* is as audacious today as ever.

Spain | 1961 | 90 minutes | Black & White | In Spanish with English subtitles |
1.66:1 aspect ratio

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Viridiana is one of the most pivotal titles in Luis Buñuel's long and storied career. For more than a decade, he had been working in the Mexican film industry, along with helming the occasional international coproduction, averaging more than one movie per year (during the 1950s alone, he directed sixteen films). But while some of these efforts, like *Él* (1953) and *Rehearsal for a Crime* (1955), showcase Buñuel's surreal, rebellious imagination, since emigrating from Europe the director hadn't mounted another of the full-out attacks on bourgeois morality and institutionalized religion that caused him to be labeled a young provocateur in the 1920s and '30s. It would take *Viridiana* to firmly reestablish that reputation.

In 1960, Buñuel attended the Cannes Film Festival to promote his latest film, *The Young One*. There, Carlos Saura made Buñuel an offer to direct a film for UNINCI (Unión Industrial Cinematográfica), the production company Saura had founded with his fellow Spanish filmmakers Juan Antonio Bardem and Luis García Berlanga. Around the same time, Mexican actor Silvia Pinal, who had been hoping to collaborate with Buñuel, encouraged her then-husband, Gustavo Alatriste—a magazine and furniture magnate who would go on to become a producer, filmmaker, and theater owner—to fund the latest project by the director, who was granted complete artistic freedom. Producer Pere Portabella's company Films 59 provided additional support.

For the new film, Buñuel went back to his homeland for the first time since 1938, when he had sought refuge in the United States upon the fascist takeover of Spain by Francisco Franco. Despite his ideological allegiance with the Spanish Republicans, and despite his public leftist sentiments, the director wasn't hassled by local authorities because Franco—who wanted an outcast Spain to be reintegrated into the international community—viewed Buñuel's return as a coup for his regime: a renowned filmmaker reentering the fold. The experience of once again living and working on Spanish soil was extremely poignant for Buñuel. In his memoir, *My Last Sigh* (1983), he wrote: "It's impossible to describe my emotions as I traveled from Barcelona to Saragossa and then back to Madrid, revisiting all the scenes of my childhood; suffice it to say that I wept as I walked down certain streets." Yet his repatriation outraged Republican émigrés in Mexico, who considered the director's willingness to work in Franco-controlled Spain as treasonous to their shared cause. Believing he would be forced to compromise artistically, they didn't suspect that Buñuel would instead deliver an explosive "gift" to the dictator while representing his country at the 1961 edition of Cannes.

Viridiana was inspired by what Buñuel described as the "memory of a little-known saint I'd heard about when I was a schoolboy," the Italian woman Viridiana (also spelled "Veridiana"). Later in life, in a Mexico City museum, Buñuel encountered a painting that depicted this figure contemplating a cross, a crown of thorns, and some nails—an image the director recreated in his eventual film. Loosely based on Benito Pérez Galdós's novel *Halma* (1895), the screenplay also incorporated Buñuel's "old erotic fantasy about making love to the queen of Spain when she was drugged." Buñuel cowrote the script with Julio Alejandro, his collaborator on *Nazarín* (1959), which, like *Viridiana*, focuses on a pious Catholic whose charity is exploited and punished instead of embraced and sanctified.



CAST

Viridiana	Silvia Pinal
Don Jaime	Fernando Rey
Don Jorge	Francisco Rabal
Ramona	Margarita Lozano
Lucia	Victoria Zinny
Rita	Teresita Rabal

CREDITS

Directed by	Luis Buñuel
Screenplay by	Luis Buñuel Julio Alejandro
Cinematography	José F. Aguayo
Editing	Pedro del Rey
Musical direction	Gustavo Pittaluga

Pinal was, of course, cast as Viridiana, while the role of Don Jaime went to Fernando Rey, in the first of several iconic parts that he would realize for Buñuel until the director's final picture, *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977). According to film scholar J. Francisco Aranda, *Viridiana* began production on February 4, 1961, a few weeks shy of the director's sixty-first birthday. The film's budget of six million pesetas was modest for the time but relatively extravagant for Buñuel, who was given eight weeks to complete production. Shooting locations included the Convento de San Pedro Mártir in Toledo as well as various sites—such as the Plaza de la Solanilla and the Plaza de la Constitución—around Madrid. Don Jaime's mansion, or at least its facade, was represented by La Moraleja, the Madrid estate of the Marqués de Usia. Interiors were filmed at CEA (Cinematografía Española Americana) Studios. Aranda reports that Buñuel's crew "was partly composed of the same young technicians as [Saura's] *Los golfos*" (*The Delinquents*, 1960), another Films 59 production.

At Cannes, *Viridiana* shared the Palme d'Or with Henri Colpi's *The Long Absence*. This award caught the attention of the official Holy See newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, which derided *Viridiana* as blasphemous; the Franco government, embarrassed that it had

okayed the production, proceeded to ban the film in Spain. National authorities went even further, attempting to incinerate *Viridiana*'s negative. Varying accounts suggest that, to prevent its destruction, Pinal dubbed the master in Paris and transferred it from film canisters to plastic bags, which she then smuggled into Mexico. Others allegedly buried the negative on the grounds of a farm owned by Domingo González, a Spanish producer. According to Pinal, the film had no country of origin and, without an import permit, could not be officially sold for the next decade. *Viridiana* "was shown in cellars and on hillsides," Pinal explained. "In Italy, they showed it on one of the seven hills. The police came along and confiscated the print, because what they were doing wasn't legal. But after many years and great expense, and with a team of French lawyers, we won, and finally, ten years later, *Viridiana* was declared to be of Mexican origin." Not until 1977, two years after Franco's death, was the film released in Spain. By that point, *Viridiana* had gone down as not only one of the most subversive films in history but also a timeless satirical masterpiece and a gateway into the radical art films—such as *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), *Belle de jour* (1967), and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972)—that would crown Buñuel as one of world cinema's definitive masters. ●



LUIS BUÑUEL BIOGRAPHY

Luis Buñuel was born Luis Buñuel Portolés on February 22, 1900, in Calanda, a small town in the Aragon region of Spain. Buñuel's parents married when his father, Leonardo, was forty-three and his mother, María Portolés Cerezuela, was eighteen—a May-December pairing that would influence the romantic and sexual dynamics of Buñuel's films. Luis was the first of seven children.

When Luis was still in infancy, the Buñuels moved to Zaragoza. At the age of seven, he enrolled in the Jesuit-run Colegio del Salvador; his final two years of education took place in a public high school, from which he graduated at the age of sixteen. In these days, Buñuel often played the part of the burgeoning director by presiding over magic-lantern productions for his friends. His early adherence to Catholicism ended during adolescence, when Buñuel became disillusioned by religious superstition and hypocrisy.

In 1917, Buñuel began attending the University of Madrid, where he studied philosophy. During this time, he befriended Salvador Dalí and Federico García Lorca, among other artists living in the Residencia de Estudiantes. The three became core members of La Generación del 27, a Spanish avant-garde movement.

In 1925, Buñuel moved to Paris, where he frequented theaters and cinemas. He studied at Jean Epstein's private film school and was soon assistant directing on Epstein's *Mauprat* (1926) and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928), though he fell out with Epstein after rejecting the filmmaker's demand that he assist Abel Gance on *Napoléon*. Film-critic positions followed at *La gaceta literaria* and *Les cahiers d'art*, and Buñuel and Dalí began to engage in friendly, essayistic debates about art and culture.

In March 1928, Buñuel and Dalí codirected *Un chien andalou*, which was released in France more than a year later. The film was an instant classic of anarchic surrealism, a short fever dream of disturbing imagery and narrative illogic that was beloved by the very bourgeois audiences that Buñuel and Dalí had meant to shock. It also brought Buñuel and Dalí to the notice of cinema owners and financiers Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, who commissioned a new work from the duo. This became the notorious *L'âge d'or* (1930), another surrealist attack on authority, religion, bourgeois propriety, and sexual decency. Buñuel and Dalí cowrote the script but quarreled during production, leaving Buñuel to direct on his own. The two disagreed vehemently over politics, with Buñuel's leftism clashing with Dalí's admiration for Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. (Before their break, Dalí starred in Buñuel's short 1930 documentary, *Eating Sea Urchins*.) The anti-Catholic imagery in *L'âge d'or* aroused the ire of fascist groups, and the Parisian police banned the film. When the Vatican threatened them with excommunication, the Noailles (both Catholics) withdrew all prints of the film from commercial circulation, beginning in 1934. For more than four decades, the film was exhibited only rarely and under clandestine conditions.

Hollywood, however, came calling in the wake of the scandal. Buñuel's contract with MGM merely required that he develop technical knowledge of the filmmaking process, but the young director quickly soured on Tinseltown pomposity and didn't contribute much to the studio. In 1931, he returned to Spain, which was entering one of its most turbulent eras. That



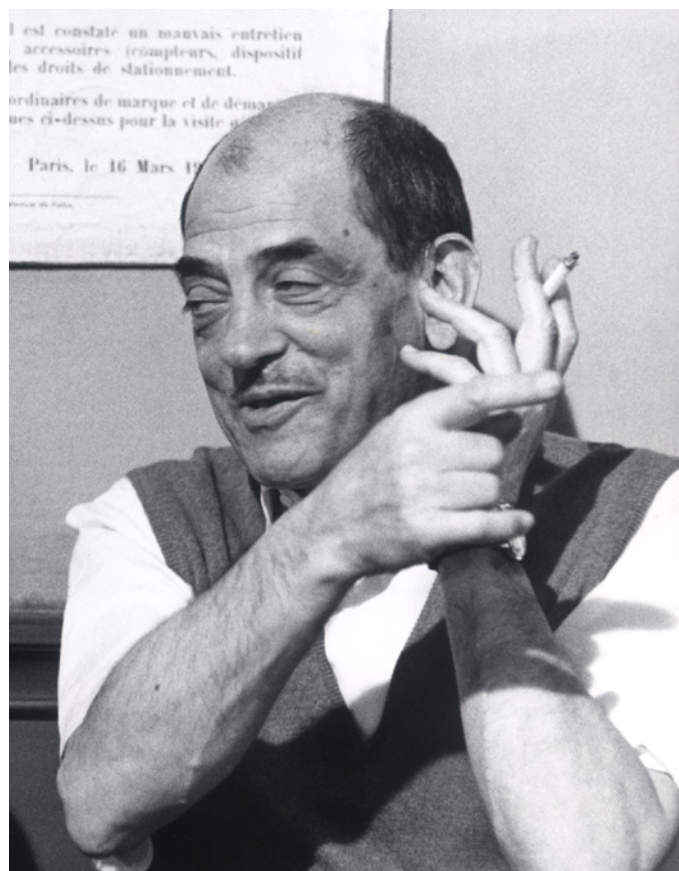
same year, Buñuel joined the Communist Party, following through on his increasing interest in political and social causes. For his first film in his native country, *Land Without Bread* (1933), he documented poor rural peasants. He also continued to employ his trademark irreverence by mocking the conventional travelogue genre, with the film's impassive narrator delivering incongruous, “objective” commentary over scenes of wretched destitution. Unsurprisingly, both the Second Spanish Republic and the subsequent Franco regime banned the short.

In 1933, Buñuel went to Paris to work in Paramount Pictures’ dubbing department. But after marrying former Olympic gymnast Jeanne Rucar in 1934, he returned to Madrid, where he found a similar role with Warner Bros. When the Spanish production company Filmófono offered him the chance to produce and direct commercial films, Buñuel accepted—he would use the opportunity to infuse Spanish filmmaking with the technical know-how he had picked up in France and the United States. Buñuel stipulated, however, that he remain uncredited for his Filmófono work, refusing to sully his surrealist reputation. During his time there, he produced eighteen films and allegedly directed four.

Buñuel spent the Spanish Civil War working for the Republican government. During official excursions to Geneva and Paris in the late thirties, he cataloged and approved Republican propaganda films, transported leftist writings to Spain, and oversaw the production of *España 1936*, a documentary about the country’s political turmoil. In 1938, the Noailles again helped Buñuel by funding his trip to the United States, where he provided technical advice on depictions of the Spanish Civil War in Hollywood productions. But the war ended in Republican defeat; instead of returning to a homeland now controlled by fascists, Buñuel and his family remained in the U.S.

After the director floundered once more in Hollywood, he sought work on the East Coast. In New York City, the Museum of Modern Art’s film curator Iris Barry asked Buñuel to educate U.S. government officials on the power of cinematic propaganda. As part of this project, Buñuel reedited Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935) to include footage from Hans Bertram’s *Feuertaufe* (1940), a Nazi-sanctioned document about the invasion of Poland. He continued to work at MoMA through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), a U.S. agency that produced anti-fascist propaganda for Latin American distribution. Buñuel resigned from MoMA when his department’s budget was slashed and, in 1944, made his third sojourn to Hollywood as a Spanish-dubbing producer for Warner Bros. Under his contract there, Buñuel developed several screenplays—one of which, *La novia de medianoche*, was made into a film in 1997, fourteen years after his death.

In 1946, Buñuel teamed up with Óscar Dancigers, a Russian independent producer then working in Mexico City, for the musical *Gran Casino* (1947), a box-office bomb that undermined Buñuel’s attempt to gain a foothold in the nation’s growing film industry. The director took some time to find a project that might restore his reputation—this turned out to be *The Great Madcap* (1949), a successful comedy. Over the next sixteen years, Buñuel would direct more than a dozen films in Mexico or as part of Mexican coproductions, and though some were undertaken as director-for-hire gigs, others stand alongside the slyest, most subversive titles of his career: *Los olvidados* (1950), *Él* (1953), *Rehearsal for a Crime* (1955), *Nazarín* (1959), *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), and *Simon of the Desert* (1965). Buñuel not only refined his directorial technique but also mastered a wide range of tones and genres—social realism in *Los olvidados*, nightmarish melodrama in *Él*, dark comedy in *Rehearsal for a Crime*, deadpan surrealism in *The Exterminating Angel*, religious satire in *Simon of the Desert*—that would prove essential to crafting his signature auteurist work in the late sixties and seventies.



During this period, Buñuel also directed his first color and his first English-language film (1954's *Robinson Crusoe*, for which he also shot a version in Spanish); returned to France to helm *This Is Called Dawn*, *Death in the Garden* (both 1956), and *Fever Mounts at El Pao* (1959); and won the Palme d'Or at the 1961 Cannes Film Festival for *Viridiana*, the official entry for Spain. *Viridiana* would turn out to be his most controversial title since *L'âge d'or*: the delirious, taboo-busting tale of an aspiring nun's moral and sexual corruption had somehow been approved by Spanish censors—the few scenes with demanded changes were revised to be even more scandalous—but upon its release, it was condemned by the Holy See and banned by the Franco government.

Viridiana thrust Buñuel into the international spotlight, giving him the cachet to direct even bolder projects. In the aristocracy-skewering *The Exterminating Angel*, a crew of moneyed guests are prevented from leaving a dinner party and consequently descend into barbarity; in the French production *Diary of a Chambermaid* (1964), Octave Mirbeau's novel is adapted to include strong antifascist elements. *Belle de jour* (1967)—another literary adaptation, in which a bourgeois housewife works as a courtesan behind her husband's back—won the Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival.

Buñuel's sixties work coincided with the increasingly radical experiments and pointed critiques of European art cinema. *The Milky Way* (1969) marked the most audacious effort of his career thus far: a loosely connected series of bizarre and outright heretical episodes concerning Christian mythology and doctrine, the film combines modern attitudes, historical figures, and fantastic leaps of logic to mock the contradictions at the heart of religious devotion. It was the third of six scripts—along with *Diary of a Chambermaid*, *Belle de jour*, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *The Phantom of Liberty*, and *That Obscure Object of Desire*—that Buñuel wrote with Jean-Claude Carrière, arguably his most important collaborator.

Buñuel returned to Spain with *Tristana* (1970), a dysfunctional romance between an aging man and a young woman, which earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign-Language Film. With *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972), he won that same award, this time for France. In that picture, which inverts the premise of *The Exterminating Angel*, a group of wealthy friends attempt to dine together but are repeatedly frustrated—a subject paralleled by the film's form, which verges into narrative-delaying tangents and long, eerie dream sequences. Digression infuses the entire structure of *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974), a picaresque film of bizarre, absurdist sketches that flow into one another sans consistent plot or characters. *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), Buñuel's final feature, also plays with structure by having two actresses portray the same young woman, who exploits an older man's sexual obsession.

Post-*Desire*, Buñuel retired from filmmaking. In 1983, he published his celebrated autobiography, *My Last Sigh* (*Mon dernier soupir*). He died that same year, in Mexico City, from complications of diabetes. To this day he is considered one of cinema's most imaginative and subversive voices. ●

LUIS BUÑUEL FILMOGRAPHY

1929	<i>Un chien andalou</i> (<i>An Andalusian Dog</i>) (short)
1930	<i>L'âge d'or</i> (<i>The Golden Age</i>)
	<i>Eating Sea Urchins</i> (<i>Menjant garotes</i>) (short)
1933	<i>Land Without Bread</i> (<i>Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan</i>) (short)
1940	<i>The History of the Vatican</i> (<i>El Vaticano de Pío XII</i>) (short)
1947	<i>Gran Casino</i>
1949	<i>The Great Madcap</i> (<i>El gran calavera</i>)
1950	<i>Los olvidados</i>
1951	<i>Susana</i>
	<i>The Daughter of Deceit</i> (<i>La hija del engaño</i>)
1952	<i>Ascent to Heaven</i> (<i>Subida al cielo</i>), a.k.a. <i>Mexican Bus Ride</i>
	<i>A Woman Without Love</i> (<i>Una mujer sin amor</i>)
1953	<i>The Brute</i> (<i>El bruto</i>)
	<i>Él</i> , a.k.a. <i>This Strange Passion</i>
1954	<i>Illusion Travels by Streetcar</i> (<i>La ilusión viaja en tranvía</i>)
	<i>Wuthering Heights</i> (<i>Abismos de pasión</i>)
	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
1955	<i>The River and Death</i> (<i>El río y la muerte</i>)
	<i>Rehearsal for a Crime</i> (<i>Ensayo de un crimen</i>), a.k.a. <i>The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz</i>
1956	<i>This Is Called Dawn</i> (<i>Cela s'appelle l'aurore</i>)
	<i>Death in the Garden</i> (<i>La mort en ce jardin</i>)
1959	<i>Nazarín</i>
	<i>Fever Mounts at El Pao</i> (<i>La fièvre monte à El Pao</i>), a.k.a. <i>Republic of Sin</i>
1960	<i>The Young One</i> (<i>La joven</i>)
1961	<i>Viridiana</i>
1962	<i>The Exterminating Angel</i> (<i>El ángel exterminador</i>)
1964	<i>Diary of a Chambermaid</i> (<i>Le journal d'une femme de chambre</i>)
1965	<i>Simon of the Desert</i> (<i>Simón del desierto</i>) (short)
1967	<i>Belle de jour</i>
1969	<i>The Milky Way</i> (<i>La voie lactée</i>)
1970	<i>Tristana</i>
1972	<i>The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie</i> (<i>Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie</i>)
1974	<i>The Phantom of Liberty</i> (<i>Le fantôme de la liberté</i>)
1977	<i>That Obscure Object of Desire</i> (<i>Cet obscur objet du désir</i>)