Domination and Appropriation in *The Young One*

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> That's my noble master!
>
> —Ariel, *The Tempest*, *I*, *II*

The Young One (1960) remains one of Buñuel's most neglected films critically. The film is a US–Mexico co-production, resulting from Buñuel's collaboration with two victims of the McCarthy House on UnAmerican Activities hearings, who were resident, like him, in Mexico: scriptwriter Hugo Butler (credited as H. B. Addis) and producer George Pepper (under the pseudonym G.P. Werker). Buñuel had already worked with both men on *Robinson Crusoe* (1952), his only other film in English, much more successful in terms of box-office returns and distribution than the one under consideration here.[1]

The few pieces written on *The Young One* have tended to comment on a restricted number of topics – mostly its anti-racism and 'Lolitaism' – and to search for the Buñuelian signature in what is otherwise often classified as a stylistically conventional film.[2] In response to José de la Colina's comment that *The Young One* was his least personal film, perhaps a 'minor Buñuel', Buñuel himself remarked with typically mischievous contrariness: 'Really? I actually think it is one of my most personal films … There are many details: the corpse's feet, the spiders, the hens, the impartiality' (Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, 1993, p. 112).[3] He was also impatient with readings that simplified the film's treatment of race and sexuality, above all adolescent sexuality (Sánchez Vidal, 1984, p. 242). Taking its cue from Buñuel's disclaimers, this essay attempts to review the pivotal themes of race and sexuality through concentration on the role of space in the construction of characters and narrative – space here meaning not merely 'setting' but that which 'implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships' (Lefebvre, 2000, pp. 82–3).

The idea to make *The Young One* came from producer George Pepper, who saw in an adaptation of Peter Matthiessen's recently published 'Travelin Man' the potential for a film on the 'ever-increasing racial unrest in the USA at that time' (Buñuel, J. L., 2000, p. 7). The story, which had won an O. Henry Award in 1957, follows the last four days in the life of Traver – the Travelin Man of the title – a black convict on the run who seeks refuge on an island off the Carolina coast, only to find that a white gamekeeper oversees it. After stalking each other for days, they come face to face, and Traver is outwitted by the white man and killed.

Hugo Butler was employed as a co-writer and, through his collaboration with Buñuel, produced a script that, while still reflecting 1950s' attitudes towards race in the United States, transcends immediate socio-political issues and becomes a parable about man's – and to a much lesser extent, woman's – quest for a psychological and physical habitat. In the process of adapting Matthiessen's story, Butler and Buñuel made numerous changes, the most significant of which was the addition of a major character, Evalyn (Key Meersman), the pubescent granddaughter of Pee Wee, late assistant to Miller (Zachary Scott), warden of the game-preserve island. In the film, Traver (Bernie Hamilton) loses part of his prominence in the original story – not least in the title – and forms the third side of the triangle created by his arrival on the island. In contrast to the short story, Traver is not an escaped convict, but a city jazz musician who flees from a white woman's false accusation of rape. The introduction of two other minor characters who briefly visit the island – Jackson (Graham Denton) and Reverend Fleetwood (Claudio Brook) – further complicates the dualistic pattern of the original story. By incorporating these, as well as, above all, the character of the young girl, Buñuel and Butler may have sought to avoid the potentially simplistic effect of the binary character pattern governing Matthiessen's story (Buñuel, L., 1982, p. 237).

One can only speculate about the decision by Butler and Buñuel to shift the emphasis of Matthiessen's race-conscious narrative, and, to some extent, sideline its black protagonist. Both scriptwriters would have sympathised and identified with Traver, a character on the run, like them persecuted by the advocates of a dominant ideology.[4] Even so, they rose to what must have seemed like the much more challenging task of exploring the psychology of the tormentor, rather than the victim's. In conversation with Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, Buñuel remarked: 'without trying to present a thesis, I wanted to understand – not to justify – the racist characters' (1993, p. 113). What, on his own admission (ibid., p. 99), interested Buñuel most in a character was its potential for change. Although most characters in *The Young One* evolve in one way or another during the course of the narrative, no one undergoes a greater transformation than Miller. He – and not the Travelin Man or the Young One foregrounded by the titles of the story and film respectively – is the narrative's main driving force. The choice of Zachary Scott, the actor audiences would have been most familiar with, seems to further support this case. Scott had an established career behind him, with titles that included *The Southerner* (1945), 99
Mildred Pierce (1945), *Flamingo Road* (1949) and *Appointment in Honduras* (1953), among others. Bernie Hamilton, by contrast, was virtually unknown: he had started his film career some ten years earlier, but had not yet managed to leave his mark on the industry, something that would only happen four years later, thanks to his role in the groundbreaking *One Potato, Two Potato* (1964). Even more significantly, the Young One, the heroine of the title, was played by a total unknown, with no previous experience in the cinema – or interest in it, according to Buñuel (Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, 1993, p. 113).

The island of the original story obviously remained an appropriate location for a narrative about characters placed under scrutiny. As if in a test tube, disparate agents are brought together in this isolated environment, and forced to interact. In this confined space (the camera never leaves the island), Miller,more than anybody else, comes under observation, not only in relation to his physical surroundings, but also to his female companion on the island, and the male stranger who appears from outside it. Miller's masculinity is thus put to the test both by internal – Evvie's developing femininity – and external threats – Traver's challenge to his status as the 'patriarch' of the island. Although Buñuel prided himself on the fact that his meticulous choice of exteriors and careful positioning of the camera had managed to create the illusion that *The Young One* had been shot in Carolina (despite the fact that it had been filmed in Mexico), a *mise en scène* laden with symbolism, the absence of names – unlike Matthiessen's original – and of temporal markers gives the film an abstract, somewhat transcendental quality. Interestingly, the film was exhibited in England under the title *Island of Shame*. The island itself, we learn early on in the narrative, is set for dramatic transformation: Miller's wild domain is soon to be developed into a modern hunting club. As if in communion with the natural space they inhabit, humans are also in a transitional stage: Pee Wee from life to death, Evvie from childhood to womanhood, Traver from alleged guilt to proven innocence, and Miller, perhaps above all, from a high-handed sexual and racial mindset to greater sensitivity and moral awareness.

Pee Wee's death just before the film's opening scene establishes Evvie and Miller as the only humans inhabiting a natural space overgrown with vegetation and populated by undomesticated animals. But the wilderness here is not romantically constructed as 'a symbol of earthly paradise, the place of before the fall where people lived in close harmony and deep sympathy with nature' (Short, 1991, p. 10). Like the Bosch-like jungle of equivocal delights in *La Mort en ce jardin* (1956), this is no Garden of Eden – at least not one without irony. In fact, the man, woman, apple and snake all reappear, but their part in the story modifies the Christian myth: neither does the snake whisper in the woman's ear (though it bites and kills her dog), nor is Evvie the defiant, seductive bearer of fruit personified by her namesake. When the girl, who has obediently tied her hair back and washed her face following Miller's order, offers him an apple, the camera delights in a shot that captures her softly lit, feminine features. Miller looks up at her, and a fast zoom-in captures the expression of a man who has suddenly discovered the woman in the girl. But even as this virginal Eve hands the apple to Miller, she remains innocent and ignorant of her sexual allure: insight and desire are associated exclusively with the film's culpable Adam, who will try to conceal his seduction of Evvie from the mainland intruders. But there is no hiding. Divine judgment eventually visits 'The Garden' in the shape of Reverend Fleetwood, who informs Miller: 'This is an abominable sin: the violation of an innocent.'

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Significantly, Reverend Fleetwood's denunciation of Miller's sinful behaviour is simultaneous to his public defence of Traver's innocence. Through his influence, then, sin and guilt are transferred from the black man to the white man, a transition stressed by the circular structure of the film itself. Setting and musical score bring together beginning and

end, creating a spiral whereby things are the same and yet different, where apparent opposites coincide.[5] The opening credit sequence had shown the black man landing on the island, throwing the weight of his exhausted body on the seashore, while a version of the famous 'Oh Sinner Man' song – sung by Leon Bibb, in a slightly altered version from the original 1958 recording – accompanies his moves, branding him as a sinner and prophesying his failure to find shelter or comfort there.

> Oh Sinner Man, where you gonna run to?
> Oh Sinner Man, where you gonna run to?
> Oh Sinner Man, where you gonna run to all on that day?
> Run to the rock. Rock won't you hide me? …
> Lord says 'Sinner Man, rocks can see you hiding' …
> Run to the sea. Sea won't you hide me? …

Then, in a characteristically Buñuelian sound–image dissociation, the natural concert of maritime sounds and bird songs that had accompanied Traver's moves is interrupted by a woman's voice screaming 'Rape! Rape!' We soon realise this exists only in Traver's mind, a space immediately invaded by the camera, allowing us to share the black man's traumatic recollection of his flight from the city, while intentionally misleading us (by withholding the actual scene in the woman's bedroom) into accepting the song's definition of Traver as a sinner. But in the course of the narrative, spectators and characters alike discover that Traver is in fact innocent, whereas Miller is the morally objectionable character. It seems only just, therefore, that the last scene of the film should return us to the initial one, as if to 'rewrite' the script. Back on the seashore, the camera focuses on Reverend Fleetwood, Evvie and Jackson hopping on a boat in the distance, and then cuts to a close-up of Miller's face, looking directly at the camera, as the song 'Sinner Man' attaches itself to the soundtrack of natural sounds, and to Miller's plight. The song continues as Traver meets Miller on the seashore, gets help from him to push the boat to the water and speeds off. Camera and song, however, do not follow Traver this time, but remain instead with Miller. A long shot of him in the distance – framed by branches in the foreground – conveys the white man's isolation and smallness on this island, while the song plays on.

This is a morality play, bringing to light the blurred limits that separate guilt from innocence, and the film's construction of space creates just the right conditions for the enactment of such a drama. The island is a liminal space, connected to but separate from the world of the town on the mainland. Its amphibious nature – defined by water as well as by land – and its hybrid combination of untamed wilderness and civilising humanity gives it a dual quality. On the island, life-affirming forces coexist with destructive ones: clean, running water shares the ground with stagnant, treacherous swamps; honey-making bees with murderous racoons. The island's feral *mise en scène* is in line with the paradoxical meanings traditionally associated with the wilderness: on the one hand 'the classical perspective which sees the negative element of the wilderness experience, the

view that wilderness quite literally bewilders', on the other, 'the wilderness as a place of spiritual regeneration' (Short, 1991, p. 21). The film's use of space and *mise en scène* encourage these parallel meanings: characters are certainly trapped by this isolated wilderness in various ways, but equally, it is here that the seeds of their material or spiritual freedom are planted.

The sense of entrapment pervades this as much as other Buñuel films – for example, *Robinson Crusoe* (1952), *La Fièvre monte à El Pao* (1959), *Viridiana* (1961), or *Simón del desierto* (1965), to mention only a few made around this same period. When Traver is at one point pursued by Miller, the camera pauses and registers the movements of the black man, miniscule in the distance, framed through a tangle of interwoven branches, effectively likening him to a small, defenceless insect imprisoned in a spider's web. Traver makes determined but unsuccessful attempts to leave the island in his boat, each seeming as futile and almost as inexplicable as those made by the guests in *El ángel exterminador* (1962), who are unable to leave their dinner-party hosts' house (a metaphorical island, as indicated by the original title of the film – *Los naúfragos de la calle Providencia*). At one point, Traver himself makes a new hole in his recently repaired boat by hurling the rifle carelessly inside it, as if unconsciously aiming to jeopardise his chances of escape – undoing, like some male Penelope, his own handiwork.

Evvie, for her part, has never left the island, having been bred, very much like the rest 102
of the animals in this game preserve, in captivity. No wonder, then, that she should often be seen caressing the little deer that stands tied to a wooden pole outside the cabins, as if naturally drawn to a creature whose plight resembles her own. But the most conspicuous emblems of Evvie's entrapment are the two cabins that preside over the forest clearing. When early in the narrative Evvie rushes out of Miller's cabin, not fully understanding but still annoyed by his attempts to fondle and kiss her, she can only escape to the other cabin, where her grandfather's corpse lies unburied. Hovering between these two elementary forces of nature, Eros and Thanatos, escaping from the former and trapped by the latter, Evvie's reaction is to fit the dead man's boots on to his feet, and then to sit down and eat, seeking comfort in that most symbolic of foods: honey.

In this male-dominated environment, Evvie's identification with bees and honey – on three occasions she is seen handling or eating it – leads to a whole series of associations. Traditionally considered, like milk, the ideal, perfect source of nutrition, honey has often signified matriarchy and, because of the elaborate process necessary for its production, wisdom, spiritual endeavour and rebirth (Cirlot, 1982, p. 305). These links further strengthen the association between Evvie and the deer – a symbol of purity, morality and knowledge. Evvie is the island's Artemis, another goddess of the forest and the protector of deer. All these life-affirming qualities set Evvie in stark contrast to Miller, the keeper of the woods who, ironically, is responsible for preserving animal life only so that it can be preyed upon by recreational hunters. Miller, in fact, is no freer than the others, but this is something that he will only acknowledge towards the end, as his confession to Reverend Fleetwood ('You can't have a man cooped up on this stinking island!') and the closing shot

of the film demonstrate. The wilderness' potential for discovering hidden depths contributes to Miller's heightened self-awareness. Prior to his transformation, though, Miller is an arrogant individual, convinced of his mastery over every living creature on the island, including Evvie. Traver's arrival threatens his status, and triggers the clash between those two representatives of different ends of the racial, social and economic spectrum. When Traver sets foot on the island, exhausted and injured, he looks up and sees a sign that defines it in unambiguous terms: 'Private game preserve'. This is a wild territory, of untamed fauna, flora and swamps, but even these are someone else's property. The close-up of the sign confronts the disadvantaged Traver with the extent of his destitution. Thus, already in this very first scene, the introspective theme carried by the score – 'Oh Sinner Man' – blends into the film's concerns with questions of social and economic (in)justice.

Traver's arrival provides a counterpoint to Miller's presence on the island. From the beginning, both men are defined through a series of contrasts. Miller is a rural white Southerner who, though a hunter, actually leads a sedentary life on the island. Traver, a Northern black city-dweller, is in fact the one who leads a nomadic existence. Miller is earth-bound (he is on the island at the beginning and remains there at the end), while Traver is mostly identified with water (he arrives from the sea at the opening of the film and sets off by sea again at the end). When Miller is first glimpsed, he is shooting a rabbit, which he then disembowels in a scene that immediately follows one in which Traver munches through a live crab he has just caught in the sea.

All about Evvie in *The Young One*

Traver's intrusion on Miller's territory poses a threat to the system that governs it, and above all, to Miller's ownership. In the course of the narrative, Traver will be seen systematically trespassing Miller's wild as well as more domestic territories, and appropriating his possessions: honey, apples, shotguns, gas, nails, tar, a hammer, one of the cabins and – at least this is what Miller comes to fear – Evvie as well. The island with its various discrete but interconnected spaces reflects here the power struggle between humans, exemplifying Lefebvre's argument that '(social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder' (2000, p. 73). A hint that the regime on the island has been unsettled comes when Miller's scornful apology to Traver for suggesting that 104
Evvie should sleep in his cabin rather than in the one to be occupied by the black man is met with even more refined irony from Traver: 'Not at all, man. Not at all. You just treat those cabins just like they were your own. Be my guest!'

Interestingly, Traver's acquisition of Miller's property is achieved not through violence, but mercantile transaction, either paying for whatever he takes or working for it. This emphasises the differences between the two men: 'The stress on the negro's offers to buy food and gas from Ewie [*sic*] makes him the representative of a trading, sophisticated, city code, in contrast to the game-warden's rural, almost Wild West atmosphere of property and guns, with its racial feudalism' (Durgnat, 1968, p. 117). As the story advances it becomes clear that Traver is less governed by the law of the wilderness than Miller. He is, in fact, much less aggressive, much more polite than the white man. An unfair, racist system alone explains the different positions they have come to occupy on the social, economic ladder.

While the moral conflict marking Miller's relationship to Evvie is conveyed through biblical imagery, the more secular issues of economic imbalance and unfair distribution of property are to a large extent expressed through evocations of fairy tale (especially 'Red Riding Hood', 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' and 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin'), as well as of legendary and literary lore. Evvie and Traver's first encounter appropriately takes place in an archetypal setting: the forest. Here, the young girl is surprised by a big, dark, threatening creature that snatches the goods she carries in her hamper. Famished, Traver is nevertheless no wolf, and offers to pay for the apple he takes from Evvie's basket (a motif that recalls the earlier scene with Miller, and establishes another link between the two men, suggesting perhaps that he too might try to abuse Evvie's innocence). As before, Evvie remains mostly ignorant of the potential danger posed by the stranger, and allows him to accompany her to the cabins. Here, the folkloric associations proliferate. Traver is seen sitting comfortably on Miller's chair, at his table, sampling his goods. When he says '[t]his guy Miller might not like me eating his food, smoking his cigarette', the link with 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' can hardly be missed. But although, as in the tale, we are

confronted here with 'a stranger who invades privacy and takes property' (Bettelheim, 1988, p. 218), the original structure is clearly subverted. Here, the character with a 'Wee' in his name is not a baby bear, but a dead old man; and the trespasser is no charming little girl, but a strongly built, dark-skinned male, himself acutely aware of the fear he instils in others: 'You are cool' – he tells Evvie – 'I don't even frighten you.' Considering the brutish nature imposed on Traver by white society – a beastly rapist who must be hunted like an animal – he would seem closer to one of the bears of the tale rather than to the young, fair girl. And yet, Traver is, in fact, an innocent man. This is confirmed when, confronted with Evvie's unself-conscious half-nakedness as she leaves the shower and accompanies him into Miller's cabin, and although captivated, like Miller before, by her sensual body – portrayed through flattering light and emphatic camerawork – he forces himself to avert his gaze and offers Evvie something to cover herself with. His reticence here points to his innocence in the rape case, and reaffirms his role as a victim of racial prejudice, in much the same way as Evvie becomes the victim of sexual abuse. Innocence links Traver and Evvie, and suggests perhaps that they are two sides of the same coin, a double-sided Goldilocks, as together they seem to threaten Miller's painstakingly acquired possessions. In the end, the greatest divergence lies in this version's moral. Whereas the original story was 'a cautionary tale warning us to respect others' property and privacy' (ibid., p. 216), Buñuel's reformulation seems to suggest instead that private property, when the result of unfair distribution and an immoral social system, deserves to be taken away.

Miller certainly senses that his most valuable 'property', Evvie, is under threat by this man who has quasi-magical powers of allure. The Pied Piper of Hamelin's resort to music as a way of avenging the community's failure to give him what he feels is his due bears some resemblance to Traver's conduct. The first time he plays the clarinet, Evvie, who is lying in bed at night, dressed in her white nightgown, is instantly attracted by its music: she gets up and sits by the window, allowing her face to be swept by the breeze and the music drifting in from the seashore. Later, when Traver starts playing it outside one of the cabins, Evvie abandons Miller and approaches Traver, dancing happily to his tune. Fearing his 'possession' might be taken away from him, Miller interrupts the duo – 'Watch this!' – and throws a home-made grenade near the cabin, thus responding with primitive, sadistic violence to Traver's seductive art. Evvie will ask Traver to play again, and when he goes looking for his instrument, she starts to follow him, as if sleepwalking, until, corralled again by her 'lawful' owner, she is prevented from leaving the cabin.

Traver's music serves two purposes: it emphasises his sensitive, artistic temperament, linking him with the rhythms of nature, but it is also an instrument of seduction.[6] It proves irresistibly attractive to Miller's young ward, raising fears, initially, that this might lead her to a destiny no less uncertain than that of the children of Hamelin. In fact, the first shot of Evvie seen hypnotically listening to Traver's clarinet comes immediately after the disturbing scene in which a group of white hens is massacred in their own coop by a badger. The metonymic link here with the black outsider who has 'invaded' somebody else's territory and threatens to take possession of his property is unmistakable.[7]

Water, wind, music and seduction are, also, the defining features of the forest god Pan. A symbol of instincts and of the life-giving, fecundating power of nature in Greek mythology, he became, in the Roman version, the representative of pastoral, nomadic life. Traver has inherited both attributes of his mythical precursor, and one wonders at first whether his encounter with the young nymphette that inhabits this forest will condemn her to the same tragic fate that befell Echo, the nymph of the classical myth. After all, Traver's musical skills are linked, as in the myth (and also, as some have claimed, in the 'Pied Piper of Hamelin'), to sexual seduction: the phallic potency of Traver's clarinet is demonstrated in its effect on women – not just on Evvie, but also on the old lady who falls for Traver when she hears him play at the cabaret. More disturbingly, Traver's clarinet is, to a certain extent, responsible for Evvie's rape: even though from the very beginning Miller is aroused by Evvie's budding femininity, it is only as he listens to Traver's clarinet that he takes advantage of her sexually. Interestingly, then, though Traver is surrounded by an aura of sexual predatoriness, he is, in fact, no more than a catalyst for it in others. 106

This deviation from stereotype is in line with the film's generally off-centre portrayal of black masculinity and sexuality. Bernie Hamilton's plump, slightly overweight body, his fleshy cherubic cheeks, curly hair, and bright eyes give him a child-like air, something emphasised by his quizzical remarks and his natural, strange affinity with young Evvie. The camera avoids any shots that might seem to construct him as an oversexualised male, and, in fact, often flinches from exhibiting his body in a state of undress. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the scene where he is washing himself outside the cabins, in front of Miller and Evvie, without removing his shirt. The unmistakable coyness of the camera here is more unexpected precisely because Zachary Scott had also been seen washing in an earlier scene, in which, unlike here, the spectator is allowed to gaze at his bare torso, as he languorously, almost narcissistically, dries his body on the cabin porch. It would seem, then, that the film purposely avoids the specularisation of the black man's body, perhaps refusing to expand the list of racialist representations of the black male through emphasis on physical prowess and sexual potency. What the film does acknowledge, however, is that the material oppression of the black male inevitably leaves its mark on the body. Already on his first appearance, Traver's body bears such scars: his head is bandaged, and his dirty, sweaty body weakened through lack of food and rest. Later, he is shot at by Miller, has his ankle torn by one of Miller's traps, and ends up lame, walking towards freedom, but carrying on his body the marks of his subjugation. Like Tristana's, his physical mortification points to social and psychological damage.

In a psychoanalytically focused discussion of melodrama, Peter Brooks claims that it is in the logic of melodramatic 'acting out' that 'the body itself must pay the stakes of the drama' (1994, p. 19). He refers to the 'aesthetics of embodiment' as the way in which the most important meanings have to be inscribed on and with the body (ibid., p. 17). *The Young One*, although not straightforwardly a melodrama – not even a civil-rights melodrama of the kind, say, of *The Defiant Ones* (1958), a film with which it does, however, have strong links – was nevertheless made by film-makers committed to racial justice and to the denunciation of tyranny. The repeated metaphorical mutilation of 107

Traver's body links him with Evvie. Traver, like Evvie, will have to struggle to keep his physical integrity in a society that sees them as subordinate to others, as someone else's property.[8]

In *The Young One*, Buñuel allows Evvie and Traver to survive their respective ordeals. The film's relatively upbeat – though clearly open and ambiguous – ending radically alters the closure of Matthiessen's short story, where Traver, despite his own proud sense of natural might – 'You doan know who you foolin with, white trash, you foolin with a man what's mule and gator all wrap into one!' (1990, p. 55) – ends up dead on the seashore (ibid., p. 56). In the film, Traver's amphibious nature – in this he resembles his literary predecessor – is conveyed through actions as well as symbols. A carefully developed correlation between Traver and water throughout the film turns him into a sort of semi-mythical aquatic being: he manages to cross the swamp (while Miller dares not), and when shot by Miller at the lake, appears to have fallen, dead, into the water, only, after a while, to re-emerge alive. The film, in fact, hysterically accumulates images of water: the sea, the lake, the swamps, the river, Evvie's shower, Miller's and Traver's ablutions, a storm, a baptism scene, a water jug on the table as Reverend Fleetwood reads the biblical passage about the Samaritan and the 'living water' (St John, 4, 11–14), Jackson's subsequent offer of water to Traver, and the final escape of all characters but one by sea. Water is the essence of all possibilities, and Traver's identification with this natural symbol of life and renewal goes hand in hand with the fact that it is precisely his presence on the island that instigates Miller's process of moral regeneration. It is also metaphorically connected with the constructive nature of the activities he performs – above all the eternal repairing of his boat. This is another point of contact with Evvie, indirectly established by the film in a variety of ways. Clever editing blends, at one point, Traver's and Evvie's respective chores: a shot of Traver's body bending over the boat in order to attach a piece of wood is smoothly taken over by one of Evvie's, in the same position, leaning over the honeycomb from which she is scraping the honey. By comparison, in an earlier scene, Traver's and Miller's efforts had been contrasted through juxtaposition of another pair of stylistically similar shots – Miller's hands filling a grenade with powder, and Traver's hands, in the same position, repairing the boat – thus inviting reflection on the conflicting implications of their respective activities.

But, as always with Buñuel, character construction is marked by ambivalence. The equivocal spatial patterns of *The Young One* are mirrored by the riven nature of its leading characters. So, Miller, for instance, though mostly defined as an unsophisticated, primitive man, displays occasional signs of sensitivity (Buñuel in Ballabriga Pina, 1993, p. 181). When Evvie flees from his cabin and sexual advances, he doesn't follow her but, instead, takes his guitar and sings a melancholy love song – 'I wish I were a red rosy bush' – unconsciously expressing, perhaps, his yearning for change. As the narrative advances, the initially stark contrast established between Traver and Miller becomes progressively blurred, coming close to disappearing. The turning point occurs when Miller approaches Traver as the latter is – as always – repairing his boat. The two men are kept at a distance, divided by the boat, as well as by the film's editing, which keeps them in separate frames,

via a shot/counter-shot exchange. In spite of this, surprising similarities between the men are revealed here: both served in the army in Italy, both are equally unsettled by offensive language, reacting angrily when called 'white trash' and 'nigger' respectively – in a scene highly reminiscent of the verbal exchange in *The Defiant Ones* where Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis voice their respective loathing for the words 'boy' and 'thank you' – and, most significant of all, both suckled at a black woman's breast:

> **Miller**
> You know. When I was a baby I was kind of puny. Needed special feed. Got my milk from an old black mammy.
> **Traver (sarcastically)**
> No kidding? So did I.

Through contact with Traver, Miller discovers the 'other' within.[9] Confined to the wilderness, that 'environmental metaphor for the dark side of the psyche' (Short, 1991, p. 9), Miller is confronted with – in Jungian terms – his shadow. What initially seemed totally alien turns out to be an integral part of him, a discovery that exposes the entrenched paradoxes of his psyche, and which will ultimately challenge his status from within.

In this, Miller is very much like the Buñuelian Robinson, that other representative of patriarchal authority stranded on an island, facing the collapse of his 'ego' through the encounter with both the 'other' from within (nightmares, daydreaming, fear, carnal desire) and the 'other' from without (an alien land, and a racially alien human being). The tension between socially acquired hierarchical racist thinking and instinctive human alliance is made explicit in both films. At one point, Traver automatically reaches for wood when asked for some by Miller, but suddenly realising that complying with the demand would put him in the position of a servant to the white man, he stops and answers back with a command – 'Give me some whiskey!' – that Miller, amused by this refusal of racial servility, obeys. This foregrounding of the ambiguities in the master–slave dynamics recalls the 109 scene between Robinson and Friday, in the earlier film, where Dan O'Herlihy briefly kneels in front of Jaime Fernández to remove his shackles, before rapidly modifying a pose that is identified with submission. The visual impact of this tableau, however, lingers on. Buñuel seems to be reprising that scene where, in *The Young One*, Reverend Fleetwood goes down on his knees to tie a bandage around Traver's injured ankle. This temporary reversal of roles, as the humble and the exalted momentarily exchange places, recalls the Maundy Thursday scene in *Él* (1952), where the priest washes the feet of the acolytes, which in turn gestures to Christ's washing of the Apostles' feet in the New Testament.

There are more than merely incidental similarities between *The Young One* and *Robinson Crusoe.* Defoe's novel lends itself to subversive readings since, according to Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, it shares with a few other canonical texts of English literature commentary on 'what English society regarded as unsuitable alliances, and … with the threat of the outsider, the Other, who is discovered or adopted, or suddenly arrives to

disrupt an English domesticity' (1993, p. 109). Save for the national idiosyncrasies, the same could be said of *The Young One*. In this film, too, 'the unwitting enabler of … reform is … the outsider, … the Other, who … can offer a timely reminder to civilised (European) man of his darker and savage origins, traces of which still lurk in the human (i.e. European/English) heart' (ibid.). It is through contact with this contemporary version of the subaltern that the darker corners of the master's psyche come under scrutiny.

All this, plus the island setting, the presence of the young girl as a companion to the older man, and of another marginalised, alienated male, links *The Young One* to another key text on patriarchal control, subordination and restitution, and one that has also been subject to 'decolonising' readings: *The Tempest*. Like Prospero, Miller is a figure of authority, positioned between contrasted characters: the much younger girl whom he instructs and grooms, and the 'inferior' male in the margins whom he despises and mistreats. Prospero's decision to provide Miranda with the knowledge appropriate to her age – '… thee, my daughter, who art ignorant of what thou art … 'Tis time I should inform thee farther' (Shakespeare, 1979, p. 2) – is echoed in Miller's insistence on Evvie's introduction to the world of the symbolic – 'There is som'in you gotta learn, baby. You gotta learn, you know? Not all men are like your granpa. Not all men are like old Hap either. I mean, you gotta learn to be careful of yourself over in town.' Like Prospero, Miller fears Evvie is in danger of being seduced by what he views as a racially inferior creature, and reacts violently to any approach the latter makes towards her. Traver, for his part, resents Miller's control over all things on the island, and his presence challenges the white man's status, and highlights the unfairness of the individual's material exploitation and colonisation, in ways that recall Caliban's own grievances – 'This island's mine … which thou tak'st from me' (Shakespeare, 1979, p. 6).

Even here Buñuel's refusal to rely on dualistic paradigms is clear. All the characters are marked by contradiction and complication. Evvie, in particular, now a Miranda now an Ariel, plays an important role in destabilising the master–slave relationships of the film. Traver actually compares Evvie to an airy spirit, calling her at one point his 'angel of mercy'. And indeed Evvie, like Ariel, hovers between the two men, sometimes getting closer – physically as well as metaphorically – to Miller, at other times to Traver. Although racially identified with the victimiser (which perhaps explains the somewhat uncanny scene in which she gratuitously kills a black spider – Traver? – that inoffensively crawls on the ground, as well as those occasions on which she betrays Traver's whereabouts, thus exposing him to Miller and Jackson's racist persecution), Evvie is also, and perhaps above all, a victim.[10] Interestingly, the Buñuelian reworking of *The Tempest* liberates Caliban but keeps Prospero trapped on the island. However, like his literary predecessor, Miller comes to realise that he has to relinquish some of his power, and have a fresh start, redefining his relationship both to human beings and surroundings.

The concern with place and displacement, or as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin put it, with 'the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place' (1989, p. 9), features largely in post-colonial debates, as it also does in Buñuel. His

exilic condition made him acutely aware of the precariousness of territorial allegiances. Even the contradictory statements he made about the nationality of *The Young One* reflect his relentless struggle to escape geographical boundaries: while sometimes affirming the film was purely North American – 'All the actors – save Claudio Brook – are from North America, as is Hugo Butler, and the producer, even though we filmed on location in Mexico. And of course, the theme is North American' (in Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, 1993, p. 113) – at other times he insisted on its undeniable Mexicanness:

> It was filmed entirely in Mexico, in Mexican studios and locations; all the technical crew is Mexican, the director of photography is Gabriel Figueroa; the production company (Olmeca Films) is Mexican, and I myself am Mexican. Thus the nationality of the film needs no discussion.
>
> --In Ballabriga Pina, 1993, p. 180

In the end, this film – like its island setting – belongs nowhere and everywhere. Its formal texture, *mise en scène*, and character construction make it transcend the barriers of national inscription, drawing on but subverting almost every code and narrative it touches, exemplifying Brydon and Tiffin's point that '[w]hen Caliban, Ariel, Miranda and Friday "talk back", a new configuration emerges' (1993, p. 89). Whether gesturing to Christian and classical myths, European folk and literary lore, or giving expression to contemporary issues, *The Young One* tirelessly examines their creative well-springs, allowing space for the expression of other views and voices.

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Notes

[1] For fuller details of the conditions of production and distribution of *The Young One* see the article by Randall Conrad (1993).

[2] Among the few that have widened discussion of the film is Victor Fuentes's chapter in *Buñuel en México* (1993, pp. 85–100).

[3] All translations of non-English texts are my own.

[4] Various critics have made the connection between Traver and Buñuel and his team of exiles. Jean Gili elaborates on this, claiming that this film is 'a drama about an artist who is forced to set aside' – like Buñuel – 'his art while he concentrates on the struggle for survival in a hostile environment' (1963, p. 198).

[5] Victor Fuentes identifies the 'coincidentia oppositorum' principle as the one governing many of Buñuel's Mexican films, including *The Young One* (1993, pp. 63–81).

[6] Peter Evans points out that for Buñuel, as for García Lorca, 'the black is the American gypsy, who through music – jazz – remains in touch with the harmonies of nature' (forthcoming).

[7] I depart here from interpretations that link the badger scene with Miller's sexual assault on Evvie (e.g. Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, 1993, p. 114; Fuentes, 1993, p. 99). Despite what has become a widespread claim, this scene (in the twenty-seventh minute) does not closely precede Miller's rape of Evvie (which does not take place until the fifty-third minute), but is inserted in between scenes that connect Traver and Evvie.

[8] In a discussion of contemporary practices of violating black bodies, George P. Cunningham discusses the triangles that position black men and white men as adversaries in the contest over the body of women, claiming that '[f]ocusing on a triangulation as a configurative site of the relationship of racial and gendered bodies to each other provides a way of thinking and talking about the simultaneity of race and gender that traditional logics do not afford' (1996, p. 135). Cunningham relates this to Freud's Oedipal triangle and Eve Sedgwick's (1985) triangle of homosocial desire (i.e. a man's interest in a rival's wife or sexual partner is often really motivated as much by admiration or envy of the rival as by sexual desire). Limitations of space prevent me from expanding on this aspect, but its relevance should be noted. Even if Traver is not actively intent on stealing Evvie – or anything else, for that matter – from Miller, this does not prevent the latter from treating his presence as a threat to his whole situation.

[9] Victor Fuentes elaborates on the question of the 'splitting … between the black and white characters', concluding that they end up together in a 'common root of human solidarity' (1990, p. 81). Although in agreement with the first point, my interpretation of this split clearly differs from his. The film, one might argue, suggests that Miller's decision to let Evvie and Traver leave is mostly prompted by his fear that Reverend Fleetwood could harm his status on the island – 'You report this, it will mean my job' – rather than by human compassion and solidarity.

[10] I disagree with Buache's – and others' – claims that 'in fact, Ewie [*sic*] fully consented to make love, and as a result the film does not … centre on rape but on an act of love' (1973, p. 114). The fact that Buñuel chose not to show the two scenes of sexual abuse does not invalidate the fact that Miller is actually imposing himself on a sexually ingenuous girl. As Buñuel himself comments, '… there is no doubt about his intentions towards Evvie, and so

it has not been necessary to provide explicit scenes' (in Ballabriga Pina, 1993, p. 181). Evvie is, indeed, a victim. But one who, like others in Buñuel's films – for example, *Los olvidados* (1950), *Él*, *Viridiana* and *Nazarín* (1958) – is not unambiguously benign, but is an agent, at times, of somebody else's oppression.