



Juan Luis Buñuel on 'Viridiana'

Upon analyzing the finished script of *Viridiana*, the censors in Madrid did not accept the final scene. The film ended with Jorge living in a room with the maid who had become his mistress. Viridiana came knocking at his door after her faith had been destroyed by the beggars' revolt. The people she had befriended had almost raped her! Viridiana, finding herself alone in this world, had decided to offer herself to her worldly half brother.

Jorge, upon seeing the young virgin at his door, was to tell the maid to get out and then accept Viridiana into his lair. He would then shut the door.

End of film.
"No, this was immoral!" clamoured the censors. "He threw out one woman and accepted another."
My father then offered a more moral ending. Again Viridiana knocks. This time Jorge opens the door and tells the maid to stay. He then

cordially asks Viridiana to come into the room.

Both women are suspicious but he smiles and convinces both of them to sit down at a card table. A record player is blaring out a modern rock and roll tune. Jorge sits down, shuffles the cards, and tries to put the two young women at ease. The camera starts to pull back. He hands the cards to the young novice, guides her hand. "You know, Viridiana," the handsome man grins. "I knew we'd end up playing *tuté* together." The doors are open, the music is lively, all three sit decently at the table. End of film.

The censorship in their great wisdom accepted this ending.

Once the film was finished there was a fear amongst the producers that maybe the censors might realize what it was exactly that they had approved – an ending where the man gets both women at the same time. It was important to get a copy of the negatives out of Spain and into France and to the film laboratories in Paris.
One of the producers, Domingo Domínguez was also an agent for bullfighters and the

following real life scenario was devised and played out.

One early morning, a minivan crowded with a matador (Pedret), his cuadrilla and I, left Barcelona, and headed for the French frontier. Apart from our personal suitcases, the back of the van was loaded down with capotes, capas, estoques and all the other gear associated with bullfighters... and under that, well hidden, were the round cans containing a copy of the negatives of *Viridiana*.

When we got to the border, the guardias, inspectores and guardia civils saluted us with cries of, "Suerte, matador". We all waved back, beads of sweating standing out on our foreheads. Once past the frontier we let out a collective sigh. We reached Lunel, in southern France in time for lunch. I set the cans of negatives in my hotel room (under the bed) and then went out with the cuadrilla to check the bulls. Pedret stayed in his hotel room to rest.

The next day the corrida took place. It was a good corrida. Late that evening, I took the night

train to Paris where the next morning I deposited the film at the laboratories.

At Cannes, the film won a prize but a certain Spanish Padre Fierro who worked at the official Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* lifted his voice in dissent. How is it that Spain could have allowed such a blasphemous film to be produced? (Apart from the ending, there was a suicide, an attempted rape and the beggars re-enacted Leonardo Da Vinci's "The Last Supper".) It was a scandal! The film was then immediately censored and prohibited in Spain. For the next few years, people in Spain who wanted to see the film would take organized trips in tourist buses from San Sebastian or Barcelona and spend the day shopping in France. They would shop for cheese and clothing and then, included in the round trip ticket, see *Viridiana* at a special theatre. There was nothing the censors could do. The tour operators made much money because thousands of people went to see the film.

Many years later, we were filming *That Obscure Object of Desire* at the old Atocha train station in



OPPOSITE

Still from 'Viridiana' (1961)

There were not enough beggars to recreate Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper", so several were added for this scene, including Buñuel's chauffeur (left).

TOP

Still from 'Viridiana' (1961)

The beggars go wild after their celebration and end up trying to rape Viridiana. Facing us are "el Poca" (Luis Heredia), Enequina (Lola Gaos) and José, the leper (Juan García Tienda).

ABOVE

On the set of 'Viridiana' (1961)

One day Tienda, a real beggar who was prone to drunkenness during shooting, was found on the floor in his own excrement. Juan Luis Buñuel cleaned him up and got him back on the set.

The film, banned in Spain, was a hit in France, and when two French tourists recognized Tienda he set off on foot to Paris, but died on the way.