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The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

LOS OLVIDADOS
(THE YOUNG AND THE DAMNED)

Thursday, January 8 8:00
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BUNUEL IN MEXICO

January 8 - February 16, 1976

When at the end of 1946, Luis Buñuel left Hollywood for Mexico with his family, he had already made three of the most original, passionate, subversive films of our time: UN CHIEN ANDALOU, L'AGE D'OR, and LAS HURDES. Behind him lay the production of several Spanish comedies and documentaries, the trauma of the Spanish Civil War ("I thought the world was coming to an end"), and years of frustrated creativity, bureaucratic jobs, and comparative inactivity. He was almost 47 years old.

As Francisco Aranda succinctly stated, "The simple fact of going to Mexico was decisive in Buñuel's rediscovery of his road. Not only the idiom and the race, but the physical types, the dry and dusty landscape, the impassioned speech, the attitudes to life and death, the religious problem, the social structure which he attacked, all combined to restore him to conditions in which he could be himself. From the very first film his personality and his 'Spanishness' were engaged, while he observed, understood and analysed the idiosyncrasy of the Mexican people with a greater profundity than any of the cineastes who had preceded him. Like many other Spanish exiles, he definitively adopted Mexican nationality."

This program at The Museum of Modern Art - where Buñuel worked between 1939 and 1943 supervising, adapting, and editing documentaries - includes the masterworks as well as the too long neglected melodramas and cheap comedies produced with Mexican financing between 1947 and 1965. Each of the films reveals something of his private obsessions, his incisive observations, his penetrating wit and black humor, his exasperation with human folly and pettiness, and his ever-rebellious attitude toward bourgeois morality. Here is an artist attracted and repelled by the contradictions, by the reality of the human condition. His outrage, ironic laughter, or sympathetic shrug rise from the spirit of a man struggling to transcend himself. Buñuel is a man of uncompromising honesty, of intrinsic moral integrity. He is also a man who admires simplicity, who is himself an iconoclastic spirit of love, tenderness, and deep understanding.

Many of the twenty-one features have never been released in commercial English language theaters in the United States; therefore this retrospective bridges a significant gap in Buñuel's filmography. It offers an opportunity for further insight into the sensibility and the creative genius of a major living artist and poet who will celebrate his 76th birthday on February 22.

The Department of Film wishes to acknowledge its gratitude and appreciation to the following individuals and organizations that have made this program possible: Jeanette Bello, William K. Everson, Azteca Films, Banco Nacional Cinematográfico de Mexico, La Cineteca Nacional de Mexico, Columbia Pictures, Macmillan/Audio Brandon Films.

...Adrienne Mancía

LOS OLVIDADOS (THE YOUNG AND THE DAMNED). 1950. Luis Buñuel. Produced by Oscar Dancigers for Ultramar Films, S.A. Assistant Director, Ignacio Villarreal. Original screenplay by Luis Buñuel and Luis Alcoriza (Max Aub and Pedro de Urdimalas collaborated, without credit, on the dialogue). Photography, Gabriel Figueroa. Art Direction, Edward Fitzgerald. Editor, Carlos Savage. Music by Rudolf Halffter, from themes by Gabriel Pittaluga. Sound, José B. Carles and Jesus Gonzalez Gancy. Production Supervisor, Federico Amerigo. With Estela Inda (Marta, Pedro's mother), Alfonso Mejía (Pedro), Roberto Cobo (Jaibo), Miguel Inclán (Don Camelo, the blind man), Alma Delia Fuentes (Meche), Francisco Jambrina (Director of the reform school), Efraín Arauz ("Pocketface"), Mario Ramírez ("Little Eyes"- "Ojitos"), Javier Amezcua (Julian) and Jesús García Navarro, Jorge Pérez, Héctor López Portillo, Salvador Quiros, Victor Manuel Mendoza, Diana Ochoa, Charles Rooner, Sergio Villarreal. Courtesy Macmillan/Audio Brandon Films. In Spanish with English titles. 81 minutes.

"...there is nothing imagined in this film. It is all merely true."...Luis Buñuel

"For me LOS OLVIDADOS is a film about social struggle. Simply because I am, I think, honest with myself, I had to do a film of social significance. I know that I am moving in that direction. But aside from that, I did not want to make a polemical film. I observed things that moved me and I wanted to transpose those things onto the screen--but to do so with the love I have for the instinctive and the irrational that can reveal itself in anything and everything. I've always been drawn toward the strange and unknown."...Luis Buñuel in an interview with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and André Bazin in "Cahiers du Cinéma," No. 36 (1954)

"The box-office success of EL GRAN CALAVERA (THE GREAT MADCAP) permitted Buñuel to make LOS OLVIDADOS. Here, for the first time since LAS HURDES (LAND WITHOUT BREAD), is an incontestably Buñuelian film. But Buñuel was no longer working independently. He had become involved with that terrifying machine, the commercial cinema. He wanted to prove that he could do commercially successful films without abdicating any part of himself. Is it not rare for a director to work on assigned, insipid, foolish subjects without betraying himself, without having to do something against his own nature and ideas? After so many years, with LOS OLVIDADOS Buñuel had a passionately interesting subject--a very difficult subject, certainly, but one worthy of him.

It was a great victory for him, because with this film he reached the general public for the first time. It is true that Buñuel has always worked on a broad canvas and addressed himself to the general public rather than to a coterie of specialists, or the 'initiate.' Now, however, for the first time--and for the simple reason that in LOS OLVIDADOS Buñuel's unusual elements are presented in a context that does not disturb the public's habits--moviegoers let themselves be carried away by the strange and violent world the film presents...With L'AGE D'OR, Buñuel discovered daily reality in the super-real; with LOS OLVIDADOS a new series of films begins, each more marvelous than the last, in which the super-real appears beneath the real. It should be noted that if there are dreams and hallucinations in LOS OLVIDADOS and in nearly all the early Mexican films (SUBIDA AL CIELO, EL ABISMOS DE PASION, ROBINSON CRUSOE), since ENSAYO DE UN CRIMEN (THE CRIMINAL LIFE OF ARCHIBALDO DE LA CRUZ) Buñuel has not needed these subterfuges to transport us to his world."...Ado Kyrou in "Luis Buñuel" (Simon and Schuster, N.Y., 1963)

"Buñuel, whose early work fascinated Freud, creates scenes that shock one psychologically, and remain shocking despite one's best efforts to pigeonhole

them or explain them away. Among them is the mother-meat drama sequence in LOS OLVIDADOS, the most brilliantly conceived dream I have ever seen in a film, and a sequence that is disturbing long after the lacerations of the more realistic material have healed."....Paul Kael in "Kiss Kiss Bang Bang" (Little, Brown and Company, 1968)

"LOS OLVIDADOS is by far the most important of the films Buñuel was to make before EL. It deals with the problem of juvenile delinquency in the suburbs of a large city. It is in fact set in Mexico City, but the situation could apply equally well to New York, Rome, London or Paris. Buñuel shows how social conditions, lack of affection and poverty can turn a child into a criminal. The film is simply a record, and attempts to find no solution to the problem. As the introductory commentary puts it, 'we leave the forces of progress to find a solution.'

The delinquents live in shacks. Completely left to their own devices, they form gangs; under the leadership of Jaibo, a sinister young hood who has just escaped from reform school, they attempt to rob a blind street musician. Then, in the course of paying off an old score, Jaibo brutally murders Julian in the presence of Pedro. An unspoken complicity springs up between the two adolescents. Pedro is both fascinated and frightened by Jaibo who takes advantage of the situation, hounds him to the knife works where he has found a job and then to the reform school. In his determination to drag Pedro down with him, Jaibo kills him in a fit of madness and is himself shot by the police.

The twists and turns of the plot enable Buñuel to describe in a vivid way the boys' relationship with each other, with their parents, with the police and with their educators. But he is not concerned with putting across a thesis about rehabilitation methods; his whole film is on a different level from Delannoy's self-indulgent CHIENS PERDUS SANS COLLIER, Truffaut's autobiographical LES 400 COUPS, the facile optimism of Nikolai Ekk's THE WAY TO LIFE and Donskoi and Legoshin's SONG OF HAPPINESS, or the repulsive sentimentality of all those films that bring tears to the eyes of the charitable by depicting the plight of waifs and strays. Even so, LOS OLVIDADOS is but a pale reflection of the unbearable objectivity and irrefutable indictment to be found in LAS HURDES. Buñuel does not manage to avoid rather romanticising the reform school, whereas he knows full well that it is no more than a plaster cast on a wooden leg. Economic and religious causes are merely hinted at, and the behaviour of the characters seems to move rather arbitrarily from paroxysm to paroxysm. The lack of balance between the over-vivid colours of the description and the haziness of the critical content provoked the following remark by Georges Franju after a projection of LOS OLVIDADOS: 'It is not a violent film; it is simply brutal from time to time.' The difference between 'violent' and 'brutal' is far from negligible. Maybe Buñuel thought he could replace one by the other; but in the process the film lost some of its fundamental impact. In spite of this flaw, however, it does contain some admirable sequences. And the fact that it steers clear of any suggestion of manicheism lends it a disturbing complexity and a poetic inspiration that abounds in searing images. The poor old blind man likes young boys, well-dressed queers flit along shop-fronts, the grandfather prefers to dump his grandson's corpse on the rubbish tip (the 'chorrito') rather than having anything to do with the police, the hens and the cock seem literally to have an evil influence. There are images that are so bursting with eroticism; a young girl pours milk on her thighs to soften her skin, two hands caress the naked back of a sick woman with a dove. In a dream, one of the children has a vision of his mother proffering him a hunk of the meat she refused to let him eat; the mangy dog of death scurries past.

Photographed by Figueroa without any seeking after effect (at Buñuel's express instructions) this love poem about those deprived of love achieves a visual and emotional conjugation of cruelty and tenderness. Jacques Prevert put it this way, at the beginning of a prose poem he wrote in homage to the film:

Los Olvidados
 children that love and are not loved
 adolescent murderers
 murdered...

LOS OLVIDADOS won the prize for the best direction at the 1951 Cannes Film Festival, and when the film came out in Paris its distributor produced a little brochure of the enthusiastic press cuttings. In it, Jean Cocteau (who also did the drawing for the cover) wrote: 'When Rossini was asked who was the greatest musician, he replied: 'Beethoven.' And when the questioner said: 'And what about Mozart?' he replied: 'You asked me who was the greatest; you didn't ask me who was unique.' Buñuel is unique. His film is a masterpiece.'"....from "The Cinéma of Luis Buñuel," by Freddy Buache (A.S. Barnes & Co., New York, 1973)

" Buñuel's tragedy has a curious way with pity: he refuses to indulge it. Instead, the atrocious and the derisory, treated with a caustic lucidity, stun it, just as they stun revulsion (moral disapproval). At first sight, there might seem some affinities with the 'theatre of the absurd,' but they don't go too deep. In Buñuel, the absurd implies an attack on specific abuses, not on some safely vague condition of man. The exhilaration....derives in Buñuel from the spectator's liberation from his sentimentality and fear. The spectator discovers with relief that he is less susceptible than he thought he was. At last he can think freely, clearly, morally. Though anti-sentimental, and against pity, Buñuelian tragedy is far from being conducive to a cold, Aristotelian impartiality. On the contrary, in substituting the criteria of the life-force for bourgeois sensibility, it may recall Nietzsche. But it is a Nietzsche whose Promethean rhetoric has been deflated by Marx, by Freud, by an inner humility and a sardonic humour....If Buñuel's heroes react so violently against the sentimentally lovable (dogs, blind men, white-haired mothers, 'gentle Jesus meek and mild') it is not simply through (misdirected?) rage, but also because all that is repressive and castratory in society is adept in exploiting this emotional blackmail. The emotion of pity is sick and masturbatory. Pity is real only as an unsentimental and effective act; otherwise, it is an insidious counterfeit of respect."....Raymond Durnat in "Luis Buñuel" (Studio Vista, Ltd., 1967)