

HITCHCOCK AND BUÑUEL: DESIRE AND THE LAW

At a Hollywood party in honor of Luis Buñuel, Alfred Hitchcock is reported to have called the Spanish filmmaker "the best director in the world."¹ In an interview shortly before his death, Hitchcock again expressed his admiration, specifically citing *Viridiana* and *That Obscure Object of Desire*.² Clear affinities between Hitchcock and Buñuel, I shall argue here, make their work especially suitable objects for comparative analysis. The two filmmakers form a pair of doubles, strangers on the train of film history, rather like the proliferating shadow-selves that haunt Hitchcock's work. The two directors "cohabit," as it were, the same universe of concern. They explore the same paradigms, posing identical questions even when their responses to those questions sharply diverge. Their superficial differences—like those of Guy and Bruno—mask submerged analogies.

Both Hitchcock and Buñuel display instantly recognizable stylistic signatures. Each creates an idiosyncratic universe crowded with self-referential icons: stairs, birds, and lamps in Hitchcock; churches, bells, and insects in Buñuel. Both have spent a professional lifetime working out their personal obsessions, and one encounters fully developed in their later films what was but embryonic in their earliest work. Their mature directorial methods are remarkably similar; both are known for almost scholastic precision, efficiency and pre-planning. For Hitchcock, the final execution is virtually anti-climactic, while Buñuel has claimed to know, before arriving on the set, "exactly how each scene will be shot and what the final montage will be."³ Both put their highly personal stamp on a wide variety of source material, and both treat actors and actresses as a kind of blank slate on which to write, showing little patience for the empathetic contortions of method acting.

Even doubles have their distinguishing features, however; we would be wrong, therefore, to ignore the many salient contrasts between the two directors. Buñuel rarely offers those virtuoso montage passages, such as the shower-sequence in *Psycho*, that dazzle in Hitchcock's work.

¹ See Francisco Aranda, *Luis Buñuel: A Critical Biography* (New York: Da Capo, 1976), p. 248.

² David Freeman, "The Last Days of Alfred Hitchcock," *Esquire*, 97: 4 (April 1982), p. 92.

³ Interview with Carlos Fuentes published in *The New York Times Magazine* (March 11, 1973), and anthologized in Joan Mellen, *The World of Luis Buñuel* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978).

Whereas Hitchcock fosters emotional suspense, Buñuel triggers intellectual surprise, preferring the shocks of recognition to the thrills of empathy. Hitchcock films engender anxiety; Buñuel's provoke doubt. The point, however, is that both directors work within the same "problematic" of the law and desire, authority and revolt, the rational and the irrational, even if their fundamental strategies differ dramatically. My purpose here is not to prove identity but rather complementarity within difference as manifested in a series of thematically paired films: *The Lodger* and *Chien Andalou*, *I Confess* and *Nazarin*, *Vertigo* and *Viridiana*, *North by Northwest* and *That Obscure Object of Desire*, *The Birds* and *Exterminating Angel*. The interest will be less in proving "influence" than in showing that both Buñuel and Hitchcock are indeed animated by similar obsessions, some broadly disseminated within western culture and others more particular to the two directors.

The overall career trajectories of the two directors are in some ways remarkably parallel. Born only six months apart (Hitchcock on August 13, 1899; Buñuel on February 22, 1900), both began with silent films in the twenties. Both were partially inspired to make films by seeing Fritz Lang's *Destiny*.⁴ Both directed their first films outside their country of origin (Hitchcock in Germany, Buñuel in France) and both collaborated with Salvador Dalí (Buñuel in *Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'Or*, Hitchcock in *Spellbound*). And both sustained brilliant international careers into the seventies, "playing the cinema," as Godard said of Buñuel, the way Bach played the organ at the end of his life.

A simplistic dichotomy would pit Hitchcock the commercial entertainer against Buñuel the avant-garde *artiste*. But in reality both filmmakers drank at the fount of the avant-garde just as both labored, generally, within the framework of the commercial film. But while Buñuel drew from French and Spanish avant-gardism (surrealism), Hitchcock drew from the Germanic (expressionism). *The Lodger* shows the traces of "Caligarism" in its expressionist play of light and shadow, while *Vertigo* reflects the anguish of space-time characteristic of surrealist painting. The art/commerce dichotomy, furthermore, tends to equate Buñuel with his "surrealist tryptych," obscuring the fact that the vast majority of his films were made within the commercial mainstream of the Spanish or Mexican industries or with large-scale producers like Serge Silberman. The real relation between Hitchcock and Buñuel is not one of contrast but of complementarity. To the gothic underside of Buñuel—witness the horrific ambulatory hand of *Exterminating An-*

⁴ See Virginia Higginbotham, *Luis Buñuel* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1979), p. 25; and Francois Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 18.

gel—corresponds the quiet surrealism of much of Hitchcock. The extroverted Spanish surreality of *L'Age d'Or* and *Exterminating Angel* is echoed by the understated “English” absurdism of *The Birds* or *The Trouble with Harry*. Hitchcock’s obsession with dream, his Bretonian *humour noir* and his love for narrative implausibilities qualify him as at least a crypto-surrealist. At the same time, his persistent questioning of conventional ways of shooting—one thinks, for example, of the ten-minute takes of *Rope*, the claustrophobic spatial restrictions of *Lifeboat* and *Rear Window*, and the “structural” use of electronically-generated sound in *The Birds*—reveal a director eager for technical challenge and cinematic experimentation.

The play of correspondences between Hitchcock and Buñuel operates from their earliest films. At first glance, the surrealist short *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) and the suspense feature *The Lodger* (1926) seem wildly dissimilar, yet their affinities range from trivial coincidences to basic strategies and concerns.⁵ Both films deal with doubles (literal in Buñuel, symbolic in Hitchcock), with androgyny, and with sex and violence. Both directors make self-referential cameo appearances: Buñuel as the man with the razor (the man who does the cutting) and Hitchcock as a newspaper “editor” and as a member of the lynch mob.⁶ That Buñuel wields a razor and Hitchcock participates in a lynch mob betokens the aggressive thrust of their “cinema of cruelty.” Buñuel called his film a “desperate appeal to murder” designed not to please but “to offend,”⁷ while Hitchcock, masquerading as an entertainer, exhibits a more disguised and in some ways more insidious aggression.

The opening sequences of *The Lodger* and *Un Chien Andalou* already intimate shared themes and common strategies. Both open with a “prologue” revolving around an aggression staged against the body of a woman. The first shot in *The Lodger* communicates extraordinary violence: a blond woman, backlit and framed in decentered extreme close-up, screams in silent terror. The horror is decontextualized; we do not know where we are, who the woman is, why the woman is screaming, or whose

⁵ Although *The Lodger* was not technically Hitchcock’s first feature, it was, according to the director himself, the first “true Hitchcock movie!” See Truffaut’s *Hitchcock*, p. 30.

⁶ While virtually all critics are aware of Hitchcock’s cameo appearances, few have pointed out that Buñuel too “signs” his works with personal appearances which are shrewdly apt and over-determined with meaning. His brief appearance in *Belle de Jour* as a Spanish tourist pinpoints his situation as a Spaniard making films in France. In *Phantom of Liberty*, he dons a beard and monk’s frock and has himself assassinated in a highly condensed expression of his own ambivalence toward Catholicism: doing violence against a symbolic representative of the Church he also does violence to himself.

⁷ From Buñuel’s presentation of the film at the Cineclub de Madrid; quoted by Aranda, *Luis Buñuel*, p. 64.

viewpoint we share. *Un Chien Andalou* withholds its equivalent act of aggression until the tenth shot: a man razors a woman's eye. Here too the act is shorn of all context. We are given no clue as to the man's motivation and no explanation for the woman's blasé attitude toward her imminent mutilation. But already here we discern difference within complementarity, in the filmmaker's distinct approaches to analogous instances of violence. The visible horror in Hitchcock fosters empathy, while the deadpan response in Buñuel favors an almost comic distance, underlined when the woman reappears subsequently with eyes intact.

Impressed by *Un Chien Andalou*, Hitchcock asked Dali to design the dream sequence for *Spellbound*, in which, in an act of creative self-plagiarism, Dali "paraphrases" the earlier film by having an oneiric figure scissor eyeballs painted on the curtains of a gambling den. But apart from this somewhat fortuitous collaboration, we may note that Hitchcock and Buñuel often aim their aggressions at the eye, one of the most vulnerable of organs and the one most deeply implicated in cinematic process. Their films are rife with injured looks and broken glasses; they are pervaded by the sense of sight wounded or menaced. The razored eyeball of *Un Chien Andalou* and the scissored orbs of *Spellbound*, in this sense, presage the sightless face of Farmer Fawcett, the hollow sockets of Mrs. Bates and the myriad blind men of Buñuel's subsequent films. Time and again, it is as if the spectators themselves were being reprimanded for looking. Ocular laceration becomes the talion punishment for what Stella in *Rear Window* calls a "race of Peeping Toms." Francisco in *El* inserts a needle through a keyhole to puncture the prying eyes of an imagined voyeur. An angry Pedro in *Los Olvidados*, tired of the condescension of his State Farm guardians, lobes an egg at the camera lens, and by extension at the complacent bourgeois spectator. The hero of *Death in the Garden* thrusts a pen into his jailor's eyes. At times the ocular references are purely verbal: "Why don't you have a look around," the car dealer tells Marion Crane, "and see if there's something that strikes your eyes." (His words anticipate the close juxtaposition of eyeball, drain and blood that ends the shower sequence). And an anonymous woman in a restaurant in *The Birds* accuses us, on whose eyes the fiction depends, as she looks at the camera and screams: "You're the cause of all this! You brought this on!"

Aggression in Hitchcock and Buñuel also takes the form of perversely misleading the audience. Both *The Lodger* and *Un Chien Andalou*, in this sense, are veritable mine-fields of miscues and false leads. Hitchcock crowds *The Lodger* with red herrings—Ivor Novello's gothic appearance, his half-scarved face, his fixation on Daisy's hair—all of which prod us to project guilt onto the wrong-man protagonist. Buñuel's red herrings, in contrast, are less narrative and characterological than spatio-temporal

and linguistic. If Hitchcock is perverse in his hermeneutics, Buñuel is perverse in his syntax. The intertitles of *Un Chien Andalou*, for example, promise a temporal coherence which the film does not deliver. Outrageously jumbling the accustomed categories of narrative time, they mix the nebulous atemporality of fable ("once upon a time") with the reportorial precision of "three in the morning." Spatial coherence, meanwhile, is undercut by a plethora of calculated mismatches and *faux raccords*.

The two director's "ouverture" films already explore what is to become a kind of dominant fantasy at the very kernel of their relations to the world—the obsessive intertwining of the imagery of love and death. Buñuel's account of his childhood as marked by a "profound eroticism" and a "permanent consciousness of death" pinpoints that which most deeply fascinates both directors. Key moments in *Un Chien Andalou*—the sexual excitement triggered by the spectacle of death in the streets; the bloodied carcasses hauled toward the inaccessible object of desire; the protagonist's clutching at a nude woman during his dying fall; the final necromantic image of the half-buried lovers—highlight this lethal union of Eros and Thanatos. *The Lodger*, meanwhile, connects love and death by constantly eroticizing murder. Indeed, Detective Joe's parallelistic summary of his deepest desires—"to put a rope around the Avenger's neck and a ring around Daisy's finger"—apart from implying a sinister equation between marriage and legal execution, encapsulates the typical movement of Hitchcock's double plots: one ("the rope around the neck") involves the bringing of a killer to justice, and the other ("the ring around the finger") involves the constitution of the couple. One narrative is quickened by Eros, the other by death. Homicide and matrimony are intimately linked. The opening and closing sequences, with typical Hitchcockian circularity, stress this link in their orchestration of repetition and difference. The electric sign flashing "Tonight Golden Curls," associated with murder at the beginning of the film, evokes wedding-night consummation at the end.

The mediating term between love and death, for Buñuel at least, is religion. Whereas Hitchcock surrounds sexuality with guilt, Buñuel suffuses it with religiosity. Dialectically negating the negation, he exploits religious prohibitions in order to intensify that which the prohibitions are designed to combat—desire. Religion becomes an aphrodisiac, a trampoline for passion. Sexual pleasure, for Buñuel, only exists in a religious context: "it is an exciting, dark, sinful, diabolical experience."⁸ Buñuel cites with approval Saint Thomas' idea that sex even in marriage

⁸ From interview with Carlos Fuentes, in Mellen, pp. 69-70.

is a venial sin: "Sin multiplies the possibilities of desire."⁹ Lacan could hardly have said it better; the Law catalyzes desire. Innumerable passages in Buñuel fuse religious law and sexual desire in a kind of transcendental pornography. Francisco becomes enamored of Gloria's feet during mass; the blasphemous debauch of *L'Age d'Or* is conducted by a Jesus Christ lookalike; the orgy and rape of *Viridiana* take place to the sounds of the Hallelujah chorus.

The most striking biographical bond between Hitchcock and Buñuel consists in their shared Catholic unbringing and Jesuit education. The implacable logic and inexorable punishment associated with the Jesuit order can be traced not only in the premeditated exactitude and artful symmetry characteristic of both directors' work but also in the motif of guilt which serves as a common motor of fascination. Their response to this shared cultural heritage is marked, however, by a number of paradoxes. While Hitchcock remained a practicing Catholic, and while critics such as Rohmer and Chabrol see him as a quintessentially religious director, there is biographical as well as textual evidence of emotional ambivalence, of a "kicking against the pricks." John Russell Taylor recounts Hitchcock's refusal to go through with a programmed visit with the Pope, on the pretext that the Holy Father might warn him to play down all "the sex and violence."¹⁰ The anecdote, while not explicitly anti-clerical, at least betrays a feeling on Hitchcock's part that the impulse which drives his films is not one of which the Church would approve.

Buñuel, meanwhile, plays out the obverse side of the same paradox, mingling outspoken hostility for religion with secret affection. The repressed anti-cleric in Hitchcock corresponds to the closet believer in Buñuel. Buñuel's public stance toward Catholicism, of course, has always been one of provocation and sacrilege. As an adolescent, he and Garcia Lorca would shave closely, powder their faces and masquerade as nuns in order to flirt with male passengers on streetcars, a piece of biographical evidence that merely confirms the ominipresent anti-clericalism of the films. On another level, however, Buñuel's relation to the Church is parasitical, almost vampirish: it feeds on what it attacks. His insistent desacralization depends on Christianity as a source of imagery and fount of inspiration. In this sense Buñuel, who has often expressed a fondness for the Middle Ages, resurrects the carnivalesque irreverence of that period. Echoes of carnival laughter resound within the walls of the festive cloister which is Buñuel's oeuvre, as he deploys blasphemy as an aes-

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁰ See John Russell Taylor, *Hitch: The Life and Times of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 310.

thetic strategy, a fond method for generating art. The religious travesties so frequent in his films—the parodistic liturgies of *Simon of the Desert*, the orgiastic Last Supper sequence of *Viridiana*—form the contemporary aesthetic counterpart of the monkish pranks and *parodia sacra* of the Middle Ages.¹¹

Religion, pervasive in Buñuel, also subliminally informs much of Hitchcock. His “wrong men” recapitulate—at times comically (Roger Thornhill), at times tragically (Father Logan)—the golgotha of their exemplary prototype: Jesus Christ. The full name of the protagonist of the paradigmatically entitled *The Wrong Man*, drawn from his real-life model, “happens,” in a marvelous instance of the “definitive by chance,” to evoke the Incarnation: the Christ in “Christopher,” the Man in “Manny,” and God, etymologically present in the Hebrew roots of “Emmanuel.” One celebrated moment deftly epitomizes the religious thrust of the film by having a shot of Manny, bowed in prayer before an icon of Christ, dissolve to the face of the actual thief. The dissolve figure, according to Metz, tends toward “substantial fusion, magical transmutation, mystical efficacy” and here it exhibits, almost in a pure state, the displacement of guilt mechanism operative in so many Hitchcock films. Manny, iconographically associated with Christ by juxtaposition within the frame, also takes on Christ’s actantial function by atoning, if only temporarily, for the guilt of others.

Both Hitchcock and Buñuel show a certain disabused affection for Christ-like figures such as Manny, Father Logan, *Viridiana*, *Nararin*. *I Confess* and *Nazarin*, in fact, can be viewed as cinematic variations on a single premise: What would happen if Christ’s teaching were strictly carried out in the contemporary world? The priest-protagonist of *Nazarin* literally follows Christ’s example, while Father Logan obeys to the letter an obscure point of the canonical code—the rule of priestly silence—and responds with immaculate purity to a battery of temptations. But their *imitatio Christi* proves to be futile. Both protect murderers, and both are vilified. Father Logan’s religiously sanctioned silence leads to the loss of innocent life, and *Nazarin*’s unassuming charity is greeted with howls of execration. In both cases, strict adherence to religious principle leads to catastrophe, illustrating Buñuel’s claim that “one can be relatively Christian, but the absolutely pure innocent person is condemned to failure.”¹² And in both films the authors underline this failure by having

¹¹ For the seminal discussion of carnivalesque demystification of religion, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1968). For a discussion of these tactics in Buñuel and other filmmakers, see Robert Stam, “On the Carnavalesque,” *Wedge*, No. 1 (Summer 1982), 47-55.

¹² From a 1961 interview with Elena Poniatowska, published in *Revista de la Univer-*

antagonistic double figures deride their useless sacrifice: "I am alone . . . like you. You are alone. You have no friends," the murderer Keller tells Logan in the climactic scene. In the same way, the thief mocks Nazarin: "Look at me. I only do evil. But what use is your life really? You're on the side of good and I'm on the side of evil and neither of us is any use for anything." Both directors highlight the fearful symmetry of saint and sinner.

Both *Nazarin* and *I Confess* score the repressive anti-sexuality of the Church. Pursued by passionate women, the protagonists of both films are too spiritually absorbed to respond to them as sexual beings. The ideal of celibacy, criticized in *Nazarin* and hysterically lampooned in *Simon of the Desert*, is subtly undermined in *I Confess*. Hitchcock's pairing of Montgomery Clift and Anne Baxter as leading man and lady inevitably stimulates certain erotic expectations. Hitchcock even offers a tantalizing "bracketed" sample of a possible romance—a subjectivized idyll complete with libidinous thunderstorm and a phallic gazebo—only to withhold its culmination. The film as a whole, similarly, withholds the satisfying closure of final marriage and implied conjugal bliss. Thus Hitchcock frustrates the hopes and desires of the spectators, who must ultimately blame the Church and its rigidity for what seems a sad waste of amorous star talent and the denial of a legitimate cinematic expectation.

Love in occidental art, de Rougemont observes, thrives on obstacles. Romance comes into existence only where love is fatal, frowned upon, doomed. Buñuel's work, especially, both laments and celebrates *l'amour impossible*. Love in *Un Chien Andalou*, *L'Age d'Or* and *That Obscure Object of Desire* becomes a tragicomic obstacle leading only to protracted frustration. Modot and Lya Lys' clumsy attempts at lovemaking in *L'Age d'Or* are in this sense paradigmatic. Burlesque comedy and high tragedy meet as the twosome stumble over chairs, bang their heads on flowerpots, are interrupted by music and distracted by statues. The music evokes passion (etymologically "pathos," suffering, being acted upon), a constantly swelling unfulfilled desire, a perpetual tumescence never reaching climax. Love and pathology become indistinguishable.

The entire oeuvre of Hitchcock and Buñuel can be seen as variations on the theme of the *liebestod*—love and death. De Rougemont traces this occidental fixation back to the medieval myth of Tristan and Isolde, and it is significant that both directors make frequent allusion to Wagner's musical version of the myth. Wagner was one of Buñuel's favorite

sidad de Mexico and quoted in J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 154.

composers and *Tristan and Isolde* one of his favorite works. Recordings of the "Liebestod" accompanied the first screenings of *Un Chien Andalou*, and the orchestra plays it during Modot and Lys' inept trysting in *L'Age d'Or*. Buñuel returned to it in the music track of *Cumbres Borrascosas* (Wuthering Heights) as commentative music for one of the classic novelistic treatments of the love-death theme. Hitchcock, for his part, also returned to this Wagnerian theme throughout his career. In *Murder*, the piece is played over the radio. Herrmann's score for *Vertigo*, similarly, consists of a variation on the "Liebestod," suggesting death as love's devoutly desired consummation. When Eva Marie Saint, double agent of murder and marriage, encounters Gary Grant on the train in *North by Northwest*, still another variation on the "Liebestod" underscores their tantalizingly dangerous flirtation. And in *The Birds*, a reiterated shot frames Melanie Daniels, a record player, and a lone album cover—Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*.

Buñuel's exalted vision of love-death, almost utopian in its religious aspiration, at times recalls the sublime pornography of Bataille's *Story of the Eye*.¹³ Both capture the oxymoronic nature of love's healing cataclysms, in which "orgasms ravage faces with sobs and horrible shrieks"; for them, eroticism is apocalyptic and danger an aphrodisiac. For the narrator of *Story of the Eye*, death is the logical outcome of erection, and the goal of sexual licentiousness is "a geometric incandescence . . . the coinciding point of life and death, being and nothingness. . . ."¹⁴ *L'Age d'Or* achieves the fulgurating cinematic equivalent of Bataille's vision by having Modot, his face bloodied, ardently embrace Lya Lys as he murmurs "mon amour, mon amour." In *The Exterminating Angel*, Beatriz and Eduardo, with a corpse at their side for inspiration, make soft-focus *amour fou*, invoking the language of death ("the rictus . . . horrible . . . my love . . . my death!") while in the throes of orgasm. Death goads sensuality and aggravates desire. The only possible next step in the amorous escalation of morbidity for the couple is mutual sui-

¹³ The Bataille novel, published shortly before the making of *Un Chien Andalou*, perhaps influenced certain sequences of the Buñuel film, as in the following passage:

I remember that one day, when we were in a car tooling along at top speed, we crashed into a cyclist, an apparently very young and very pretty girl. Her head was almost totally ripped off by the wheels. For a long time, we were parked a few yards beyond without getting out, fully absorbed in the sight of the corpse. The horror and despair at so much bloody flesh, nauseating in part, and in part very beautiful, was fairly equivalent to our usual impression upon seeing each other.

Here, the cyclist, the automobile murder of a young girl, the emphasis on physical dismemberment, and the eroticizing effect of the spectacle of death all anticipate specific images in *Un Chien Andalou*.

¹⁴ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye* (New York: Urizen, 1977), p. 6.

cide (or is it reciprocal murder?), illustrating de Rougemont's observation: "Sometimes even, [death] aggravates desire to the point of turning into a wish to kill either the beloved or oneself, or to founder in a twin downrush."¹⁵

Since fetishistic love thrives on obstacles, death, as the ultimate obstacle, is the perfect spur to love. Love in Hitchcock and Buñuel, therefore, often takes on a decidedly necrophiliac cast. The male protagonists of both *Viridiana* and *Vertigo*, for example, are obsessed with deceased love objects. Don Jaime is haunted by the memory of his first wife, who expired in his arms on their wedding night. Just as the heartbroken Tristan weds a second Isolde in order to sustain the memory of the first, so Don Jaime attempts to transform Viridiana, the physical double of his spouse, into a reincarnation of his former love. He dresses her in his wife's wedding clothes, drugs her and beds her, caressing her ankles and running his hands along her satin gown to the accompaniment of Mozart's *Requiem*. The intense sensuality of his unilateral caresses clearly suggests necrophilia. Viridiana resembles a corpse, and Don Jaime's clumsy gestures toward consummation remain incomplete, as they must, for he is in love with death itself. Later, he smiles enigmatically as he pens the suicide letter which binds Viridiana to him after death through the inheritance he leaves her. He thus realizes a crass and legalistic fulfillment of the courtly ideal of a love attainable only beyond the grave.¹⁶

The necrophiliac overtones of *Vertigo* are equally clear and insistent. The protagonist, Hitchcock told Truffaut, "wants to go to bed with a woman who's dead; he's indulging in a form of necrophilia."¹⁷ "Madeleine" and Judy, while not literally dead, enjoy what might be called a privileged relationship to death. "Madeleine" appears to be possessed by the deceased Carlotta Valdez, and is thus her "ghost," just as Judy, in turn, is the "ghost" of Madeleine. Like Don Jaime, Scottie shows a morbid predilection for the defunct; he can only respond to a flesh-and-blood woman after she has been transformed into a spectral repetition of a lost love. Like Don Jaime, he coaxes a reluctant surrogate into masquerading as a deceased beloved. He prefers "Madeleine"/Judy and the threat of the abyss to the life-affirming pragmatism of Midge. The film continu-

¹⁵ Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 53.

¹⁶ Love beyond the grave at times acquires incestuous overtones in Hitchcock, notably in *The Lodger*, where Ivor Novello's potentially murderous hand is guided by his deceased mother, and in *Psycho*, in the form of Norman Bates' oedipal relation to a mother who also has a privileged relationship to Death.

¹⁷ See Peter Bogdanovich, *The Cinema of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962), p. 32.

ally associates Madeleine with ghost-like ethereality, with tombstones and suicide, and the fascination she exerts is that of death, a drawing towards oblivion and annihilation, a yearning for final release. This yearning is cinematically realized by morbidly eroticized camera movements. The lure of the abyss is rendered by the subjective track which buries the dreaming Scottie in Carlotta's grave. And the subjective shots depicting Scottie's vertigo combine a backward track with a forward zoom, a double movement of attraction and repulsion whose kinesthetic in-and-out is analogous to the sex act itself.

In Buñuel, the sex-death nexus assumes at times a different form—in an ironic intimation that sexuality itself might either cause death or risk punishment by death. Such, at least, would be one possible reading of the phone call that suspends Modot and Lya Lys' lovemaking in *L'Age d'Or*. An earlier sequence in which the authorities forcibly separate the passionately engaged couple has already installed the notion of sexual play as a censurable activity. In the garden sequence, the call is from the "Minister of the Interior," a possible code-word, as Raymond Durnat has pointed out, for "Conscience," that internalized voice of the social Superego which once warned that masturbation led to madness and lovemaking to death. The Minister, in a parodic escalation *ad absurdum* of all the parental and societal admonitions against inappropriate sexplay, blames Modot for the deaths of countless men, women and children. Sexuality is portrayed, only half-mockingly, as capable of unleashing the downfall of "civilization."

In Hitchcock, the notion of sexuality as prosecutable offense takes on more dramatic tonalities. For Hitchcock, the law of illicit desire is to be castigated by the law. The murder charge against Father Logan becomes intimately linked to the question of a possible past affair with Ruth Grandfort. The presiding judge's request that the jury ignore the question of their alleged relationship, paradoxically only calls attention to it. The short sequence showing the jury deliberations reveals that the jurors are indeed focusing on Logan's relationship with Ruth Grandfort, as if he were being prosecuted not for murder but rather for the crime of sexuality itself. Asked whether the two did in fact have an affair, Hitchcock once answered that he certainly hoped so, then added: "But far be it from me as a Jesuit to encourage that kind of behavior." Hitchcock's response counterpoises the desire for sexual liberation with the tongue-in-cheek disavowal of that very desire. Hitchcock the Victorian clearly infuses sexuality with a guilt that he himself finds oppressive, and much of the special poignancy of the "wrong man" theme in the film undoubtedly derives from this double attitude. Surrounded with guilt, sex remains at the same time one of the few radically innocent activities available to human beings. Hitchcock feels the guilt, and adroitly plays on

our own, yet he is quietly outraged that such guilt should ever have been instilled.¹⁶

Both *Viridiana* and *Marnie* anatomize the psychic damage done by sexual guilt. In both films, the woman protagonist proceeds from extreme sexual reticence to "normal" sexuality. Superficially, they are polar opposites: *Viridiana* is a contemporary saint; *Marnie* is a liar and a thief. *Viridiana*'s vocation is charity, the art of giving; *Marnie*'s avocation is kleptomania, the crime of stealing. Yet there is a radical Genet-like innocence about *Marnie*'s attempt to "help herself" in a desperate search for love. And both are repulsed by sexuality. *Viridiana* recoils in disgust from the phallic cow-udders, just as *Marnie* shrinks from Mark's "degrading" and "animal" touch. Both films trace the religious etiology of this sexophobia—Catholic in *Viridiana*'s case, fundamentalist Protestant in *Marnie*'s. The latter receives misguided sexual counsel from her mother; the former from her Mother Superior.

Both *Marnie* and *Viridiana* evolve toward a highly problematic normality. *Viridiana*, after rebuffing Don Jaime's advances, ultimately "plays cards" with his son Jorge. *Marnie*, after angrily rejecting Mark's embraces, moves toward acceptance and implied fulfillment. Both are readied for this "normality" by a process of symbolic as well as literal rape. *Viridiana* is first symbolically raped by Don Jaime, then literally raped by the cripple. *Marnie* is symbolically raped by Mark's predatory interrogation and by a coerced marriage, and literally raped on their "honeymoon." In both films, wedding-night consummations are surrounded with morbid association. Don Jaime restages the wedding-night death of his first wife with *Viridiana* as surrogate corpse, and her subsequent rejection of him triggers *his* suicide. *Marnie*'s wedding-night, meanwhile, very nearly literalizes the sex-death connection evoked in their free-association word-game, in which "sex" is followed by "death." Hitchcock renders their sexual encounter as a kind of living death, with *Marnie*'s body rigid and her face expressionless as Mark advances in menacingly outsized close shots. And sex is followed, the next morning, by near death, in the form of *Marnie*'s attempted suicide.

In both *Marnie* and *Viridiana*, the men exercise social and patriarchal power over the women, Don Jaime by virtue of his role as *Viridiana*'s benefactor, Mark by virtue of his wealth and his knowledge of *Marnie*'s

¹⁶ At times this sexual guiltiness is extended to art itself as a potentially erotic form of play. Manny in *The Wrong Man* "plays" the bass, and, in his imagination, the horses. Both activities are held against him by the police who see him, according to their cultural stereotypes, as a fast-living bohemian. It is as if playing itself were suspect in the eyes of the Law. A strong undercurrent in Hitchcock suggests a guilty love for the playing involved in his own art.

theft. The recognition of the female protagonists' sexophobia should not blind us to the psycho-sexual problems of their male counterparts. Don Jaime is not only a necrophiliac but also a transvestite, fetishist and voyeur. Mark's love for Marnie, similarly, is shot through with neurosis, pithily summarized by Marnie as a "pathological fix on a woman who's a thief and who can't stand for you to touch her." He belongs, along with L. B. Jeffries in *Rear Window*, Norman Bates in *Psycho*, and Bob Rusk in *Frenzy*, to Hitchcock's overcrowded gallery of sexually problematic males. His generosity, deeply involved with fantasies of domination, begins with a kind of rescue fantasy: he saves Marnie from joblessness by persuading her prospective employer to overlook her lack of references. He then blackmails her with his secret knowledge in order to gain proprietary rights. His pretext for taking "legal possession" by marriage recalls the ancient rationale for slavery: the vanquished owes all to the victor who has spared his life. The same patriarchal power that "normalizes" the female protagonist also generates a humiliating dependency.¹⁹

The title of Buñuel's latest and perhaps last film points to the theme that so obsesses both Hitchcock and Buñuel—*That Obscure Object of Desire*. Here again, Buñuel anatomizes desire as pathology. Just as Mark is attracted to Marnie's frigidity, Mathieu fetishizes Conchita's virginity. Playing out a widely disseminated double bind, the aging protagonist (again played by Fernando Rey) cannot attain his desire without destroying it. His love of a virgin, like Humbert Humbert's adoration of nymphets, is foredoomed and ephemeral by definition. A shrewd piece of editing indicates the religious and cultural roots of Mathieu's fetish. Conchita's "anunciation" of her virgin status segues by direct cut to an entrance plaque alluding to two notorious virgins: "Chapel of the Annunciation, Joan of Arc School." Even Conchita's names fuse physicality and spirituality. Her real name is "Concepcion" as in "the immaculate conception," but "conchita," in colloquial Spanish, means "cunt." Once again, religion (the law) annoints sex with a halo of tantalizing interdiction.

That Obscure Object of Desire demonstrates a kind of Zeno's paradox of passion: the space between two potential lovers is infinitely divisible. While Mathieu enjoys the sterile plenitude of physical proximity—the same house, the same bed, naked together in the same bed—Conchita remains as spiritually remote as a medieval damsel locked in the castles of courtly love. The scene is partially set in Seville, historically one of the centers of the Provençal poetry often cited as the source of courtly love.

¹⁹ For a feminist analysis of this process in *The Birds*, see Jacqueline Rose, "Paranoia and the Film System," *Screen* (Winter 1976/1977), pp. 85-104.

Provençal love poetry drew on the Arabic culture pervasive in Andalusia, and especially on a kind of poetry which idealized love as the humble (and usually unrewarded) service of a lady worshipped from afar. The Buñuel film visualizes this inaccessibility by placing the lovers behind bars, fences, grillwork. Mathieu especially, in a chromatic version of the incarceral obsessions of film noir, is framed as the prisoner of desire. His vision is repeatedly barred as he is subjected to cruelly seductive revelations of Conchita's flesh. The bars become a metaphor of the treadmill of desire—always tantalizing, always unfulfilled, perpetually on the brink—both confronting and generating its own longed-for obstructions.

More important than Mathieu's desire *per se* is Buñuel's playful foiling of *our* desire. The title itself designates our own position as desiring (largely male) spectators. The film is a protracted joke on the spectator, a narrative striptease that refuses to strip. The film never delivers on the abstract erotic promise of the title. We too are cruelly locked out of the spectacle, subjected to an infinite regress of spectatorial frustration. Instead of stimulating desire, Buñuel holds the mirror to our own psychic fix on films themselves. He analyzes, as if on a Steenbeck, the most mystified moment in our culture—the moment of sexual surrender—and scrutinizes our phantasmatic relation to the spectacle, exposing desire as a cultural and cinematic construct.

In her excellent study of surrealist film, Linda Williams contrasts the completed phallic quest of *North-by-Northwest*, and the final train as metaphor for that quest, with the perpetually deferred quest, and the train as "teasing interruption," in *That Obscure Object of Desire*.²⁰ The comparison points to a fundamental difference between Hitchcock and Buñuel. The Lodger and Daisy, Roger Thornhill and Eve Kendall *do* consummate their marriage; the protagonists of *Chien Andalou*, *L'Age d'Or* and *That Obscure Object of Desire* presumably do not. Hitchcock's narratives achieve orgasm; Buñuel's practice systematic *coitus interruptus*. If *North-by-Northwest* is shorn of its final shots, however, its narrative begins to resemble that of the Buñuel film. Both films posit picaresque itineraries—Buñuel might have entitled his film *North-by-Northeast*—in which desire's pursuit of its receding object is set against a background of international terror. In both films, middle-aged men, successful in the world but infantile in love, pursue younger women. An oedipal configuration, analyzed by Williams herself in relation to *That Obscure Object of Desire*, and by Raymond Bellour in relation to *North-by-Northwest*, links both narratives, with the difference that Buñuel

²⁰ See Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1981), pp. 190-191.

leaves Mathieu's trajectory incomplete, while Hitchcock has Thornhill accede to civic heroism and responsible marriage. Thornhill is "cured," while Mathieu prefers the disease to the cure.

The women, in both cases, are portrayed as dangerously and mysteriously double. This doubleness is made literal, in Buñuel, by having two actresses, dubbed by a single voice, play the same role. The character Conchita, meanwhile is a compendium of contradictions, at once passionate and frigid, modest and brazen, assertive and submissive. Hitchcock's heroine is similarly bifurcated: saint and temptress, madonna and whore. The actress's name, in another instance of aleatory good fortune, incarnates these dualities: the fallen Eve, the Virgin Mary, the canonical Saint. In both films, death is concatenated with desire. Terrorist explosions "punctuate" each of Mathieu and Conchita's erotic encounters, and Eve Kendal and Roger Thornhill speak of murder during their first kiss ("Maybe you're planning to murder me, right here, tonight. Shall I? Yes . . . please do . . ."), "What else do you do," Thornhill asks, "besides lure men to their doom on the Twentieth Century Limited?" Both Conchita and Eve could, as Thornhill says, "tease a man to death without half trying." In both films desire is enhanced by inaccessibility and by conventional barriers of class conflict or political tension. Both women become damsels trapped in imaginary castles. In both films, finally, the desired woman participates in a subtext of prostitution. Conchita is the recipient of Mathieu's interested generosity and is kept, ironically, in every sense except the sexual, while Eve, in her role as double agent, is kept by a powerful pimp called the CIA. And if Eve wields sex as a "fly-swatter" against America's enemies, Conchita wields virginity as a terrorist weapon against Mathieu and the bourgeois order he represents.

Both *North-by-Northwest* and *That Obscure Object of Desire* outrageously flaunt their fundamental implausibility. The narrative action swirls around an empty center: the conundrum of Conchita's virginity in the Buñuel film, and vague international intrigues in Hitchcock. The espionage of *North-by-Northwest* forms a Hitchcockian McGuffin, an empty signifier like *Obscure Object's* burlap bag. The purposes of the spies, like those of the CIA, remain obscure, hollow like the 'O' in Roger Thornhill's name that "stands for nothing." The film glories in fantastic coincidences and impossible situations. Narrative implausibilities—the couple's amorous badinage while clinging to the granite face of Rushmore—are mirrored by self-referential devices (Vandamm's malevolent "This matter is best disposed of from a great height" triggers an abrupt shift to a high angle), exhibitionistic set-ups (the extreme high angle shot of Thornhill running from the U. N.) and audacious *faux raccords*. The splice which takes us, spatially, from Mount Rushmore to a hurtling train, and temporally from singledom to marriage, demon-

strates a flair for discontinuity no less dazzling than that of Buñuel, whose splices magically substitute one actress for another.

It would be misguided, then, to pigeonhole Hitchcock as the classicist master-of-suspense and Buñuel as the disruptive avant-gardist. Both *North-by-Northwest* and *That Obscure Object of Desire* are highly reflexive films. Their authors, in both cases, appear in self-aggressive cameo roles. The credit-sequence of *North-by-Northwest* shows a bus door closing in Hitchcock's face. (Thornhill enters the tunnel, Bellour point out, but Hitchcock cannot enter the bus). Buñuel, meanwhile, plays the well-dressed man, early in the film, who asks to be driven to the bank and is promptly blown up by terrorists, a reminder that the film attacks *his* obsessions, *his* class, *his* privileges. Buñuel also inscribes the spectators within the diegesis in the form of Mathieu's listeners in the train compartment, a collective interlocutor not unlike the audience of a film. They ask Mathieu questions, prod him to continue, speculate about motivations and outcomes. Hitchcock's strategy is different; *North-by-Northwest* develops a insistent theatrical subtext, beginning with the title drawn from *Hamlet*, and sustained by constant allusions to the theatre and to theatrical language.²¹

The crucial difference between Hitchcock and Buñuel, in the final analysis, is that Hitchcock's narrative trains run on time, while Buñuel's never arrive. Although Hitchcock keeps the spectator in the dark during the first third of *North-by-Northwest*, after that the double series of enigmas—the espionage series and the romance series—proceed smoothly and finally coincide. Hitchcock ultimately does unravel his enigmas, even if reluctantly and only in the final reel. Buñuel, in contrast, frustrates our epistemophilia as well as our scopophilia. *That Obscure Object of Desire* leaves its central enigmas as intact as Conchita's putative hymen. What drives her to act as she does? Did she actually make love to El Morenito? The film elicits hypothetical answers to these questions and then swiftly subverts them, leaving us with a core of irrationality. Indeed, the fact that Buñuel substituted filmic doubts for the certainties of the source novel tells us a good deal about the corrosive cinema which is his real object.

An excellent test case for both the parallels and contrasts between Hitchcock and Buñuel is provided by an instance when the two directors work similar themes, in comparable genres, at the same point in their careers: *The Birds* (1963) and *The Exterminating Angel* (1962).²² The parallels begin with their titles, both of which refer to winged creatures

²¹ I would like to thank Michael Vertucci for his observations on *North-by-Northwest*.

²² *The Birds* was originally scheduled for completion in 1962, the same year as *The Exterminating Angel*, but production was delayed due to problems with the special effects.

seen as meting out justice on human beings. The scourge, in both instances, carries overtones of the apocalypse. The exterminating angel executes a mission of social justice, an apocalyptic laying low of the noble and the powerful. The characters in *The Birds*, similarly, are collectively the victims of a kind of Judgment Day, a theme sounded explicitly by the drunk in the restaurant: "The Lord said, I will devastate your high places" and "It's the end of the world."

The apocalypse, in both cases, has resonances of the absurd in that the central premise—the inexplicable entrapment of a pride of socialites, an avian mass attack on human beings—is as calculatedly implausible as those subtending many Beckett or Ionesco plays. Because of a curious critical double standard, Buñuel was never belabored for the improbabilities of *The Exterminating Angel*—one expects such things from an avant-gardist—while Hitchcock was ardently pursued by his nemesis "the plausibles." "Why didn't the school children hide in the cellar?" critics asked, and "Why didn't Melanie die of birdbite?" (Because it would be *boring* for Melanie to die of birdbite, Hitchcock presumably would have answered). Both authors, in any case, pointedly refuse coherent explanation. Hitchcock accepted Truffaut's account of the film as a "speculation or fantasy" without "specific explanation" while Buñuel's prefatory note to the first Parisian screening of *Exterminating Angel* warned that: "The only explanation is that there is no explanation."²³ This lack of explanation does not prevent certain of the characters in the films, like certain critics, from seeking plausibility where none exists. Hitchcock's policeman advances common sense explanations—the children *provoked* the birds, the birds were attracted to the *light*, the birds entered *after* Farmer Fawcett was murdered. In both films, such rationalists are discredited. Buñuel's positivist doctor pleads for scientific analysis, but his rationality leads nowhere. The ornithologist, who at first haughtily dismisses the very possibility of mass bird attacks, is left cowed and trembling. We are left with a core of mystery and the incomprehensible.

Both *The Birds* and *The Exterminating Angel* elaborate the theme of entrapment that so obsessed the theatre of the absurd. In *The Exterminating Angel*, the human characters are barred from crossing the magical threshold, while animals move about freely. Even sheep, the stereotypical emblems of passivity and conformism, show superior mobility. *The Birds*, as many critics have pointed out, operates on a similar inversion, moving from a situation in which the birds are caged and the people are free to one in which the people are caged—in houses, telephone

²³ See Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 216.

booths, cars—and the birds are free. The situation in *The Exterminating Angel* would seem, at first glance, to be more claustrophobic, but in fact *The Birds*, apparently more spacious and airy, offers a more frightening situation of global entrapment. This theme is first sounded in the film's opening shot, in which bird cries are superimposed on the turning globe of the Universal logo. The birds aurally cover the earth like a roof, prefiguring a situation in which the whole earth will become a trap. It is touched on again in the dazzling aerial shot of Bodega Bay, clearly from the birds' perspective, and sealed by the final shot, again from the birds' point-of-view, showing the human beings beating a cautious automotive retreat, as the birds, the permanent residents, watch them leave.²⁴

Both *The Exterminating Angel* and *The Birds* can be seen as protodisaster films in which respectable people become "castaways" in situations of extreme pressure where ordinary social conventions no longer apply. Stripped of their advantages, the "castaways of Providence Street" revert to distinctly ungentle behavior: Laetitia picks at her blackheads, the conductor makes unseemly advances, and Raul and Nobile scrap over petty offenses. As the social contract breaks down, the pathological politeness of bourgeois etiquette disappears. In *The Birds*, bourgeois good manners lapse only temporarily, just enough to provide a glimpse of their essential fragility. This fragility is imaged by broken glass and destroyed homes in both films. In *The Exterminating Angel*, the Valkyrie lobs an ashtray through a window, and the Nobile mansion is progressively reduced to rubble. *The Birds* is littered with broken glass: the broken windows of Melanie's pranks, the children's shattered glasses, the birds inscribed on Farmer Fawcett's broken panes, and the fractured glass of the phone booth. In *The Exterminating Angel*, the mansion is destroyed from within, by the residents, while in the Hitchcock film, it is destroyed from without, by the birds. In both cases, the escalating destruction triggers a scapegoating process. "You led us into this," Raul tells Nobile, "you should be killed!" And in *The Birds*, an anonymous mother of two accuses Melanie: "You made this happen! I think you're evil!"

Having signalled these parallels between the two films, it is equally

²⁴ Interestingly, Hitchcock contemplated a double-trap structure that would have been even more parallel to that of *The Exterminating Angel*. The foursome were to have driven off to San Francisco only to encounter the Golden Gate Bridge covered with birds. The endings of both films, in any case, are highly ambiguous. Buñuel leaves his characters trapped in a Church; it is for us to imagine subsequent events. In Hitchcock, the reconstituted "family" apparently makes a safe exit, yet we have no evidence that the birds will not attack again elsewhere. Hitchcock also wanted to forgo the formal closure of "The End," but audiences misinterpreted the lack of an ending as a projection breakdown. Universal, as a consequence, was obliged to overlay final titles on all the prints in circulation.

important to note their salient contrasts. These contrasts have to do with the modes of the films, and the consequences of these modes for spectatorial positioning, and with politics. The mode of *The Exterminating Angel* is ultimately comic, ironic, carnivalesque. The film is structured according to the comic formula of a slow descent into anarchy, and much in *The Exterminating Angel*—the slapstick, the chaplinesque bear, the proliferating chaos à la Laurel and Hardy, the deadpan style in the manner of Keaton—derives from the burlesque comedy that Buñuel so admired. The mode of *The Birds*, meanwhile, despite its comic underside, is ultimately tragic, in the sense that the film takes us through pity and fear to catharsis. “Comic” and “tragic” are here used in their Brechtian senses; the question is one of spectatorial positioning. Hitchcock enlists all the cinematic codes—camera movement, framing, editing, color—in the service of an identificatory response. His predilection for point-of-view editing, in this sense, is but the most clearly marked instance of a general subjectivization. Buñuel, on the other hand, works in the opposite way. We identify with no one in *The Exterminating Angel*; we merely observe critically. Buñuel consistently refuses empathy-inducing techniques, eschewing point-of-view editing, shot-counter-shot structures, eyeline matches and the like. The camera, meanwhile, exhibits its own autonomy, exploring walls and weaving through the party-scape without following individual characters. Even dreams offer no pretext for subjectivization, for they are collective rather than individual, thus anticipating *Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, where the members of the same class dream one another’s dreams.

These differing modes and strategies are correlated with very distinct political impulses. Although both *The Birds* and *The Exterminating Angel* attack complacency, that attack takes strongly divergent forms. Although Hitchcock could perhaps subscribe to Buñuel’s summary of the final sense of his films—“to repeat, over and over again . . . that we do not live in the best of all possible worlds”—the import of this subscription would not be the same. *The Birds* makes a broad humanistic statement about human caring; its categories are moral rather than social or political. *The Exterminating Angel*, in contrast, radicalizes burlesque and avantgarde *topoi* by linking them to the carnivalesque theme of the “world turned upside down.” The film’s critique is structural; its categories are political. The logic of the film is to reduce its upper-class protagonists to the miserable condition of the very people they normally oppress—the forgotten ones, *los olvidados* of the slums. The Noble mansion becomes an overcrowded mini-slum, without running water, with people sleeping on the floor in promiscuous cohabitation. The butler chops at the wall with an axe, revealing bare bricks and cement as in lower-class Mexican dwellings. As in a slum, copulation and defecation

shed the privilege of privacy. The characters scramble openly for the drugs that they formerly took in secret, and Raul, like a lumpen vagabond, pokes through the rubble looking for stray cigarette butts. The same aristocrats who spilled expensive food as an amusing theatrical device are now ravaged by hunger and on the verge, it is suggested, of ritual murder and even cannibalism.

Our comparison, which has strategically downplayed certain obvious contrasts between Hitchcock and Buñuel, here touches on a critical arena of difference—politics. Buñuel, even while critiquing the bourgeoisie from within, never forgets “*los olvidados*”; he consistently places in foreground the realities of class, of physical hunger and its social causes. While he never stoops to vulgar proselytizing—he is no socialist realist—his commitment is everywhere evident.²⁶ For Buñuel, a single social system generates the aristocrats of *The Exterminating Angel* and the slum-dwellers of *Los Olvidados*, the nobles of *L'Age d'Or* and the famished peasants of *Land Without Bread*. While Hitchcock thinks in the psychological singular of the subjectivized monad, Buñuel thinks in the social plural of class. The contrasting titles of two of their documentary-style socially conscious films of the fifties—*Los Olvidados* (The Forgotten Ones) and *The Wrong Man*—are symptomatic in this regard. The slum-dwellers collectively are “wrong ones,” the objects of societal abuse. And while it would be a mistake to underestimate the social critique performed by a film like *The Wrong Man*, where the ordinary workings of justice are revealed to be deeply flawed, it must also be admitted that the Buñuel’s social critique is far more thoroughgoing and radical.

What is true of politics in general is true of sexual politics in particular. The verdict on the place of woman in Hitchcock is not yet in. Where some critics, such as Donald Spoto and Robin Wood, see a “therapist,” putting his heroines through “humanizing” ordeals, others, such as Raymond Bellour and Jacqueline Rose, see “the rapist” punishing the “de-

²⁶ It is important to stress that Buñuel’s life-experience pushed him in a political direction. Born in Spain, having gone to France and living in Mexico, Buñuel is associated with countries with violent, changing political histories and with a strong tradition of political art. The civil war between fascists and republicans in Spain made for a situation where not to choose was to be a coward. Buñuel also knew the face of harsh poverty, in Spain, and later in Mexico. Buñuel’s overall political position might be summed up as an anarchist-inflected critical Marxism, the position of an independent leftist rather like that of the late Sartre in philosophy. Marxism for him is a critical instrument rather than a precise program, a means to probe bourgeois institutions. It is Buñuel’s political awareness, and his awareness of harsh social contrasts of wealth and poverty, it should be added, that has helped to make him, rather than Hitchcock, a model for many radical third world filmmakers.

sire that speaks in woman's look," a desire that Hitchcock himself has willed into being. Whether we see Hitchcock as one or the other depends largely on our angle of vision. All agree that a character like Melanie is being punished; the disagreement concerns whether or not she *deserves* the punishment.²⁶ Buñuel's work, on the other hand, is fairly unambiguous on the subject of sexual politics; his films form an unending indictment of patriarchy and machismo. What spectator can compare Gloria and Francisco in *El, Evie* and Miller in *The Young One*, and Viridiana and Don Jaime in *Viridiana* and not realize that these "couples" exist in a relation of oppression and that this oppression forms part of a general configuration of power? (The indictment is less clear in *That Obscure Object of Desire* only because Conchita is nothing more than a phantasmatic "figure of desire" [Williams] enlisted in Buñuel's critique of Mathieu's masculinist vision).

The focus of Buñuel's attack has one Name—the Law—and many surnames: Patriarchal Power, Authority, God the Father, the Pope, the President, the Generalissimo, the Pater Familias, but also Certainty of Origin, the Unity of a Single Meaning, Dominant Cinema. Buñuel's frontal assaults on Authority, with their historical trail of scandal and censorship, find but faint echo in the kind of devious undermining performed by Hitchcock. Buñuel offers a profound critique of the symbolic structures of patriarchal thought, a critique at once political, economic, cultural, religious and anthropological. His politics are not collapsible with those of Hitchcock. The latter is merely uncomfortable with power, while the former assaults it, provokes it into showing its true face. If Hitchcock's world is an unending labyrinth of guilt, Buñuel's world is one of constant change and revolt. If both directors linger on the illicit pleasures of voyeurism and fetishism, Buñuel indulges them less and for a different purpose. If Hitchcock excites emotions to their paroxysm, Buñuel short-circuits them by a Brechtian "theatre of interruptions." Hitchcock concentrates on the inferno within, while Buñuel brandishes the camera-eye in order to set the world on fire.

²⁶ While it is true, as Jacqueline Rose points out, that Hitchcock identifies Mitch with the Law and Melanie with Transgression, it is also true that Hitchcock himself is less than fond of the Law and feels complicitous with Transgression.