

HISP 447

Luis Buñuel y su legado



Close to four decades after his death, the work of the father of surrealist cinema, Spanish-Mexican director Luis Buñuel (1900-1983), remains as puzzling and disturbing as ever. Through some twenty of his films—including his lesser-known work produced during his long exile in Mexico—we will attempt to understand Buñuel as a groundbreaking filmmaker situated at the crossroads of the major debates, movements, and tensions of twentieth-century cultural and political history: realism, modernism, and surrealism; communism, anti-communism, the Popular Front; the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and the Cold War; commerce, politics, and artistic integrity.

Prof. Sebastiaan Faber
MWF, 2:30 pm - 3:20 pm, 234 Peters

HISP 447: Luis Buñuel y su legado

Primavera de 2020

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Course prerequisites

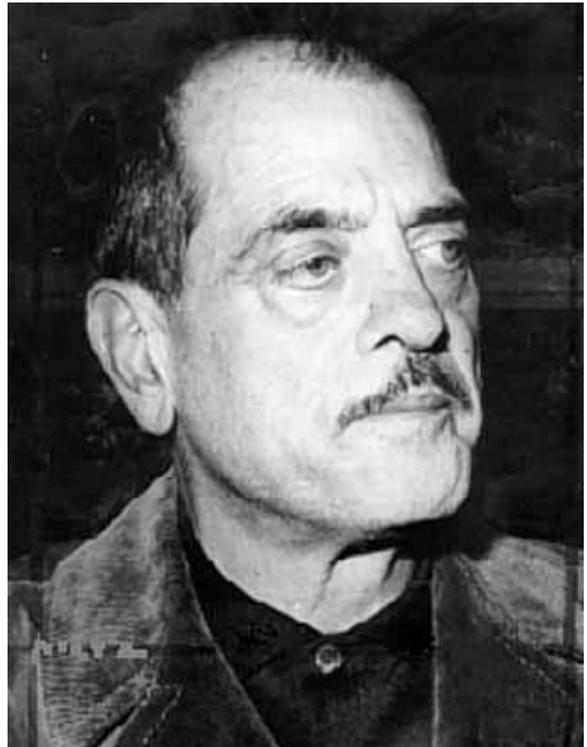
Before taking a 400-level course, students must have taken two Spanish-taught 300-level courses above HISP 304 (these may be courses taken abroad).

Readings and viewings

All required readings will be made available through Blackboard. An extensive set of books by and about Buñuel are available in Terrell Library (start looking around PN1998.3). All of LB's films in the collection have been placed on reserve.

Course Description

Close to four decades after his death, the work of Spanish-Mexican director Luis Buñuel (1900-1983), the father of surrealist cinema, remains as puzzling and disturbing as ever. Through some twenty of his films—including his lesser-known work produced during his long exile in Mexico—we will attempt to understand Buñuel as a groundbreaking filmmaker situated at the crossroads of the major debates, movements, and tensions of twentieth-century cultural and political history: realism, modernism, and surrealism (Buñuel's avowed "moral code"); communism, anti-communism, the Popular Front; the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and the Cold War; commerce, politics, and artistic integrity.





Buñuel was a walking contradiction. In some ways, his work is a remarkably consistent catalog of personal motives and obsessions: sex, religion, power; insects, roosters,

spiders; sadism, masochism, voyeurism; the power of animal instincts and the frailty and hypocrisy of bourgeois manners. In other ways, his work is remarkably shapeshifting, almost chameleonic. While priding himself on his moral and artistic integrity, Buñuel was nevertheless forced, and willing, to adapt his work and self-presentation to his changing circumstances. A ruthless critic of the Spanish Republic in the mid-1930s, he became one of its central propaganda operators after the outbreak of the Civil War. An enthusiastic supporter of André Breton, the “pope” of Surrealism, Buñuel left the Surrealist group when he believed the moment called for an unambiguous commitment to Communism. Buñuel was the epitome of avant-garde independence *and* a canny operator in the commercialized movie business of Spain, France, the United States, and Mexico. In his self-presentation, he was both scarily sincere and insufferably coy, if not downright deceptive. For Buñuel, life and art were one big practical joke that, nevertheless, should be taken extremely seriously. When *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* was nominated for an Oscar in 1973, he didn’t miss a beat: “Estoy convencido de que obtendrá el Óscar,” he told the press straight-faced. “Ya he pagado los veinticinco mil dólares que me han pedido. Los norteamericanos tienen sus defectos, pero son hombres de palabra.” He won.

The four prongs of this course will be political history, intellectual history, biography, and cinematic analysis. Buñuel came of age as a filmmaker in a time period—the 1920s and ‘30s—when the alignment of progressive writers and artists with revolutionary political movements, in particular Com-

munism and Socialism, sparked a series of groundbreaking discussions about artistic form and content, about the relationship between the artist and the larger public (the “people” or “masses”), and about the role of artistic autonomy vis-à-vis social and political structures and organizations, particularly the Communist Party. Although within Marxism there was a wide range of opinions on these questions, the dominant, party-sponsored position paradoxically associated formal innovation—that is, modernism widely conceived—with political conservatism, and, conversely, art’s revolutionary potential with traditional forms, especially realism. The rise of fascism during the same time period further increased the stakes and urgency of these debates. Buñuel had his own views and was not afraid to defend them.



But this course is about more than just Buñuel. His life and work—fascinating as they are in their own right—invite us to reflect more generally on the power and limitations of cinema as a medium for entertainment, knowledge production, persuasion, or political change. They also provide an opportunity to think through a series of questions that occupied many prominent minds between the late 1920s and the 1960s, some of which remain unresolved today: What, if any, is the social or political function of artistic and literary production? What is the relation between artistic form and the social or political impact of a particular work of art or literature? More generally, what is the relation among artistic representation, critique, and social change? Can art and literature make any claim to social, political or economic autonomy? To what extent is

the institution of art in the West since Romanticism, and the related conceptions of the figure of the artist, part and parcel of bourgeois capitalism? And how exactly should we define and understand modernism?



A note on class organization. Buñuel's work aims to be ungraspable, and it—arguably—often succeeds in this effort. Rather than letting ourselves be intimidated by his films' impenetrability,

however, this class seeks to use it to our advantage. If no one can really claim to understand Buñuel, then we should feel fully entitled to read and interpret his work as we see fit. The main purpose of this class, therefore, will be to allow every student the chance to formulate, share, and defend their own questions and answers in response to the films we screen; and to test the validity or relevance of their interpretations through conversations and debates in class and with the readings. The structure of the class reflects this objective. Generally, films are assigned for the weekend, followed by a Monday class session dedicated to exchanging first impressions. Next, for Wednesday, we read a select set of secondary (critical) sources to inform, deepen, or contrast those impressions. To help formulate thoughts before we meet, there is a *respuesta breve* (RB) due for almost every class. (These are generally between 1 and 2 pages in length, double-spaced, and should be brought to class in hard copy, to be used in class handed in at the end. They will be graded globally, (✓++, ✓+, ✓, ✓-). Of the 22 RP prompts you are expected to hand in at least 18.

Language

This class is conducted in Spanish and all writing assignments are in Spanish, too; one of the class objectives, after all, is for students to improve their command of Spanish in all four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking). That said, work for

the class will not be artificially monolingual. Buñuel filmed and wrote in three languages (Spanish, English, and French) and the relevant bibliography is also multilingual. When quoting from original sources, there is no need to translate.

Screening: Best Practices

Most of the films will be assigned as homework, to be screened outside of class time. A couple of tips for screening: If you watch the films on a computer screen, **turn off your internet**. Multitasking while movie watching is not a good idea. What is a good idea, though, is to develop a habit of **note-taking** while watching. Jotting down your ideas, impressions, and observations in the moment will help when you write or talk about the film later. Whenever possible, **watch the films with other people**. Not only were they meant to be a collective experience, but others' reactions (shock, laughter, puzzlement) will help you understand the film. And there's nothing like an immediate post-screening exchange of impressions to get your ideas going.

Classroom Climate

This course seeks to create a space where ideas can be freely developed, exchanged, argued, and questioned—in Spanish. As your teacher, I will work to create an environment in which people feel it's okay to take risks. To achieve this, "safety" is less of a goal than mutual trust, good faith, and generosity of interpretation. I hope we can work together to build an atmosphere in which everyone trusts each other enough on a personal level to leave their comfort zone on an intellectual level. The goal of the class is to generate understanding, meaning, sense—not necessarily in order to formulate answers, but certainly the sharpest possible questions about issues that matter. I strongly believe that this process is creative and collective. Ideas are to share—and to challenge. All positions are tentative. Mistakes are allowed; in fact, they are inevitable and necessary. This is why it's helpful to assume good faith and be generous with granting the benefit of the doubt. Reading and viewing, too, can be an exercise in critique *and* generosity; historicizing—understanding works in their own context—means seeking a balance between the two.

Generally, it is good to ask questions before assuming an interpretation that may prompt a visceral reaction, be it admiration or offense. We can only learn if we are not afraid to be wrong. Jumping to conclusions, on the other hand, tends to block the learning process.

Buñuel's aesthetic—like much of the avant-garde, surrealism in particular—aimed to shock the viewer. This means that his films consistently transgress what, at the time, were considered boundaries or taboos, whether they applied to content (religion, sex, death, politics, violence) or form (narrative linearity, genre, cinematic conventions). Some of those boundaries or taboos have since ceased to exist, so that their transgression has lost much of its shock value. But some of them are still very much in force, in some cases perhaps more now than they were at the time. As we view, interpret, and debate Buñuel's films, it is important to be aware of the historical context in which they first appeared. It is also important to not let our own contemporary sensitivities get in the way of our understanding. Being shocked or offended is a legitimate reaction to works of art—in fact, it's a reaction that Buñuel sought to provoke—but it's not necessarily conducive to a productive discussion.

Honor Code

Every student is expected to adhere to the honor code. This means in very general terms that you only submit work that is yours. More specifically, it means that you will not plagiarize; that is, you will not appropriate the work or ideas of someone else—whether written or not—without acknowledgement (using the conventionally agreed-on scholarly practices for quoting and citation), and that you will not cheat, fabricate, collaborate on a project that is meant to be done individually, or submit the same work for multiple classes or assignments without the prior approval of all instructors involved. While you are allowed and encouraged to ask advice and help from the instructor, librarians, or official writing tutors, you are, in the end, to submit work produced by you. Everyone in the campus community is required to report all

suspected violations of the honor code to the student honors committee. Following college-wide policy, you will include a signed statement on every assignment to certify that you adhered to the honor code.

Educational Access

If any aspects of the instruction or design of the course result in dis/ability-related barriers to your participation, please let me know. If you receive any specific accommodations, please provide documentation from Disability Resources.

Course Objectives

Knowledge

- To develop a detailed knowledge and nuanced understanding of the life and work of Luis Buñuel in its political, historical, and artistic context;
- To develop an understanding of the nature and development of modernism in Europe and the Americas;
- To understand the dynamic interactions between cultural and political history in the twentieth century;
- To understand the power and potential, but also the limitations, of cinema as an artistic medium.

Skills

- To read, write, and speak Spanish in an academic register;
- To write an academic paper in Spanish;
- To analyze, in Spanish, films in their historical context, using an appropriate methodological toolkit;
- To leverage this analysis in support of a sustained, original argument of a historical, theoretical or formal-aesthetic kind;
- To engage in a nuanced, informed discussion—both written and oral—about Luis Buñuel's filmography and legacy;

Dispositions

- To appreciate the distinctive contribution of different disciplinary outlooks when it comes to understanding complex social and historical processes, including cultural production;

- To appreciate the indeterminate, open-ended nature of artistic and literary expression;
- To hear, understand, appreciate, and critically evaluate points of view different from our own;
- To take advantage of others' positions and points of view to critically evaluate your own;
- To understand and appreciate historicity, accepting that the values and assumptions of the present are not always sufficient or appropriate for understanding, let alone judging, the past.

Course Requirements

- Students are expected to have read or viewed the **assigned texts and films** by the day indicated on the syllabus.
- **Respuestas breves (RBs)** will be brought to class in hard copy, used in discussions, and handed in at the end of each class. There's a total of 22 RB prompts, of these, you are expected to hand in 18 (i.e., **you can miss 4** without consequences).
- Students are expected **actively to participate** in class discussion. (There'll be no computer or cell phones use for anything unrelated to the class.)

- **Three formal papers**, with two drafts each: One 3-page paper, one 5-page paper, and an 8-page final paper. (Only the grade for the final draft of each paper counts toward the class grade.)
- **Attendance** to all class sessions is mandatory. Following Department policy, any unexcused absence over 3 will lower the final class grade with 0.75 %. Students are expected to be on time and to remain for the entire class. Unexcused tardiness, long absences during class time, or early departure will be regarded as an absence. The student who misses any part of the class is responsible for acquiring the information missed.
- Students are expected to check their mail and Blackboard page every day.

Evaluation

- Attendance and participation: 10%
- Respuestas Breves (RBs) [18 en total]: 30%
- First paper (3 pages): 10%
- Second paper (5 pages): 20%
- Final paper (8 pages): 30%

Programa del curso

febrero

lun 3	Introducción al curso: Vida y obra de Luis Buñuel
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mar	<i>Le Fantôme de la Liberté</i>
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miér 5	Un primer encuentro con LB: <i>Fantôme</i> (primer debate)
	RB1: reacción a <i>Fantôme</i>

vier 7	LB: surrealista, comunista, aragonés
	Lecturas: Evans/Santaolalla (intro); Buñuel, <i>Último suspiro</i> , pp. 5-31; LB, "Cine como instrumento"; Gubern & Hammond, Introduction (pp. 13-15); Richie, "Moral Code"; Martins, "Disturbing"

Finde	<i>Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie</i>
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lun 10	<i>Charme discret</i> (primer debate)
	RB2: análisis de una escena (descripción; interpretación)
	Lectura: <i>Último suspiro</i> , pp. 32-70

miér 12	<i>A propósito de Buñuel</i> [visionado en clase]
	Lecturas: Breton; <i>Último suspiro</i> , pp. 92-136
	RB 3: El legado del surrealismo hoy en la cultura popular occidental

vier 14	Ensayos críticos sobre <i>Charme</i> y <i>Fantôme</i> [no hay clase]
	Lecturas: ensayos sobre <i>Charme</i> and <i>Fantôme</i> .
	Visionado: resto de <i>A propósito</i>
	RB 4

Finde *Chien andalous; L'Âge d'or*

lun 17 *Chien andalous; L'Âge d'or* (debate)
RB 5: *Chien andalous; L'Âge d'or*, primeras impresiones
Lecturas: Gubern & Hammond, ch. 1 (pp. 17-29).

miér 19 *Chien andalous*: la crítica
RB 6

vier 21 *L'Âge d'or*: la crítica; Introducción a *Las Hurdes*
Lecturas: sobre *L'Âge d'or* (Hammond)
RB 7

Finde *Las Hurdes/Tierra sin pan; Espagne 1937*

lun 24 *Las Hurdes & Espagne 1937* (primer debate)
RB 8

miér 26 *Las Hurdes*: la crítica
Lecturas: sobre *Las Hurdes* (Ibarz; Las-tra; Hammond/Gubern, ch 9)
RB 9

vier 28 Trabajo 1, versión 1 (3 págs)
Edición por pares (en clase)

Finde Reuniones con María José; entrega Trabajo 1

Finde *Los olvidados*

marzo

lun 2 *Los olvidados* (primer debate)
RB 10

miér 4 *Los olvidados*: la crítica
Lecturas: Sobre *Los olvidados*
RB 11
[Devolución Trabajo 1, V1]

vier 6 [Visionado en clase: documental]
Entrega: Trabajo 1, V2

Finde *Ensayo de un crimen* (Archibaldo de la Cruz); *Él*

lun 9 *Ensayo de un crimen; Él* (primer debate)
RB 12

miér 11 [no hay clase]
Visionado: *Susana*

vier 13 [no hay clase]
Lecturas: Sobre *Susana, Ensayo, Él*
RB 13

Finde *El ángel exterminador*

lun 16 *El ángel exterminador* (primer debate)
[no hay RB] Entregar: Plan para el segundo trabajo

miér 18 Segundo trabajo (5 págs), primera versión
Trabajo 2, v1: trabajo en clase

vier 20 Reuniones con María José
Entrega: Trabajo 2, v1

*** Vacaciones de Primavera ***

Vacas *Simón del desierto; Nazarín; La Voie Lactée*

lun 30 *Simón del desierto; Nazarín; La Voie Lactée* (primer debate)
RB 14
[Devolución T2v1]

abril

miér 1 *Simón, Nazarín, Voie*: la crítica
Lecturas: sobre *Simón, Nazarín, Voie*
RB 15

vier 3	Visionado en clase: documental
	Entrega: T2v2
Finde	<i>Viridiana ; Tristana</i>
lun 6	<i>Viridiana; Tristana</i> (primer debate)
	RB 16
miér 8	<i>Viridiana; Tristana</i> : la crítica
	Lecturas: sobre <i>Viridiana, Tristana</i>
	RB 17
vier 10	Buñuel y sus legados (debate)
	Lecturas: por determinar
Finde	Película(s) por elegir (cualesquiera de la filmografía de LB aún no cubierta en clase)
lun 13	Intercambio de impresiones basadas en las películas visionadas
	RB 18
martes	Visionado: <i>Carne Trémula</i>
miér 15	El legado de Buñuel: Pedro Almodóvar, <i>Carne Trémula</i>
jueves	Visionado por determinar
vier 17	El legado de Buñuel
	RB 19: Legados
Finde	<i>Journal d'une femme de chambre</i>
lun 20	<i>Journal d'une femme de chambre</i> (primer debate)
	RB 20
miér 22	<i>Journal d'une femme de chambre</i> : la crítica
	Lecturas sobre <i>Journal</i>
	RB 21

	Visionado : <i>Cet obscur objet</i>
vier 24	<i>Cet obscur objet du désir</i> (primer debate)
	RB 22
Finde	[tiempo para pensar en el trabajo final, buscar bibliografía, etc.]
lun 27	[Compartir planes para el trabajo final]
	Entregar: Plan (esquema) para el trabajo final, con bibliografía y filmografía anotada
miér 29	[Edición por pares]
	Primeras páginas trabajo final
mayo	
viern 1	[Visionado en clase: Documental]
lun 4	Presentaciones trabajo final (5 min c/u)
	Trabajo final: primer borrador completo
miér 6	Presentaciones trabajo final (5 min c/u)
vier 8	Cierre y evaluaciones
	Devolución TF, V1

➔ **Entrega trabajo final, versión final:**

Sábado, 16 de mayo, 9pm