

Michael Powell directed another comedy in Australia, *Age of Consent* (1969), but Mangiamele did not get the opportunity to make another feature. Yet what he had begun, others took up. *The Pudding Thieves* (1967), *Time in Summer* (1968), and, especially, *Two Thousand Weeks* (1969) drew, as Clay had, on European models of art cinema and, in so doing, established a new understanding of what film in Australia might become—not British, not American—and laid the foundation for the important films of the next decades.

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The Oxford
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 world cinema

Cinema in Latin America

MICHAEL CHANAN

COLONIAL BEGINNINGS

Moving pictures first reached Latin America with representatives of the Lumière brothers, who sent out teams around the world on planned itineraries designed to capitalize on the fascination which the new invention created everywhere; two teams went to Latin America, one to Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, and Buenos Aires, the other to Mexico and Havana. The Lumière Cinématographe served as both projector and camera and men like Gabriel Veyre, who arrived in Mexico in the middle of 1896 and Cuba the following January, were also briefed to bring back scenes from the countries they visited. Hard on their heels came the Biograph men from New York and other adventurers, from both the United States and Europe. The North Americans tended not to penetrate very far south, where European immigration was at its height, and in Argentina and Brazil the pioneers were French and Belgian, Austrian and Italian. The earliest moving images of Latin America were thus mostly taken by European immigrants or residents, possessing both the minimum expertise needed to set up a film business and the contacts in the Old World to ensure a supply of films for exhibition. The varying dates of these first films—1896 in Mexico, 1897 in Cuba, Argentina, and Venezuela, 1898 in Brazil and Uruguay, 1902 in Chile, 1905 in Colombia, 1906 in Bolivia, 1911 in Peru—bespeak the steady penetration of film across the continent, for they usually follow the dates of first exhibition fairly quickly.

The scenes that were shot follow the expected trends: they picture official ceremonies and presidents, with their families and entourages; military parades and naval manoeuvres; traditional festivities and tourist scenes, including views of city architecture, picturesque landscapes, and pre-Columbian ruins. The Brazilian film historian Salles Gomes (1980) reckoned that the work of the first Latin American *cinéastas* was roughly divided between

depicting 'the splendid cradle of nature' and 'the ritual of power'. A good proportion consisted in the kind of exotic scenes popularized by nineteenth-century photographers; in the words of Susan Sontag, 'the view of reality as an exotic prize . . . tracked down and captured by the diligent hunter-with-a-camera'. Adopting the point of view of the outsider, who gazes on other people's reality with curiosity, detachment, and professionalism, the photographer behaves as if the captured view transcended class interests, 'as if its perspective is universal' (Sontag 1977). In the condition of dependency which characterizes an underdeveloped continent like Latin America, this not only served to gratify the audience—which in Latin America was initially the upper and middle classes—with flattering images, but also to secure finance—by advancing the cause of publicity. And if in Mexico newspapers sponsored free film shows which they financed by including colour slides carrying advertisements, in Havana in 1906 an entertainment park commissioned the Cuban film pioneer Enrique Díaz Quesada to make a film for its publicity campaign in the United States. Early attempts at narrative often followed in the same ideological mould by taking up safe patriotic subjects, like the Argentinian film *El fusilamiento de Dorrego* ('The shooting of Dorrego') of 1908.

There is no necessary connection, however, between these early endeavours and subsequent developments. Cuba, Venezuela, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, and Bolivia saw no significant film production for several decades, only a few sporadic attempts. In the smallest countries, like Uruguay, Paraguay, Ecuador, and those of Central America, there is still no significant production of feature-length fiction today, though documentary and video production are now in evidence. A continuous history of production with significant contributions in successive periods can only be found in the larger countries—Mexico,

into a tropical appendage of Hollywood. Indeed, cashing in on the decline in European production due to the war, and following a general shift in US trade, from the end of 1915 onwards American firms adopted a new strategy of direct dealing by opening more subsidiaries outside Europe (and not only in Latin America). By 1919, Fox, Paramount, the distribution arm of Famous Players-Lasky, and Samuel Goldwyn were operating between them in virtually every Latin American country, displacing local distributors and local films. By the 1920s, Argentina and Brazil had become Hollywood's third and fourth largest export markets after Britain and Australia; in Brazil they had an 80 per cent market share—while Brazilian production itself could only manage 4 per cent.

Given that these were indeed growing markets and that film-making was still artisanal and cheap, Brazil's peculiarity was that, while the vast size of the country prevented the national organization of film distribution, it allowed a number of regional centres of production to develop. There were 'regional cycles' in half a dozen provincial capitals, prominent among them Recife, where thirteen films were made in the course of eight years by a community of some thirty film technicians. Here, in films like Tancredo Seabra's *Filho sem mãe* ('Motherless son', 1925), emerged one of the first indigenous fictional genres of Latin America, where landscape plays a preponderant role and the central protagonists are rural characters and *cangaçeiros*, the 'bandits' of the *sertão*.

The *cangaçeiro* is cousin to the Argentine gaucho film, which first appeared around 1915 with *Noblezza gaucha* ('Cowboy nobility'). Based on an episode from the popular nineteenth-century epic *Martin Fierro* by José Hernández, in which a peasant girl is raped, taken to Buenos Aires by force as the landowner's mistress, and rescued by a gaucho from the estate whom the *patrón* falsely accuses of cattle rustling, the story, says the Argentine film historian J. A. Mahieu (1966), may be simple and ingenuous but the filmic rhythm is effective and its scenes of almost feudal exploitation make it the first film to portray the oppression of the rural classes in Argentina. At just the moment when new European films were scarce and the North Americans had not yet captured the market, this film, which cost 20,000 pesos to make and earned more than 600,000, was a major box-office hit showing simultaneously in twenty theatres. As striking a demonstration as one could wish that Latin America could not only command its own narratives, but they had an import which gave the lie to the sanitized representations preferred by commercial and state interests. There was even, a year later, a film shot in the province of Santa Fe by an anthropologist called Alcides Greca, *El último malón* ('The last Indian uprising'), which Mahieu describes as a kind of documentary reconstruction of an uprising that took place at the beginning of the century, filmed in the auth-

entic locations with the Indians as protagonists of their own story.

It is almost as if a pattern is at work in which the most original of films are always made in the most marginal of circumstances, where film-making is at its most basic but there is room for maverick initiatives outside the generic themes of the commercial industry. There are also examples in Mexico, like *El hombre sin patria* ('The man without a country', Miguel Conteras Torres, 1922), the first film to address the theme of Mexican workers in the USA; and even in Bolivia, where two films of the 1920s, *Corazón aymara* and *La profecía del lago* ('Aymara heart' and 'The prophecy of the lake') dealt with indigenous themes (though they ran into censorship problems). A film of 1929, Mario Peixoto's *Limite* ('The boundary'), is a landmark of the Brazilian avant-garde, an experiment in multiple narration—Eisenstein, no less, remarked on its 'genius' when he saw it in London in 1932.

But if these are isolated examples, they belong to an unknown history. It is a history recently evoked by the Venezuelan director Alfredo J. Anzola in his feature documentary *El misterio de los ojos escarlata* ('The mystery of the scarlet eyes', 1993), which provides a rare glimpse of previously unseen images of Venezuela in the 1920s and 1930s. The footage is that of his father, Edgar Anzola, who made documentaries and two silent feature films, now lost, in the 1920s, and then acquired a 16 mm. camera and filmed mostly documentary footage throughout the 1930s and 1940s. His efforts of the 1920s had not led him to a career in film, and these 16 mm. films were not made for public viewing; they were the work of an *aficionado*. Anzola earned his living as right-hand man to a local North American entrepreneur, who, among other things, opened Venezuela's first radio station, Radio Caracas, in 1930, of which Anzola became the director; a radio serial written and produced by Anzola *père* provides the title of his son's film about him. How many others among the all-but-nameless Latin American film-makers of the early years had similar careers? And may have left undiscovered archives? And how many of these *aficionados* have not even left their names behind? And one other thing: Anzola, as portrayed by his son, was clearly no intellectual, but he was a keen cineaste who took his camera with him to events where he had entry as a radio producer. The point of view is uncritical and marked by his social class. But *aficionados* of the same class in succeeding decades were the very people whose first film-making efforts represent the initial stirrings of the powerful new movement in Latin American cinema which emerged in the late 1950s.

THE SOUND PERIOD

The coming of the talkies at the end of the 1920s was both a boon and a disaster for Latin American production. Sound offered the promise of films featuring popular

Argentina, and Brazil—for only these had internal markets to provide an audience large enough for production costs, if low enough, to be covered at home. But if rock-bottom production costs are one of the constants of Latin American cinema, until the coming of sound this was no great disadvantage, and a modest level of film production was able to develop in several countries.

The early audience was essentially an urban one, limited to cities connected by the railways. Even in Mexico, where film spread rapidly to rural districts with the itinerant showmen known as *cómicos de la legua*, they only reached a little beyond the railway network. In this too film is associated with economic colonialism: in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the novel by Gabriel García Márquez, film arrives in the town of Macondo with the same trains that bring the United Fruit Company.

However, local conditions and national histories varied, with assorted results. In Cuba the War of Independence arrived at its final stages with the intervention of the USA against Spain in 1898. Cameramen from North America arrived with the troops (as they were also to do in Southern Africa the following year with the Second Boer War). When they failed to bring back any real battle scenes among their footage, they had no compunction in faking them, relying, as one of them wrote in his autobiography, on the imperfection of early film and lenses to conceal the crudity of their efforts. These films Albert E. Smith later claimed in *Two Reels and a Crank* (1952) as 'the forerunner of the elaborate "special effects" techniques of modern picturemaking'.

The same ready dissimulation occurred during the Mexican Revolution, which served as a school for film-making equivalent to the First World War in Europe. Indeed, the Mexican film historian Aurelio de los Reyes (1983) reckons that around 1910-13 the skill of Mexican film-makers in structuring a documentary narrative was in advance of the North Americans. North of the border the films inspired by Mexican events went from tales of arms smuggling (like *Mexican Filibusters* of 1911) to simplistic stories (like *The Aztec Treasure* of 1914) which generally extolled the superiority of white-skinned heroes among the violent, irresponsible, and treacherous Latin, whether bandit, revolutionary, or greaser. Such developments betray the patriotic populism, the thrall of the American Dream and its doctrine of 'manifest destiny', in which North American cinema was gripped from the very start—an ideological servility which inevitably distorted their lensing of the Latin south. The assassination of Madero and the threat of US intervention not only prompted a number of North American films clearly designed to justify US action, on the grounds that Mexicans alone were incapable of bringing peace, order, justice, and progress to their country, but also drew more North American cameras across the Rio Grande. Pancho Villa became a

film star when he signed an exclusive contract with the Mutual Film Corporation. For a fee of \$25,000 he agreed to keep other film companies from the scene of his battles, to fight in daylight whenever possible, and to reconstruct the battle scenes if satisfactory pictures were not obtained in the heat of conflict. In fact the best battle scenes in Mutual's *The Life of General Villa* (1914), on which Raoul Walsh cut his teeth, were studio reconstructions, but the dawn executions were real: Walsh, future director of more than a hundred Hollywood movies, himself—he tells us—asked Villa to delay his summary administration of justice, which used to occur at four in the morning, until there was enough light to film with.

It is no accident that Mexicans became the first to protest the misrepresentation of their reality by Hollywood. A declaration to the newspapers by two film-makers in 1917 condemned 'that savagery, that backwardness which is used to depict us in false movies'. Five years later, provoked to fury by a Gloria Swanson movie, *Her Husband's Trademark*, in which the heroine is all but raped by a gang of desperadoes while her husband is doing business with the Mexican oil industry, the Mexican government imposed a (temporary) embargo on all films of the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation (Paramount). But the problem persisted. Despite the 'Good Neighbour' policy of the 1930s, when Washington was trying to defuse the revolutionary nationalism abroad in Latin America from Cuba to Chile, and advised the studios to tone things down, Hollywood seemed incapable of not offending Latin American sensibilities. The founder of university film studies in Cuba in the 1940s, J. M. Valdés Rodríguez, wrote of a film of the time, *Under the Texas Moon*, as 'openly offensive to Mexican women, the projection of which in a movie-house in the Latin section of New York City provoked a terrible tumult' caused by the enraged protests of some Mexican and Cuban students, in which one of them was killed.

INDIGENOUS FILM-MAKING

In Brazil, according to Salles Gomes (1980), if cinema did not take root for about a decade after its introduction, it was due to our underdevelopment in electricity. Once energy was industrialized in Rio de Janeiro, exhibition halls proliferated like mushrooms—and production soon reached a hundred films a year. A foretaste of things to come was the success in 1910 of a satirical musical review called *Paz de amor* ('Peace and love', Alberto Botelho), perhaps the first film to engage the Brazilian vocation for the carnivalesque. But films like this, projected in theatres with appropriate musical accompaniment, were limited to audiences of the better-off. By the time cinema reached the popular classes, North American distributors had begun to move in, turning the growing Brazilian market

Gabriel Figueroa

(1907-)

Although towards the end of his fifty-five-year career he shot a number of films in colour, Gabriel Figueroa will always be remembered as one of the world's greatest masters of black and white cinematography. 'Black and white films', he once said, 'are like engravings. Their force as an artistic medium is unrivalled by colour, in films or any other artistic medium. . . In colour films it is very difficult to capture the dramatic force that is almost inherent in black and white.'

Born in Mexico City, he was orphaned at an early age. He enrolled in the Music Conservatory and Art Academy of San Carlos, but turned to still photography out of economic necessity. In 1932 he took a job as a stillman and later camera assistant to cinematographer Alex Phillips. In 1935 he won a scholarship to study in Hollywood, and, by luck, the teacher who took a liking to him was the master innovator Gregg Toland. In 1936 he shot his first film as a director of photography: Fernando de Fuentes's *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, a film that became a cornerstone of Mexico's fledgling film industry and its first major international hit.

In 1943 Figueroa and director Emilio Fernández began one of world cinema's legendary partnerships with the making of *Flor Silvestre*, which also celebrated the return to Mexico of actress Dolores del Río after nearly twenty years in Hollywood. Figueroa went on to shoot all but one of Fernández's films between 1943 and 1953, including *María Candelaria* (1943—winner of the Palme d'Or at

Cannes in 1946), *The Pearl* (*La perla*, 1945), *Enamorada* (1946), *Río Escondido* (1947), *Maclovia* (1948), *Pueblerina* (1949), and *Salón México* (1949). Together they took Mexican cinema to a new level. Fernández allowed Figueroa almost complete freedom of lighting, composition, and camera placement, leaving himself free to concentrate on acting and story.

Over the years Figueroa created many of the beautiful and indelible images we now associate with Mexico and its people. Margarita de Orellana, a noted essayist of the Mexican Revolution, wrote: 'Not only have these images changed the way Mexicans look at the cinema, but even, perhaps, the way they view their lives.'

In 1946 Samuel Goldwyn refused to release Toland to shoot John Ford's *The Fugitive*, an adaptation of Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory*. Toland recommended Figueroa, and, after a few days on the set, Ford responded to Figueroa much the way Fernández had, allowing him almost complete freedom to create his images. The success of *The Fugitive* led to a lucrative offer of a contract from Goldwyn, but, after careful deliberation, Figueroa refused, preferring to remain in Mexico with his family and circle of artistic friends.

His versatility enabled him to work with a diversity of directorial styles: the ornate settings, picturesque skies, and dramatic angles of the Fernández films; the lean, even primitive non-style sought by Luis Buñuel in *Los olvidados* (1950), *Él* (1952), *Nazarín* (1958); *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) and *Simon of the Desert* (1965); the action pyrotechnics required by Don Siegel for *Two Mules for Sister Sara* (1969); the actor-driven personal dramas of John Huston in *Night of the Iguana* (1964) and *Under the Volcano*



(1984); and the enormously difficult night-time battle sequences in Brian Hutton's *Kelly's Heroes* (1970).

In his work on lenses, filters, laboratory innovations, and formulas of composition, Figueroa often drew upon painting and on classical principles of aesthetics. Dissatisfied with the rushes of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, he turned to a passage on atmospheric colour in Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting*, which led him to experiment with black and white filters to counteract the layer of air which he felt was getting between the camera and the landscape. From then on 'Figueroa's skies' became a feature of his work, earning him universal recognition and several prizes.

He was close friends with the great Mexican painters of the period. Diego Rivera influenced his ideas of colour and composition, and they shared a passion for pre-Hispanic figures; with José Clemente Orozco and Leopoldo Méndez he traded ideas of the power of black and white and its relation to popular art in engravings and photography; and with Doctor Atl he shared concepts of curvilinear space; but most importantly it was David Alfaro Siqueiros whose theories of *escorzo* or foreshortening helped him attain unique effects of depth.

Figueroa's work is marked by stunning contrasts of light and shadow, rich textures, and a frequent use of dark foregrounds and bright backgrounds; torches, candles, flames, and fireworks are often in evidence; sharp angles set subjects against atmospheres of intense blacks and whites, or bright colours depicting the decorative visual splendour and folklore of Mexico; deep focus captures extensive action in one shot despite foregrounds which fill the screen.

Throughout his long career, Figueroa worked almost exclusively in his native Mexico. A nationalist and an internationalist, he took position against Franco's Spain, opened his Mexico City home to blacklisted writers run out of Hollywood by McCarthy's witch hunts, and fought to establish fair unions for his domestic industry.

Asked what a cinematographer does, Figueroa replied that a director describes the shot and the general camera placement; then the cinematographer goes to work. 'Lighting creates an atmosphere in which the story will develop. . . Lighting is the privilege of the cinematographer. He is the owner of the light.'

MICHAEL DONNELLY

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

Allá en el Rancho Grande (1936); *María Candelaria* (1943); *La perla* (1945); *Enamorada* (1946); *The Fugitive* (1947); *Río Escondido* (1947); *Los olvidados* (1950); *El* (1952); *Nazarín* (1958); *Night of the Iguana* (1964); *Two Mules for Sister Sara* (1969); *Kelly's Heroes* (1970)

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Opposite: A scene from *Pueblerina*: one of the celebrated collaborations between Figueroa and director Emilio Fernández.

singers and comedians, singing and performing adaptations and fusions of the musical genres of popular culture: the *tanguera* in Argentina, the *chanchada* in Brazil, the *ranchera* in Mexico. But the dependent state of distribution and the increased costs of production took their toll, and film production remained a risky business which barely kept its head above water.

To force the conversion of Latin American cinemas to sound, at a time before the technical development of either dubbing or subtitling (which is not much use for a largely illiterate audience anyway), Hollywood began producing factory-made Spanish-language versions of selected productions in California, on which many apprentice film-makers from south of the Rio Grande learnt their trade. Meanwhile, it was in the studio complex in the Paris suburb of Joinville set up by Paramount for foreign-language versioning and low-budget production that the great Argentine tango singer Carlos Gardel made a number of films in 1931-2, together with other Argentine touring artists. Hugely successful throughout Latin America, Gardel made four more films for Paramount out of New York before he was killed in an air crash in Colombia in 1935. He was the first international Latin American musical film star, and the influence in Argentina and elsewhere of his urbane macho image was enormous.

The Brazilian *chanchada* was partially modelled on North American musicals but with roots also in Brazilian comic theatre and Carnival, of which Salles Gomes wrote that, while the universe constructed by North American films was distant and abstract, the derisive fragments of Brazil in these films at least described a world lived in by the spectators. Hollywood cinema prompted superficial identification with the behaviour and fashions of an occupying culture; in contrast, popular enthusiasm for the rascals, scoundrels, and loafers of the *chanchada* suggested the polemic of the occupied against the occupier.

The most significant single film-maker of this period was Humberto Mauro, later cited by Glauber Rocha as a precursor of Cinema Novo. Mauro's originality is a prime example of what Salles Gomes called the Brazilian's 'creative incapacity for copying'. A product of Brazil's regional film movements, his first films, made in Minas Gerais before he migrated to Rio de Janeiro, 'creatively copied' models ranging from Thomas Ince Westerns to Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphony of a City*. Best known for *Ganga bruta* ('Brutal gang', 1933), he later teamed up with the leading Brazilian cinematographer Edgar Brasil; the French film historian Sadoul (1972) praises his 'remarkable feeling for images and backgrounds, a highly original conception of filmic space, and an impassioned feeling for people and the landscapes of his country'.

In Mexico, where Eisenstein filmed his abortive portrait of Mexican culture *Que viva México!* in 1931, his artistic example was followed in 1935 by the group who made

Luis Buñuel

(1900-1983)

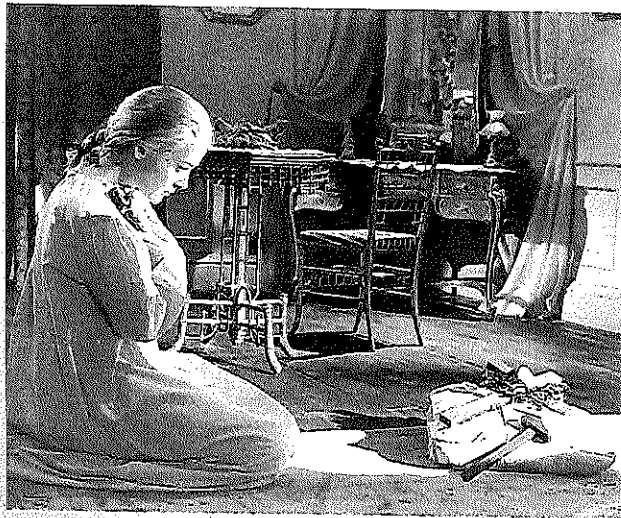
One of the oddities of Buñuel's late flowering career is that it almost did not happen. Often regarded as Spain's greatest director, Luis Buñuel spent most of his life in exile and made almost all of his films in either Mexico or France. Had he not escaped from Spain during the Civil War, he remarked, he would probably have been remembered only as 'a Spanish film-maker who died before his time, director of *Un chien andalou*, *L'Âge d'or* and *Las Hurdes*. Shot by Franco's forces just as he began a promising career.'

Un Chien andalou, made in France in 1928, in collaboration with Salvador Dalí, earned Buñuel entry into the surrealist group. *L'Âge d'or* (1930) confirmed his originality and caused one of the great surrealist scandals, when ultra-rightists attacked the cinema where it was showing and the authorities responded by banning it. Both films brought the surrealist credo to the screen in a blazing series of oneiric images and a blistering attack on the tyranny of a social system which repressed imagination and sexuality alike. As Jean Vigo wrote of *Un Chien andalou*: 'Beware of the Andalusian dog. It bites.'

Returning to Spain, in 1932 he made the documentary *Las Hurdes* (also known as *Tierra sin pan / Land without Bread*), which in turn was banned by the Spanish authorities. (A similar fate was also to befall *Viridiana*, which in 1961 was the first film Buñuel had shot in Spain in almost thirty years.)

In the mid-1930s Buñuel found work as a dubbing director for Paramount and Warner Bros. in Paris and Madrid, then as an executive producer of popular Spanish commercial movies. When the Civil War broke out in 1936, he was sent to Paris to produce a documentary about the war using newsreel material shot by the Russian cameraman Roman Karmen and others. He went to

Silvia Pinal in Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961)



Hollywood as official adviser on films about the war, but the US government placed an embargo on his projects and when the Spanish Republic fell to Franco's forces he found himself stranded. He got a job at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, preparing propaganda films for distribution in Latin America, but was forced to resign when the mercurial Salvador Dalí, with whom he had fallen out just before shooting *L'Âge d'or*, accused him of atheism and Communism. After four years odd-jobbing in the United States, chance brought him an invitation to direct a film in Mexico, where he settled until his death in 1983.

Los olvidados ('The Young and the Damned', 1950), Buñuel's third Mexican film, was a caustic portrayal of delinquency among children of the shanty towns, combining carefully researched realism with powerful dream sequences which deepened the portrayal of its characters. Criticized by many Mexicans for blackening Mexico's name, its international success resuscitated Buñuel's reputation. The years which followed were Buñuel's most prolific period—another sixteen films in ten years, including *Él* (1952), a disturbing study of a respectable man consumed by a paranoid jealousy which destroys his wife; the quietly ironic adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe* (1952), shot in English as a Mexican-American co-production; and *Nazarín* (1958), a deceptive portrayal of quixotic religiosity against brutish reality, and the first of two adaptations of novels by the Spanish writer Galdós, whom Buñuel had known in his youth.

Buñuel's Mexican years have often been seen as a middle period, harbinger of the late maturity which followed his return to Europe to make *Viridiana*, but there are strong continuities between the two periods and indeed the whole of Buñuel's work is informed by the same preoccupations: his Jesuit education and Surrealism, he said, marked him for life. Thus the saintly defrocked priest of *Nazarín* becomes a nun in its companion piece, *Viridiana*, with its famous beggars' orgy, a burlesque on the Last Supper to the strains of Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus', and one of Buñuel's most mordant pieces of religious parody. At the same time, the films which foreground the irrationality of religious belief—which also include *Simon of the Desert* (*Simon del desierto*, 1965) and *The Milky Way* (*La Voie lactée*, 1968)—are matched by those which deal with the consequences of repressed sexuality. Thus *Él* finds a counterpart in *Tristana* (1970), the second of Buñuel's Galdós adaptations, as well as *Belle de jour* (1967) and *Cet obscur objet du désir* (*That Obscure Object of Desire*, 1977). In none of these films, it should be said, does Buñuel fall into a simple Manichaean opposition between male and female, but rather male concupiscence is confounded by female will in forms which ridicule the pretensions of machismo.

Buñuel returns to full-blown Surrealism with his last two Mexican films, *The Exterminating Angel* (*El ángel exterminador*, 1962) and *Simon del desierto*. With the highly comic irrationality of the former, a biting critique of the pretensions of the Mexican ruling class, and the illusion-

ism of the latter, a satire against the delusions of religious faith, Buñuel begins a process in which he completely dismembers the premisses of the rational illusion on which not just realism but all narrative cinema depends.

The basis of the surrealist method employed by Buñuel is the dream, gateway to the unconscious. Dream images were the origin of *Un chien andalou* and dream sequences occur in many of Buñuel's films from *Los olvidados* on—though Buñuel himself makes a careful distinction between such different mental states as dream, fantasy and delirium. At the same time, in *L'Âge d'or* the narrative form itself is taken from dream language, with its irrational displacements, or what Buñuel himself called 'discontinuous continuity', and this is the technique he explores to its furthest point in his last films, above all *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (*Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie*, 1972) and *The Phantom of Liberty* (*Le Fantôme de la liberté*, 1974). In these two films, which represent the summit of Buñuel's art, the plot is both nonsensical and logically impossible, the mere semblance of narrative, but the fact that it would be absurd to try and explain the symbols and metaphors is not to say that the films are meaningless. On the contrary, their elusive deconstruction of narrative conventions insinuates a lucid commentary on social and ideological pretensions, in which Buñuel remains ever faithful to Surrealism's revolutionary convictions.

MICHAEL CHANAN

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Un Chien andalou (1928); *L'Âge d'or* (1930); *Los olvidados* (1950); *El* (1952); *Las aventuras de Robinson Crusoe* (1952); *Ensayo de un crimen* (*The Criminal Life of Arcibaldo de la Cruz*, 1955); *Nazarín* (1958); *La joven* (*The Young One*) (1960); *Vindiana* (1961); *El ángel exterminador* (1962); *Simón del desierto* (1965); *Belle de jour* (1967); *Tristana* (1970); *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (1972); *Le Fantôme de la liberté* (1974); *Cet obscur objet du désir* (1977)

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Redes (*The Wave*) at the invitation of radical Mexican government officials: the New York photographer Paul Strand and the young Austrian director Fred Zinnemann, assisted by the Mexican Emilio Gómez Muriel, with Mexico's most original composer Silvestre Revueltas providing a wonderful orchestral score. The first of an uncompleted series of films on Mexican life, *Redes* portrays the struggle of Vera Cruz fishermen against exploitation and explicitly argues for collectivization—a rare early instance of what will later (in the 1960s) become a major tendency of politically committed film-making in every corner of Latin America. A rare example, too, of co-operation between North and South as a collaboration between equals, it was also (as Sadoul observed) one of the first successes of the New York school of the 1930s.

For the most part, however, Mexican cinema consisted in numerous *rancheras*, and the varieties of melodrama—tragic, sentimental, and costume. Tragic melodrama in Mexican cinema goes back to *Santa* (Luis G. Peredo) of 1919, about an innocent girl from the provinces forced into prostitution in the big city and finding redemption only in death, first of a long line of Mexican films romanticizing the prostitute, down to the *cabaretera* or brothel films of the 1950s. *La sangre manda* ('Blood dictates', José Bohr, 1933) initiated a cycle of sentimental middle-class melodramas, which later mutated into the costume melodrama, such as *En tiempos de Don Porfirio* ('In the days of Don Porfirio') of 1939, nostalgic and reactionary evocations of a world before revolution. The *ranchera* was born in 1936 with a singing cowboy film, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* ('Over there on the Rancho Grande') by Fernando de Fuentes, a comedy which added a pastoral fantasy to the Gene Autry/Roy Rogers formula, says the Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsivais, whose success both in Mexico and the rest of Latin America was so extraordinary that it changed the direction of Mexican cinema. This rural idyll was very different from the reality of the years of Agrarian Reform, and this cinema is fundamentally escapist.

The expansion of Mexican cinema began in the mid-1930s, when the leftist President Lázaro Cárdenas provided funds for new studios. This was not quite the first government intervention on behalf of cinema in Latin America: that honour goes to the Brazilian President Getulia Vargas with a fairly innocuous decree of 1932 imposing minimal exhibition quotas for Brazilian films. But the Mexican industry was stronger, and saw the formation of the first film union in Latin America in 1934. By 1937, with fewer films coming from Spain as a result of the Civil War, Mexican production reached thirty-eight films and growing in one year, and overtook that of Argentina. It was boosted again in 1943 when the United States, angered by Argentina's neutrality in the war and suspicious of its links with Fascism, took measures which included cutting off its supplies of virgin film stock in



Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's Argentinian classic *La casa del ángel* (1957)

favour of Mexico. Hollywood, moreover, angled much of its wartime output towards propaganda genres, leaving space in Latin America for Mexican producers to fill the gap with new variations of established genres by a new generation of film-makers. The 'golden age' of Mexican cinema is the period of the actor-turned-director Emilio ('El Indio') Fernández, once described as Mexico's John Ford; the cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa; and of stars like María Félix, Dolores del Río, the comedian Cantinflas, and several more. Some of these films are individually pleasing, like Fernández and Figueroa's exemplary *María Candelaria* (1943), which gives the theme of the fallen woman an Indianist treatment. But by the 1950s, there is nothing of any lasting value in Mexican cinema except the work of Buñuel (including several of his most distinguished films as well as some of the least successful).

The gradual recovery of Argentinian cinema after the war coincided with the rise of Juan Perón, who both before

and after becoming president in 1946 sponsored various measures to support the film industry, like quotas and state bank production loans funded by a tax on admissions, as well as restrictions on the repatriation of profits by foreign distributors. On the other hand, Perón, who carefully cultivated his Carlos Gardel film-star looks, and his minor film-star wife Evita were both intensely conscious of the power of imagery, and maintained a sub-secretariat to keep a close eye on the content of the movies, with predictable results. Nor was government support a great success economically, being either weakened in response to bullying by Washington, or else ineffectively policed. If these conditions produced films largely angled to safe urban bourgeois sensibilities, the period boasted its one distinguished stream of work in the films of Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, a staunch anti-Peronist, who stylishly dissected the social psychology of the Argentine ruling classes in a mode that was readily recognized, at home

and abroad, as a national version of *auteur* cinema; the International Press Prize at Cannes in 1961 went to his *La mano en la trampa* ('The hand in the trap').

Brazil had come up with another Cannes prize-winner a few years earlier. Lima Barreto's *O cangaço* (1953), which revived the old theme of the bandits of the *sertão* in the guise of a Western—but shot in São Paulo, where the landscape was hardly authentic—was a world-wide success distributed in some twenty-two countries, though not exactly Brazilian cinema at its most original. The production company responsible for this film was the short-lived Vera Cruz film company, set up in 1949 with backing by São Paulo's industrial bourgeoisie in 1949 and bankrupted in 1954. São Paulo attempted, says Salles Gomes, to create a more ambitious cinema both industrially and artistically; the *paulistas* dismissed the popular virtues of *carrioca* cinema (that of Rio) and tried to give their films the look of Old World movies, usually with a European *mise-en-scène*. When they finally rediscovered the *cangaço* genre, or turned for inspiration to radio comedies, it was already too late. The project was a disaster not only culturally but also economically. While the company invested huge sums

in production, it overlooked the question of distribution. Thus, in handing over distribution of *O cangaço* to Columbia Pictures in order to reach the international market, the millions earned by the first world-wide success in the history of Brazilian cinema went to fill the coffers of Hollywood. Nothing demonstrates more clearly the ramifications of a cinema of underdevelopment in the years before it awoke to a new vocation.

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