

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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An Andalusian Dog / Un chien andalou (1929)

Luis Buñuel (1900-1983)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Luis Buñuel is known as one of most influential surrealist filmmakers of the mid-twentieth century. Although he was born and raised near Zaragoza, Spain, he spent a large portion of his life and career as an exile in Paris and Mexico City. One of his earliest short films, *Un chien andalou* (1929), or the *An Andalusian Dog*, is the subject of this essay. *An Andalusian Dog* became an iconic representation of eerie surrealist art in which Buñuel presented the audience with a series of unsettling, violent, and even erotic images plucked from a dream. Buñuel would continue in his surrealist style with such films as the *Age of Gold* (1930). Later in his career, the director adapted novels and short stories to film and used the narratives to criticize the Francoist regime and expose the Catholic repression of the era. Buñuel's middle period was characterized by several satirical and allegorical dramas based on Biblical stories and nineteenth-century Spanish novels. Buñuel's production in Mexico in the 1950s and 60s included *Nazarín* (1959), in which the eponymous priest attempts to administer to a rural Mexican community, and *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), a masterful critique of the bourgeoisie. The last phase of Buñuel's career was characterized by a series of hyper-erotic French satires such as *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977).

Film *An Andalusian Dog* (1929) is a twenty-minute, black and white silent short that juxtaposes numerous jarring and nightmarish images in a non-linear sequence, with the result that there is not a discernable plotline. Buñuel used his burgeoning surrealist style and the themes that would characterize all his films: eroticism, satire of the bourgeoisie, critique of the Catholic Church, and bestial symbolism.

Background *An Andalusian Dog* exemplifies Buñuel's signature style while also marking his first foray into the Parisian silent film industry. The shoot itself only lasted ten days in Le Havre and the Billancourt Studios in Paris. The film was distributed by Les Grand Films Classiques and debuted at the Studio des Ursulines. Unlike the right-wing backlash that followed the *Age of Gold* a year later, *Andalusian Dog* remained relatively popular and ran for eight months. The screenplay and style of shooting was also a result of the continuous collaboration between Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, the most recognizable Spanish surrealist painter. Together, the two surrealists used their dreams to create a series of irrational images with occasional references to literature, classical music, and art history. This distinct style carries over into Buñuel's first full-length film a year later, *The Age of Gold*.

CHARACTERS

<i>Young Girl</i>	Rebellious flapper and object of the Young Man's desire
<i>Young Man</i>	The male lover who takes two forms
<i>Second Man</i>	The man in the white suit who confronts the Young Man
<i>Beach-comer</i>	A third man who becomes the Young Girl's lover
<i>Androgynous Woman</i>	The figure who is hit by the car

SYNOPSIS

This film consists largely of a series of nightmarish or ridiculous / nonsensical images, most of which are imagined scenarios of the male protagonist—the Young Man. These scenarios include fighting an evil version of himself and dying by his doppelganger's hand, as well as turning into a moth and holding ants in his hand. An early scene provides the most iconic image of the film—the slicing open of the Young Girl's eye with the shaving razor.

While there is not a linear plot of any sort, there is an implied sex (and perhaps love) story between the Young Man and the Young Girl. Like Juliet, the Young Girl sees the Young Man from her balcony window.

He “crashes” his bike in front of her apartment, and she goes down to check on him. They have a series of exchanges in her bedroom which end with the Young Man attempting to seduce her in a highly aggressive fashion (or perhaps even rape her). She resists his advances and escapes the bedroom. When he returns as a moth at the end of the film, she rejects him again and runs off with the man on the beach. In this sense, the sequence between the would-be lovers does loosely follow the romantic plot of a meet-cute, acquaintance, attempted seduction, and rejection or break-up. The final shot of the new lovers (the Young Girl and her new lover) buried in sand, immobilized, suggests that they are united in death.

SCENES

Credits A tango plays while the credits roll. There is a paragraph in French indicating that Wagner’s opera *Tristan and Isolde* was played by the Francfort Opera and directed by Carl Bamberger. There is also a note about the restoration of the original 1929 film by Buñuel in 1960.

Posh Shaving A man is smoking and sharpening his shaving razor in his living room next to floor-length windows. He rubs the razor against his thumb but does not draw blood. He opens the doors and steps out onto his balcony, still holding his razor. He looks at the moon.



Sliced Eye The camera cuts to a close-up of the Young Girl seated in a chair. Two male hands appear: one hold open the left eyelid of the Young Girl while the other draws the razor across the woman’s left eye. Before the eye is cut, the camera cuts to a shot of thin clouds crossing the moon, then back to the razor slicing open the eye. As the eye opens up, a generous amount of gelatin pours out.



Eight Years Later on a Bike The title cards reads “Eight years later,” and the camera cuts to a shot from behind of the Young Man riding a bicycle. When the camera cuts to a frontal shot, we see the Young Man’s costume: a woman’s black dress with a habit-like collar and white skirt at the waist. He is also wearing a sailor-like hat and a small handbag hanging from his neck as if it were a necklace. The shots fade between images of the street and the Young Man’s back as he continues to pedal. With a wider shot, we see that the man is wearing black trousers under the dress. There is a close up of the handbag necklace, which now has a keyhole.



Young Girl Reading The camera cuts to an interior shot of the Young Girl reading. When she is startled by a noise, she jumps up and drops her book. The open pages reveal a copy of a painting that looks similar to Vermeer’s *The Lacemaker*. The Young Girl looks through her balcony window at the Young Man, who is approaching on his bike. He falls to the side and stays prostrate on the curb. The Young Girl yells at him from the window, then walks downstairs to check on him. When she sees that he remains on the curb, she runs to him, kneels down, and kisses and caresses his face.



Creating an Outfit The Young Girl opens the purse with the keyhole in her bedroom. When she unwraps the white paper, she finds a striped tie. She proceeds to layout a white shirt on the bed, then places the striped tie around the collar. Below the shirt is the short white skirt that the man had been wearing on the bike. The Young Girl sits in a chair facing the bed and stares intently at the outfit for several seconds.



Encounter in the Bedroom The Young Man, now dressed in a dapper “male” suit, is posed outside of the Young Girl’s bedroom. His right arm is extended as if he intends to knock, but he remains posed and stares at the palm of his hand. There is a close-up of a group of ants squirming around in the Young Man’s palm. The Young Girl hears the man outside and lets him in. She, too, stares at his palm with the ants. The camera cuts between shots of the pair looking at each other and close-ups of the ants. One close-up dissolves from the ants in a clump to a close-up of the Young Girl’s similarly clumped armpit hair. The wider shot shows the Young Girl laying on her back with her left arm behind her head.



Mound and Circle Images The shot of the Young Girl’s armpit hair transitions to a hairy black circle (similar to a sea urchin) amidst a sandy beach. Then, there is an aerial shot of a figure with short hair using a stick to poke a severed hand. A crowd swarms around the figure. When the camera cuts to a full-length shot of the figure, we see that she is the so-called Androgynous Woman (named thusly in the script) with slicked-back hair and a tailored suit.



There are several close-ups of the severed hand with a bloody stump interspersed with the concerned and angry faces of the crowd. A policeman enters the circle. There is another aerial shot of the crowd forming a perfect circle around the woman. The policeman disperses the crowd and hands the androgynous woman the striped handbag.



Watching the Accident The camera cuts to a shot of the couple in the bedroom looking at the spectacle below from the Young Girl’s balcony windows. They comment to each other about the situation below. When the camera cuts back to the street, the Androgynous Woman remains in the middle of the street, clutching the striped handbag. Two cars rush by her, but the woman remains stationary. The Young Man continues to watch and becomes increasingly excited with each near-miss of the rushing cars. Finally, one car hits the woman head-on. She lies dead in the street. The Young Man, whipped into a frenzy, stares intently at the Young Girl.



Foreplay Harassment The Young Man, now obviously aroused, grabs the Young Girl’s waist and breasts. She backs away from him, but he keeps following her around the bedroom and grabbing her breasts. In one moment, he closes his eyes and imagines that the Young Girl is naked. He continues to massage her breasts, then imagines that they are the woman’s buttocks. The camera shows his fantasies of the naked body parts. The Young Girl breaks away from the Young Man, and he chases her around the bedroom.



Obstacles to Sex The Young Girl grabs a club and stands in the corner of the bedroom. She uses a chair to defend herself. The Young Man stares at her in the corner and pauses. There is a series of close-ups on the couple’s faces as they decide what to do in the stand-off. Suddenly, the Young Man appears to have an idea, and he bends down to pick up two ropes. When he pulls on the ropes, we see two tablets hanging from the ropes. The Young Girl reacts, alarmed. When the camera offers a wider shot, the ropes are revealed to be attached to two grand pianos. In addition, there are two dead donkeys on top of each piano with their heads draped over the sides. When the camera closes in on one donkey, there is a shot of oozing blood (and perhaps other liquids) coming out of the donkey’s nose and mouth.



Donkeys or Priests? The Young Man continues to pull on the two ropes and drag the donkeys and pianos slowly across the bedroom floor. However, when the Young Man looks back at his cargo, he sees two living priests attached to the ropes. The Young Girl, conversely, still see the dead donkeys on the piano. The camera continues cutting between the faces of the couple and the two visions of the cargo. Eventually, the Young Girl makes a break for the door and runs out of the bedroom. The Young Man drops the ropes and pursues her, but she slams the door on his arm. As she presses against his wrist, there is another close-up of the man's palm with ants. He slowly makes a fist as the Young Girl continues to push on the door.



Young Man on the Bed When the Young Girl is pressing the door on the Young Man's wrist, she suddenly notices that he has been transported to the bed and is lying down with his eyes closed. In bed, he is dressed as he was when he was riding the bike, complete with collar and cap. A title card appears that says "About Three in the Morning." Another man approaches the apartment from the outside and rings the doorbell. The Young Man stays in bed but turns his head towards the noise, irritated. He sees two arms coming through two circular cut-outs in the wall. The hands are shaking a martini shaker. The Young Girl leaves to let the second man in.



Confrontation between Men The second man enters the bedroom and sees the Young Man lying on the bed in the nun-like outfit. He approaches and screams at the Young Man, who remains immobile. The second man shakes the Young Man by his lapel, then lifts him to his feet. The second man strips off the accessories and throws them out of the window violently. The camera cuts to shots of the white items dropping down from the balcony window. The Young Man, now dressed in a suit and the striped tie, cowers as the second man continues berating him. The Young Man stands in the corner and turns away from the second man with his arms outstretched.



A Doppelganger Appears A title card says "Sixteen Years Earlier." There are two Young Men in the bedroom now: one standing in the corner with arms outstretched, and the other crossing the room and facing the camera. The moving Young Man wears a gray suit and approaches a work desk with several books on top of it. There is also a paint brush sticking out of a receptacle at a diagonal angle. The Young Man organizes and surveys his supplies affectionately.



Confrontation between Doppelgangers He (in the grey suit) takes a book back to his doppelganger and hands it to him. The Young Man in the corner takes the book but glowers at him. When the Young Man in the grey suit turns to walk away, the Young Man in the black suit pivots in the corner, holding two books. The books turn into pistols with which the Young Man threatens his counterpart in the grey suit. The man in the grey suit holds up his arms, but the Young Man in the black suit shoots him point blank. He collapses in slow motion.



Forest Procession The camera cuts to a shot of the Young Man's dead body in a clearing in a forest. Two men approach and spot the dead body. Together, a group of men pick up the body and carry it across the clearing. There is a shot front the front as the men carry the dead body pall-bearer style. Then, there is a wide panoramic shot of the forest with the men, now small, walking away slowly.



Moth Transference The Young Girl returns to her bedroom. When she opens the door, she sees a moth on the wall across the room. There are several successive close-ups of the moth, ending on the pattern on its head. When the Young Girl looks again, the Young Man has replaced the moth. The couple stare at each other from across the room until the Young Man's mouth is obscured by black hair. The Young Girl raises her arm and notices that her armpit is shaved. She makes faces at the Young Man and sticks her tongue out at him.



Reunion at the Beach When the Young Girl leaves her bedroom, the hallway becomes a beach. She waves at another man in a sweater vest and shorts as her dress blows in the wind. She runs to him, and he raises his wrist to her face with a watch, as if to show her the time. She kisses him, and they walk arm in arm down the beach. At one spot, they pick up a series of wet rags. Then, they continue walking down the beach arm in arm, stopping to kiss.



Death in the Spring The title card reads "In the Spring." The camera cuts to a shot of a couple buried in the beach sand. The figures appear to be the Young Girl on the left and the Young Man on the right. Their upper torsos and head stick out as if they were toys. The Young Man has a rifle on his back, also sticking out of the sand. The Young Girl has butterfly epaulettes on the shoulder straps of her dress.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Young Man

The Young Man, as he is named in the credits, is the male lover and arguably the protagonist of the film. He is tall and slender with dark hair, and he wears a tailored, stylish suit or the nun-like dress. He pursues his desires (mostly sex with the Young Girl) and fights his fear (the evil doppelganger).

Obsessive Even though intercourse is interrupted, the male lover keeps pursuing the Young Girl. He even pulls the dead donkeys and live priests in order to catch the Young Girl. He appears several times in her bedroom, including his final appearance as a transformed moth after his supposed death by gunshot. He is frequently transfixed by situations, people, and objects, including the paintbrush on the worktable and the Androgynous Woman hit by the car.

Aggressive The Young Man pursues the Young Girl with physical force and obsession. He literally corners her and manhandles her until she escapes. His evil self (in the black suit) manifests pistols in order to kill his doppelganger.

Young Girl

The female lover is a young and beautiful flapper with short, dark hair. She is intrigued by yet afraid of the Young Man, and she eventually gains some agency with her ability to leave.

Curious The Young Girl initiates contact with the Young Man when she sees him riding the bicycle from her balcony. She goes down to check on him when he crashes, and she is fascinated by the ants in his palm. Before he grabs her breasts, the Young Girl wants to learn about him and the world below. When she leaves her bedroom at the end of the film, she wants to explore the beach.

Rebellious Although she is somewhat attracted to the Young Man, the Young Girl spends most of the short film trying to escape him. She consistently fights back against his advances, and she even brandishes the club-like object when he corners her in the bedroom. When he chases her, she slams the door on his wrist. At the end of the film, she leaves her bedroom and runs off with the beach-comer.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Cultural References Many film and literary critics have analyzed how Buñuel folds in frequent literary, artistic, and film references into his cinematic creations. This penchant for references and metareferences appears in *Andalusian Dog*. For his part, Dalí tended to recreate images or postures from iconic paintings, including Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (1670) and Jean-Francois Millet's painting *The Angelus* (c.1859). According to film critics Guy Wood and Javier Herrera Navarro, Buñuel parodies early westerns throughout *Andalusian Dog*. In particular, they argue that the ways in which the Young Man wields his pistols is reminiscent of the quintessential gunslingers of *The Virginian* (1902) or *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). As with many of Buñuel's films after this inaugural short, Buñuel embraces Gothic imagery and stylized gore in *Andalusian Dog*. In particular, Buñuel references a long literary tradition of the grotesque in the art and literature of Spain stretching back to the Baroque era.

Illustrative Moment: Young Girl Reading The camera cuts to an interior shot of the Young Girl reading. When she is startled by a noise, she jumps up and drops her book. The open pages reveal a copy of a painting that looks similar to Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*. The Young Girl looks through her balcony window at the Young Man, who is approaching on his bike. This overt reference to a Vermeer painting early in the short sets up the sense of frames within frames—that is, the meta imagery of a painting in a book in a film, which in turn, draws the viewer's attention to the artistic mechanism of creating an image (or frame) in the film. Later, there is an echo of reference to the artistic process when the Young Man approaches the writing desk with a paintbrush cocked at an angle. In both moments, Dalí signals his own subjectivity as a painter within the artistic creative space of the film.



Religion Many of the images in this film suggest a disdain towards the Catholic Church. The Young Man appears early in the film as a sort of travelling nun: he wears a habit-like (white) hat and collar and black dress over his trousers. This imagery juxtaposes the purity of the order with the social subversion of transvestism or gender-bending. When the man is lying in bed, he finds himself dressed again as the nun until the Second Man enters and rips off his nun-like accessories. The implication is that the Young Man may want to experiment with his gender or sexuality, but society (in the form of the Church or men in authority) prevent him from doing so. The most overt references to Christianity occur during the aggressive seduction (or attempted rape) sequence in the Young Girl's bedroom. When the Young Man picks up the ropes, the first objects attached to them are two tablets.

Illustrative Moment: Donkeys or Priests? The Young Man continues to pull on the two ropes and drag the donkeys and pianos slowly across the bedroom floor. However, when the Young Man looks back at his cargo, he sees two living priests attached to the ropes. The Young Girl, conversely, still sees the dead donkeys on the piano. The camera continues cutting between the faces of the couple and the two visions of the cargo. The implication is that the man is pulling the Ten Commandments and he is prevented from having sex due to the mandates of the Church. Although the ropes are initially attached to grand pianos with dead donkeys on them, they become two priests. In this sense, the priests are "dragging the Young Man down" with shame.



Gender The Young Man's primary motivation is sex. Like many other male protagonists in Buñuel's future films, however, the Young Man never achieves actual penetration. The Young Girl is the illusive object of his desire. The lack of sex suggests not only repression but also an attraction towards queer or subversive forms of gender, sexuality, and desire. The Young Man engages in travestism and literally fights himself, which could indicate an acknowledgement of sexual transgression. This notion of sexual or gender transgression also appears in the way in which the Androgynous Woman dresses. The viewer does not immediately identify her as a woman, and her "transgression" is punished through death by impact. With respect to the Young Girl, she does not appear to be sexually attracted to the Young Man

and rejects his advances. She has some transgressive agency in that she rejects one man and comes on to another.

Illustrative Moment: Confrontation Between Men The second man enters the bedroom and sees the Young Man lying on the bed in the nun-like outfit. He approaches and screams at the Young Man, who remains immobile. The second man shakes the Young Man by his lapel, then lifts him to his feet. The second man strips off the accessories and throws them out of the window violently. The camera cuts to shots of the white items dropping down from the balcony window. The Young Man, now dressed in a suit and the striped tie, cowers as the second man continues berating him. In this scene, the Second Man acts as society as a whole in that he is stripping away the fluid or experimental gender trappings of the Young Man in that moment. The “queerness” is literally thrown out the window, and the Young Man resumes his performance of heteronormative / cisgender behavior in his traditional suit.

SEXUALITY

Id Although the lovers do not ever achieve intercourse or perhaps orgasm, they routinely give into their subconscious or illicit sexual desire and violence. The examination and exploration of the Id and the subconscious mind was at the heart of the surrealist movement, so it follows that Buñuel and Dalí allowed the characters to act out their subconscious desires and fears. The Young Man addresses both continuously—he indulges in sexual fantasies and impulses with the Young Girl, and he acts out violence against “himself” and others. The sudden transference of images to violence (such as shaving to cutting the eye and books to pistols) underscores the subconscious’s tendency to create violent scenarios. The implication is that the Young Man both fears and is aroused by sexual and gender transgression, which is why he enjoys seeing the Androgynous Woman hit by the car. All of the main characters express a fear of death, both as the moment of losing life and the ambiguous states of transformation post-mortem. The rotting donkeys and the insects reflect a fascination with putrefaction. Whereas it could be argued that the ego and superego abhor death, dying, and rotting, the Id brings the repressed fears and curiosity to the surface.

Illustrative Moment: Foreplay Harassment The Young Man, now obviously aroused, grabs the Young Girl’s waist and breasts. She backs away from him, but he keeps following her around the bedroom and grabbing her breasts. In one moment, he closes his eyes and imagines that the Young Girl is naked. He continues to massage her breasts, then imagines that they are the woman’s buttocks. The camera shows his fantasies of the naked body parts. The Young Girl breaks away from the Young Man, and he chases her around the bedroom. The association of violence with arousal indicates that the Young Man is giving into the desires of his Id, hence his explicitly sexual imagination. The impetus to dominate (and potentially rape) the Young Girl also emphasizes the lack of social constraints or superego in this particular moment.



Sadomasochism The Young Man’s very first fantasy is sadistic—he dreams about slicing the Young Girl’s eye open with a razor. Later, he takes sadistic pleasure in watching the Androgynous Woman hit by the car, then immediately harassing the Young Girl. He is aroused both by the danger of the woman’s position in the street and her ultimate violent death. Immediately after she is hit, the Young Man chases the Young Girl around the bedroom and acts as though he might rape her. The Young Girl also has moments of sadism in her desire to punish the Young Man for his crimes, most notably slamming his arm in the door after the attempted rape. As stated above in the Id category, all of the characters “dance with” death despite their fears and revulsions. The Young Man confronts death head on with the duel with himself, and the Young Girl witnesses the dead and dying around the Young Man—she is the one who sees the donkey carcasses and the death moth. Both characters vacillate between a fascination with death and a fear of their own mortality.

Illustrative Moment: Watching the Accident The camera cuts to a shot of the couple in the bedroom looking at the spectacle below from the Young Girl's balcony windows. They comment to each other about the situation below. When the camera cuts back to the street, the Androgynous Woman remains in the middle of the street, clutching the striped handbag. Two cars rush by her, but the woman remains stationary. The Young Man continues to watch and becomes increasingly excited with each near-miss of the rushing cars. Finally, one car hits the woman head-on. She lies dead in the street. The Young Man, whipped into a frenzy, stares intently at the Young Girl. Once again, the Young Man's arousal is stimulated by violence, voyeurism, and transgression. He gives into his subconscious, which then becomes the driving force of most of the film.



Fetishism Remarkably, the ubiquitous foot fetish of many Buñuel films is missing in this particular short. However, *Andalusian Dog* does include several phallic and vaginal references. In addition, clothes and objects are invested with erotic meaning. The most phallic objects are the weapons that the Young Man wields against himself and others—the razor and the pistols. In addition, Buñuel and Dalí placed the paintbrush at the work desk and the rifle in the beach sand at a 70-degree angle, thereby suggesting an erect penis. Conversely, the focus on black hair, mounds, and circles evokes both the pubis and the outer labia of the vagina. It is notable that whenever there is a close-up of the striped handbag, we see a keyhole. The Young Girl is the one person who opens the handbag, even though the Young Man and the Androgynous Woman cling to it tightly. The implication is that the characters wish to open the handbag by penetrating the keyhole, but they are unable to fulfill their desires. Finally, cross-dressing as a practice is framed as fetishistic. The Second Man punishes the Young Man for his nun-like attire, and the Androgynous Woman is punished for not adhering to gender norms in public. Because cross-dressing is framed as subversive, the articles of clothing and props attached to the practice become eroticized—most notably, the striped handbag. The compartmentalization of the body also lends itself to fetishization. The severed hand and the sliced eye are framed fetishistically, if violently. Film critic Sarah Cooper also notes how the final shot of the lovers buried in sand emphasizes the fetishized torso.

Illustrative Moment: Mound and Circle Images The shot of the Young Girl's armpit hair transitions to a hairy black circle (similar to sea urchin) amidst a sandy beach. Then, there is an aerial shot of a figure with short hair using a stick to poke a severed hand. A crowd swarms around the figure. When the camera cuts to a full-length shot of the figure, we see that she is an androgynous woman with slicked-back hair and a tailored suit. There are several close-ups of the severed hand with a bloody stump interspersed with the concerned and angry faces of the crowd. A policeman tries to intervene and prevent the Androgynous Woman's poking of the hand. There is another aerial shot of the crowd forming a perfect circle around the woman. The policeman disperses the crowd and hands the Androgynous Woman the striped handbag. The armpit hair looks like pubic hair, which then reminds the viewers of female genitalia in general. The fragmentation of the body (that is, the parts unnervingly detached from context) enhances the surreal grotesqueness of the film as a whole.



LIFE STAGES

Death Much of the imagery in the film refers to the encroachment of death or the embodiment of death. The characters seem to be simultaneously fascinated and stimulated (sometimes sexually) by death, while also experiencing fear and revulsion. This duality likely emphasizes the psychological struggle between the dirty desires of the Id and the social constructs that the Superego demands. It is unclear whether the Young Man's fantasy of slicing the Young Girl's eye results in death or dismemberment, but his actions suggest a tendency towards violence and murder. The Androgynous Woman is hit by a car early in the film, thereby presaging the untimely death of the Young Man. The Young Man kills "himself," and his body is carted off in a funeral procession. Later, the Young Man assumes the form of a black moth that evokes a feeling of death. All the characters are surrounded by images of death and putrescence. The dead donkeys on the pianos not only constitute literal and figurative weight; they are also reminders of post-mortem rot.

Illustrative Moment: Forest Procession The camera cuts to a shot of the Young Man's dead body in a clearing in a forest. Two men approach and spot the dead body. Together, a group of men pick up the body and carry it across the clearing. There is a shot front the front as the men carry the dead body pall-bearer style. Then, there is a wide panoramic shot of the forest with the men, now small, walking away slowly. This scene acts as a confirmation that the Young Man is, in fact, dead, and his body is being carried away. The recognizable traits of a funeral signal to the viewer that the preceding murder of the Young Man by his doppelgänger was not an imagined psychological exercise, but a literal murder. However, Buñuel subverts his own message by reincarnating the Young Man as the moth and a figment of the Young Girl's imagination. Whether he be literally or figuratively dead, the essence and presence of death is unmistakable.



CHANGE

Transformation Throughout the film, Bunuel and Dalí edit the frames in such a way that the human and animal characters (or body parts) suddenly morph into other entities. The Young Man creates his own double, changes in and out of his “nun” outfits, and turns into a post-mortem moth. The Young Girl's eye becomes the moon in the night sky, and her armpit hair transforms into a black sea urchin. Often, the mode of transformation is ambiguous or sudden, with the result that the viewer cannot track the chronology of change over time. Not only is the logic of the change non-existent, time is often suspended all-together. Yet somehow, the transition is realized through the surrealist editing. The overarching theme of death (see above) also creates a sense of transition. The characters pass from life to death. In addition, the viewer sees the transformation of flesh through decomposition—most overtly with the shots of the rotting donkeys on the pianos and the dried blood on the severed hand. The frequent close-ups on insects also imply decomposition.

Illustrative Moment: Moth Transference The Young Girl returns to her bedroom. When she opens the door, she sees a moth on the wall across the room. There are several successive close-ups of the moth, ending on the pattern on its head. When the Young Girl looks again, the Young Man has replaced the moth. The couple stare at each other from across the room until the Young Man's mouth is obscured by black hair. The Young Girl raises her arm and notices that her armpit is shaved. She makes faces at the Young Man and sticks her tongue out at him. In this sequence, Bunuel creates the literal transformation of human into insect into hair. There is also a transference of power and subjectivity, as the Young Girl remains alive, spurns the Young Man's reincarnated / imagined form, and proceeds to walk arm in arm with her replacement beau.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How are the images dreamlike or nightmarish? How do they represent illicit desire?
2. Can you discern a “plot” involving the two lovers? What is it?
3. As with almost all Buñuel films, there is a strategic / symbolic use of animals and bestial imagery. What is the possible symbolism of the ants, the donkeys, and the moth?
4. Why do the characters lack names?
5. How is Buñuel's style surreal in this film? Consider the multiple fades, close-ups, and cuts.
6. What is the effect of the high-angle shots in the accident / street scenes?
7. How and when does Dalí insert references to art and the artistic practice?
8. Comment on the repetition of certain melodies from Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde* and the repeated bars of the tango. Why are certain scenes accompanied by the tango and others by the operatic motifs?