

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Tracie Amend, Ph.D.

***Belle de jour* (1967)**

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, *Le chien andalou* (1929), or *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 *L'Age D'or* (1930), or the *Age of Gold*. 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 featured film of this essay, *Belle de jour* (1967), was a French production that in many ways set the stage for the last phase of Buñuel's career: a series of hyper-erotic French satires such as *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977).

Film *Belle de jour* (1967) is a full-length color film about Séverine Serizy, a partially frigid housewife who has sadomasochistic fantasies, then proceeds to work as a prostitute in a Parisian brothel. The film is an adaptation of the 1928 novel of the same name by Joseph Kessel. However, Buñuel and his screenwriter Jean Claude Carrière set the action in 1960s Paris rather than in the 1920s.

Background As with the much of Buñuel's later *oeuvre*, *Belle de Jour* is featured in the Criterion Collection as an exemplar of the auteur's French style. It is still considered one of the most critically acclaimed films of Buñuel's career. Along with writing the script with his long-time collaborator Jean Claude Carrière, Buñuel cast several of his favorite French actors in this film, include Jean Sorel, Marguerite Muni, and Georges Marchal. Michel Piccoli, who plays Séverine's adulterous love interest Henri, acted in virtually every French film in Buñuel's career stretching back to his portrayal of the suave missionary in *Diamond Hunters* (1956). Most notably, the famous actress Catherine Deneuve played Séverine. In many ways, her performance in this film presages the cool eroticism of the title protagonist in Buñuel's *Tristana* (1970). The film was shot all over Paris, including on the iconic Champs-Élysée.

CHARACTERS

<i>Séverine Serizy</i>	Housewife who ends up working in a brothel
<i>Pierre Serizy</i>	Séverine's husband
<i>Henri Husson</i>	Friend of the Serizys who is drawn to Séverine
<i>Renée Husson</i>	Henri's wife and Séverine's confidant
<i>Hippolyte</i>	Spanish drug lord and brothel regular
<i>Marcel</i>	Criminal and one of Séverine's johns and lovers
<i>Madame Anaïs</i>	Madame of the brothel who hires Séverine
<i>Mathilde</i>	Red-headed prostitute at the brothel
<i>Charlotte</i>	Brunette prostitute at the brothel
<i>Adolphe</i>	Portly businessman who is a regular client
<i>The Professor</i>	Gynecologist who is a regular client
<i>Pallas</i>	Employee of the brothel and friend to Anaïs

SYNOPSIS

Séverine and Pierre Serizy appear to be the perfect Parisian couple: they are young, attractive, and well-off. Pierre is a respected medical doctor who longs to have children, and Séverine frequently proclaims her love for her husband (although she rarely has sex with him). The Serizys vacation and enjoy activities with a fellow rich couple, Renée and Henri Husson. When the two couples visit a ski resort together, Henri makes a pass at Séverine in front of their respective spouses, but Séverine rejects him.

For the majority of the film, the scenes of bourgeois leisure are interspliced with Séverine's masochist fantasies, including the opening sequence where her husband and carriage coachmen tie her up, whip her, and rape her. In each successive fantasy, Séverine imagines herself tied up and humiliated in some form by both her husband and Henri.

When Henri tries to seduce her a second time in "real life", Séverine remains offended but is intrigued by his description of local brothels and the women who work there. He gives her the address to his favorite house of ill repute, and Séverine decides to visit the apartment. Despite her fear, Séverine gives in to the madame's coaxing and decides to work as a prostitute each afternoon. Madame Anaïs gives her the moniker Belle de Jour, and Séverine quickly becomes the most popular whore at the brothel. Séverine manages to juggle her "two lives" effectively until one of her johns, a young, violent criminal named Marcel, becomes obsessed with her. By the end of the film, Marcel stalks Séverine and comes to her house. When he realizes that she wants to stay with her husband, Marcel shoots Pierre in the street. A police chase ensues, and the encounter ends with Marcel shot dead, Pierre paralyzed, and Séverine as dutiful housewife and nurse. A few months after the attempted murder, Henri visits Pierre and reveals to him Séverine's secret. The last scene of the film is Séverine's most benign yet illusive fantasy—sharing a drink with a completely healthy and happy Pierre.

SCENES

Opening Credits There is a wide-angle shot of a country road alongside a row of trees in autumn. Two men drive a carriage while a couple ride in the back, and the sleighbells on the carriage ring out continuously. As the ride continues, the man (Pierre) tries to kiss his wife, Séverine. She rejects him, and he remarks that he wishes she weren't so cold. He declares his tender feelings for her, but Séverine only replies by saying "what good is that?" Pierre calls her cruel and yells for the coachmen to stop the carriage.



Séverine's Rustic Punishment Angry, Pierre forces Séverine out of the carriage in the middle of nowhere. The coachmen literally drag her out of the carriage kicking and screaming, then they drag her by her hair through the forest. Pierre ties her to a tree, wraps a scarf around her mouth, and rips off her red dress. Séverine begs for forgiveness, but Pierre commands the coachmen to take turns whipping her. Pierre watches the whipping, and Séverine sighs with each stroke. Pierre leaves the forest but tells the coachmen that they can have their way with her. As he walks away, Séverine murmurs: "I love you." One of the coachmen approaches her from behind and kisses her exposed back.



"Normal" Goodnight The camera cuts to Séverine in one of two adjacent twin beds. Pierre looks at her from the bathroom and asks her what she is thinking. Séverine replies that she was having the daydream about the carriage again. Pierre approaches in pajamas and kisses her goodnight. He suggests they get sleep so that they can enjoy a one-year anniversary surprise that Pierre planned. Séverine asks about his work at the hospital, and he replies that he is taking time off. Séverine remarks that she wishes he were always by



her side, but when Pierre tries to get into her twin bed with her, she says no. Pierre kisses her forehead and gets into his own bed.

Fun at the Ski Resort Séverine and Pierre walk with their friend Renée alongside a ski lift. Each one is dressed in fashionable sweaters. Renee remarks that Henri always goes to bed early, but that she would like to stay up and see the “mesmerizer” (hypnotist) perform. Séverine vows that she will not be hypnotized.



Erotic Tension in the Café Henri and Renée sit at a table in the café, and Henri nibbles her fingers. He remarks that her scars have healed well. When Severine and Pierre enter the dining area, Séverine tells her husband that she is reluctant to eat with Henri because of the way he stares at her. Nonetheless, the foursome sit down together. Henri describes his vices (especially women and hunting) and ogles the young women who walk past the table. Pierre suggests that he see a therapist for his obsessions, but Renée quips that Henri’s only illnesses are being “rich and idle.” Henri goes on to compliment and leer at Séverine before leaving the table. Pierre shrugs off Henri’s behavior as “amusing.”



Henriette is a Prostitute Séverine and Renée chat in the back of a taxi. Renée brings up her friend Henriette and reports that she works as a prostitute in a brothel in downtown Paris. Séverine is amazed. The two women imagine what it would be like to sleep with strangers and have “no choice” in clients. Séverine marvels that brothels still exist. The tax driver interjects and says that there are at least six highly popular brothels in the city.

Séverine’s Butterfingers Séverine returns home that afternoon to find red roses in a vase. The maid explains that Henri Husson sent them. Séverine picks up the vase and carries it to the dining room, but drops it right by the table. The maid tells her not to worry about it. A few seconds later, Séverine also knocks a perfume bottle off the counter in the bathroom. She asks herself: “What’s wrong with me today?” There is a close-up of a young girl’s legs and a mini skirt, then a male adult hand caressing her torso. As the camera pans up, the viewer sees that an older man in a workman’s uniform is kissing a young teenager’s cheek. She winces.



Pierre Explains How Brothels Work That night, Séverine asks Pierre whether he ever visited a brothel. Pierre deflects by saying he has to work, but Séverine persists. Pierre describes entering a brothel lobby where the women are seated. He says that the john picks one, spends an hour with her, and then feels guilty and depressed for the rest of the day. Séverine is irritated by the unsatisfying answer, but the two go to bed amiably and separately.



Henri Comes On to Séverine Séverine has just finished a tennis match at a swanky club, and when she goes into the lobby, she sees Henri. He greets her, and Séverine asks if he has visited brothels. Henri admits his tastes immediately and says that brothels have a special character—especially since the prostitutes are almost like slaves. He also mentions one specific brothel run by the madame name Anaïs. Henri leans in and tries to kiss Séverine. She pulls away, offended. Henri suggests a tryst without Pierre, and Séverine walks away briskly. Henri calls after her, giving her the address of the brothel.



Séverine's First Visit to the Brothel The camera cuts to the brothel door with the address plate. Séverine approaches slowly, and there is an extended following shot of her walking in the streets. She has second thoughts and walks to a nearby park. She sits on a park bench for a few seconds, then returns to the brothel door. As she walks up the stairs to the apartment, the camera cuts to a flashback of a priest giving Séverine her first communion. The camera closes in on the priest's hands as he retrieves the wafer from the goblet, then cuts to Séverine's young face refusing to open her mouth. The camera cuts back abruptly to the adult Séverine at the top of the stairs.



Anaïs Hires Séverine Madame Anaïs invites Séverine into the apartment that doubles as a brothel. Anaïs asks if she is looking for a job, but Séverine does not answer. Anaïs tries to calm down Séverine by offering her a drink, a cigarette, and saying that she will do her best to make Séverine more comfortable. The madame compliments Séverine's "fresh" appearance and tells her that she will split the proceeds with her fifty-fifty. When Séverine gets up to leave, Anaïs pats her shoulder and mentions that she has a loose button. Anaïs implies that she will hire Séverine, and Séverine replies that she would have to leave at five "without fail." The madame agrees but warns her to be punctual and come back that afternoon at 2:00. Séverine runs out of the apartment without agreeing or disagreeing.



Séverine Returns in the Afternoon Séverine meets Pierre outside the hospital where he works and begs him to have lunch with her. He replies that he is having lunch with his boss but that they are scheduled for a dinner date with the Févrets. Séverine assents reluctantly and walks back to the brothel. She walks slowly up the staircase, and the camera closes in on her petite feet in black pumps as she pauses on each stair and even swivels her feet back and forth. When Anaïs opens the door, the madame remarks that she didn't think Séverine would come back.

Terms of the Job The madame does not describe protocol except to say that her girls should be cheerful and classy. Anaïs asks Séverine's name, and when she refuses to answer, Anaïs suggests that they come up with a flirtatious and catchy work pseudonym. Anaïs prepares Séverine a glass of brandied cherries while she explains how the arrangement would be. The madame suddenly thinks of the name "Belle de Jour" given that Séverine will only work afternoons and that she is a special treat. Anaïs flirtatiously asks if Séverine has a special someone, and she even kisses her softly.

First Customer Anaïs goes to open the door for the man outside, who she explains to Séverine is their most loyal customer—a candy executive named Adolphe. Séverine grabs her purse and coat and starts to move to the door, but Anaïs intercepts her. Séverine is presented to the john with the other prostitutes, who are named Charlotte and Mathilde. Charlotte sits on Adolphe's lap while he gazes at Séverine. The john compliments Belle de Jour on her classy demeanor and posh dress, and everyone drinks champagne in honor of Belles's premiere. Adolphe gives Charlotte a present that looks like a candy container, but when she opens it, snakes pop out. Everyone laughs except Séverine, and Adolphe approaches her and asks why she is so moody. When he unzips her dress and throws Séverine on the bed, she jumps up and runs out of the room.



Séverine Needs a Firm Hand Madame Anaïs apologizes and explains to the gentleman that this is Belle's first time, which the man does not believe. She goes out and tries to comfort Séverine. When Séverine resists, the madame scolds her and pushes her towards the door. Then, Séverine submits. Anaïs comments that she needs a firm hand. When Séverine enters again, Adolphe asks the other prostitutes to leave them. Adolphe pulls off her dress and chases her around the bed, at first cajoling her, then yelling at her. When he slaps her and



throws her on the bed, she lays there quietly in her underwear. The john comments that she likes it rough, and he kisses her. Séverine grabs the back of his head and the camera focuses on her wedding ring.

Séverine's Guilt After her first customer, Séverine scurries out of the brothel and runs home. She scrubs herself thoroughly in the shower and burns her bra, pantyhose, and panties in the fireplace hearth. When she hears that Pierre is home, she runs to the bedroom and hops into bed. Pierre approaches and asks if she is sick. She replies that she had a headache but feels better after a warm bath. Pierre kisses her gently and says that he will cancel the dinner date with the Févrets.



Western Masochistic Fantasy Séverine imagines a western scene with cattle roaming the vast plains, and once again, there is the sound of bells (but this time more like tinkling). There is a big pot of soup boiling over a fire, and Pierre tastes the soup (still in his work suit). The camera pans to Henri who is also sitting by the fire. The two men comment that all of the cattle are named Remorse, except for the last bull, who is name Expiation. Pierre gets up and shovels mud into an orange bucket while Henri inquires after Séverine. The camera cuts to Séverine tied to a post (with her right arm raised at a right angle) and wearing a draped, white gown that is reminiscent of a Roman vestal virgin (also a possible reference to the bull arena scene in the biblical epic *Quo Vadis*). Henri and Pierre sling mud (and possibly cow dung) at Séverine's face and torso while Henri calls her a slut and hurls other insults at her. She moves her head slightly but smiles when the mud hits her cheeks.



Séverine's Second John: The Professor When Séverine returns after a week, Madame Anaïs almost refuses to give her back her job. However, the madame gives in and explains that another regular has an appointment: a gynecologist and surgeon who will like her. Anaïs tells Mathilde to "fill in" Séverine. When Anaïs escorts "the professor" to a room, she mentions that he can try her new girl. The camera cuts to the john opening up a suitcase filled with costumes and props, including a pilot's cap that he puts on. Séverine enters the room in a white robe and reveals her breasts, but the professor is not there. He knocks on the door and enters, then tells Séverine to get dressed. He comes in again in a valet's costume and asks repeatedly whether the mistress is satisfied with his work. Séverine answers meekly "Not really." The professor drops character and calls in Madame Anaïs. He proclaims that the new girl isn't good, and that he wants Charlotte. Anaïs assents and pulls Séverine out of the bedroom.



Watch and Learn Madame Anaïs brings Séverine into the adjoining room and demands that she watch Charlotte's performance through the peephole. Anaïs reminds her not to make a sound but to make note of Charlotte's technique. The camera cuts back to the bedroom where Charlotte enters. The professor comes in with his valet costume and repeats his concern about the mistress being unhappy. Charlotte chides him and insults him, and eventually she throws him down, whips him, and steps on his face. Séverine continues watching, but the lesson is interrupted when Anaïs says that another john has arrived.



Fun with the Korean John Anaïs presents Séverine to a portly Korean gentleman who speaks very little French. Séverine kisses his cheek while he and Anaïs discuss the payment. The Korean man offers a geisha club card, but Anaïs insists on cash. He pays happily and they go together to one of the rooms. The john shows her a black lacquer box that has some sort of buzzing insect inside. He tells Séverine in broken French not to be afraid and gestures that he wants her to keep her bra on but remove her underwear. The john undresses and flexes his muscles, then he performs a ritual in which he shakes little bells. Séverine continues to caress him and giggles at the performance.



Cathy and Her Mother Pallas, a woman who works in the brothel (but not as a prostitute), lives there with her teenage daughter, Cathy. When Cathy enters one afternoon, her mother asks her to show her report card to her godmother—Anaïs. The madame looks it over and praises Cathy for getting good grades in history and speech. When the Korean john leaves, he leers at the teenager and strokes her face. Her mother intervenes and opens the door to the john, then she tells Cathy to go upstairs. Pallas goes into the room to check on Séverine and notices that there are small blood stains on towels and sheets. She tries to comfort Séverine, saying that the john scared her, too. Séverine sits up and has a satisfied smirk on her face. She says slyly, “What do you know, Pallas?”



The “Duke” Hires Belle de Jour Séverine waits in an outdoor café. A new john pulls up in the same carriage, horses, and coachmen from Séverine’s earlier fantasy (the opening scene of the film). They chat for a while al fresco, and the gentleman compliments Séverine’s charming pseudonym and her elegance. He invites her to come to his house for a special “religious ceremony”, and he laments that the younger generation lacks “a feeling for death.” Séverine agrees to come to his mansion for the ceremony.



Erotic Fake Mourning The camera cuts to a shot of Séverine in the carriage with the john—this time the carriage is moving towards the mansion. Once inside, the gentleman’s butler lays out Séverine’s dress, bra, and panties on an armchair. The camera cuts to Séverine, naked but standing behind a bouquet of lilies and other flowers. The butler asks her to put on a see-through gossamer robe with a black hood. The butler reassures her that she will enjoy the gig even though the duke insists that no one comes back. The butler escorts her down the hall, and the camera cuts to Séverine lying motionless in an open casket. The gentleman leans over her and mourns the loss of his daughter. He laments that he can never be with her again and that her eyes are closed forever. Séverine remains perfectly motionless until the Duke collapses on the floor and the casket starts to move. Séverine sits up and looks down at the Duke, shocked, although the viewer does not see what is happening on the floor next to the casket. The camera cuts to Séverine back in the living room and dressed in her street clothes. The butler brusquely pushes her out onto the patio even though it is raining.



In Bed with Pierre After her visit to the Duke’s mansion, Séverine invites Pierre into her twin bed. They snuggle together, and Pierre remarks that he wishes she would do this more often. He also laments that he feels he is forcing her sometimes. Séverine professes her love to him, and they kiss.



Rejection of Henri The next afternoon, Henri shows up at the Serizys' apartment and asks to see Séverine. She tells the maid to tell him she is not in, but Henri can hear her plainly from the entryway. Henri puts on his coat, thanks the maid, and leaves immediately. The camera cuts to Séverine sitting in a chair as she listens.

Fantasy with Henri There is an abrupt cut to the café in the ski lodge with Pierre, Renée, Henri, and Séverine sitting at the table. They are all wearing the same clothes as in the "real" get together from the beginning of the film, but this time, Séverine and Henri sit across from each other and gaze into each other's eyes. In this fantasy scene, Henri compliments Séverine and asks if he may write her a letter. Séverine assents but insists that they "do it" in front of all the café customers. Henri breaks a glass bottle, and the two lower themselves under the table. The table starts to shake, and Renée bends over to watch them. When Pierre asks what is going on, Renée relates that Henri has "opened an envelope" and that the two are "having fun."



Elevator Robbery A man with an accordion-style bag enters a mall vestibule and waits for the elevator. A sinister looking young man with a cane lurks nearby, so the man decides to walk to the other lobby elevator. A third, older man in a white coat waits for the second elevator. When the door opens, both men enter, and the young man pushes his way in behind them. The elevator goes up as the two criminals (the man in the white coat and the man with the cane) beat their victim (the third man) unconscious. They exit the elevator and calmly walk out of the atrium with the bag.



The Most Dangerous Johns: Hippolyte and Marcel The two thieves walk over to Madame Anaïs's apartment, and she lets them in. Charlotte and Mathilde recognize the older man as Hippolyte, a Spanish regular whom they dislike. Neither of the prostitutes recognize Hippolyte's associate, but they fill in Belle de Jour about the clients. Anaïs asks Belle de Jour, along with Charlotte and Mathilde, to present themselves. Pallas passes through the bedroom, and Hippolyte asks her whether her daughter is old enough "to be tickled." Pallas makes excuses, offended, and hurriedly leaves the room. Charlotte and Mathilde greet Hippolyte and start kissing and caressing him. He reciprocates but eventually gets irritated and throws them out of the room. Hippolyte leers at Séverine and starts to grab her, but Marcel intervenes by sticking his cane in between them. Marcel says, "let me have her," and Hippolyte gives in reluctantly.

Marcel and Séverine's First Encounter While Séverine gets undressed on the bed, Marcel struts around asking her personal questions. He takes off his shirt and asks for her name and whether she has a protector. Séverine deflects and says she won't charge him. Marcel becomes distracted by her body. He asks her to turn over, and when he notices a birthmark on her butt, he gets annoyed and acts as though he is going to leave. The camera cuts to the lobby where Hippolyte is chatting with Anaïs and the girls. When he asks about Belle de Jour, they explain that she is the new favorite due to her classy air. The camera cuts back to the bedroom where Marcel's clothes are strewn over the floor. Séverine says that she is "still trembling" and she caresses his back when she feels a scar. They kiss and declare how much they like each other.



Disgruntled Gangsters Marcel and Hippolyte wait at a table in a café. Hippolyte teases Marcel for being so obsessed with Belle de Jour. Two men enter and join them at the table. They show their displeasure about a deal and complain that Hippolyte keeps upping his cut. One of the men calls Marcel a thug, and Marcel brandishes his knife. Hippolyte tells everyone to calm down and tells his associates that he knows they have "the snow." The men hand over a package of



cocaine and leave quickly. Hippolyte sings playfully at Marcel to diffuse his anger. Marcel goes to the bar and calls the brothel, asking after Belle de Jour. He smiles at the answer.

Marcel Confronts Séverine at the Brothel Marcel runs over to the brothel, enraged, and starts interrogating Séverine. She explains that she had to leave town for a few days. He takes off his belt and strikes her once. Séverine warns that he will never see her again if he beats her. Marcel relents but proceeds to whip a framed painting until the glass shatters. He sits down with her on the bed and tells her that he missed her, then insists that she meet him at night. Séverine says no and explains that she has another life. Marcel guesses correctly that she loves “the other guy.” Séverine claims that she likes Marcel, too, but they are “two different things.”



Pierre and Séverine Have a Lunch Date Séverine meets Pierre at the hospital and they walk arm in arm to go to lunch. Pierre remarks that Séverine has changed and is smiling all the time. Séverine confirms that she is much happier now. Pierre wistfully says that he wished her happiness meant that she were pregnant. As they leave the hospital, Pierre stares at an old wheelchair on the street corner, and he comments to Séverine that he is mysteriously drawn to it.

Henri Returns to the Brothel The camera cuts to Henri at Madame Anaïs’s door. She greets him warmly and asks why he hasn’t visited in so long. She accompanies him to the back room, and he greets Pallas warmly. Pallas flatters him and says that she dreams about him sometimes, and Henri gives her a generous tip. As he walks around the bedroom, Henri notices that there are still the same drapes and jasmine smell as before. Henri asks after the lion tamer girl, and Madame Anaïs explains that she quit. When Séverine walks in, she is startled at the sight of Henri. He asks the others to leave. Séverine screams at him, accuses him of stalking her, and tells him that she is disgusted by him. Henri remains calm and quips that unlike her, he does not like to be humiliated. Séverine begs him not to tell Pierre, and he agrees. Henri says that he is not interested in sex this way, but he will send along his friends to give her business. He leaves cash on the table and exits quickly.



Duel Fantasy The camera cuts to yet another shot of the carriage that pulls up to a clearing in a lush forest. A group of well-heeled men in long period jackets assemble in the clearing. Pierre approaches a table with weapons and there is a prolonged close-up of him loading a pistol. Pierre and Henri stand back-to-back, count out, and turn around. There is a close-up of both men shooting. Pierre, supposedly the victor, walks over to Séverine, who is wearing a red dress and is tied to a tree. Pierre smears a drop of blood that streaked down her left temple, and he kisses her passionately.



Hippolyte and Marcel Stalk Séverine After Séverine quits the brothel, Hippolyte waits outside in a trench coat. He watches her leave and follows her home. Marcel shows up at the Serizys’ home later and confronts Séverine, asking her why she left. She begs him to leave before Pierre gets home. He replies that he will leave if she spends the night with him at a nearby hotel. She says “impossible,” and Marcel sits down and says he will wait for Pierre. Séverine starts to give in and admits that she needed to confess, anyway. He agrees to leave but murmurs “He is the obstacle.”



Attempted Murder and Police Chase After threatening Séverine, Marcel pulls a gun on Hippolyte, who is sitting in a car outside. Marcel forces him to get out of the car, and Hippolyte declares that he will no longer associate with him. The camera cuts back to the Serizys's living room where Séverine is lying on the couch, then sits up suddenly. She runs out to the balcony and sees the black car taking off. When she looks down, she sees Pierre laying face-down on the sidewalk with worried passers-by swarming him. The camera cuts to the interior of the car with Marcel speeding through traffic. He crashes into another car, then hops out and tries to run down the street. The other driver grabs him while a traffic cop approaches. Marcel breaks free but see another cop approaching from the other direction. He turns around and runs the other way. The cop pursues him. Marcel turns around and shoots, but the cop fires first, and Marcel collapses.



Diagnosis The camera cuts to a hallway in the hospital where the doctors are discussing Marcel and Pierre's conditions. One of the orderlies explains that Marcel died immediately and upon investigation, was linked to several crimes and at least one other murder. The doctor describes Pierre's grave condition, and the orderly reports that his wife (Séverine) is waiting in the lobby. The doctor comes out and puts his arm around Séverine while Renée looks on. The doctor explains that Pierre is alive but in a coma. Séverine asks to see him, but the doctor tells her she should go home.

Séverine Takes Care of Pierre There is a sequence of shots of fall foliage, followed by a close-up of Séverine standing at the window of the house, looking out at the rain. She goes to stoke the fire and says that Maria has brought over Pierre's favorite newspapers. The camera cuts to Pierre sitting motionless in a chair and wearing protective glasses. Séverine fusses over him and reminds him that he is making good progress on his recovery. She sits down and crochets, then gets up to prepare his eye medication by putting drops into a glass of water. She holds up the glass for Pierre to drink. Henri shows up to pay his respects, and Séverine warns him that Pierre still cannot speak. Henri tells Séverine that he plans to tell Pierre the truth so that the doctor does not feel guilty about being a burden on a "virtuous wife." Séverine allows him to walk into the other room.



One Last Fantasy As Henri leaves the apartment, Séverine walks slowly around the living room and slides her fingers along the edge of a marble counter. The camera closes in on her feet and legs in a similar fashion to the shots of her mounting the stairs to Madame Anaïs's apartment. She enters the room and sees that Pierre has been crying. Suddenly, Séverine's face brightens as Pierre takes off his glasses and asks her "What are you thinking about, Séverine?" She replies "of you," and Pierre smiles and rises from the chair. He walks to the dining room and pours them a drink. They embrace, and Pierre kisses her on the forehead. Séverine hears bells and walks out onto the balcony. The camera cuts to a bed of autumn leaves on the road alongside the forest of Séverine's earlier fantasies. The sleighbells ring out as FIN appears on the leaves.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

SÉVERINE

Séverine is a young, beautiful housewife who decides to indulge in her masochistic fantasies by working in a brothel. Rather than display her emotions, Séverine presents a stoic demeanor and a usually blank expression, which lends her an air of mystery, coolness, and sophistication. There are only a few times when she smiles, and that is usually after she has engaged in illicit sex or a fantasy. Although she proclaims her love for her husband several times throughout the film, she maintains a sexual frigidity

towards him for most of their marriage. Séverine's wild swings between frigidity and erotic desire suggest a psychological problem, but the nature of her psyche remains mysterious.

Bored Although Séverine expresses her love for Pierre several times throughout the film, she does not seem to take pleasure in her daily routine, shopping, or "normal" sex with her husband. She often escapes to a fantasy world to get her out of her ennui, and she is fascinated (if afraid of) the idea of becoming a prostitute. Even normal bourgeois pleasures such as buying a new coat do not satisfy her.

Masochistic All of Séverine's fantasies involve pain, restraint, or humiliation, and often at the hands of her husband. When she finally gives into her first john, Adolphe, Séverine lets herself be penetrated only after Anaïs and Adolphe rough her up first. When the neighbor Pallas discovers blood on the sheets after her encounter with the Korean john, the implication is that Séverine enjoyed being stung by the gentleman's mysterious insect in the box.

Icy Along with her frigidity in her marriage, Séverine does not exude warmth or affection. She rarely smiles or laughs. Although Séverine sometimes appears like a frightened bird, she keeps her composure in each sexual encounter. She maintains a statuesque stoicism that attracts the johns to her, and this steely and classy demeanor is likely why the widower chooses her to play the corpse in his mansion.

PIERRE

Pierre is a young and handsome doctor. By all accounts, he is a faithful and supportive husband to Séverine. He is sympathetic to his wife's frigidity and respects her wishes. In addition, he is hard-working and dedicated to all aspects of his profession, and it is implied that he would have climbed the ladder quickly had it not been Marcel's attack. There are many moments when Pierre takes his work home and cuts the vacations short in order to get back to the hospital. Pierre also has a strong paternal instinct and hopes that Séverine will be pregnant soon.

Kind Pierre seems to dedicate himself fully to his work and enjoys helping people. He tells Séverine that he is longing to have children. He enjoys taking care of Séverine and always asks how she is feeling. Even when Séverine rejects him sexually, he shows understanding and does not press the issue.

Affable Along with being a good employee and husband, Pierre gets along with everyone. He arranges trips and dinners with his friends and colleagues. When Henri behaves inappropriately at the ski lodge, Pierre chooses to laugh at his friend's odd sense of humor rather than take offense.

HENRI

As Pierre's lascivious friend, Henri provides a sort of foil for the virtuous doctor. He openly engages in vices and does not apologize for his wealth or status. Renée jokes that Henri is idle and therefore has the luxury of indulging his vices. While this assessment is born out through his actions, Henri also maintains an honor code in that he does not sabotage Séverine and Pierre's marriage. Although he pursues Séverine openly, he does not push the issue when he runs into Belle de Jour at the brothel. He also decides to tell Pierre about Séverine's prostitution.

Lustful While Henri's vices are not limited to sex, his primary motivations throughout the film are related either to sexual gratification or seducing Séverine. He propositions Séverine twice, and he returns to Madame Anaïs's brothel as a former regular.

Honest Henri never lies or tries to hide his proclivities. He lacks tact and discretion, as exemplified by his attempts to seduce Séverine in front of their respective spouses, but he remains very open about his intentions. Henri also admits that he is jealous of Pierre. When he realizes that Séverine works at the brothel, he promises not to reveal her secret, and he keeps his promise until Pierre is in stable condition.

MADAME ANAIS

Madame Anaïs is a beautiful and graceful businesswoman who runs a brothel out of her apartment. She is not much older than the prostitutes she employs, which suggests that she knows how to build a thriving

(if small) underground operation. Anaïs is very beguiling and gentle with Séverine and with her customers. She does not get ruffled or angry, but rather is adept at smoothing things over. She is good at her work, as she maintains several regulars over many years.

Coaxing Madame Anaïs employs a variety of tactics to recruit, assuage, and retain Séverine as her “new girl.” When Séverine is nervous and attempts to leave, Anaïs tries to calm her down with brandied cherries, cigarettes, kind words, empathy, and gentle physical touch. The madame explains the tricks of the trade and assures her that it is ok to need a job. There is even a curious moment when Anaïs asks Séverine to kiss her gently.

Ambitious Although Madame Anaïs is likely more benevolent and generous than the average pimp, she also realizes that she is running a business and must keep the customers happy. In particular, she does whatever is necessary to please her regulars, even when they pose a danger to her girls. When Belle de Jour becomes the most popular prostitute, she uses that hook to build the business. Later, she is reluctant to let Séverine quit.

MARCEL

Marcel is an attractive (if threatening) thief who works for the Spanish drug lord Hippolyte and ends up dead in the streets of Paris. As a young hothead, Marcel becomes violent quickly and often brags about his abilities. Because of his talent as a criminal, he ingratiates himself with Hippolyte, who thinks of him as a son. Due to his charm and his abilities as a lover, Marcel also wins over Séverine’s affection. His violent nature manifests itself in part through his desire to control Belle de Jour.

Violent From the very first scene in which Marcel appears (in the mall atrium), the viewer knows immediately that Marcel is a violent criminal. He knocks the man unconscious in the elevator in order to steal his bag. Later, he threatens and whips Séverine, then destroys the bedroom in the brothel. He even threatens his associates with his knife and Hippolyte with his gun. Marcel is also willing to kill the policemen who pursue him after he shoots Pierre.

Obsessive Although Marcel plays it cool during his first encounter with Séverine, he becomes increasingly obsessed with “owning” her. He calls the brothel constantly and demands that Belle de Jour spend the night with him. Later, he stalks Séverine and tries to kill her husband in order to get rid of “the obstacle.”

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class As with many of Buñuel’s films, *Belle de Jour* satirizes the bourgeoisie. Pierre and Séverine appear to be the perfect couple: they are young, beautiful, successful, well-off, respected, and likely to be fertile and good parents. Séverine’s ennui derives from boredom and her masochistic tendencies, and her foray into prostitution provides a break from her bourgeois coma. Ironically, Séverine’s “classy” demeanor (buttressed by designer clothes) makes her the most popular whore in Madame Anaïs’s brothel. Unlike the prostitute Mathilde, who must turn tricks to survive financially and support her disabled boyfriend, Séverine has the privilege of “slumming it,” then leaving when she is slated. When Séverine first appears at Madame Anaïs’s apartment, the madame tries to assuage her anxiety by saying that everyone needs money “now and again.” The implication is that Anaïs herself is only one step above working class and must keep her regulars happy. Séverine, conversely, expects to hold onto to the comfort and protection of her class, but she learns by the end of the film that she cannot have it both ways. This portrayal of the bourgeois as both repressed and selfish appears in many of Buñuel’s French films, as well as in one of his best Mexican efforts, *The Exterminating Angel*. In both *Belle de Jour* and *Angel*, the bourgeois are “punished” for their excesses.

Illustrative Moment: Séverine's First Time in the Designer Dress Anaïs goes to open the door for the man outside, who she explains to Séverine is their most loyal customer—a candy executive named Adolphe. Séverine grabs her purse and coat and starts to move to the door, but Anaïs intercepts her. Séverine is presented to the john with the other prostitutes, who are named Charlotte and Mathilde. Charlotte sits on Adolphe's lap while he gazes at Séverine. The john compliments Belle de Jour on her classy demeanor and posh dress, and everyone drinks champagne in honor of Belles's premiere. Adolphe gives Charlotte a present that looks like a candy container, but when she opens it, snakes pop out. Everyone laughs except Séverine, and Adolphe approaches her and asks why she is so moody. When he unzips her dress and throws Séverine on the bed, she jumps up and runs out of the room. Although Séverine (now Belle de Jour) is presented with the other two prostitutes, she stands out from Mathilde and Charlotte. All of the characters notice that Belle de Jour is wearing designer clothes that lend her an air of sophistication, although Adolphe remarks that "you can't buy class." Beyond her classy bourgeois appearance, Séverine also has privilege that Mathilde and Charlotte do not enjoy. Because she does not need the money, Séverine can spurn or say no to the johns (which she does on multiple occasions). Even though Séverine misbehaves or is unprofessional, Madame Anaïs indulges her, knowing that her class will continue to attract business.



JUSTICE

Crime From very early in the film, the characters discuss and debate whether prostitution constitutes a real crime. Séverine mentions several times that brothels are illegal, but both her husband and the taxi driver explain that brothels exist and thrive throughout Paris, albeit underground. Madame Anaïs does little to hide her business—the prostitutes work out of an ordinary apartment with johns coming and going all day long. Moreover, Séverine quickly learns that all of the men in her life have visited brothels. Even her upright husband Pierre admits that he has felt the shame of spending a half hour with a prostitute, and Henri openly brags about being a regular. Prostitution seems to be a crime in name only. The real crimes appear in the last third of the film, when Hippolyte and Marcel wreak havoc not only on the brothel, but on Parisian society as a whole. The implication is that Hippolyte is a Spanish drug lord and Marcel a thief and henchman, and their criminal behavior in the city streets also endangers the brothel. Charlotte, in particular, fears these particular johns. Marcel's crimes escalate to the point that he attempts to murder Pierre, and as the doctors explain later, Marcel had killed before.

Illustrative Moment: Completing the Drug Deal Marcel and Hippolyte wait at a table in a café. Two men enter and join them at the table. They show their displeasure about a deal and complain that Hippolyte keeps upping his cut. One of the men calls Marcel a thug, and Marcel brandishes his knife. Hippolyte tells everyone to calm down and tells his associates that he knows they have "the snow." The men hand over a package of cocaine and leave quickly. This scene fleshes out Marcel and Hippolyte's sinister characters. The viewer already knows that they are thieves with violent tendencies, but this drug deal reveals that Hippolyte is involved in an international trafficking network and Marcel acts as his henchman. Like in other Buñuel films, violent crime interrupt moments of bourgeois pleasure and tranquility, thereby underscoring the larger societal problems in France or Europe as a whole.



RELATIONSHIP: SEXUALITY

Desire In many of Buñuel's films, the focus on desire flows from the older male gaze and objectifies the young woman, who in turn, either submits to the old Don Juan or rebels and explores her own sexuality with a young man. In *Belle de Jour*, there are a plethora of men (of varying ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds) who gaze at Séverine and desire her. Whether bourgeois wife or prostitute, Séverine is objectified and fetishized through the male gaze. As film critic Michael Wood explains, Séverine is meant to be "looked at but not understood." Henri lusts after Séverine in part because of her cool beauty and in part because he admires Pierre and by extension, the wife that he "possesses." As with many

Buñuelian husbands and boyfriends, Pierre suffers rejection and unrequited and unfulfilled sexual drive. However, Buñuel is more interested in Séverine's sexuality and desire in this particular film. She attains some agency and subjectivity as the one who decides her own actions and as the subject who fantasizes. The viewer feels Séverine's desires because she sees Séverine's fantasies as well as her first-hand experiences with the johns. In addition, Séverine chooses to subvert societal norms when she actually goes through with her prostitution (and even learns to enjoy it).

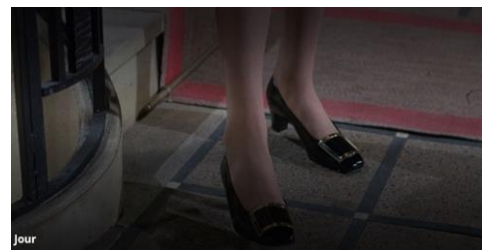
Illustrative Moment: Sex Play with the Korean John and His Insect Anaïs presents Séverine to a portly Korean gentleman who speaks very little French. Séverine kisses his cheek while he and Anaïs discuss the payment. He pays happily and they go together to one of the rooms. The john shows her a black lacquer box that has some sort of buzzing insect inside. He tells Séverine in broken French not to be afraid and gestures that he wants her to keep her bra on but remove her underwear. The john undresses and flexes his muscles, then he performs a ritual in which he shakes little bells. Séverine continues to caress him and giggles at the performance. Afterwards, Pallas goes into the room to check on Séverine and notices that there are small blood stains on towels and sheets. She tries to comfort Séverine, saying that the john scared her, too.



Séverine sits up and has a smirk on her face. She says slyly, "What do you know, Pallas?" While this scene offers yet another example of Séverine's masochism (being stung or cut, perhaps), it also explores the dual desires of a man looking at Belle de Jour and Séverine as a person in control of her own sexuality. Belle de Jour is presented to the john as an alternative piece of merchandise (after Mathilde says no), and he directs her to take off her panties but leave on her bra. Nonetheless, Séverine enjoys getting into character and enacting an international encounter. Her satisfied smile at the end of the scene indicates that her desire for adventure, pain, humiliation, and attention has been quenched.

Fetishism The fetishes in *Belle de Jour* are more subtle than in other Buñuel films. Nonetheless, Buñuel does employ his trademark close-ups on hands and feet, and these shots often occur right before an erotic moment or explicit sexual encounter. We see close-ups of the hands of the man molesting the young teenager (who is later understood to be a young Séverine) and the priest's hand touching the host (in Séverine's memory of her first communion), and there are several close-ups of Séverine's hands and feet. Séverine's bare back is featured in her first fantasy (where she is whipped) and later when she undresses as the chosen prostitute for the professor (the masochistic john). The professor's masochistic fantasies depend upon specific fetishes related to roll-playing, whips, and being stomped on. The stylish clothes of the bourgeois characters, while serving to visually emphasize their wealth, often acquire more erotic meaning. When Séverine finally agrees to sleep with Adolphe, the other prostitutes and the john comment extensively on the beige designer dress that she is wearing, which is emblematic of her status. Like many of Buñuel's horny male characters, Henri talks about his collection of hunting rifles—a clear phallic fetish. This emphasis on phallic pistols reoccurs in Séverine's period fantasy with the duel between Henri and Pierre. Marcel's cane also becomes fetishized when he uses it to separate Hippolyte and Belle de Jour.

Illustrative Moment: Séverine Climbs the Steps to the Brothel Séverine walks back to the brothel. She walks slowly up the staircase, and the camera closes in on her petite feet in black pumps as she pauses on each stair and even swivels her feet back and forth. When Anaïs opens the door, the madame remarks that she didn't think Séverine would come back. Obviously, this scene is meant to show Séverine's fear and guilt about becoming a prostitute. Once she crosses Madame Anaïs's threshold for the second time, she has crossed the Rubicon. Buñuel uses his trademark foot fetish to heighten the tension. Rather than focus on Catherine Deneuve's stoic face or flashes of emotion, Buñuel stays in a tight close-up of her feet and the carpet on the stairs. Although the black pumps are not particularly sexy or garish, they become metonyms for Séverine's body as a commodity.



Later, when Séverine and Marcel have their second liaison in the brothel, the camera pans to Marcel's red socks with holes and the same pair of modest black pumps on Séverine.

Sadomasochism Séverine's masochist fantasies act as lynchpins that elucidate her relationships with Pierre and Henri, among others. In each of her fantasies, Séverine receives both physical punishment and humiliation from Pierre and at least one other man. While she resists the domination initially, Séverine seems to enjoy getting tied up, whipped, and slapped, and she also leans into whatever humiliation is at hand. When the more violent johns try to dominate her, she also gives into their physical abuse—most notably when Adolphe slaps her to get her to submit to him during her first day on the job. Séverine's masochism is mirrored by the professor's sexual proclivities. Ironically, Séverine lacks sadistic talent and even judges the john for enjoying his humiliation and "sinking so low." The majority of the sadism is imagined and reflects Séverine's illicit desires and boredom before venturing into the world of prostitution. In some ways, her short time as a prostitute constitutes her highest point of masochism. According to film critic Stephen Forcer, Séverine also acts as a sadist in that she is punishing iterations of herself and also enjoys the moments when she has control over the men who desire her.

Illustrative Moment: Severine's Western Masochist Fantasy

Séverine imagines a western scene with cattle roaming the vast plains. The camera cuts to Séverine tied to a post (with her right arm raised at a right angle) and wearing a draped, white gown that is reminiscent of a Roman vestal virgin (also a possible reference to the bull arena scene in the biblical epic *Quo Vadis*). Henri and Pierre sling mud (and possibly cow dung) at Séverine's face and torso while Henri calls her a slut and hurls other insults at her. She moves her head slightly but smiles when the mud hits her cheeks. Beyond the requisite humiliation, this fantasy also suggests that Séverine enjoys being sullied. Her beautiful white dress (an obvious symbol of virtue and perhaps virginity) is ruined by the mud-slinging, and she is enjoying the process. This particular fantasy explains why Séverine enjoys her time as a prostitute—she wants to break free of bourgeois purity and experience an alternate life as a slut.



Alternative / Taboo Sexualities

As in most of Buñuel's films, the main characters experiment with taboo or alternative forms of sexuality. Often, the sexual proclivities of the characters (in particular, sadomasochism, obsession, and fetishism) point to deeper psychological issues or conditions. On the other hand, Buñuel also implies that alternative sexualities are normal, healthy, and an effective modality for subverting oppressive societal norms. When Pierre suggests that Henri get therapy early in the film, Renée asserts that he does not have any issues beyond being "rich and idle." In the case of Séverine, her psyche is somewhat of a mystery. Both her fantasies and prostitution could merely be antidotes to ennui and her desire to do something outside of her duties as a housewife. However, her duplicity and guilt suggest that she is motivated by latent psychological issues. There are two flashbacks to Séverine's childhood that imply that she may have been molested, and this early trauma inspired both her frigidity with Pierre and her masochistic fantasies. Séverine's distaste, then craving, for sex also mimics a pattern in many nineteenth-century European novels, where the female protagonist suffers from hysteria (in which she swings between asexuality and extreme erotic desire). The portrayal of the tightly-wound governess or wife in Gothic novels of the early nineteenth-century, in particular, are often cited as inspirations for Buñuel's characters and *mise en scene*—not just in *Belle de Jour*, but in several of his films. Séverine herself tells Henri that she is "lost," but it is possible that the opposite is true—that is, she has finally found her true sense of self as a prostitute.

Illustrative Moment: Rejecting the Host The camera cuts to the brothel door with the address plate. Séverine approaches slowly, and there is an extended following shot of her walking in the streets. She has second thoughts and walks to a nearby park. She sits on a park bench for a few seconds, then returns to the brothel door. As she walks up the stairs to the apartment, the camera cuts to a flashback of a priest giving Séverine her first communion. The



camera closes in on the priest's hands as he retrieves the wafer from the goblet, then cuts to Séverine's young face refusing to open her mouth. The camera cuts back abruptly to the adult Séverine at the top of the stairs. This flashback of Séverine's first communion represents a rejection of mandates: she is rejecting the ritual, the authority of the priest, and her submission (either religious or sexual). The fact that this flashback occurs just as Séverine is approaching the brothel indicates that the protagonist is drawn to prostitution because of childhood trauma.

QUEST

Adventure / Imagination Séverine hungers for something beyond her humdrum, bourgeois life. Her foray into prostitution could be interpreted as rebellion, exploration, or reenacting (or exorcising) trauma. Yet, even before she goes to Madame Anaïs's brothel, Séverine imagines another world outside of the house. Her masochistic fantasies take place in the forest or on the plains, in particular. The interior spaces of "real life" are equated with entrapment and suffocation, whereas the outdoors represent freedom, rebellion, and taboo sexuality. Séverine imagines herself as a different person even when she is physically inside. Film critic Jimmy Hay points to the moments when Séverine breaks glass containers or bleeds, both metaphors for shattering societal norms, losing virginity, or ejaculation. Several critics also describe Séverine's fantasies and brothel adventures as allusions to fairy tale worlds: she crosses over into an alternate, psychedelic universe like Alice in Wonderland or Dorothy, she has to leave at the stroke of 5:00 like Cinderella, and she runs into the woods where predators await her like Little Red Riding Hood or Snow White. I would also add that the scene with the necrophiliac Duke frames Séverine as a Sleeping Beauty. In addition, Catherine Deneuve's blonde hair and ivory skin is reminiscent of a Disney princess. The ending of the film also suggests that Séverine is creating a happy ending for herself through her imagination: either she fantasizes that Pierre is back to his old self (and their marriage is still intact), or the entire sequence of her foray into prostitution was all a dream.

Illustrative Moment: Duel Fantasy The camera cuts to yet another shot of the carriage that pulls up to a clearing in a lush forest. A group of well-heeled men in long period jackets assemble in the clearing. Pierre approaches a table with weapons and there is a prolonged close-up of him loading a pistol. Pierre and Henri stand back-to-back, count out, and turn around. There is a close-up of both men shooting. Pierre, supposedly the victor, walks over to



Séverine, who is wearing a red dress and is tied to a tree. Pierre smears a drop of blood that streaked down her left temple, and he kisses her passionately. As with many of Séverine's fantasies, she is wearing a scarlet dress, is tied up, and is outside. In this particular fantasy, however, Séverine is not being humiliated, but rather has the excitement of watching two men fight over her. The men's period costumes and pistols lend an air of romanticism to this fantasy, as if she is imagining herself to be a nineteenth-century damsel in distress.

Curiosity Séverine longs to break out of her bourgeois ennui, but her choice of prostitution rather than some other form of sexual or social rebellion is largely due to her curiosity. Once she learns that Renée's friend Henriette works in a brothel, the possibility of this outlet becomes more enticing to her. Rather than investigate on her own, Séverine asks the men in her life to describe the brothel and the prostitutes inside. Her curiosity drives her to cross over into another world, like Alice in Wonderland. Séverine likely also wishes to try out a version of her masochistic fantasies with strangers; she wonders whether she can quench her desire for humiliation and satisfaction through this taboo profession. Despite the film's focus on Séverine's psyche and desires, several of the other characters are also driven by curiosity. Madame Anaïs and the other prostitutes wonder about Séverine's background and motivations, but she refuses to give them even basic information such as her name and address. Many of the johns wish to know more about the new girl, even though her mysterious air is what attracts them to her. Marcel's curiosity turns into obsession as he wants to possess Séverine and get rid of the other man in her life.



Illustrative Moment: Repulsed Yet Enticed at the Tennis Club Séverine has just finished a tennis match at a swanky club, and when she goes into the lobby, she sees Henri. He greets her, and Séverine asks if he has visited brothels. Henri admits his tastes immediately and says that brothels have a special character—especially since the prostitutes are almost like slaves. He also mentions one specific brothel run by the madame name Anaïs. Henri leans in and tries to kiss Séverine. She pulls away, offended. Henri suggests a tryst without Pierre, and Séverine walks away briskly. Henri calls after her, giving her the address of the brothel. Even though Séverine is offended by Henri’s advances, she is the one who broaches the subject of illicit sex. She intuitively knows that Henri will answer honestly about his knowledge of the underground. He, in turns, intuits that she wishes to break free from her traditional marriage and stokes her curiosity further by giving her the address and name of the brothel.

APPEARANCE

Deception / Secrets From the very first scene of the film, the viewer understands that Séverine holds secrets from her husband—specifically, her fantasies and the true reasons that she does not want to have sex with him. Once she officially becomes one of Madame Anaïs’s girls, she leads a double life and believes that she can keep her world as a housewife separate from her adventures as a prostitute. Séverine naively believes that if she leaves the brothel at 5:00 “without fail,” her marriage will stay intact and untouched. Of course, Marcel’s violent obsession with her destroys this mirage. Conversely, the men in Séverine’s life do not hide their desires or fantasies: Henri admits and even brags about his vices, and he comes on to Séverine in front of Pierre and Renée. Likewise, the brothel regulars do not seem the least bit worried about discretion, nor do they feel ashamed about soliciting sex. Adolphe even reports on the whores he has met during his business travels, and the Korean john is a member of the “geisha club.”

Illustrative Moment: Séverine Plays Sick After her first customer, Séverine scurries out of the brothel and runs home. She scrubs herself thoroughly in the shower and burns her bra, panty hose, and panties in the fireplace hearth. When she hears that Pierre is home, she runs to the bedroom and hops into bed. Pierre approaches and asks if she is sick. She replies that she had a headache but feels better after a warm bath. Pierre kisses her gently and says that he will cancel the dinner date with the Févrets. This scene after Séverine’s first job establishes her intention to lead a double life. She literally burns the evidence, and she thinks that if she cleans herself, her relationship with her husband will remain virtuous. It is in this moment that Séverine separates her life into sections: “two different things.”



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the possible symbolism of the carriage and forest or country settings?
2. How does Buñuel use odd or recurring sounds? Some examples include bells, cats meowing, and the chimes of the clock.
3. Film and literary critics disagree as to the nature of Séverine’s sexuality and psyche. Do you think she has trauma or other psychological problems?
4. Comment on the symbolism of Séverine’s masochistic fantasies. Why is she always tied up?
5. Is there a moralizing message in this film? If so, what is it?
6. What is the symbolism of animals and insects in this particular film? What is the meaning of the cattle in the western fantasy?
7. Unlike earlier Buñuel films, nearly all of the actors and characters in *Belle de Jour* are young, straight, thin, Caucasian, middle or upper class, do not have physical disabilities, and are extremely attractive. What is the effect of this “hot” casting?
8. How do you interpret the final scene of the film? Here are a few different critical interpretations: a) Séverine fantasizes that she and Pierre can go back to where they were before, b) Pierre is the one having the fantasy of going back to a happier past; c) Pierre has died in the chair but Séverine does not want to acknowledge it; d) the last scene of the happy couple is reality and the entire film before that moment was Séverine’s crazy dream.