

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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MEXICAN BUS RIDE / *Subida al cielo* (1952)

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 the *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*. During his long exile in Mexico, Buñuel wrote and directed a handful of commercial films, including the featured comedy of this essay, *Mexican Bus Ride* (1952). The middle period of Buñuel's career was also characterized by three satirical dramas loosely based on nineteenth-century Spanish novels: *Nazarín* (1959), *Viridiana* (1961), and *Tristana* (1970). In the 1970s, Buñuel returned to his hyper-erotic and surreal style in such films as *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977).

Film *Mexican Bus Ride* (1952) is a black-and-white comedy set in the Mexican state of Guerrero in the 1950s. The plot involves a family dispute over inheritance and the misadventures of the travelers on the bus as they make their way up the hill to a town called Petatlán. The cast features one of the most popular ingenues of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, Lilia Prado, who starred in three Buñuel films. Buñuel also picked one of his favorite young male actors, Roberto Cobo, to play Juan. Buñuel was nominated (but did not win) an Ariel Award for best film direction. The Ariel Awards are akin to the Academy Awards, but the ceremony is specific to Mexican films.

Background *Mexican Bus Ride* was largely shot on location in the Mexican state of Guerrero. Like the comedy *Illusion Travels by Streetcar* (1954), *Mexican Bus Ride* explores the sociocultural importance of transportation in Mexico's post-revolutionary period. The premise of working-class characters on a literal and figurative journey presaged several of Buñuel's comical or satirical films throughout his career, including the ill-fated pilgrimages in *Nazarín* (1959) and *The Milky Way* (1969), as well as the wandering dinner guests in *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972). In addition, Buñuel infused the road trip realism with several surrealist dream sequences throughout the film. This juxtaposition was also prevalent in many of the director's later films.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

<i>Oliverio</i>	recently married son of Ester
<i>Ester</i>	dying matriarch
<i>Albina</i>	Oliverio's new wife
<i>Raquel</i>	temptress on the bus
<i>Juan</i>	Oliverio's youngest brother
<i>Felipe</i>	Oliverio's oldest brother
<i>Chuchito</i>	Oliverio's toddler nephew
<i>Jacinta</i>	Oliverio's sister who died in childbirth
<i>Silvestre</i>	bus driver
<i>Feliza</i>	passenger who goes into labor
<i>Don Nemesio</i>	rich landowner
<i>Don Eladio</i>	congressman in the middle of an election
<i>Linda</i>	grandma who acts as midwife
<i>El Cojo</i>	passenger with the wooden peg/ broken leg

SYNOPSIS

Oliverio, Juan, and Felipe are three coconut farmers who live and work on their mother's plantation in a remote island in the Pacific Ocean (in the Mexican state of Guerrero). Oliverio decides to get married despite his mother's worsening condition. Before he and Albina can go on their honeymoon, Felipe, the eldest brother, alerts them that their mother is on the brink of death. Oliverio realizes that his brothers are jockeying for land and inheritance, but Ester, his mother, tells Oliverio that she wants to give the house to her young grandson, Chuchito. She asks Oliverio to travel to Petatlán in order to secure her will and testament. Oliverio worries about leaving his new wife and dying mother for a long journey, but he agrees to take the bus to Petatlán.

Oliverio boards the bus with a colorful menagerie of fellow passengers: Feliza, a pregnant woman in her last trimester, Don Nicasio, a wealthy landowner, Don Eladio, a regional congressman, El Cojo, a farmer with a wooden leg, Linda, a grandma traveling with two young kids, and Raquel, a seductive ex-girlfriend who keeps coming on to Oliverio during the trip. While some of the journey involves the passengers chatting and flirting with one another, the bus ride quickly goes astray due to a series of mechanical and logistical problems. The bus blows a tire and gets stuck in the mud twice. In addition, personal celebrations and tragedies also interrupt the journey to Petatlán: Feliza going into labor, the passengers attend a birthday party, and there is an unexpected death of a young girl.

After a series of misadventures, Oliverio drives the bus the last stretch into Petatlán with Raquel on board. When there is a wild rainstorm, the two end up having passionate sex on the bus. Oliverio makes it to the lawyer's office and retrieves documents that will secure his mother's will legally—as long as she presses her fingerprints in ink on each page. He rushes back down the hill to San Jeronimito, only to discover that his mother just passed. Oliverio presses his dead mother's fingerprints on the document.

Later, at the wake, the other brothers present Oliverio with their own will—which was not signed. Oliverio evades the confrontation by walking out on the beach with Albina. He sees his nephew Chuchito sleeping in a hammock, and he vows that he will assert his mother's will so that his nephew can study and have a better future.

SCENES

The “Humble” Village of San Jeronimito The camera pans across a village of palm trees, small houses, and images of men with coconuts. A male narrator describes the humble village of San Jeronimito, which lies on the coastal side of the Mexican state of Guerrero. The narrator lists a few of the town's main industries, including coconut plantations. He goes on to report that many of the farmers are relatively rich landowners; as a result, the coastal farmers regularly brag that a coconut tree yields as much as a milk cow. The narrator also describes the sociocultural traditions of the village, which include a newlywed couple sailing to an island in the Pacific for their honeymoon. The journey seals the vow of marriage, as long as the couple's mothers give their blessings.



Preparing for the Wedding We see a bus pulling up to a humble home. Several senior visitors and two children deboard, all of whom are carefully carrying supplies for an upcoming wedding. The elderly woman gingerly carries a wedding dress, and the two children lift up the train to keep it from dragging. As they walk together, the old woman shouts in anticipation of the upcoming nuptials: “Long Live the Newlyweds!”



Wedding Procession and Matriarch Ritual The bride and groom walk towards the bride's mother's house. A group of cheerful neighbors follow, and the two children continue to hold the bride's train. When the couple enter, the bride's mother, Doña Clara, paces in front of them and declares that they are too young to get married. The camera cuts to the friends waiting outside, who all yell: "Forgive them, Doña Clara!" Clara continues to perform her role of the angry mother-in-law for another minute, but quickly gives in and embraces her daughter. The groom vows to take care of Albina (his new bride), and the couple go out to greet the wedding guests.



The Honeymoon Begins The bride and groom proceed to the beach and get on a small boat decorated with arches and white flowers. The neighbors see them off and cheer as they set out on the ocean. On the way, the newlyweds talk about their future together. Albina expresses her happiness that they will visit Oliverio's mother in Portales, then go on to enjoy a deserted island. She also asks her husband if they will inherit the family's big house.



Bad News About Mother Another boat approaches, and Oliverio tells Albina that his brother must have bad news. Felipe, Oliverio's brother, shouts that their mother's condition has worsened and that the couple should have postponed the wedding. Oliverio retorts that their mom wanted them to get married today. The camera cuts to the interior of Felipe's boat, where the brothers continue sniping at each other while Felipe drives to the island. Oliverio insists that they do not discuss the inheritance and let their mother make her decision.



Albina remains in the honeymoon boat and looks at the brothers worriedly.

Juan Tries to Convince Mother There is an interior shot of the house at Portales, where Juan, Felipe and Oliverio's younger brother, is looking after the mother on her deathbed. Juan is also babysitting a small boy named Chuchito, who takes advantage of the chaos to steal a coke from the fridge. Juan keeps throwing out Chuchito so that he can discuss the inheritance with his mother. He suggests that she give him the house, Felipe the plantation, Oliverio the boats and the appliances, and a small plot of land for Chuchito. Ester replies that she knows what he is up to. Juan reminds her that he would like to move to the city with the money he gets from his inheritance.



Ester's Dying Request Oliverio and Albina arrive, and Ester asks the other siblings and Albina to leave her alone with Oliverio. She apologizes for interrupting Oliverio's wedding. Then, she tells Oliverio to give the house to Chuchito so that he may go to school in the city and have a profession. She also reminds Oliverio that it is his responsibility to care for his nephew once she has passed. Oliverio consents to her decision, but advises her to get it all in writing. Ester asks him to fetch the local deputy to draw up a will.



Mourning and Lust in the Bar Oliverio walks to the bar, where his brothers and Don Esteban, a local official are getting drunk. Juan thinks that Ester is on the verge of dying, whereas Felipe thinks that she might live a few more months. Felipe tells Juan not to be a vulture. Raquel, a sexy local, comes in and declares that she has been stood up. One of the men quips that she is never stood up for long here. When Oliverio enters, Raquel flirts with him, but he heads straight to Don Esteban. Oliverio asks Esteban to visit his mother over his brothers' protests and accusation. Esteban yields to Felipe's will as the eldest son, so Oliverio leaves empty-handed.



A New Plan and a New Will Oliverio returns home and reports back to Ester. The matriarch asks him to fetch the family lawyer in Petatlán, who is named Figueroa. Oliverio suggests getting a lawyer from Acapulco, which will be closer and faster. Ester replies that it will be more official if Figueroa witnesses her will and testament in person, but she makes Oliverio promise that he will not tell his brothers about the plan. As Ester falls asleep, Albina asks her husband if she can accompany him to Petatlán. He asks her to say and look after mother, and she agrees reluctantly.



Boarding the Bus Several townspeople throw their suitcases and supplies on top of the bus. Raquel hands the driver a large mirror and reminds him that it is bad luck if it breaks. The driver rough-houses with the kids outside. Feliza, a very pregnant woman, approaches to get on the bus. She explains to Oliverio and the driver that she needs to see the doctor in Petatlán; she remarks that she is overly cautious after what happened to Jacinta when she went into labor. Oliverio vows to protect her on the journey. Several other passengers board, including a local congressman and the rich Don Nemesio, who complains to several passengers that his family lost their land during the Revolution.



Immediate Flat Tire The journey gets off to a rough start when the front right tire goes flat within a few seconds. Oliverio gets out to help the driver change the tire, and the camera fades to a close-up of the spinning spare. The camera then takes the driver's perspective and frames a country road penetrating a jungle. A stray dog trots towards the bus but passes under it safely.



Complaining Passengers The congressman tells the worker next to him of his plans for the future and offers to help him when "things improve." The worker asks if he will still be a judge, and the congressman replies yes—especially since he is friends with both the governor and the president. Raquel chats with the driver and seductively steals his cigarette. Then, she tries to flirt with Oliverio by letting him put out the flame. Oliverio becomes increasingly irritated and says that if he were the driver, they would be moving much faster. Raquel retorts that Oliverio would crash the bush given that he could never handle "curves." The camera cuts back to the driver's perspective as he the bus takes several hard turns in a row, and the viewer sees the dense palm leaves next to the windshield.



Fog and Other Challenges Raquel keeps chatting up the men on the bus while the other passengers get nervous. Everyone notices that the fog is getting thicker. Don Eladio, the passenger behind the driver, yells at him to watch out for a rock. The others remind him that too many cooks in the kitchen ruins the soup. Feliza clings to Oliverio as she becomes more afraid and nauseated, but the kids on board sleep through the rough ride. Don Eladio suggests that they stop until the fog has passed, but Oliverio doesn't want to lose time. Feliza moans, and she admits to Oliverio that she might actually be in labor. Another vehicle approaches in the fog, and the couple inside worries about driving in these conditions. The two vehicles stop face to face, as there is not enough room for either of them to pass.



Feliza Goes into Labor Some of the men get off the bus to ask the other driver to back up. The driver explains that the reverse is broken and his car probably can't even be towed. The men try to push the car back up the hill with no success. Meanwhile, Linda realizes that Feliza is in full labor and will have the baby right there. She sends out the men and the children and asks the other women to come help. Together, they prepare for a birth. The men wait outside, perplexed, until the driver whispers to the others that Feliza is having her baby. The men react astounded and concerned.



It's a Boy! One of the women runs out to the couple from the car and tells them that the baby was born. Oliverio pumps water from the hood of the car to give to Feliza while Raquel makes flirtatious comments. When he leaves, Don Eladio asks Raquel why she is so evasive with his advances. The grandma descends from the bus with the baby wrapped in a Mexican blanket and announces that it is a boy. Everyone celebrates the birth of a healthy baby. The men gingerly carry Feliza to the couple's car and send her back home. One of the passengers offers to be the baby's godfather before the car takes off.



New Passengers and New Squabbles Everyone hurriedly jumps back on the bus and the driver is relieved that the weather has cleared. Oliverio expresses concern over the delay. An elderly couple waves down the bus, and Silvestre pulls over. The couple gets on with two sheep, much to the other passengers' dismay. The kids start fighting and trip over El Cojo's wooden leg. Silvestre takes the melee in stride and keeps driving.



Stranded in the River Silvestre tries to drive the car through a shallow river but the wheels get caught in the mud. Everyone gets off as Oliverio dislodges the back wheels. Raquel continues to flirt with him, but Oliverio insists that he wants to get back to his wife. All of the passengers except for Don Nicasio wade in the water and play around. One woman takes advantage of the opportunity to bathe her son. As they wait for the bus to be dislodged, some of the men remark that there shouldn't be such a backwards bus system in a "modernized" country. They all look at a motorized tractor on the other shore.



The Oxen Do the Trick The camera cuts to Raquel swimming in the stream. She gets out and poses in front of Oliverio. When he doesn't react, she curses that he is "too loyal." Oliverio bends over as if to kiss her, but they are interrupted by the sounds of the men yelling. They look over at the stranded bus being pulled by two huge oxen. The men try to push, but they do not have success. The congressman and Don Eladio bring over the tractor, but it also gets stuck in the mud. As the men continue arguing, the rancher's young daughter guides the oxen with a rope, and the bus starts to float across the river. Everyone re-boards except Don Eladio, whose wooden leg is lodged in the mud. Silvestre frees him, and the rancher and his daughter wave goodbye to the passengers from the river's edge. The rancher guides his oxen along the shore and passes the farmer, who is still struggling to dislodge his tractor.



Dream Sequence Part 1: Imagined Seduction Back on the bus, Raquel offers Oliverio a long, curled strip of an apple, but the little girl on board snatches it. Then, she "feeds" him the whole apple and he takes a bite. Oliverio turns his head forward and stops smiling. The camera fades to a dream sequence where he and Raquel are alone on the bus. She stands up and takes off her clothes, revealing the black swimsuit she was wearing moments ago. The camera cuts backs and forth between shots of the couple kissing at the back of the bus and other passengers handing out brass instruments (and playing them outside). There is also a sequence where Albina, dressing in a long, silky robes, is thrown into the river by another Oliverio avatar. Then, the camera cuts back to Raquel and Oliverio eating the long strip of apple on either end. The back of the buss has turned into a jungle swarmed by palms.



Dream Sequence Part 2: The Unending Apple Peel Raquel uses the remaining apple strip as a leash, and she guides Oliverio forward as if he were a dog. Oliverio's mother, Linda, sits atop a tall column and peels an apple. The peel dangles all the way down the column as if it were Repunzel's hair. Oliverio turns back to Raquel, now outside in her swimsuit, and brushes her hair. They lay down on the jungle floor while a swarm of sheep and goats walk over them. Oliverio spots Albina climbing of the river with her silky garments dripping wet. He runs over to her, and kisses and embraces her. When he releases her, however, it is Raquel who appears in the wet silky robes. Oliverio looks at the river and sees other silky fabric floating there. A figure emerges, and it is also Raquel, who poses seductively and smirks at Oliverio. Oliverio "wakes up" from his vision and realizes he is holding a sheep on his lap. Raquel asks: "Were you thinking of me?"



It's Getting Late As the afternoon wanes, Silvestre makes another stop and picks up a salesman from Madrid. The salesman tries to sell chickens to Silvestre first, then during the trip, he shows pictures of his brood to Don Nicasio. The landowner praises the chickens but says he will not buy anything until his lands are restored to him. Silvestre drives



into the night but starts to fall asleep. He pulls over and announces that they will get into another accident if he doesn't take a nap. Agitated, Oliverio offers to drive the bus so that they stay on schedule. Oliverio continues driving until dawn while the driver sleeps on top of the luggage nestled on top of the bus.

Silvestre's Mother's Birthday When Silvestre wakes up, he climbs down from the top of the bus and announces that they will make another stop before arriving at Petatlán—the house of his mother, who has her birthday party. Silvestre invites the passengers to the party and asks them to sing *Las mañanitas*, the Mexican Happy Birthday, outside of his mother's bedroom. Everyone agrees, and Silvestre “wakes up” his mother and embraces her as the passengers sing from outside.



Fun at the Party At the bustling birthday party, Don Nicasio is enjoying time with old friends. Everyone drinks hot chocolate, and Don Nicasio chides Carmelita, his granddaughter, for her lack of etiquette at the table. Silvestre's mother also nags him about being too much of a glutton as he eats and drinks continuously. Don Eladio makes a long, pedantic speech that has little to do with his political platform. El Cojo heckles Eladio as he drones on, but Eladio insults him back. After the speech, the guests listen to a trio of guitarists who sing a song about the beautiful women of San Marcos. Everyone gets up to dance, and the men whip out their bandanas and use them as props in the dance. Meanwhile, a bus of gringo tourists pulls up, and a group of Good Samaritans and their wives get out. The guide explains in English that he has brought them to a “simple” Mexican ranch where they will see a “typical Mexican fiesta.” One of the Samaritans asks the guide to speak in Spanish so that they can practice.



More Fun at the Party The American tourists enter, and Raquel takes advantage of the bigger audience to sing a verse of the song. Don Eladio also takes a verse. Both sing that the women of San Jeronimito are also beautiful. Nicasio keeps chatting with Carmelita and lecturing her about manners. One of the gringo tourists asks to buy Oliverio's hat, but he refuses. El Cojo offers to sell his hat, instead, but the tourist is not interested. Silvestre gets drunker and drunker. He clings to Linda and bemoans the fact that he is not a better son. Oliverio and Eladio both notice that they are running out of time. Oliverio asks the drunk Silvestre if he can drive to Petatlán, and Silvestre acquiesces. Eladio, realizing that he will miss his rally, chases after the bus. Raquel manages to hop on the moving bus while Eladio calls after them.



The Last Climb to Subida al Cielo Now alone together in the bus, Raquel continues to come on to Oliverio. Oliverio brushes off her advances and tries to concentrate on driving. There is a rainstorm with falling rocks, and Oliverio struggles to keep going. As the rain continues, the tires start to spin in the mud. Raquel ignores the danger and keeps caressing Oliverio's back and kissing his neck. Oliverio stops the bus on the cliff. He threatens Raquel with violence, and she retorts that he can do with her what he wants. Raquel dares him to hit her, then kisses him passionately. The camera pulls back to



show a side shot of the couple kissing through the rain, then an even wider shot of the bus precariously perched on the Subida al Cielo mountain pass.

News of the Candidate Back at the party, Silvestre and the other passengers wonder whether Oliverio made it through the storm. Eladio jokes that between the thunder and Oliverio's "store of dynamite," the bus has probably blown up. Don Nicasio overhears and asks if dynamite is actually allowed on public transportation. Everyone laughs, and Silvestre tells him: "it is just a figure of speech." Eladio gets word that he should attend another event, and he leaves quickly.

Oliverio Finally Makes it to the Legal Office Oliverio drives the bus the last part of the trip the following morning. He and Raquel glance at each other knowingly, and Oliverio asks where he should drop her. The camera cuts to the legal office of Figueroa. The elderly lawyer refuses to take the dangerous journey back, but he suggests an alternative to Oliverio: have his mother press her fingerprints on every page of the will while a reliable relative witnesses the transaction. Figueroa explains that Oliverio should pick a witness who owes his mother money or favors; in this way, he will be obliged to stand up against the other relatives. Oliverio suggests his father-in-law Lucilo, but he worries that his brothers will protest.



Another Will at Home Back at the local bar in San Jeronimito, Juan and Felipe are writing their own will with the help of the local official. The brothers fight over various parts of the inheritance. Juan insists that he get the house, but Felipe protests. They roll the dice, and Juan wins. The official continues drafting the papers. The camera cuts to an interior shot of the house with Chuchito looking at the family chicken. The brothers enter with the newly written will. Juan asks his mother to put her X on the document, but she resists. Albina tries to stall the brothers.



Political Scuffle in Petatlán Oliverio tells Raquel he will start back and asks if she wants anything. She spits out a chunk of apple and retorts: "I already got what I wanted." Oliverio leaves just as Eladio shows up for his rally. As a parade approaches, Eladio and Raquel flirt with each other. Eladio tells Raquel to move out of the way so that he can "gather his flock." A group of townspeople suddenly turn violent and start throwing trash at Eladio. Another leader breaks up the mob and reminds everyone that in a free democracy, political adversaries can debate peaceably. Eladio shakes his opponent's hand and thanks him for his integrity. The parade continues with supporters of both candidates. Eladio tries to compose himself, and Raquel offers to help him clean up.



Return Trip That night, Silvestre starts back with the majority of the passengers from the party. A group of people hails down the bus, and an old man is carrying a coffin. Silvestre descends to find out what happened. The old man reports that one of Silvestre's goddaughters was bit by a viper and died immediately. The bus driver is amazed given that he just saw her at the party. Mournful, everyone helps the family board with the coffin and the other funeral supplies. The bus continues down the mountain from the pass. Oliverio gets out to clear away rocks. Meanwhile, the little girl in the bus comforts the old man and asks to see his granddaughter's face. The old man opens a square door on the lid of the coffin, and the camera closes in on the peaceful face of the dead girl.



Funeral Procession Silvestre drives to a small cathedral, and everyone gets off to attend the funeral. Some of the family members play a dirge while others file into the church behind the coffin. Silvestre joins the procession and offers to let Oliverio take the bus home.



Home at Last Oliverio pulls up to the house and runs inside. Albina embraces him and tells him that his mother just died. Oliverio bends over his mother, kisses her, and crosses her arms. Oliverio looks directly into the camera and has a vision of Raquel with an apple. She spits out a bite, then says: "I got what I wanted." Oliverio asks Albina to keep watch while he presses his mother's fingerprints onto the will. Albina runs back to the house and tells Oliverio that his brothers are approaching.



Oliverio's Declaration Later, at the wake, Juan and Felipe approach Oliverio with a copy of the will they drafted. Oliverio looks at it and notices that there is no signature. The brothers ask him to trust them, and Oliverio asks to talk about it later. He and Albina take a moonlit walk on the beach. Oliverio looks down at Chuchito, who is sleeping peacefully in a hammock. Oliverio vows to assert his mother's will and give the house to Chuchito. He kisses the sleeping boy, then walks arm in arm with Albina towards the ocean.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

OLIVERIO Oliverio is the middle son of Ester and the most reliable and moral person in the family. Throughout the film, he shows loyalty to his mother, his nephew, and his wife—until Raquel finally manages to seduce him after multiple attempts. His determination and morality may win the day despite the sin of adultery.

Determined Oliverio fights to complete the task of getting the will before his mother dies. Whenever there is an obstacle or delay, Oliverio is the one who attempts to solve the problem quickly. He even drives the bus himself in order to make up for lost time. He also fights off the machinations of his brothers and vows to follow through with his mother's wishes.

Loyal Ester picks Oliverio to fetch the will because she trusts that he will put her wishes and the future of Chuchito ahead of his own desires and greed. Oliverio forges ahead knowing that he will not inherit much of anything. He also is determined to be a solid and faithful husband to Albina. Until the fateful rain storm, Oliverio eschews Raquel's advances and keeps his eyes on the prize.

RAQUEL Raquel is not a fully fleshed-out character; she is more of a caricature of a femme fatale. In fact, her language, actions, and movements evoke any number of Old Testament temptresses: Eve, Jezebel, Delilah, or even the devil himself. Despite her one-note character, she is a crucial cog in the trajectory of the story. Like those Old Testament vixens, Raquel is constantly seductive in an overt and vulgar way.

Seductive Raquel is relentless in her seduction of Oliverio to the point that she strips in front of him. In true femme fatale fashion, she makes constant double entendre and tries to incite Oliverio's lust and rage. She also embodies Eve by offering Oliverio bites of her apple on multiple occasions. In the middle of the rainstorm, she finally manages to seduce Oliverio by daring him to hit her. Later, she completely loses interest and goes on to seducing her next victim, Don Eladio.

Vulgar Along with being overtly sexy and actively seductive, Raquel also lacks discretion, tact, and subtlety. On the bus, she is constantly poking and prodding Oliverio and touching him. She also shows

off her body in front of all the passengers. She eats with her mouth open and even spits out chewed up bits of apple.

SILVESTRE Silvestre is the cheerful, middle-aged bus driver. He takes all of the obstacles of the bus trip in stride, which means that he is both flexible and irresponsible in the execution of his duties.

Amiable Silvestre is polite with all of his passengers from different parts of life. He has multiple godchildren and relatives along the route. He also engages with the passengers and shows concern for their own troubles. An example is when he asks Feliza about her pregnancy.

Irresponsible Much to the annoyance of the other passengers, Silvestre declares that he will not drive through the night given that he is falling asleep. He climbs on top of the bus while Oliverio takes his place. Later, he gets drunk at his mother's birthday party.

Flexible Silvestre tries different solutions when there are logistical or mechanical problems—perhaps most notably, he allows the rancher and his daughter to try dislodging the bus with their oxen. He also allows Oliverio to “borrow” the bus in order to complete the return journey.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class As with his other transportation film *Illusion Travels by Streetcar* (1954), Buñuel showcases a wide variety of ethnicities, classes, and professions on the bus. The elder landowner is perhaps the wealthiest passenger, but even he requires transportation to visit his relatives on the top of the hill. In addition, Don Nicasio consistently complains about how he lost his land, which is perhaps referencing land redistribution in the 1930s. Don Eladio and Oliverio likely represent the middle tier, as the farmers often make a good living from the coco trees (as the narrator explains in the beginning). The fact that the brothers squabble over inheritance also suggests that the family is one of the richer ones in Guerrero. Silvestre, while a working-class bus driver, also appears to have a small ranch in his family's name. The poorer Mexicans are the rural workers such as Linda and the man with the wooden leg. The diversity of professions does not necessarily translate into a huge wage gap as it does for the urban working-class characters of Mexico City. Buñuel implies that the rural areas may have a greater equality in some respects—after all, everyone has to take the run-down bus to get to Petatlán.

Illustrative Moment: A Coco Tree Yields More Than a Cow

The camera pans across a village of palm trees, small houses, and images of men with coconuts. A male narrator describes the humble village of San Jeronimito, which lies on the costal side of the Mexican state of Guerrero. The narrator lists a few of the town's main industries, including coconut plantations. He goes on to report that many of the farmers are relatively rich landowners; as a result, the coastal farmers regularly brag that a coconut tree yields as much as a milk cow. This opening narration juxtaposes the “humble,” or poor, characteristics of rural, tropical Mexico with the wealth that the land provides. In this sense, the coconut families seem to exist in two classes: their lifestyle suggests a working-class existence, but they are sitting on considerable wealth.



RELATIONSHIPS

Marriage The film begins with several scenes of Oliverio and Albina's wedding. Buñuel takes the time to focus on each aspect of the wedding, including preparations, decorations, processions, and rituals. Beyond characterizing the particular tropical culture of Guerrero, the emphasis on the wedding establishes Oliverio as the future patriarch, or the pillar of the family. There is also the implication that Albina epitomizes the ideal wife of this period: virginal and naïve, hard-working, loyal, affectionate, and practical. During his fight with Felipe, Oliverio repeats that their mother wanted him to get married despite her failing health. Once Ester dies, the newlyweds will take their place as the leaders of the village. This more expansive meaning of a wedding presages Ester's decision to entrust Oliverio with the will and the

family's future. The societal importance of marriage makes Raquel's advances even more dangerous: adultery threatens to topple the stability that marriage provides.

Illustrative Moment: The Whole Town Roots for the Newlyweds

The bride and groom walk towards the bride's mother's house. A group of cheerful neighbors follow, and the two children continue to hold the bride's train. When the couple enter, the bride's mother, Doña Clara, paces in front of them and declares that they are too young to get married. The camera cuts to the friends waiting outside, who all yell: "Forgive them, Doña Clara!" Clara continues to perform her role of the angry mother-in-law for another minute, but quickly gives in and embraces her daughter. The groom vows to take care of Albina (his new bride), and the couple go out to greet the wedding guests. On the most basic level, the extended wedding sequence allows Buñuel the opportunity to showcase rural traditions and create beautiful shots of the ocean and the wedding procession. However, the rituals establish the importance of a marriage as the foundation for the community. The whole village takes part in the wedding, and everyone has a stake in the success of the marriage, the coconut plantation, and the estate.



Desire As in most Buñuel films, the male protagonist in *Mexican Bus Ride* has to fight his subconscious and conscious urges. Oliverio experiences temptation through his visions on the bus. In these waking dreams, Oliverio lusts after Raquel but also shows concern and affection for his wife. The battle between his Id and Superego is represented by Albina's transformation into Raquel in the midst of Oliverio's vision. Unlike the erotically charged or even predatory male characters in Buñuel's other films, Oliverio puts up a strong defense against temptation. It is only with repeated and forceful attempts at seduction that Oliverio and Raquel have sex. Were it not for the rain storm, Oliverio would have likely resisted Raquel. However, Raquel's comments about not being able to "handle curves" turns out to be a prophecy of his future adultery. When Oliverio sees a vision of Raquel next to his mother's deathbed, the implication is that his night of passion prevented him from returning in time to say goodbye to his mother. Raquel says "I got what I wanted"—an indication that sin was her goal all along. This framing of Raquel as evil temptress bears out when she sets her sights on seducing Don Eladio next.

Illustrative Scene: The Garden of Eden on the Bus The camera fades to a dream sequence where he and Raquel are alone on the bus. She stands up and takes off her clothes, revealing the black swimsuit she was wearing moments ago. There is also a sequence where Albina, dressing in a long, silky robes, is thrown into the river by another Oliverio avatar. Then, the camera cuts back to Raquel and Oliverio eating the long strip of apple on either end. The back of the buss has turned into a jungle swarmed by palms. The first half of Oliverio's vision underscores his sexual attraction to Raquel and his guilt for "throwing out," or betraying, Albina. Ultimately, desire trumps faithfulness, as Oliverio lays down with Raquel in the palms. In order to further underscore this recreation of the Garden of Eden, Buñuel continually repeats the trope of Raquel offering Oliverio a bite of her apple.



Motherhood There are multiple mothers and maternal figures in the film, and most have an intense influence on their sons' actions and behaviors. There are the domineering matriarchs, which include Silvestre's mother, Linda on the bus, and Ester, as well as the new mothers Jacinta (who dies in childbirth) and Feliza (who survives the perilous labor on the bus). Albina also acts as Chuchito's stand-in mother throughout the film, which further indicates that Oliverio has picked a good bride. As the central matriarch, Ester sets the whole plot in motion. The sons attempt to gain her good will, but it is Oliverio who has the closest relationship to her. Buñuel emphasizes the deep connection between Ester and Oliverio in the protagonist's surrealist visions. At one key moment in his dream, Oliverio sees his mother atop a column, where she is peeling an apple. The peel dangles all the way down to Oliverio, thereby evoking an umbilical cord. This imagery suggests that the mother-son connection remains a key part of Oliverio's subconscious.

Illustrative Moment: Linda Acts as Midwife Linda realizes that Feliza is in full labor and will have the baby right there. She sends out the men and the children and asks the other women to come help. Together, they prepare for a birth. The men wait outside, perplexed, until the driver whispers to the others that Feliza is having her baby. One of the women runs out to the couple from the car and tells them that the baby was born. Linda descends from the bus with the baby wrapped in a Mexican blanket and announces that it is a boy. Everyone celebrates the birth of a healthy baby. This scene emphasizes the generational solidarity among mothers and the power of the matriarch. Linda, who is a mother herself, shepherds Feliza through her own labor ordeal. With the help of the female passengers, Feliza leaves with her life and a healthy baby boy. Yet another powerful mother-son bond is created.



LIFE STAGES

Birth and Death From the very first scenes of the film, Buñuel juxtaposes the young and the old, weddings and funerals, and birth and death. The young newlyweds are flanked with young children carrying the bride's veil; an hour or so later, the couple are standing over Ester's deathbed. Part of Ester's concern for her grandson is that his mother died in childbirth. Chuchito's position as an innocent orphan acts as a dual metonym for both birth and death. Later, on the bus, Feliza survives her labor and is gifted with a healthy baby boy. This joy finds its foil at the end of the film, when Silvestre's goddaughter dies suddenly and too early. Whereas the opening scenes of the film are rituals related to weddings and marriage, the final scenes underscore the rituals of mourning. Both life stages are marked with long processions in the film, complete with picturesque shots of veils, flowers, candles, coffins, and altars. The distinctly Mexican attitude towards birth and death is seen throughout the film, and perhaps most overtly in the celebration of Silvestre's mother's birthday. The passengers sing to her at the break of day, as is the Mexican custom, and the party celebrates her birth in the context of her advancing age (and Silvestre's knowledge that she, too, may be close to death). Along with tracing the cycle of life, Buñuel also emphasizes the bookends of life—the importance of the take-off as well as the final destination.

Illustrative Moment: Feliza Recognizes the Danger of Her Pregnancy Feliza, a very pregnant woman, approaches to get on the bus. She explains to Oliverio and the driver that she needs to see the doctor in Petatlán; she remarks that she is overly cautious after what happened to Jacinta—that is, death from labor complications. Oliverio vows to protect her on the journey. In this moment before the bus ride begins, Buñuel overtly juxtaposes life and death. Feliza's labor may result in new life or tragic death, and all of the San Jeronimito residents are painfully aware of the danger. Jacinta's fate hangs over the whole town and incites the other residents to help Feliza when she goes into labor on the bus.



CHANGE

Modernity vs Tradition A big part of Mexico's political and social transience at midcentury is the effort to modernize: to renovate, to create efficiency, and to stimulate a bustling capitalist economy. The film underscores the move toward capitalism and modernity most directly with Juan's desire to move to the city, Ester's wish that Chuchito study in the city, the lack of professionals in Guerrero, the influx of gringo tourists, and most overtly, the farmer's use of the brand-new tractor. Unlike in Buñuel's urban settings, tradition largely triumphs over modernization. The villagers cherish their regional traditions and seem to thrive in their respective professions. They also take comfort in their ceremonies and customs, from the funeral processions to the handkerchief dance at the birthday party. On the other hand, the lack of modernity (which is epitomized by the bus) leads to Oliverio's inability to accomplish the central task of the film. The mechanical problems derive from a lack of infrastructure and renovation, and the personal crises of the characters might have been avoided if the villagers had access to doctors and lawyers.

Illustrative Moment: Oxen Trump Tractor Silvestre tries to drive the car through a shallow river but the wheels get caught in the mud. Everyone gets off as Oliverio tries to dislodge the back wheels. As they wait for the bus to be dislodged, some of the men remark that there shouldn't be such a backwards bus system in a "modernized" country. They all look at a motorized tractor on the other shore. The camera cuts to the stranded bus being pulled by two huge oxen. Don Eladio brings over the tractor, but it also gets stuck in the mud. As the men continue arguing, the rancher's young daughter guides the oxen with a rope, and the bus starts to float across the river. Everyone re-boards, and the rancher and his daughter wave goodbye to the passengers from the river's edge. The rancher guides his oxen along the shore and passes the farmer, who is still struggling to dislodge his tractor. Although the men believe that the tractor will be their salvation, it is the old way—using beasts of burden—that yields success. Along with pointing to the benefits of traditional practices, Buñuel also uses the opportunity to inject the scene with his trademark bestial imagery and an appreciation for nature in general.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you consider this film a comedy or drama? Why?
2. Is the timing surrounding Ester's death a question of fate, coincidence, or Oliverio's punishment for succumbing to Raquel?
3. Who do you think wins in the fight over the inheritance? Will Oliverio fulfill his mother's wishes?
4. How does Buñuel use bestial imagery and Biblical allusions in this film?
5. Subida al Cielo translates to Ascent to Heaven, which is also the name of the mountain pass that the bus must traverse before arriving in Petatlán. How does Buñuel use this title to play with the concepts of heaven and hell? Are there other references to the afterlife?