'The gaze and the Virgin: Marian dimensions of Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana*'

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Abstract

This essay presents a new interpretation of the surrealist representation of female gender and patriarchy in *Viridiana* (1961) focussed through its semiotic treatment of the Virgin Mary. Examining the reconfiguration of the Christian story, Christ and Mary are revealed as 'ghosted' doubles of Fernando Rey and Silvia Pinal's characters. Analysing the '*The Last Supper*' and suicide sequences with reference to Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, I trace an explicitly cinematic interplay of Marian motherhood and castrating patriarchy organised via the gaze. Conclusions on female gender and motherhood build on that commentary, giving insight into Spanish psychosexual identity in the film. Drawing on Kristeva's '*Stabat Mater*', I argue that the film questions logocentricity paralleling her text's confrontation of the Word of the Father with the eventhood of childbirth. The doubling of Viridiana and Mary gives a surrealist counter-reading to the film's bleak diegetic treatment of the bind of woman in patriarchy.

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Comparing her roles in *Viridiana* (1961) and *El ángel exterminador* [*The Exterminating Angel*] (1962), Robert Miles has argued that Silvia Pinal performs a liminal role translating the 'virgin-whore' cultural stereotype between the cinemas of Spain and Mexico.¹ He notes that Pinal's characters veer between idealised purity and worldly physicality and, as mirror images, they do so in reverse in the narratives.² Concluding with detailed reference to the later, Mexican film, he likens its trope of the invisible border to a hymenal line drawn by Pinal's character. Rather than repeating 'the classic stereotypically Hispanic virgin-whore dichotomy'³, her character is of indeterminate identity and this reinforces the undecidability at the heart of the film.⁴

Miles' analysis of Pinal's (and Fernando Rey's) liminality connected to a reading of Buñuel's peripatetic identity reveals the ambiguity of the director's films. Nevertheless, the conclusions regarding undecidability are closely derived from the comparison between Pinal's characters and the irrational scenario of *El ángel exterminador* with that film comprising the bulk of the analysis. *Viridiana*, on the other hand is formally more conventional than *El ángel exterminador* and within the context of the realist diegesis, the 'virgin-whore' typification of Pinal's

¹ Robert J. Miles, 'Virgin on the Edge: Luis Buñuel's Transnational Trope', *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2006), 169-188.

² 'Virgin on the Edge', p. 181.

³ 'Virgin on the Edge', p. 181.

⁴ In his conclusions, Miles cites Bauman, in turn drawing on Derrida. 'Virgin on the Edge', p. 186-187.

character forms the central dilemma.⁵ In comparison with Leticia, who is enigmatic and one character amongst an ensemble, Viridiana centrally embodies the 'virgin-whore' figure within an explicitly religious context. For this analysis the difference is significant because in *Viridiana*, rather than a playful and self-conscious metaphor for a stereotype, Pinal's character is a seemingly realist portrayal of a novice who moves from the confines of a convent to lose her faith (and chastity) in the outside world. The character of *Viridiana* is not so much a cypher for the 'virgin-whore' cultural stereotype as a realist presentation of a woman who moves from religious observance to a secular world of sexual relations. As I aim show, the character without question connects to the patriarchal stereotype but Buñuel is using her first and – given the religious content - overtly as a symbolic bridge between a flesh-and-blood woman and Mary, mother of Christ. My starting point is that *Viridiana* examines the role of woman in patriarchy with a very deliberate focus on Christian iconography and dogma. The film – albeit subversively – treats that question with an overtly theological interest.

My analysis will focus explicitly on that doubling in the film to show it as the focal point of the director's surrealism within an ostensibly realist frame. As such, my contention is that it works to destabilise both the conventional narrative of the film and what at first appears to be an essentially realist study of Spain's patriarchal Catholicism. In an interview shortly after making *Viridiana*, Buñuel said the film reflected the two major influences that 'left their mark all

⁵ In an interview, Buñuel has discussed how the film has a realist narrative that seems far removed from surrealism. See José de la Colina and Tomás Pérez Turrent, *Objects of Desire: Conversations with Luis Buñuel* (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1992), p. 158.

through [his] life': his Jesuit schooling and his involvement with surrealism.⁶ This study will argue that, despite its realist frame, the film has a thoroughly surrealist dimension explicitly connected to Christian iconography and, in particular, with the figure of Mary.

The analysis will examine the mechanisms of Buñuel's singular, cinematic surrealism. Rather than seeing the surrealist elements as illustrations of character psychology, they need to be understood as a separate discourse or 'world' that stands almost in opposition to the diegesis; a world with a language other to that of patriarchal logic.⁷ My focus will fall on Buñuel's manipulation of Christian imagery and theology, not only with respect to Mary but also to Christ and the Passion. Echoing Miles' conclusions, my reading of Pinal's character in *Viridiana* shows her to embody, on the one hand, inscribed patriarchal, female norms and, on the other, a fissure in the discourse within which the latter are produced. Differently from Miles, who sees Pinal's characters as a site of deconstructive ambivalence, in *Viridiana*, I trace the exploration of a cultural archetype and an immersion in the mythologies of woman and mother in patriarchy.

⁶ Luis Buñuel, 'Out of a Cinema of Credo', *New York Times*, 18 March 18, 1962, sec. 2, pp. 29-30, reprinted in Jon Cowans (ed.), *Modern Spain: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 240-241 (241).

⁷ The former approach has characterised much of the discussion of the surrealist traits of the film. Gwynne Edwards, for example, has called *Viridiana* 'an extremely complex film', affirming its surrealism. He notes that 'Buñuel exposes the inner life, the desires and unconscious urges of his characters [...] by exposing their reactions to certain key-objects'. Arguing that *Viridiana* has a lasting power because 'its symbolic language is deeply ingrained in each of us', the reading of the surrealist objects is confined to a study of characterisation and their properly textual interconnections are underplayed in favour of a universalised psychologisation. Gwynne Edwards, *The Discreet Art of Luis Buñuel: A Reading of His Films* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1982), 164-65.

The approach is semiotic, bringing together visual and linguistic textuality at formal and conceptual levels in the film. By examining the Marian dimensions of pivotal sequences, I argue that Buñuel's visual surrealism is produced through a network of gazes aimed at and initiating from a feminine/Marian perspective. The readings of the male-female scopic language of the 'Last Supper' sequence draw on Georges Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* [*The Story of the Eye*] and Julia Kristeva's essay '*Stabat Mater*'. Bataille's surreal condensation of eye imagery, the gaze and perverse maternity gives insight into Buñuel's cinematic take on Leonardo's painting. Kristeva's essay provides a conduit between the visual surrealism and the film's treatment of Christian, patriarchal authority. Just as Kristeva, proposes a maternal language anterior to the Judeo-Christian Word, the doubled, symbolic mother of Pinal's character is the focus of a surreal semiotics that unsettles the logic of the narrative and the patriarchal contexts to which it points. Before moving into the detail of those analyses, it is necessary to look at the overt and implicit Christian dimensions of the film.

Christian subject matter in *Viridiana*

Viridiana has much overt Christian content, some connected directly with the religious life of the novice and some more incidental. Viridiana arrives at Jaime's house with the instruments of the passion: cross, nails, hammer, sponge and crown of thorns. She kneels in contemplation of these, in an image adapted as publicity for the film and which, according to Buñuel, replicates a painting of the saint he had seen in a Mexico City museum.⁸ A second, overt staging of Christian

⁸ *Objects of Desire*, p. 149. Vicente Sánchez-Biosca has noted that the existence or identity of this painting had never been verified; see *Luis Buñuel. Viridiana:*

dogma is the Angelus prayer led by Pinal's character and celebrated in the grounds of the house with the beggars. The third, overtly Christian sequence is the restaging of Leonardo's *The Last Supper*, in which Jesus and the disciples are substituted for the blind Don Amalio and the beggars. This scene is captured by Enedina who, lifting her skirts, takes a 'photo' of the gathering with 'una máquina que me regalaron mis papás'.

In addition to these overt sequence, Buñuel includes religious elements with meanings that are both explicit and implicit and beyond to realms of surrealist allusion. Apart from Ashley Beaumont's *Shimmy Doll* (195?) in the final sequence, the music is sacred with an emphasis on Mozart's *Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah*. The image of the Cross is repeated in the penknife that Jorge finds in his father's desk; a typically surrealist object combining religion, death and resurrection with psychoanalytic connotations of sexual violence. The skipping rope that Jaime gives to Rita and which he then uses to hang himself has a religious significance. Although not used explicitly as such in the film, ropes or chords form part of the instruments of the Passion, indicating the binding of

Estudio crítico (Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós, 1999), p. 64. However, it appears that the work must have been Baltasar Echave Ibía's, *Beata Viridiana Florentina*, an image and details of which can be found in the on-line archive of Jaime H. Borja Gómez's *Proyecto ARCA: Cultura visual de las américas coloniales*, <http://157.253.60.71:8080/artworks/7765> (accessed 28/4/17). The image is as Buñuel describes in the interview and the archive states that it is held in the collection of the Museo de la ciudad de México. The painting is not signed and an earlier study has attributed it to Echave Ibía's father, Baltasar Echave Orío. See Jacques Terrasa, 'Les citations picturales dans *Viridiana*, de Luis Buñuel', *Cahiers d'études romanes*, vol. 2 (1999), pp. 171-192 (n.p.), <http://etudesromanes.revues.org/3372> (accessed 28/4/17).

Jesus upon his arrest.⁹ Jaime's use of the rope as a noose slung over the tree is one of the elements that double the suicide as a representation of the crucifixion.

The Christian story presented via Mary

When the overtly religious subject matter is viewed together with the symbolic subtext, it becomes clear that alongside the main diegesis, there is a free-form semiotic treatment of elements of the Christian story. The Angelus celebrates the Angel Gabriel's annunciation of the Incarnation, bringing to Mary the news of the virgin birth via the Holy Ghost. The prayer gives account of three stages: the Incarnation, the dwelling of Christ on Earth and salvation through resurrection. The Angelus sequence is pivotal in relation to many layers of meaning in the film. It encapsulates key elements of the Christian story that are repeated in more or less explicit forms elsewhere and it does so via Mary. The recollection of the journey of Christ within the Angelus sets up a theological path paralleling the passage of the novice from the convent to an ambiguous modernity. The Angelus sequence reinforces the identification of Pinal's character with Mary that is developed elsewhere in multiple ways.

Whereas the diegesis traces a linear path for the novice, the Christian story is treated differently. The Angelus sequence is placed between two representations of episodes from the Passion that reverse the order of the gospel narratives as well as logical chronology. The first is the scene of Jaime's suicide

⁹ Buñuel is following a long tradition of the representation of the *Arma Christi* in the Spanish arts. See, for example, the excerpt from Gómez Manrique's *Representación del nacimiento de Nuestro Señor* (1458-68), that details the ropes alongside the Cross, and Crown of Thorns. Louise M. Haywood (ed.), 'Section I: The Iberian Peninsular (including Majorca)', 554-612 (601), in William Tydeman (ed.), *The Medieval European Stage, 500-1550* (Theatre in Europe: A Documentary History) (Cambridge U.P., 2001).

that is staged as a clear encoding of the crucifixion and the second is the tableau vivant recreation of *The Last Supper*. The latter will be discussed after first considering the 'crucifixion' sequence.

As mentioned above, Jaime hangs himself with the skipping rope, a multivalent surrealist object that alludes to the instruments of the Passion. The tree is synonymous with the True Cross in Catholic devotionals on Good Friday when Venantius Fortunatus' 6th century hymn *Pange, Lingua Gloriosi* is chanted. The eighth verse begins with the lines: 'Crux fidelis,/inter omnes,/arbor una nobilis' (Faithful Cross!/Above all other,/one and only noble Tree).¹⁰ Verse Two makes reference to the Tree of crucifixion being formed from the Tree of Life. This refers to the popular medieval tradition in which Adam's skull is buried at Golgotha. The skull contains a seed of the tree from the Garden of Eden that, in turn, produces another that is used to make the Cross. Once crucified, Christ's blood seeps into the Cross – and Tree – via Adam and flows into mankind at its foot.¹¹

¹⁰ Michael Martin (ed.), *Thesaurus Precum Latinarum*, <http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Hymni/PangeF.html> (accessed 16/8/2016).

¹¹ This tradition is central to the Legend of the Rood, the northern European, medieval folk tales derived from the Old Testament. The source of the legend is much older and can be traced back the *The Life of Adam and Eve*, a collection of writings of Jewish origin from before the beginning of the Common Era. For a discussion of this, see Simon Ekehard, 'Four Unpublished Meisterlieder on the Legend of Adam's Death and the Holy Rood', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 75, nos. 1/2 (Jan-April 1976), 209-227 (209). Buñuel may have encountered this myth in his reading of *The Golden Legend*, a collection of accounts of the saints compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, archbishop of Genoa, in around 1260. For a recently published reference to this, see: Mosén Vicente Allanegui, 'An Interview with Luis Buñuel' in Max Aub, *Conversations with Bunuel*, trans. and ed. by Julie Jones (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 2017), 222: 'You were asking if I had found documentation for Simon del desierto. In 1940, in New York, one day when it was raining, I went to 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, to the library, because I had been interested in the idea ever

Viridiana as amalgam of woman and the Virgin forms the bridge between these oblique Christian references. In an earlier scene, Pinal's character peels an apple for Jaime and apologises for piling the ashes on Jaime's bed whilst, sleepwalking. She tells him 'la ceniza quiere decir penitencia y muerte' and although Jaime responds jokingly, these words together with the apple, clearly foreshadow Jaime's suicide, reinforcing its connection to the crucifixion and to Original Sin. The ashes connect to the Easter story and to the themes of death, sin and repentance that saturate the film. Returning to the staging of the suicide, Buñuel further overlays secular elements that stand in for their Christian counterparts. The Inspector of Police and the *Guardia Civil* echo Pilate and the Roman soldiers, and Pinal's character, who looks then hides her face in horror, rehearses the *Stabat Mater*. This sequence forcefully links Pinal's character to maternity and to Mary, building on the accentuated cradling of the wooden cross on her arrival at Jaime's house. Her harbouring of the beggars will later emphasise this association.

Mary as cultural figure and as a window on patriarchy

From the beginning of the film, Pinal's character has an ambiguity that recalls the gathering together of the human and the divine of the Virgin Mary. When she arrives at Don Jaime's estate, he desires her immediately due to the uncanny resemblance to his wife who died on their wedding night before marriage was consummated. But her erotic presence – accentuated from the perspective of the

since Federico Garcia Lorca brought me *The Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, a Dominican from the twelfth or thirteenth century'.

melancholic Jaime¹² – is contrasted with an icy other-worldliness. At their first meeting, she confirms that Jaime provokes in her ‘ningún calor humano’. Alone in her room, a voyeuristic shot of her removing her stockings is contrasted with a devotional contemplation of the instruments of the Passion; a scene that Sánchez-Biosca describes as painterly and removed from the diegesis.¹³ Pinal’s character reflects the mystery of the Virgin but her complex role is constructed via a surrealist subtext and her identity evolves in relationship to the others. Echoing the contradictions of Mary’s virgin motherhood, Pinal’s character is a site of intersecting female roles but she is neither an unconscious copy of Marian stereotypes nor an allegorical representation of the Virgin.

In accordance with Buñuel’s surrealist background, the Christian elements are refracted in combination with meanings secular and the profane. The culmination of Viridiana and Jaime’s relationship in the latter’s suicide is an unsettling illustration of that process. From a position of dogmatic piety, it is easy to see the profanity of a surrealist re-working of the *Stabat Mater*. Jesus is replaced by a man guilty of both suicide and of a sexual assault on the woman who stands in for Mary. The True Cross is the tree under which Rey’s character lustfully watched Rita skip and her rope becomes his noose. Although implicit, the barb against Christian patriarchy might be compared to the final scenes of *L’Âge d’Or* (1930) where Sade’s Duc de Blangis resembles Christ and women’s scalps are nailed to the Cross. The attack is present but the realist frame of *Viridiana* alters the tone of the surrealism. More than symbolism because of the

¹² For a discussion of Jaime’s melancholia, see Peter Evans, ‘*Viridiana*’, in Alberto Mira (ed.), *The Cinema of Spain and Portugal* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), 99-107 (103-4).

¹³ *Luis Buñuel. Viridiana*, 64-65.

multivalent images, the psychoanalytic content and the semiotic role of the gaze, Buñuel's surrealism operates in tandem with a realism that requires that the viewer see Viridiana and Jaime as characters and not merely as cyphers for Mary and Christ. The result is a ghosting of the story of the Passion and a surrealism that that haunts the verisimilitude of the scene.

Mary can be understood as a paradigmatic spectral double that accompanies Pinal's character and, more broadly, the other representations of female gender in the film. The character of Viridiana, although represented realistically, is doubled in the layering of psychosexual desires channelled via individual and social sublimation. Viridiana, first as a result of what Jaime would want her to represent and, second in response to her own personal crisis, becomes the battleground for a series of culturally determined female identities.

As Pinal's character interacts with Jaime, his household and, later, with the son, Jorge, her identity develops via the cathexis of those relationships. Jaime's obsession with her as a surrogate for his absent wife projects upon her the role of bride. When she wears the bridal dress, re-enacting the wedding night, the costume signifies physically only what she has already become in Jaime's mind. Buñuel stages this process of cathexis via a series of voyeuristic episodes when Jaime, Ramona and her daughter Rita are 'caught' peering at the oblivious Viridiana. Pinal's character is shown an overt object of desire and is forced to live with the guilt thrust upon her. Loaded with the Catholic guilt that her Mother Superior is quick to attribute, it is a short journey from phantasmic bride of Jaime to bride and mother of Christ as she witnesses the lifeless Jaime.¹⁴

¹⁴ As Peter Evans observes, Jaime has already transformed the lookalike Viridiana into an icon of maternity through the morbid idealisation of his dead

The irony of this scene is sharply critical. Viridiana's arrival has brought death and utter change. As she covers her face, she is left to bear the consequences but her guilt has been projected upon her via Jaime, his household and patriarchy at large.

Reflecting further on this guilt and returning to Miles' observations about the virgin-whore function of Silvia Pinal, it might be noted that, she and Fernando Rey bring about a further layer of doubling in the film. Buñuel would cast Rey three more times and, as Julie Jones has argued, the actor became almost a double for the director.¹⁵ In each of these four films, Rey's character combines old-world charm with different degrees of vulnerability and menace and is compelled by a sexual desire encapsulated in the director's emphasis upon the male gaze. Rey's characters fuse sexual desire – often for a younger woman – with a controlling need to mould their objects. Buñuel has noted how the story of *Viridiana* was inspired by his childhood fantasies of drugging and raping Queen Victoria Eugenia of Spain: 'I find the idea of having a sleeping woman at my disposal very stimulating. I can do it in my imagination, but in practice it would

wife: 'Like a child at a madonna's feet he had fetishised her [...] into the mother to whose womb – the seed-bed of his own "inorganic" condition of existence – his death instinct seeks constantly to restore him'. As I argue here, Evans' reading can be taken further. By having Fernando Rey's character 'crucified', Buñuel develops that relationship – a metaphorical Pietà – via the restaging of the *Stabat Mater*, thereby accentuating the Christian doubling of both characters. 'Viridiana and the Death Instinct', in Robin W. Fiddian and Peter W. Evans (eds) *Challenges to Authority: Fiction and Film in Contemporary Spain* (London: Tamesis, 1988), 61-70 (67).

¹⁵ Rey played Don Lope in *Tristana* (1970), Rafael Acosta in *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* [*The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*] (1972) and Mathieu in *Cet obscure objet du désir* [*That Obscure Object of Desire*] (1977). See Julie Jones, 'A Dialog with Self: Luis Buñuel's Dramatization of Identity in Four Characters played by Fernando Rey', *Cinéaste*, vol. 35, no. 4 (Fall 2010), 32-37.

scare me'.¹⁶ The director observes that the age difference is reversed between *Viridiana* and his fantasy, yet the Jesus-Rey-Buñuel triptych of identities only multiplies meaning attached to Jaime's final impotence and the untouchable, maternal aura of Pinal's character.

Viridiana and the Virgin: Motherhood of flesh and blood and miraculous conception

From the *Stabat Mater* sequence that joins the two halves of the film, the question of motherhood becomes more prominent. Physical motherhood is present only in a minor way in the diegesis. A number of the female beggars have young children and we learn that another is four months pregnant in a conversation where 'El Poca' jokes that she had never seen the father's face. However, with the Marian and Christian contexts, Buñuel opens out a string of maternal associations that reveal the film's moral complexities.

The theological and cultural meanings connected to Marian conception, birth and motherhood are reconfigured within a surreal aesthetic accompanying the dominant realism of the film. The ironic nature of Viridiana as catalyst was discussed above but on a more cryptic level, the Marian and maternal meanings attached to her character have a destabilising influence not reducible to the proscribed function of woman in a male society. The film's surrealist reading of those norms initiates a reversal of agency whereby the latent presence of Marian birthing brings forth a chaos that threatens the laws of patriarchy.

¹⁶ *Objects of Desire*, p. 150. Buñuel himself doesn't use the term 'rape' in reference to the childhood fantasy.

Whilst Jaime's death can be read as an allusion to Christ's Passion, its staging as a *Stabat Mater* emphasises the point of view of Pinal's character and Mary. Up to this point, the film has constructed Viridiana as an object of the gazes of Jaime's household. The *Stabat Mater*, on the other hand, is a devotional centred on the gaze of Mary that allows us to see the Passion from the place of motherhood and the Virgin birth. Whilst the simple empowerment of Pinal's character should not be assumed from this point, there is, nonetheless, a remarkable turning of tables where the gaze directed at the female is replaced by a female gaze that, through its connections to Mary, assumes a generative force.

To analyse this process in the film, the view needs to be sensitive to how the orthodoxies of Christian iconography are subjected to dark surrealist inversions. Aside from her charitable act of sheltering the beggars, Pinal's character is devoid of normatively selfless, maternal characteristics. Any such definition of her is, on the contrary, treated with black humour. Referring to her as 'nuestra Santa Protectora que es persona decente', Don Amalio pompously chides the beggars for their lewdness. Moments before, Pinal's character shows a little too much pleasure when 'El Cojo', her future attempted rapist, asks her to pose for his painting of the Virgin. Any association of sanctity with Pinal's character is immediately undercut with a reminder of human failing. She is neither a biological mother nor genuinely nurturing. Instead, and appropriate to the obscure desires of the Freudian id, Viridiana's role as mother is less life-giver than a herald of the struggle between life and death. As an emblem of Christ to Pinal's Mary, Rey's character exemplifies this, strung up by the rope that throughout the film has signified sexual desire. It is Jaime's (and Christ's) death that becomes Viridiana's offspring. In a surrealist re-reading of the *Stabat Mater*

that uncovers the sublimation of the iconography, the Virgin weeps over death incarnate.¹⁷

It might be argued that this dimension –albeit with the promise of the Resurrection – is already inherent in the complex theology of the Passion but these sequences reinforce and condense those implications within Buñuel's particular surrealist language. Christ's death is present in the Incarnation remembered in the Angelus and this is one of the dimensions of Millet's painting of the same name that obsessed Dalí in his reworkings of the theme.¹⁸ Dalí first saw the Oedipal trauma in Millet's painting in order to reproduce it in his own surrealist style. Buñuel's staging of the Angelus and the implied *Stabat Mater* can be compared to Dalí's appropriation of the theme. The images differ greatly from Dalí's dream-like transformations but the preparation of the surrealist qualities of the elements of the *mise-en-scène*, in tandem with the disturbing psychoanalytic subtext, produce a mental surreal scenario that rivals their bizarre effect. The aesthetics differ but the subversive re-reading of canonical cultural forms spring from a shared source. The striking aspect of Buñuel's manipulation of this cultural iconography is that he brings agency to Pinal's

¹⁷ The implied return to childhood that accompanies Jaime's death in this sequence touches on the personal resonances of Rey's character and the director's own youth in *Viridiana*. Buñuel has spoken of the 'two basic sentiments of (his) childhood, which stayed with (him) well into adolescence', namely 'a profound eroticism, at first sublimated into a great religious faith, and a permanent consciousness of death'. More acutely than any other of Buñuel's films, *Viridiana* returns to the scenario of the Spain of his childhood. The sublimation present in the covert images of Mary and Christ points directly to an intimacy between erotic pleasure and death. That Freudian network of signification is present in the first two overtly surrealist films. This passage is cited in *The Discreet Art of Luis Buñuel*, 12.

¹⁸ Amongst a series of art works produced by Dalí on the theme of Jean-François Millet's *The Angelus* (1857-59) are *Millet's Architectonic Angelus* (1933), *Atavism at Twilight* (1934) and *Archaeological Reminiscence of Millet's Angelus* (1933-35) as well as the book *Le Mythe tragique de l'Angélus de Millet* (1963).

character and to the maternal. Bringing her to the foreground, he deploys her gaze as a form of miraculous conception that creates a series of conflicts encapsulated in Rey's/Jaime's/Jesus' corpse. Jaime's death, in a classically Freudian surrealist way, condenses the conflicts of life and death, male and female and body and mind. In the gaze of Viridiana, the 'Incarnation' and the *Stabat Mater* both provide models for a surrealist auto-generation of the look.

Pinal's character, first gazed at then gazing and bound up with Marian iconography, becomes metonymically associated with the film's cinematic surrealism. Perhaps overlooked as such because of the conventional diegesis, these sequences are focal points of a surrealist 'silence' that disrupts the dialogic narrative of the film. With respect to Antonin Artaud and the visual surrealism of cinema, Linda Williams observes how 'the immediacy of film [...] bypass(es) the usual coded channels of language through a visual short circuit'.¹⁹ Although the example of Artaud connects to a more thorough, dreamlike surrealism, I would argue that these sequences achieve a comparable effect. Unlike the surrealism of *Un chien andalou* (1929), they are moments punctuating the narrative but as such, they open up an alternative form of signification. Rather than 'surrealist "touches"'²⁰, as they have come to be known in the mid-period cinema, they are shocks that stand apart from the narrative and trouble its coherence. As the following analysis of 'The Last Supper' sequence will demonstrate, that alternative signification, comprising a new assemblage of Christian iconography, presents a challenge to the *Logos*, the guarantor of 'usual coded channel of language'.

¹⁹ Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1981), 21.

²⁰ *Figures of Desire*, 151-152.

‘Una máquina que me regalaron mis papás’

If the *Stabat Mater* scene alludes to the productive Marian gaze covertly, it is writ large and developed in the ‘photo’ reconstruction of Leonardo’s *The Last Supper*, a further scene from the Passion, in which Christ’s betrayal is introduced, the Resurrection announced and a model for the Eucharist established. Its reconstruction in *Viridiana* is meta-textually recaptured by a ‘camera’ in the form of Enedina’s genitalia. With Jaime dead, Jesus, at the centre of the gaze and the tableau vivant is now played by the vicious blind beggar, Don Amalio. Pinal’s character is not present but the amalgamation of birth and the look that is here thoroughly explicit sustains the established connection to Mary. Added to these is an unambiguous link to the mechanical gaze of cinema introduced through the motif of photography. Often passed over quickly as an element of blasphemy that offended the Vatican’s press office, this sequence is one of the director’s most complex and suggestive moments of film surrealism.

Enedina’s ‘máquina’ is a camera that doubles as surrealist ‘machine’ of condensed semiotics fusing the automatic and the organic. As a mental image invisible to the viewer, it is formally oppositional to Pierre Batcheff’s machine of pianos and dead donkeys in *Un chien andalou* but it shares a comparable surrealist function.²¹ Another sequence set apart from the diegesis, this ‘Last Supper’ congeals time in the gaze echoing still photography. As such, it is

²¹ Philip Drummond refers to the assemblage in *Un chien andalou* as a ‘machine’ in his introduction to the shooting script of the film, ‘Surrealism and *Un chien andalou*’. See Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel, Jean Vigo & Philip Drummond, *Un chien andalou* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), v – xxiii (xiii). Drummond discusses how the ‘machine’ was Dalí’s central preoccupation when it came to the making of the film. The simple yet dense semiotics of the ‘máquina’ in *Viridiana* is classically Buñuelian in comparison.

paradigmatic of the gaze in the film but we are prepared for it first by the *Stabat Mater* sequence and then by 'El Cojo's' unfinished painting of a sick woman with a prominent single eye, watched over by the Virgin yet have hers painted in.

The shape of this single eye prefigures that of the hidden 'camera' that will capture the transfigured Christ and his disciples. Aside from Buñuel's casual reference to it as a playground joke²², the 'máquina' multiples as a vulva, an eye and a camera lens. These are matched conceptually and visually in their shared description of the outline of the *vesica piscis*, an ancient geometric symbol that had significance in Pythagorean thought and other ancient world religions as a symbol of the earth goddess.²³ Passed down into Christianity it forms Christ's symbol the *ichthus* as well as the mandorla or almond-shaped aureola of Romanesque and medieval art.²⁴ In the latter, both the Virgin Mary and Jesus were depicted framed by the mandorla and it was used to represent the light emitted from Christ at the Transfiguration.²⁵

Not only does Enedina's 'camera' build on the film's Marian and scopic dimensions but the image it 'produces' centres on the semiotic play between Jesus, the Passion and blindness. Typical of Buñuel's fondness for revisiting motifs, the combination of the eye and the lens with an overlaid motif of blinding

²² *Objects of Desire*, 155-56.

²³ For a discussion of the history and functions of this symbol, see Todorova Georgieva Rostislava, 'The Migrating Symbol: *Vesica Piscis* from the Pythagoreans to Christianity', in Violeta Cvetkovska Ocokolijć (ed.), *Harmony of Nature and Spirituality in Stone: Proceedings, 17-18 March 2011, Kragujevac, Serbia* (Belgrade: Stone Studio Association, 2011), 217-228.

²⁴ 'The Migrating Symbol', p. 219 and 222-24.

²⁵ For example, a mandorla frames the image of the Virgin in a 12th century fresco at the Basilica of San Fidele in Como (fig. 4) and in the iconic painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe, held in the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. A notable representation of the latter is Pietro Perugino's *The Transfiguration of Christ* (1497-1500) that is housed in the Collegio del Cambio, Perugia (fig. 5).

reprises the eyeball slicing that began his career, and although we do not see Enedina's 'camera', as a sign it figuratively repeats the knife-eye-cloud-moon juxtaposition of *Un chien andalou's* opening montage. On a psychoanalytic level, it carries over from that film the implication of Oedipal castration.²⁶ If the material signs here are implied and therefore covert, *Viridiana's* linking of the gaze, the lens and the (automatic) virgin birth extends the cinematic surrealism whilst referring backwards to that first assault on the spectator's gaze.

James Lastra has discussed the relationship between *Un chien andalou* and Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye*.²⁷ Although the intense eroticism of Buñuel's first film seems closer in tone to the frenzied pornography of Bataille's novella, *Viridiana's* focus on the archetype of the mother and Christian symbolism draws close conceptual comparisons. At the end of Bataille's story, following the final murderous orgy, the young Spanish priest's eye, cut out and inserted into Simone's vagina, stares at the narrator as a reincarnation of their dead companion Marcelle.²⁸ In his explanatory footnote to the story, Bataille confesses that the character Marcelle 'is basically identical with [his] mother'.²⁹ He also makes it clear in the preface to the 1943 publication of the text, that the eye imagery of the story is connected to the memories of his blind, syphilitic father.

If *Story of the Eye* and *Viridiana* are aesthetically distinct, they are close intellectual companions that share a surrealist reworking of Freud's ideas on

²⁶ For a detailed analysis of the question of castration in *Un chien andalou*, see Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire*, 79-86.

²⁷ James Lastra, 'Buñuel, Bataille, and Buster, or, the Surrealist Life of Things', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 2 (2009), 16-38 (33-35).

²⁸ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschal (London: Penguin, 2013 [1928]), Amazon Kindle e-book (location 788 of 1696).

²⁹ 'Coincidences', in *Story of the Eye*, (location 877 of 1696).

psycho-sexuality. To Bataille's over layering of the eye and the vagina, Buñuel adds the camera lens that in its convex form sometimes carries the name *vesica piscis*.³⁰ Enedina's 'camera' then becomes a conceptual condensation of the vulva, the eye and the lens; a multi-purpose signifier to join the material objects already introduced.³¹ This 'eye', the source of surrealist creation in *Viridiana*, is also that of the mother; on the one hand biological in the shape of Enedina's 'regalo' and, on the other, the gaze of the Virgin, the religious and cultural archetype. This semiotic chain connects the camera lens to the (M)other and identifies the object – and offspring – of that machine as the father, gazing back blindly at the 'camera'.

Perhaps the Vatican was right to be so horrified by the work of Enedina's 'camera'? Did that horror arise from an unconscious knowledge that the view of the Church in the film emanates from the female sex? Enedina's 'camera', as surrealist, photographic apparatus, is a metaphor for a cinema that deals in the genetic material of light and shade, vision and blindness. In the 'Last Supper' sequence, Buñuel gives us an instantaneous reproduction – or rebirthing – of the Passion. Light and life from Enedina's 'machine' produce a surrealist transfiguration of Christ. As an emanation from the mandorla of the vagina, the eye and the camera lens, Christ is transformed, not into the resurrected Saviour

³⁰ Weisstein, Eric W., 'Lens' from *Mathworld* – A Wolfram Web Resource, <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/Lens.html> [accessed 29/3/16].

³¹ Elizabeth Scarlett has observed that the *Last Supper* image is captured 'by [Enedina's] vulva-as-camera'. She adds that this depiction of Christ 'reaches a comic height for lampooning of the sacred of both scripture and art'. Whilst there is laughter to be had in this sequence, to my mind, that springs from the anarchic joy on Enedina's face rather than an unambiguous satire of the sacred in the restaging of Leonardo's work. Elizabeth Scarlett, *Religion and Spanish Film: Luis Buñuel, The Franco Era, and Contemporary Directors* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014), p. 40.

but into the blinded and castrated patriarch, Don Amalio. In a surrealist twist on the Passion, eternal life and light are juxtaposed with darkness and destruction.

The specifically religious core of Buñuel's surrealism contains echoes of Bataille's concept of transgression that he connected to the eroticism inherent in religion. The spontaneous conception and birthing from Enedina's camera ironically violates the Christian, patriarchal interdiction against death, in the spirit of Bataille, recalling his notion of the continuity of death in its unbridled, surrealist free association of bodies.³² As in the *Stabat Mater* sequence, the Mother gestates and gives birth to death. The Bataillean resonance is compounded by the film's orgiastic celebration of the Last Supper and the Catholic sensibilities shared with Buñuel despite their absolute rejection of the Church. That parallel provides us with another way of seeing the Marian, surrealist sequences as transgressions against the law and its institutions: the Father, the Church and the Word. The next section will develop the Marian aspects of these transgressive sequences.

Buñuel had no explicitly feminist agenda and it would be odd to read *Viridiana* as a gender polemic, yet the surrealist core of the film has a distinctly female-gendered focus that allows fresh perspectives. The focal point of Pinal's character brings into relief the human and archetypal roles of woman and mother. Inspired by the miraculous virgin motherhood of Mary, Buñuel's

³² The 'crucifixion' sequence might equally be read in this way. Following Bataille, who contests the Christian assertion of eternal discontinuity in its disavowal of death, the unbroken lineage from Abraham to Jesus symbolized in the Tree can be read, perversely, as an unbroken continuity of death, an image that sits well with Bataille's quasi-surrealist eroticism. Bataille develops and exemplifies his notion of erotic transgression in the volume *Eroticism*, trans by Mary Dalwood (London: Penguin, 2012 [1957]). See Bataille's introduction for a discussion of death and discontinuity, especially pp. 11-16.

treatment goes beyond sociological observation by lending a surrealist agency to woman and mother. Subverting the role of mother as guardian of patriarchy, she becomes a lens that reveals its baseness and insecurities. The 'photo' of the 'Last Supper' with Don Amalio and Jesus at its centre provides an alternative Incarnation of the horror of the Father, the Law and the *Logos*.

A semiotic challenge to the *Logos*

Whilst the brutality and ignorance of Don Amalio as patriarch and Christ-double is clear, his blindness connects back to Buñuel's earliest surrealism and intensifies the character's ambiguity. On the one hand, it suggests his castration and lack of potency from the point of view of a female Other but, as Peter Evans has argued in relation to *Los olvidados*, blindness can equally herald menace via the threat of castration.³³ In this light, Don Amalio's blindness, accompanied by the frenzied violence of his smashing of the tableware, is not simply a symptom of patriarchal insecurity as exposed by Enedina's 'camera'. Such an interpretation is quickly opened out to a wider network of surrealist semiotics connected to the Oedipal. On this level, Enedina's maternal 'gaze' and Don Amalio's patriarchal blindness encode an extra-diegetic exchange between gendered and sexual archetypes or cultural signifiers. This eye/blindness economy of the sexes culminates in the 'Last Supper' but is already foreshadowed by the *Stabat Mater* sequence (where Viridiana looks but quickly looks away) and reinforced by El Cojo's painting in which the Virgin, like Don Amalio's 'Christ', is missing her eyes.

³³ See Peter William Evans, *The Films of Luis Buñuel: Subjectivity and Desire* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 72-89

Established in these exchanges, is an implicit study of the semiotic relationship between the Father (the Son, the Law, the *Logos*) and the Mother, who births, nurtures and, to live within the Law, must accommodate the former. Part of the film's subversive quality comes from this surrealist semiosis that counter-reads the diegesis. Religious and societal law directs Viridiana's path through the film. Wedded to the Church, she takes a last journey away from its protection only to be ensnared by Jaime's schemes and, finally, is left to play cards with Jorge. Yet the surrealist reconfiguration of the Father is sensitive to a maternal agency that accompanies the diegetic focus of Pinal's character.

Viridiana's extra-diegetic, treatment of Mary in the Christian story opens up a surrealist reconfiguration of the symbolic order and Julia Kristeva's '*Stabat Mater*' – a semiotic study of the Virgin and the human maternal – provides an extraordinary commentary on this aspect of the film. Kristeva sets two texts side by side, one dealing with the role of Mary within Catholic and Orthodox traditions and the other a personal reflection on the experience of childbirth and maternity. The manifestations of Mary, for Kristeva, organise representations of the Mother (and the feminine, culturally defined as maternal) as idealisations of primary narcissism, or of a non-individuated existence prior to the symbolic order. The first text is composed in an academic style whilst the second, written impressionistically, treats maternity from a quasi-autobiographical perspective. Consonant with Kristeva's wider project to posit a pre-Oedipal semiotics of the body, the personal text imagines a genetic process not inscribed by symbolic, phallic language.

The motif of Marian motherhood that is an index of the feminine in *Viridiana* is akin to the 'the mechanism of enigmatic sublimation'³⁴ that Kristeva attributes to the long history of the Virgin in Christian cultures. She argues that the promotion of Mary in Orthodox and Catholic cultures has accommodated men and women within cultural norms via a two-fold process. On the one hand, images of maternal nurturing humanise Christ and, on the other, the virgin birth, Mary's Immaculate Conception and assumption lend an otherworldly and non-biological significance to woman. In this way, Mary's relationship to Christ is instrumental to the ideology of Christian humanism whilst the absence of biological conception and her immortality link her doctrinally to Christ's divinity.

Kristeva affirms that 'the history of the Christian cult of the Virgin is actually the history of the imposition of beliefs with pagan roots upon, and sometimes in opposition to, the official dogma of the Church',³⁵ adding that 'all belief in resurrection is probably rooted in mythologies dominated by the mother goddess'.³⁶ Through the essay's central image of the Virgin of the *Stabat Mater*, Kristeva argues that the promised resurrection of Christ, 'the immortality that belongs primarily to the Name of the Father'³⁷ is a sublimated longing for a primary narcissism associated with the mother. This atavistic desire, in turn, is cloaked in the image of Mary as the locus of love, encapsulated in the

³⁴ Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, *Poetics Today*, vol. 6, nos. 1/2, *The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives* (1985), 133-52 (135).

³⁵ 'Stabat Mater', p. 135.

³⁶ 'Stabat Mater', p. 144.

³⁷ 'Stabat Mater', p. 144.

supplication of the *Stabat Mater*: 'Eia mater, fons amoris'.³⁸ That normalised, maternal love, enshrined in the image of Mary, is for Kristeva another sublimated desire for a return to the gestatory 'spectrum of auditory, tactile, and visual memories that precede language and re-emerge in its absence'.³⁹ In this, the maternal love of the *Stabat mater* simultaneously encompasses a sublimation of life as maternal origin and of death as a form of annihilation where 'the identity of thought and the living body breaks down'.⁴⁰

In removing a sense of normalised maternal love, Buñuel's perverse reconstruction of the *Stabat Mater*, stages its own particular dissection of Christian sublimation. Guilt – her own as well as Jaime's (whose suicide recalls that of Judas) – replaces love in the sequence and recalls the opposing icons of the feminine, Eve or even La Malinche of Buñuel's Mexican 'home'. But if the film finds no place for a selfless Mary, the sublimations identified by Kristeva are present in Don Jaime's attempted unification with his dead wife, first by dressing in her wedding clothes and, second, by proposing marriage to her double. The sequence in which Rey's character drugs Viridiana and contemplates rape is a ritualised necrophilia that replicates Kristeva's double sublimation of return to life/death with the mother. As Kristeva reminds us, Mary has been represented variously as Christ's daughter and wife.⁴¹ The wedding gown, firmly linked to the

³⁸ '*Stabat Mater*', p. 145. Kristeva only cites these lines but the whole verse is instructive: 'Eia mater fons amoris / me sentíre vim dolóris fac, ut tecum lúgeam'.

³⁹ '*Stabat Mater*', p. 145.

⁴⁰ '*Stabat Mater*', p. 145.

⁴¹ '*Stabat Mater*', 139-40. This is revealing with respect to the Rey/Buñuel doubling discussed above. The director's first use of the actor in *Viridiana* perhaps implies an exploration (conscious or unconscious) of his youthful fantasy for an older and unobtainable female object. This aetiological dimension

virgin bride and the Virgin Mother, appears again worn by 'El leproso' whilst dancing to Handel's Hallelujah Chorus and tossing the feathers of a white dove (the Holy Spirit) in the air. Condensed into this scene is a perverse 'celebration' of the reborn Christ, with the 'crucified' Jaime's 'cross-dressing' now replaced by that of 'El leproso'. Echoing Kristeva's theory of sublimation, this complex image connects intimately to the mother (via the dead wife), Viridiana and the Virgin, semiotically bound together in the image of the bridal gown. The bizarre juxtaposition of the dress with 'El leproso' exemplifies the film's surrealist use of images.

Pinal's character, as a result of her own and Jaime's idealisation, reflects Kristeva's discussion of the 'uniqueness' required of the Virgin and the price a woman must pay to conform to those ideals:

this recognition of the desire of uniqueness is immediately checked by the postulate that uniqueness is achieved only by way of exacerbated masochism: an actual woman worthy of the feminine ideal embodied in inaccessible perfection by the Virgin could not be anything other than a nun or a martyr.⁴²

In both of these roles Viridiana falls short and, in the disillusion of the final scene, she fails to attain the 'assurance of ecstasy' that is Mary's reward.⁴³ Despite this, through the character's performance of those roles and the layering of semiotic exchanges that confront the Marian and the maternal with the Christic and patriarchal, the film exposes the sublimation required by (and for) that patriarchal Law.

aside, it's clear that the figure of Mary incorporates the erotically charged and the maternal aspects of women that accompany Rey's characters in the films.

⁴² 'Stabat Mater', p. 149.

⁴³ 'Stabat Mater', p. 149.

That confrontation is most overt in the 'Last Supper' sequence. The result is a surrealist condensation of the primary elements of the relational sublimation that takes place between Viridiana and Jaime. As a double for Christ, Don Amalio's threat can be seen, in Kristevan terms, as the sublimating force of the Word. But through a perversion of Leonardo's canonical image, Buñuel's sequence short-circuits the blind gaze of the *Logos*. Enedina's own 'lens', as it repels the patriarchal stare, makes visible a language anterior to the Word. The cinematic reconstruction of *The Last Supper* initiates a heretical pre- (and post-) history of the *Logos*. Erupting as a challenge to the Word of the Father, is an alternative semiotics that reveals itself in Kristeva's poetic allusion to maternal language:

FLASH – an instant of time or a timeless dream; atoms swollen beyond measure, atoms of a bond, a vision, a shiver, a still shapeless embryo, unnameable. Photos of what is not yet visible and which language necessarily surveys from a very high altitude, allusively. Words always too remote, too abstract to capture the subterranean swarms of seconds, insinuating themselves into unimaginable places.⁴⁴

'FLASH', a 'photo', and a semiotics of another time, not replacing but placed alongside the movements of sublimation traced by the diegesis of the film.

The resemblance is uncanny. Beginning the counter-commentary on the history of Mary with a photographic metaphor for the instantaneity of conception, Kristeva's words crystallise the significance of Buñuel's 'Last Supper'. Aping the didacticism of the tableau vivant, Enedina's photograph exposes and electrifies the would-be petrification of the Word. An exposure of light from a female, reproductive organ, this photograph counters the gaze of the eye, the lens and the father that canonical criticism has long associated with

⁴⁴ 'Stabat Mater', 133-34.

cinema.⁴⁵ Here, woman as 'photographer' produces an image of – as Kristeva would have it – that which 'is not yet visible and which language necessarily surveys from a very high altitude, allusively'. Elsewhere in *Viridiana*, we often 'see' woman from such an 'altitude', be it through a keyhole, via Jaime's gaze from the upstairs window or from the implied perspective of the annunciation. That such a view of woman in the film should be understood explicitly as an image of patriarchy in its broad sense in Catholic culture is unarguable when juxtaposed with the instantaneous turning of the tables of the 'Last Supper'.

The 'Last Supper' sequence does not overthrow the bleak prospect for Pinal's character in the diegesis but it is the core of the film's surrealist destabilisation of patriarchal codes. Buñuel does not explicitly propose a maternal language of the body along Kristevan lines, yet, curiously, the two share a praxis – and a comparable pragmatism – that unites their work more closely. Kristeva's dual text is a strategy that acknowledges the problematic idealism of a non-patriarchal language whilst affirming its presence in times and spaces vacated by the Word. Her parallel texts present, on the one hand, a study of Mary within the Catholic tradition and, on the other, an expression of another language that exists outside of the cultural parameters of the Word. Buñuel's film echoes Kristeva's essay in its structure and its purpose. Pinal's character is filtered through the icon of Mary to present an image of woman as agent and mediator of culture but that rational account is punctuated and destabilised by a distinctly

⁴⁵ A body of film studies initiated by Laura Mulvey's seminal 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), 6-18. Following my contention that *Viridiana* sets up a dual surrealist/realist depiction of woman and mother, it might be argued that sequences such as the 'Last Supper' enable an experimentation along the lines proposed by Mulvey as a counter-stance to the patriarchal gaze of the dominant narrative cinema.

feminised semiotics that opens up unsettling fissures within that culture. The latter might approach a definition of Buñuel's later surrealism that, in *Viridiana*, is a disruptive force within the diegesis comparable to Bataille's symbolic undercurrent in his *Story of the Eye*. Further echoing Bataille, who argued that transgression did not 'deny taboo', Buñuel's transgressive, surrealist spaces present an alternative language that coexists in tension with the laws of realist narrative.⁴⁶

Approaching the Christian story of birth, death and resurrection through a Marian prism, Buñuel makes sparing use of a surrealistic language that challenges the logocentric orthodoxy of Catholic patriarchy. The surrealism in *Viridiana* centres on the dichotomy and substitution of blindness and sight, developing a preoccupation that begins with *Un chien andalou* and, as I have argued elsewhere, continues as a fundamental component of his later cinema.⁴⁷ *Viridiana's* 'Last Supper' is a carnivalesque parody of Christ's embodiment or making visible of the Word. The cinematic gaze, that elsewhere Buñuel has underlined as a patriarchal gaze upon Woman, is here replicated in Don Amalio's blindness and phallic violence. But Leonardo's canonical image, thanks to Eneida's 'lens', is reproduced by a female and uncannily biological 'machine'. The promise of redemption in the Word ('He shall reign for ever and ever') is remodelled in Don Amalio's castrating, patriarchal threat, as an image of primary narcissism. As if to underline the irony of this turning of the tables, Christ/Don

⁴⁶ Bataille heads his chapter titled 'Transgression' with the epigraph 'The transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it' (*Eroticism*, p. 63).

⁴⁷ Sheldon Penn, 'On A Road to Nowhere: Parodic Movement at Time-Image in *La Voie lactée* and *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie*', in Rob Stone and Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla (eds), *A Companion to Luis Buñuel* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 457-78 (466-67).

Amalio cannot see his photographer whilst she rejoices in the pleasure of her joke. Unbeknown to Don Amalio – and to the *Logos* – that blindness provides an insight into the abyss of the ends of patriarchal representation.

In conclusion: ‘The best of all possible worlds’

Reflecting on *Viridiana*, Buñuel cited Voltaire’s *Candide*, saying that he wanted to show that ‘we do not live in the best of all possible worlds’.⁴⁸ Typically laconic, his suggested interpretation was that the film painted a harsh world beyond the remedy of idealism. Yet if we were to pursue Voltaire’s example in the film, it would be difficult to see Jorge’s cultivation of Jaime’s lands as the way forward either.. As Raymond Durgnat persuasively notes, Jorge’s improvements are acts of sublimation equal to Viridiana’s pious charity.⁴⁹

Diegetically, *Viridiana* offers no hint of a solution to the classically Buñuelian scenario of imprisonment. However, as I have argued, *Viridiana* has a complex juxtaposition of distinct ways of seeing or – seen in surrealist terms – multiple worlds. The diegesis culminates in a reality of harsh pragmatism but this is not the film’s only meaning. Pinal’s character may be defined in relation to the symbolic order in the final sequence but the surrealist semiotics destabilise the workings of that order. The film debunks the notion of a perfect world in the chaos wrought by Viridiana’s failed utopia but does not present the single perspective of a brute, pragmatic reality.

⁴⁸ Luis Buñuel, ‘*Viridiana*’, in *An Unspeakable Betrayal: Selected Writings of Luis Buñuel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 226-29 (226).

⁴⁹ Raymond Durgnat, *Luis Buñuel* (London: Studio Vista, 1967), p. 121.

Instead, through the prism of Mary and the Christian story, *Viridiana* presents a network of transferential, sublimated states. Condensed within the moments of surrealism, the film produces a distinct semiotic space that does not refute the latter but maintains with it a relationship of exchange. Contrary to Buñuel's observation, it might be asserted that *Viridiana* contains 'possible worlds' comparable to Breton's 'vases communicants'; in other words, a fluid exchange between waking and dream, rationality and irrationality. Although *Viridiana* does present a harsh and pragmatic world but this is mediated by the surrealist handling of the tenets and icons of Christianity that recalls and playfully reinserts the epistemes of the medieval or renaissance worlds in which material reality was but one plane of existence reflected by the others. These insertions are anything but literal or pious but their surrealism produces a sense of atemporality within the diegesis.

Buñuel's ghosting of Christ and Mary alongside his characters may owe something to the Christian mind's cleaving to the archetype. Binding Pinal's character to Mary as both accommodation and reminder of the ends of patriarchy, the film conveys a female-centred otherworldliness in the midst of a convincing portrayal of a transitional 1960's Spain. Within the frame of a concrete, historical realism, the surrealist approach to gender that I have likened to Kristeva's work on the logocentric, multiplies times within a single, cinematic duration. *La Voie lactée* and *Simón del desierto* [*Simon of the Desert*] (1965) make this effect overt but *Viridiana's* treatment of Christ and Mary affects a comparable, if implicit, sense of time travel. These times do not represent an ideality, (or 'best world') but they glimpse sexuality, gender and Spain in unsettling and novel ways.

Distinct from these later films, in *Viridiana*, that migration between temporal worlds is achieved in a visual language set apart from the diegesis. Standing alongside the characters of Don Jaime and Viridiana, the representations of Christ and Mary move the film into territory different to the Freudian psychology of the individual that has long connected to cinematic realism. Freud's influence on Buñuel is incontestable but the surrealist treatment of the Christian archetype in *Viridiana* adds a sense of the Jungian collective unconscious.⁵⁰

A full-length study might pursue the fertile ground of a Jungian analysis of the film's archetypes, supplementing these readings to reveal new mythical or historical dimensions of the film. Here, it is worth noting the affinity between Buñuel's use of Mary, the Christian story and Jung's affirmations concerning the significance of such archetypes or 'pre-existent form[s]' for the collective unconscious.⁵¹ The ghosting of Christ and Mary recalls Jung's assertion of the unconscious forms that shape a collective psyche, linking the past and present in unexpected, often shocking ways. In this sense, a connection might be made between Pinal's character and Jung's *anima*.

The most Jungian aspect of *Viridiana* is the persistence of cultural archetypes as mechanisms for the conscious manifestation of the unconscious. Buñuel may be unsympathetic to the Church and its legacy but his film transforms and rejuvenates Catholic archetypes. Although possible biographical

⁵⁰ In his following film, *El ángel exterminador*, the director appears to explore something similar in the collective dream sequence that precedes the party's brief liberation from the house on Calle Providencia.

⁵¹ Carl Gustav Jung, 'The Concept of the Collective Unconscious', in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, The Collected Works, vol. 9, pt. 1, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1968 [1959]), 42-52 (42).

readings exist, the film text seems at its richest in connection with a socio-cultural psyche akin to Jung's collective unconscious that he referred to as 'anything but an incapsulated [sic] personal system; [...] sheer objectivity, as wide as the world and open to all the world'.⁵² In this way too, *Viridiana* might be seen as a representation of worlds rather than one imperfect, brute reality. Despite the critique of Christian charity and the implied condemnation of patriarchy, Buñuel uses Catholic forms as archetypes, recalling Jung's view of them as negotiators between material existence and the realms of interior intangibility. Primarily, the director focuses on humanity and society at large in *Viridiana* and not the moral dilemmas of his individual characters.

As such, Buñuel's use of *The Last Supper* recalls Jung's critique of Freud on Leonardo. Where Freud identified a personal, dual-mother pathology in Leonardo's *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, Jung argues that any such presence says more about the ancient archetypes of being "twice-born" and the duality of motherhood.⁵³ Parallels abound between Jung's commentary and Buñuel's tableau vivant. *Viridiana's* 'Last Supper' draws attention to the trans-historical nature of the archetype by condensing symbols of the Mother and Father that are multiplied in the characters and in the images of Christ and Mary.

Kristeva's take on Mary and childbirth dialogues with Jung's concept of the "twice-born". Her Mary is a dual mother, represented by twin texts each accounting for a specific form of birth. *Viridiana* presents the duality of Pinal's character on several levels but as I have sought to argue, duality in the film is not

⁵² 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, The Collected Works, vol. 9, pt. 1, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1968 [1959]), 3-41 (22).

⁵³ 'The Concept of the Collective Unconscious', 44-47.

necessarily best understood as a circulation of the virgin-whore archetype. The film's surrealism, like Kristeva's tracing of the fault line of the logocentric, reveals an innovative force of the female as the overlaid double of the biological and archetypal mother. Ultimately, *Viridiana's* doubling of the maternal departs from Jung's reading of archetypes in social history. With a progressive view of history, Jung sees the horror of an unresolved past in archetypes as exemplified by his analysis of National Socialism.⁵⁴ In comparison, the surrealist Buñuel is daemonic, delighting in a perverse recurrence of archetypes that are renovated as they shock. The spectator may not inhabit the 'best of all possible worlds' but the camera lens can refract alternatives to the bind of patriarchy.

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⁵⁴ 'The Concept of the Collective Unconscious', p. 48.

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