

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
A CHANGE OF HABIT

There's nothing more joyous than discovering that a film that was shocking in one's youth still has the power to make one cringe. Luis Buñuel's "Viridiana," from 1961, is certainly not his greatest movie—it's obvious at times, and repetitive—but, if you fear blasphemy



and entertain any hope for the Christian redemption of the downtrodden, this is the jolt you need. In the first half, Viridiana (Silvia

Pinal), a beautiful novice, visits her wealthy uncle (Fernando Rey) in the Spanish countryside and confronts his sexual fetishes; in the second, Viridiana gathers the scrofulous local beggars onto her uncle's property, which she now shares with her powerfully attractive cousin (Francisco Rabal). The rabble take over the house, and, to the sound of the "Hallelujah" Chorus, despoil everything in sight, including one another. The movie is a very elaborate dirty joke in which one can find, amid the mocking ironies and cruelties, a defiant celebration of sexuality as the only redemption God ever offered to his flock. Playing at MOMA on Oct. 25 and Oct. 31.

—David Denby

