





# SPANISH CENSORSHIP AND BUÑUEL'S FILM *L'ÂGE D'OR*

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ANGELES ALEMÁN GÓMEZ

Senior Lecturer

University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria,  
Canary Islands, Spain

e-mail:angeles.aleman@ulpgc.es

## Introduction

In 1935, André Breton, Jacqueline Lamba and Benjamin Péret were invited to Tenerife by the editors of *Gaceta de Arte* to organize the Second International Surrealist Exhibition at the Ateneo of Santa Cruz, as well as to give some lectures and sign the Second Surrealist Manifesto.

André Breton brought a copy of Buñuel's film *L'Âge d'Or* [The Golden Age] with him and planned to screen it as part of the activities surrounding the Exhibition. The screening did not take place and he offered the copy to Eduardo Westerdahl, Domingo Pérez Minik and Agustin Espinosa. Breton's intention was good as this would allow them to screen the film in a cinema and recover some of the large sum of money that had been spent on this trip. However, Catholic censorship and the newspaper *La gaceta de Tenerife* [Tenerife News] carried out a ruthless campaign making public screening of the film impossible.

Due to the nature of the film and the ferocity of the campaign against it, the editors of *Gaceta de arte* decided to send it to Gran Canaria. And there is where we lose track of it.

Forty years later, in 1975, Domingo Pérez Minik published the book *Facción española surrealista de Tenerife* [The Spanish surrealist faction of Tenerife], in which he wrote about this copy of *L'Âge d'Or*:

We cannot forget the treasure that didn't make us rich except on the artistic level. *L'Âge d'Or*, the film had been an instrument of battle, which we brought from Paris. We lost this great travel companion after a private screening in Santa Cruz. In order to offer it to the public, the film was sent to Las Palmas de Gran

Canaria, where it remained in the hands of a German friend with an interest in new forms of art, whose name we cannot mention for now. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, he had the film at home. Frightened by the war, he hid it in a waste dump near his place.

After World War II, our man had already vanished from Las Palmas. At the time, we assumed that he had gone back to his country. Some years later, we learned that a house had been built over *L'Âge d'Or's* hiding place. It is very possible that it still remains there, turned into sand, mixed with cement, maybe under bricks, or turned into dust or some dangerous scorpion. But maybe [...] it has become a strange rock, just like any other on the island...the truth is that we know nothing of its whereabouts. Our treasure slipped through our fingers; this is the only truth... (Pérez Minik, 1975, pp. 151- 152)

Domingo Pérez Minik, whose memory was always prodigious, kept silent about the name of the person who had received *L'Âge d'Or*. We must not forget that 1975 was the year Franco died and the period called *Transición*, the origin of democracy in Spain, begun. For Pérez Minik, a man who had known political repression, protecting the name of the person who had been in charge of Buñuel's film copy was still necessary. Certainly for various different reasons, we cannot find a single word about this case in Luis Buñuel's book of memories *Mi último suspiro* [My last breath].

In this article we present the case of censorship against *L'Âge d'Or* and the Canarian surrealists involved in its screening, as well as the role played by surrealist writer Agustín Espinosa (author of the surrealist novel *Crímen*) in the transmission and possible disappearance of this copy.

## ***L'âge d'Or* and Surrealism**

### **The origin of a film: the Viscounts de Noailles' private financing and their relationship with Oscar Domínguez**

In 1930, Marie Laure de Noailles and her husband, the Viscount de Noailles, both collectors and patrons of the arts, commissioned Luis Buñuel to make a film. Their help was essential in terms of directorial freedom. The date is also of interest to our work as Marie Laure de Noailles later become the lover of Oscar Domínguez, the Canarian artist who served as the link between Breton and the Canarian surrealists. Years later, Luis Buñuel declared that he had felt the freedom to provoke with this film thanks to de Noailles' help (Buñuel, 1982, p.97). On the other hand, Buñuel already had ties to the Canary Islands through his friend, Canarian sculptor Juan Márquez, who had participated in *Un chien andalou*.

<sup>1</sup> Domínguez, Oscar: letter to André Breton, 8 April 1934, Breton's Archive, Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet, Paris.

Buñuel made *L'Âge d'Or* and showed it in Paris to an uproar of scandal. Several Catholic associations asked for the film to be banned. *L'Âge d'Or* attracted hard criticism. This, however, was not enough to prevent its screening, and the scandal ensured the film a legendary status among more forward-thinking audiences.

## 1.2. Oscar Dominguez and André Breton: the trip to Tenerife

In Breton's Archive there is a letter signed by Oscar Dominguez in which he presents himself as a surrealist artist<sup>1</sup>. This letter must have been promptly answered by Breton, judging by his next epistle to the French surrealist, which shows a close relationship between them.

Dominguez was born in Tenerife and he had a very particular character, so *bizarre* that for Breton he was the incarnation of what a surrealist should be. His father had sent him to Paris to deal with the banana shipments from his estate, but Dominguez

Eduardo Westerdahl- Oscar Dominguez at the Café Select- 1935 – Fondo Westerdahl, Gobierno de Canarias.



spent his nights drinking, although he was always impeccably dressed for the morning visits to the market<sup>2</sup>. Dominguez loved painting, but he was lost because of alcohol. In the dazzling, bohemian atmosphere, charming Dominguez persuaded Breton to travel to his native island. Breton would write about this in *L'Air de l'eau: On m'a dit que là-bas les plages sont noires De lave allée à la mer*. (Breton, 1934, p.28)

The invitation to travel to Tenerife was sent to Breton through Dominguez, but the actual hosts were the editors of the literary and arts magazine *Gaceta de arte*. Eduardo Westerdahl, Dominguez' closest friend, was the chief-editor of the magazine, which included such contributors as the writers Domingo Pérez Minik, Agustín Espinosa, Pedro García Cabrera and Domingo López Torres, all of them very close to Surrealism. By 1935, Agustín Espinosa was also the director of Ateneo de Tenerife, where the Second International Surrealist Exhibition was held in May of that year. Eduardo Westerdahl, Pérez Minik and Agustín Espinosa were in charge of organizing the surrealists' trip and had to cover for all the expenses. Except for the ship tickets, which they obtained thanks to the collaboration of a Canary Islands businessman, the rest was paid by the young, enthusiastic writers.

Initially, the guests consisted of three poets: André Breton, Paul Éluard and Benjamin Péret. Breton's idea was to bring with him Man Ray's film *L'Étoile de mer* [The Starfish]. Last minute changes meant that instead of Paul Éluard, it was Breton's wife who travelled to Tenerife, the charming and talented Jacqueline Lamba, who designed the Exhibition catalogue. In Fondo Westerdahl there is a telegram sent by André Breton hurrying Westerdahl to make all the arrangements for the trip scheduled for 27 April<sup>3</sup>. They arriving in Tenerife on 5 May.

The day before their arrival, Agustín Espinosa published in the newspaper *La Tarde* [The Evening]:

Here comes the Treasure – which is also a gift – brought by these Three Wise Men to the Canary Islands. It does not come in fragile shell chests as was fashionable according to the imagination of the Bible, but in wooden boxes, packed by the best Parisian transportation agency, and insured by the most stringent European company. It travels under the sky, next to the new *Kings*, cradled by the sea and watched closely by a star: the surreal star – rough and noble star –, lashing the cretins and wringing the heads of the old fashioned.<sup>4</sup>

The French surrealists arrived in Tenerife on 5 May with boxes of surrealist paintings. They were guests at the Hotel Victoria and we can see Breton looking down at the street from the balcony in a picture taken by Jacqueline Lamba.

The days were filled with of activities, some of them unforgettable, like the trip to Puerto de la Cruz, where Breton gave a lecture about Surrealism at the Sociedad XIV de Abril. Agustín Espinosa was the translator of this lecture and, years later, Pérez Minik wrote about its free-spirit and originality.

The Second International Surrealist Exhibition opened on 11 May. All of them, the French surrealists and their hosts, were proud and happy, as seen in the pictures

<sup>2</sup> Márquez, Juan: "Mi amigo Oscar". Unpublished, Fondo Juan Márquez, Museo Casa de Colón, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

<sup>3</sup> Breton, André: cable to Eduardo Westerdahl, 1935, Fondo Westerdahl, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Tenerife(AHPT), Tenerife.

<sup>4</sup> Espinosa, Agustín.1935. "Navidades de primavera, Breton, Péret y Éluard, nuevos Reyes Magos en Canarias", *La Tarde*, 4 May.

Eduardo Westerdahl- The trip to Teide: López Torres, Benjamin Peret, Jacqueline Lamba and André Breton- 1935 – Fondo Westerdahl, Gobierno de Canarias,



of the opening. The show included paintings by Dalí, Miró, Oscar Dominguez, Yves Tanguy and other surrealist artists.

However, more than the cultural activity, the most powerful aspect of the experience for Breton and his companions was the Canary Islands landscape. For Breton, the trip to Teide, the ancient mountain volcano, offered the image of a surrealist landscape.

It made such a profound impression in him that as soon as he arrived in Paris Breton wrote the surrealist poem, *Le Château étoilé*, published in the surrealist magazine *Minotaure*. Later on, Breton included this poem as a chapter of his book *L'Amour fou* [Mad Love], published by Gallimard in 1937. In chapter V Breton wrote about the thwarted screening of Buñuel's film:

*L'Âge d'or! For me these words, which crossed my mind as I began to surrender to the inebriating shades of Orotava, remain associated with a few unforgettable images of the film of Buñuel and Dalí, which had appeared formerly under this title and with which, precisely, Benjamin Péret and I would have acquainted the public of the Canaries in 1935, if Spanish censorship had not chosen so rapidly to show itself even more intolerant than French censorship. This film remains, to this day, the only enterprise of exaltation of total love such as I envisage it. (Breton, 1937, p.113)*

The exaltation of absolute love, *L'Amour fou*, and the landscape of Tenerife came together at that special time in Breton's life to form a reflection of the most intense and surreal passion.

## After the Surrealist Journey. Gaceta de Tenerife and the Censorship

Given the impossibility of screening Buñuel's work during their stay, Breton gave his hosts the copy of the surrealist film. The idea was that they could show the film in a cinema and thus ease some of the debt that the invitation to the surrealists and the Exhibition had left, a total of 5.000 pesetas [circa 15,000 Euros].

In fact, this was an enormous debt given the poor financial situation of Westerdahl, Minik and Espinosa. They had to turn to a loaning agency and apply for an instalment loan in order to pay back the amount, but this problem could have been lessened by screening the film, which they initially tried to show at Cinema Numancia. As the invitation card demonstrates, they took precautions. The invitation warned about the film's images and the screening was scheduled for 11 a.m. Despite this, the Catholic newspaper *Gaceta de Tenerife* launched a fierce attack on 14 June by publishing a front page piece urging the authorities on the island and the at capital to suspend the film:

*L'Âge d'Or*. The title of singular attraction that brings us the theme of the day. However, this is nothing but the old wolf in a sheep's skin ruse. 'The golden age' is a surrealist film and it was imported here, by some people who call themselves artists, at the invitation of Ateneo of Santa Cruz and *Gaceta de arte*. Two enterprises whose prestige gives cover to this film made specifically for heresy, for poisoning the souls in order to deteriorate and turn them against the Catholic Religion.

The Cinema Numancia has supported this degeneration. What does this businessman think of Tenerife? And what do the Ateneo de Santa Cruz and *Gaceta de arte* think of the people of Santa Cruz?

We have before us, Mr Governor, the invitation that both the Ateneo de Santa Cruz and the editor of *Gaceta de arte* have distributed to the population in secrecy to attend the function that will take place next Sunday at Cinema Numancia. The monstrous film, on which we will expatiate in the future, has not been censured and was banned in the Mainland. Every conscience, even the most sectarian, rejects it. Because it hurts, Mr Governor, not only to the Christian sentiment of the people, but also the family, our ancestors and parents.

'The golden age' is the new poison that Judaism and Freemasonry want to use to spread revolutionary sectarianism and corrupt the people. Governor: we expect from you an attitude that befits the dignity of Santa Cruz. Lord Mayor



Author unknown – Invitation to L'Age d'or  
screen – 1935 –Fondo Westerdahl Gobierno de  
Canarias

**DOMINGO**  
**2 de junio**  
en el **CINE NUMANCIA**  
**‘LA EDAD de ORO’**

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**LA PELICULA MAS SENSACIONAL.**

**NOTA.-Dado el carácter de esta película y a fin de que el público no se sienta herido en sus convicciones, la película será proyectada en función especial a las 11 de la mañana.**

<sup>5</sup> Unsigned.1935. ‘La edad de oro’, *La Gaceta de Tenerife*, 14 June.

of Santa Cruz: your political affiliation, your ideology, should not prevent you from acting according to your conscience, that of an honest man. This film is only appropriate for those who have lost all sensitivity, but not for these people whose culture is above this other culture that the Ateneo and *Gaceta de arte*, in a display of cynicism, want to infiltrate in Santa Cruz<sup>5</sup>.

The following day, 15 June, the eve of the expected screening at Numancia Cinema, a new attack to its owner appeared in the cover of the Catholic newspaper. The article against the businessman had the unnecessary tone of a lynching call, as the newspaper had also published the Governor’s ban to the film. The title was striking: ‘Figures of the Passion of Christ in the surrealist film *The golden age*’. Moreover, the article was based on rumours:

The owner of Cinema Numancia has shamelessly made his venue available to the surrealist film *The golden age*. We have learned, from someone that deserves all our trust, that when asked why he had allowed the film to premiere at his cinema, the owner replied that he was not interested in the Catholic element; that his premises were often visited by radicals and, therefore, he would make things easy for this radical film.

...*The golden age* is riddled with Soviet-style blasphemy.

Symbols of the Passion can be seen in worldly scenes, clubs or brothels, ridiculing Jesus Christ in a way not known to date. It is a true display of heresy, a brutal and savage, inconceivable and unacceptable assault against any educated person who has not fallen into the abyss of spiritual degeneration.

(The Ateneo de Santa Cruz, *Gaceta de arte* and Cinema Numancia) try to abuse this peaceful people, presenting them with scenes that can skilfully usher in the poison of heresy. And, with the utmost bigotry, Ateneo de Santa Cruz and *Gaceta de arte* dare tell their guests: 'This film has a documentary character, we thank our guests for seeing in it our contribution to the island'.

Were it not for the fact that Santa Cruz has let these madmen thrive, speak seriously in their delirium, there would all around laughter in the town.

But in this case there can be nothing but contempt, even among the small number of the unwary, for those who conduct their ridiculous artistic activities<sup>6</sup>.

**On page 8, *Gaceta de Tenerife* published the news of the Government ban:**

'The Governor's decision. The screening of the film *The Golden Age* is forbidden. We inform you that the Civil Governor of this province, Mr Malboysson, has banned the screening, public or private, of the aforementioned film...

We are very pleased with the Government's ban, as this film is a disgusting heap of religious desecration and immorality, unworthy of being shown to any decent audience.

*Gaceta de Tenerife* have done their duty of denouncing the exhibition of *The Golden Age* at Cinema Numancia to the authorities and the general public, and of calling for its ban as an urgent and vigorous moral therapy.

As we achieve our purpose, we applaud the administrative authorities, which have done their duty by forbidding such cinematic trash – sponsored by the Ateneo and *Gaceta de arte!* – from being shown in Santa Cruz or any town in the province under their jurisdiction<sup>7</sup>.

**On same day, the republican newspaper *Hoy* [Today], confirmed the suspension of the screening with a brief note:**

Suspension of a surrealist film.

The civil Governor Mr Malboysson told us yesterday in the morning that he forbade the screening of the surrealist film *The golden age*, which had been announced for tomorrow at Cinema Numancia.<sup>8</sup>

**The atmosphere was very tense and after the attack by *Gaceta de Tenerife* the response by Benigno Ramos, owner of Cinema Numancia was published on the 16 June:**

I have read [in yesterdays' newspaper] a few comments relating to *The Golden Age*, [claiming] that I have been paid to be the enabling instrument for the exhibition of the film.

I regret very much your unflattering opinion of this Cinema, and cannot but disagree with it, because here I have only screened, and will continue to do so, films that are authorized by the relevant authorities. A business of this kind cannot be subject to programmes [that satisfy only] a certain ideology.

<sup>6</sup> Unsigned.1935. "Figuras de la Pasión en el film surrealista 'La Edad de oro'", *La gaceta de Tenerife*, 15 June.

<sup>7</sup> Unsigned.1935. "Resolución plausible. Se prohíbe la proyección de la película "La Edad de Oro"", *La Gaceta de Tenerife*, 15 June.

<sup>8</sup> Unsigned.1935. "Suspensión de una película surrealista", *Hoy*, 15 June.

<sup>9</sup> Ramos, Benigno. 1935. 'Una carta. Sobre la prohibición de ser proyectada la película "La edad de oro"', *La Gaceta de Tenerife*, 16 June.

<sup>10</sup> Unsigned. 1935. "Una carta. Sobre la prohibición de ser proyectada la película "La edad de Oro"', *La Gaceta de Tenerife*, 16 June.

<sup>11</sup> Unsigned. 1935. 'Gaceta de Tenerife falsea la verdad', 16 June, in Pérez Corrales, Miguel. 1987. *Agustín Espinosa, entre el Mito y el Sueño*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria: pp. 726-728.

This Cinema does not have any political ideology, which is proved by the fact that several conferences have been held in it, including Catholic<sup>9</sup>.

To this dignified and elegant letter, the editorial of the *Gaceta de Tenerife* answered with insulting disregard, in a paragraph that appears next to the previous letter:

The letter from Mr Ramos means that he would have allowed the screening of *The Golden Age*? What do the morality or the perversion of society matter to Mr Ramos? Is this not what you want to say, Mr Ramos?

Precisely! Public opinion and the people already know that they cannot trust Cinema Numancia<sup>10</sup> anymore.

Meanwhile, the editors of *Gaceta de arte* and the director of the Ateneo de Santa Cruz defended their position in the newspaper *La Tarde*. On the 16 June, *La Tarde* published an unsigned article, later attributed to Agustín Espinosa (Pérez Corrales, 1986, 726-728):

*Gaceta de Tenerife* blows things out of proportion. They (the editors) ring their acerbic bells on the occasion of the thwarted screening in the Canary Islands of surrealist film *The Golden Age*, which they qualify as 'criminal heresy at the hands of those who have lost all sensitivity'.

Despite the unfounded statements of *Gaceta de Tenerife* that the 'Monstrous film has not been shown in the Mainland', *The Golden Age* has indeed PREMIERED in the Mainland.

Yes, SIRS, *The Golden Age* has already been released in Spain. Yes it has, *Mr know-it-all*, *Mr fake-it-all* of *Gaceta de Tenerife*, it has been released in Madrid, at the end of 1931, in a special invitation-only session, as it was going to be shown in Santa Cruz. Yes, gentlemen, it has been released already. Contrasting his deep and wide culture and his fine critical acumen to the rude stridency of *Gaceta de Tenerife*, it was precisely your Ernesto Giménez Caballero who wrote the following about *The Golden Age* (*El Robinson Literario de España*, p. 9, n. 4): *The Golden Age* is an exciting, honest, POETIC and great film. I say it with all my strength. AND IT SEEMS POETIC TO ME BECAUSE IT IS MORAL. It is the most religious film that has ever been made in Cinema so far. There is such a strong yearning for purity in it that its allusions to Sade and Freud are unimportant<sup>11</sup>.

On the following day, Pedro García Cabrera, poet and editor of *Gaceta de arte*, published an article defending the screening of *L'Âge d'Or* and the owner of Cinema Numancia:

*Gaceta de Tenerife* made a fuss and pulled their hair out in frustration (or even kicked themselves) as they saw masons, Jews and Bolsheviks where none ever existed. They saw cynical, immoral degenerates and maniacs among those who have tried to present a cinematographic work in a private session. And it collected fables about Jesus Christ entering 'brothel clubs', when this is not true at all...

But although there are several aspects related to the failed exhibition of *The Golden Age*, all of them picturesque, in this article we will collect the diatribes against the Cinema Numancia owner whose property was the venue for the film

that was going to be screened. *Gaceta de Tenerife* says ‘whether or not censored by the authorities, this immoral show seems wrong to all of us’. ‘Immoral’, in this specific case, aside from hints of religious character contained in this film, is under the dominant influence of Eros and is instinctively against all social prejudices. The role of the owner is limited. He shows every kind of film, attending only to the discretion of the authorities regarding morality, because if films depended on the push-pull of moral individuals or groups, no cinematographic work would merit general acquiescence. The owner makes his profit [percentage] and moves on. And this is, exactly, what makes *Gaceta de Tenerife* a newspaper company, which, as a company, is faithful to the morale of percentage.<sup>12</sup>

Despite such grounded and reasonable articles against the virulence of the *Gaceta de Tenerife*, the editors of the newspaper did not stop, even attacking those who defended the screening of *The Golden Age* in private conversations, as in the case of Elfidio Alonso, a member of the Tenerife Partido Republicano, who had complained about the handling of censorship and the consequent ban of *L’ Âge d’Or* in the corridors of the Congress.

The disdainful and dangerous comment by the *Gaceta de Tenerife* was ad hominem: Don Elfidio has allowed himself this pointless talk in the corridors, saying that ‘because of a poor understanding of morality by Catholic elements in Tenerife’ *The Golden Age* has been banned. And there is one of two options: Either that novel Member speaks without knowing such a film, the disgusting and reprehensible nature of its script and development, or Don Elfidio has a very poor concept of morality...

Not one line justifies Don Elfidio’s childlike behaviour. The country can now once more see how Members of the Partido Republicano of Tenerife use their time in Parliament. Instead of working in the Chamber of the Congress to address the many problems that exist today in the economy of Tenerife, they are busy coming out in defence of pornographic films in the corridors of the Camera<sup>13</sup>.

As we can see, *Gaceta de Tenerife* was not only waging war against Buñuel’s film. Their targets were also the young politicians of the Republican Party of Tenerife, the Cinema Numancia owner, the editors of *Gaceta de arte* and the director of the Ateneo de Santa Cruz, Agustín Espinosa. We must not forget that this environment, already overshadowed by censorship and bigotry, resounded with the first echoes of rebellion in certain sectors of society, which explains why *Gaceta de Tenerife* attacked their targets with impunity. Not content with banning the screening of the film, (which had plunged Westerdahl, Pérez Minik and Agustín Espinosa into debt), *Gaceta de Tenerife* continued attacking everything having to do with the surrealist adventure, including Breton and Péret. A month later, the Catholic editors published a piece by Alonso Tabares during the Semana de la Buena Prensa [Week of the Good Press] held at the Catholic Youth of La Laguna headquarters: *Gaceta de arte* claims to represent a new universalist sense, but it is plunged in the absolute aberration led by Picasso, of whom is said that he is not even responsible for himself. And this was brought to us, the people of Tenerife, by

<sup>12</sup> García Cabrera, Pedro. 1935. ‘El pleito surrealista. La moral del tanto por ciento’, *La Tarde*, 17 June.

<sup>13</sup> Unsigned. 1935. ‘Mientras desatienden los intereses del país. ¡De lo que se preocupan los diputados del Partido Republicano Tinerfeño!’, *La Gaceta de Tenerife*, 22 June.

Eduardo Westerdahl- Agustín Espinosa – 1936 –  
Fondo Westerdahl, Gobierno de Canarias



<sup>14</sup> Unsigned.1935. 'En La Laguna. Semana de la Buena Prensa', *La Gaceta de Tenerife*, 13 July.

<sup>15</sup> Unsigned.1935. "Comentarios del día", *La Gaceta de Tenerife*, 27 September.

the leading figures of Breton and Perait (sic), both nullities in the artistic and cultural life of France. They did not succeed to show the film *The Golden Age* in Santa Cruz Cruz due to the magnificent *Gaceta de Tenerife* and the Catholic associations' campaign that unmasked the *Gaceta de arte* editors<sup>14</sup>.

Continuing their tireless personal and political fight against freedom of expression and the 27 September 1935 issue, with a cover featuring the new Government of the Republic, insisted:

Our vigorous campaign against the screening of *The Golden Age*, sponsored by the Ateneo and *Gaceta de arte*, was successful: We tenaciously opposed it and the awful film could not be shown<sup>15</sup>.

The consequences of this campaign were dramatic: the screening of *The Golden Age* was banned, the owner of Cinema Numancia was discredited, Member of Parliament Elfidio Alonso was slandered, and the Ateneo de Santa Cruz and *Gaceta de arte* were viciously attacked.

These problems were echoed in *Gaceta de arte's* issue 36 (October 1935):

The case of the surrealist film *The Golden Age* in Tenerife

One of the events planned for the Surrealist campaign organized by *Gaceta de arte* in collaboration with the Ateneo of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, was the screening of the surrealist film *The Golden Age* made by Spanish artists Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí.

When we started negotiations for the screening of this film, the Catholic associations began to mobilize against it, launching a violent campaign in its mouthpiece *Gaceta de Tenerife*. . . . We had never seen such insolent language against a cultural and artistic exhibition on the island, or such an attack against freedom of expression by the reactionary forces<sup>16</sup>.

Forced to leave Ateneo de Santa Cruz, a month later Agustín Espinosa was transferred to Gran Canaria to head the Instituto Pérez Galdós. On 12 November 1935, newspaper *Hoy* announced that Fulgencio Egea was now director of the Ateneo. Vice President Pedro Pinto de la Rosa and the librarian, Domingo Pérez Minik, had been supporters of the modern project that Agustín Espinosa had directed.

<sup>16</sup> Unsigned. 1935. 'El caso del film surrealista "La edad de oro" en Tenerife', *Gaceta de arte*, n. 36, October, p. 2.

## The Spanish Civil War and the Lost Film

The Spanish Civil War started on 18 July 1936.

Pedro García Cabrera was arrested on the 18 July at the gate of the Santa Cruz Town Hall, where he served as city councillor for the Socialist Party. He remained in prison until 1947.

Domingo Pérez Minik was also immediately arrested but he was released three months later. Domingo López Torres, another surrealist editor of *Gaceta de arte*, was arrested and killed at the beginning of 1937.

Eduardo Westerdahl, whose Swedish passport allowed guaranteed his freedom (under pain of silence), received a letter from Breton dated 15 July:

My dear friend:

I have heard neither from you nor from our friend Oscar Domínguez in a long time. He had promised me that he would write, but he must have locked himself in a very worrisome silence. I suppose you will know that the Surrealist Exhibition in London has had a triumphal welcome (25.000 visitors). Have you received the catalogue on time? I'd like to know your opinion about these latest publications and especially about my last poem "Le château étoilé" that has

<sup>17</sup> Breton, André: letter to Eduardo Westerdahl; 15 July 1936, Fondo Westerdahl, AHPT, D. 183.

<sup>18</sup> Pliego de cargos. Expediente de Depuración de Agustín Espinosa García, 31 April 1937. Archivo Familia Agustín Espinosa.

<sup>19</sup> Espinosa, Agustín: letter to Eduardo Westerdahl, undated, Fondo Westerdahl, AHPT, D.303.

been translated in the magazine "Sur"... My dream is that this poem, which is very special for me, can be published in Tenerife, either with illustrations by Domínguez or photographs by any of you two. Do you think this could be possible? It would make me very happy, dear friend, if we could make it possible.<sup>17</sup> Agustín Espinosa, whose surreal fervour had not prevented his sympathy for the Spanish Falange, suffered a cruel persecution. In the first months of the war, he was denounced by the priest Manuel Socorro, a teacher at the Institute where he worked. Agustín Espinosa was expelled from the Institute and accused, among other things, of having written 'The crime of Augustin' and trying 'to show in the cinemas of this city an immoral and sacrilegious film in which the most pure person of Jesus Christ appears in a cabaret'<sup>18</sup>.

His fragile health condition and his fear of losing his freedom and even his life, after having lost his job and being barely able to support his family, made him join the Falange Española. In spite of this he did not end his relationship with his friends at *Gaceta de Arte*. He wrote to Eduardo Westerdahl in 1938 giving him news of his poor health and financial situation. Despite these, he still continued to pay the existing debt:

I send you back the signed payment notice. I've been sick for several days, which is why I haven't been able to pick up your letter before. Anyway, I don't think the deadline will expire, as today is still the 18<sup>th</sup>. I live with my mother-in-law. *I have no salary*. If there was any vacancy at the newspaper, that would be something good. If I am sent to the front, which would be in the second half of August, I'll see you in Tenerife, because I will pay my family a visit before leaving<sup>19</sup>.

He could not have gone to the front. The ulcer he had been suffering of for a long time prevented him. He would die in January 1940, a few months after the war ended, in after a surgical intervention.

The copy of *L'Âge d'Or*, which Espinosa had surely received (since he was the only person that Westerdahl and Pérez Minik could trust in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), was lost forever. The brutal censorship they had suffered was so hard that either he, or the mysterious German citizen (Pérez Minik would speak about him years later), made sure it disappeared.

## Conclusion

Through correspondence and articles published in 1935, this article has made it possible to trace this case of censorship against a work of art, Luis Buñuel's film *L'Âge d'Or*.

Breton's relationship with the Canary Islands was over, although, in a letter from Barcelona, during the Civil War, Benjamin Péret wrote to him about García Cabrera, who had been deported to North Africa.

Oscar Domínguez and André Breton maintained their friendship until 1940, the year in which Breton departed for exile in United States. Domínguez remained in France. Although they tried to mend their relationship through Maud Bonneaud, Domínguez' wife, this was impossible.

Eduardo Westerdahl and Domingo Pérez Minik continued working for culture in the Canary Islands. In 1981 they both organized a publication on the 2nd Surrealist Exhibition in the Canary Islands. And, despite having written about it in *La facción surrealista española de Tenerife*, neither Pérez Minik nor Eduardo Westerdahl wrote a single word about the lost copy of *L'Âge d'Or*.

Censorship against a work of art had been so effective that forty-six years later the protagonists of this story were still afraid of speaking about it.

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