

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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The Young and the Damned / Los olvidados, or The Forgotten Ones (1950)
Luis Buñuel (1900-1983)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Luis Buñuel is known as one of most influential surrealist filmmakers of the mid-twentieth century. Although he was born and raised near Zaragoza, Spain, he spent a large portion of his life and career as an exile in Paris and Mexico City. One of his earliest short films, *Le chien andalou* (1929), or the *Andalusian Dog*, became an iconic representation of eerie surrealist art in which Buñuel presented the audience with a series of unsettling, violent, and even erotic images plucked from a dream. Buñuel would continue in his surrealist style with such films as *L'Age D'or* (1930), or the *Age of Gold*. Later in his career, the director adapted novels and short stories to film and used the narratives to criticize the Francoist regime and expose the Catholic repression of the era. The middle period of Buñuel's career was characterized by several satirical and allegorical dramas based on Biblical stories and nineteenth-century Spanish novels. Buñuel's production in Mexico in the 1950s and 60s included this quasi documentary that is the subject of the essay, *Nazarín* (1959), in which the title priest attempts to administer to a rural Mexican community, and *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), a masterful critique of the bourgeoisie. In the last phase of his career, Buñuel returned to his hyper-erotic and surreal style in such films as *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972).

Film *The Young and the Damned* (1950) is a black and white film set in the slums and urban nooks and crannies of Mexico City in the early 1950s. Although there is a fictional plotline concerning the boys in the gang, there are also moments that mimic a documentary style. For this reason, this film is often described as a mix of Italian Neorealism, New Wave, and surrealism. Buñuel worked with his long-time collaborator Luis Alcoriza and the famous Spanish novelist Max Aub to write the screenplay. The director cast authentic Mexican youths in the film, including the charismatic and menacing Roberto Cobo in the role of El Jaibo. Although the film did not win any awards of note, critics cite this bleak drama as one of the best (if not the best) Buñuel films produced and filmed in Mexico. In fact, a film convention in 1994 ranked *The Young and the Damned* #2 on the list of the best Mexican films of all time.

Background Due to a long exile in Mexico, Buñuel's films in the 1940s and 1950s (and early 1960s) were often shot in and around Mexico City. This film features shots of real neighborhoods in the D.F. As with many of his Mexican films, Buñuel worked with producer Óscar Dancigers and the Tepeyac Production Company in Mexico City. While *Young and the Damned* reflects a distinctly urban Mexican culture and dialect, its style and themes echo Buñuel's short documentary film of 1933, *Las Hurdes / Land Without Bread*. In this early film, Buñuel documents the misery of the Spanish peasants and farmers in the mountains of Las Hurdes, an area in the province of Extremadura (northern Spain). Both films underscore the destructive effects of generational poverty on society.

CHARACTERS

<i>Pedro</i>	Young protagonist who falls in with the gang
<i>El Jaibo (the crab)</i>	Leader of the gang from Tampico
<i>Julián</i>	Ex-gang member who is accidentally killed
<i>Ojitos (little eyes)</i>	The lost boy from the country
<i>Cacarizo (pock-marked)</i>	Another gang member and older brother to Meche
<i>Meche</i>	Cacarizo's sister and family milkmaid
<i>Don Carmelo</i>	Blind man who busks in the market
<i>Marta</i>	Pedro's mother
<i>Julián's Father</i>	Drunkard who depends on Julián for money
<i>School Director</i>	Principal of the agrarian reform school

SYNOPSIS

The film opens with aerial shots of several major cities and a voiceover monologue commenting on society's failure to address poverty and delinquency in urban settings. The first half of the film centers on a group of boys playing in construction sites and committing petty crimes. Among them is El Jaibo, the tough ringleader of the gang, Cacarizo, an older boy who has a younger sister Meche, and Pedro, a new recruit.

In the marketplace, there is a boy from the country who waits for the return of his father. The country boy is nick-named Ojitos (or little eyes), and he ends up staying with and working for the blind musician who busks in the market, Don Carmelo. Meche, a teenage girl, also works for Don Carmelo and befriends Ojitos.

When Jaibo takes Pedro on an errand to confront ex-gang member Julián at work, the meeting turns into a confrontation. El Jaibo hits Julián with a concrete block and ends up killing him. From that point on, Jaibo and Pedro try to evade the police, and El Jaibo threatens Pedro continually.

Eventually, Pedro is sent to an agrarian trade school after he is accused of stealing a knife from his boss. When Pedro goes on an errand for the principal, he ends up fighting with El Jaibo in the streets. Later that night, El Jaibo kills Pedro in a barn, then is shot by the cops minutes later. Meche and her grandfather find Pedro's body and decide to throw it in the garbage dump.

SCENES

Opening Credits and Narration During the credits, a paragraph pops up underscoring the authenticity of the characters and stating that the film is based on real-life events. The opening scene consists of low-angle shots of New York City from the Hudson Bay, The Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Big Ben in London, and ending with an aerial shot of Mexico City. A male narrator explains that behind the majesty of the cities lies immense misery and poor children; furthermore, this festering problem is universal and has yet to be resolved.

Meet the Toreros The shots of Mexico City fade to a group of boys playing in the slum. We see a distant shot of one boy waving a rag in the style of a Spanish matador while another boy charges him as the bull. There is a sudden close-up of the boy playing the bull, and we see that he has lost his teeth. The camera then shows the boys chatting and smoking, and among them is the young Pedro. The older boys try to get the others to smoke, and when one of them says no, they call him a "*marica*" (fairy or fag). Then, the teenagers mention that El Jaibo has escaped from the correctional school.



El Jaibo Back on the Streets El Jaibo walks along the city streets, smoking, and orders a tortilla from a street vendor. The vendor asks about toppings, and El Jaibo replies that he can put everything on it. El Jaibo is startled when he sees a black cop car approaching, and he runs away. The camera cuts to one of the boys in the gang shining El Jaibo's shoes as the teenager brags about his escape from the correctional school. The boys ask him questions, and El Jaibo mentions that the beds were ok and the food was pretty good. One boy asks if it is true that Julián ratted on him, and El Jaibo confirms the rumor.



Ojitos Waiting in the Marketplace The camera cuts to vendors carrying baskets in the plaza and Don Carmelo playing his pipes. There is a close-up on Ojitos, who is crying and moving around trying to spot his father. When Don Carmelo finishes his song, he proceeds to give a speech about the good old days under the Porfiriato, which refers to the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) and the period leading up to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Don Carmelo asserts that men used to be more



honorable and women stayed home instead of running around on their husbands. The crowd, which includes several small children, laughs at the blind man's commentary. Don Carmelo asks for donations, and some of the crowd throw coins on a newspaper on the ground.

The Gang's First Robbery El Jaibo leads the other boys to the marketplace, and they stand in front of Ojitos. El Jaibo gives them instructions as to how to rob Don Carmelo, and all the boys agree. Pedro notices Ojitos's judging look, and he pushes Ojitos and calls him "*chango*" (monkey). As Don Carmelo sings, the shortest boy in the gang inches closer to Don Carmelo's side and attempts to cut his purse strap with a razor. The blind man feels the strap moving and strikes the boy with a wooden club. Later, the boy reveals a deep cut on his shin, and the gang realizes that Don Carmelo's club had a jagged nail on it. El Jaibo suggests that the short boy put a cobweb on his wound to stop the bleeding.



The Boys' Revenge Back at the marketplace, Don Carmelo collects his things and calls out for help crossing the street. He feels Ojitos's face and asks the boy why he is crying. Ojitos explains that his father left him there and he never came back. Don Carmelo asks him for help, and as Ojitos leads him, the gang returns and plans their revenge. El Jaibo and two other gang members follow Don Carmelo and throw rocks and mud at him. El Jaibo destroys his instruments, and the blind man trips and falls as he tries to intervene. There is a close-up on a rooster facing the blind man as he lifts his head.



Marta Punishes Pedro Marta, Pedro's mother, has returned from work to give her four children breakfast. There is a baby on the bed and Pedro's younger brother and sister. Marta doles out a sandwich to each child as Pedro enters the room. Marta asks him why he was out all night, and Pedro replies that he was looking for work and he is hungry. Marta refuses to give him a sandwich and tells him that it is punishment for his bad behavior. She reminds him that she had to wash floors just to buy a meal for everyone. When she turns to lift the kettle, Pedro grabs the last sandwich and runs out the door.



Julián Fetches His Father Back in the plaza, Ojitos continues to wait for his father at the fountain. Pedro chats with him and asks him why he is in the city. Ojitos replies that he came with his father from Los Reyes but doesn't know why they made the trek to the city. Pedro takes Ojitos's coins and buys them food from the bar. Meanwhile, Julián, an ex-gang member, drags his drunk father out of the bar and walks him home. His father shows remorse for drinking away Julián's salary, and he vows never to drink again.



Visit to the Family Barn Pedro and Ojitos walk to Cacarizo's (or Pock-Marked) family's barn to spend the night. Cacarizo is one of the "elders" of the gang, and he is one of El Jaibo's closest confidants. We see Cacarizo enter and greet his mother, who is bedridden with extreme pain, and his brother and two sisters, all sleeping in the same room. Meche, Cacarizo's younger sister, goes to the barn for hay and is startled when El Jaibo, hidden on the floor, grabs her leg. They exchange a few words, and El Jaibo remarks that she has gotten pretty while he was in prison. Cacarizo lets Pedro and Ojitos spend the night, and they all enter. Meche tries to leave, and El Jaibo grabs her again, vowing to marry her when he has money. When Cacarizo and Meche leave, the boys decide to milk the cows before bed. Ojitos lays down and suckles directly from the cow's teat.



El Jaibo and Pedro Confront Julián The next morning, Pedro takes El Jaibo to the construction site where Julián works. Pedro asks Julián to talk to El Jaibo outside of the work area. Meanwhile, El Jaibo uses a bandana as a fake sling and hides a brick in the scarf. When they are a few yards away from the construction site, El Jaibo accuses Julián of ratting him out to the police. Julián replies that he did not say anything and he will fight El Jaibo once the latter's arm has healed. When Julián turns around to threaten Pedro, El Jaibo uses the brick to strike Julián's head, then he continues hitting him with a stick. Julián lies unconscious in the weeds, and El Jaibo steals the cash from his pocket.



Don Carmelo Treats Cacarizo's Mother Don Carmelo runs into Ojitos at the market and tells him that his father may have abandoned him. The blind man offers to feed and shelter Ojitos in exchange for assistance, and Ojitos follows him back to Cacarizo's house. Don Carmelo enters the house to check on Cacarizo and Meche's mother. He takes a dove from under the bed, squeezes its wings, and moves it like a brush over the woman's back. We see a huge tumor protruding from one shoulder as Cacarizo's mother complains of the pain. Don Carmelo assures her that the dove is taking in her illness and when it dies, she will be cured. Outside, Meche and Ojitos talk about the illness and the treatment. Ojitos tell Meche that the dove won't work, but he gives her a dead man's tooth to protect her from the evil eye.



The Boys Attack a Man Without Legs El Jaibo approaches a man without legs who pushes himself on a cart. The words "me miraa's"—you were looking at me—are painted on the side of the cart. El Jaibo asks the man for a cigarette and he says no. The boys come out from various corners and surround the disabled man. They lift him up and rob him, then leave him on the sidewalk. El Jaibo takes his cart and kicks it down the hill. A few minutes later, the boys are celebrating their triumph by drinking soda. El Jaibo brags that he is just getting started, and he gives each gang member a peso.



Julián Is Dead Another boy comes running up to the gang and reports that Julián was found dead not far from the construction site. The boys run to go look at the body, but El Jaibo and Pedro stay behind. Pedro accuses El Jaibo of murder, but he replies that that wasn't his intention. El Jaibo threatens Pedro and warns that they will both end up in jail if he tells the cops what happened. Pedro protests that he didn't do anything, but El Jaibo reminds him that they are in this mess together.



Pedro's Dream Pedro returns home and falls asleep in bed. He has a dream in which a white chicken falls from the ceiling, and he gets up to find a bleeding Julián lying under his bed. His mother arises in a white nightgown and approaches him with her arms outstretched. Pedro asks why she won't kiss him and why she doesn't love him. Pedro embraces her and promises to find a job. She walks away, and Pedro asks why she wouldn't give him meat the other day. Marta retrieves a big flank steak from the bed. When she gives Pedro the meat, El Jaibo jumps up and tries to steal it from him. They fight until Pedro wakes up.



Pedro Gets a Job and Meche Milks the Cow The next morning, Pedro enters a blacksmith shop with a sign that says "Apprentice Wanted." The camera fades to the barn where Meche is milking the cow. While Ojitos waits for Don Carmelo's daily bottle to be filled, he tells Meche that his female relatives rub milk on their legs to moisturize their skin. Ojitos leaves with the bottle but stays outside talking with Meche's older brother. Inside, Meche lifts her skirt and rubs milk on her exposed thighs.

El Jaibo assaults Meche El Jaibo jumps down from the loft of the barn and tells Meche that he will give her two pesos for a kiss. She agrees reluctantly, and El Jaibo grabs her. Meche tries to fight him off and yells at him to let her go. Meche's brother Cacarizo and Ojitos hear Meche crying from outside, and Ojitos starts to move towards the barn. Meche's brother stops him and says that El Jaibo is having fun with his sister. A minute later, Meche runs out insulting El Jaibo, who says she is overreacting. Ojitos throws a piece of wood at El Jaibo's head. The gang leader runs over and slaps him. Meche intervenes and escorts Ojitos out. She kisses him on the cheek.

Cacarizo Confronts El Jaibo Back in the barn, Cacarizo confronts El Jaibo about Julián's murder. When El Jaibo protests, Cacarizo assuages him by saying that El Jaibo must have had a good reason for killing Julián. Cacarizo's grandfather enters and interrupts the conversation. He asks who his grandson is with, and Cacarizo answers that El Jaibo is a friend who is helping out. The grandfather kicks them both out, and Cacarizo shows El Jaibo a construction site where he can hide out from the cops.

Ojitos Gets Abused Twice When El Jaibo enters the construction site, he spots Ojitos carrying water. The gang leader roughs him up and threatens him, saying: tell no one you saw me here. Ojitos proceeds on to Don Carmelo's house with the water. The blind man asks him about the other voice, and Ojitos says it was just a passerby. Don Carmelo thinks he is lying and pulls Ojitos' ear until he gives up El Jaibo's name. When he finally lets him go, Ojitos, enraged, picks up a concrete brick from the floor. He approaches and lifts the brick, but eventually decides to drop it. Don Carmelo hears the noise, and Ojitos says that it was a rock that fell. There is a close-up of Don Carmelo's hand cutting potatoes with a knife.



Pedro with the Chickens The camera cuts to Pedro in the coop-like area next to his house. He bends over to pick up a chick, and he pets it gently. Suddenly, a rooster flies up on top of the wall. Pedro throws a rock at it. When he goes inside, he tells his mother that he found a job and promises to behave. Marta sorts beans and does not respond. Pedro grabs her hand and kisses it, which causes the beans to fall on the floor. When they hear screeching outside, Marta takes a broom to break up the fight. They see the rooster attacking the hens, and Marta starts hitting the rooster with the broom. Pedro is horrified, yells for her to stop, and runs inside.



Theft in the Blacksmith's Shop The camera cuts to the smelting bellows in the blacksmith shop, and we see the pools of hot metal. Pedro moves the bellows until the blacksmith and his other apprentice leave the shop. El Jaibo watches the boss leave and sneaks into the shop. Pedro continues to work as El Jaibo enters and warns him that the police will interrogate them regarding Julián's murder. Pedro asks if they found out what happened, and El Jaibo answers no. When Pedro's back is turned, El Jaibo steals one of the knives on the table and leaves. The blacksmith returns, lets Pedro go for the day, and notices the missing knife. The other apprentice suggests that it fell, but the owner suspects that it was Pedro.



Sexual Tension at the House El Jaibo shows up at Pedro's house to continue the conversation about the cops, but Pedro is not yet there. Marta is washing her legs with soap, and El Jaibo leers at her. While he waits for Pedro, El Jaibo tells Marta that he is jealous of Pedro for having a nice mother. Marta asks about his parents, and El Jaibo says that he is an orphan who only has one early memory of his mother's face.



Policeman at the Door Pedro starts to approach the house at night and notices that a cop is talking with his mother outside. He watches for a few seconds, then runs away. Marta lets the cop inside the house, and Pedro's siblings and El Jaibo listen. The policeman tells them about the missing knife and that it could have only been Pedro who stole it. Pedro's sister yells that it wasn't him, but Marta asserts that he needs to be punished. She explains that he is out at all hours with a bad crowd. The policeman warns that Pedro will be arrested, and Marta says that she supports the toughest punishment, including beating him.

Pedro is Almost Molested The camera cuts to a shot of busy city traffic at night. We see Pedro meandering on a commercial street. An older, well-dressed man approaches him and says a few words. Even though we can't hear the dialogue, we can see that he is propositioning Pedro and offering him money. However, when a cop walks by, the old man signals for Pedro to run away. The camera cuts to the next morning, when Pedro is sleeping outside at another construction site. When he wakes up, he is chased out by two older homeless men.

Carnival Exploitation The camera cuts to an aerial shot of a carnival with tents and rides. Pedro and two other boys are pushing the horses of the carousel to keep it moving. Pedro asks for a lunch break, but the barker only yells at them to keep going. There is a close-up of a small girl on one of the horses who is smiling, then a close-up on the smaller boy pushing the carousel. The smaller boy sweats and tells the barker to pay him what he owes. The barker hits him, and the boy vows to destroy the carousel if he isn't paid.



Ojitos and Pedro Work the Market After one of Don Carmelo's performances, Ojitos collects money from the spectators in his hat. Pedro approaches him and asks whether there is news about Julián's death or El Jaibo. Ojitos replies no, but their conversation is interrupted when the carousel boss kicks Pedro and tells him to get back to work. Pedro turns the wheel for another carnival ride while Ojitos gives him an update. Ojitos says that El Jaibo is still living in Cacarizo's barn and that no one knows where Pedro has gone. The carnival barker throws out Ojitos, and Pedro runs away as his boss yells after him.

Seduction at the House El Jaibo returns to the house looking for Pedro, but Marta tells him that she hasn't seen him for days. The young kids tell Marta that the baby has swallowed marbles, and she runs to fish them out. Pedro's siblings sit on the floor playing with marbles and several chicks. When they hear the circus music, Pedro's younger siblings run out to watch a dancing dog show. El Jaibo continues to look at Marta as she picks up the marbles and shoos the chicks outside. El Jaibo and Marta exchange several erotic glances, but El Jaibo eventually turns to leave. Marta asks him if he is leaving already, and El Jaibo turns and closes the door behind him. The camera cuts to the dog show where an old man plays a tambourine and the dogs to dance on their hind legs.



Pedro Returns Home Pedro returns to an empty house and washes himself in the basin. His mother appears in the doorway with the baby on her hip and asks him where he's been. Pedro replies that he is working with the "little horses" and that he wishes that she would hit him rather than ignoring or dismissing him. Marta sets down the baby and starts hitting him, saying that he only worked at the blacksmiths so that he could steal. Pedro jumps over the bed to escape the beating and grabs a wooden stool. Marta sees that he intends to strike her with the chair and asks "Are you actually capable of that?" He replies no and says he will go where she takes him.



Juvenile Court Marta speaks with the bureaucrat assigned to Pedro's case, and he tells her that the sentence will be to send Pedro to an agrarian reform school. Marta replies that she agrees, but when the official asks for her signature, she mentions that she cannot write. The official asks for her x and suggests that she talk to Pedro before he is sent away. She replies that she is not interested, and the administrator admonishes her for lack of feeling. The bureaucrat tells her that delinquents crave affection and they suffer when they don't get it from their parents. Marta retorts that she works all day and did not even know Pedro's father. The official asks a guard to accompany Marta to the cell.

Saying Goodbye in the Cell Pedro waits in the cell after the hearing on the knife. Two boys play a version of "cat's cradle" with string, and they wonder what Pedro's crime could have been. Marta enters and reports that Pedro will be sent to the agrarian school. Pedro sits silently, then accuses Marta of pretending to be a "good" mother for appearances. Marta replies that he deserves punishment for stealing the knife, and Pedro swears that he didn't do it. Pedro accuses his mother of trying to get him to talk. She watches his behavior and says calmly, "I believe you". Pedro starts crying with his head down, and Marta slowly walks out of the cell. Pedro realizes that she has left and runs to the edge of the cell, crying out for her.



El Jaibo Visits Again Marta is fetching water outside when El Jaibo approaches her from behind. El Jaibo tells her that he heard of Pedro's sentence and wants to visit him in the agrarian school before they make him talk. Marta assures him that Pedro didn't rat him out, and El Jaibo plays dumb. She then mentions that El Jaibo visited the blacksmith shop on the day of the robbery. El Jaibo evades the accusation and says he will leave since she is in a bad mood. Marta tells him never to come back.

Chat with the Principal Pedro, now clean, enters the principal's office at the agrarian school. The principal compliments his appearance and tells him that they can teach him to write and how to work in a trade. He mentions that another boy from the school became a locomotive engineer. Pedro objects, saying that he doesn't belong there and he didn't steal. The principal notes that according to the files, Pedro is good with animals. He tells his assistant to assign Pedro to work with the chickens in the coop.

Fight on the Farm Pedro is sitting on a bench outside when another boy brings a bucket of eggs over. Pedro tries to drink the yolk but spits it out. He throws the egg directly at the camera, and the yolk drips down the lens. A group of boys approaches and tells Pedro that they sell the eggs and he cannot have any. Pedro resists, and one of the boys runs to tell the principal. Pedro calls him a rat, and one of the other boys puts up his fists. Pedro smashes another egg on his head, and the two start wrestling and punching each other. The boys run to the other side of the fence, and Pedro starts whacking the fence with a stick. He turns around and starts beating two white hens on the ground. The camera cuts to a low angle shot of Pedro's enraged face, then a shot of the dead hens with broken legs.



Pedro's Punishment The principal and assistant come running up and disperse the boys who are watching Pedro's meltdown. The principal orders that Pedro be sent to a room to cool down, but he also tells the assistant to feed him a good meal. When the assistant asks the principal why he is smiling, he muses that he wishes he could "lock up" poverty instead of the boys.



The Principal's Test The camera cuts to Pedro drawing a chicken on the wall. The principal fetches him and walks with him through the farm. He explains to Pedro that he understands his rage, and he suggests that Pedro wanted to attack everyone at the school—and the chickens were the unfortunate substitutes. Pedro agrees with the principal's analysis. The principal gives Pedro 50 pesos and asks him to go buy him a carton of cigarettes outside. He reminds Pedro that the school is not a prison and he can actually leave. Excited, Pedro runs out the front gate. The principal's assistant warns the director that this method of education will cost him. The principal replies that Pedro is the type of boy who needs someone to trust him.

El Jaibo's Ambush Pedro walks directly to the tobacco shop but is interrupted by El Jaibo, who was waiting for him right outside the school gates. El Jaibo threatens Pedro again about squealing on him, and Pedro replies that he is not a rat. El Jaibo notices the 50-peso note and asks Pedro how he got it. Pedro replies that he is on an errand for the principal, but El Jaibo tries to steal it. Pedro resists and declares that he wants to go back to the school. El Jaibo pins him to the ground and threatens to break his wrist. He grabs the bill and jumps onto a moving bus while Pedro runs after him.

Pedro Confronts El Jaibo The camera cuts to El Jaibo playing craps with the other boys. Pedro approaches and demands that El Jaibo give him back the bill. El Jaibo calls him a wimp and fag when he says he wants to give the money back to the principal. El Jaibo pushes Pedro and tells him to go back to his mother, whom he already "had." Enraged, Pedro charges him and they have an extended fight. El Jaibo quickly pins Pedro and punches him in the face multiple times. Pedro manages to get up, and he accuses El Jaibo of Julián's murder in front of the whole slum. Don Carmelo hums disapprovingly, and the women watching decide to tell the police. El Jaibo runs off, swearing vengeance on Pedro.



Don Carmelo's Lecture on Delinquents Back in the marketplace, Don Carmelo once again laments the sorry state of Mexican society while a circle of women mold tortillas. Don Carmelo suggests that the gang members be hung, and he proclaims that no one would have even dared to speak out during Porfirio Díaz's time as president 50-60 years ago. The women lament that one of the good boys, Julián, was murdered. Don Carmelo asks one of the women to lead him to the police station in order to report on El Jaibo.



Don Carmelo Propositions Meche Pedro runs to Don Carmelo's room and asks Ojitos if El Jaibo still spends the night. Ojitos tells him yes, but that he won't come to the empty shack until very late. Don Carmelo approaches, and Ojitos asks Pedro to hide near the bed and be quiet. Meche brings Don Carmelo his goat's milk, and he thanks her for being such a good girl. He grabs her and mentions that she smells nice. He makes her sit on his lap while he continues to sniff her. Meche lifts up her skirt and takes out a knife. She mimes stabbing Don Carmelo's chest while Ojitos watches and eggs her on. Meche tries to leave, and Don Carmelo bribes her with caramels, saying he will give her two—"after."



Scuffle in Don Carmelo's Room Pedro knocks over supplies in the dark corner, and Don Carmelo, startled, asks Ojitos who it was. When Ojitos says "something fell," Don Carmelo grabs him and pulls him by the hair. Pedro runs out while Don Carmelo continues cursing and abusing Ojitos. Meche intervenes, and Don Carmelo yells that it was El Jaibo coming for revenge. The kids run out shouting insults, and Don Carmelo vows that he will get them all soon enough. He crosses the room and removes a brick in the wall. He takes out a tin can with coins and starts counting them.

Meche Says Goodbye to Ojitos Outside, Marta sees Meche and approaches. Marta asks if they've seen Pedro, and Meche says no. When Marta leaves, Ojitos asks Meche why she lied, and the girl responds that Pedro's mother must have heard about his escape from the agrarian school. Ojitos tells Meche that he will return to the market in hopes of finding his father. Meche wishes him well and gives him a peso and the dead man's tooth.

Deadly Barn Fight Don Carmelo comes back to his neighborhood with the cops and explains that El Jaibo comes back late. The camera cuts to El Jaibo in the barn loft, already asleep in the hay. Pedro enters and quietly climbs the ladder to the same loft, but he startles a chicken on the way up. The clucking alerts El Jaibo, who walks up to Pedro. The two wrestle, and El Jaibo throws Pedro out of the loft. Pedro yells "don't kill me," but El Jaibo proceeds to jump down from the loft and beat Pedro with a piece of wood. The camera then cuts to Meche lying down in the bed next to the window, where she sees

the donkey looking at her. She fetches her grandfather and the two run into the barn. El Jaibo runs out and escapes as they approach.

Pedro is Dead Meche and her grandfather immediately see Pedro's body on the ground, and the chickens are walking over his chest. The grandfather knows that he is dead, and Meche says she knows who killed him. The grandfather urges her to stay quiet so that they are not implicated in the murder. He tells Meche to help him get the body on the donkey so that they can take it away from the house.



El Jaibo is Shot El Jaibo runs through the ruins and behind a wall where the police are waiting. When he runs in the other direction, the police command him to stop. They immediately shoot him in the back twice. Don Carmelo, listening intently, revels in the death of El Jaibo, proclaiming, "One less...they'll all end up like this." He continues by saying, "It would be better if they were never born." Meanwhile, El Jaibo, not yet quite dead, lays prostrate and moves his head back and forth. In a dream-like delirium, he sees a stray dog walking the streets while a young male voice whispers "you are all alone" and a female voice whispers: "Rest, my son."



Dumping the Body The camera fades to Meche and her grandfather guiding the donkey with the loaded dead body on its back. Marta crosses them in the street, but they say nothing to her. Meche and his grandfather continue down the road to a city dump. They throw the body down the hill, and it rolls into a ditch. The camera pans over to a nearby tree.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

EL JAIBO

As the ringleader of the gang, thief, and a two-time murderer, El Jaibo appears to be an unredeemable, evil villain. Yet despite his cruelty, the character also earns sympathy due to his position as a victim of neglect. When he, too, is murdered, the viewer cannot help but consider society as the real villain.

Violent El Jaibo is the most violent among all of the characters. Along with his murder of Julián and Pedro and assault of Meche, he constantly bullies those around him to maintain his power and force his will on others. His violence is physical, verbal, and psychological, especially with his constant threats towards Pedro.

Sociopathic El Jaibo seems to lack empathy towards the other boys. He ruins Pedro's life and ability to get ahead several times throughout the film, and he never shows concern or remorse for his fellow gang members. El Jaibo attacks Meche despite her yells of protest, and he does not feel remorse for killing Julián. He also follows his impulses in the moment without thinking of the consequences.

Vulnerable During his one moment of vulnerability with Marta, El Jaibo reveals his softer side. While he does desire Pedro's mother sexually, he also feels the lack of his own mother and his own identity. His only link to his past is the memory of his mother's affectionate face. It is notable that the sexual encounter with Marta is the only time when El Jaibo does not use violence against others in order to impose his will.

PEDRO

Pedro could be interpreted as the protagonist of the film. He struggles not only to survive but also to escape the traps around him. He vacillates between loyalty to El Jaibo and the gang and his motivation to provide for his mother, or in his words, "behave" and "be good."

Industrious Despite his unfortunate indoctrination into the gang, Pedro attempts to find legitimate work throughout the film: as a blacksmith's assistant, carousel boy, and farm laborer at the reform school. He strives to do a good job for his bosses but is ultimately thwarted by El Jaibo's actions (and the abusive practices of the carnival owner).

Defiant Although he is outmatched in strength and power, Pedro keeps fighting El Jaibo and even attacks him in the street. When he is arrested for stealing the knife, he maintains his innocence. At the agrarian school, he fights back against the boys who try to control him, and he talks back to the principal.

Angry There are hints throughout the film that Pedro is intrinsically kind-hearted but becomes increasingly enraged by the abuse around him. The scene in which Pedro pets the chick suggests that he does have the capacity for gentleness and affection. The principal of the agrarian school notes that Pedro acts tenderly towards the chickens, which suggests that his angry outbursts derive from trauma. Ironically, the description of Pedro's "gentleness" occurs right before Pedro beats the chickens to death. In addition, Pedro lashes out physically at El Jaibo and his mother.

OJITOS

To some extent, Ojitos acts as an exemplar of an innocent country boy and pure peasant life. In addition to his symbolic importance, Ojitos also acquires a complexity as he is forced to acclimate to slum life.

Empathetic Ojitos shows compassion towards both Don Carmelo and Meche, whose rape he tries to stop. Rather than condemn his father for abandoning him, Ojitos seems to keep the faith that he will return.

Moral Ojitos is one of the few characters who does not engage in any crimes. In some cases, he defies the older boys or Don Carmelo when they are violent or oppressive. He refrains from bullying or stealing. He also helps guide Don Carmelo through the busy plaza.

Angry Like the other boys, Ojitos turns to anger when he is repeatedly victimized. He throws a piece of wood at El Jaibo, and he almost kills Don Carmelo after the blind man beats and abuses him.

MARTA

Pedro's mother is essentially a slightly older exemplar of the victim / victimizer individual in the slums. Because she was raped at 14, she is saddled with Pedro. Later, she has three children with another man who dies. Although it is not intentional, her misery is passed down to Pedro and his siblings through her somewhat neglectful behavior (and the necessity to survive).

Weary Like all of the characters, Marta is beaten down by the misery of poverty. She works long hours scrubbing floors and can only afford a few sandwiches to feed her children. She is so tired that she cannot muster the energy to corral Pedro.

Unsympathetic Marta takes a draconian attitude towards Pedro's crimes and misbehaviors. Early in the film, she refuses to give him food as a punishment for disappearing. Later, she encourages the police to imprison Pedro and teach him a lesson. When she visits Pedro in prison, she is somewhat dismissive.

Lustful Despite her traumatic experience with sex, Marta encourages El Jaibo's sexual advances—it could even be suggested that she seduces him. Although Marta starts washing her legs before El Jaibo's arrival, her erotic seated position does frame her as a seductress.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class Unlike other Buñuel films, the focus is not on the bourgeoisie and their servants, but rather on the poorest of the poor in city slums. The characters exist on the extreme edges of society where they must vacillate between victim and victimizer. There is literally and figuratively no place for them: no home, no work, no security, and often, no sense of familial identity or origins. For this reason, the characters exemplify the original title of the film: *Los olvidados*, or the *Forgotten Ones*. And, of course, children, women, the disabled, and elderly are even more marginalized and victimized in the urban jungle. The characters cannot even break into the working class, and as a result, they continue wallowing in generational poverty. Some of the characters attempt to find and keep steady work. Julián seems to have found stability in construction, and Marta, Pedro's mother, works as a maid—although she can

hardly afford anything. Pedro also jumps from job to job, but each time he is hired, El Jaibo or his abusive boss thwarts his efforts.

Disability, Illness and Addiction As with almost all of Buñuel's films made in Mexico, there are several featured characters in the *Young and the Damned* who have physical and mental disabilities / illnesses. Early in the film, the boys attack a man without legs and rob him. Don Carmelo is blind, which puts him in a unique position of being both victim and victimizer. He is able to earn a living in part because of his disability, and his paternal power leads to the physical and sexual abuse of the children. On the other hand, the children are able to strike back because Don Carmelo cannot see danger approaching: Ojitos almost bashes his skull with a concrete block, and Meche almost stabs him with a knife. Cacarizo's mother suffers from a debilitating disease where she literally cannot get out of bed. Her poverty prevents treatment, so she depends upon Don Carmelo brushing a dove on her back as a folk remedy. With respect to psychological issues, it is highly likely that the boys will acquire mental problems because of the trauma and violence, and we see this effect in Pedro's angry and violent outbursts. When Pedro beats the chickens on the agrarian farm, he breaks their legs in a striking parallel to the characters who lack limbs or who cannot walk. In addition, addiction runs rampant—as evidenced by Julián's drunkard father. Thus, the "broken bodies" act as stand-ins for a broken society.

Identity Even though the boys and their parents exist on the edges of society, they are still rooted in a distinctly Mexican culture and in the specific urban milieu of Mexico City. Some of the boys identify themselves by their home town or neighborhood—El Jaibo is named for his origins in Tampico, and Ojitos comes from a town in the countryside: Los Reyes. Don Carmelo busks in a marketplace which is likely the Zócalo in the center of Mexico City. The focus on Mexico City (with identifiable shots of its streets and plazas) alludes to its history as the colonial structure built on top of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán. This history leads to an interpretation of the characters as representative of various periods in Mexican history. Marta is the Malinche, or Aztec mother, of the mestizo nation (see **Motherhood** below for more context). Ojitos represents the rural peasant farmers under the Spanish colonial system. Don Carmelo alludes to Porfirio Díaz, the nineteenth-century dictator who provided stability. Finally, El Jaibo incarnates Mexican modernity and the failed national project after the Mexican Revolution.

Urban versus Rural Even though the film depends upon the context of the city, there is also a frequent juxtaposition of the urban with the rural. On the one hand, the viewer is bombarded with city images: traffic, food carts, the crowded market, construction sites and blacksmith shops, and of course, the shots of skyscrapers in the opening of the film. However, there are also pastoral settings: Cacarizo's family barn with the cow, and the agrarian reform school filled with hens. Ojitos also retains his rural essence despite the corrupting influences in the city. His position as the pure boy from the country is emphasized visually when he suckles the teat of the cow. In addition, Ojitos shows more compassion, innocence, and morality than the other boys. He attempts to rescue / protect Meche from El Jaibo's assault, which suggests that he has a strong sense of right and wrong. Buñuel frames the rural settings as potential respites from the crime and poverty of the city, although these respites fail to rescue the boys.

JUSTICE

Crime Although El Jaibo is the mastermind of the gang's many crimes, nearly all of the characters commit crimes or immoral acts by proxy. The boys' crimes are constant and obvious: theft, harassment, and of course, murder. The adults also engage in arguably more insidious crimes: rape and pedophilia, in particular. While it could be argued that some of the crimes are committed for survival and are not premeditated, the majority of the incidents in the film show malicious intent. Nearly all of the crimes enact violence or injustice on the weak: the adults try to manipulate or groom the children, the men rape the women, and the boys prey on the disabled. Even when the boys' motivations are pure, their efforts often devolve into crime. For example, Ojitos tries to be an obedient "ward" to Don Carmelo, but the blind man's abusive behavior leads the boy to contemplate murdering him. For Pedro, each of his efforts to work is thwarted by crime, which makes his murder all the more tragic. The viewer suspects that if it were not for El Jaibo's interference, Pedro could have put his life back together.

Punishment The boys receive punishment from law enforcement and parental figures, but the means of punishment are either ineffective, misdirected, or poorly executed. Buñuel's attitude towards police is arguably more empathetic in *Young and the Damned* than in his later satires in which the police, the

military, and the military police engage in torture, unlawful arrests, and embezzlement. In the case of this film, the police fail to punish the real culprits: El Jaibo (although he is finally shot in the last minutes of the film), Don Carmelo, and the pedophile who approaches Pedro at night. Pedro's punishment, particularly his stay at the agrarian reform school, could constitute a fair or appropriate solution. Of course, this opportunity slips away as soon as Pedro returns to the streets. Within the familial structure, the boys are punished by neglect: Julian's father is a helpless alcoholic; El Jaibo never knew his parents; and Marta denies Pedro food and affection. In the end, the misery of poverty is the constant punishment.

Violence Violent acts occur almost every minute in this film. Even in the opening scene, the viewer sees the boys acting out a *corrida* in which the *torero* / *matador* mimics taunting the toothless boy playing the bull. There are several attempted and successful murders: El Jaibo kills Julián and Pedro, Don Carmelo kills El Jaibo, and both Meche and Ojitos contemplate or mimic killing Don Carmelo (although they do not actually go through with it). Whereas the moments of murder act as climaxes to the scene, there is also a continuous crescendo of violence: the beating or attempted rape of the kids by adults, and the constant verbal and physical abuse and fights between El Jaibo and Pedro. Concurrently, the aftermath of each violent act also begets more violence. Pedro's anger bursts out in several moments where he throws rocks at or beats animals, including the fight at the farm where he beat the hens to death with a stick. El Jaibo uses violent coercion to cover up his other violent acts.

POLITICS

Power: Failed Modernity As a quasi-documentary, *The Young and the Damned* portrays real social problems of Mexico City in the early 1950s. This period in Mexico's political trajectory marked the end of a nationalist wave that included a reforming of the educational system and an idealized vision of implementing the promises of the Mexican Revolution (which had ended only a generation earlier). During the presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946-52), there was a boom in industry and infrastructure—multiple projects were designed to stimulate the Mexican economy after World War II. In reality, the development led to lower wages and a lack of funding for education. Despite the attempts to improve the lives of the poor and celebrate Mexican culture and heritage, there was still a huge morass of poverty and various economic problems. It is this disconnect between political rhetoric and urban reality that Buñuel underscores in this film. As several critics note, the boys fall through the cracks of a post-revolutionary failed modernity.

RELATIONSHIPS

Sexuality

Desire El Jaibo lusts after Meche and Pedro's mother, forcing himself on the former and being somewhat seduced by the latter. In both cases, his sexual encounters constitute a part of his larger crimes against society. Pedro's mother also gives into her yearning for sexual contact when the opportunity arises. Don Carmelo, initially portrayed as a caring father-figure, also tries to coerce Meche into sexual favors. The adults' inappropriate sexual behavior underscores the overall abuse of the orphaned boys. In addition, the boys (and El Jaibo in particular) experience a strong Oedipal Complex. Due to the boys' lack of parental figures, Pedro's mother becomes a target for their latent desire for a mother. The yearning for maternal affection is mixed in with erotic desire, as is evidenced explicitly by El Jaibo's sexual encounter with Pedro's mother. Despite the bleak and devastating tone of the film as a whole, Buñuel infuses some scenes with his trademark eroticism. Marta washes her legs in front of El Jaibo, which sparks the sexual encounter. Meche also lifts her skirt twice: once to rub milk on her thighs, and once to retrieve the knife with which she contemplates stabbing Don Carmelo.

Childhood Sexuality; Rape and Molestation Obviously, the occurrence of rapes or attempted rapes in this film is also a part of the categories of crime and violence. Rape is interspersed with murder and theft: El Jaibo and Don Carmelo try to rape Meche (or at least, sexually harass or assault her), and Pedro nearly falls into the clutches of the pedophile in the city streets. The viewer quickly realizes that even those characters who have parents do not find affection or security. Don Carmelo, who initially appears to empathize with the lost children and provide them with food and shelter, is revealed to have pedophilic intentions later. Along with emphasizing the plight of the weak in the urban jungle, the references to rape reverberate on a psychological and sociopolitical level. We learn that Pedro's birth was a product of rape

and that Marta was violated at fourteen. This information signals to the viewer that Pedro will be one of the “damned” and “forgotten”, as he is already unwanted / neglected from birth. In addition, Marta’s position as the raped mother references Mexico’s love-hate relationship with la Malinche (see **Motherhood** below) and Mexicans’ problematic relationship to their national identity.

Parenting: Motherhood Marta’s position as Pedro’s biological mother parallels her symbolic and psychological position as the mother not only of all of the boys in the gang, but also as mother of the Mexican nation. Several critics interpret Marta’s symbolic position as an allusion to la Malinche, or Cortés’s interpreter, lover, and wife during the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs. Like la Malinche, Marta is raped and impregnated by the “enemy,” and both women bear and raise the children who are the product of the violence. In some ways, Marta betrays Pedro by turning him over to the police and sleeping with El Jaibo. So, too, is la Malinche seen as a traitor to the indigenous people even while she is held up as the first Mexican mother. While she aides in the massacre of her people, la Malinche also gave birth to the first Mexicans—the mestizos, or mixed race, who become the foundation of Latin American identity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As with nearly all Buñuel films, *The Young and the Damned* juxtaposes human characters with animal stand-ins and bestial symbolism. The most recurring animal imagery is that of the chickens and roosters around Pedro. How does the appearance of fowl throughout the film create suspense and an eerie tone?
2. As with nearly all of Buñuel’s films, there are multiple characters who have physical disabilities, sicknesses, and mental problems. What is the purpose of the man on the cart, Cacarizo’s bedridden mother, and Don Carmelo’s blindness?
3. Besides society in general, who is the villain in the film? Do you agree that nearly all of the characters are both victimizers and victims?
4. This film was not received well by audiences due in part to its bleak themes and message. Would it be a more or less effective film with a different ending?
5. What is the effect of the opening sequence that shows multiple cityscapes? Why not just focus on Mexico City?
6. Is Marta a bad mother?
7. What is the purpose of Don Carmelo? Why is he important to the film’s themes and structure?