

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## ***A Woman Without Love / When Children Judge Us* (1952)** ***Una mujer sin amor o Cuando los hijos nos juzgan*** Luis Buñuel (1900-1983)

### OVERVIEW

**Auteur** Luis Buñuel is known as one of most influential surrealist filmmakers of the mid-twentieth century. Although he was born and raised near Zaragoza, Spain, he spent a large portion of his life and career as an exile in Paris and Mexico City. One of his earliest short films, *Le chien andalou* (1929), or the *Andalusian Dog*, became an iconic representation of eerie surrealist art in which Buñuel presented the audience with a series of unsettling, violent, and even erotic images plucked from a dream. Buñuel would continue in his surrealist style with such films as *L'Age D'or* (1930), or the *Age of Gold*. During his long exile in Mexico, Buñuel wrote and directed a handful of commercial films and hard-hitting dramas, including the featured melodrama of this essay, *A Woman Without Love* (1954). The middle period of Buñuel's career was also characterized by three satirical dramas loosely based on nineteenth-century Spanish novels: *Nazarín* (1959), *Viridiana* (1961), and *Tristana* (1970). In the 1970s, Buñuel returned to his hyper-erotic and surreal style in such films as *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977).

**Film** *A Woman Without Love* (1952) is a black-and-white melodrama set in Mexico City. The plot involves an illicit affair that may or may not have resulted in the birth of a love child. The female protagonist was played by the ingenue Rosario Granados, who had worked with Buñuel on the comedy *The Great Madcap* (1949). *A Woman Without Love* also features two prominent male actors of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, Tito Junco and Julio Villarreal. This particular melodrama is one of the few films in Buñuel's Mexican period that was not co-written by Luis Alcoriza. Instead, the script was adapted from Guy de Maupassant's French novel *Pierre et Jean* (1940). Maupassant, Spanish screenwriter Jaime Salvador, and famed Mexican dramatist Rodolfo Usigli collaborated on the screenplay.

**Background** Due to a long exile in Mexico, Buñuel's films in the 1940s and 1950s were often shot in and around Mexico City. *A Woman Without Love* was no exception: it was filmed in the famed Churubusco Studio. In addition, the scenes depicting the forest preserve were filmed in the Bosque de Chapultepec, an enormous state park that lies in the heart of Mexico City (similar to Central Park in New York City). Although Buñuel himself considered *A Woman Without Love* one of his weakest films, film and literary critics such as Ernesto Acevedo Muñoz hail the film as an exemplar of the Mexican melodrama of the 1950s.

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

<b>Rosario</b>	young wife and mother
<b>Carlos Montero, Sr.</b>	aging patriarch and Rosario's husband
<b>Julio Mistral</b>	engineer and Rosario's lover
<b>Carlitos / Carlos Jr.</b>	Rosario and Carlos's son
<b>Miguel</b>	Rosario's younger son and Carlitos' brother
<b>Luisa</b>	love interest for both Carlos Jr. and Miguel
<b>Rita</b>	nurse and Carlos Jr.'s ex-girlfriend

### SYNOPSIS

Rosario Montero is the young wife of a rich businessman, Carlos Montero, and mother to the young Carlitos. The couple run an antiques shop in Mexico City. When Carlitos runs away, a kindly engineer and environmental activist, Julio Mistral, catches him and brings him back to the house. Julio becomes a

treasured friend of the family, and the connection between Julio and Rosario evolves into a romance and adulterous affair. When Carlos Sr. falls ill and Rosario decides to stay with him, Julio breaks up with Rosario and moves to Brazil.

Twenty years later, Rosario and Carlos Sr. are still together and are proud that both of their sons, Carlos Jr. and Miguel, are young doctors with a lot of promise. The brothers agree that it is a good idea to open a medical clinic together, but their relationship is damaged by their mutual attraction to the beautiful young doctor Luisa. In addition, Carlos Jr. becomes increasingly jealous of his younger brother when it is revealed that Julio died and left his entire fortune to Miguel. Everyone is suspicious of the inheritance, and Rosario feels increasingly guilty as Carlos Jr. becomes more bitter and nasty with each passing day.

In the last scenes of the movie, Miguel opens up the new clinic and marries Luisa. Enraged, Carlos Jr. takes a job outside of Mexico. When Carlos Sr. dies of a sudden heart attack at the wedding reception, the remaining family members are forced to contend with all of the family resentments and secrets. Rosario confesses that Julio is Miguel's biological father. Eventually, the brothers reconcile with each other and forgive their mother.

## SCENES

**Refusing to Sell the Painting** We see an exterior shot of the street followed by a close-up of a sign for an antiques store. Inside the store, there are multiple objects and trinkets on display. Rosario brings over a nineteenth-century iron-plated painting for a male customer to peruse. The customer replies that he doesn't care about the date, but he debates Rosario as to the estimate. In his personal office (in a separate room of the house), Carlos Sr. talks on the phone to an unknown official regarding an "unbelievable" case. Back in the shop, the customer and Rosario begin to barter, but Carlos Sr. interrupts them. He tells the customer that the painting is not for sale and kicks him out of the store.



**Carlos Sr. Chides Rosario** When the customer leaves, Rosario asks Carlos Sr. why he is so agitated. He responds by accusing Rosario of being a thorn in his side, just like their son. Rosario tries to get more information about Carlitos, and Carlos Sr. explains that the director of their son's school accused Carlitos of stealing. Carlos Sr. remarks that he doesn't want his son to develop a thief's character and that Rosario spoils him too much. Rosario begs her husband to give Carlitos a chance to defend himself. When Carlos Sr. continues to rant, Rosario lashes out by saying that her husband has always suppressed her will and her opinions. She declares that while she may bow to his will, she will also protect her son. Carlos Sr. retorts that Rosario was happy to be submissive when they were dating, and that she was desperate to escape squalor. Rosario agrees that she has a comfortable life, but she still asks Carlos Sr. to be fair with their son.



**Carlos Accuses Carlitos of Stealing** When Carlitos comes home in his school uniform, Carlos Sr. accuses his son of stealing. Carlos Sr. declares that his son will not eat or leave his room until he confesses. Carlitos denies the charge, and his father slaps him in the face. Rosario tries to intervene, but Carlos Sr. drags his son to his room and locks him in. The camera cuts to the luxurious dinner table. Rosario refuses to eat and remains sullen while Carlos Sr. devours his dinner with gusto. She goes to check on Carlitos and knocks on the door. She tells him that she believes him and thinks he is a good boy. When he doesn't answer, she enters his room and realizes that he has run away. She walks out to the dining room and blames Carlos Sr. for driving away his son. Carlos Sr. asks how he escaped his room and calls the police. Rosario and the maid Chule decide to go outside and look for the boy.



**The Surveyors Spot Carlitos** Outside, there is a forest with several men walking in a clearing. Julio and his associates examine the forest and look through a telescope. When Julio studies a hill through the telescope, he spots Carlitos trying to walk down the steep terrain. Julio's associate notices that Carlitos is crying and guesses that he might be lost. Carlitos runs down the path to avoid two of the surveyors but ends up running into Julio and another engineer on the other end. Julio tries to probe the boy gently, and he offers to teach the boy how to fish for trout in a nearby river. When Julio teases him and calls him Juanito, Carlitos bristles and tells his full name. Julio affectionately squeezes his chin and asks him why he ran away. Carlitos squirms and refuses to answer.



**Julio Brings Back Carlitos** Back at the house, Rosario proceeds to call around asking after Carlitos. Julio walks in and initially pretends to be a customer who wants an appraisal of a "unique object." Rosario tells him she can't think about the business now. Julio leaves and brings back Carlitos as his interesting "found object." Rosario thanks Julio profusely. Carlos Sr. comes in and asks for his son's rescuer's name. The two men introduce themselves, and Montero suggests that Julio stay for dinner.



**Julio Explains His Philosophy on Love** After eating dinner, the three adults retire to the living room for a chat. Carlos Sr. asks if Julio is having fun being a single womanizer, and Rosario chides him for his indiscretion. Julio retorts that he does not like "loose women" and would like to settle down. Carlos Sr. remarks that Julio is a true romantic and gets up to fetch his good cigars from the other room. While they are alone, Rosario apologizes for her husband and thanks Julio again for finding Carlitos. Julio replies that he senses she is an honorable woman. The two look in each other's eyes until Carlos Sr. returns with the cigars. Julio suggests that the family meet him in the forest that he is surveying. Carlos asks if there will be good food, and Julio replies that the streams in this area have the best trout in Mexico. They set a date for 10AM.



**Excursion in the Forest** The scene opens on a country road, where Rosario and Julio stand alongside Carlos's Model T. The businessman explains that he has to go to work and he will meet them in the forest later. The camera cuts to Carlitos holding up a newly caught trout and yelling to his mother. Rosario and Julio sit together on the ground and watch Carlitos fishing. When Rosario comments on the beauty of nature, Julio remarks that he wishes to enjoy the mountains before human development cuts down the old trees (and destroys nature in general). Julio asks Rosario why she married so young, but their adult conversation is interrupted by an excited Carlitos, who is eager to fry and eat the trout. Julio escorts Rosario to the campsite.



**Romantic Serenade** Later that evening, a group of men gather for a song in the campground. A trio of guitarists sing a romantic ballad in a picturesque tableau. The camera moves from the singers to a window of a cabin. Rosario sits in the window sill with Julio standing behind her. Carlitos is fast asleep in bed, so Rosario tucks him in. When Julio approaches her seductively, Rosario wonders aloud why Carlos hasn't



joined them yet. Julio expresses his feelings and tells her that he knows she is trapped in a loveless marriage with a much older man. They embrace until they hear Carlos arriving. There is a cut to a panoramic long shot of the outside of the cabin.

**Tryst in the Office** Rosario enters Julio's office, and the two embrace and kiss passionately. Julio asks her why she took so long to come over, and Rosario reminds him that she isn't free. Rosario professes her love for Julio and tells him she thinks about him constantly. Julio declares that they can't keep having an affair and begs Rosario to divorce her husband. Rosario resists initially until Julio suggests that she bring Carlitos to the train station—and that they all escape together tomorrow. Rosario agrees, and they kiss.



**Plans Interrupted** Julio buys three tickets at the train station, then packs his suitcase in his office. Rosario enters visibly upset. She explains that her husband is ill and she could not bring herself to leave him. Julio asks if his illness is serious, and Rosario says yes. Julio agrees to accompany Rosario back to the house. They enter to see Carlos in bed with Carlitos sitting by his side. The doctor reports that he may recover if he stays in bed and doesn't speak. Carlitos crawls into bed with his father. Julio and Rosario steal away to the office. Rosario admits that she feels guilty. Julio suggests that they wait a couple of weeks and try again.



**Julio Presses Rosario** There is a close-up of a toy ship floating in a lake. Carlitos retrieves the boat and stays on shore with a group of other children. Rosario and Julio talk on a park bench. Rosario reports that her husband has recovered somewhat and that he and Carlitos have become closer. Julio asks about leaving again, but Rosario is reluctant to make another plan. Julio accuses her of falling out of love with him. He professes his love for her again. Carlitos runs over to report that his toy boat is broken. Julio gives Rosario an ultimatum. She embraces Carlitos and shakes her head no.



**Miguel's Graduation** After about twenty years have passed, Carlos Sr., Rosario, and Carlitos (now the adult Carlos Jr.) are waiting outside in a courtyard. The camera closes in on a sign that says "Department of Medicine." When greeted by friends, a now middle-aged Rosario comments that she is very proud of her sons, both of whom have graduated from medical school. Miguel, one of Rosario's sons who just graduated, runs over to greet his parents. Back at the house, Carlos Jr. and his Luisa waltz in the living room. Miguel cuts in, and Luisa agrees to dance with the "younger" doctor. Carlos asks his mother to dance, and the guests cheer them on as they whirl around the living room to Strauss. Carlos Sr. keeps drinking whisky and toasts the new doctors. The servants bring out an elegant dinner with lobster and other dishes. The camera zooms in on the trays of food.



**Family Meeting After the Party** When the boys go upstairs to talk to their parents, Carlos Sr. reveals that he has found a good place for them to open a clinic. He tells his sons that he will help buy the building and invest in their endeavor—as long as they pay him back. Both sons agree



that it is a good idea and they can run a clinic together. Carlos Sr. admits that the clinic was Rosario's idea, and the boys rush over to kiss and hug her.

### **Carlos Proposes a Professional and Personal Union**

Now at the clinic, the family tours their new facility. When Miguel and Rosario walk into another room, Carlos asks Luisa if she would like to be the director of their new clinic. Luisa graciously declines but thanks Carlos for his mentorship as her professor. Carlos retorts that he considers her a woman and his future, not a colleague or student. Luisa replies that she wants to wait a bit longer. A nurse from another office enters and declares that her boss is also interested in the building. Carlos introduces the nurse to Luisa, and the nurse says that the doctor's reputation precedes her. The nurse explains that Luisa is known for her treatment of children but that her methodology "extends to adults." Luisa and Carlos catch the inference (that the two are romantically linked), and Luisa calls the nurse an unprofessional gossip. When she leaves, Luisa asks Carlos if the nurse is an ex-girlfriend.



**Julio Has Died** Back at the house, the men discuss whether to go ahead with purchasing the clinic. They are interrupted by a notary who visits them with bad news—that Julio Mistral has died in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The camera zooms in on Rosario's anguished face. Carlos Sr. remarks that he was a loyal friend who helped take care of him when he was ill. Carlos Jr. chimes in by saying that he remembers that Julio taught him how to fish for trout. Miguel asks whether he even met Julio, and Carlos Sr. replies that Miguel was born a few months after Julio left for Brazil to work on forest conservation.



**A Secret Revealed in Julio's Will** The notary proceeds to read Julio's will and reveals that his fortune, 1.5 million pesos, is left entirely to Miguel. The notary toasts the "inheritor" while Carlos Sr. wonders why Julio thought of them after all those years (and why he left his fortune to Miguel specifically). Rosario moves to the bar with her back to the family in order to avoid showing her emotions. She pours herself a drink. She makes the excuse that Julio loved the family and Miguel is the youngest. Carlos congratulates Miguel and leaves the house with a headache.



**Rita Stirs the Pot** At the doctor's office, Carlos studies x-rays. Rita, the jealous nurse from the tour of the clinic, enters and tries to kiss Carlos. He brushes her aside, and she accuses him of being unfeeling and obsessed with his "little doctor girlfriend." When Rita congratulates him regarding the family's recent windfall, Carlos explains that Miguel is the sole inheritor. Rita remarks that the will is suspicious and that both sons should have received inheritance. Carlos gets agitated and grabs Rita forcefully. She escapes his grasp and tells him to do what he wants.



**Celebration Dinner** Back in the dining room, Rosario and Carlos Jr. sit on one side of the table with Miguel and Luisa on the other side (and Carlos Sr. and a family friend at the head). Rosario chats with Carlos Jr. and asks why he has a sour disposition. A family friend offers a toast to Miguel and the family for their recent fortune. He wishes the youth a productive and fortunate life. Miguel responds to the toast by thanking everyone around him and suggesting that he and Carlos forge ahead with the plan to open up their own clinic. Carlos Jr. rejects his brother's proposal by saying he doesn't want to accept charity from anyone. Carlos Sr. chides his son for his bad manners in front of their guest. Irritated, Carlos Jr. gets up and leaves the table.



**Family Conflict** Later that night, Carlos Sr. and Rosario get ready for bed. Carlos Sr. rants about his eldest son's disrespectful behavior, and Rosario tries to defend him. Rosario decides to go check on Carlos Jr. She gently confronts him about his behavior and diagnoses his bitterness: he is jealous of Miguel's luck. Carlos Jr. eventually admits that he is jealous of Miguel, mostly because the money would have allowed him to make something of himself. Rosario comforts him by saying that he should have faith in himself and belief in her. Carlos Jr. agrees and kisses his mother. He sets the alarm for the next morning.



**Carlos Jr. Spies on His Mother** There is a close-up of the alarm clock which indicates that it is 2 AM. Carlos Jr. awakens to see shadows pass under his bedroom door. He opens the door quietly and sees his mother walking down the hall and holding a candle. He follows her to a separate room and watches from the door (which is slightly ajar). Rosario takes out a box of souvenirs from a drawer and looks through the contents. The camera focuses on an old picture of Julio in his camping and surveillance gear, then cuts to Carlos Jr.'s perturbed reaction.



**Miguel Asks Carlos Jr. About Luisa** Miguel and Luisa pull up to Carlos Jr.'s medical office. Carlos is organizing his office when Miguel enters and asks if Carlos would like to accompany him and Luisa as they visit the new clinic. Carlos reminds his brother that he is booked with appointments. Miguel goes on to ask his brother whether he has feelings for Luisa. Carlos scoffs at the suggestion despite Miguel's continued probing. Carlos remarks that he and Luisa have a sort of teacher-student closeness, but nothing more than that. Miguel confesses that he does, in fact, love Luisa.



**Another Violent Encounter with Rita** After Miguel leaves Carlos Jr.'s office, Rita comes in and tries to comfort Carlos. She suggests that they could resume their romantic relationship and that Carlos would forget about Luisa and the inheritance. Rita reminds Carlos that they had a good time when they were dating, but Carlos continues to reject her and say that he doesn't want to be seen with a nurse. Rita lashes out by saying that Carlos should treat everyone with respect and that even a nurse can see the meaning of the inheritance. Enraged, Carlos starts to strangle Rita.



She manages to wriggle out of his grip and leave the office.

**Carlos Jr Reveals His Plans** Back at the house, Carlos fumes quietly in the living room and runs to his bedroom. When Rosario goes to check on him, she notices that he has torn a picture of her and left the pieces on the floor. Wounded, she leaves his bedroom. The next morning, Carlos Jr. announces that he is leaving his current office and starting over in the “tropics”—but outside of Mexico. Carlos Sr. reminds his eldest that he should think about partnering with Miguel, but Carlos Jr. replies that Miguel is already set up beautifully.



**Carlos Jr Lays a Trap** The embittered son then suggests that his parents show Miguel a picture of his benefactor. Rosario stalls, but Carlos Sr. reminds her that they do have a picture of Julio. When Rosario brings the photo over to the table, Miguel remarks that Julio was young and handsome. Carlos Jr. grabs the photo and studies Miguel’s face while glowering. Rosario leaves the table, and Carlos Sr. remarks that everyone is in a bad mood this morning. Rosario collapses on the stairs, and Miguel and Carlos Sr. rush to her side. Carlos passes them and dismissively remarks that he will write his mother a prescription.



**Weakening Health at the Clinic** Miguel shows his parents and Luisa around the new clinic. Carlos Sr. is impressed with their progress and happy about the future. Suddenly, the patriarch has a dizzy spell, and Miguel and Luisa go to check on him. The camera cuts to Rosario and Carlos in the lobby of the clinic. Carlos Jr. slanders Luisa and accuses her of being a gold-digger. He also accuses his mother of doing the same thing when she was young. Rosario defends Luisa as an educated and virtuous woman.



**Miguel and Luisa Get Engaged** The two walk to the window and look out at Luisa and Miguel kissing on the patio. Carlos Jr. remarks that the kiss will cost his brother 1.5 million pesos. Carlos goes on to say that women are all calculating adulteresses. Rosario calls him unfair and cruel as she walks out to the patio. Miguel accompanies his mother to a nearby bench and announces his engagement to Luisa. Rosario congratulates the young lovers.



**Miguel and Luisa’s Wedding** There is an exterior shot of the church, followed by an interior close-up of Miguel placing the wedding ring on Luisa’s finger. The next frame is that of the newlyweds cutting the cake in front of their families. The wedding guests convene for the dinner at two long tables in the mansion foyer. Carlos Jr. is conspicuously missing from the wedding couple’s table. When he arrives, Carlos Sr. chides him for missing the ceremony. Carlos Jr. replies that thus is



the life of a doctor.

**Carlos Jr's Snide Toast** Carlos Jr. decides to give the newlyweds a toast. He begins by complimenting the union of "beauty, science, and fortune." He then reveals that he received a position in the tropics and will move on to a new life—without a woman or fortune, and without the danger of losing either one. Carlos Sr. interrupts his son and says that he is drunk. Carlos Sr. takes over the toast by praising Miguel and Luisa's good qualities. He remarks that this is the happiest day of his life, then suddenly, the patriarch collapses from a heart attack. The sons rush over, and Carlos Jr. remarks that at least he died happy.



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**Luisa Confronts Carlos Jr.** Now dressed in black, the family gathers to mourn the dead patriarch in the house. Carlos Jr. bids the family farewell and starts to leave for his new job. Luisa approaches him and says that she wants to clarify something before he leaves. Luisa explains that when Carlos Jr. came on to her at the clinic, she wanted to let him down gently. She reveals that she always loved Miguel, years before the inheritance. Carlos Jr. calls her a liar and a gold digger. Luisa retorts that he is poisoned by jealousy. She leaves infuriated, and Miguel takes up the argument after seeing his wife's agitation. Miguel confronts Carlos Jr. for his mistreatment of their mother, and Carlos Jr. retorts that a real man would not have taken the inheritance from an interloper. Carlos Jr. also says that Miguel is Julio's biological son.



**The Truth is Revealed** The brothers fight with pushes and punches. Miguel grabs a letter opener and tries to stab Carlos. Rosario enters and intervenes. She confesses to Miguel that he is, in fact, Julio's biological son and that Julio was the love of her life. Carlos calls her an adulteress. Rosario defends herself by saying that she considered Julio her true husband, but she stayed with Carlos Sr. out of loyalty and in order to raise Carlos Jr. properly. She confesses that Julio is still alive in her heart. Miguel and Carlos ask forgiveness for judging her, and Carlos even offers to stay with her. Rosario tells them to live their own lives and that she understands that they (and especially Carlos Jr) have suffered. Carlos embraces her and walks out of the room. Rosario asks to be left alone. Miguel and Carlos say goodbye and make up with each other. Alone, Rosario takes out the box with Julio's photo and places it on the mantel. She sits down to knit as the credits roll.



## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**ROSARIO** Rosario is an unhappy wife and mother who strays. However, her character is much more complex than the adulterous wives and seductresses of Buñuel's typical melodramas. Although she gives into her passion for Julio, she is a caring mother and wife, and she feels guilty throughout her life. In addition, she harbors resentment for the sacrifices she's had to make.

*Caring* Rosario shows great affection for her sons and, to an extent, her husband. She wishes that all three succeed, and she comes to the rescue when one of them is ill or having a personal crisis. She is willing to sacrifice her relationship with Julio to nurse Carlos Sr. back to health and give Carlos Jr. a stable upbringing. When she is with Julio, she also professes her love without hesitancy.

*Guilty* Despite the fact that she stays with Carlos Sr. for over twenty years, Rosario feels guilt for her affair and the pain that she has caused the men in her life. Her guilt is exacerbated when news of the

inheritance arrives, as she realizes that her sons will deduce the truth. Rather than shield her sons from the affair, Carlos Jr. becomes increasingly embittered, and Miguel is blindsided. Rosario feels responsible for the fallout, as is evidenced by her cowing to Carlos Jr.'s abuse and her fainting spell on the stairs.

*Resentful* Although Rosario feels remorse for her adultery, she is also resentful that she has to live "a life without love," particularly when she could have had true love and a relationship with Julio. From the very first scenes of the film, Rosario expresses a rebellious attitude towards Carlos Sr. and declares that she has made herself subservient to his opinions and desires.

**CARLOS JR.** As the eldest son and esteemed doctor, Carlos Jr. exhibits many of the same traits as his father. He is industrious and driven in his work, but he also expects the women in his life to bend to his will. When they do not act as he expects, he becomes judgmental, bitter and jealous, and he condemns them for being manipulative and deceitful.

*Driven* Carlos Jr. works his way through medical school and fosters a thriving office. In addition, he has acted as a professor and mentor for the next generation. He confesses to his mother that he has always longed to "make something of himself."

*Judgmental* Carlos Jr. adopts a very dismissive and borderline misogynistic attitude towards the women in his life. He brushes off Rita's advances by saying that she is "just a nurse." He insults his mother and Luisa and accuses them of being selfish gold-diggers. The eldest son even judges Miguel for accepting the inheritance and believing (in his view, naively), that Luisa really loves him.

*Jealous* Carlos Jr. has something of the oldest child complex in that he believes that Miguel has had it too easy and is his parent's favorite. These feelings awaken when Miguel receives the inheritance and gains Luisa's love. Carlos Jr. is so blinded by jealousy that he sabotages his own career and lashes out at the entire family.

**JULIO** Even though Julio is a confirmed bachelor for his whole life, he exemplifies the perfect husband and father. He exudes kindness to both Carlos Sr. and Carlos Jr., and he is particularly gentle and intuitive with Carlos Jr. Julio also shows great passion for Rosario and his chosen career.

*Kind* As explained above, Julio treats all of the other characters with consideration and kindness. Not only does he rescue Carlos Jr. in the forest, he also takes the time to ask him about his problems and offers to teach him how to camp and fish. Apart from his attraction to Rosario, he shows sensitivity with regard to her hopes and dreams.

*Passionate* Julio frequently expresses his passion for Rosario and professes his devotion several times. Julio also displays a passion for his environmental activism. He loves the beauty of the land, and he wishes to protect it for future generations.

## THEMES

### SOCIETY

**Gender** The portrayal of masculinity and femininity, as well as gender roles, remains complex throughout the film. On the one hand, Rosario and the other female characters are condemned for their desires (be they emotional, sexual, or related to their careers), and the implication is that the female characters deserved to be punished for not adhering to society's expectations of them. Moreover, Rosario's position as the adulteress who "stains" her sons' honor evokes the age-old Mexican trope of La Malinche (Cortés's lover, wife, interpreter, and mother to the first mestizo Mexicans during and after the Spanish Conquest of the early 1500s). This lingering myth in the Mexican consciousness paints La Malinche as a traitor to her people, a victim of rape, and as the mother of the Mexican nation-state. It is hardly surprising, then, that Rosario and other mothers in Mexican melodramas are likewise framed in a contradictory fashion. The male characters, with the exception of the sensitive Julio, react to the women with a condemnatory and often violent machismo. Carlos Jr. verbally condemns his mother and physically abuses Rita. On the other hand, the film also presents a somewhat feminist view towards women and their ambitions. Luisa has gained prominence and respect as a pediatric physician. The audience and Julio (and eventually, the other characters) empathize with Rosario and her lack of choices

as a young woman. The implication is that Rosario deserved to be with Julio, and her sacrifice is lauded. Despite his notable lack of machismo, Julio is framed as the compassionate hero, which suggests that there may be another acceptable form of “modern” masculinity.

*Illustrative Scene: Carlos Jr. Propositions Luisa and Rita Insults Her Rival*

When Miguel and Rosario walk into another room in the clinic, Carlos ask Luisa if she would like to be the director of their new clinic. Luisa graciously declines but thanks Carlos for his mentorship as her professor. Carlos retorts that he considers her a woman and his future, not a colleague or student. Luisa replies that she wants to wait a bit longer. A nurse from another office enters and declares that her boss is also interested in the building. Carlos introduces the nurse to Luisa, and the nurse says that the doctor’s reputation proceeds her. The nurse explains that Luisa is known for her treatment of children, but that her methodology “extends to adults.” Luisa and Carlos catch the inference (that the two are romantically linked), and Luisa calls the nurse an unprofessional gossip. When she leaves, Luisa asks Carlos if the nurse is an ex-girlfriend. This scene exemplifies the somewhat contradictory portrayal of women throughout the field. Carlos Jr. conflates a professional and intimate relationship with Luisa, which suggests that he acknowledges her expertise but also wants her to morph into a traditional, subservient wife. Rita also sees Luisa as a romantic rival and as a respected professional. Luisa becomes an object of desire for the two brothers, a professional who could be equal to them, and a participant in a probable cat-fight. In this sense, Luisa vacillates between a female character with autonomy and other stereotypical gender roles (gold-digging slut and dutiful wife, in particular).



**Science** Many of the characters in *A Woman Without Love* are scientists and educators who wish to further their field. Carlos Jr., Miguel, and Luisa have all borne the difficulties of medical school to graduate and serve their communities. By all appearances, Carlos Jr. has a respectable clinic even before his father suggests a new office that incorporates Miguel. Carlos Jr. also has a stake in educating the interns below him, and this position of mentorship paves the way for his unrequited love for Luisa. As a female doctor in the 1950s, Luisa’s success as a physician is also remarkable. It is for this reason that Carlos Jr. alludes to the union of “science and money” in his toast during the wedding reception. It is also telling that Julio has dedicated himself to the preservation of nature. Rather than just camp out in the wilderness, Julio employs his education and appreciation of science as a means of promoting and enacting conservation. Julio’s influence on his field is implied both by his mentorship in the forest and the fact that he lived the majority of his adult life as a conservationist in Brazil. This emphasis on erudite professionals throughout the film underscores the talent and industriousness of the characters and their ability to wield science as a means of improving society. The idea of improving society through modernity and education aligns with the mid-century Mexican worldview after WWII: that Mexico will flourish through an assertive modernization project. The focus on science also allows Buñuel to juxtapose cool logic with passion and jealousy. Even the scientists cannot evade the power of their emotions when it comes to their relationships with lovers and family members.

*Illustrative Moment: Julio and Rosario Muse on the Beauty and Impact of Nature*

Carlitos holds up a newly caught trout and yells to his mother. Rosario and Julio sit together on the ground and watch Carlitos fishing. When Rosario comments on the beauty of nature, Julio remarks that he wishes to enjoy the mountains before human development cuts down the old trees (and destroys nature in general). Although the subtext of this scene is Rosario and Julio’s burgeoning attraction to each other, Buñuel also comments on the importance of nature and the environment to humankind. Like Julio, Buñuel always



appreciated the natural sciences, in particular, agronomy, entomology, and virology. This scene was shot in the Chapultepec forests of Mexico City, which further underscores the director's affinity with nature.

## RELATIONSHIPS

**Love** The title of the film is somewhat misleading, as Rosario does have love in her life. A more apt description would be a 'marriage without love', although this assertion also belies the nuance in Rosario's relationships with the other characters. Despite her adultery, Rosario shows devotion to all the men in her life. She stays with Carlos Sr. for thirty years as a subservient wife, engaged mother, and she also works as a clerk in his antiques store. Rosario also loves her sons dearly and tries to protect them from destructive forces. She keeps the secret hidden effectively for the majority of her sons' adult lives and helps them establish their careers as doctors. Despite their rancor and judgement regarding their mother's affair, both sons show fierce devotion and affection for Rosario. Ironically, Julio and Rosario share the purest form of romantic love and passion. Whereas other adulterous Buñuel characters are motivated by lust, power, and boredom, Rosario and Julio genuinely care for each other and wish to live a life together as partners. The implication is that Julio would also make a loving stepfather for Carlitos and a sensitive father to Miguel.

### *Illustrative Moment: Julio Offers Rosario and Carlitos a New Life*

Rosario enters Julio's office, and the two embrace and kiss passionately. Julio asks her why she took so long to come over, and Rosario reminds him that she isn't free. Rosario professes her love for Julio and tells him she thinks about him constantly. Julio declares that they can't keep having an affair and begs Rosario to divorce her husband. Rosario resists initially until Julio suggests that she bring Carlitos to the train station—and that they all escape together tomorrow. Rosario agrees, and they kiss. While this scene portrays the couple's illicit passion and the secret romance, their conversation also acts as confirmation that this affair is not a fling. Both Rosario and Julio express their desire to become a couple and raise children together.



**Marriage (Adultery)** As the title of the film suggests, romantic love is not necessarily linked to marriage. By all accounts, Rosario marries Carlos Sr. to escape poverty and foster security for her sons. Although she does cheat on Carlos Sr. with Julio, she also foregoes potential happiness with her true love in order to help her husband get through his illness. This vacillation between deception and loyalty underscores Rosario's complex character, as well as Buñuel's tendency to satirize or even flaunt society's mandates. The other marriage in the film, that of Miguel and Luisa, provides some ambiguity. According to Luisa, the union is founded on love, mutual respect, and common interests. However, Carlos Jr. accuses Luisa of following his mother's model and only marrying Miguel for his inheritance. Carlos's interpretation of the relationship derives from his jealousy and anger, yet the screenplay does not debunk his theory. Luisa's motivations are not clear. The occurrence of marriages of convenience lends itself to the intrigue of three erotic triangles: 1) Carlos Sr., Julio, and Rosario; 2) Carlos Jr., Miguel, and Luisa; and 3) Luisa, Rita, and Carlos Jr. In some cases, the rivals know that they are fighting for the object of desire; in other cases, the rivals do not realize their position. The possible happy ending flows from the hope that Miguel and Luisa will be able to break the family pattern and unite love, career, and family.

### *Illustrative Moment: Carlos Sr. and Rosario Fight Over the Power Dynamic in Their Marriage*

Carlos Sr. remarks that he doesn't want his son to develop a thief's character and that Rosario spoils him too much. Rosario begs her husband to give Carlitos a chance to defend himself. When Carlos Sr. continues to rant, Rosario lashes out by saying that her husband has always suppressed her will and her opinions. She declares that while she may bow to his will, she will also protect her son.



Carlos retorts that Rosario was happy to be submissive when they were dating, and that she was desperate to escape squalor. Rosario agrees that she has a comfortable life, but she still asks Carlos to be fair with their son. In this early scene, the screenwriters acknowledge the transactional nature of Carlos Sr. and Rosario's marriage. Rosario is akin to a trophy wife, and Carlos Sr. wears the pants in the relationship. While Rosario appreciates her comfortable life, she also resents her mandated subservience. This tension provides the basis for the adulterous affair with Julio.

**Brotherhood / Sibling Rivalry** Although this film appears to focus intently on romantic relationships and traditional, heteronormative marriage, the engine for the second half of the film is the affection and tension between Carlos Jr. and Miguel. Until the fateful will arrives, Carlos Jr. and Miguel share a closeness born of their career, class, and respect for each other. Given their substantial age difference, Carlos Jr. takes on a father-like, or mentoring, role with his brother. Both men are excited to open up a clinic together and continue to spend time with each other, which suggests that they also participate in a brotherhood of science and service (see Science above). This positive relationship turns sour quickly, however, when Carlos Jr. realizes that he has lost love and fortune to his younger and less experienced brother. Jealousy and bitterness poison their personal and professional relationship to the point that Carlos Jr. decides to detach himself from the family and Mexico all together. In addition, the brothers come to blows in the film's climax. Ironically, the bonds of brotherhood hold firm because of Rosario's confession. Just as Carlos Jr. is about to leave the house forever, Rosario tells Miguel of his true parentage. Miguel's shock allows Carlos Jr. to comfort his younger brother and open up a dialogue of forgiveness.

*Illustrative Moment: Tense Dinner After the Will is Read*

Back in the dining room, Rosario and Carlitos sit on one side of the table with Miguel and Luisa on the other side (and Carlos Sr. and a family friend at the head). Rosario chats with Carlitos and asks why he has a sour disposition. A family friend offers a toast to Miguel and the family for their recent fortune. He wishes the youth a productive and fortunate life. Miguel responds to the toast by thanking everyone around him and suggesting that he and Carlos forge ahead with the plan to open up their own clinic. Carlos



Jr. rejects his brother's proposal by saying he doesn't want to accept charity from anyone. Carlos Sr. chides his son for his bad manners in front of their guest. Irritated, Carlos Jr. gets up and leaves the table. This scene marks the moment when the seed of bitterness is growing in Carlos Jr.'s mind and he cannot stomach any interaction with his brother. Conversely, Miguel wishes to continue their amiable relationship as colleagues even though he, too, sense impending confrontations over Luisa and the inheritance.

## PYSCHOLOGY

**Guilt** Rosario suffers from guilt throughout her life--and not just related to her adulterous affair with Julio. On the one hand, she feels an obligation towards her husband. Because he rescued her from poverty and gave her (and her children) a comfortable life, Rosario has given up on her autonomy within the marriage and is compelled to nurse Carlos Sr. back to health. On the other hand, Rosario also feels guilt for the affair in the moment as well as her inability to commit to Julio fully. He declares his love and devotion to her, but she cannot fully reciprocate. Rosario's guilt towards both men bleeds into her relationship with her sons. She bears Carlos Jr.'s abuse because she understands that she brought bitterness into his life. She also acknowledges how Julio's parentage has affected Miguel. The festering of the family secrets is ameliorated in the last scenes of the film, when Rosario confesses, the brothers forgive her, and Rosario reasserts her autonomy and the truth: that Julio was the love of her life. The sons also experience guilt for their harsh judgement. As the secondary title of the film suggests, the sons put the female characters on trial for their actual or perceived social sins, yet they come to empathize with their mother.

### *Illustrative Moment: Rosario's Confession and the Sons' Forgiveness*

Rosario confesses to Miguel that he is, in fact, Julio's biological son and that Julio was the love of her life. Carlos calls her an adulteress. Rosario defends herself by saying that she considered Julio her true husband, but she stayed with Carlos Sr. out of loyalty and in order to raise Carlos Jr. properly. She confesses that Julio is still alive in her heart. Miguel and Carlos ask forgiveness for judging her, and Carlos even offers to stay with her. Rosario tells them to live their own lives and that she understands that they (and especially Carlos Jr) have suffered. In this climactic moment, both Rosario and her sons have the opportunity to purge themselves of the guilt and bitterness eating away at them. The confession seems to work, as both sons soften towards their mother, and Rosario is able to place the photo of Julio on the mantel in plain sight.



### FLAWS

**Jealousy** Although Carlos Sr. remains blissfully unaware of his cuckolded state and the source of the turmoil between the brothers, nearly every other character in the film harbors resentment and jealousy. Julio himself yearns for the affection and stability of Carlos Sr.'s family life. The lover may have Rosario's heart and body, but he still cannot compete with Rosario's sense of obligation and Carlos Sr.'s fortune. Obviously, Carlos Jr.'s descent into bitterness exemplifies jealousy, much like the nasty protagonist Don Quintín in Buñuel's *Daughter of Deceit* (1951). Carlos Jr. experiences jealousy towards Miguel on multiple levels: he resents Miguel's windfall and "easy" achievements, he is angry that Luisa picked his brother over him, and he also suspects that Miguel is the favorite son of both Carlos Sr. and Rosario. This suspicion becomes stronger once he learns that Rosario considered Julio the love of her life. Miguel also implies that he was jealous of his older brother's achievements and of his potential romantic relationship with Luisa. Rita, Carlos Jr.'s ex-girlfriend, lashes out at the doctor because he cast her aside and continues to disrespect her. The nurse is not only jealous of Carlos's interest in Luisa, but also of Luisa's status as a female doctor. Likewise, Carlos Jr. accuses all of the female characters of gold-digging manipulation and deceptive machination. In this way, Maupassant and the other screenwriters interlace questions of love and desire with class and gender.

### *Illustrative Moment: Carlos Jr.'s Nasty Wedding Toast*

Carlos Jr. decides to give the newlyweds a toast. He begins by complimenting the union of "beauty, science, and fortune." He then reveals that he received a position in the tropics and will move on to a new life—without a woman or fortune, and without the danger of losing either one. Carlos Sr. interrupts his son and says that he is drunk. Carlos Jr.'s rant creates drama at the wedding, but it also delineates his worldview as an embittered cynic. He feels that Miguel has bested him in love, career, and fortune, and there is no hope for him to find that happiness or to "make something of himself," as he has always wanted.



### APPEARANCE

**Deception / Secrets** There are two primary secrets that potentially could poison the family dynamic over time. The first is the adulterous affair. Unlike most family melodramas, however, the cuckold in *A Woman Without Love* remains blissfully unaware of the threat to his honor. Because Rosario sacrifices her love for Julio to stay with the family, this damage from the affair is contained in the couple's guilt and yearning for each other. However, the second secret of Miguel's true father resuscitates Rosario's guilt and the damaging effects of dishonor. Suddenly, Rosario becomes a metonym for all deceiving and calculating

women, and she brings dishonor upon her sons even after their father has died (see **Gender** above). In this sense, Rosario's secrets become a slow-burn poison, and the antidote is a purging of the transgression through means of the will. In other words, Rosario cannot maintain the secret once the will exposes the truth.

*Illustrative Moment: Reading of the Will*

The notary proceeds to read Julio's will and reveals that his fortune, 1.5 million pesos, is left entirely to Miguel. The notary toasts the "inheritor" while Carlos Sr. wonders why Julio thought of them after all those years (and why he left his fortune to Miguel specifically). Rosario moves to the bar with her back to the family in order to avoid showing her emotions. She pours herself a drink. She makes the excuse that Julio loved the family and Miguel is the youngest. Carlos congratulates Miguel and leaves the house with a headache. Julio's death and the reading of the will act as the propulsion of the plot for the second half of the film. Rosario has buried the family secrets for twenty years; now, a piece of paper will expose her and force her to confess.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do any of the characters find redemption for their sins? Does Rosario's confession constitute a happy ending?
2. The attitude towards women in this film is complex and somewhat contradictory. Is the message feminist or sexist?
3. Is Luisa actually in love with Miguel, or is she (as Carlos Jr claims) after Miguel's new-found fortune?
4. How do the characters' professions (medical doctors and engineers) influence the themes of the film? Is there a symbolism to the fact that Carlos Sr. and Rosario own an antiques store?