

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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***THE BRUTE / El bruto* (1953)**

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 drama of this essay, *The Brute* (1953). 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 *The Brute* (1953) is a black-and-white melodrama set in Mexico City in the early 1950s. The plot involves a cruel landlord who tries to cast out his tenants. The cast features two prominent international actors of the 1950s, Katy Jurado and Pedro Amendáriz, both of whom starred in several famous Hollywood westerns and Golden Age Mexican dramas. Critics consider *The Brute* as one of Buñuel's best Mexican films.

Background Due to a long exile in Mexico, Buñuel's films in the 1940s and 1950s were often shot in and around Mexico City. *The Brute* was no exception: it was filmed in the famed Churubusco Studio and in the streets of Mexico City. The screenplay was one of several scripts Buñuel wrote with his longtime collaborator Luis Alcoriza, who would later co-author one of the director's most acclaimed films, *Exterminating Angel* (1962). The focus on the streets of Mexico City and working-class characters mirrors the style and themes of many of Buñuel's Mexican (and Spanish-language) films of the early 1950s. In this sense, *The Brute* could be offered as a companion piece to *The Forgotten Ones* (1950), as both films portray the gritty underbelly of Mexico City.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

<i>Andrés Cabrera</i>	cruel, elderly landlord
<i>Cabrera Sr.</i>	Andrés's father with dementia
<i>Pedro</i>	butcher and Cabrera's heavy—the title "brute"
<i>Paloma</i>	Cabrera's young wife and Pedro's lover
<i>Meche</i>	evicted tenant and Pedro's love interest
<i>Carmelo González</i>	Meche's father and ringleader of the tenant
<i>Lorenzo and Julián</i>	arrested carpenters
<i>Lencho and Pepe</i>	tenants who takes up the resistance
<i>María</i>	Pedro's common-law wife
<i>Enriqueta</i>	threatened mother
<i>Rosita</i>	wife and mother trying to survive

SYNOPSIS

As an aging landlord in Mexico City, Andrés Cabrera decides to sell one of his estate homes. He plans to oust his tenants (poor laborers in the city), demolish their shacks, and move into a smaller home with his senile father and young wife, Paloma. The tenants beg for mercy and protest that they have nowhere to go, but Cabrera and his lawyer tell them they have twenty days to get out.

Don Carmelo, one of the elder tenants, rouses a group of his neighbors to fight back against the unjust eviction. Cabrera realizes that his tenants will put up a fight and cause problems. His wife Paloma suggests that the landlord recruit a heavy to intimidate the ringleaders among the tenants. Cabrera convinces Pedro, the so-called El Bruto, to leave his job as butcher in the Rastro market and act as his enforcer. The landlord also urges Pedro to leave his wife and in-laws and move into his storage room.

In the middle part of the film, Pedro works with Paloma in the butcher shop by day and intimidates the tenants at night. Along with stalking the estate and threatening all the residents, Pedro confronts and slaps Don Carmelo. The old man dies shortly after the confrontation due to his chronic illness. Pedro keeps working for Cabrera, and Paloma becomes increasingly attracted to his brutish strength. After a series of erotically charged moments, Pedro and Paloma have two sexual encounters.

Meanwhile, the other tenants have re-grouped and decided to go after El Bruto. After chasing him through the streets, an injured Pedro seeks shelter with Meche, Carmelo's daughter. Pedro realizes that he is falling in love with the daughter of his victim and he decides to court the young, innocent girl. Paloma visits Pedro and finds out that Meche is his new live-in girlfriend. A catfight and brawl ensue, which ends with Meche leaving Pedro and El Bruto leaving Paloma.

In the final sequence, Paloma incites Cabrera to kill Pedro after telling her husband that El Bruto raped her. Pedro uses his strength to fight back and ends up killing Cabrera. Then, he tries to win back Meche even though he knows the cops are coming for him. Despite the efforts of the tenants to help their former enemy, the police end up shooting Pedro dead.

SCENES

Sending Father to Work Meche, Carmelo's teenage daughter, helps her father prepare for work. The camera zooms in on an eye-dropper and the drops falling into a glass of water. Meche hands the glass of water to her father, who grouses about having to take his medicine. She proceeds to wrap a pork chop and other provisions for his lunch. They are suddenly interrupted by the noise of shouting neighbors outside, and they walk out to see what happened.



Reacting to Probable Eviction All of the neighbors crowd into a big house with a long staircase. The owner and landlord, Andrés Cabrera, yells at them to get out of his house. The tenants yell back that it is their house, too, after having lived and worked there many years. Carmelo asks his neighbors to calm down so that Cabrera can explain. Cabrera's lawyer reads off documents indicating that his client may sell off the land and evict the tenants with twenty days' notice. One mother and her children steal food from the table while everyone is debating the law. Another woman asks Cabrera where they will find lodging, and the landlord replies that it is not his problem. The others complain and explain their predicaments (including sick children), but Cabrera shows no empathy or mercy.



The Law is for the Rich Don Carmelo interjects and vows that no one will be forced out. The lawyer warns them that the law is the law, but Carmelo retorts that laws only serve the rich. Cabrera escalates the tension by saying that the law is on his side and that the tenants are moochers who are robbing him blind. Infuriated, some of the male tenants approach menacingly and threaten violence. The mob starts to attack, and a policeman breaks it up with a whistle. The cop escorts Cabrera out with the tenants following angrily. Carmelo and a few other neighbors climb the staircase and plan their next move. Carmelo suggests that they stand up to the official with weapons.



Cutting Down the Flowers The camera closes in on a series of white flowers inside a house. When it zooms out, we see an attractive young brunette watering the flowers and walking around the house. She eats grapes and gazes at herself in a mirror. Cabrera enters and calls for Paloma to come into the living room. They snipe at each other with Paloma complaining that Cabrera is late and Andrés complaining about the revolting tenants. Cabrera explains that Carmelo and a few others are the ringleaders, and Paloma suggests that taking care of the leaders will cause the others to disperse. In order to illustrate this point, she cuts the stems of four tall blossoms. Cabrera agrees with her assessment, but worries about the other tenants rising up in defense of Carmelo. Paloma suggests that her husband recruit a “strong and determined” enforcer.



The Brute’s Family Begs for Money There is an interior shot of a humble abode with an older, sickly woman in bed. The young mother who stole the food at the riot checks on the bedridden woman, who complains about her painful state but continues to chain smoke. An old man with a crutch hobbles out from the bedroom. The young woman chides her uncle for not contributing while her two young children hang out in the living room. Cabrera knocks on the door and asks to speak to El Bruto, but the family explains that he is not there and only shows up to eat dinner. The older mother complains about her sickness and the uncle complains about not having a job despite being licensed. They both beg Cabrera for money, and he gives both cash as he walks out the door. In the hallway, Cabrera hears the family squabbling over how to use the money.



Meat Carcasses in the Market There is a close-up of an altar dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe, followed by a shot of a busy outdoor market, El Rastro. A butcher drags a wrapped cow leg across the floor while his fellow laborers tease him. The camera cuts to a row of hanging carcasses on two floors of a building. The foreman appears on the upper floor and calls down to El Bruto, who is the butcher on the market floor. El Bruto shouts back asking if it is an old lady who wants him, and the other workers chuckle.



Cabrera’s Proposition When the eponymous butcher ascends to the second floor, Cabrera is waiting for him, cigarette in hand. El Bruto greets him as “Patrón,” and Cabrera explains that he had already visited his house and met his family. Cabrera remarks that he is surprised that El Bruto puts up with such annoying in-laws, and Pedro admits that his “wife” is a pain—and that she made him take in her relatives. Cabrera suggests that El Bruto leave María, and the butcher agrees. Then, Cabrera explains that he wants to hire the butcher for a special, confidential job. Before the landlord can elaborate, the other butchers and the foremen keep jostling the pair and interrupting them. Cabrera invites El Bruto to come to his house at 7:00 so that they can discuss the job in peace.



Checking on Father Cabrera walks home in the evening and is immediately confronted with the disgruntled nursemaid. She explains that his father is on the warpath and she can't take it anymore. Cabrera retorts that she can pick up her last paycheck in the morning or continue working, and the nurse replies that she would quit if she weren't so poor. Cabrera greets El Bruto, who has been waiting patiently. Cabrera praises his punctuality and tells El Bruto that he is going to go check on his father. The bedridden old man complains that the nurse is mistreating him. Cabrera chides him for misbehaving and threatens not to give him the candies that he brought him. His father replies that he wanted a chorizo sandwich, but the nurse only made one for herself. Cabrera soothes him by giving him a candy, and the father reminisces about how he spoiled Cabrera when he was a young boy.



Cabrera Lays Out the Plan Cabrera escorts El Bruto into his office and tells him that he respects him. Pedro says that he will obey the landlord's wishes. Cabrera mandates that El Bruto quit his job as a butcher in El Rastro (a central market neighborhood of Mexico City) and work at his house with his wife Paloma. He also insists that El Bruto kick out his mooching relatives and leave his house. El Bruto protests slightly but agrees. Suddenly, the camera cuts to Cabrera's father hiding behind a curtain in the living room.



He ambles across the room to a cupboard and sneaks a few candies, then scurries back to his room. The camera cuts back to the office, where Cabrera is explaining how he wants to sell the land and the house so that he and his father can live in a smaller house together. El Bruto declares that he will suppress the uprising and teach the "desgraciados," or "good-for-nothing," tenants a lesson. Cabrera shakes his hand in gratitude, then tells him to focus on the four ringleaders—especially Carmelo González. El Bruto studies the names and vows to shut down the resistance.

Carmelo Walks Home There is a side shot of the tenants leaving work in the evening. One worker greets Carmelo and asks him out for a drink. Carmelo politely declines and reports that he keeps falling down. He continues on the route home, but stops frequently to cough. As the night descends, Carmelo is confronted by El Bruto, who accuses him of riling up his neighbors. Carmelo retorts that El Bruto must be Cabrera's new minion and notes that he is particularly big and strong. Offended, El Bruto slaps him hard. Carmelo falls down quickly from the blow.



Meche and the Tenants Try to Save Carmelo Back at Cabrera's work house, the women are waiting for their husbands and fathers to return from work. Rosita complains that she was not able to find work, and she remarks that the family will have to eat candy for dinner. Enriqueta runs in and reports to Meche that her father is ill and being carried in by the men. Meche runs out to help her father, and the men report that he has been vomiting blood but is still alive. Don Mariano, another neighbor, insists that Carmelo needs a doctor. Enriqueta offers to go fetch a doctor, but as she runs into the street, El Bruto intercepts her and threatens her baby.



El Bruto Reports Back to Cabrera and Throws Out His In-Laws The camera cuts to a close-up of an old-fashioned phone in Cabrera's house. Cabrera picks up and realizes that El Bruto is giving him an update. He listens and remarks that everything seems to have gone well. El Bruto explains that he is going to his house to pick up his things. When he arrives at home, Pedro sees his brother-in-law and starts to rough him up despite his mother-in-law's protests. After throwing out his brother-in-law, El Bruto starts



to pack as his wife and mother-in-law continue protesting. María realizes that he is leaving them for good, and she vows to find another man with money. As he walks out of the building, the lame uncle begs for El Bruto to stay and support them, but Pedro keeps walking and kicks out the uncle's crutch from under him.

Cabrera Makes a Move on Paloma Cabrera checks on his father again, and removes the bag of candy he has hidden under his pillow. He then gets in his own bed and starts to kiss and caress Paloma. She becomes irritated and remarks that her hands are worn and she has a bad headache. Cabrera complains that she always resists his advances, and Paloma replies that he could find another young wife in the streets. Their squabble is interrupted by El Bruto's ponderous knock at the door. Cabrera tells Paloma to let him in and make a bed for him in the almacén, or storage room.



Erotically Charged Clean-Up Paloma and El Bruto exchange pleasantries and charged looks after she opens the front door. She leads him to the storage room and warns him that it is a mess. When they enter, Paloma remarks that her husband throws everything in this room and it hasn't been cleaned or organized for several years. Paloma reports on what is in various trunks, and El Bruto moves the heavy trunks to the side. She compliments his strength and hands him blankets. They say good night, and Paloma leaves. El Bruto watches her with a lingering gaze. When Paloma returns to bed, Cabrera compliments her hair and kisses her neck suggestively.



Carmelo's Funeral There is a side shot of a funeral procession leading to a parked van, along with several townspeople standing between the van and the camera. The pallbearers place the coffin in the back of the van and close the doors. The camera swings violently to an arch in a stone wall nearby, where Cabrera watches the funeral from a distance. He smokes calmly, then walks away.



El Bruto and Paloma in the Butcher Shop El Bruto takes a rack of meat off the wall at a butcher's shop while the viewer hears Paloma selling meat to a customer outside of the frame. El Bruto starts to chop the leg, but Paloma stops him and explains that the customers prefer finer cuts. The two continue flirting, and Paloma asks about El Bruto's past lovers. The butcher brags that he has enjoyed a handful of women—some decent, and some not-so-decent. Paloma drops a sausage onto El Bruto's head. Cabrera enters with both laughing, and he asks for a report. Paloma explains that El Bruto is easygoing and funny, but he is too rough around the edges. She promises that she will continue to train El Bruto. Cabrera changes the subject by revealing that Carmelo died the night of the confrontation. El Bruto defends himself by saying that he only gave the old man a "little slap," and he punches the rack of meat as a demonstration. Cabrera remarks that El Bruto is indeed brutish. Paloma sidles up to El Bruto behind the counter and squeezes his arm seductively. There is a close-up of her fingers digging in to his forearm.



The Tenants Try to Create a Unified Front Back at the farm house, Don Lencho and the other laborers notice that some of the younger tenants have moved. They interrogate Dona Enriqueta, who eventually admits that El Bruto threatened her baby. The men vow to protect the women and fight back, especially after



Carmelo's death. They also demand that the rest of the tenants stay in the house so that they can form a unified front. The women tell the men that the culprit is the big, ugly butcher that has been skulking around the property.

Seductive Mending In the storage room, Paloma is sorting through El Bruto's shirts when he enters. Paloma teases him about how worn his clothing is as she goes about repairing one of his shirts. El Bruto watches her sew and remarks that she reminds him of his mother. He goes on to explain that the patrón raised him when he was little: he would beat him when he misbehaved and gave him candy when he was a good boy. Eventually, he discovered that the patrón was his biological father. As El Bruto reminisces, Paloma starts sewing the collar on the shirt that he is wearing. Suddenly, she kisses his hairy chest. He reacts by trying to kiss her and the two struggle for a few seconds. El Bruto apologizes and says that he thought she liked him that way. Paloma replies that she does like him, but she did not give consent for "it." Paloma storms out and El Bruto paces agitatedly.



Confrontation with the Tenants When El Bruto leaves Cabrera's house, the male tenants spot him and follow him down the street. They confront him, but El Bruto tells them to mind their own business. The men take out clubs and charge El Bruto, but he manages to open a door in the fence behind him. Pedro runs through the shadowy streets with the men in pursuit. Pedro enters a lumber yard but runs into the men coming from the other side. He climbs over another fence into a corral. When a chicken squawks loudly, he throttles it.



El Bruto Meets Meche Meche opens the door to her house, and Pedro grabs her and enters the house. He presses his hand over her mouth and asks her not to scream. She agrees, and he releases her. Pedro reports that the tenants tried to kill him, and he shows her his injured shoulder. She explains that he has a nail in his shoulder, and he demands that she take it out. Meche resists initially, but she proceeds to treat his wounds. El Bruto introduces himself as Pedro and promises to bring her another chicken. As he leaves, Pedro thanks her for her tenderness.



Cabrera Has Lorenzo Arrested Cabrera enters a carpentry workshop with a policeman. The landlord accuses Lorenzo and Julian of attempted murder, and the cop arrests Lorenzo. The other tenants follow them out with the women protesting his innocence. Meanwhile, Pedro is at the hospital being treated for his wounds. Cabrera meets him at check-out.



Family Dinner Cabrera's father sits at the dining table while Paloma and El Bruto prepare the meal. Paloma leans over and lets her father-in-law suck tequila off of her finger. He thanks her but asks for a real shot. Paloma chides him for pushing too much. The old man rants about how men were not such "fags" in his day. He also brags about his physical strength when he was young. Pedro puts on music, and everyone dances alongside the dining table. When Cabrera enters, he demands that his father go immediately to bed. The landlord then chides Paloma and Pedro for egging him on.



Cabrera Advises Pedro to Leave Town Paloma leaves the dining room. Cabrera warns Pedro that the tenants may rise up again and they now hate him (El Bruto) more than ever. Cabrera advises Pedro to get out of the neighborhood, and the landlord gives him cash. Pedro agrees reluctantly and goes to bed. Upon lighting the candle, Pedro sees Paloma asleep in his bed. At first, he is startled, but then he smiles lasciviously. Pedro snuffs out the candle moments after lighting it.

Meche Sells Her Father's Toolbox There is a close-up of an open metal toolbox inside the farm house. The lid has a label that reads "Carmelo González." Antonio, a laborer in the neighborhood, agrees to buy Carmelo's toolbox. Meche acts depressed, but Antonio tries to cheer her up by saying that she will bounce back. She walks back to her room with a bucket and discovers new-born chicks walking around the hen.



Pedro's Peace Offering Pedro suddenly enters with a new chicken and a paper bag. He offers her chitlins and other food, but she tells him to get out. When he asks why she is so cold, Meche replies that she blames him for the arrest of the carpenters. Pedro asks for forgiveness and explains that he acted the enforcer before he knew her. He also compliments her by saying that she helps him think and express himself. Another neighbor, Marta, interrupts their conversation and glares at Meche for associating with the enemy. Marta leaves, and Meche explains that El Bruto is a liability. He asks to remain her friend as he walks out in the street.



Paloma's Visit Pedro hangs up his jacket and starts to get ready for bed. He is surprised when Paloma enters carrying a bag of groceries. She explains that she missed him and that Cabrera was irritating her, so she lied about going to the movies. Paloma kisses him and looks around his new "apartment." She notices that it is basically a shed next to a noisy factory, and she asks Pedro how he can stand it. The camera zooms in on a fire heating up the meat while the viewer hears Paloma murmuring seductively and Pedro whispering "My Paloma"—but all outside the frame. When Paloma notices that the meat is burning, Pedro tells her to let it burn.



Cabrera Threatens Meche Cabrera visits Meche outside of her shack and tells her to move out. She explains that she has no where to go and that she wants to stay where her father lived. Cabrera refuses to listen and walks away. He checks in with a cop and warns the officer that the tenants may cause trouble. A few minutes later, laborers are demolishing the shack. Pedro approaches and asks where Meche is. One of the workers points him towards the stone wall.

Pedro's Proposition Pedro finds Meche sitting in rubble and goes to comfort her. He suggests that they live together given that they get along well. Meche agrees to leave with him. Pedro asserts that they will take care of each other even though they lost their other loved ones. Meche asks whether Pedro will marry her, and Pedro says he will be flexible. He takes her to his room by the factory and compliments her beauty. He tries to kiss her gently, and she agrees to get into bed with him. The two confess their love to each other. The camera cuts to the dark room a few minutes later, where we hear Meche softly sobbing.



New Wife and Old Flame Pedro hurries home for dinner after a few drinks with his fellow laborers. When he arrives at the room next to the factory, Meche tells him that she is worried about the other displaced tenants—especially given that they are still paying Cabrera rent. Pedro comforts her and suggests that they go to the movies. Meche starts to get ready but is intercepted by Paloma. Meche



explains that she is Pedro's new "woman" and Paloma slaps her. Paloma calls her a slut disguised in an innocent face and continues to advance on her menacingly. Both women claim that El Bruto is theirs.

Big Reveal Pedro enters and breaks up the fight. Paloma reveals that El Bruto was the one that killed Meche's father. Pedro strikes her, and she falls to the ground. Paloma bleeds from the mouth and eggs on Pedro saying "kill me with one little slap as you did with Carmelo." Meche confronts Pedro and walks away when she realizes Paloma's accusation is true. Pedro tries to follow her, but Paloma latches on to him and says "You're mine." They struggle again. Pedro leaves Paloma sobbing on the floor and roams the streets looking for Meche. A prostitute propositions him through a barred window.



Paloma Returns Home Back at Cabrera's residence, Paloma enters with a torn dress and her mouth still bleeding. Cabrera sees her come in as he sits at his desk. Paloma explains, sobbing, that El Bruto beat her up and raped her. Cabrera retrieves a pistol from the bureau and Paloma tells him to kill Pedro. Cabrera walks the streets and asks after Pedro. The camera cuts to Pedro downing several shots at a bar. A cyclist passes by the bar and warns Pedro that the patrón is after him. Pedro walks back to Cabrera's house and enters the dining room.



Final Confrontation and Struggle Cabrera meets Pedro in front of the dining table and slaps him. Pedro asks why the boss is coming after him, and he replies that El Bruto went after Paloma. Pedro explains that it was she who came on to him. The two struggle as Cabrera goes for his gun. Pedro tells Cabrera the truth about Meche, and the landlord threatens to kill her, too. Enraged, El Bruto slams Cabrera's head on the dining room table, then stomps on him once he falls down. Paloma and Cabrera's father hear the pounding from their respective bedrooms. Cabrera senior sneaks into the dining room to retrieve candy from the cupboard.



No Escape for El Bruto Pedro runs over to the factory to find Meche. He tries to explain, but the other tenants surround him and start to attack. Pedro fights them off and tells them that he just killed the patrón. Everyone hears a police siren, and Pedro explains that the police are coming for him. El Bruto vows to return to Meche after serving time. When the police enter, the other tenants stall the officers by claiming that Pedro does not live there. Paloma spots Pedro trying to escape and alerts the police. The officers shoot at Pedro, who tries to hide behind a barrel. Meche runs over to his dead body. The officers remark that he deserved it. Paloma walks into an adjoining shack and sees a rooster perched above her. She looks at it, fearful and amazed, and continues walking away from the camera.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

ANDRÉS CABRERA Despite his tenderness towards his father, Cabrera epitomizes the evil landlord. He completely lacks empathy for his tenants, and he takes extreme measures to make their lives more difficult. He acts selfishly with respect to his wants and needs, be they sexual, emotional, or economic.



Calculating As the economic alpha male of the neighborhood, Cabrera lays down the law with his tenants. He uses his power overtly, yet he also buttresses his plans through manipulation and machination. Even in the early scenes when Cabrera announces the evictions, he brings along a lawyer to emphasize his legal rights. Later, he uses Pedro and the cops as his puppets in order to quell

resistance. He also watches Carmelo's funeral from a distance in order to make sure that his chief rival is dead.

Selfish Along with wanting to retire, Cabrera also tries to get what he wants in the moment. He expects his wife to satisfy his sexual needs, and he expects Pedro to obey his every whim—including leaving his wife on a dime. Cabrera also likes to maintain appearances to stroke his ego. It is obvious that he chose Paloma to be his trophy wife, and when he believes that Pedro raped her, he is willing to kill El Bruto to restore his honor.

PALOMA Like many of Buñuel's femme fatales, Paloma incarnates the aggressive seductress. As a 1950s Delilah-Salomé hybrid, she provides an irresistible temptation for Pedro. However, Paloma's character also has more depth than other Buñuel temptresses: she acts as advisor and shop owner, which emphasizes her intelligence. In addition, she actually falls in love with Pedro over the course of the film.

Intelligent Paloma is a master manipulator—she knows how to influence her husband and Pedro. Beyond this emotional intelligence, however, Paloma has good ideas for business and negotiations. It is her idea to recruit a heavy to tamp down the tenants, and she is an effective manager of the butcher shop. Buñuel implies that her talents are wasted as a trophy wife.

Lustful Paloma does not need to seduce Pedro for practical reasons. She does so because she is physically attracted to his strength and she is excited by the thrill of adultery. Before their first sexual encounter, Paloma strokes and kisses Pedro's muscles. Afterwards, she keeps coming back for more sex. The lust is so powerful that Paloma becomes obsessed and possessive; she continually declares "You're mine."

PEDRO / EI BRUTO On its face, the eponymous brute is just that: tall, wide, strong, ugly, and not very bright or eloquent. However, Pedro's character, like that of Paloma, contains depth and contradictions. Pedro acts callously at times but is empathetic and tender at other times. He is loyal and respectful to Cabrera and Meche, yet he discards his wife María and Paloma at the drop of a hat. He indulges his desire occasionally, but he also sacrifices comfort and safety out of a sense of obligation.

Violent Pedro does act brutishly, but not out of malevolence or sadistic pleasure (unlike several male psychos or sociopaths in other Buñuel dramas and thrillers). For Pedro, the violent act is a means to an end or a necessary task to complete. He slaps Carmelo as part of his new job, and he slaps Paloma in order to protect Meche and get away from her. He breaks the chicken's neck in order to hide from the angry mob. His decision to kill Cabrera is partially motivated by self defense and partially motivated by his anger that Cabrera threatened to kill Meche.

Tender When Pedro is not acting the enforcer (or when he is not cornered), he displays compassion and softness to those around him. He acts as a hard-working and amiable employee who is always trying to please his boss. He shows compassion for Cabrera's father. When Paloma kisses his chest but then resists his advances, Pedro backs off and apologizes for misreading her signals. He is also tender and patient with Meche on their wedding night.

Obedient For the first half of the film, Pedro does whatever Cabrera and Paloma demand: from roughing up Carmelo to cutting the racks of meat in a particular way. He also agrees to quit his job at the Rastro and leave his family, and he gives Paloma sex whenever she wants it.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class As with almost all of Buñuel's Mexican-made films, *The Brute* elucidates the plight of laborers and the poor in Mexico City. Whereas films such as *Illusion Travels by Streetcar* (1954) and *The Forgotten Ones* (1950) focus on the difficulties of finding and keeping a job (and paying for goods), *The Brute* highlights the housing crisis of the 1950s and the lack of rights of the working class. Despite their attempts to fight back against Cabrera, the tenants find their uprising to be ineffectual. Cabrera manages to squash them through El Bruto, the police, or his own personal lawyers. In the end, the poor laborers

only escape eviction because their landlord is murdered. Buñuel and Alcoriza imply that even coordinated resistance cannot contend with the power of the oligarch. Conversely, Cabrera wields a colonial power that stretches back to the Conquest (1519). The fact that his father speaks with a peninsular (from Spain) accent and his land is inherited suggests that the Cabrerhas have occupied Mexico City for decades (if not centuries), and the land reforms of the post-revolutionary period (the 1920s and 1930s) did not succeed in breaking up their power.

Illustrative Moment: The Plight of the Dispossessed Tenants

Cabrera's lawyer reads off documents indicating that his client may sell off the land and evict the tenants with twenty days' notice. One mother and her children steal food from the table while everyone is debating the law. Another woman asks Cabrera where they will find lodging, and the landlord replies that it is not his problem. The others complain and explain their predicaments (including sick children), but Cabrera shows no empathy or mercy. Along with posing the central conflict of the film, this early scene also underscores the connection among housing, work, food, health, and survival. It is obvious that the tenants barely survive as it is, and those who have children struggle to earn enough money for food and medical care. The probable eviction becomes the socioeconomic nail in the coffin, yet Cabrera remains fixated on earning a profit and retiring.



JUSTICE

Injustice As explained in the section on **Class** above, the entire pretense for evicting laborers is an unjust, if legal, one. Cabrera technically has the law on his side, but it is obvious that the tenants have suffered a loss of their rights and dignity. The fact that Cabrera can employ muscle to dominate his tenants also speaks to an abusive sociopolitical system that is a remnant of the nineteenth century. Although Cabrera complains about the effects of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the supposed reforms of the mid-twentieth century never came to fruition. The justice in the form of land redistribution was not enforced, with the result that the laborers still do not have rights. In addition to the injustice of the eviction, the punishment for crimes committed barely exists. Cabrera uses his influence to intimidate and arrest the tenants, but neither Cabrera nor El Bruto is held accountable for assault, coercion, or bribery. With the exception of the virginal Meche, the main characters lack morals and act according to their desires of the moment. Paloma commits adultery, and El Bruto abandons his makeshift first wife and the children who live there. While the police insist that Pedro deserved to die in the film's climax, the viewer may well disagree. At best, the deaths of El Bruto and Cabrerhas constitute poetic justice.

Illustrative Moment: The Law is for the Rich Don Carmelo

interjects and vows that no one will be forced out. The lawyer warns them that the law is the law, but Carmelo retorts that laws only serve the rich. Cabrera escalates the tension by saying that the law is on his side and that the tenants are moochers who are robbing him blind. Infuriated, some of the male tenants approach menacingly and threaten violence. The mob starts to attack, and a policeman breaks it up with a whistle. The cop escorts Cabrera out with the tenants following angrily. Carmelo and a few other neighbors climb the staircase and plan their next move. Carmelo suggests that they stand up to the official with weapons. In this moment of resistance, it appears that perhaps the tenants can prevail and keep their lodging. Shortly after, however, Cabrera manipulates the system to the point that the tenants can no longer fight back. It is only with Cabrera's murder that the tenants escape their unjust fate.



RELATIONSHIPS

Desire As with most of Buñuel's dramas, the main characters either indulge in or fight against their illicit sexual attraction to one another. Paloma acts as both the femme fatale and as the young wife suppressed by a much older (and often tyrannical) husband. As with many of Buñuel's films in the 1960s and 70s, the old man comes on to his young wife or girlfriend, but she spurns his sexual advances. Paloma rebels against Cabrera's dominance by sleeping with the man who epitomizes strength and virility—El Bruto. Similarly, Pedro is drawn to Paloma as the forbidden fruit and as a stand-in for a missing maternal figure. Often, the most erotic moments between the two occur when Paloma is performing domestic chores and acting the mother to Pedro: making his bed, bringing him food, mending his shirts, and teaching him how to be a clerk in the store. Whereas Paloma's desire grows in intensity after their first sexual encounter, Pedro becomes fixated on Meche's purity as the new focus of his desire. Meche's innocence draws him in to the point that he is willing to marry her in order to be her first lover. In this sense, *The Brute* layers the overt sexuality of physical attraction with the psychological urges beneath the surface.

Illustrative Moment: Paloma Squeezes Pedro's Arm El Bruto takes a rack of meat off the wall at a butcher's shop while the viewer hears Paloma selling meat to a customer outside of the frame. El Bruto starts to chop the leg, but Paloma stops him and explains that the customers prefer finer cuts. The two continue flirting, and Paloma asks about El Bruto's past lovers. The butcher brags that he has enjoyed a handful of women—some decent and some not so decent. Paloma drops a sausage onto El Bruto's head. Paloma sidles up to El Bruto behind the counter and squeezes his arm seductively. There is a close-up of her fingers digging in to his forearm. Although Paloma and Pedro's flirtations are interrupted by Cabrera's entrance into the shop, the erotic tension between the two continues to build throughout the scene. The close-up on Paloma's fingers digging into Pedro's forearm offers one of the more explicit visual signs of erotic desire, especially given that the two have not yet had sex.



Fatherhood / Father-Son Dynamics Whereas Buñuel frequently explores the mother-son dynamic and the Oedipal Complex in his films, *The Brute* centers more on the role of fathers and their effect on the main characters' lives and personalities. One of Cabrera's primary motivations is to move to a more comfortable house with his father, who in his state of dementia, has become more like a son. Cabrera recognizes his new role as the patriarch but also is aware of his inherited wealth and the alpha male energy that his father once had. In one of the intimate scenes with Paloma, Pedro confides that his biological father was the patrón, who did help raise him, albeit from a distance. Finally, Buñuel also highlights the special relationship between Meche and Carmelo and the ways in which Meche cared for her father during his final days. In all three cases, the main characters are psychologically and emotionally motivated by their relationships with their fathers.

Illustrative Moment: Pedro Explains How His Patrón Raised Him In the storage room, Paloma is sorting through El Bruto's shirts when he enters. Paloma teases him about how worn his clothing is as she goes about repairing one of his shirts. El Bruto watches her sew and remarks that she reminds him of his mother. He goes on to explain that the patrón raised him when he was little: he would beat him when he misbehaved and gave him candy when he was a good boy. Eventually, he discovered that the patrón was his biological father. Pedro's description of his father suggests that El Bruto formed his concept of masculinity through the dominance of the patrón. Moreover, Pedro's history with a macho father-figure explains not only his own machismo, but also his respect for and obedience towards Cabrera. By working for Cabrera and showing him loyalty, Pedro reenacts his relationship with his own father.



LIFE STAGES

Old Age Whereas El Bruto, Meche, and Paloma epitomize strength, virility, and youthful vitality, many of the main characters in the film are struggling with the physical and social effects of old age. Although the Cabrereras are a powerful family, both father and son recognize that their wealth cannot save them from impending death. Andrés tries to stroke his own ego by showing off his young wife, but he also realizes that he needs to retire and take care of his father. Even with his wealth and power, Cabrera still contends with his father's dementia and the reality that he is the primary caretaker. There is a parallel dynamic between Meche and Carmelo, as she is the one who treats her father's illness. Despite Carmelo's leadership qualities, he remains disadvantaged by an unnamed illness (possibly tuberculosis) and begins the film on the threshold of death. Several of the other poor characters also contend with sick and aging relatives. Although Cabrera denounces Pedro's in-laws as moochers, it is clear that both Maria's mother and uncle suffer from physical ailments and are slowed down by their age. As is the case in many of Buñuel's Mexican films, the disabilities that accompany old age make the characters even more vulnerable to the ravages of poverty.

Illustrative Moment: Cabrera Sr. Waxes Nostalgic About His Youth

Cabrera's father sits at the dining table while Paloma and El Bruto prepare the meal. Paloma leans over and lets her father-in-law suck tequila off of her finger. He thanks her but asks for a real shot. Paloma chides him for pushing too much. The old man rants about how men were not such "fags" in his day. He also brags about his physical strength when he was young. Pedro puts on music, and everyone dances alongside the dining table. When Cabrera enters, he demands that his father go immediately to bed. Although Cabrera Sr. enjoys dancing and reminiscing with Paloma and Pedro, his exuberance is short-lived. Even with his wealth and former strength, he has reverted to a child-like state in which he depends upon his son to care for him and allow him to eat candies. Buñuel and Alcoriza emphasize that even the most powerful cannot escape the ravages of time.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does Buñuel portray the plight of the poor and working-class characters in *El Bruto*?
2. As in almost all of his films, Buñuel plays with bestial imagery in *The Brute*. What do the chickens symbolize? Does Pedro's spirit inhabit the rooster in the final shot of the film?
3. Do El Bruto and Cabrera's deaths constitute poetic justice? Do you think this ending is satisfying?
4. The character of Paloma can be interpreted in a number of ways. Do you see her as a Delilah-like seductress, a sociopath, or a victim of circumstance?