

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Weeping for a Bandit / Llanto por un bandido (1964)

Carlos Saura (1932-2023)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Carlos Saura was arguably the most lauded and well-known director in Spain in the second half of the twentieth century. Born in Huesca, Aragon in 1932, Saura grew up in the stark post civil-war landscape. From an early age, he experimented with photography, painting, and music, and all three artforms informed the themes and visual frames in his films. For this reason, many of his early films (most notably *Golfos* of 1962 and *La Caza* of 1966) depict the poverty and violence of both the city and the country in the mid-twentieth century. Saura's middle period was characterized by satires of the bourgeoisie and a dissection of the Spanish family unit. Saura married three different women and had a long-term relationship with his favorite actress and muse, Geraldine Chaplin. All four relationships yielded children: one daughter, and six sons. In the 1980s and 1990s, Saura became fascinated with various music and dance styles and used his documentary eye to capture the process of performance with music. His later period includes films about tango from Argentina, fados from Portugal, and flamenco and theater from Andalucía (southern Spain). Saura died in 2023, right before he was set to receive the lifetime achievement award at the Goya Awards.

Film *Weeping for the Bandit* (1964) is a western drama in color set in Andalucía (southern Spain) during the authoritarian rule of Fernando VII (1808-1833). The plot involves the rise and fall of the bandit José María, El Tempranillo (red wine grape). El Tempranillo was a real figure in Andalucía in the 1820s, and there is a song written about him. His nickname refers to the grape that is picked early, or “temprano”, in the wine-ripening process, which referenced the bandit's young age when he roamed the plains of Andalucía. In the film's interpretation, El Tempranillo is a conflicted and complex middle-aged man rather than an impetuous teenager. Francisco Rabal plays the title bandit, who starred in several Spanish dramas of the 1960s and 70s—most notably, the handsome and mysterious cousin in Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961). In his old age, Rabal also appeared as the dirty old man character in Almodóvar's sex dramady, *Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down* (1989) and the painter Goya in Saura's *Goya in Bourdeaux* (1999).

Background Saura wrote *Weeping for the Bandit* with Mario Camus. Like many of his dramas in the 1960s and 1970s, Saura uses symbolism and allegory in *Bandit* as a means of criticizing Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975). Fernando VII's “Ominous Decade,” or the 1820s, becomes a thinly veiled reference to Franco's execution of political enemies in the decade after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). It is hardly surprising, then, that Saura cast his subversive colleagues, fellow filmmaker Luis Buñuel and playwright Antonio Buero Vallejo, in bit parts. Because of the inferred critique of Franco's regime, the film was subjected to government censorship and editing. Saura felt increasingly frustrated with the unevenness of the finished product and the manipulation of the opening execution scene. Although the socio-historical context of the film is very Spanish, the production depended upon international collaboration. Many of the actors and technicians were French or Italian, and the film was screened at the Berlin Film Festival.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

José María, El Tempranillo
El Lutos
Jiménez
El Tuerto

the bandit on the lam
sadistic lead bandit in black
dissenting bandit with the head wrap
partially blind and indignant bandit in the hat

<i>El Sotillo</i>	bandit with the knife
<i>Antonio</i>	sensitive bandit and el Tempranillo's right-hand man
<i>El Lero</i>	bandit leader of the sierra who wants to retire
<i>María Jerónima</i>	José María's long-suffering wife
<i>Pedro Sánchez</i>	escaped prisoner and El Tempranillo's negotiator

SYNOPSIS

During the “Ominous Decade” of Fernando VII’s reign in Spain (the 1820s), several bandit groups roamed Andalucía trying to control the land. In addition, there were a series of liberal uprisings throughout Spain (liberals accused Fernando of being an authoritarian ruler who did not follow the tenets of the 1812 Constitution).

As a result of this tenuous situation, the monarchy cracked down on crime and uprisings through widespread arrests, violence, and executions. After several bandits are garroted in front of the townspeople in the opening scene of the film, the surviving bandits decide to flee south to avoid capture. Initially, their leader is the cruel El Lutos, who robs and murders with impunity. José María, also known as el Tempranillo, joins the group when he flees his own arrest. However, el Tempranillo and some of the other bandits disagree with el Lutos’s sadistic methods. When one of the bandits threatens to leave the group, El Lutos stabs him in the middle of the night. Horrified, José María attacks el Lutos, and the two end up dueling with clubs.

José María barely survives the duel but manages to kill el Lutos. He assumes the leadership position of the bandits. At first, el Tempranillo is an effective leader and does not murder townspeople. Through collecting tribute and forging alliances with the elder bandit el Lero, Tempranillo’s gang flourishes and controls vast territory around Córdoba and Málaga. In addition, Tempranillo reunites with and marries his lost fiancée, María Jerónima.

When el Tempranillo learns that María is pregnant with a son, he plans to retire to a farm with his accumulated wealth. However, the onslaught of the king’s troops in the plains prevents him from keeping and expanding his territory. In addition, María suffers imprisonment and later dies in childbirth. The traumatic death turns El Tempranillo into a hard-hearted leader, and he decides to take a deal with the crown—specifically, he agrees to hunt down his fellow bandits in exchange for a payout and amnesty. When El Tempranillo leads the king’s men up into the mountains, Pedro and the other bandits shoot him, and the final image is José María’s dead body hanging over his horse.

SCENES

Reading the Execution Order There is a scaffolding in the middle of a dusty plaza. An official reads off an execution order from a scroll while villagers listen. Many onlookers are perched on the balconies of surrounding buildings. The official reads off the justification for the execution as commanded by Fernando VII: seven criminals are to be garroted for their crimes of murder and other attacks on society. The executioner (played by Luis Buñuel in a brief cameo) crosses the platform and kneels in prayer. The camera pans to the left of the scaffolding, where several clergymen in black are kneeling and praying. One priest asks for forgiveness for the executioner. The criminals who are to be executed are wheeled out in a wagon, all dressed in white uniforms with their hands tied. The official reads that each dead body should be displayed in different streets and different towns as a warning to all.



The Bandits Decide What to Do There is an abrupt cut to an interior of a cave, where El Tuerto (the one-eyed man) continues describing the scene. He explains that even though Aurelio had fought against the French, they did not pardon him and even executed him first. He goes on to say that Diego cried like a woman, but Francisco remained brave and looked straight ahead. El Tuerto continues to become agitated and describes how the executioner nearly beheaded Francisco, then tore off his clothes and dragged him down the street. He approaches El Lutos and declares: “this is how they treat those of us



who fought against the French.” The other bandits listen intently and together; they decide that they must leave town. Lutos suggests that they move south so as to avoid being “hunted down like rabbits.” One man insists on sleeping first.

The Bandits Meet El Tempranillo There is a panoramic shot of a man riding a horse (in a white, wide-brimmed hat) in a vast desert landscape. He descends into a cave, and we see that El Lutos’s gang is hidden behind various rocks. When he enters the cave, the others descend on him and pull him off of his horse. El Sotillo puts a knife to his neck, but El Lutos commands that El Sotillo back off when the man explains that he, too, is a bandit. The others pepper him with questions, and he explains that he was set to be executed for murdering a man over a woman. He goes on to say that it occurred in Jauja during their festival, and he had to flee south. The other men test him by asking him questions about Jauja and the festival, which the bandit gets right. El Lutos nods his approval and leaves the cave. The others follow, including El Tempranillo.



El Lutos’s Plan There is an aerial shot of the bandit procession with El Lutos leading the way in a black headdress. The next day, the bandits proceed south but quickly tire in the desert heat. As they wash their faces and drink from the river, Jiménez and some of the others complain that El Lutos is not a good leader and discuss separating. El Lutos explains his plan—to arrive at the inn by nightfall and steal the travelers’ horses. Jiménez (seen in the image here) doubts that there will be horses to steal, and he declares that he will look for El Lero by himself. Tempranillo and the others look on as he takes the reins of a horse. El Lutos reminds them that if one person is caught, they will all be executed.



Political Discussion at the Inn The innkeeper’s wife serves three men their dinner at the inn. They complain that there is a liberal revolt against Fernando VII every week. One man comments that his wife loves the king because he gave them ancestral lands and because he (the king) cleaned up the riff-raff. He goes on to explain that before they captured the bandits, no one could travel on the roads without being robbed. Another guest remarks that they just captured and killed seven bandits. Two soldiers approach and complain that the guests did not leave enough of the barbeque for “the authorities.” The innkeeper’s wife remarks that the soldier’s wife is blond and fair, and the others retort that rich women in Madrid can stay out of the sun and remain pale. The innkeeper jokes that if he stayed inside, he would only come out darker. Everyone laughs. There is a knock at the door, and a traveler asks to spend the night. He sits down and crosses himself, and a woman in the corner does the same.



Robbery Gone Bad When the bandits arrive at the inn, they enter it and brandish their guns. The guests and innkeepers quickly surrender items. The innkeeper says that the woman upstairs is rich, but one guest yells that they had better not touch her. El Lutos punches the protesting guest, then climbs the stairs, walks down the hall, and opens each door until he comes upon the woman. A woman in bed, dressed in white, looks at the bandit. She tells him to leave the room immediately. El Lutos notices a painting of Jesus above the bed and leaves, closing the door. The bandits begin to walk out with their newly stolen stash, and El Lutos mounts a horse outside. Suddenly, he decides to ride back into the inn on horseback. Soon after, el Lutos quickly strides down the same hall but his frame only appears as a shadow. El Tempranillo, now on the lower floor, watches the lead bandit enter the woman’s bedroom. We hear the door open and the woman screaming, then el Lutos reappearing holding the woman in his arms. He walks towards the railing and throws the woman from the top floor. She lands face down, motionless, with her white dress splayed out. The camera cuts to El Tempranillo’s horrified reaction in a close-up. He looks at el Lutos in shock, then walks towards the body. El Tempranillo checks to see if she is still alive, but he leaves her face down in the middle of the floor.



El Lutos Tries to Strong-Arm the Others Later that night, the bandits lie around a campfire. Jiménez and others whisper that they will leave. El Lutos confronts them and asks who is too afraid to follow him. Pedro replies that he is not afraid, but there are some things that even a bandit does not do. El Tempranillo gets up and starts to walk away, and El Lutos reminds him that he cannot abandon the group. El Tempranillo walks back and lies down on his side. He also takes out his knife and

holds it against his chest. The next morning, the men put on their cummerbunds and get ready to leave. When Jiménez does not move and appears asleep, Antonio approaches him to wake him up. El Lutos commands that they leave him. El Tempranillo disobeys and uncovers Antonio's dead body with a stab wound in the chest. They all look up at El Lutos, who has already mounted his horse. He comments: "He was asking for it." Furious, El Tempranillo charges El Lutos and cries out "I will kill you!" Sotillo and El Tuerto hold back El Tempranillo, but Antonio and Jiménez aim their rifles at El Lutos.

Duel in the Sand There is a close-up of hands digging a hole in the ground, and then a wide shot of the four intermediaries and el Lutos and el Tempranillo with their arms tied behind their backs. The four lead El Lutos and El Tempranillo to two holes in the ground, where they are both buried up to their knees. The four bandits untie the two duelers and hand them long sticks that act as clubs. The two face each other and begin striking at one another. The other four bandits walk away and sit down on the side of the hill. One plays guitar as a "battle" accompaniment. From the spectators' perspective, we watch as el Lutos lands several blows against Tempranillo, and it appears that El Lutos will triumph. When El Lutos leans back, exhausted, a bloody Tempranillo uses his last ounce of strength to throw sand in El Lutos's eyes. When he flinches, El Tempranillo strikes him quickly in the head twice. The other bandits approach and certify that El Lutos is dead. They dig out el Tempranillo, who falls backwards, exhausted.



Antonio Watches Over El Tempranillo The four healthy bandits bury their murdered compatriot. Antonio goes over to check on Tempranillo, whose wounds have prevented him from getting up. The other three living bandits mount their horses and ride away. Antonio calls out that he will stay with Tempranillo. There is a cut to an interior of a cave where a curandera (faith healer) is examining the wounded Tempranillo, who lays on his back. She marks his chest with crosses and says that he will heal with rest. Antonio thanks her, and el Tempranillo vows that he will not forget Antonio's kindness. Antonio suggests that they catch up with the others in a few days. When El Tempranillo tries to get up, he falls back. Antonio tells him that he has to stay put and recover. He asks El Tempranillo who is María, and reports that El Tempranillo was talking about her in his delirium.



El Tempranillo and Antonio Rescue the Others When El Tempranillo has recovered, he and Antonio ride out on a high ridge. They notice that a group of policemen have captured El Sotillo and another prisoner, whom they have tied together. When the troops arrive at a fortress, the two prisoners are seated back-to-back and tied together. El Sotillo gazes at a fountain of water longingly. A priest in black approached and notices a pile of bodies in the courtyard. Behind them appears El Tempranillo, partially in disguise. El Sotillo recognizes his compatriot and calls out for the priest to hear his confession. As the police and the priest turn to walk towards El Sotillo, El Tempranillo and Antonio stab the police and cut the ropes of the prisoners. Together, the four bandits manage to overcome the soldiers at the fortress.



The Four Survivors Reach El Lero's Camp The bandits climb up a steep hill. El Lero greets them and embraces Antonio. The bandit leader asks after El Lutos, but the others only report that he has died. El Lero replies that he had hoped El Lutos would change his evil ways. El Lero notes that there are not very many left in the group. Antonio explains that Tempranillo is their new leader, as he is both clever and has "cool blood." El Tempranillo asks El Lero for more men and explains that they can offer El Lero something in return. El Lero retorts that it is too early to start making demands. Later that night, El Lero notices that El Tempranillo has the confidence of youth. El Lero explains that he always tried to avoid being a poor farmer, but that his dream is to retire as an oligarch in Granada—where no one will recognize him as an old bandit.



El Tempranillo and María Jerónima Reunite Now an expanded group with El Lero's men, the bandits ride out on the plains. El Tempranillo leads the way with a black hat similar to what El Lutos wore. There is a panoramic shot of the bandits riding across a wheat field as a mournful flamenco ballad plays (the lyrics express the singer's loneliness and yearning for his lover). When they come across a group of farmers, El Tempranillo asks for María Jerónima. They point him towards an area where female workers are cutting down shafts of wheat. Tempranillo approaches the women slowly and the camera maintains a wide-angled shot. There is also a close-up on María's face as she recognizes her old lover. Rather than run towards him, María runs away from him as he slowly walks towards her. He explains that he has returned as he promised. María retorts that she suffered greatly because of his misdeeds, including being beaten and going hungry. El Tempranillo tries to continue explaining, but the other bandits shout catcalls from afar. As María runs away again, the other bandits form a circle around her and trap her.



A Reception After the Wedding A procession forms with María, as the bride, riding in a carriage with Tempranillo. As they arrive at the inn where they will spend their wedding night, the onlookers shout "Long live the bride!" The couple enter the inn together and walk upstairs to the bridal chamber. María wonders over to the other side of the room and sits down. El Tempranillo also sits in a chair alongside the bed, and the two proceed to undress slowly—starting with their shoes and socks / stockings. Syncopated clapping and guitar music enter the scene as the couple undresses. Then, the scene shifts to downstairs, where we see the origin of the music—the guests dancing and clapping along to the "reception" music.



The Morning After Partially dressed, El Tempranillo walks to the balcony window and shouts down to Antonio. "We're leaving in a half an hour—tell everyone." Antonio follows orders and starts gathering the bandits in the courtyard. El Tempranillo moves back towards the bed where María is sitting in her white nightgown. He washes the top half of his body with a washbasin and starts to put on his own white shirt. María protests, saying that he can't abandon her right away. She vows to follow him into the mountains or wherever he goes, but El Tempranillo does not respond except to ask her to hand him his belt, or faja. She helps him button his shirt and wraps his in his belt as he turns around. Finally, el Tempranillo explains that he wants her to live with her aunt and that he will visit her when he can. He further insists that he must remain a bandit and finish certain things.



El Tempranillo Explains His Bandit Rules Now with his new tribe, El Tempranillo arrives at an inn and asks for Paco Morales. El Tempranillo explains to the man at the door that he does not wish to kill any citizens and he will be satisfied if villagers pay a tribute for their protection. He explains that they will collect from travelers every two weeks, and he will also expect millers and farmers to pay a bandit tax. There is a panoramic shot of the landscape. El Tempranillo visits El Lero and thanks him for his assistance. El Tempranillo proclaims that together, the bandits will take all of Andalucía. El Lero warns him that Fernando VII and his officials will send all the migueletes, or royal police, after them. José María urges el Lero to join forces rather than retire. El Lero insists that he still wants to be a small farmer around Granados. El Tempranillo offers to give him a generous portion of the land, which would also serve El Lero's men. El Lero suddenly starts to barter with el Tempranillo, saying he wants a fourth of the loot, Málaga, and control over collecting tributes from farmers and millers in northern Seville.



Chain Gang Shootout There is a long procession of arrested men in a chain gang. The Spanish Crown's soldiers ride alongside them on horseback. When a handful of men break free and start running away, the soldiers shoot them in the back.



El Tempranillo (in Disguise) Visits María

El Tempranillo, dressed as a priest with a long hat, rides up to a soldier guarding a city gate. The soldier asks for his papers and apologizes for molesting a clergyman. El Tempranillo asks whom they are pursuing, and the soldier replies a liberal who once lived here. El Tempranillo assures the young man that they will capture the sinner. He continues on to María's aunt's house. When he appears at María's door, she asks; "What do you want, Father?" El Tempranillo raises his head and laughs heartily. She rushes to him and embraces him, declaring that she prayed every day for his arrival. He sits on a chair and María sits on his lap. María's aunt enters and upon seeing El Tempranillo's disguise, chides them fiercely for their sins. El Tempranillo laughs, but María pulls away, somewhat ashamed.



Another Fraught Goodbye

After they make love, María confesses that she is pregnant with a son. El Tempranillo assures her that he is making enough money for the whole family to settle down on a little farm. He also vows that his son will not be a poor farmer who goes hungry. María retorts that he should give up the criminal life now and not get too greedy. The couple share a similar goodbye as the morning after their wedding. María helps her husband dress and winds the faja around his torso. She repeats that a man and wife should share the same bed. El Tempranillo leaves the same way he arrived—in a priest's outfit and riding a burro. As he urges the burro up a cliff, a wild man jumps out behind a rock. His hands are in shackles, but he holds up a rock as if to strike El Tempranillo. The bandit asks for his name, and the wild man replies that he is Pedro Sánchez, a criminal wanted by the authorities. El Tempranillo replies that he is in the same boat, and he offers to let Pedro ride behind him on the burro.

The Bandits Settle Up

El Sotillo counts the collected money and notes that the group is making a profit from the tributes. Meanwhile, El Tempranillo poses astride a rock while an English painter paints his portrait. When El Tempranillo bends down to drink, the British painter chides him. The painter looks at the painting admiringly, and we, the viewers, also see the painter's progress (the painting is in a similar style to portraits of Enlightened kings of Europe). Each bandit lines up to receive their allotted salary from Antonio.



María Jerónima is Arrested and The Bandits Catch a Noblewoman

María Jerónima and her aunt are forcibly removed from the safe house, and María is arrested. Meanwhile, the bandits intercept a coach carrying the Marquesa de los Cerros, also named María. Although the coachman raises his hands in surrender, El Tempranillo fires. He falls off the coach, dead. Antonio asks El Tempranillo if that were really necessary, but the head bandit does not respond. Instead, El Tempranillo commands that his men raid the belongings of the passengers. When a blond woman and a man exit the coach, El Tempranillo asks her if she is the marquesa—and she admits it.



Prisoner Exchange

María Jerónima walks the prison yard and is approached by a female stranger. The woman tells her that she has a message from José María—don't despair, for your husband will get you out of here soon. María tells the messenger to tell her husband not to take the risk to come get her. There is a cut to the bandits holding their own prisoner—another María—a blond noblewoman. Spanish troops and the bandits meet on an open plain. The two Marías walk towards their "people" and cross each other. María Jerónima sees José María and embraces him passionately.



Husband and Wife Say Goodbye

After rescuing María from prison, José María arranges for a skilled midwife, named Juana, to watch over her. He assures her that she is safe and he will return as soon as she goes into labor. María clings to him, crying, and warns him to be careful.

Failed Negotiations

The camera cuts to a wide shot of the king's army marching down a steep hill. The General Ramos tells his men to prepare for a "liberal" attack. Later that night, the bandits view the approaching army from a high position. Pedro Sánchez and El Tempranillo decide to descend and negotiate with Ramos. Ramos reports that the army is there to quash the liberal uprising and to continue on to Madrid. El Tempranillo insists that the surrounding land is his. Later on, the mountain, Pedro



advises El Tempranillo that the king will be eager to negotiate with the bandits given their current control of Andalucía. Pedro suggests that El Tempranillo give up his designs on the mountains and concentrate on the plains—where he has an established network and interests. Many of the other bandits concur, but José María insists on fighting.

María Dies in Childbirth A few days later, José María receives word that María is in labor. He rushes to the midwife's house and sees a boiling pot of water on the stove. He rushes around calling out "Juana!" the midwife, but does not find her. Upon entering the bedroom, José María sees his wife on the bed, nearly unconscious. The midwife crosses herself, and we assume that the baby was a stillborn. José María tries desperately to revive María, but she only briefly opens her eyes and murmurs. She grabs his arm weakly and tries to talk. There are sudden gunshots from outside, and José María looks out the window. He rushes back to the dying María while the soldiers outside yell: "Surrender, José María Hinojosa!" María asks her husband to take her out of the house, and he carries her out of the back door. José María loads his wife onto his horse and gallops fiercely while the soldiers fire at him. He is hit in the right arm. José María escapes and rides behind her all the way back to the fortress. Upon arriving, María dead body, draped in a white nightgown, hangs over the horse.

Epic Battle Pedro meets with the General Ramos again to come to an agreement. The general does not believe that the liberals will ever give up the fight. Pedro warns that the bandits will form an alliance with the liberals against the kings. The migueletes ride away but suddenly see the bandits charging down the mountain from a high hill. The two groups engage in hand-to-hand combat for an extended battle. The bandits use their horses to chase the soldiers up the hill. Eventually, the bandits win, and there are several shots of the soldiers' dead bodies in piles all along the hill. The bandits remove the soldiers' uniforms and place them in a mass grave ditch. El Tempranillo demands that the soldiers are hung upside down from the cliff, and José María rides up to survey them. El Sotillo remarks that El Tempranillo has turned into El Lutos. José María rides away without replying.

José María Considers a New Deal After the battle, Antonio brings a general and a notary to meet José María on the mountain. The General offers the whole group a pardon from the king, which includes amnesty, a farm in Córdoba, and a payout for El Tempranillo. Pedro urges El Tempranillo to take the deal. The notary reminds El Tempranillo that amnesty will allow all of the bandits to live a normal life as farmers. When El Tempranillo asks for the conditions, the general explains that the bandit must help track down his associates who hide out in the mountains. The camera cuts to that night, where José María explains the terms of the agreement to his men. Pedro argues that they should not take the deal, as the king will continue to abuse his position and the people once the bandits are no longer in power. El Tempranillo reminds Pedro that he will be pardoned. Pedro insists on fighting from the sierra, and El Sotillo sides with Pedro. El Tempranillo tells them that he must pursue them as part of the agreement. Pedro simply replies: "We'll see you again, then."

José María Decides to Attack Pedro José María and Antonio visit the general and report back. El Tempranillo explains that Pedro refuses to compromise, but the general says that Pedro is a liberal renegade who would not tow the line, anyway. The general offers to provide 20 soldiers to pursue Pedro and those bandits who followed him. He tells José to expect payment upon victory. After Antonio and the general leave the room, José María looks at the portrait of himself on the wall. He leaves the next morning in his black bandit regalia. Antonio watches him prepare the horse. José María struggles to secure the saddle, as his right arm has been paralyzed from his recent injury. Antonio helps his leader mount the horse. As El Tempranillo leaves, he asks Antonio to watch his things.



The Final Showdown The bandit leads the troops up the mountain, and there is an extend wide shot of their ascent. The bandits, rifles in hand, start to descend the mountain to attack the troops. They hide behind rocks and aim at the line of soldiers. José spots Pedro just before he shoots. The troops and the bandits open fire on each other. El Tempranillo is immediately hit and slumps over his horse in a similar position to his wife after her death. There is a close up of his head hanging over the side of the saddle as a flamenco ballad plays and the end credits roll. The lyrics laud José María's heroism and mourn his death, thus referencing the title of the film.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

JOSÉ MARÍA, EI TEMPRANILLO (nickname refers to red wine grape)

José María is the criminal who was arrested for love, then becomes the leader of a vast network of Andalusian bandits. He is tenacious in his pursuit of both land and love, but his ambition does him in. Until the final scenes of the movie, José María treats his men and the townspeople graciously.

Tenacious José María stubbornly pursues everything he desires, especially María and Andalusian territory. He pushes past obstacles on multiple occasions. Even before he assumes the role of head bandit, he manages to escape arrest and then against all odds, he triumphs in the club duel with El Lutos.

Gracious Up until María's death, José María maintains an ethos of a benevolent bandit. He treats his men with respect and avoids killing or terrorizing the general public. When Pedro Sánchez attacks him, José María immediately forgives him and invites him to join his group.

Ambitious Despite his "soft" rule, José María is determined to conquer Andalucía and provide for his son. As soon as he kills El Lutos in the duel, he assumes a leadership position and forges an alliance with a reluctant El Lero. He also works to build a vast network and collect revenue from protection fees.

EL LUTOS

El Lutos (Mourning or the Mourner) is the temporary leader of the bandits who dresses in black. He leads with a cruelty bordering on psychopathy. He is both practical and sadistic.

Practical In his short time as leader, El Lutos does come up with good ideas and practical ways to execute them. He plans an escape route moving south, and he chooses strategic inns to rob on the way down. Despite the other bandits' protests, El Lutos manages to secure horses via a well-planned robbery.

Cruel It is clear early in the film that El Lutos does not value life or respect his fellow bandits. He tries to dominate his men and even murders Jiménez, the bandit who disagrees with him openly. When he throws the woman off the balcony during the robbery, José María realizes that he is psychopath with no conscience or sense of moral code.

ANTONIO

Antonio is one of many bandits under the command of El Lutos and later, José María. However, his personality and character are fleshed out a bit more than most of the others. He is loyal to the bandit brotherhood, but he also shows a remarkable compassion.

Loyal Antonio follows orders faithfully, whether under El Lutos or José María. Unlike the other bandits, he does not question the leader's plan. When José María creates a plan to unite forces with El Lero and collect tribute from the townspeople, Antonio executes the plan and successfully creates the Andalusian empire that José María desires.

Compassionate Antonio cares for his fellow bandits, often more than the leader. When El Lutos murders Arturo, Antonio first checks on him, then tries to bury him. After the duel, Antonio volunteers to stay behind with José María. He takes Tempranillo to a curandera and stays by his side as José María recovers. When El Tempranillo shoots the coachman and hangs the migueletes by their feet, Antonio protests and warns his boss that he is turning into the sadistic leader that he used to abhor.

THEMES

Justice

Crime and Punishment As a western about bandits, the film's trajectory consists of a series of robberies and the age-old question posed by westerns in general: will the police or the bandits win? Will the bandits be caught or executed? Like many spaghetti westerns of the 1960s, the criminals deserve punishment, but the audience sympathizes or even roots for the antiheroes. In this case, the viewer likely hopes that José María will be able to retire to a farm with his wife and raise son. In addition, Saura's opening execution sequence immediately frames the bandits as victims and Fernando VII's government

as the villains. The tone is one of unjust justice—the implication is that the executions are barbaric and possibly not commensurate with the crimes the prisoners committed (or perhaps they were not guilty of the crimes at all). Later, this suspicion becomes more explicit when El Tuerto (the one-eyed bandit) rails against the executions and explains that many of the captured men were veterans of the War of Independence. The soldiers' tactics, including arresting a pregnant María for her husband's crimes, further underscore the idea of an oppressive dictatorship in the 1820s. Saura suggests that Fernando VII was the true criminal, and this inference also acts as an allegorical criticism of Franco's dictatorship—in particular, the arrest and murder of socialist Spaniards in the years after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). In addition, the bandits often describe the crushing poverty that Andalusian farmers suffer—and that they are determined to have a better life. The implication is that crime is the only way forward for these men and their families. In the end, however, the bandits pay the ultimate price for their crimes.

Illustrative Moment: El Tuerto Describes the Executions

There is an abrupt cut to an interior of a cave, where El Tuerto (the one-eyed man) continues describing the scene. He explains that even though Aurelio had fought against the French, they did not pardon him and even executed him first. He goes on to say that Diego cried like a woman, but Francisco remained brave and looked straight ahead. El Tuerto continues to become agitated and describes how the executioner nearly beheaded Francisco, then tore off his clothes and dragged him down the street. He approaches El Lutos and declares: “this is how they treat those of us who fought against the French.” The other bandits listen intently and together; they decide that they must leave town. Lutos suggests that they move south so as to avoid being “hunted down like rabbits.” Along with introducing the bandit gang, this early scene contextualizes the criminal perspective and invites the viewer to sympathize with the bandits. The description of the execution does not merely depict the means of killing, but rather individualizes each prisoner. Moreover, El Tuerto makes the case for clemency, as most of the executed men were veterans of the War of Independence. The result is that we the viewers do not trust the Spanish state as the arbiters of justice.



Politics

Power There are power plays in the film at both a macro and micro level. Much of the conflict among characters derives from the fights within the bandit collective. When El Lutos is in charge, many of the other bandits question both his strategies and his sadistic actions, which results first in the murder of Jiménez and in the club duel. As the winner of the duel, José María becomes the alpha male and respected leader. He further gains respect by creating a network throughout Andalucía and forging an alliance with El Lero. It is only with his draconian measures at the end of the film when the other bandits contest his leadership. On a macro level, the bandits fight to retain their “stolen” territory against the onslaught of Fernando VII's troops, or migueletes. The final showdown results in the national troops capturing and killing el Tempranillo. The irony lies in that the bandits could have negotiated with Fernando's generals and received land and pardons, as the monarchy was much more interested in quashing the liberal uprisings than in breaking up the bandit syndicate. Once again, Saura emphasizes the hypocrisy and corruption of Fernando VII's reign (and by extension, Franco's dictatorship), which would become a running theme (or at least subtext) in several of his dramas.

Illustrative Moment: El Lutos and El Tempranillo Duel with Clubs

El Lutos and El Tempranillo are both buried up to their knees. The four bandits untie the two duelers and hand them long sticks that act as clubs. The two face each other and begin striking at one another. The other four bandits walk away and sit down on the side of the hill. One plays guitar as a “battle” accompaniment. From the spectators' perspective, we watch as el Lutos lands several blows against Tempranillo, and it appears that El Lutos will triumph. When El Lutos leans back, exhausted, a bloody Tempranillo uses his last ounce of strength to throw sand in El Lutos's eyes. When he flinches, El Tempranillo strikes him quickly in the head twice. The other bandits approach and certify that El Lutos is dead. They dig out el Tempranillo, who falls backwards, exhausted. On its face, this duel seems to epitomize the barbarity of bandit culture, as the winner must beat his opponent to death with a club. José María is rewarded for his brutality and becomes the alpha male. On the other hand, Saura



implies that this violent duel provides a justice that suits the bandit ethos, and in many ways, is more just and fair than the government-sanctioned executions at the beginning of the film.

Relationship

Marriage Much of José María's motivations derive from his desire to get back to María and marry her. Despite María's initial resistance when they are reunited, José María persists until he gets a ceremony and a wedding night. Later, when María reveals that she is pregnant, José María rejoices in the thought of fostering a family, although he is determined to avoid his son languishing in poverty. Despite his fierceness regarding being a husband and father, José María does not prioritize his marriage. Rather, he treats María as an attraction that he occasionally visits while plundering the Andalusian countryside. María frequently begs him to give up the bandit life, or to take her with him so that they can be together, but José María refuses. Instead, the bandit uses his clout and resources to hide María or rescue her from prison. While the bandit may sincerely hope to have a real marriage with María "later," his ambition dooms everyone to a tragic end. The death of the family is even more tragic due to the obvious love and passion between the two, as well as their yearning for their unborn son. Saura further enhances the tragedy of lost opportunity with the names of the characters, which allude to Joseph and Mary of *The Bible*. Like the Virgin Mary, María is forced to give birth in the countryside in dire conditions, which result in her death and the death of the would-be Jesus.

Illustrative Moment: José María Leaves His Wife the Morning After

El Tempranillo moves back towards the bed where María is sitting in her white nightgown. He washes the top half of his body with a washbasin and starts to put on his own white shirt. María protests, saying that he can't abandon her right away. She vows to follow him into the mountains or wherever he goes, but El Tempranillo does not respond except to ask her to hand him his belt, or faja. She helps him button his shirt and wraps his in his belt as he turns around. Finally, el Tempranillo explains that he wants her to live with her aunt and that he will visit her when he can. He further insists that he must remain a bandit and finish certain things. Although José María almost dies for his love of María, he immediately abandons her right after the wedding ceremony. María remains isolated throughout the film, and she has to bear both imprisonment and a rocky pregnancy. María's willingness to wrap José María in his belt signals her loyalty and sacrifice to him, which he does not return until it is too late.



Life Stages

Death The shadow of death hangs over the entire film, from the blood-red credits rolling over the execution scene to the close up of the dead Tempranillo hanging over his horse in the final image. The bandits try to avoid death but also embrace a violence and recklessness that leads to their demise. El Lutos, as his name, demeanor, and black suit suggest, incarnates a sadistic incarnation of the Angel of Death. He kills at the drop of a hat and nearly bests el Tempranillo in the club duel. Conversely, José María tries to avoid death and instructs his men to collect tribute peacefully without violence. Nonetheless, the death of María and his son in childbirth spurs José María to throw out his moral code and begin killing his enemies. In his grief, el Tempranillo partners with death but succumbs to it himself in true tragic form. Like in many westerns, the characters are destined to die either due to their evil behavior or their tragic flaw. Saura emphasizes the tragic fate of the bandits with foreshadowing. For example, El Tempranillo's priest disguise (all in black) looks surprisingly similar to the black frocks the clergy wear in the opening execution sequence. The curandera, María's disapproving aunt, and the midwife are elder women dressed in black who cross themselves ominously when confronted with el Tempranillo. The fact that José María has picked the best midwife cannot protect María from death's shadow.

Illustrative Moment: José María Fails to Revive the Dying María

A few days later, José María receives word that María is in labor. He rushes to her bedside, but María is already dying. The midwife crosses herself, and we assume that the baby was a stillborn. José María tries desperately to revive



María, but she only briefly opens her eyes and murmurs. Devastated, José María loads his wife's dead body onto his horse and rides behind her all the way back to the Jauja fortress. This is the moment when José María abandons his moral code completely. Despite his efforts to hide his wife from the world (and indeed, the afterlife), Death takes both his wife and his child. In a particularly haunting visual callback, María is dressed in a white nightgown and her long, dark hair covers her face. This image of a lifeless, innocent maiden echoes the framing of the noblewoman's dead body at the inn (after El Lutos throws her off the balcony).

Flaws

Ambition As a benevolent and effective leader, José María seems to have conquered Andalucía. In addition, he manages to escape authorities and marry his one true love, María. Unfortunately, José María refuses to quit while he is ahead. María begs him to give up the bandit life, but José María keeps insisting that it is something he "has to do." By all accounts, José María's network and tributes have led to a successful endeavor and provided him with enough wealth to retire. In addition, he could have negotiated clemency with the migueletes and secured land for his family. Instead, José María continues to fight for more territory and power until he is forced to make a deal with the Crown. Moreover, José María's obsession with success sabotages his marriage, as María becomes a casualty of his criminal lifestyle several times. In the final moments of the film, José María turns into a vengeful sadistic who kills at will—he has, as Antonio notes, turned into el Lutos.

Illustrative Moment: José María Rejects a Potential Deal with the Crown

The bandits view the approaching army from a high position. Pedro Sanchez and El Tempranillo decide to descend and negotiate with Ramos. Ramos reports that the army is there to quash the liberal uprising and to continue on to Madrid. El Tempranillo insists that the surrounding land is his. Later on, on the mountain, Pedro advises El Tempranillo that the king will be eager to negotiate with the bandits given their current control of Andalucía. Pedro suggests that El Tempranillo give up his designs on the mountains and concentrate on the plains—where he has an established network and interests. Many of the other bandits concur, but José María insists on fighting. This moment is one of the few times when José María is neither practical nor gracious. He remains focused on controlling all of Andalucía rather than securing protection and lands for his men and his family, which ultimately leads to his capitulation later—and his demise.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is this film a typical western of the 1960s? In particular, what are the tropes of the spaghetti westerns (think Clint Eastwood)?
2. Who is the hero and who is the villain? Does José María turn "bad" at the end of the film?
3. What is the significance of the name María? Note that three characters have María in their name. What is the meaning of the bandits' nicknames?
4. How is the Ominous Decade (1820s) depicted in the film? Why do the characters reference the War of Independence (1808-1812), which ended a decade before the time period of the film's action?
5. How do you interpret María's death? Is death José María's punishment for his criminal ways?
6. What is the effect of referencing paintings and painters (especially the later works of Goya) in the film? How does Saura use black and white symbolically?
7. How does Saura criticize Franco's dictatorship through the historic setting? What do nineteenth-century bandits have to do with mid-twentieth-century politics?