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The young ones: Buñuel's unsentimental look at street kids

/LOS OLVIDADOS

Directed by Luis Buñuel

Koch Lorber

January 28 through February 10, Film Forum

A great, great movie, as well as a personal favorite, *Los Olvidados* (*The Forgotten Ones*, 1950) is the means by which exiled Luis Buñuel re-established his international reputation. This low-budget account of Mexico City street kids, inspired by actual cases as well as Buñuel's impressions of his new country, is a masterpiece of social surrealism and the founding work of third-world barrio horror. *Los Olvidados* is strong enough to make a hardened Communist cry or drive a (true) Christian to despair. The title is in part ironic: Once seen, this movie can never be forgotten.

In no way "ennobled" by their struggle to survive, Buñuel's children are predators who band together to rob the crippled and the blind. *Los Olvidados* is set in a world where one child is abandoned by his father and another has to steal food from his mother. The weak prey on the weaker, dogs



Photofest/Film Forum

The wretched of the earth: *Los Olvidados*

dress as people, and people die like dogs. Buñuel, who anticipated this cruel universe with his 1932 anti-documentary *Land Without Bread*, may have been only slightly exaggerating when he recalled that patriotic Mexicans stormed from the movie calling for his expulsion.

Appearing the following year at Cannes, where André Bazin wrote that it "lashes the mind like a red-hot iron and leaves one's conscience no opportunity

for rest," *Los Olvidados* mugged the then dominant neorealist tradition from which it ostensibly sprang. (As a critique of naturalism and an assault against audience pieties, *Los Olvidados* had the same relationship to neorealism as Buñuel's 1929 *Un Chien Andalou* had to the French avant-garde. And as in *Un Chien Andalou*, the presence of professional actors subtly confounds expectations.) The movie provides no basis for reformist optimism, although, in his brilliant dream sequence, Buñuel attributes a Freudian unconscious to the wretched of the earth: This is his humanism.

Buñuel's producer made a vain attempt to sanitize *Los Olvidados* with a a liberal introduction explaining that juvenile delinquency was a universal and not just a Mexican problem; someone also shot an unused, recently rediscovered happy ending. Buñuel's parting shocker evokes, albeit with a different meaning, the Marxist image of history's dung heap; the two-minute alternate ending, which Film Forum is screening after the movie, has one character kill his tormentor and happily return to reform school.

You may be familiar with the old *Los Olvidados*, but struck from a nitrate original and resubtitled, Koch Lorber's new 35mm print is the best I've ever seen. **J. HOBERMAN**

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