

STUDY GUIDE



THE QUEEN OF SPAIN (LA REINA DE ESPAÑA)

a Film by FERNANDO TRUEBA
SPAIN/2017/128 MIN
Spanish and English with English subtitles



www.pragda.com

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country where that film comes from. Find two or three articles on Spanish history and write a brief summary on what is happening and what has happened in the country. Please use reliable sources.

Following the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Spain entered into a nearly forty-year long military dictatorship (1939-1975) led by General Francisco Franco. Although Franco had plans to reestablish Spain's glory, the country was in need of major investment and reconciliation, having just experienced a bloody and costly war that effectively polarized the country.¹ By the mid-to-late 1940s, Spain was still in need of foreign investment—despite evading more war costs by remaining neutral during World War II—and positive international publicity—after the United Nations had ostracized Franco for being the “last surviving fascist dictator.”²

However, by the 1950s a curious relationship was formed between the Spanish government and Hollywood filmmakers and producers. Numerous Hollywood producers found themselves hard-pressed by the growth of television and the US antitrust lawsuits against major studios, and therefore needed international outlets in order to lower production costs.³ Thus, Franco's administration agreed to the co-productions of big-budget films as this would not only improve Spain's ruined reputation through the positive portrayal of Spaniards in these motion pictures, but also provide an influx of US dollars through production costs and tourism for film screenings.⁴ As the international blockade on Spain had dissolved due to growing Cold War tensions, the country became a popular destination for motion pictures.⁵ During this time, Franco's regime lessened restrictions on foreign investors and tourists, which offered more incentive for American producers and filmmakers to relocate to Europe in the early 1950s, escaping the House Un-American Activities Committee's anti-communist “witch hunts” that compromised US guarantees on the First Amendment.⁶

¹ Payne, S. G. (2018). Francisco Franco. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francisco-Franco>

² Ibid.

³ Rosendorf, Neal M. ““Hollywood in Madrid”: The Franco Regime and the American Film Industry.” *Franco Sells Spain to America: Hollywood, Tourism and Public Relations as Postwar Spanish Soft Power*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 48-79.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Payne, S. G. (2018). Francisco Franco. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francisco-Franco>

⁶ Cook, D. A. & Skylar, R. (2018). History of the motion picture: The war years and post-world war II trends. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/art/history-of-the-motion-picture/The-war-years-and-post-World-War-II-trends>

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *The Queen of Spain*:

After enjoying a successful career in Hollywood, Spanish actress Macarena Granada (a luminous Penélope Cruz) returns home to play Queen Isabella in an epic period film that has the local media buzzing. Once in Spain, she runs into former friends and colleagues while the film production goes through a roller coaster of emotional scenarios, including the return of a once-famous director, passionate affairs between crew members, and the hovering presence of Franco's regime.

- ☐ From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film's plot and the socio-political background to the film.
- ☐ How does the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- ☐ Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing materials (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images)?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ How does the title sequence (00:36-4:33) introduce the narrative's setting to familiarize the audience with the history of the specific time period? Analyze the *mise-en-scène*⁷, paying close attention to sound, editing, and archival footage. Summarize in one to two sentences the key points that the audience needs to know about the time period.
- ❑ Diegetic and non-diegetic⁸ sound play a major role throughout the film. Select scene(s) that contain sound and explain its use in the narrative: the emotions it produces for the audience and the tone that it creates.
- ❑ What do the close up and medium shots of the different characters aim to portray? What can you uncover from the characters' emotions from these shots? Do these emotions vary throughout the narrative? Choose a specific scene or frame and connect it to what is occurring in the plot.
- ❑ How does the film continue to establish a 1950s setting throughout the narrative? Pay close attention to the technology, costumes, sound, and behavior on the set of "The Queen of Spain," as well as the *mise-en-scène* and editing transitions of the film itself.
- ❑ The audience quickly learns that this film is "Reflexive cinema—a cinema about movies and movie-makers."⁹ Compare and contrast the narrative of "The Queen of Spain" and the actual plot of Trueba's film.
- ❑ How does Trueba blend his own movie with the movie that the characters are making? Think of one or two scenes where the film being made becomes the film you are watching – and think what Trueba does with the camera to create this effect.



⁷ "Mise-en-scène...is used in film to refer to everything that goes into the composition of a shot--framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and the visual environment, and sound."

"Term Index." *The Columbia Film Language Glossary*. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

⁸ "Diegetic music is 'produced within the implied world of the film'...The sound of a mother's voice as she is shown singing to her infant is clearly diegetic, and the faint sounds of a music box might be assumed to be coming from inside the nursery, even if the source is not shown on screen. In contrast, non-diegetic music refers to music that accompanies a scene but is external to the fictional world, such as dissonant orchestral chords sounding as a figure appears in a deserted alley or throbbing music punctuating a car chase."

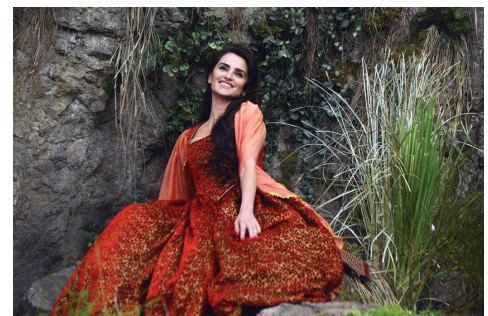
Tan, S.-L., Spackman, M., & Wakefield, E. (2017). The effects of diegetic and nondiegetic music on viewers' interpretations of a film scene. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 34(5), 605-623.

⁹ Siska, W. C. (1979). Metacinema: A modern necessity. *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 7(4), p. 285-289.

NARRATIVE

- ❑ What assumptions can you make about the film from the opening minutes (4:35-14:20)? What do you think the film is about? Do these assumptions evolve or stay the same as the film continues?
- ❑ Describe Macarena's personality, values, motivations, and actions? How do her personal attributes determine the role she plays in the narrative?
- ❑ How does the friendship between Macarena and Leo advance the plot?
- ❑ What are the differences and similarities between the society and political systems of the United States and Spain that are discussed throughout the narrative by the various characters?
- ❑ How does Macarena express her political sentiments? How is her voice limited? How does she work past these limits?
- ❑ Why is Blas brought to Cuelgamuros (El Valle de los Caídos)? What is happening in there?
- ❑ What role does Trini play in this narrative? How does her character work to advance the plot?
- ❑ Explain why you think Macarena and the group decide to take the risk to save Blas. What motivates them? What obstacles do they face?

(continued on next page)



NARRATIVE *(continued)*

- ❑ What happens to Julián that makes him believe his manhood has been damaged? What does he try to do in order to compensate for these feelings? How does the director portray this loss of masculinity: with humor or drama? Are you in agreement with this portrayal?
- ❑ How is General Franco portrayed? Is he portrayed in a positive, negative, or neutral light? How does this depiction influence the audience's interpretation of this time period in Spain?
- ❑ Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution in the final scene (1:59:45-2:02:42)? What solutions, if any, does this film provide its audience?
- ❑ What did you enjoy most about the film? Was there something you did not like or fully understand about the narrative?

THEMES

- ❑ How did the film industry benefit Spanish nationalism? Explain how *The Queen of Spain* portrays the relationship between Spanish nationalism and cinema, and connect it to what you know about Hollywood epics made in Spain during the 1950s. Is there any parallel between Spanish nationalism and the Hollywood film industry?
- ❑ How does the director demonstrate our relationship to history and how history is subjected to interpretation, not only by society and the national government, but also by foreigners? Make sure to include scene(s) that discuss the differences of historical interpretations in your response.
- ❑ Explain how the narrative depicts Americans coming to produce films in Europe. Does the narrative allow the audience to sympathize with these characters, and if so, how does it elicit such emotions from the audience?
- ❑ What role does the Catholic Church play in the narrative? How is this a commentary of the Church's influence on society and its role in politics during this time period? How does this portrayal of the Church compete with traditional depictions of Catholicism?
- ❑ What message do you believe the director wants the audience to understand about exile during the Spanish Civil War and repatriation during Franco's regime?
- ❑ How does this film shed light on the ongoing violence and abuse of military power during Franco's regime?
- ❑ What is the filmmaker saying about the relationship between art and politics? What happens to art and artists under a dictatorship?
- ❑ How does this film represent the majority of Spanish society during Franco's repressive period?
- ❑ In what ways does this film deal with the complexity that surrounds the topic of national identity? How and why do the characters struggle with their own sense of national identity?
- ❑ How does the film demonstrate the Spaniards' opinion on the "Americanized" actresses, such as Macarena Granada or even Rita Hayworth? Does this popular opinion clash with the Spanish government's original aims for co-productions with Hollywood producers and directors?
- ❑ How do the Spaniards view the Americans? Specifically, think about which Americans are portrayed in a positive light and which ones are portrayed in a negative light by the characters.
- ❑ Select scene(s) that discuss the motivation for Spaniards to continue work in American productions and connect it with the Spanish economy during that time period.
- ❑ There is a lot of humor in *The Queen of Spain*. Think of two or three scenes that you found funny or parodic and think about what the filmmaker is trying to satirize or parodize in those scenes.
- ❑ In what ways does this film explore machismo and sexual identity? Does it contradict the societal culture of 1950s Spain? Does it shed light on certain issues that were suppressed in the 1950s?
- ❑ Does the last scene (1:59:45-2:02:42) give the audience a concluding message regarding the film's theme(s)? Why or why not? What tone does the film end on? How does this tone impact the theme(s) that emerge throughout the film?
- ❑ Can you assess the filmmaker's political view on the military dictatorship and Spanish society during that period? Analyze his intentions using key scenes throughout the film.

