

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

# DISCUSSION GUIDE



## THE GOOD BOSS (EL BUEN PATRÓN)

A film by FERNANDO LEÓ DE ARANOA

Spain / 2021 / 116 min  
Spanish with English subtitles

## BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country that film comes from. Learning about the filmmaker is also a relevant way to gain insight on the context in which the film was produced. You can learn more about Fernando Leó De Aranoa at <https://pragda.com/film/the-good-boss/>.

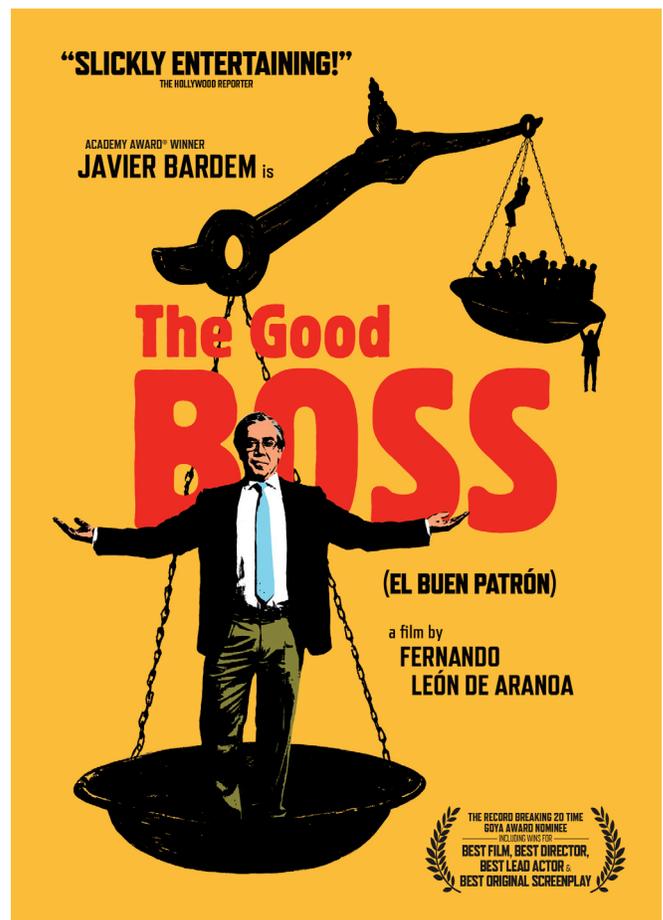
### INTRODUCING THE FILM

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's marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this synopsis for *The Good Boss*:

A smash hit in Spain starring Academy Award® winner Javier Bardem, *The Good Boss* is an acerbic character study and a darkly funny social satire of the workplace.

Blanco, the charismatic owner of a family-run factory, is under pressure as he covets a local award for business excellence. Everything needs to be perfect! But the veneer of the perfect company cracks as Blanco must deal with a vengeful fired worker, a depressed supervisor, and an infatuated ambitious intern. To win the competition, the manipulative “good boss” shamelessly meddles in his employees’ private lives and crosses every line imaginable, unknowingly starting an explosive chain reaction with wild consequences.

- From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film?  
From this same text, try to identify the main events of the film's plot and the socio-political context of the film.
- Do you think that the film will have a political message? Cite specific language from the synopsis to support your answer.
- How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- Viewing the marketing materials alone (i.e., trailer, poster, and still images available at <https://pragda.com/film/the-good-boss/>) without the aid of the synopsis, can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about?



## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

### NARRATIVE

- Analyze the introduction of Julio Blanco. How is Blanco portrayed in the opening minutes of the film? Does the same personality shown exist as the film progresses?
- Speak on the character of José. How does he develop from a victim, into a person of power? Why does he refuse Blanco's offers to regain a position of his choice in the company?
- At the beginning of the film, Blanco is a man who comfortably operates his factory. However, by the end, he begins to break down as the committee's arrival approaches. What are the various causes of Blanco's loss of power?
- Although Blanco continuously cheats on his wife, Adela, and is obsessed with his work, he always returns to her. Describe the dynamic between the couple. What is the role of Adela in Blanco's life?
- Liliana is a young and vulnerable woman in an internship position. Analyze her journey within the factory. How does she get the better of Blanco and find stability and success in the workplace?
- Fortuna is an employee who consistently proves his loyalty towards Blanco. What sacrifices does he make for the company? Why is Fortuna so loyal towards his employer?
- The relationship between Blanco and Miralles has lasted since their childhood. Speak on the progression of this relationship throughout the film. Why did Blanco choose to fire him after trying to help him improve his life? Was Blanco ever really Miralles' friend?
- At the start of the film, Blanco's factory is shown to be operating at maximum capacity. The workers are efficient, and the atmosphere is overall positive. Nonetheless, the factory gradually falls into chaos as internal problems arise. Describe the progression of the factory. What issues develop? How are these issues resolved?
- As the film ends, Blanco finally receives the last award needed for his collection. However, in the process Blanco makes a series of unethical choices that even lead to the death of Fortuna's son. Has Blanco changed or is this the same man from the beginning of the film?



### CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- Explain the significance of the recurring motif of the scale. What symbolic significance does it carry?
- The film begins at night by following three foreign men that are never seen again, speaking in a park. They are jumped by a group of young hoodlums and eventually the police arrive. Why does the film start this way? Why did Leó De Aranoa choose to begin with an event that does not directly involve Blanco?
- *The Good Boss* blends comedy and absurdity to satirize and critique elements of corporate culture and management practices. What techniques are used to accomplish this? Why does humor serve as a great tool for criticism?
- Describe the factory as a setting. How does Fernando Leó De Aranoa use it to develop a dense and isolated community away from the rest of the world? What are the different sections of the factory and how do they interact amongst each other?
- Analyze the color palette of *The Good Boss*. Do the colors feel dull or vibrant? How does it interact with the narrative? Does it affect the mood? Pay special attention to the mise-en-scène (composition, sets, props, actors, costumes, and lighting).



## CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *continued*

- *The Good Boss* is a film that manages to create a great sense of tension in the latter half of the film through its editing. How did the filmmakers achieve this? Analyze the film's pacing and how it complements the progression of Blanco's journey.
- When the committee finally arrives, the film utilizes a montage dubbed with non-diegetic music as Blanco gives them a tour of his factory. How does this differentiate from the rest of the film's style? Why did the filmmakers use these elements for this specific scene?
- The film ends with a long-take closeup of Blanco with Fortuna in the background. They have just added Blanco's newest award to his collection, as he stares at its placement on the wall. What feelings does this long-take invoke? How is the story being told through the facial expressions of these characters? How does the final line of dialogue contrast the viewer's expectations?

## THEMES

- Explain the significance of the title, "The Good Boss". What makes a "good boss"? Is a good boss one that achieves corporate success, or one that cares deeply for their employees?
- Julio Blanco is a complicated man. While he claims to want to support his employees, he often allows his personal aspirations to interfere with his ability to be a positive figure. Is it possible to maintain a level of balance between pursuing corporate success and demonstrating compassion towards employees? Do you believe that Blanco's moments of kindness were genuine, or were they merely for show?
- By the end of the film, the relationship between Blanco and Miralles is completely destroyed after Blanco fires him. Although Miralles and Blanco were childhood friends, Miralles' accumulation of failures led to his dismissal. To what extent can one forgive the errors of another? Should leaders ignore personal relationships when operating a business?
- *The Good Boss* highlights the significance of corporate social responsibility. Throughout the film, Blanco is confronted by opportunities in which he can choose to better his community, however he rarely does make decisions to help others. What moral obligations do companies have in regard to helping the communities they exist in?
- Blanco and Liliانا frequently reference the Uncertainty Principle in relation to people; a theory that states that you can never truly know a person because they change when approached by another. How does Blanco adapt to fit alongside each individual character? Can one truly ever be completely themselves when communicating with another?
- Khaled is a character who often faces prejudice for being a North African immigrant. Nonetheless, he stands by the quality of his work and refuses to be pushed around by his colleagues and boss. How has Khaled risen above his status as an immigrant? What difficulties do immigrants face in the workplace?
- On various occasions, Blanco confronts and judges his employees based upon their behavior. However, Blanco hypocritically commits similar offenses. Provide examples of Blanco's transgressions that do not align with the values that he professes.
- One of the major themes of *The Good Boss* is the concept of workplace ethics and integrity. Throughout the film, various characters generate problems amongst each other such as workplace affairs and fights. What are some basic rules that help to prevent conflict in the workplace? When these conflicts cannot be avoided, how should they be resolved?
- When Blanco confronts Khaled regarding his affair with Aurora, Khaled argues that what occurs outside of the factory is his own private business. Should one's personal life be separated from their work life, or should they be held accountable for their behavior outside of work? Does Blanco have the right to insert himself in other's affairs?
- At the start of the film, Blanco is a man who feels comfortably in control. He manipulates his employees and appears to know everything that occurs within his factory. However, through his hubris, he begins to lose power as secrets are revealed and employees prioritize their personal needs. Speak on the dangers of overconfidence. In what ways did Blanco's confidence lead to a shift in power? How did he regain power?

