

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Agustina de Aragón / The Siege (1950)

Juan de Orduña (1900-1974)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Juan de Orduña was born and lived his entire life in Madrid. He was one of the most prominent film directors of Spain in the mid-twentieth century, although he also frequently wrote scripts and acted. Orduña specialized in historical melodramas during Franco's regime (1939-1976). Unlike other artists, Orduña remained in Spain throughout the dictatorship and refrained from writing any satirical or politically-charged scripts. As a result, his filmography is frequently equated with Francoist propaganda. Nonetheless, it is rumored that Orduña was a homosexual and hinted at his repressed sexuality in some of his later films. In any case, his adroitness at creating historical epics contributed greatly to European cinema of the twentieth century.

Film *Agustina de Aragón* (1950) is a black-and-white historical drama set during the War of Independence in Spain (1808). The plot involves a young woman from Zaragoza who leads the Spanish as they battle French invaders. Although the screenwriters did not adapt the screenplay from a play (as is often the case in Orduña's filmography), the story in the film mirrors historical events from the Napoleonic occupation of Spain.

Background *Agustina de Aragón* is one of Orduña's famous historical melodramas of the 1950s. The film stars Orduña's favorite lead actors, Aurora Bautista and Fernando Rey, who also famously interpreted the "mad queen" Juana and the womanizing prince Felipe in Orduña's highly successful historical drama, *Madness of Love* (1948). Unlike most of the historical epics he directed, Orduña co-wrote the screenplay for *Agustina*. The dominate studio in Francoist Spain, CIFESA, produced and distributed the film. Orduña shot many of the battle sequences on location on the plains of central Spain.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Agustina	female soldier who fights in the battle of Zaragoza
Juan el Bravo	leader of the Aragonese forces
General Palafox	leader of the Spanish forces
Luis	Aragonese scholar who is Agustina's love interest
French Emissary	Luis's contact who convinces him to betray Spain
French Colonel	Soldier who leads the invasion of Aragón
Francisco	Agustina's uncle and innkeeper in Zaragoza
Pilar	Agustina's aunt
Carmen	Agustina's cousin

SYNOPSIS

Agustina is a young woman from Zaragoza who is engaged to be married to the local intellectual, Luis de Montana. While Agustina is in Barcelona, Napoleon's French forces invade Spain and quickly take control of the provinces of Navarra and Cataluña. The French also manage to invade Madrid during the infamous battle of May 3, 1808.

When the French decide to move towards Aragon, Agustina's home province, she decides to help a fugitive spy flee Barcelona. Agustina drives the coach into Aragon and hides the spy. When the French follow them and shoot at the coach, the spy dies in Agustina's arms and begs her to deliver secret documents about the Aragonese resistance.

Agustina agrees to become a replacement spy and delivers the documents to General Palafox, who is stationed a few towns away and is bracing for a French invasion. En route, she meets and falls in love with the leader of a band of rebels—Juan. Agustina discovers that Luis is working with the French and breaks off her engagement with him; then, she marries Juan amidst the rubble of war.

When the French finally arrive at the gates of Zaragoza, Juan, Agustina, and a reformed Luis fight a series of fierce battles against the formidable French artillery. Eventually, Palafox, Luis and Juan die in battle, but Agustina survives as the one who lights the canon against the French. As an old woman, the Spanish king Fernando VII gives her a medal in honor of her heroism in Spain's War for Independence.

SCENES

Agustina Lights the Canon Literally and Figuratively Before the credits roll, we see Agustina standing defiantly alongside a canon. She screams "You will never defeat us!" and lights the canon. At the end of the credits, an epilogue thanks the "glorious" Spanish army for their cooperation. The camera fades to a close-up of a statue of Agustina. A male narrator explains that the statue commemorates Spain's independence from France in 1803. He also indicates that the film is meant to capture the fiery spirit of the heroes of independence rather than an exact account of the battles in the war. He proclaims Agustina the symbol of this moment of patriotism.



Agustina Arrives at Court An older Agustina gets off the carriage and looks around nervously. A colonel greets her and accompanies her in a long procession towards an altar. When they adjoin to an elegant waiting room, the colonel reassures her that it is appropriate for her to meet the king and reminds her of the Spaniards' unlikely victory against the French in Zaragoza. He remarks that everyone believed Napoleon to be the owner of the world, yet the Spanish beat him. The colonel leaves, and Agustina closes her eyes slowly. The close-up of her face leads to a flashback to 1808.



Napoleon Demands a Crackdown on the Spanish The camera fades to Napoleon pacing the hall of his palace as his troops look on. He demands that the roads in Spain be closed down and that his brother, José, be installed as emperor of Spain within 15 days. Napoleon suggests that the troops use a march towards Portugal as a pretext to occupy Spain, but his military advisors warn that the Spanish will fight back. Napoleon scoffs at the warnings as he looks at a map. He declares that his troops will take Spain easily, and with a dismissive wave of his hand, he knocks over a bottle of ink that quickly covers and seeps into the map.



The Famous Battle: Dos de Mayo There is a wide shot of French cavalry galloping forcefully across the Spanish plains. Then, we see the famous scene when the French line up the people of Madrid and execute them against a wall. Title labels in big white letters cover the battle scenes.

Looking for a Rebel in Barcelona The camera fades from the May 2-3 battle to the streets of Barcelona, where an official rides around the streets searching for someone. We see the supposed target, a well-dressed gentleman, standing on a balcony and hiding in the shadow cast by the roof. Once the rider goes past, the man enters the house adjoined to the balcony by climbing through the window. He startles a young Agustina, who warns him to get out. The next scene is the rider reporting to his superiors that the man could not be found.



Agustina Helps the Spy Escape We see a sign marking the “Royal Road” to Aragón and a carriage approaching. A French guard stops the carriage and notices that Agustina is the driver. Agustina explains that she is visiting her lover. The Frenchman comes on to her and suggests that she “lose a night” with him. Agustina rebukes him and remains still as the French guard caresses her. Eventually, he lets Agustina pass. After a few yards, Agustina pulls over and the driver opens up the back, where the spy was hiding. The spy gets in the coach, and Agustina asks the driver, Jaime, to continue on quickly to Zaragoza.



Perilous Journey through Aragón Inside the coach, the spy thanks Agustina for her help and asks her to become a spy against the French. He explains that her first job will be to deliver documents, and he tells her the code word for the recipient: La Franca. Meanwhile, the French troops at the border realize that the spy has escaped in Agustina’s coach, and they make chase. As the coach continues, a group of refugees walks slowly along the road; some carry stretchers with injured men. Jaime stops to let them pass. An old man explains to Agustina that Napoleon’s troops destroyed their village.

The French Close in on the Coach Agustina tells Jaime to keep going, but they quickly realize that the French troops are closing in on them. The spy is hit by a bullet, and Agustina holds him as he dies. He reminds her of her directive and her service to Spain. A Spanish man approaches and asks Agustina if the dead man is her husband. She answers no, and the Spaniards decide to bury him. The leader explains to his men that the dead man was likely the one “they were waiting for.” After praying over his grave, the Spaniards plan their next move. They decide to follow Agustina to Zaragoza.



Juan and Agustina Chat on the Way to Zaragoza Juan gets in the coach with Agustina while his men follow behind. He asks her about the journey and whether another man got into the coach earlier. Agustina replies no, and Juan guesses that she has the documents. Agustina plays dumb and declares that she is only on the journey in order to get married to her fiancé. Juan stops pressing her and says that he doesn’t think her boyfriend will mind if he serves as her guardian on the journey.



Juan Takes Off Juan leaves Agustina with his mother at the inn. The Spanish troops ride out on the plains and meet up with a cheeky clergyman, who boasts of his wine stash. Juan tells him that a new female spy has the documents. Back at the inn, Juan’s mother comforts Agustina and tells her about Juan’s fiery personality. Agustina predicts that Juan will become a folk hero about whom the descendants will sing. Juan’s mother agrees but warns Agustina that the women won’t be on the battlefield.

The French Slaughter Aragonese Civilians At night, the Frenchmen storm the village and start shooting men—starting with those who ring the bell to sound the alarm. The general demands that the two spies come out. The troops open fire on the crowd, killing several men in the courtyard. A stray bullet strikes Juan’s mother, who dies in Agustina’s arms. Agustina screams “Murderers!” and the Frenchman who attempted to seduce her approaches the inn. Agustina bars the doors and runs upstairs to hide. The Frenchman manages to break down the door and proceeds to search the inn.



Attempted Rape and Epic Battle The Frenchman finds Agustina in the attic and confronts her about the documents. He also tries to kiss her and threatens to “hand her over” to his soldiers. Agustina accuses the general of murder and shows him the blood of his victims on her hands. She remains defiant even though she is cornered and declares that she doesn’t fear him or his soldiers. The general throws her in a



pile of hay and begins to rape her. Juan suddenly appears and tackles the French general. The two wrestle, and the Frenchman strangles Juan. Juan wriggles out and the two trade multiple punches. The fight continues as both men fall down the stairs and continue trading blows. Eventually, the Frenchman falls off the staircase and hits his head. Juan jumps down and chokes him to death.

Surveying the Carnage The priest comes upon the courtyard and surveys the piles of dead bodies on the ground. He asks God why there was so much blood spilt.

Agustina Returns Home to Zaragoza Agustina and Juan flee to the tavern and inn that her aunt and uncle own. Upon entering, Agustina embraces her uncle Francisco, her aunt Pilar, and her cousin Carmen. She introduces the family to the injured Juan and describes his heroic deeds. Francisco thanks Juan for his service to Spain. When Pilar and Carmen take Juan to get food, Francisco asks Agustina if she still intends to marry Luis. Agustina does not give him a direct answer but indicates that she is still interested. Francisco reveals that Luis has turned traitor and is working with the French invaders. Agustina, disbelieving, is shocked.



The French Officials Make Plans Montana and a French emissary discuss how to keep Zaragoza “quiet” according to Napoleon’s orders. The emissary suspects that the residents of Zaragoza are planning a rebellion. He reminds Montana that the French are paying a fortune for his services, and he could do more to spy on the people. Montana replies that his “salary” is deserved and that he has used his newspaper to promote French propaganda, but the Commandant is not satisfied. He reveals that his men know of the documents and that a local girl has them in her possession; moreover, the girl has just returned to Zaragoza. However, they need to surveil her in order to figure out where the documents are going. The Commandant suggests that Luis use his charm and local connections to cozy up to the girl.



Agustina and Carmen Discuss Luis While Agustina gets ready for bed, she asks Carmen if Luis has really turned traitor. Carmen replies that her father would know the truth, but Agustina still does not believe it. Agustina places the documents under her pillow and gets into bed. She asks Carmen about the meaning of La Franca, and Carmen explains that it is the name of a ranch a few miles away.

Agustina Sneaks Out Agustina slips out of the inn in the early morning hours. Francisco hears her leave and goes into Carmen’s room. He wakes her up and asks where Agustina went. Carmen reports that her cousin wanted to go to morning mass and insisted on going alone. Francisco suspects that she might get into trouble. Agustina asks directions from a blind man and child, but when they point her in the right direction, she goes the other way. She spies a suspicious man leaning up against the wall. Agustina walks away, and another man follows her.

Agustina Delivers the Documents She enters the cathedral and pretends to pray, then slips out and continues on to La Franca. She asks a man at the gate for Renzo and explains that she needs to give him something. The captain appears, and Agustina asks him the coded questions. When he answers correctly, she hands him the documents. He asks whether she is sure and how she got them. Agustina tells of the death of the original spy, and the captain advises her to say that they are “business documents.” She agrees and leaves. Juan approaches as the captain reads the documents. The two agree that Agustina is a reliable spy, and they start discussing the plans for the revolt.



Francisco Confronts Agustina When Agustina returns from La Franca, Francisco interrogates her. Agustina sticks to her story about going to church, but Francisco notices the red mud on her shoes—which indicates country dirt. Agustina refuses to tell the truth, and her uncle threatens her with punishment. He reminds her that she could “pay dearly” for her spy games. Agustina assures him that he will never be ashamed of her. Pilar descends the staircase and asks if Agustina went to go see Luis. Agustina “admits” to this hypothesis and claims that she is going to visit his house.

Agustina Visit Luis Agustina enters Luis's house and looks at the papers on his desk. She notices a letter that calls the French troops "our friends," as well as Voltaire's Completed Works and a history book about Napoleon's conquest. Luis appears and greets her warmly. Agustina immediately confronts him about his politics, and he argues that his loyalties should not disrupt their wedding. Agustina chides him for his disloyalty to the state. Luis admits his current political position, and Agustina breaks up with him on the spot.



The Spanish Rebels Plan Their Next Move Francisco and other rebels sit around a dining room table and discuss whether to attack. Some of the elders suggest that the villagers await General Palafox's orders, but others remain listless. Those who advise patience mention that Juan el Bravo has arrived in Zaragoza, which indicates that there is movement at the top. They adjourn the meeting. Francisco pulls Juan aside and expresses his concern about Agustina as a rebel spy. Juan replies that Agustina has a knack for intrigue, and he knew that she would be a good asset the moment he met her. When Francisco returns home, he embraces Agustina and whispers in her ear: "tomorrow will be a great day for Zaragoza."

The Common People Revolt An angry mob gathers in the town square, where Juan is giving a speech. He explains that the French have usurped the real Spanish king. The French soldiers in a nearby hall hear the mob outside and decide to let a few villagers inside. The French general tells his men to avoid violence and escalation. Agustina, Juan, and a group of rebels appear at the threshold of the hall. Agustina spots Luis, approaches him, and slaps him across the face. When Juan and Agustina hear the roar of the mob, they move up to the balcony and address the mob below in the town square. Juan urges them to storm the castle. As Luis exits the hall, Juan asks about their relationship, and Agustina explains that she was going to marry Luis.



Palafox is Debriefed The Spanish soldiers report to the general about the current state of affairs. Palafox notes that the French control Cataluña and Navarra, so it will be difficult to fight against them—especially since the Spanish rebels do not have many troops.

Francisco Puts on His Uniform, and Juan Gets Promoted Carmen and Agustina help Francisco get into his old military uniform. The ladies tease him because the jacket barely fits over his gut. He walks out of the inn and waves goodbye from the threshold. Shortly after, Juan enters to also bid the ladies adieu. Juan reports that he received a promotion to Captain from General Fox, and he thanks Agustina for giving him legitimacy with the top brass. Agustina nearly kisses him, but instead says flirtatiously: "I knew I judged you well when we first met."



Preparations for Battle Back at headquarters, a soldier enters with the report that the French will march through Pamplona with 10,000 troops. Palafox vows to meet them with valor. The camera cuts back to the inn where Juan rides off to battle. Agustina and Francisco wave goodbye, and Francisco remarks that he feels like Juan is his own son. The Aragonese rebels ride through the village gates in a procession. The French Colonel address his troops on the battlefield and tells them the battle plan. Back at the gates of Tudela, a rider pushes his way through the crowd and makes it to headquarters. He tells Palafox of the French troops waiting to invade and that the Spanish reinforcements have not arrived. The General paces nervously.

Agustina and Luis Meet at Night In a dark alley that night, Luis waits for Agustina to walk by. He thanks her for saving his life in the hall. He then asks if she would ever consider getting back together with him. She responds no, and he begs her not to abandon him. When he asks her if she hates him, she says that she couldn't even if she wanted to.



A Brutal Attack on Zaragoza Agustina and other women sit and sew clothes for the soldiers. Francisco and Pilar pull her aside and tell her that the French managed to get through Pamplona and are going to attack Zaragoza directly. Agustina and the other young women pray at the cathedral until the bells ring to mark the arrival of the wounded Spanish soldiers. Many process through the gates with several injured men on stretchers. One young soldier embraces his girlfriend and reports: "It was a disaster." Another woman holding a child asks after her husband. The soldier responds that he is gone. Juan rushes toward a relieved Agustina.



The Women Confront Palafox The women start to become enraged and blame General Palafox. They storm the headquarters, but Agustina intervenes. She stands in front of the general and faces the women. She exhorts them to prepare for another French invasion rather than waste time blaming the general. As the women listen to her intently, Agustina turns toward Palafox and urges him to defend Zaragoza down to the "last man and the last rock." The women rally behind Agustina's battle cry.

Bravery Before the Battle Palafox walks out on the balcony and vows to keep the French outside the gates of Zaragoza. He tells them the French are on their way, but he will defend the capital. Everyone cheers. Palafox orders that the flag of the Virgin of Pilar be unfurled and that she be the symbol of Spanish bravery. A woman in the crowd sings a song about Pilar and how she will not "be French."

The French Plan Their Attack There is a cut to the French marching and a general who asks if his men delivered the deal with the silver coins to the Spanish. The soldier replies that the Spanish vowed to die before they would surrender. The French general laughs and says "That's just what the Austrians said before they handed me everything." The general then proclaims that the date of June 15, 1808 will go down in history. He commands that the troops storm both gates of the city at dawn.

The Battle of Zaragoza Begins The tower bells ring as Juan and the Spanish rebels stand guard on top of the city walls. Luis hides inside the tower, looks out through the window, and bows his head in shame. The French fire canons at the city walls and eventually blow a hole through one side. The Spanish rebels run towards the opening with their bayonets. The camera cuts periodically to the plains outside the city where the French troops march in formation. As they approach, the Spanish shoot their smaller canon at them. The French storm the gates on foot. There are long panoramic shots of the French troops approaching and charging while the Spanish rebels fire back.



Agustina Enters the Fray Agustina waits inside the city walls and tends to the injured. A group of men run towards her and report that the French have breached the gate of Carmen. Agustina, furious, calls them cowards and wrests a rifle from one of the men. She declares that the women will take their place, and she runs towards the gate. Inspired, the men run after her.



The Battle Escalates While the men engage in hand-to-hand combat just outside the gate, the women throw rocks from behind the barricade. General Palafox vows to keep fighting even though the French general is offering some sort of ceasefire. The French general watches amazed as his troops retreat. Later that night, the tower bells ring and the surviving rebels celebrate. As the smoke from the canons floats up over the wall, the Aragonese sing about their victory.



The French Plan Another Attack Outside of the cathedral, the old beggar man and young boy watch the doves flying above. The old man remarks that if the birds are coming back, it must mean that peace is at hand. The young boy retorts that peace is only temporary. The camera cuts to the French soldiers, who are insulted by the Aragonese resistance. The colonel describes the unique fortitude of Zaragoza and reports that



this village is different than the others. Napoleon chides the colonel and says that he has summoned 47,000 troops and enough artillery to raze all of Europe. He commands that they attack by surprise.

The French Emissary Tries to Bribe Luis The French emissary visits Luis and explains the new plan to conquer Zaragoza. He suggests that Luis try to get the Spanish to surrender. Luis refuses roundly, much to the surprise of the emissary. Luis also promises to reveal the plan to Palafox. The emissary draws his weapon and threatens him. Luis manages to wrest the gun from the official's hands and shoots him in the chest. The emissary falls down, dead. Luis runs to Zaragoza and tells Agustina what happened. He vows that he did it for her, but Agustina proclaims that he may have saved Zaragoza.

The Hospital Collapses The French fire a multitude of canon that starts fires and knocks down walls. We see the roof of the hospital collapsing as Agustina and wounded Spaniards try to flee. Agustina is almost crushed by falling debris. She falls down, unconscious. Luis rushes over and carries her out of the building. He lays her on a rock outside the hospital and runs back trying to find water.



Juan and Agustina Get Engaged In the interim, Juan approaches and waits as Agustina comes to. She embraces him and describes how she called out for him "silently" when she was trapped in the hospital. Juan soothes her but admits that he was not the one who rescued her. Luis returns and stops to watch the lovers. Agustina does not believe him and professes her love. Juan also professes his love and proposes indirectly. There is an extreme close-up as the two kiss.



Failed Negotiations and a Wedding Palafox negotiates with the French colonel at the Spanish headquarters. The French offer another ceasefire agreement, but Palafox refuses. The camera cuts to a long interior shot of the cathedral. Agustina and Juan kneel at the altar and take their wedding vows.

Death of Spanish Patriots The battle begins again, and the French storm the cathedral. Palafox receives word that the church is under attack and the French have breached the Carmen gate. Inside the cathedral, Agustina tries to save the wounded who are dying. One soldier asks to kiss the curio of the Virgin of Pilar with his last breath. Francisco takes Agustina aside and warns her that the French are inside the city—but that she should not say anything to the troops. Outside, the surviving soldiers sing a mournful song.

On the Eve of the Last Battle The remaining Spanish soldiers spend a cold Easter guarding what remains of the city walls. They wonder if their missing friends are dead and if they will get a special meal for the holiday. Inside the barracks, a beleaguered and injured Palafox hears of the casualties but does not surrender. He insists that women, clerics, children and old men take up arms in battle. When the French colonel visits him, Palafox pretends to be well and stands up defiantly. Palafox continually refuses terms of surrender. The camera cuts to the injured soldiers packed into the cathedral and singing. There is a close-up of the altar. Palafox and the colonel enter the church and survey the scene. The colonel admits that this Spanish village is indeed strong and formidable.



Battle at Night The women join the men inside the city to fight the invading French. Agustina and Juan stand behind the cannons on the hill and ask for reinforcements. Luis joins the fray and even kills a French officer with his bare hands. Palafox lays in the barracks, dying, but insists that the village keep fighting to the last rock. Outside the barracks, the soldiers lose hope. Agustina insists that they rise again and keep fighting. She cries out that it is better to die for the country rather than surrender. The injured soldiers march out. Agustina runs back to the cannons to find Juan dying from a head injury. She embraces him, and he exhorts her to keep fighting. She rises defiantly and lights the cannon at the charging French.



Fernando VII Commemorates Agustina's Bravery The camera fades from Agustina's battle cries to her older self in the palace. The colonel accompanies her to the throne room where she is to meet the current Spanish king, Fernando VII. She bows before the king. Fernando calls her the symbol of heroism and pins a medal on her dress. There is a close-up on Agustina's grateful face, then a fade to the statue that commemorates her.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

AGUSTINA

Agustina is a young and vibrant woman from Aragón. After she is recruited as a spy, she remains a proud and defiant soldier in the Spanish resistance. She is so devoted that she actually takes up arms in two different battles.

Defiant Agustina repeatedly stands up to the men in her life and refuses to give up the fight against the French. When Juan's mother is shot in an attack on the village, Agustina vows vengeance. She acts as both a spy and soldier despite the protests of her uncle Francisco, and she exhorts General Palafox and her countrymen to keeping fighting to the "last rock." When she confirms that her fiancé Luis has aided the French, she denounces his treason to his face and breaks off their engagement.

Devoted Agustina remains faithful to the cause throughout her life. She agrees to work as a spy despite the danger (and seeing her predecessor die before her eyes); then, she works as a nurse and messenger within the city, and finally, she takes up arms and lights the canon even when the Spanish are losing the battle. She also remains devoted to Juan as both a comrade and husband.

JUAN EL BRAVO

Juan is the head of the Aragonese resistance and leads the charge in defending Zaragoza. As one of Agustina's love interests, he is charming, handsome, and brave.

Charming Juan is a charismatic leader who commands the respect of the other soldiers. He is also able to give persuasive speeches to the Spanish villagers. When Juan meets Agustina's family, he greets them graciously and charms them with compliments. He is also able to court Agustina with flair.

Brave As the leader of a small band of rebels, Juan knows that there is a great danger of arrest and execution. He shows bravery in small ways such as riding with Agustina and shielding her from a possible coach attack and running into the collapsing hospital. He also acts bravely in battle—most notably, he refuses to give up his post at the canon even though the French have definitively won the battle.

LUIS DE MONTANA

Luis is a cultured writer and Agustina's devoted fiancé. Although he agrees to assist the French by printing their propaganda in the local newspaper, he ultimately refuses to act as a French spy and joins in the battle against the French, which underscores his bravery. In his death, he finds redemption.

Devoted Although he is not loyal to the Spanish crown (at least initially), Luis shows consistent devotion to Agustina. He tries to keep their relationship alive and even reforms himself in order to gain back her love. Even when Agustina chooses to marry Juan, Luis persists in fighting to save Zaragoza from French invasion.

Brave Despite his initial treason, Luis shows bravery when he refuses the emissary's bribe. He goes on to shoot the emissary and rush into the collapsing hospital to rescue Agustina. In the last two battles against the French, Luis charges the field against the enormous French artillery.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Identity: National and Regional In the early nineteenth century, the Spanish are fighting to oust the French and hold on to their waning empire in the Americas. Most Spaniards greatly resented Napoleon's power grab and wished to restore the Bourbon line on the throne. Even though French culture and intellectualism had dominated Spain for much of the eighteenth century, the Spanish people at the dawn of the nineteenth century craved their own unique national identity. We see this juxtaposition in the film with Juan and Luis as Agustina's two choices of husband: Luis is an intellectual who studies Voltaire, and Juan is the rugged soldier who lives in the country. Agustina chooses Spain and Spanish identity in part through marrying Juan. Ultimately, the Spanish ability to retain and defend the patria, or homeland, becomes more important than death, as Agustina proclaims several times throughout the fight. In addition to the general Spanish resentment of French interlopers, the film focuses intently on the unique fiery character of the people of Aragón. Early in the film, the northeast provinces of Navarra and Cataluña fall to the French. When the French try to invade Aragón in the center of the Spain, however, it is much harder to take the cities and quell resistance. The French soldiers and colonels frequently remark on the toughness of the Aragonese and their remarkable perseverance when facing the French artillery. The symbol of Aragonese pride becomes the Virgin of Pilar, who was an apparition of the Virgin Mary who appeared to saints in Spain around 40 CE. This iteration of the Virgen Mary is the patron saint of Zaragoza and the Spanish Civil Guard; therefore, she is imbued with both regional and national symbolism.

Illustrative Moment: The Dying Aragonese Cling to Their Identity

Inside the cathedral, Agustina tries to save the wounded who are dying. One soldier asks to kiss the curio of the Virgin of Pilar with his last breath. Francisco takes Agustina aside and warns her that the French are inside the city—but that she should not say anything to the troops. Outside, the surviving soldiers sing a mournful song. This stark moment during battle underscores the tough and patriotic nature of the Aragonese. They are overwhelmed and losing to the French, yet they refuse to give up. The discussion of the Virgin of Pilar further emphasizes the soldiers' devotion to both Aragón and Spain.



POLITICS

Conflict Much of the second half of the film depicts the strategy and violence of war. There are extended battle sequences, strategy discussions, and images of wounded and dying soldiers (as well as demolished structures). The conflict of the French occupation and the sacrifice of the Spanish people in 1808 is front of mind throughout the film. Beyond this war, however, is the greater context of Spain's future as a formally dominant empire. Shortly after the Spanish oust the French, Spain's colonies in the Americas begin to revolt and engage in multiple wars of independence (1810-1830, roughly). The Spanish must also compete with their European neighbors and decide whether to create a constitutional democracy or retain the Bourbon monarchy. In 1812, the Spanish write a constitution but Fernando VII becomes a dictator who reigns with an iron fist until his death in the 1830s. The preference for Fernando in the film also becomes an allegory for Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975).

Illustrative Moment: Fernando VII Gives Agustina the Medal of Honor

The camera fades from Agustina's battle cries to her older self in the palace. The colonel accompanies her to the throne room where she is to meet the current Spanish king, Fernando VII. She bows before the king. Fernando calls her the symbol of heroism and pins a medal on her dress. There is a close-up on Agustina's grateful face, then a fade to the statue that commemorates her. The choice to end the film in Fernando's palace emphasizes that Spain and the Bourbon monarchy prevailed in the conflicts of the early nineteenth century. The implication is that Fernando is meant to be king, despite his defiance of the constitution and the loss of the Latin American colonies.



Imperial Greed The French hunger for power and territory is framed as an attack on Spanish culture and sovereignty. Spanish society in the eighteenth century had already been Frenchified (afrancesado) with the Spanish elite studying French literature and philosophy and dressing in the rococo fashion. Ironically, this Frenchification also fostered an adherence to the Enlightenment, which had already inspired several revolutions and wars of independence. Even Carlos III, who was king of Spain in the mid-eighteenth century, was known as the Enlightened One. The juxtaposition of enlightened rule and imperial conquest appears in the film when Agustina visits Luis's office—she sees both a book on Voltaire and a book on the recent European victories of Napoleon, and the viewer understands that Luis has indeed been working with (and for) the French. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Napoleon sought to create a vast French Empire modeled after the ancient Roman Emperors. He considered an invasion of Spain and Portugal a way to extend his control to the Atlantic and contend with France's longtime imperial rival, England. Spaniards, conversely, wished either to restore the Bourbon monarchy or create a constitutional monarchy modeled after the U.S. After ousting the French, however, Fernando VII tried to hold on to Spain's Latin American colonies. This greed and imperial domination became one of many authoritarian traits of the end of the Bourbon monarchy, along with emphasizing the hypocrisy of the Spanish rulers of the first half of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, both the Spanish and French empires would lose most of their territories in the Americas by 1850.

Illustrative Moment: Spilled White Ink Seeps Into the Map of Europe

The camera fades to Napoleon pacing the hall of his palace as his troops look on. He demands that the roads in Spain be closed down and that his brother, José, be installed as emperor of Spain within 15 days. Napoleon suggests that the troops use a march towards Portugal as a pretext to occupy Spain, but his military advisors warn that the Spanish will fight back. He declares that his troops will take Spain easily, and with a dismissive wave of his hand, he knocks over a bottle of ink that quickly covers and seeps into the map. Along with showing Napoleon's hubris, this moment before the Battle of Zaragoza exemplifies Napoleon's lust for power. The spilled ink symbolizes the emperor's designs on the European continent, as well as the stain his invasion leaves on the sovereignty of Spain.



RELATIONSHIP

Love Along with the characters' immense love for their country and province, Agustina, Luis, and Juan show a great capacity for romantic love. Both men love Agustina until their dying breath, and both use their valor in battle as symbols of their devotion to her. Although Luis and Juan are technically rivals who compete for Agustina's hand, they do not combat each other directly. Rather, they both profess their undying love and admiration for the heroine. Luis saves her life, and Juan defends Agustina against potential enemies and the criticism of her uncle. Agustina expresses great passion and devotion towards both men, even though she denounces Luis as a traitor. Up until she confirms Luis's treason, she defends his honor and vows to keep her word to marry him. Later, when he finds redemption, she forgives him and implies that she will always love him. For Juan, Agustina gives up her safety and agrees to marry the rebel on the eve of the great battle. She returns to the canon and embraces him as he dies. The implication is that all three characters must sacrifice their love in order to defend the country, but it is a cruel price to pay.

Illustrative Moment: Agustina Embraces Juan as He Dies

Outside the barracks, the soldiers lose hope. Agustina insists that they rise again and keep fighting. She cries out that it is better to die for the country rather than surrender. Agustina runs back to the cannons to find Juan dying from a head injury. She embraces him, and he exhorts her to keep fighting. She rises defiantly and lights the cannon at the charging French. Right at the climax of the battle and the film, Agustina gives up her new husband for the cause. He also loves her dearly and uses his last breath to encourage her to keep fighting. In this way, love lives on in the cherished sacrifice for Spanish independence.



VIRTUES

Loyalty Almost all of the characters show a remarkable loyalty to the cause and to their country. Juan and Agustina risk their lives both as spies and in battle. The Aragonese vow to defend Zaragoza to the last rock, even though they suffer mass destruction and casualties from the French onslaught. When the troops begin to withdraw from the city walls, Agustina calls them cowards and leads the charge back into battle. Unlike other Spanish provinces, the Aragonese refuse to surrender or even consider a ceasefire. General Palafox refuses to deal with the French even as he dies from his battle injuries. All of the prominent male characters sacrifice their lives for the cause, and Agustina loses her chance to be happily married. In addition to their bravery in war, the main characters also remain loyal to each other. Agustina vows not to break her engagement with Luis until she hears from him that he is working with the French. Luis tries fervently to win back Agustina. Juan and Agustina support and respect each other until the bitter end, when Juan dies in Agustina's arms. In this way, the characters hold on to love of country and love of partners.

Illustrative Moment: Agustina Rallies the Troops

Agustina waits inside the city walls and tends to the injured. A group of men run towards her and report that the French have breached the gate of Carmen. Agustina, furious, calls them cowards and wrests a rifle from one of the men. She declares that the women will take their place, and she runs towards the gate. Inspired, the men run after her. Along with showing Agustina's grit and bravery, this battle scene also emphasizes the Aragonese commitment to Spanish independence and their loyalty in defending the city of Zaragoza.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does Agustina adhere to and defy traditional gender roles? Note that Juan de Orduña's films frequently feature strong female protagonists.
2. How do Orduña and the other screenwriters characterize Aragonese culture?
3. Why does Luis turn traitor? What makes him defy the French later?
4. How is the history of war in nineteenth-century Spain a commentary on Franco's dictatorship in the 1950s?
5. How does Orduña film the battle sequences? How does he create suspense and momentum in the second half of the film?