

***The Duchess of Benameji / La duquesa de Benameji* (1949)**

Luis Lucía Mingarro (1914-1984)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Luis Lucía Mingarro was a prolific director and screenwriter for the principal film studio in twentieth-century Madrid, CIFESA. Born in Valencia in 1914, Luis eventually moved to Madrid when his father became the Spanish Minister of Communications in 1935. As a young man, Luis studied law and worked as CIFESA's primary attorney. Over time, however, he realized that he had a talent for screenwriting and casting. By the late 1940s, Lucía had established himself as a respected film director under Franco's regime. Like his contemporary Juan de Orduña, Lucía excelled at historical epics, melodramas, and musical comedies. He wrote and directed films well into the 1970s. He died in Madrid in 1984.

Film *The Duchess of Benameji* (1949) is a black-and-white historical drama and musical set during the early nineteenth century. The plot involves a young duchess from Córdoba (in the province of Andalucía, or southern Spain) who falls in love with a bandit. The role of the duchess and the gypsy Rocío (who is the duchess's mirror image) were played by Amparo Rivelles, who was one of the most popular character actresses in the CIFESA films of the 1940s and 1950s. She also starred in several other films, including *The Nail* (1944), Lucía's drama *Woman to Woman* (1950), and historical epics such as *The Lioness of Castile* (1951).

Background *The Duchess of Benameji* is a lesser-known Spanish historical melodrama of the late 1940s. The screenplay was based on the musical play written by the brothers Machado, which writers José María Pemán, Ricardo Blasco, and Luis Lucía himself adapted into a screenplay. The Francoist censors demanded that the screenwriters rewrite certain scenes so that the bandits are punished for their crimes. The dominate studio in Francoist Spain, CIFESA, produced and distributed the film.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Duchess	Noblewoman who is famous for her beauty
Lorenzo Gallardo	"king" of the mountain bandits
Rocío	Gypsy singer who lives with the bandits
Pedro	Head bandit and Lorenzo's mentor / left-tenant
Carlos, the Marqués	The duchess's cousin and suitor
Peñaflors	
Chaca	The duchess's gossipy chambermaid

SYNOPSIS

Lorenzo Gallardo and his band of cheeky bandits roam the mountains outside of Córdoba in Andalucía (southern Spain). In the early nineteenth century, the bandits enjoy relative freedom and are able to retreat to their lair, a cave up in the mountains. The Cordoban officials either ignore them or are unable to catch them.

This dynamic changes drastically when the bandits kidnap the Duchess of Benameji just outside the city. Lorenzo takes the duchess to the bandit cave, and the two fall in love over a couple days of captivity. The sole woman among the bandits, Rocío, has pined for Lorenzo for years and decides to break up the burgeoning romance by helping the duchess escape.

Despite their decision not to pursue a relationship, Lorenzo and the duchess keep visiting each other. Lorenzo interrupts a marriage proposal by the duchess's cousin, Carlos, the Marqués of Peñaflors. The two men challenge each other as romantic rivals, even though Lorenzo knows that the duchess is unlikely to choose him.

Over the course of the film, the duchess becomes an ally to the bandits by warning them about attacks and procuring a pardon for Lorenzo. When Carlos discovers their cave, the bandits move to another headquarters--castle ruins. The duchess eventually professes her love to Lorenzo, and the two decide to run away together and give up their respective lives. Rocío stalks the lovers and tells Carlos where the bandits second lair is. When the duchess accuses her of treason, Rocío shoots the duchess.

Lorenzo watches over the duchess as she dies. Carlos storms the castle hideout, and Lorenzo decides to turn himself in. The bandits also agree to be arrested, and both the soldiers and the bandits walk down the mountain towards Córdoba. The soldiers blow up the castle with dynamite, and Rocío, trapped inside, is crushed by the collapsing pillars. A male narrator explains that the bandits never revived their mountain tribe, and the tragic romance between the bandit and the duchess remains a legend of the mountains.

SCENES

The Bandits as Male Chorus A group of accomplished horsemen traverse the Andalusian plains. They sing a rousing chorus while they ride. The head bandit sings several solos with Flamencan runs. There are a series of close-ups of individual riders and their horses, including a white steed decorated with shiny beads. There are also wide, panoramic shots of the plains and the whole group of riders. Pedro rides up to the leader who was singing the solos—Lorenzo. The two discuss their plans: to “visit” the beautiful duchess and kidnap her.



Other Travelers Spot the Bandits There is a fade to another wide shot: a coach crossing a canyon over a high aqueduct. The two coachmen spot the riders approaching and assume that they are Lorenzo's bandits. Inside the coach, a pompous middle-aged couple, an old couple, and one beautiful young woman also hear the bandits approaching. The middle-aged woman gets excited at the thought of the wild and handsome bandits accosting them. The other woman in the coach, who is more richly dressed, expresses the other sentiment: that she would rather avoid the bandits all together.



The Bandits Make Their Move When one bandit appears on a rock overlooking the road, the coachmen realize that they are about to get robbed. Inside, the old woman crosses herself and the old man takes out his lucky horseshoe and kisses it. The coachmen take a sharp turn around the mountain, but the riders decide to follow them with their lookout (the man on the rock) tells them that there is not a shortcut. The bandits gallop joyfully and catch up to the coach. They fire their guns in the air, and the middle-aged woman shouts excitedly that she gets to be part of an adventure. The coachmen fire back at the bandits but struggle to hold them off. The bandits overtake the coach and force the coachmen to stop.

Lorenzo Politely Interrogates the Travelers Lorenzo opens the coach door and assures the frightened passengers that he will not harm them. He asks if the Duchess of Benameji is among them. When Lorenzo spots the young beauty with the expensive hat, he asks her name and documents. She replies that her name is Emilia López García, and she hands over a paper. Lorenzo correctly assumes that she is lying about her identity and is, in fact, the duchess. The young woman sticks to her story, but Lorenzo says he recognizes her from her beauty and elegant demeanor. The duchess asks if the bandits intend to kidnap her, and when he says yes, she retorts that the authorities will catch him soon enough. Lorenzo brags that he is the invincible king of the sierra, and he offers his arm so that the duchess can climb out of the coach. The duchess realizes that she must comply. Lorenzo graciously bids farewell to the other travelers and tells the coachmen not to let the mosquitos get to them.



Lorenzo Takes the Duchess to His “Palace” Lorenzo and the duchess ride on a single horse with the duchess blindfolded. As they make their way up a mountainside, the two converse. After prompting by the duchess, Lorenzo explains that he is taking her to his “palace” and holding her for ransom. The duchess is irritated at his common behavior. As they approach a cave, they hear a woman singing. The duchess asks if she is another captive, and he replies that they have women in their tribe, too. Rocío, one of the bandit women, greets the duchess and escorts her to a cave. Lorenzo reminds Rocío to treat the duchess with respect.



The Duchess Meets Her Doppelgänger When the women reach the inside of a cave, Lorenzo takes off the duchess’s blindfold. The duchess and Rocío gaze at each other in surprise, and the duchess remarks that it is if she were looking at herself, in costume. Rocío replies that she sees an illusion of something she could never be in the duchess’s face. Rocío guides the duchess further into the cave. As she walks away, the duchess throws a few insults at Lorenzo, who replies with compliments.



Lorenzo Confesses His Crush to Pedro Pedro enters the cave to check on the situation. Lorenzo remarks that the duchess is beautiful and nice. Pedro scoffs at his assessment and reminds Lorenzo that all she has done is insult him. Lorenzo replies that he enjoys the duchess’s feistiness. Pedro warns him that it is dangerous to toy with a powerful woman, and he asks whether Lorenzo has a plan or a ransom amount in mind. Lorenzo admits that he does not have a plan, and Pedro asks why Lorenzo wanted to kidnap someone who is the copy of Rocío. When Lorenzo doesn’t give him a reason, Pedro warns him that women can destroy men’s lives.

Rocío Explains Her Backstory When the two women are alone, the duchess asks Rocío how she came to be with the bandits—and why she stays with them. Rocío explains that she was born into poverty and had to beg for bread. As an adult, she performed in inns around Córdoba as a singer and dancer. One night, Lorenzo entered as she was performing. Rocío was impressed by his charisma and regal posture, even though the bandits robbed everyone at the inn. She explains that Lorenzo returned her money to her and placed his hand on her forehead, saying: “follow your path.” Rocío decided in that moment to follow the bandits instead.



Dinner and a Show The duchess is seated at the head of a long table with the bandits all around. Rocío stands off to the side. The men eat heartily, but the duchess picks at her food. Pedro suggests that they serenade the duchess, and he starts to play a guitar. Lorenzo explains that this song is a serrana, or mountain song. He begins to sing in a high key with multiple scales and vocal flourishes. The duchess listens coldly at first, but joins in for the second verse. She attempts to sing the same runs as Lorenzo, and she gets better as she goes. The men cheer her on. When the song ends, Rocío leaves in a huff. Pedro declares that when it comes to music, everyone is equal. The duchess gets up and asks to take a walk; Lorenzo offers to accompany her.



Lorenzo and the Duchess Hike Among the Cliffs As they walk, the duchess remarks that the mountains remind her of her childhood. Lorenzo also reminisces and describes how he dreamed of being the “king of the mountains.” He goes on to say that although he is the head bandit of the region, he longs for a wife and children. As they talk, Rocío follows them and hides behind a tree. The duchess asks



why Lorenzo has not started a family with “her mirror image,” and Lorenzo replies that looking alike does not mean that two things are the same. He takes out two coins with identical engravings and holds them up for the duchess to look at. He explains that the coins seem identical, but one is made of gold, and the other, copper. Rocío bows her head, devastated at the slight.

Rocío Begs the Duchess to Leave Back in the cave, the duchess looks at a curio on a necklace, and there is a close-up of the oval frame. Rocío enters the cave and offers to help the duchess escape. The duchess surmises that Rocío is in love with Lorenzo. Rocío admits her feelings and asks the duchess to get away from Lorenzo so that she (Rocío) might have a chance. The duchess assures Rocío that she will not fall in love with Lorenzo.

The Travelers Report the Kidnapping Now in Córdoba, the two couples who were riding in the coach with the duchess report the kidnapping to the police. Carlos, the duchess’s cousin, listens intently. The old woman reports that the duchess’s pseudonym was Emilia López. The others chime in, and Carlos declares that the woman in the coach was the duchess. The head policeman tries to calm down Carlos and promises to send out a search party in the morning.



The Bandits Prepare for the Search Party The bandit lookout rides up to the cave and asks to speak with Lorenzo. The rider reports that the Marqués de Peñaflores has sent a search party to look for the duchess. Pedro approaches and suggests that they release the duchess in order to avoid conflict. Lorenzo refuses and admits to Pedro that he would rather leave the bandit life all together and marry someone. When Pedro protests, Lorenzo vows to stay with his men and honor the contract signed in blood between them.

Lorenzo Goes on a Tirade Rocío reports to Lorenzo that the duchess is not in her bed. He searches the cave and finds her curio necklace. Infuriated, Lorenzo gathers his men and demands to know who betrayed him. Pedro vouches for the men and declares that everyone at camp is loyal to him. Lorenzo accuses Pedro of going after the bounty, and he strikes him. Pedro falls to the ground, and Lorenzo begins to whip and kick him furiously. Another bandit intervenes and tells Lorenzo that he should not abuse his most faithful subject, or he will lose the obedience of the group.



Pedro Defends Lorenzo and Leaves the Group Pedro stands up and chides the bandit for not respecting Lorenzo as the captain. Pedro offers to leave the group, and he gives his pistol to the protesting bandit as a sign of their pact with Lorenzo. When they protest, Pedro admits that he has become tired after fifteen years of marauding. He turns to Lorenzo and reminds him that he (Pedro) was the one who taught him how to ride, shoot, and lead. Pedro warns Lorenzo that those skills only matter if a leader can control himself. Pedro bids the group farewell, and Lorenzo looks on sheepishly.

Rocío Confesses, and Pedro Gives Another Speech As Pedro walks away, Rocío intervenes and confesses that she let the duchess escape. Lorenzo moves to strike her, but Pedro pulls his pistol on Lorenzo. He declares that now that he is no longer a member of the tribe, he can stand up to Lorenzo—even though the youth is stronger than he is. Lorenzo begs for forgiveness and asks Pedro to rejoin the group. He declines, saying that Lorenzo doubted his fidelity, and that mistrust cannot be mended. As he leaves, Pedro warns the group that the duchess has “a curse in her eyes.” Dejected, Lorenzo asks his men to leave him alone.



Rocío Confesses Her Love After the men leave, Rocío confesses her affections for Lorenzo. He gently caresses her face and realizes that she has been hiding her feelings for a long time. Lorenzo asks Rocío how she helped the duchess escape, and when Rocío answers that she loaned her a strong horse and led her down the “gentle” path, Lorenzo praises her good judgement. She responds by describing

how she dreamed of having a couple “dark little ones” and living together. Lorenzo tries to kiss her tenderly, but Rocío pulls away when she realizes that he is imagining that he is kissing the duchess. Rocío declares that she will not be a substitute for the duchess, and she vows that the two will never be together.

The Duchess Tells Her Maid What Happened Now back in Córdoba, a richly dressed duchess chats with her handmaid, Chacha. Chacha asks for details about Lorenzo, and reports that the bandit is said to have a lazy eye. The duchess scoffs at the rumors and describes Lorenzo as handsome and sensitive. She also recalls how they bickered and insulted each other, but Lorenzo seemed not to take offense. Chacha laughs heartily and teases the duchess for having developed a crush on the bandit. The duchess chuckles at Chacha’s delight and asks her to be discreet.



Lorenzo Visits the Duchess Lorenzo rides down the mountain, then climbs up the façade of the duchess’s palace. He greets her after entering through the window. The duchess is startled and scolds him for his brazen manner, but she also admits she is happy to see him. Lorenzo replies that he wished to visit her in her palace. The duchess asks Lorenzo not to reveal intimate information from their hike in the mountains. Lorenzo agrees and hands the duchess the curio that she left on the bed. The duchess warns the bandit that her servants will catch him and arrest him. When they hear trumpets outside, the duchess takes the curio and urges Lorenzo to flee quickly.



The Duchess Hides Lorenzo When he tries to climb out the window, Lorenzo spots the guard at the entrance and reports that he cannot escape undetected. The duchess agrees to hide Lorenzo if he promises never to visit her again. He agrees, and she hides him in an adjoining room. Carlos, the duchess’s cousin, enters and greets his cousin warmly. He also asks for details about the kidnapping, such as how they bound her and took her. The duchess assures her cousin that it wasn’t too violent or scary, as they only bound her hands with silk. Carlos also asks the duchess if she knows where Lorenzo is. She says yes, and moves slowly towards the adjoining room as if to reveal the bandit in that moment. However, she suddenly turns on her heels and points out the balcony window. The duchess recommends that her cousin search out a few leagues in “that direction,” close to a grove of aspen, and not far from the palace. She tells him that the bandits like to camp in that valley. Carlos says he is reluctant to ambush the bandits when the search party is so tired, so they will try another time.



Carlos Makes a Proposition Carlos transitions from strategies for catching the bandits to discussing the duchess’s future. He suggests that they get married and move to Madrid, where the duchess would be the toast of all the court parties. She replies that she remains a noblewoman of the Andalusian plains, not of the royal court. Carlos disagrees and argues that she would do well at his side in Madrid. Lorenzo listens to the conversation from the adjoining room and gets increasingly agitated. He emerges and demands that the duchess say no to the proposal. Infuriated, Carlos demands answers about the man’s identity. The duchess begins to describe her kidnapping, but she ends by saying that “this man” rescued her from Lorenzo Gallardo. The bandit smiles at the duchess’s quick thinking.



Lorenzo Declares Himself a Suitor and Challenges Carlos Carlos thanks Lorenzo for his service and asks him to leave, but Lorenzo refuses. Carlos asks whether he is a rival for the duchess’s hand, and Lorenzo says yes forcefully. Carlos makes fun of Lorenzo’s vulgar speech and manner, then asks if Lorenzo knows the bandit. Lorenzo



describes at length the bandit's skills, and he warns Carlos that the head bandit is wily and hard to capture. Also, Lorenzo declares that the bandits are the best riders /horsemen in Andalucía. Carlos vows to capture them despite the challenges. When Carlos continues to insult Lorenzo, the bandit reveals his true identity and draws his pistol. Carlos reacts quickly and draws his pistol, too. The duchess tries to de-escalate the stand-off by saying that it is inappropriate to duel in front of a lady. She also chides Lorenzo for breaking his promise. Lorenzo agrees that he has acted rashly out of love, and he decides to retract his pursuit of the duchess. The bandit leaves but tells Carlos that they have unfinished business. Carlos warns the bandit that he is an excellent shot. Lorenzo jumps onto his steed from the balcony and rides away gracefully.

Carlos Interrogates the Duchess Carlos watches Lorenzo ride away and points his pistol at him, but the duchess asks him to let him live for now. They go back inside, and Carlos tells his cousin that he must interrogate her to get to the real truth. She admits lying about some parts of the kidnapping. The duchess describes her escape, and Carlos confirms that she knows the location of the bandit cave. The duchess says yes but is reluctant to take Carlos there. Carlos correctly guesses that his cousin has fallen for the bandit.

The Soldiers Search for the Bandit Lair Various guards report to Carlos that they are struggling to get information on the bandits. The guards note that the peasants are “forgetful” about their knowledge of the criminals, and they are having trouble recruiting informants. Carlos suggests attacking their cave directly. He tells his officers that he will use his cousin as bait to find the bandits' cave. The camera fades to the palace interior. Carlos “reports” to the duchess that his men have found the cave and will attack later that night.

The Duchess Rides Out to Warn the Bandits The duchess rides side-saddle up the mountain on a white steed. Carlos and his left-tenant follow a few feet behind. When the duchess arrives at the cave, there is an aerial shot of the cliffs and the bandits coming out to greet her. Lorenzo and the duchess chat outside. Lorenzo tells her that their love is impossible due to the class distinction and that he needs to stay away from her “flame.” The duchess explains that she came to warn them. Their conversation is interrupted when Pedro, Lorenzo's mentor, approaches with a gun. He announces that he is not returning to the tribe, but he has brought a visitor—Carlos.



Carlos Confronts the Bandits The duchess gets irritated at her cousin and realizes that he tricked her. Lorenzo “welcomes” Carlos to his beautiful home. Carlos retorts that it will become a beautiful graveyard, but he offers the bandits a deal: he will not attack and he will give them pardons if they turn over Lorenzo. Lorenzo replies that even if the marqués is good at warfare, he will never know the mountains as well as the tribe. Lorenzo touches each member of the tribe and reminds them that he has taken them in and helped them. The duchess defends the bandits and accuses Carlos of manipulating the group in order to execute Lorenzo. The members of the tribe vow loyalty, and Pedro kisses the duchess's hand in gratitude. Carlos leaves without the duchess, and Lorenzo warns him that the tribe will move locations.



Back at the Palace The duchess tells Chacha that she intends to visit the high officials. Chacha retorts that they are old men who don't know anything. Chacha asks if the duchess will ask for more troops to attack the bandits. The duchess reveals that she will “get rid” of the bandits in her own creative way.

The Duchess Rides Through Bandit Territory The duchess rides in an expensive coach with José as her coachmen. When they pass through a forest, José warns that the bandits may approach them. He becomes increasingly agitated and starts to stutter. Lorenzo approaches and flirts with the duchess on his white steed. He eventually gets in the coach and throws a purse full of coins at José. Lorenzo commands that the coachmen continue up the mountain,



and José obeys, now more relaxed. The duchess asks how Lorenzo knew she was coming, and she correctly surmises that his men have been spying on her. The other bandits greet the coach as it passes and follow behind. Lorenzo admits that he still cannot put aside his feelings for the duchess, and he leans over to kiss her.

The Duchess Makes the Officials a Proposal The duchess presents her case to an old official: quit chasing the bandits so that they get complacent, and pardon Lorenzo. The old official is alarmed at the second request, as he doesn't want to give the leader of the bandit a pass. The duchess explains that a pardon will make him a less effective leader. The official agrees, reluctantly, and signs the paper. Upon reading it, the duchess is annoyed that the official did not pardon the whole tribe. When the duchess leaves, the official reveals his new plan—capture and arrest all the bandits except for Lorenzo.

The Duchess Delivers the Pardon The duchess rides to the bandits' new domicile--a castle in ruins. The duchess toasts Lorenzo's pardon in a makeshift kitchen, and everyone gets drunk. Lorenzo accompanies the duchess to another room. Rocío appears and becomes increasingly angry. The bandits recommend that she get drunk with them to dull her pain. They continue to tease her and remind her that she can only be "queen of the kitchen." Furious, Rocío vows vengeance on everyone.

The Duchess Tries to Convince Lorenzo to Quit The duchess and Lorenzo chat in front of the arch windows of the old castle. The duchess argues that Lorenzo should quit the bandit life so that he no longer has to worry about being pursued and harassed. Lorenzo quotes a romance, or medieval poem, that describes the beauty of the vagabond life with only the tools of the horseman. The duchess suggests that they could run off together to a deserted area where no one knows them. Lorenzo disagrees, saying that her idea is only a dream. The duchess hands him the pardon, and Lorenzo is surprised that she was able to get it. The duchess repeats her offer to run off with him. They kiss passionately. Rocío watches the scene from behind a tree.



Lorenzo Makes an Announcement Lorenzo and the duchess return to the drunken party. Lorenzo shows the group their pardon. The duchess corrects him and reveals that she could not get pardons for everyone. Lorenzo realizes that the strategy is to neutralize him as the leader. He refuses to leave his tribe, and he tells the duchess that he will not abandon his men—even for her. She replies that she understands and that she was consumed by affection for Lorenzo. The other bandits nod in understanding.

Rocío Betrays the Tribe Rocío descends the mountain and reveals to Carlos that the bandits now reside in the old castle. Carlos does not believe her and assumes that this betrayal is a red herring. Rocío vows that she is telling the truth. Carlos doubts that Rocío would betray her love, but Rocío explains that she wants vengeance. Carlos declares that he won't make decisions based on "low passions." Rocío leaves, angry. Carlos's lieutenant asks what are his orders. Carlos replies that they will stay the course and follow the orders from above. He asks his lieutenant, should he die, to tell the duchess he died bravely.

The Bandits Brace Themselves for an Invasion Pedro visits the tribe again and reports that Carlos and his troops are about to attack. Lorenzo suggests that they collect weapons and get into position. He bids the duchess farewell, and she offers to go with him. Instead, he suggests that she stay inside with Rocío. Carlos and his troops sneak up to the castle and spread out. Lorenzo pops out of a cleft in the rocks and shouts down at Carlos. Lorenzo warns him that his men are positioned like snipers with guns. He suggests a deal in which Carlos extends the pardon to everyone and no one fights. Carlos rejects the offer and says that the bandits have brought war on themselves.



The Duchess Confronts Rocío The two women wait inside the castle as the battle begins. The duchess asks Rocío how Carlos knew where the men were. She replies that perhaps spies followed the duchess up the mountain. The duchess retorts that she did not make that mistake again,



and she accuses Rocío of being a traitor. Rocío eventually admits her actions. She proclaims that she is attacking the duchess and not Lorenzo. In a fit of rage, however, Rocío vows to let Lorenzo die rather than let them be together; then, she repents at the thought of losing Lorenzo. Rocío cries hysterically, and the duchess comforts her by saying that she understands Rocío's feelings and that the "face is the mirror of the heart." The duchess begins to leave and threatens to reveal Rocío's "jealous madness" to Lorenzo. Rocío panics, picks up a pistol, and shoots the duchess in the chest.

The Duchess Dies with Lorenzo at her Side The wounded duchess lays on a stretcher in the palace. Lorenzo and the other bandits watch over her. Carlos runs in and examines the duchess's wound. He demands to know who shot her, but neither the men nor the duchess reveal that it was Rocío. Lorenzo bends over to place his cheek against the duchess, who smiles and says wistfully that they will not be able to run away together. Lorenzo begs her to keep fighting against death. The duchess retorts that she will not die, but rather live in a dream where the two of them can sail away and look at the white sails billowing freely. Lorenzo agrees and says that in that world, they will merely be Lorenzo and Reyes rather than a bandit and a duchess. The duchess takes her last breath, and Pedro declares her the queen of the mountain.

Funeral Procession Carlos's men carry out the duchess's body solemnly in a funeral procession. Rocío, distraught, collapses on the duchess's bed and cries. Lorenzo bids her farewell and asks them men to carry the duchess's body down the mountain to the palace.



Lorenzo Turns Himself Over to the Law Lorenzo approaches Carlos and tells him that he is giving up the fight and that he wishes to prevent further deaths. Carlos agrees and promises to minimize arrests. Lorenzo explains to his men that he cannot come back from the lover's path he went down, nor can he stomach the bandit life anymore. Lorenzo offers himself up as the leader of the bandits in exchange for pardoning his men. He says goodbye to his tribe and follows Carlos down the mountain. The bandits decide to follow him to prison.

The Bandits Only Exist in the Echo of the Mountains As the bandits and troops walk down the mountain, Rocío remains inside the castle ruins. There is an enormous explosion, and the walls crush the gypsy traitor. Carlos hears the explosion from afar, and his left-tenant reports that his orders have been fulfilled. The left tenant also gives Carlos the torn pardon, and the two decide to let the bandits find another cave. The bandits continue walking down the mountain as seen in a panoramic shot. A male voiceover narrator reports that although the bandits were not arrested, they never resurrected their tribe, nor was there another generation of bandits. Instead, their legend lives in the sounds echoing in the mountain cliffs.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

THE DUCHESS OF BENAMEJI

The duchess is a young and beautiful noblewoman and object of desire, but she also has agency as the protagonist of the film. The duchess manages to influence both Lorenzo and Carlos and acts as a sort of cultural diplomat. In this way, she is empathetic to the bandits but also resourceful and practical in dealing with her kidnapping and the fallout afterwards.

Crafty At every stage of her kidnapping, the duchess stays cool and collected. She uses the false papers to try to avoid being recognized. Then, she befriends Lorenzo and the bandits on the ride up and during her stay in the cave. She further gains their trust by singing them a song and warning them about impending attacks. When Carlos presses her for information, the duchess uses partial truths to help hide Lorenzo.

Empathetic Although she is somewhat cold and proper in her demeanor, the duchess empathizes with her captors. She defends the bandits in general by saying that they have not committed violent crimes. The duchess falls in love with Lorenzo largely because she identifies with his yearning for

freedom and a family. She also understands Rocío's motivations and jealousy and realizes that she is the interloper in the love triangle.

Practical Although the duchess is motivated by her growing attraction to Lorenzo, she also knows how to set aside her feelings to negotiate effectively. She helps Carlos focus on strategy rather than revenge. When she argues for a pardon for Lorenzo, she convinces the old official by saying that the pardon will help disperse the bandits.

LORENZO GALLARDO

Lorenzo is the charming and handsome bandit king. He is skilled as a leader, a good rider, and a good tracker. When he meets the duchess, his longing for another life causes him to yearn and to take brazen action to win her over.

Charming As a handsome criminal, Lorenzo has a bad boy quality that attracts the women around him—even the traveler in the coach is mesmerized by his charisma. He also participates in witty repartee despite his “vulgar” upbringing. He compliments the duchess when she insults him. Despite his tyrannical outburst, Lorenzo holds the loyalty and admiration of his men due to his charismatic leadership.

Yearning Although he has vowed to remain with the tribe, Lorenzo longs for a wife and children—and an escape from a criminal lifestyle. He also dreams of ascending the social ladder by marrying the duchess.

Daring / Brazen Lorenzo frequently attacks and blocks coaches throughout the film, and often as a means of courting the duchess. Rather than hiding, he confronts Carlos several times and refuses to surrender (until the very end of the film). His brazenness comes out with his courtship of the duchess: he pursues her continuously (including climbing through her window), and he interrupts Carlos's proposal.

PEDRO

Pedro is the oldest and wisest bandit of the tribe. He advises and mentors Lorenzo even when his apprentice turns on him, which emphasizes his undying loyalty.

Loyal Pedro remains Lorenzo's loyal right-hand man throughout the film. Although Pedro trained and mentored Lorenzo, he understands that the bandits require a young, strong leader. Even when Pedro leaves the tribe after Lorenzo's beating, he exhorts the men to remain faithful to their rightful leader. Later, when the troops approach, it is Pedro who warns Lorenzo.

Wise As a former leader himself, Pedro understands the wants and motivations of Rocío and the other men, as well as Lorenzo's misgivings. He is able to articulate everyone's position to Lorenzo and caution him about his own blindside—the duchess. Pedro warns Lorenzo that the duchess carries a curse and knows instinctively that the love affair will end in tragedy.

ROCÍO

Rocío is a poor gypsy singer who decides to live in the cave with the bandit gang. She looks identical to the duchess. Rocío is in love with Lorenzo and yearns to be with him. When she realizes that he is in love with the duchess, she lashes out impulsively.

Yearning Like all the characters in this film, Rocío dreams of another life where she can live with Lorenzo and raise children. She understands that she can never live up to the duchess's grace and education, but she longs for the admiration of Lorenzo. When she realizes her dream will never come true, she is consumed by rage.

Impulsive Unlike the duchess, Rocío acts rashly in the moment and does not fully consider the consequences of her actions. She helps the duchess to escape in order to get rid of her competition, and she betrays the tribe by leading Carlos to the dilapidated castle. When the duchess confronts her, Rocío shoots her. Rocío's actions literally “blow up” in her face, and her death by explosion is poetic justice.

THEMES

JUSTICE

Crime and Punishment Despite their lack of violence, the bandits of the sierra have stolen from the residents of Córdoba for years, to the point that everyone is afraid to travel. Even Lorenzo's relationships begin and end with crime—the bandits met Rocío when they robbed an inn where she was performing, and Lorenzo's courtship of the duchess begins with her kidnapping. As king of the mountain, Lorenzo considers himself relatively untouchable and free from the dictates of the marqués. It is only after the duchess's death that Lorenzo is willing to stop running from the law. The officials vacillate between punishment and pardon, with the duchess using her influence to get Lorenzo off the hook. The pardon which the duchess carries becomes a symbol of her love but also implies that there was a somewhat corrupt legal system in Andalucía in the early nineteenth century. In addition to the literal crimes of theft and kidnapping, there is also a conception of morality and emotional crime. Both Lorenzo and Rocío betray the bandit trust by their words and actions. Rocío commits the ultimate treason and murder. She ends up dying in the dilapidated castle, and the bandits turn themselves in. Even the duchess commits the crime of aiding and abetting the bandits, and it could be argued that she commits the "social crimes" of spurning her noble cousin, crossing into or slumming with a lower class, and planning to elope with Lorenzo. As film and literary critic Jo Labanyi argues, the duchess dies as a punishment for her social and legal transgressions. In this sense, the conclusion of the film provides a sort of poetic justice.

Illustrative Moment: Rocío Dies in the Explosion

As the bandits and troops walk down the mountain, Rocío remains inside the castle ruins. There is an enormous explosion, and the walls crush the gypsy traitor. Carlos hears the explosion from afar, and his left-tenant reports that his orders have been fulfilled. In this moment, all of the "criminals" have received their punishment: both women die, and the bandits have surrendered to the law. The explosion also symbolizes the end of the bandit legacy, as they had to abandon one lair and the other was destroyed. In effect, Carlos "wins" the battle as the arm of the law, even as he loses his love.



RELATIONSHIP

Love and Erotic Triangles In true melodramatic fashion, the tension and plot lines in the film rely heavily on two erotic triangles: Lorenzo and Carlos vying for the duchess's love and hand in marriage, and Rocío and the duchess fighting to gain and keep Lorenzo's affection and commitment. In the first erotic triangle, Lucía and the screenwriters create a rivalry of opposites: the noble official of the law pursues the criminal in the hopes of removing his romantic rival. While Carlos offers the duchess stability and wealth, the duchess values Lorenzo's love above all else. The duchess uses her influence to protect the bandits, and she seems comfortable living among them. She also tells Carlos that she belongs to Córdoba and identifies with the Andalusian mountains; in this sense, the duchess's love for Lorenzo is a metonym for her love of the province—which she places above class. With regard to the second erotic triangle, Rocío remains a rival without hope throughout the film. She is described as the duchess's imperfect copy, and no number of flirtations or declarations can make Lorenzo consider her as a wife. The duchess wins from the start, yet the triangle remains intact because Rocío refuses to give up. The female rivals are both identical and opposites, which makes the relationships among all four characters particularly complex. In the end, both the duchess and Rocío sacrifice themselves for love.

Illustrative Moment: Lorenzo Interrupts Carlos's Proposal

Carlos suggests that they (he and the duchess) get married and move to Madrid, where the duchess would be the toast of all the court parties. Lorenzo listens to the conversation from the adjoining room and gets increasingly agitated. He emerges and demands that the duchess say no to the proposal. Carlos asks whether he is a rival for the duchess's hand, and Lorenzo says yes forcefully. Carlos makes fun of Lorenzo's



vulgar speech and manner. When Carlos continues to insult Lorenzo, the bandit reveals his true identity and draws his pistol. Carlos reacts quickly and draws his pistol, too. In this moment, Lorenzo actively and aggressively pursues the duchess rather than dreaming about her from afar. The triangle comes together as the two men overtly declare themselves romantic rivals.

Brotherhood With the exception of a few lovers' trysts, Lorenzo is always with his brother bandits. Even when Lorenzo kisses the duchess in the coach, the bandits follow behind. The men travel together, sing together, and eat together. Their comradery ensures that they remain kings of the mountains and are never captured. Despite Lorenzo's tyrannical outburst in the middle of the film, the men remain dedicated to him as their leader. They even follow him to jail at the end of the film. The men's dedication to Lorenzo and their growing affection for the duchess create a sort of family dynamic in which the lovers are the parental king and queen, and the bandits are their children-subjects. The bond among the bandits makes it even harder for Lorenzo to leave his vagabond life, but the yearning for a family pulls at him throughout the movie. Along with the criminal brotherhood, there appears to be a similar bond among the Córdoba officials—the left-tenant and other soldiers trust and obey Carlos, and he seems to trust and care for their well-being. This concern for their brothers in arms prevents Carlos from mounting a full attack on the cave and castle.

Illustrative Moment: Musical Prelude

A group of accomplished horsemen traverse the Andalusian plains. They sing a rousing chorus while they ride. The head bandit sings several solos with Flamencan runs. There are a series of close-ups of individual riders and their horses, including a white steed decorated with shiny beads. There are also wide, panoramic shots of the plains and the whole group of riders. Along with establishing the Andalusian flavor of the film, this opening sequence also reveals the comradery among the riders. They adorn their horses in a similar fashion, and they sing in harmony—as a group.



PSYCHOLOGY

Loneliness Although the main characters are rarely alone, their relationships do not cure their yearning for another life. Lorenzo enjoys the brotherhood of the bandit tribe, yet he remains unsatisfied without a wife and children. His loneliness derives from an inability to start another life in which he does not flee from the law. He may be king of the mountain, but he knows his legacy lies in children. Carlos has a similar yearning in that he wishes to retreat to Madrid and start a family at court. The duchess, conversely, feels alone within the world of privilege, which is why she is attracted to the free spirit of the bandits. Rocío grew up an orphan in extreme poverty, and her loneliness was so extreme that she joins the bandits with merely a kind word from Lorenzo. Once she serves the men in the cave, she finds herself the sole woman and helplessly in love with the bandit king. Ironically, Rocío's feelings of loneliness are compounded by her identical resemblance to the duchess. She is literally faced with a copy who is a "better" version of herself. Lorenzo and the other bandits regularly remind her that she does not measure up. This feeling of emotional isolation and worthlessness incites Rocío to break up the lovers at all costs—even death. It is arguably Rocío's sense of "doppelganger" desperation, more so than her jealousy, that brings about the film's tragic end.

Illustrative Moment: Lorenzo Compares the Two Coins

Lorenzo explains that although he is the head bandit of the region, he longs for a wife and children. As they talk, Rocío follows them and hides behind a tree. The duchess asks why Lorenzo has not started a family with "her mirror image," and Lorenzo replies that looking alike does not mean that two things are the same. He takes out two coins with identical engravings and holds them up for the duchess to look at. He explains that the coins seem identical, but one is made of gold, and the other, copper. Rocío bows her head, devastated at the slight. In this moment, Rocío realizes that she will never gain Lorenzo's love, which is



particularly painful given that she is as beautiful as the duchess. Rocío is assigned to a “lesser” status and remains alone in the sea of male bandits.

FLAWS

Jealousy With the possible exception of the duchess, all of the main characters are jealous of their rivals. Carlos is threatened by Lorenzo's charm and charisma (and his cousin's obvious attraction to him). Lorenzo knows intrinsically that Carlos is the “proper” match for the duchess, yet he cannot help but break up their courtship. Right after Carlos proposes to the duchess, Lorenzo reveals himself and challenges the marqués—even though the duchess had successfully hidden his identity. As the elder bandit, Pedro carries with him a sense of lost opportunity. Although he trained Lorenzo to be an effective leader, Pedro also realizes that time has passed him by. In this sense, Pedro may feel a twinge of jealousy for Lorenzo's youth and vitality. Whereas the men's jealousy is framed as viral competition, Rocío's jealousy becomes an insane obsession. At first, the viewer empathizes with Rocío's tragic back story and understands her motivations to help the duchess escape. Rocío is jealous of the duchess's grace and stature, which she cannot emulate. This natural jealousy, however, quickly escalates to a psychotic level. Not only does she wish to break up the budding romance between the duchess and Lorenzo, but she is willing to aid in the destruction of Lorenzo's life. She ends up calling for Lorenzo's death and murdering the duchess in a jealous rage. Conversely, the duchess empathizes with Rocío's plight.

Illustrative Moment: Rocío Refuses Lorenzo's Kiss

Lorenzo asks Rocío how she helped the duchess escape, and he praises her good judgement. She responds by describing how she dreamed of having a couple “dark little ones” and living together. Lorenzo tries to kiss her tenderly, but Rocío pulls away when she realizes that he is imagining that he is kissing the duchess. Rocío declares that she will not be a substitute for the duchess, and she vows that the two will never be together. Rocío's declaration of love occurs just after the duchess has escaped captivity. Rocío believes that the duchess's absence will pave the way for her courtship with Lorenzo, but she soon realizes that she can only be a substitute. This bitter realization paves the way for Rocío's destructive jealousy in the second half of the film.



APPEARANCES

Dreams Versus Reality All of the main characters wish to live a different life in a different place. Carlos wants to marry the duchess and live a life of luxury at court in Madrid; the duchess and Lorenzo wish to elope and escape to the Caribbean, and Rocío longs to live on a boat alone with Lorenzo. The characters feel a sense of disillusionment with their current life styles. Lorenzo and Rocío want stability, and the duchess wants freedom. This yearning leads to loneliness and depression, even when the characters live amongst each other (see LONELINESS above). The characters stubbornly pursue this alternate life, but death thwarts their plans. In many of the scenes between the duchess and Lorenzo, the two create a fantasy life where they can run off together. The viewers sense that this dream is a mirage akin to Romeo and Juliet. In order to keep the illusion alive, the characters frequently “try on” alternative identities. The duchess, in particular, moonlights as the queen of the bandits. She frequently lives among them and integrates into the group. Despite the bandits' acceptance of her, the film's tragic ending suggests that the duchess cannot shed her noble identity completely, nor can she escape her class responsibilities without punishment.

Illustrative Moment: Sailing Away on White Sails

Lorenzo bends over to place his cheek against the duchess, who smiles and says wistfully that they will not be able to run away together. Lorenzo begs her to keep fighting against death. The duchess retorts that she will not die, but rather live in a dream where the two of them can sail away and look at the white sails billowing



freely. Lorenzo agrees and says that in that world, they will merely be Lorenzo and Reyes rather than a bandit and a duchess. The duchess takes her last breath, and Pedro declares her the queen of the mountain. In this penultimate scene, the lovers cannot avoid the reality of death, yet they still try to hold on to the illusion that they will be together in the afterlife. The motif of sailing away appears a few other times in the film, including Rocío's own fantasy of escaping with Lorenzo.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Describe the characterization of the duchess. Why does she wish to live among the bandits?
2. What is the effect of Amparo Rivelles playing both the duchess and Rocío? Beyond looking alike, are the two women parallel characters or opposites?
3. Why doesn't Lorenzo marry Rocío? What does the duchess represent for him?
4. What are the Andalusian elements in this film? What is the effect of the bandit songs in the first half of the film?
5. What are some of the visual symbols in the film? What does the duchess's curio represent?
6. Is this film a melodrama? What are the comic elements, and what are the tragic tropes?