



Camila

Director: María Luisa Bemberg

Production Companies:

GEA Cinematografica, Impala (Madrid)

Executive Producer: Lita Stantic

Producers: Angel Baldo, Hector Gallardo,
Edecio Imbert

Associate Producer: Paco Molero

Production Manager: Marta Parga, Clara Zappettini

Production Assistants: Eduardo Aparicio,

Raul Ahumada, Dolly Pussi, Beatriz Heiras,
Patricia Barbieri

Assistant Directors: Alberto Lecchi, Antonio Barrio,
Claudio Retier, Valeria Satas

Screenplay: María Luisa Bemberg,

Beda Docampo Feijóo, Juan Bautista Stagnaro

Director of Photography: Fernando Arribas

Camera Operator: Daniel Karp

Special Effects: Alex Mathews

Editor: Luis César d'Angiolillo

Art Director: Miguel Rodriguez

Set Designer: Esmeralda Almonacid

Costume Designer: Graciela Galan

Wardrobe: Olga de Alvarez

Make-up: Oscar Mulet

Music: Luis María Serra

Sound Recording: Jorge Stavropoulos

Military Clothes Adviser: Mario Chaves

Cast:

Susú Pecoraro (*Camila O'Gorman*)

Imanol Arias (*Father Ladislao Gutierrez*)

Héctor Alterio (*Adolfo O'Gorman*)

Elena Tasisto (*Dona Joaquina O'Gorman*)

Carlos Muñoz (*Monsignor Elortondo*)

Héctor Pellegrini (*Commandant Soto*)

Claudio Gallardou (*Brother Eduardo O'Gorman*)

Boris Rubaja (*Ignacio*)

Mona Maris (*La Perichona*)

Lelio Incrocci (*voice of Imanol Arias*)

Juan Leyrado

Cecilio Madanes

Alberto Busaid

Lidia Catalano

Zelmar Gurñol

Jorge Hacker

Carlos Marchi

Roxana Berco

Alejandra Colunga

Alejandro Marcial

Oscar Núñez

Jorge Ochoa

Fernando Iglesias

Argentina-Spain 1984

108 mins

Digital

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Too Much: Melodrama on Film

Camila

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

A contemporary review

Camila gains much of its power from the circumstances of its production. Its story of a tragic love affair between a young upper-class Catholic girl and a priest, based on actual events which took place towards the end of the 19th century in an Argentina governed by a violently repressive dictatorship, has until now been deemed too politically controversial by successive Argentinian regimes, who have consistently denied permission for it to be filmed. Director María Luisa Bemberg, who decided to risk going ahead without permission, was fortunate in that the start of shooting in January 1984 coincided with the election of a democratic government which ended censorship. Thus the film stands both as an indictment of past dictatorships and as a celebration of new political freedoms after more than a century of repression. It has already been enormously successful in Argentina, some indication of the way in which the implications of the story have captured the imagination of a society which is in the process of redefining itself and its past.

But credit must also go to the director, who has used the potential of melodrama to pit the private (emotional and sexual) world against the political complicity between Church, state and an oppressive patriarchy. This lends the tragic scenario a feminist slant which emphasises its heroine's transgression of 'femininity' as an important factor in the collusion of government and civic institutions against the doomed couple. Bemberg displays the same acute sense of irony evident in *Señora de nadie* (*Nobody's Wife*, 1982), the adventures of a wife and mother who leaves her home and family to seek sexual and emotional fulfilment as a single woman, but here her target is social institutions rather than contemporary sexual politics. *Camila* is a period piece, and it is likely that the costume melodrama allowed more space for overt political criticism, since its setting in the past puts a safe distance between 'then' and 'now'. But even so, the film's feminism is directly relevant to present-day issues of women's freedom to control their own lives and sexuality.

For Camila O'Gorman is not a victim, even though the film ends with her tragic death. Indeed, it is Ladislao Gutierrez, the tormented priest, who takes the victim's role and who finally gives way to his guilt. Camila fights for her freedom every inch of the way, whereas Ladislao is masochistically inclined to submit to punishment: when they are recognised in their village hideout and denounced, the local police commandant offers them a chance to escape; Camila wants to go, but Ladislao decides to stay to be arrested. Unable to leave without him, Camila feels deeply betrayed; Ladislao's guilt and fear, his inability to carry on fighting, are a manifestation of his complicity with the repressive system. Because of her love for him, Camila endures brutal punishment which culminates in both their deaths. Her own tragedy within the wider tragedy of the persecuted couple is that her strength and courage are not matched by her lover, so that her desire for him is brought into question. By giving the story this inflection, Bemberg has fashioned a powerful feminist melodrama which has resonances beyond its Argentinian context. *Camila* has already been acclaimed as an artistic *tour de force* – it is to be hoped that its political strengths will also be recognised.

Pam Cook, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1985

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Maria Luisa Bemberg on filmmaking and 'Camila'

I guess one of the things that brought me to make films was my concern with the women's movement. At one moment I got very severe with myself and asked myself, 'What the hell are you doing, apart from bitching about the way women are educated and the way women live and behave?' I think that was probably the first impulse towards something that I really had in me from the beginning, because as a child I used to do storyboards without realising that that was what they were. I'd write plays, I'd direct plays, I'd act in them, I'd have puppet shows, I'd have all the things to do with the magical world of spectacle. But also, like so many women, I didn't dare take myself seriously, I didn't think that anything I might have to say could be important, so I kept on postponing myself.

Camila was shot in a highly romantic style because I felt that in that way I could really hit the audience in the heart and in the pit of their stomach. Melodrama is a very tricky genre, because at any minute it can turn into something sentimental which I detest. So it had all those little tricks, such as the handkerchief, the gold coin, the priest who's sick with love, and the thunder when God gets angry. They're all like winks at the audience. Whereas *Miss Mary*, for me at least, is a cool, distant film, as is *Momentos*. I don't think that women should emphasise or recuperate romanticism because I think it's almost forced on us. The way we have been induced into this emotional trap has prevented us from thinking. On the other hand, what I do think is important is our capacity for feeling, we are not cut in parts the way men are.

The Church's attitude to *Camila* was generally very good, but (there is always a 'but' with the Church) I couldn't shoot in the church that I wanted – they never said no, but they never said yes. So finally we went about one hundred kilometres from Buenos Aires and shot in a church that wasn't so pretty. I know that the poor priest had problems afterwards. There is a very extreme Catholic magazine which said that the love scenes had been done just for the box-office. But I think it was a good idea to have the priest seduced by the woman, to have a role reversal, because all the stories tell of the beautiful, innocent Camila who was seduced by the nasty priest. It helped me with the Church since he was the 'pure' one.

Working in film is difficult for women, but I had a great advantage inasmuch as I could afford to produce my first two movies. Usually women don't have money and there's no feminine network to help them to get finance and so forth, although I see lots of men who also don't have money but somehow manage to make movies. I think my biggest problems were interior ones, such as lack of confidence or lack of references to other women doing the same thing. But I must say that once I began doing my first film I was surrounded by the nicest artists and technicians who were co-operative and creative. I'm sure that deep down they were probably saying, well let's see what this woman who just happens to have money can do. I was fortunate because it came out very well and from then on things were fine. I don't think films can change anything but I think they can act as an eye-opener, change the focus of things, create a certain awareness in people and mobilise them. I like to believe that I help the audience to discover what is already in them and to bring it out, because after all a filmmaker's main object is to communicate with the audience.

Interview by Sheila Whitaker, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1987