

PRODUCTION NOTES



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**"A HEART-
BREAKING
AND UTTERLY
UNFORGETTABLE
EXPERIENCE."**
FILMINK

CAMINO

A FILM BY **JAVIER FESSER**

NEREA CAMACHO • CARMELI ELIAS • MARIANO VENANCIO • MANUELA VELLÉS

BEST PICTURE 6 WINNER!
SPANISH ACADEMY AWARDS (GOYAS)
including BEST PICTURE and BEST DIRECTOR



CAMINO

a film written and directed by JAVIER FESSER
produced by PELÍCULAS PENDELTON & MEDIAPRO

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CAMINO. TECHNICAL DATA

PRODUCERS	Películas Pendelton / Mediapro
LOCATIONS	Madrid, Ciudad Real, Guadalajara, Pamplona, Almería
FILMING TIME	13 WEEKS
FILM FORMAT	HD
PROJECTION FORMAT	35 MM 1:2,35
SOUND	Dolby Digital
LANGUAGE	Spanish, English Subtitles
RUNNING TIME	143 mins
CENSORSHIP	M
AUST. DISTRIBUTION	The Other Films

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CAMINO. SYNOPSIS

CAMINO is an adventure of the emotions inspired by the real-life story of a captivating eleven-year-old who is faced with two completely new situations in her life: falling in love and dying. Above all else, CAMINO is a radiant light able to shine through every gloomy door closing across her path in an attempt to shroud in darkness her desire to live, to love and to feel the full depth of her happiness.

CAMINO. TREATMENT

Pamplona, June 2001

Camino, a lovely little girl of eleven, is living her very last moments in a hospital room. Surrounded by relatives, friends, priests and an unusually large number of medical staff, she is an almost supernatural example of serene and peaceful death. In this saintly atmosphere, just as her demise seems inevitable, something extraordinary takes place in the room.

Some months earlier.

Camino is a little girl in Madrid who goes to school just like everyone else and who plays and shares her dreams with her friend Begoña. She also has a very close relationship with her mother, who has brought her up in her own "bullet-proof" religious faith around which she centres everything in their lives.

At an age when everything is continually changing, she is confronted by something completely new and unexpected: falling in love. It is here, in the midst of this wonderful emotional adventure, that the first symptoms of a cruel disease make their appearance. A strange and particularly aggressive tumour begins to sap away her life and robs her, little by little but with painful precision, of each and every one of her dreams.

Camino's father is a man who is willing to give up everything for his daughter but does not know how to cope when tragedy strikes. He is Camino's sole confidant in the platonic love story that unravels in Camino's mind like a fairy tale. José is in dramatic contrast with the fortitude displayed by Gloria, the mother, who gradually encourages the idea that Camino is an extraordinary being and that everything that happens to her is the will of God who has chosen her daughter from among millions of human beings.

The dramatic advance of Camino's illness, requiring the surgeon's knife on three occasions and which wastes away her body leaving her unable to move, is very hard to bear for the parents, who each experience a radically different ordeal.

The process gradually destroys José, who is utterly unprepared for the loss of the most precious thing to him in the world, while the idea takes root in his wife that what is happening picks them out as them privileged beings. Above all, however, the pain and suffering that befalls Camino merely nourishes the love in the heart of the child, who applies her unshakable faith to her experience of a love affair with a being she cannot see or touch.

Nuria, her older sister, is a major void in her life. A member of Opus Dei and cut off from her family, Nuria embodies what their mother's circle expects from Camino.

Nearing the final instants of the child's last breath (to which the story returns at the end of the film) Camino dies, but a "miracle" occurs because she does so at the peak of the happiest moment in her life, truly feeling embraced and loved by the boy she has spent months dreaming of, and whose image has allowed her to withstand the terrible illness that has devoured her. CAMINO is a story of love and – most of all – of generosity and selflessness.

CAMINO. NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

CAMINO is a love story, a tale of first love that is never forgotten, that demands nothing and yet moves mountains. It is an adventure of the human heart; the crossroads where the wellbeing of the body and the soul, pain and bliss, faith and reason, serenity and fear, light and darkness converge. All this is possible without departing from the real world, since even the world of dreams and nightmares experienced by Camino belong to reality. What goes on in our heads while we sleep exists too, and it has strong links to what happens during our waking hours.

This is a film about characters made of flesh and blood, with their thoughts, who see life from different stances, whose points of view are sometimes so diametrically opposed that coexistence necessarily strikes up contradictions between them, affecting both sides. All except Camino, an extraordinary, resplendent being who displaying a wholly unsuspected maturity takes the most fair and wise determination: the quest for true love in the face of the direst adversity.

After learning of an unusual sequence of events, I set out on an exhaustive search for documentation on many other cases of saintly lives and on the true mode of operation within the Opus Dei which ended up in a fascinating research project on the subject of people's innermost feelings.

In-depth knowledge of the testimonies and experiences of others who think quite differently to ourselves is an enriching experience when, far from attempting to prove them wrong, we try to get into their shoes. This is how I have become convinced that I could have ended up being any of the characters in this film: any one of them at all!

I hope I have succeeded in conveying all the things that those stories have suggested to me, devoid of stereotype and prejudice and leaving plenty of room for the spectator. My own position is in fact just the opposite of what the title, CAMINO, seems to imply, on the lines of pointing to the path others should follow, singling anyone out or deciding who is right or wrong. Nothing could be farther from my intention with this film.

The only criticism in this tale is of those who are intent on preaching to others, imposing their views and beliefs – whether to praise Saint Benedict, to speak the local dialect or to support their favourite football team.

For me, CAMINO is a story that is packed with life, which in turn serves as an overwhelming argument in the struggle against sorrow.

CAMINO. THE PROJECT

I heard the story of Alexia González Barros 20 years ago, by chance, reading a book which gave a detailed account of her illness but, in fact, focused on the courage of this girl and her family in the face of suffering and death. That started everything off, because that tale sparked my curiosity and the need to find answers to things I am unable to understand: What does "to offer" suffering mean? How can one accept that grief and despair are a signal of God's love? How can one die contentedly at the age of fourteen? How would I behave under similar circumstances? In my search for answers to these questions, I came upon the story of Montse Grases, another adolescent who, from her deathbed, asked to be admitted to the Opus Dei; the case of Bernadette Soubirous, the clairvoyant of Lourdes who did not wish to cure her own blindness; the story of the shepherd children Lucía, Francisco and Jacinta, to whom the Virgin told her secrets in confession; the story of Mari Carmen García Valerio, the little girl who "gave herself to God"; the life of Saint Therese of Lisieux, and many others who felt privileged through their suffering because they saw in it a quality of beauty. All these characters, however, have in turn led me to discover other stories, much closer to home, which have allowed me to recreate faithfully and with great precision the medium in the midst of which all this takes on a special meaning: the Opus Dei. The testimony and experience of the large number of people who belong or have belonged to this congregation have made it possible for me to investigate probe in this closed and obscure world, known officially as "personal prelature".

I have not sought to discover members' data, behaviour or even beliefs. I have researched exclusively the background to the feelings of these people, driven by the fact that every one of them, in his or her own way, is on a quest for the same thing: happiness. And aren't we all?

Camino is meant to be a story told from an objective angle, free from prejudiced or stereotyped mindsets. A film which regards reality with a generous gaze, without judging it. Rather like an x-ray image. And this is precisely the reason for this film's bold, closely focused and severe quality.

CAMINO. THE CAST

CAMINO	Nerea Camacho
GLORIA	Carme Elias
JOSÉ	Mariano Venancio
NURIA	Manuela Vellés
INÉS	Ana Gracia
TÍA MARITA	Lola Casamayor
CUCO	Lucas Manzano
DON MIGUEL ÁNGEL	Pepe Ocio
BEGOÑA	Claudia Otero
DON LUIS	Jordi Dauder
MR. MEEBLES	Emilio Gavira
ELENA	Miriam Raya

CAMINO. THE CHARACTERS

CAMINO

An extraordinary, luminous and unique soul. At an age (11) when everything in life is continually changing and new options and possibilities are constantly opening up, Camino chooses LOVE above all else, and in doing so is an example of generosity and selflessness. Her heart is transparent, but nevertheless visible throughout the film. Her mother has other plans for her.

GLORIA

Camino's mother struggles stoutly against a role that is unrelentingly unkind to her. And when she finally prevails, it is one of the starkest but at the same time most beautiful moments of the film. Gloria has to live with a crushing sense of guilt constantly fed by her background and her peers.

JOSE

José is trapped. Camino's father is a portrait of uncertainty, disorientation and inability to face something as unnatural as the death of a daughter. This is precisely what makes him so real, of flesh and blood, with a soul. His eyes betray the tragedy deep inside: he has no alternative plans whatsoever.

NURIA

She is absence. She is fragility. She is virtue. She is unable to face her own existence. Camino's older and only sister, she was also a luminous, extraordinary being who is now powerless before the spectacle of the gradual, wretched waning of her own light, that renders her full of envy and admiration for her ailing sister.

CAMINO. THE ACTORS: FILMOGRAPHY

Nerea Camacho

In the film, the main character is played by Nerea Camacho, a new actress making her debut under the guidance of director Fesser. During the casting process, Nerea was considered a stunning discovery for her natural talent, her radiant beauty and spectacular photogenic qualities.

Carme Elias

FILMS:

"CAMINO" - Director: Javier Fesser
"ROUGH WINDS" - Director: Gerardo Herrero
"CIEN MANERAS DE ACABAR CON EL AMOR" - Director: Vicente Pérez Herrero
"BESTIARY" - Director: Vicente Pérez Herrero
"MANOS DE SEDA" - Director: César Martínez
"DON'T TELL ANYONE" - Director: Francisco Lombardi
"PESADILLA PARA UN RICO" - Director: Fernando Feman Gómez
"IN PRAISE OF OLDER WOMEN" - Director: Manolo Lombardero
"MENOS QUE CERO" - Director: Ernesto Telleria
"EL HOMBRE DE ARENA" - Director: Vicente Pérez Herrero
"THE FLOWER OF MY SECRET" - Director: Pedro Almodóvar
"THE WORST YEARS OF OUR LIVES" - Director: Emilio M. Lázaro
"LOS DE ENFRETE" - Director: Jesús Garay
"PONT DE VARSOVIA" - Director: Pere Portabella
"PUZZLE" - Director: Luis José Comerón
"STICO" - Director: Jaime De Armiñán
"ENTRE PARENTESIS" - Director: Simón Fábregas
"VICTORIA" - Director: Antoni Ribas

TELEVISION:

"MAR DE FONTS" - TV3
"THE SIMULATORS" - Cuatro
"7 VIDAS" - Telecinco
"MIRALL TRENCAT" - TV3
"ANTIVICIO" - Antena 3
"DONES D' AIGUA" - TV3
"TURNO DE OFICIO II" - TVE
Nominated for the Best TV Actress Award, Fotogramas de Plata
"LUCRECIA" - Director: Mariano Barroso
"ARNAU: ELS DIES SECRETS" - TV3
"EL ASCENSOR" - Director: José M^a Carreño
"DICEN QUE EL AMOR ES ALGO MARAVILLOSO" - Director: José M^a Carreño
"HASTA LUEGO COCODRILO" - Director: Alfonso Ungría
"TURNO DE OFICIO" - TVE
Nominated for the Best TV Actress Award, Fotogramas de Plata
"PEPE CARVALHO" - Director: Adolfo Aristarain
"FILLIPO DE MONTE" - Director: Jesús García De Dueñas
"CUENTOS IMPOSIBLES" - Director: Jaime De Armiñán
"EL JARDIN DE VENUS" - Director: José María Forqué
"ANILLOS DE ORO" - Director: Pedro Masó
"LUIS Y VIRGINIA" - Director: Jaime Chávarri

THEATRE:

"EL REY LEAR" - Director: Gerardo Vera
"84 CHARING CROSS ROAD" - Director: Isabel Coixet
"THE SEAGULL" - Director: Amelia Ochandiano
"ELS GEGANTS DE LA MONTANYA" - Director: Georges Lavandaunt
"LAS UL TIMAS LUNAS" - Director: J. Luis García Sanchez
"ACREEDORES" - Director: Juan Carlos Coraza.
"LA DOBLE INCONSTANCIA" - Director: Miguel Narros
"CASI UNA DIOSA" - Director: Miguel Narros
"LA QUINTA COLUMNA" - Director: Ariel García Valdés
"EL HOMBRE DEL DESTINO" - Director: María Ruiz
"EL MISANTROP" - Director: Josep M^a Flotats
"LORENZACCIO" - Director: Josep M^a Flotats
"EL DRET D'ESCOLLIR" - Director: Josep M^a Flotats
"MADAME DE SADE" - Director: Yukio Mishima
"LA GATA SOBRE EL TEJADO DE ZINC" - Director: Carlos Gandolfo
"ABSALON" - Director: José Luis Gómez
"TERRA BAIXA" - Director: Josep Montanyes
"THE SEAGULL" - Director: Herman Bonnin

Mariano Venancio

FILMS

2008. "CAMINO". Director: Javier Fesser
2008. "MORTADELO Y FILEMÓN: MISIÓN SALVAR LA TIERRA". Director: Miguel Bardem
2004. "TÁNGER". Director: Juan Madrid
2003. "LA GRAN AVENTURA DE MORTADELO Y FILEMÓN". Director: Javier Fesser
2001. "EL CIELO ABIERTO". Director: Miguel Albadelejo
1998. "LA HORA DE LAS VALIENTES". Director: Antonio Mercero
1991. "LA TABERNA FANTÁSTICA". Director: Julián Marcos

TELEVISION

2008. "HOSPITAL CENTRAL". Episódico. Cadena: TELECINCO
2007-2006. "AMAR EN TIEMPOS REVUELTOS". Cadena: TVE
2006. "GÉNESIS, EN LA MENTE DEL ASESINO". Episódico. Cadena: CUATRO
2006. "AQUÍ NO HAY QUIEN VIVA". Episódico. Cadena: ANTENA 3 TV
2005-2002. "CUÉNTAME". Cadena: TVE
2005. "MANERAS DE SOBREVIVIR". Producido por Telespan 2000
2004. "LOS 80". Producido por Boca a Boca
2004. "EL INQUILINO". Cadena: ANTENA 3 TV.
2003. "EL COMISARIO". Cadena: TELECINCO.
2000. "RAQUEL BUSCA SU SITIO". Cadena: TVE
1998. "HERMANAS". Cadena: TELECINCO
1997. "MEDICO DE FAMILIA". Cadena: TELECINCO.
1996. "ESTE ES MI BARRIO". Cadena: ANTENA 3 TV
1993. "FARMACIA DE GUARDIA". Cadena: ANTENA 3 TV
1990. "EVA Y ADÁN, AGENCIA MATRIMONIAL". Cadena: TVE
1984. "COSAS DE DOS". Cadena: CANAL 9

Manuela Vellés

Manuela Vellés first appeared on the Spanish cinema screen thanks to Julio Médem, who gave her the leading role in his latest film "Caótica Ana" after an extended casting process. She began her training in Modern Dance as an adolescent and at 17 joined the Escuela de Juan Carlos Coraza theatre school for a course in acting for young people.

Years later, after a period of training in dance, singing and acting, she took a voice training course with Lidia García followed by an advanced course with Jorge Eines.

In 2008, after her film debut, she completed her training at the Actors Centre in London where she took further voice training courses.

Apart from her role in "Camino", filmed last year by Javier Fesser, her latest work before the camera is "Flores para Belle", a special episode made by TVE to celebrate the extraordinary success of its television series 'Amar en tiempos revueltos'. The plot tells the story of Belle, a beautiful French spy who in 1943 carries out a mission to neutralize Otto Ganz, an industrialist with important connections in the upper echelons of Nazi leadership, who is passing through Madrid.

CAMINO. THE CREW

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY	Javier Fesser
PRODUCERS	Luis Manso / Jaume Roures
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	Luis Manso / Javier Méndez
CINEMATOGRAPHER	Alex Catalán A.E.C
ART DIRECTOR	César Macarrón
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR	Marina Ortiz Lenoir-Grand
MUSIC	Rafa Arnau y Mario Gosálvez
EDITING	Javier Fesser
VISUAL EFFECTS SUPERVISOR	Ferran Piquer
COSTUME DESIGNER	Tatiana Hernández
SPECIAL EFFECTS	Raúl Romanillos (EFE-X)
MAKE UP	Almudena Fonseca
HAIR STYLIST	Martha Marín
SOUND	José M ^a Bloch
SOUND EDITING	James Muñoz

CAMINO. THE DIRECTOR: FILMOGRAPHY

Javier Fesser was born in Madrid in 1964 and is a graduate of Visual Sciences at Complutense University of Madrid.

He discovered cinematography making films in Super 8 mm and in 1986 he founded LÍNEA FILMS, specializing in commercial spots, which led him into the world of filmmaking. In April 1992 he established Películas Pendelton, jointly with Luis Manso, in order to take on cinematographical projects, his true vocation.

The first two works he wrote and directed, *AQUEL RITMILLO* (1995) and *EL SECDLETO DE LA TLOMPETA* (1996), became the two most awarded Spanish shorts, including the 1995 GOYA. At Christmas 1998, his first feature film was premiered: *EL MILAGRO DE P. TINTO*, viewed by 1,300,000 spectators and winner of the GOYA for Best Visual Effects and nominated for another for Best New Director. In February 2003 he presented his second feature: *LA GRAN AVENTURA DE MORTADELO Y FILEMON*, which won five Goya awards in 2004 and was seen by over 5,500,000 spectators.

Fesser is the creator of countless pieces for Internet, such as the 14?chapter series *Javi y Lucy*, premiered in December 2000 and registering over two million downloads from the net. In 2005, he wrote and directed *BINTA Y LA GRAN IDEA*, a short film shot in Senegal in collaboration with UNICEF that has won 88 awards at international film festivals and was nominated for an OSCAR in 2007. This film deals with the issue of girls' education, and forms part of the full-length film *EN EL MUNDO A CADA RATO*.

Fesser is also one of the authors of *Notodofilmfest*, a festival that has become a reference for short films on Internet and which is currently preparing its seventh edition.

In the year 2006, Fesser published his short novel *Tres Días en el Valle* [Three days in the valley] and produced *CANDIDA*, his brother Guillermo Fesser's first film, in which he also co-authors the script.

CAMINO is Fesser's third feature film, of which he is screenwriter, director, producer and editor.

CAMINO. THE PRODUCERS: FILMOGRAPHY

Películas Pendelton was created in 1992 by director Javier Fesser and producer Luis Manso, with the aim of alternating advertising work (the sector both came from) with films (their true vocation). However, in 2003 Películas Pendelton, despite having won major awards such as the "Gran Premio de San Sebastián" or the "León de Oro" at the Cannes Festival, in this category, resolved to give up advertising altogether and concentrate solely on films.

Their first steps in cinema consisted of two short films directed by Javier Fesser and produced by Luis Manso: "Aquel Ritmillo" (1994) and "El Secdleteo de la Tlompeta" (1995). These two works won 45 prizes, including the "Goya" (1995), "Best European Short Film" at the Premiers Plans d'Angers Festival (1995), "Best International Comedy" at the Albany NY Festival, (1996), and the "Special Award of the Jury" at Clermont-Ferrand (1996).

In December 1998, Películas Pendelton presents its first feature film, "El Milagro de P. Tinto". Directed by Javier Fesser and produced by Luis Manso for Películas Pendelton and Sogetel, the film was selected and awarded at international festivals (Sundance, Seattle, San Sebastián, Valladolid, London, Göteborg, Locarno, Peñíscola...), besides winning the "Goya" for Best Special Effects and receiving the "Entrada de Bronce" for being the third largest box office success of the year. Moreover, "El Milagro de P. Tinto" became the first Spanish film to be distributed world wide by Buena Vista International.

In February 2003, Películas Pendelton presented its second feature: "La Gran Aventura de Mortadelo y Filemón", directed by Javier Fesser and produced by Luis Manso, in a coproduction with Sogecine. This was the biggest box-office hit that year for newly released films (including international films) and currently ranks as the second Spanish film in history as far as takings are concerned. It has also won a number of prizes, such as for example five "Goya" awards for the categories of Production Management, Art Direction, Editing, Special Effects, Make-up and Hair Styling.

In 2004 Películas Pendelton produced "Binta y la gran idea", a short film shot in Senegal, directed by Javier Fesser and produced by Luis Manso, which, along with four other shorts, made up the feature film "En el mundo a cada rato". "Binta y la gran idea" has received 88 awards, over half at film festivals in the United States. For this work, Javier Fesser and Luis Manso were nominated for an "Oscar" in 2007 for Best Fiction Short Film.

In 2005, Películas Pendelton produced Guillermo Fesser's first film "Cándida", co-written by Guillermo and Javier Fesser and produced by Luis Manso in a co-production with Sogecine, and premiered in December 2006.

In the summer of 2007, Películas Pendelton filmed "Camino", written and directed by Javier Fesser and produced by Luis Manso in a co-production with Mediapro.

CAMINO. REVIEWS / REVIEW QUOTES

"A work of art."

GUIA DEL OCIO (Edmon Roch)

"Camino is a fascinating miracle."

CINEMANIA (David Bernal)

"A horrifying but convincing portrayal of the Opus Dei."

EL PAIS (Carlos Boyero)

"Devastating and overwhelming. Beauty and intelligence through and through."

FANZINEDIGITA

"An implacable, fascinating and very tender film."

Camino is real cinema

DIARIO VASCO (Begoña del Teso)

"A revealing, moving and brave film which unsettles you inside and, of course, does not leave anybody indifferent."

MUCHOCINE.NET (Pablo López)

"Great performance by debutant Nerea Camacho, a girl whose fragile smile in cinemascope can break a heart.

What a film!"

ON MADRID (Yago García)

"The true origin of the story told by Fesser does not prevent the film from splashing around in fables and fantasies while being true and impossible at the same time. A fascinating beginning ...a moving and thunderous ending.

Camino is a journey with brilliant sequences and moments of breathtaking poetic force which turns confusion into philosophy and double meaning into spirituality.

A brilliant as well as an excessive work that provokes attraction and repulsion. In a radiant, chromatic and tasty way it depicts some dark sides of our own inside, when it describes dark, cunning and calculating environments in the believe they are enlightening. "Camino is pure polysemy, it is plurality of meanings and disparity of feelings. ... it is difficult to forget some of its lasting moments. Its actors, Carmen, Elías, Mariano Venancio, Manuel Vellés are all magnificent, but the child Nerea Camacho is not only magnificent, but absolutely glorious, blessed and completely celestial.

Moments of great cinema straighten and daunt its characters' feelings and emotions."

ABC, SPAIN (E. Rodriguez Marchante)

"Fesser succeeds at stamping his more personal and vehement style, his taste for fantasy combining with reality and a precise and brilliant esthetics which are borrowing from comics and advertising in equal parts.

Camino is an uncomfortable account, deliberately ambiguous. ... It is an odd and unusual film, without any referential model, but above its strangeness it manages to be undoubtedly efficient because it succeeds in awakening deep feelings, leaving a hint of restlessness with the memory."

EL CULTURAL (Alberto Bermejo)

"Fesser manages to mix styles and genres without losing its way. "Camino" breaks the rules while carrying the viewer happily through a visually spectacular two and a half hours. Pers are superb across the board, with Elias in particular resisting the temptation to lapse into mere caricature and creating a wonderfully complex character as a result. The radiant-eyed, debutante Camacho has a joyous screen presence, suffusing her role with a transcendent saintliness that makes the priests eager to canonize her."

VARIETY (Jonathan Holland)

"Fesser's Camino rivets San Sebastian audiences.

Tangible proof of how a religious organisation can condition the lives of its members is well documented. With Camino ("Path") Javier Fesser shows how this radicalisation is condemnable from any perspective.

Camino has pulled off a miracle. A miracle that the characters invoke throughout the entire film to save the life of an innocent person. Yet in the film the laws of life follow their natural course, which comes as no surprise, for the director deals with his issues fearlessly, exposing them from the very beginning of the film, as only great artists can."

CINEUROPA (Carlo d'Ursi)

"Camino is a fully justified moral indignation. (...)

It is tragedy at the beginning (that of the child and her parents) and a denunciation (her own family and the Opus Dei "encourage" her to suffer) of an aberrant fanaticism and propaganda. The most serious criticism of the Opus Dei."

EL MUNDO (Francisco Marinero)

"Javier Fesser surprises with a brutal and heartbreaking fairy tale. A spiritual film about love, death and the Opus Dei."

EL MUNDO (Luis Marínez)

"Exhausting, intense, sad, luminous, vitriolic, repairing, excessive, tender".

CONTRAPICADO (Evaristo Martínez)

"Fesser tackles with risk, develops with credibility and ends up leaving the spectator with a high degree of emotional tension. Breaking (and heartbreaking) performance by Carmen Elias."

LA VANGUARDIA (Lluís Bonet)



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Film Review: Camino

Bottom Line: A daring, compulsively watchable melodrama against religious fundamentalism.

By Deborah Young

Sep 25, 2008



San Sebastian Film Festival, In Competition

A rather extraordinary movie about an 11-year-old girl who falls in love while dying of cancer, "Camino" is raptly fascinating for over two hours, as Spanish director Javier Fesser intertwines melodrama, horror and animation in outrageous new ways. It is earmarked for media attention

thanks to its biting criticism of the controversial Opus Dei movement and Catholic fundamentalism in general. Widely acclaimed at its San Sebastian bow, it has already been sold to Latin America.

Fesser's uncompromising script is not anti-religious, though it condemns the dehumanizing effects of religious extremism with great conviction. Negative fallout might be anticipated from conservative circles in the Catholic church, but if the Opus Dei put-downs in "The Da Vinci Code" didn't harm that film's boxoffice, they're unlikely to do much commercial damage here, either.

In its own way, "Camino" is every bit as over the top as Dan Brown's novel; it is just far more realistic in its depiction of life in an Opus Dei center and flagship hospital at the University of Navarra. Also, the film's insistence that it is based on a true story points the finger at the organization founded by now-canonized saint Josemaria Escriva, who appears in the film in the form of a gilded statue and whose book "El Camino - The Way" is referred to in the film's title.

Camino is also the name of the young protagonist (Nerea Camacho), a sugary-sweet, very pretty girl with big blue eyes who could have stepped out of a Walt Disney movie. Lo and behold, when Camino's class puts on a school play, scenes from Disney's 1950 "Cinderella" are excerpted. She would be ideal in the leading role opposite young Jesus (Lucas Manzano), the boy she has a crush on, as Prince Charming, but there is another fate awaiting her.

In a bold directing choice, film opens on its toughest scene: Camino's death in a hospital

room, surrounded by priests, doctors, nurses and her pathologically religious mother. The scene is played straight and is very moving, unlike the effect it will have at the end of the film when everything is put in a different context.

Back to six months earlier, when Camino experiences sharp back pains, the first symptom of her illness. Her stern mom (Carmen Elias), a caricature of Catholic fervor, tells her to offer up her suffering for the poor children in the world. More compassionate is her loving but weak dad (Mariano



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Bart Got a Room

Forgetting Sarah Marshall

Smart People

TV Review: **24: Redemption**

TV Review: **Accidental Friendship**

TV Review: **Nova: The Bible's Buried Secrets**

TV Review: **A Colbert Christmas: The Greatest Gift of All**

TV Review: **Crash**

TV Review: **Pam: Girl On The Loose**

TV Review: **On the Road in America**

American Experience: **George H.W. Bush**

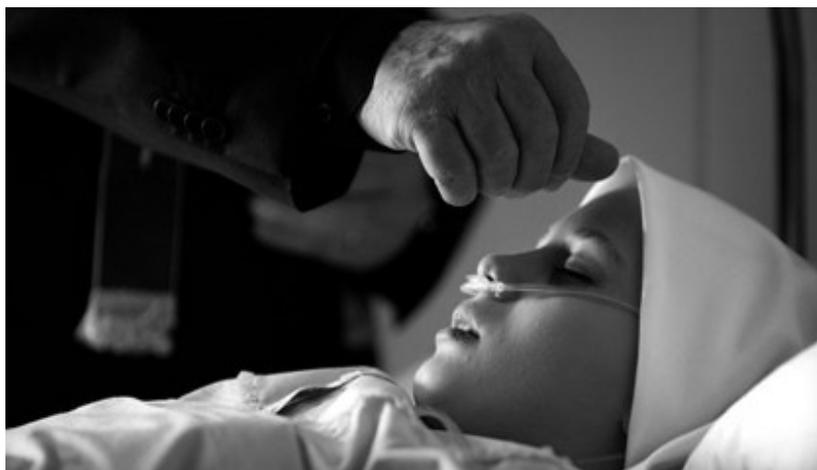
Television Review: **'Molotov Alva and His Search for the Creator: A Second Life Odyssey'**

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Story

**Camino**Lee
Marshall
in San
Sebastian25 Sep
2008
17:23**REVIEWS LINKS**✉ [Email this story](#)🖨 [Print this story](#)🔄 [Feedback](#)[Click here for further film details](#)*Dir/scri: Javier Fesser. Spain. 2008. 142 mins.*

Few films manage to balance Hollywood sentiment and European irony as successfully as Javier Fesser's weird but impressive third feature, which is based on the case of Alexia Gonzalez-Barros, a devoutly Catholic Spanish girl whose 'exemplary' hospital death in 1985 at the age of 14 has become the focus of a cult of sainthood. Despite its dark subject matter, this is a big, commercial film. Set for Spanish release on October 17, *Camino* may pose some marketing challenges, but it's hard to imagine a major territory in which it won't work on some level despite its lengthy running time and subject matter.

In his third feature, Fesser – who helmed cartoonish Spanish box office smash *Mortadelo y Filemon* in 2003 – keeps the audience guessing as to whether *Camino* is joking or serious, sarcastic or sincere. The result is a kind of three-way collision between *The Magdalene Sisters*, *Amelie* and *The Song of Bernadette*. At times it feels like a children's movie – but its bitter grown-up irony and squirmingly graphic scenes of open surgery would countermine this.

Like Gonzalez-Barros and her family, the film's dying protagonist Camino and her mother, father and sister are members of Opus Dei – the controversial Catholic organisation (founded by Spain's recently-canonised Jose Maria Escrivá) that encourages 'personal prelature' – devoting oneself to God without taking holy orders or retreating from the outside world. The film's undisguised critique of what it sees as the bulletproof spiritual smugness of many of Opus Dei's members and prelates had already begun to stir controversy in Spain despite the secrecy surrounding *Camino's* plot.

Opening with a deathbed scene that will be reinterpreted when it appears again at the end, the film soon backtracks five months to follow the life of thirteen-year-old Camino (Camacho) – a bouncy girl whose happy, God-coddled life in Madrid pans out between her religious school and a home dominated by her pious but also creepily authoritarian mother Gloria (Elias, who gives a terrifically controlled performance). Camino falls in platonic love with a boy called Cuco (Manzano) at a school theatre group. But young love is thwarted when the back pains that have been troubling her turn out to have a serious origin – and she is forced to undergo a barrage of tests, operations and radiation therapy sessions that eventually leave her bedridden, immobilised and blind.

Bolstered by a swelling orchestral score and characterised by hyper-real, theatrical performances from its child actors, the first part of the film sometimes feels like pure mush. But gradually, irony begins to pierce the veil. Gloria encourages her daughter to dedicate her suffering to Jesus, and gives her bedside flowers away to another, more needy patient; Camino's older sister Nuria (Velles), meanwhile, is living as a novice in an Opus Dei house where the women are cordoned off from the men – and yet act as housemaids to them. Only Camino's weak and spiritually confused father (Venancio) gives her pure affection untainted by religious dogma.

A series of CGI-rich dream sequences convey the dark side of Camino's Catholic faith, as the guardian angel her mother so fervently invokes becomes a disturbing force. But she also increasingly uses fantasy to escape from her hospital bed, elaborating on the progress of the innocent love affair that she was unable to pursue (the outtakes from Disney's *Cinderella* that feature here give some idea of Camino's major budget).