

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

THE MASK OF POWER

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The film *Camila* is set in nineteenth century Argentina, following the country's fight for independence from Spain. This film shows the fragile nature of the new government and the forceful nature by which laws were enforced to ensure peace. Ensuring peace was important so that the country would stay united and not divided in a Civil War, which could easily have allowed the mother country, Spain or any other country for that matter to re-conquer the land. The Catholic Church, being the main united group in the country, already having established laws and guidelines, became the foundation and the essence of the new "free" government. The rules and laws of the Church became the rules of the government and when someone broke one of the Church's laws, it meant that they were defying the State and therefore were subject to a subsequent punishment.

The Church created an order in society in which morals and regulations were imposed on the people. It also required that women, who were not seen as valuable by the Church, which was ruled by men, be married or subject themselves to a life in a convent. Women in the society reflected in *Camila* were not allowed to remain single. They were forced to marry men within the same social class, usually abiding by arranged marriages. This is the same kind of arrangement that has allowed Kings and Churches to remain united throughout the centuries of Western Civilization. Marriage, within the same class, ensures a continuing feudal-type system and ensures or in most cases throughout history, has delayed a peasant and working class from rising up against the power and control of nobles and Kings.

Camila, masterfully shows the length that a government will go to in order to keep peace. As Juan Manuel de Rosas, the governing leader of Argentina has said, “twenty drops of blood spilled on time [will] save spilling twenty thousand [drops at a later time].” The society that *Camila* depicts is that of a utilitarian society, in which Rosas contends that he is doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Rosas was quick to put down and have killed anyone who spoke out against his government and would not fall into line. At the time of his reign, there were many Unitarians who wanted to return to be governed by Spain, but Rosas would see otherwise. He believed that if people who spoke against his government were not killed, their “dangerous” propaganda and ideas would be allowed to spread and with enough support from groups which do not benefit from the Church being in control of the government, a revolution could ensue.

In a gruesome scene in the movie, the head from a man who spoke out against the Rosas government was put on display in the town as a symbol and as a warning to anyone who got out of line. Oppression was the only means by which Rosas could establish a dictatorship because if people were allowed to create and follow through with their own ideas and plans, the dictator would most likely be overthrown. The rules and desires of the Church have never been to give the common man a voice, but to make sure that they followed orders.

Utilitarianism is in direct opposition to democracy, which was guaranteed to Americans in the United States Constitution of 1789. The U.S. Constitution developed a different type of legal system in which its citizens would have rights over their own future. The U.S. system of government was revolutionary, as some of its basic principles

of freedom had not been seen since the days of Greece. Rosas as the leader of the country could have created a Constitution, which would have given more rights to his citizens and still kept peace, but he chose to use the Church as the tool that it has historically been used for, to give him the power to rule with an iron fist over his people, ensuring that he would command fear, respect, and great notoriety. It also shows the large ego and the disdain for human life that Rosas had, matching that of the Great Dictators, Kings, and Pharaohs throughout history. Rosas who liberated Argentina from Spain was not doing it for the benefit of the country, but for his own self-righteous purposes, which is the reason that he ruled with a tighter fist than Spain. He feared losing his own power and so he used fear and patriotism to blind the vast amount of supporters of his revolution, as to how much worse off the country had become with him as the leader.