

A THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL
 FILIPINO CRITIC
 TODAY



WHAT HE SAYS:

On Lino Brocka's *Mother Dear*: "We are doing our country men a great disservice by feeding them such a low-calorie intake of intellectual food." On Mike de Leon's *Batch 81*: "De Leon is saying that our country is run like a fraternity, with blind obedience being the primary rule." On Maryo de los Reyes' *Disco Madhouse*: "It is a significant failure because it shows how a brilliant screenwriter and a brilliant director can produce a terrible movie—it's like two geniuses producing a retarded child." On Eddie Romero's *Kamakalawa*:

"There is nothing in the film worth the price of admission." On Fernando Poe Jr.: "Many people still do not take Poe seriously, despite the fact that he makes movies which not only entertain, but also satisfy the cinematic eye." On Filipino movies in general: "What is bad in local films? Primarily the writing. A film is basically a story. Without a good story, a film inevitably fails. A good story not only features realistic dialogue and interesting themes; it must first be logical and credible."

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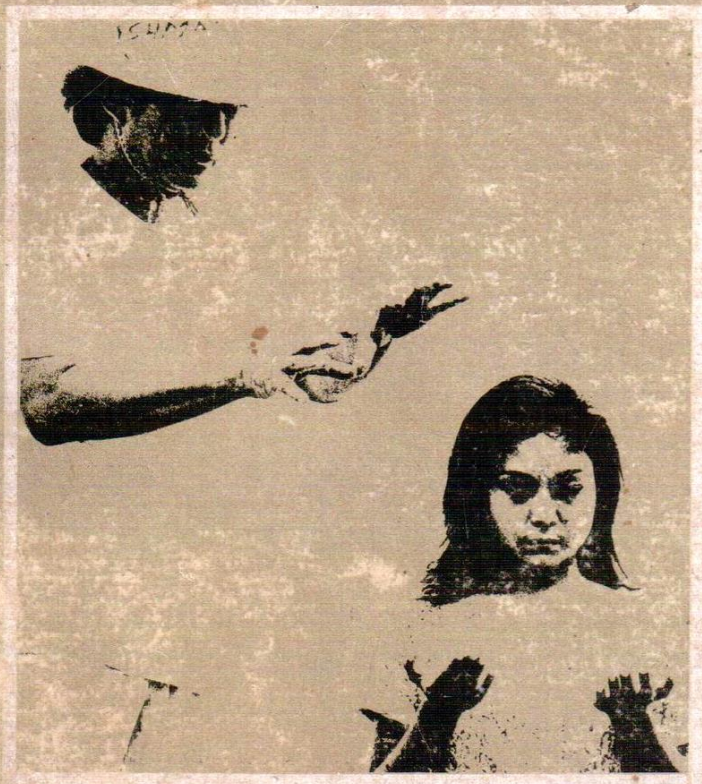
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MOVIE
 TIMES

CRUZ

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Isagani R. Cruz



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PHILIPPINES



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Preface

If journalism is literature in a hurry, then reviews must be criticism in an instant. Like instant coffee, however, film reviews may not be as good as criticism brewed with the beans of deep thought in the water of leisure. Nevertheless, looking back at the hundreds of film reviews I have churned out since I got hooked on film — in the sixties—after watching Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* in an empty theater on Escolta, sitting through a dozen screenings of *My Fair Lady*, and rediscovering my Filipino roots as I marvelled at Gerardo de Leon's *Noli Me Tangere* and Lamberto Avellana's *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, I find that not all my reviews (all written to meet deadlines set by appreciative, supportive, kind, but always strict editors) may be as forgettable as instant coffee. In fact, I have gathered (with a writer's typical *hubris*) what I consider the best of my hurried efforts, if only to test my theory that criticism may indeed be written in a hurry.

This book is divided into three parts. The first, "Film in the Modern Filipino World," brings together short opinion articles which answer the nagging question,

"What's a nice professor like you doing in a place like this?" Like more and more specialists in literary criticism in the world today, I believe that the professor's place is not only in the school, but also in the marketplace (where Socrates, after all, used to teach). Technocrats use the term "research dissemination," activists use "relevance," but I call it simply "duty." The professor-scholar-critic has the duty to apply the latest results of academic research to the art pieces that the masses of his countrymen recognize and appreciate — in our generation, films. Films are the most popular, most representative, probably most artistic art forms of our time.

The second part, "The Landscape of the Filipino Film," brings together reviews of movies which serve as a canvas against which our better films stand out like colors against darkness or gems against plain stones. It is better — says the old but still remarkable saying — to light a candle than to curse the darkness, but sometimes, it is necessary to curse the darkness, if only to remind ourselves that it indeed deserves to be cursed. Most of the films discussed in this second part are forgettable, but unless we remember them as we remember history's mistakes, we are bound to repeat them.

The third part, "A Gallery of Film Artists," pays tribute to our better directors, actors, and writers. While I have sometimes been particularly harsh with our leading filmmakers, I have never denied that they have what it takes to gain national and international recognition for their outstanding talents and achievements. Filipino films have long been entering international festivals, but it was only recently that foreign festival directors placed Manila in their obligatory list of places to recruit films from. Everyone knows that when Filipino films are bad, they are very, very bad, but too few people know that when our films are good, they are very, very good.

For convenience, I have classified the reviews in the third part alphabetically by filmmaker (mostly by director). An index to films and film artists can be found at the back of this book, for those who want to find out what I have written at various times on particular figures. Because I have been greatly impressed by Renato Constantino's editorial achievement in *Soliongco Today* (1981), I have followed his method of grouping items together primarily in terms of theme, rather than chronologically.

I wish to thank the Integrated Research Center of De La Salle University for giving me a grant to compile this work. I thank the editors of the following periodicals in which portions of this book were originally published: *Asiaweek*, *Diliman Review*, *Expressweek*, *Interlock*, *Observer*, *Panorama*, *Parade*, *Philippines Herald*, *Student Canteen Magazine*, *TV Parade*, *TV Times*, and *WHO*. "The Use of Film in the Teaching of Literature" was first published in *Proceedings of the 1980 CETA Convention* (College English Teachers Association, 1981). I am grateful to critic Mario A. Hernando (who first suggested this anthology), to the other members of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (whose fortnightly meetings have stimulated me since 1979), and to my wife Remedios Calma Cruz (who patiently and painstakingly saw this book through publication). Most of all, I wish to thank all those who argued with me, those who wrote letters to editors about me, those who wrote articles against me, even those who spread false rumors about me, because their actions proved, beyond any doubt, that in the uncritical world of Philippine cinema, critics do make a difference.

Isagani R. Cruz
Metro Manila, 1983

Introduction

Bienvenido Lumbera
Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino

Film reviewing in the Philippines is an unfortunately intermittent occupation at present. Therein lies a source of resentment against the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino as an organization with the avowed aim of alerting audiences to new films that deserve attention. Some filmmakers and their producers are understandably frustrated that reviews which get published come few and far between, reviewers being hampered by such factors as the reluctance of available outlets to print straightforward reviews, or the rigidity of the reviewers' schedule in the full-time job they are holding. In such a situation, one negative review published in a particular newspaper could put a film under a cloud at the start of its run, with no other (perhaps positive) review forthcoming from another critic, or if another does come, it might appear after the film's run is over.

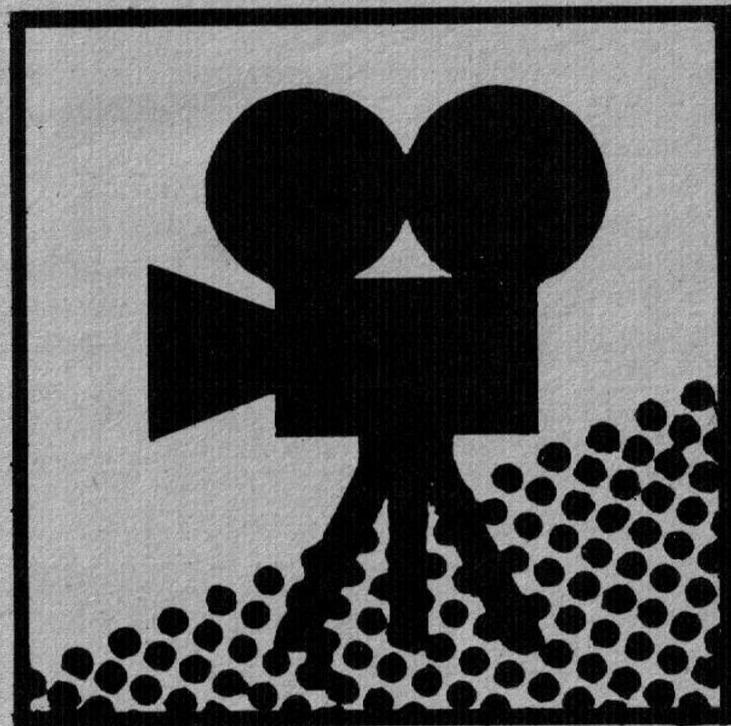
Much lamented as it might be, the situation is but inevitable for as long as film reviewing in this country can-

not as yet be a full-time, paying occupation. The economics and politics of publishing in an underdeveloped society such as ours have made it necessary for qualified intellectuals to hold jobs that might not utilize their full potential but nevertheless pay well. Thus, a film reviewer might earn his livelihood at some stable job (usually as teacher), writing his reviews during lulls in his schedule. Most often, however, his "sidelines" eat up those lulls, and the result is fewer and even no reviews. One wishes for a time when the entertainment sections of the national dailies would begin to employ as full-time journalists reviewers whose sole responsibility would be to watch films and write frankly about them. Until then (and from the looks of things, such a day will be a long time coming), one can only make do with the sporadic reviews that pass for film criticism in our time.

No other Manunuri since 1979 when he joined the MPP has been more prolific as a reviewer than Isagani R. Cruz. Into his film criticism, Cruz brings the best of recommendations. A passing resume of his academic background establishes the intellectual versatility that has thus far characterized Cruz's career. Armed with an excellent record as a physics major in the University of the Philippines, Cruz tried the priesthood after getting his undergraduate degree. It was as a Jesuit scholastic that he shone in his classes as an insightful critic while taking up graduate work in literary studies at the Ateneo de Manila University. Later, he was to decide to leave the religious life, turning to the theater which in the late 1960s was bouncing back to life at the impetus of the nationalist movement. He wrote two innovative Pilipino plays *Tao* and *Halimaw* and edited a book on Philippine theater, and then left for the United States to study literary criticism at the University of Maryland where he earned his Ph.D.

The seemingly boundless energy which Cruz has poured into his work since as a reviewer is reflected in this book of reviews. Because he reviewed films with reasonable regularity, Cruz has been the most exposed of the Manunuri to the tirades of those in the film industry resentful of any kind of adverse criticism. That he has dared to retain in this collection views originally expressed in reviews that were passionately assailed when they first appeared is a measure of Cruz's faith in what he is doing. "Criticism in an instant" is his own description of a review. The expression suggests the hazards that confront the reviewer each time he passes judgment on a film he has watched. Occasional sweeping generalizations that more reasoned reflection would have revealed as vulnerable, candid remarks about the work of a director or a performer that prove to be unduly cutting, reckless endorsement or dismissal of films viewed on the run — these are shortcomings that at one time or another have tripped Cruz in his race against deadlines. Cruz has gamely faced up to the poisoned remarks and letters that some of his reviews have drawn from his victims. And those of us who are zealous about the growth of the Filipino film industry are in his debt for such daring.

When film reviewing has ceased to be occasional journalism hereabouts, *Movie Times* will have become a landmark the new reviewers will look back to. Together, the reviews in this book document a chapter in Philippine film history with great verve and vitality. Because he wrote almost regularly about films as they passed through the Metro Manila theaters during their first run, Cruz in this book is able to give a vivid chronicle of the heights and depths of contemporary Philippine cinema, allowing us insights into the vagaries, vulgarities and when the occasion allows it, also the virtues of local filmmaking. This, it seems to me, is a reasonable enough justification for Cruz's theory that "criticism may indeed be written in a hurry."



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FILM IN THE MODERN FILIPINO WORLD

The feeling of actuality, the sense of resemblance to life without which there can be no art of the cinema, is not something elementary, provided by direct sense perception. Being a component part of a complex, artistic whole, it is facilitated by numerous ties with the artistic and cultural experience of society.

— Jurij Lotman, *Russian semiologist*

Movie critics have an advantage over critics in other fields: responsive readers. And it can help you to concentrate your energies if you know that the subject is fresh and that your reviews gain rather than lose from the speed and urgency of making deadlines and reaching the public before the verdicts are in on a film.

— Pauline Kael, *American film critic*

UNDERSTANDING MOVIES

What is a good movie?

A good movie has three things: technical excellence, literary value, and cinematic sense.

Technical Excellence

Technical excellence refers to the way the basic technical requirements of the film medium are met. The photography (technically known as *cinematography*), for example, must be exact; no shots should be out of focus, badly composed, or poorly lighted. When we see a painting in an art gallery, we do not expect to see the frame smudged with paint, the canvas full of the painter's fingerprints, the colors dripping down. When we listen to a symphony, we do not expect to hear improperly-tuned violins, pianos played by half-asleep pianists, conductors going to the bathroom in the middle of the concert. Similarly, in a good film, we do not want to see an empty screen (because the lighting is too dim), blurred figures, or actors with their heads chopped off by the edge of the screen.

In the same way, the technical art of *editing* must be exact. If the words are heard one split second before the actor opens his mouth, the editing is bad; we say that

such a movie is "out of synch." When a scene drags on three seconds after its point has been made, the editing is bad. When film strips are put together such that an actor suddenly shifts position, or a piece of furniture suddenly appears on screen, or the color of the background suddenly changes from bright red to dull green, the editing is bad. Just as we do not expect the sentences in a novel to be grammatically wrong, we do not want a movie to be badly edited.

Production design is another technical aspect of filmmaking. The production designer is in charge of making sure that the sets, the locations, the props, the make-up, and the costumes all belong to the period when the action of the movie is supposed to be happening. If the movie is set in the American period, for example, the cars should not be Toyotas. If the movie is set during the Second World War, nobody should be wearing denims. If the movie is set in Forbes Park, the actresses should not be wearing thick make-up or bright red lipstick. (All of these mistakes have been made by several Filipino moviemakers.) In short, because movies are usually realistic, everything in a movie should be realistic. There are exceptions, of course, especially in artsy-craftsy films, but there is no excuse for Amalia Fuentes, for example, looking young when she is supposed to be Fernando Poe, Jr.'s mother in Eddie Romero's *Aguila* (1980).

The other technical aspects of filmmaking which should be excellent in a good movie are directing, acting, scriptwriting (technically known as *screenwriting*), sound engineering, musical scoring, special effects, and title design. During the credits, for example, we expect to be able to read the names of the actors and the other filmmakers when these names are flashed on the screen. If the names are in yellow and the background is in yellow, the names disappear and we get eyestrain trying to

read the almost invisible credits; when such a thing happens, we say the movie is badly titled. (*STUDENT CANTEN MAGAZINE*, November, 1980, p. 39.)



Literary Value

Every good film begins with a good *screenplay*. This is an old rule that admits of only two or three exceptions. Most critics have pointed out that, given a good screenplay, a good director can make a great film. These same critics realize that, without a good screenplay, nobody—not even a great director—can make a good film. Just as the director is responsible for seeing to it that a film has technical excellence, the *screenwriter* is responsible for ensuring that a film has literary value.

What are the qualities of a good screenplay?

First of all, a screenplay must tell a story. This sounds rather obvious, but there are many local movies which do not tell a story. More precisely, they do not tell a *single* story. All great films tell stories. Some of them tell very complicated stories; others tell very simple stories. But all of them have some kind of story to tell.

Next time you're watching a movie, ask yourself the question: "Whose story is this film?" In other words, the film is about some person. Most films are about only one person; a few films (very few) are about two or three persons. Take the great Filipino film *Jaguar* (1979), directed

by Lino Brocka, the story of a security guard. Everything in the film contributes to the story of the guard. Even the story (called a *sub-plot*) of the prostitute is meant only to be a parallel of the guard's story.

Jaguar is one of the best films of the seventies; it is not surprising that it has literary value. But even a mediocre film such as Jett Espiritu's *The Quick Brown Fox* (1980) is about only one character, in this case the thief (played by Dolphy). Everyone else in the film, even Nida Blanca, is a supporting actor or actress.

There are films, of course, which are exceptions. Take Ishmael Bernal's *City After Dark* (1980), formerly *Manila by Night*, written by Bernal himself. This film tells the stories of several people, but the people are all of the same type. The film is the story of only one kind of person—the night person of Manila. It may be said that the different characters all portray facets of one personality—the Manileño. Films such as *Manila by Night*, however, are very few. Most films are like Eddie Romero's *Aguila*, which tells the story of only one man named Aguila despite the large number of major stars in that film.

Since a film is the story of one person, it follows that the second quality of a good screenplay is good characterization. The major character, also called the protagonist, should be fully explored. We should know what kind of a person he is, how different he is from the other characters, how alike he is to real-life people. We should not have the feeling that he is stereotyped; on the contrary, we should almost mistake him for a real individual. Take the homosexual in *Manila by Night*, for example. We like him when he helps the blind masseuse, but we hate him when he uses his money to lure boys to his bed. He is manipulative; at the same time, he is warm. He would be nice to know as a friend, but we

would always be suspicious of him. In short, this character is complex.

Similarly, in *Jaguar*, the guard is complex. We sympathize with his attempt to rise above his class, but we cannot condone his pretenses. We pity him when he is forced to shoot his boss' enemy, and yet we know that it is his ambition which has put him in that situation in the first place. When he wears an expensive shirt and pretends to be one of the disco set while his family is starving, we feel repelled by him. *Jaguar* is an anti-rich film, but it is not pro-poor.

Plot and *character* are the two literary values that we look for in a film. The plot must be credible, logical, flawless straightforward, easy to follow. The character must be credible, complex, sympathetic, human, consistent. One of the qualities of both plot and character is *conflict*. The plot must revolve around some kind of conflict facing the main character.

The main character may be facing a conflict of *man against man*. In Romy Suzara's *Sa Init ng Apoy* (1980), for example, the main character faces a supernatural enemy. Another kind of conflict is *man against his environment*. There is a little bit of this in *Jaguar*, because the guard there fights Tondo. The third kind of conflict pits *man against himself*. Maryo de los Reyes' *Gabun* (1979), for instance, shows the main character torn to pieces by his having two families.

Next time you watch a film, then, ask first the basic question: does the film have technical excellence? If the answer is yes, then ask the next question: whose story is being told? Does the film have literary value? (STUDENT CANTEEN MAGAZINE, December, 1980, p. 16.)

Cinematic Sense

Even if a film is technically excellent and even if it has an impressive screenplay, it cannot be called a good film if it does not have cinematic values. By this, I mean that a good film must communicate something to the viewer through the various resources of cinema.

In Ishmael Bernal's *City After Dark*, for example, there is a shot of Alma Moreno, in her all-white nurse's uniform, walking down a dark street. She passes a garbage dump truck, with the garbage collectors busy at their task of cleaning up the street. This particular shot is cinematic, because it says something to the viewer. It says, first, that Manila is a city full of contrasts: the whiteness of the uniform with the blackness of the night, the cleanliness of the nurse with the dirtiness of the garbage collectors, the brisk pace of Moreno as she walks by and the unhurried movements of the collectors. The shot says, secondly, that Manila is a city full of pretenses. Moreno in the film is a prostitute passing herself off as a nurse; her nurse's uniform is a kind of whitened sepulcher. The garbage collectors appear to be serious at their task, but their truck is already full. That means they cannot possibly clean up the entire street. They are ineffective garbage collectors.

In Marilou Diaz Abaya's *Brutal* (1980), the opening shows Amy Austria being brought out of the apartment where she has just killed her husband Jay Ilagan and his two gangmates. The camera follows the police jeep which has rushed to the scene of the crime. Going above the heads of the people in the crowd which has gathered

in front of the apartment, the camera shows Austria being practically carried to the jeep. The shot—a continuous one—tells the viewer immediately what is happening: Austria is in a state of shock. She is not going to talk about the crime. We have to find out about the crime from other sources.

In Lino Brocka's *Bona* (1980), the final sequence is a masterpiece. Nora Aunor, finally coming to her senses, takes a pot of boiling water and scalds (by implication, blinds, maybe even kills) her erstwhile idol Phillip Salvador. Brocka uses slow motion, in order to capture all the nuances of Aunor's face as she explodes in a mixture of rage, frustration, and hate. By stopping the action every so often during the sequence, Brocka manages to get the audience also to feel Aunor's anger. The revenge comes even more sweetly because throughout the film, water has been used to oppress Aunor. Once the person forced to fetch water for Salvador and to bathe him even, Aunor now becomes a dark avenger. It is a powerful sequence, one of Brocka's best. (The film, however, is far from being Brocka's best.)

Cinematic values, then, reside in the director's ability to integrate sight and sound, visual image and sense, plot and meaning. If a film merely tells a story, we say it is as good as a novel or a play. If the film merely manages to have technical competence, we say it is all right as a film, but not necessarily worth seeing. But if a film, aside from being technically precise and logically told, excites the viewer's imagination through its use of the camera, then we say that it is a good film.

Good films, however, are not necessarily great films. There are very few great films, just as there are very few great novels or great plays. Great films have scope and grandeur, insight and inspiration, aside from the three

qualities of good films. Sooner or later, we shall have our great Filipino film. But meanwhile, let us at least do good films. Put another way, let us watch only the good films and refuse to pay good money to watch bad Filipino films. That is the only way our movie industry will respect our tastes. (*STUDENT CANTEEN MAGAZINE, January, 1981, p. 41.*)



Rudy Fernandez faces a supernatural enemy in *Sa Init ng Apoy*.

BOOKS ON FILMS

The second book in the Teach Yourself series published by the Communication Foundation for Asia, entitled *Writing for Film* (1982), a slim volume by Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr., promises to be heavily influential in the development of Filipino screenwriting. After all, it is the first and only book of its kind ever published locally. It is also written by a multi-awarded writer, who is not only the author of several distinguished screenplays (including *Maynila ... sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, *Itim*, *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* and *Kisapmata*), but also an academically trained film critic (he holds a master's degree in film from the University of Kansas).

Writing for Film shows the beginning writer how to fulfill his long-cherished dream of gaining fame and fortune through the movies. The book first establishes the necessity of thinking in filmic terms. Defining film as "a story told in moving images," Del Mundo insists that the writer understand his medium. Film is made up not of words, but of "image, movement, sound, and editing." Despite the need for words in actually writing the screenplay, the writer must subordinate verbal language

to cinematic language. "If you can show it," argues Del Mundo, "why say it?"

Crucial to the film, says Del Mundo, is character. Character is "the key" to story, dialogue, and structure. One should start with character, insists Del Mundo: "Character provides the story; character projects a need which moves the screenplay forward." Similarly, "dialogue (or no dialogue) does not merely move the story forward; it reveals character." Even the structure of a film is "rooted in character." It is not surprising, therefore, that of the ten chapters in the book, four are devoted to character (two others to the introductory description of the film medium, three to techniques for selling a screenplay, and one to advice from filmmakers). Character is the meat of his book.

One cannot teach writing, says an old anti-academic adage, but del Mundo certainly tries. By encouraging thinking about the character first, Del Mundo ensures that the aspiring screenwriter will be on the right track. One can go wrong any number of ways, but there are less ways to go wrong if one starts out right. Similarly, by concentrating on the essentials of screenwriting rather than on details, Del Mundo manages to give the impression that writing is not that hard (an important incentive for the beginning writer).

Besides the clear guidelines for logical writing, Del Mundo offers generous examples from his own work, as well as from other local or foreign screenplays. Notable among his examples are excerpts from *Batch '81*, the storyline of which he reprints. There are also well-chosen excerpts from Ishmael Bernal's *City After Dark*, Ricardo Lee and Jose Lacaba's *Jaguar*, Lee's *Brutal*, and Marina Feleo-Gonzalez's *Ang Alamat ni Julian Makabayan*. Of course, as in any other book on screenwriting, there are excerpts from foreign screenplays,

such as *Citizen Kane*, *Chinatown*, *The 400 Blows*, and *Wild Strawberries*.

Despite its excellence, the book could have been even more useful if it had added certain features. For instance, a sample page from a screenplay (photographed from an actual script) would have been extremely helpful. Del Mundo also mentions "a standard format of the contract between writer and producer" that the Philippine Screenwriters Guild uses. Such a contract should have been reprinted in the book. Although Del Mundo correctly advises the writer not to use technical terms, photographs illustrating the most useful terms should have been included. For example, shots showing the difference between a long shot and a close-up would be useful to many writers who still think of these words in absolute terms (the words are used relatively, such as "the close-up of a building" and "the long shot of a man"). The glossary in the book, although helpful, is sometimes too abstract or too technical.

A book on how to write for film has long been needed in our country. Some local writers still write as though they were in Hollywood, with all the sophisticated machinery that makes American movies look so easy. Some writers, on the other hand, still write as though our filmmakers are all ex-komiks illustrators who have never experimented with even the primitive equipment we now have. The virtue of *Writing for Film* is that it insists that local writers follow the American model of writing films with a three-act structure (borrowed by Del Mundo from Syd Field's *Screenplay* (1979), as he himself acknowledges), but at the same time cautions against ignoring the realities of our local motion picture industry. (OBSERVER, February 14, 1982, pp. 29-30.)



"You know how very few young minds survive the pressures of show business," a worried Carmen Soriano confides to Emmie G. Velarde, as they talk about Lloyd Samartino. The statement comes as no surprise to Velarde, who has heard the same sentiment expressed in various ways by most of the show business personalities she has interviewed. In fact, if there is a common theme running through the interviews collected in *All-Star Cast* (Cine Gang, 1981), it is the theme of survival.

How do the stars survive in the jungle of show business? Velarde inevitably focuses on that central question. The answers she gets are as different as the stars themselves.

Nora Aunor, for instance, periodically "shuts off the whole world to be mother and playmate to her kids." Pilar Pilapil does either of two extremes: she either really keeps busy ("I get busy in my little garden. I go shopping. I go marketing. I even go to Divisoria alone.") or remains completely idle ("...just lock myself up and do nothing, not even think"). Rudy Fernandez has a simple solution: "I often take cold water first thing in the

morning. They say it builds up the stomach resistance to stress." Fernandez has a less physical, more psychological defense mechanism: he is a master in what Velarde calls "defensive rapping."

Dina Bonnevie reads *MAD* comic/books; she also listens to relaxing music. Al Tantay keeps "a safe, uninvolved distance" between himself and the world of make-believe. Lorna Tolentino shuns pretending, resolving to "just be myself." Gina Alajar cannot survive without her friend Perla Bautista, neither can Eddie Rodriguez remain afloat without Carmen Soriano. The APO play a constant game with each other, always putting each other down, therefore always putting each other up. Edu Manzano claims he learned survival tactics from Vilma Santos, who has "patience and subtlety." But the final word seems to have been spoken by two survivors: Tirso Cruz III suggests that one should "yield, make things easy on yourself. Don't rush. Cool it." Jay Ilagan agrees; he thinks people should be able to say of you, "Wow, this guy, cool na cool, kahit na heavy na pala ang situation."

In the world of "star eats star," the young learn quickly. Maricel Soriano, for instance, knows what it takes to grow old being a star: "*Kung gusto mong mag-survive, dapat alam mo kung ano talaga ang pakay mo, at dapat, lalaban ka.*" To fight—that is the secret of survival. Those who were intimidated too soon are no longer around. Those who hoped for too much are gone. Those who have remained are hard, realistic, and alone. Fernando Poe, Jr., the longest and most successful of the survivors, is described by Velarde with the most flattering words she can put together. Poe is the "acknowledged maestro at keeping mum."

Most interviews of movie stars find the reader merely being told all sorts of things he already knows. Not Velarde's interviews. There are all kinds of facets that

Velarde reveals about our stars which we never knew existed. Aunor for instance, turns out to be a real mother to her children. Poe turns out to be a literate person who can quote "The Rubaiyat" in the same breath as talking about his latest leading lady. Chanda Romero acquires her interests (poetry, photography) from her lovers. Unlike Pilapil who ignores "nearly everything written about her", Jose Quirino loves even his detractors: "When they throw stones at me, I should join them in throwing stones at JQ. That way, they'd talk more about me. You see, it's hard to be Number One."

The most enjoyable interviews in *All-Star Cast* are those in which Velarde succeeds in gaining the complete trust of her interviewee. The interviews of Nora Aunor, J.Q., Rudy Fernandez, Fernando Poe, Jr., the APO Hiking Society, and Maricel Soriano, for instance, are especially delightful. Only once or twice is Velarde forced to use secondary sources for her articles (the Julie Vega interview, for example, is a disaster). In almost all the interviews in *All-Star Cast*, the star opens up to Velarde, and through Velarde's lucid prose, to us.

All-Star Cast is only the second book published by Cine Gang (the first was *Brutal/Salome*), but already, Cine Gang has shown a fine sense for marketability and inherent value. Perhaps, however, in their next book, Cine Gang will pay more attention to such irritating errors as forgetting to place the original publication dates of Velarde's essays, retaining such useless phrases as "which opened two weeks ago in Metro theaters," and allowing a few typographical errors to remain uncorrected. Nevertheless, *All-Star Cast* clearly deserves an all-star billing. (*OBSERVER*, January 24, 1982, p. 29.)



What is a screenplay? In his book *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (Dell, 1979), Syd Field answers this question simply: "A screenplay is a story told with pictures."

Field should know. Before he wrote this excellent book, he read more than 2,000 screenplays. Out of these screenplays, he recommended only 40 for possible production to his bosses at Cinemobile. Out of these 40 screenplays came such movies as *The Godfather*, *Jeremiah Johnson*, and *Deliverance*. Clearly, Field not only knows what he is talking about, but actually was in a position to back his opinions with money. (When Cinemobile started to make movies, it had 10 million dollars earmarked for production.)

The book is useful not only to those who are dreaming of a screenwriting career in Hollywood, but—in the local context—especially to those who write for Philippine movies. The more you read this book, the more you will realize that, as far as screenwriting is concerned, Filipino writers are still in kindergarten. Only two or three of our local writers (Ricardo Lee and Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr.,

perhaps only a couple more) have an idea how to write screenplays. Most Filipino screenplays are short stories in dialogue form, plays with camera instructions, writing exercises put one after another, or—worse—simply sequence guides. Hardly anybody in the local industry can tell a real screenplay from a *komiks* novel.

If a screenplay is nothing else but a story told with pictures, what is a good screenplay? Field says that the answer is obvious. "When you read a good screenplay, you know it—it's evident from page one. The style, the way the words are laid out on the page, the way the story is set up, the grasp of dramatic situation, the introduction of the main character, the basic premise or problem of the screenplay—it's all set up in the first few pages of the script."

Field has several more, actually a lot more, of these theoretical principles waiting in store for the screenwriter. He has a theory, for instance, that almost all the screenplays filmed in the last decade by Hollywood follow a certain outline. This outline is similar to the outline of a theatrical three-act play. Briefly summarized, a screenplay consists of three main parts: the beginning or set-up, the middle or confrontation, and the end or resolution. The three acts are separated by two "plot points," i.e., points at which the story spins around into another direction.

Such theorizing, however, would be valueless if Field does not give lots of examples, and this he does. He gives numerous examples (complete with pages from the pertinent screenplays) from such films as *Star Wars*, *Carrie*, *Annie Hall*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Bullitt*, and *M*A*S*H*. In fact, if you studiously follow the directions in the book, you will be writing screenplays in no time. Here, you will find all the technical vocabulary you need (there is not much jargon actually expected of the screenwriter), all the models you need (there is an excellent ex-

cerpt from *Silver Streak*, for example), and all the confidence you need (to write a screenplay, all you really need is alertness to your own experiences).

Here's an example of the kind of thing the book offers. Field, in this example, is explaining what a "sequence" is. "Remember the 'party' sequence in *Midnight Cowboy*? Dustin Hoffman and Jon Voight decide to go to a party. They find the apartment, walk up the stairs, and enter. The party is in full swing, bizarre, unreal. They mingle, exchange words with several people. Jon Voight meets Brenda Vaccaro, Dustin Hoffman leaves, and Jon Voight goes home with Brenda Vaccaro. Beginning, middle, and end." From the example, Field draws the principle: every sequence has a beginning, middle and end. That is the kind of thing one learns reading this book. It is the kind of thing most of our local screenwriters have never learned. (*PARADE*, August 24, 1980, p. 11.)

YEARS IN REVIEW

1971

Once a year, during the awards night of the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences (FAMAS), Philippine movie producers, directors, actors, and personnel remember that film is not only an industry, but also an art. So much has been said about the commercialism ingrained in our local film industry that the twentieth FAMAS awarding ceremonies at the Manila Hilton should not be looked at merely as a welcome breather from the usual gossip sessions about movie personalities, but also as the continuation of a praiseworthy tradition.

Lilet (Velarde and Associates), directed by Gerry de Leon, won the award for Best Picture. It also won the awards for Best Director, Best Actress, Best Color Cinematography, and Best Musical Score. Also nominated for Best Picture were two socially-conscious films, *Asedillo* (FPJ Productions) and *Hukom Eitay* (Trans-Asia Films). The inclusion of these films indicates a healthy desire among filmmakers to make the film industry share in the rising politicalization of the country.

Although the FAMAS gave the limelight to Fernando

Poe, Jr., and Celia Rodriguez for their achievements in acting, the 1971 FAMAS awards are especially significant in the light of the influx of fresh young talent into the movie industry. Two young directors did not make it this year. There were Lino Brocka, nominated for *Stardoom* (LEA Productions), and Ishmael Bernal, nominated for *Pagdating sa Dulo* (Frankessa Films).

Brocka, who paved the way for the entrance of young talents into the industry, was nominated for the wrong film. *Lumuha Pati mga Anghel* (LEA Productions), which he also directed, was nominated for Best Picture. If Brocka had been nominated for *Lumuha Pati mga Anghel*, he would have given Gerry de Leon a good fight for the directorial award. In *Lumuha Pati mga Anghel*, Brocka shows his skill in editing and lighting. The film is probably Brocka's best work so far, even overshadowing the classic *Santiago* in tightness and overall design. It is also in *Lumuha Pati mga Anghel* that Brocka proves his thesis that a good director can bring out a splendid performance from unsuspected talents. Awardees Marissa Delgado, Lorna Tolentino, and Arnold Gamboa are all at their best in *Lumuha Pati mga Anghel*.

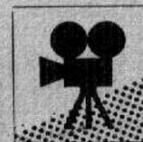
Bernal's *Pagdating sa Dulo* (Best Screenplay and Best Editing awards) is too advanced for the FAMAS members to have won the Best Picture award. Bernal uses French techniques in editing, underground movie techniques in plot construction, and some other tricks he learned abroad. Unfortunately for him, many movie fans are still of the opinion that a good film is simply a good story, with a lot of poetic language and mood music thrown in for good measure.

All in all, the 1971 FAMAS awards for Best Picture and Best Director show that our standard-makers are aware that new techniques and new themes are now called for (explaining the nominations given to new directors and

new companies and the conscious playing down of the superstars), but these standard-makers are still wary of abandoning the traditional Filipino norm of entertainment and profit before relevance and experiment. That FAMAS chose the old master Gerry de Leon who, unlike the proverbial old dog, has learned some new tricks, shows the curious but cautious attitude that prevails among the less mercenary of our film standard-setters. (PHILIPPINES HERALD, April 19, 1972, pp. 16-17).



Hilda Koronel — a favorite of film buffs in Europe.



1979

Christmas is the season for counting our blessings, and the biggest blessing in sight for the ailing local movie industry is the participation of Lino Brocka's *Jaguar* (1979) in Cannes. *Insiang* (1976), of course, already introduced Brocka to the international film community, but *Jaguar*—hailed as one of the ten best Filipino films of the seventies, perhaps of all time—should establish him as one of the best film directors in the world.

1979 was not a bad year for Philippine cinema abroad. Mike de Leon's *Itim* (1976), for example, was well received at three festivals: the Sydney Asian Film Festival in July, the Edinburgh Film Festival in August, and the Locarno Film Festival in September.

Fr. Nick Cruz, S.J., recently told me about the 28th Mannheim Film Festival, held October, 1979, in Mannheim, West Germany, to which he was the lone Southeast Asian delegate. Fr. Nick, who was my classmate in Lamberto Avellana's film class at the Ateneo a long time ago (a class which also included Laurice Guillen—how's that for name-dropping?), is now Professor of Film Theory and Production at the Ateneo and at Maryknoll.

He has a degree in cinematography from the London Film School.

In Mannheim, at a study group attended by directors, producers, journalists, distributors, and filmologists from eight countries, Fr. Nick read a paper entitled "The Starts and Perspectives in the Young Film-Countries: Hongkong, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Sri-Lanka." Other speakers included the internationally-known Indian director Mrinal Sen, the German television director Heinz Ungureit, and Basu Battaacharya, current president of the Indian Directors' Union.

The good news that Fr. Nick brought home is that, of the twenty-five Asian films shown during the Festival, six were chosen to be distributed in the Federal Republic of Germany. Of these six, three are Filipino: Brocka's *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975), Brocka's *Insiang* (1976), Eddie Romero's *Ganito Kami Noon, Papaano Kayo Ngayon* (1976).

Fr. Nick recalled how the three films were given standing ovations by the largely German audiences. Hilda Koronel, as in Cannes, became an instant favorite. In many film circles in Europe, according to Fr. Nick, Brocka is now being called the new Satyajit Ray. To anyone who knows Ray, this is a big compliment; Ray is often mentioned in the same breath as Kazin, Hitchcock, and Welles. I am not sure, however, that Brocka—who deals with larger social problems than Ray does—feels comfortable being compared to the great Indian director. Fr. Nick also mentioned that the only Asian film shown on German television so far is *Perfumed Nightmare*, directed by Kidlat Tahimik, a Filipino.

One conclusion reached by the delegates to the Mannheim study group was that "Asian films should not adjust to Western taste and standards." "Genuine Asian cultures and peoples should be projected through Asian

films." The study group apparently felt that there is something Asian in Asian films, that whatever this something is should not be lost in the expected drive to be commercially successful in Europe. An example of an Asian quality that the study group members observed, according to Fr. Nick, is "the peculiar narrative style and structure and length of Asian films in general."

Now, I don't know exactly what the Mannheim delegates or Fr. Nick meant by this particular conclusion, but I certainly have a few thoughts about it. Despite the scientific experiments which tend to prove that films are culture-bound, that certain visual images make sense only to certain groups of people, there is a lingering suspicion that, in film, man has discovered a universal language. Kurosawa may be understood completely only by Japanese audiences, but a film by Kurosawa, even in Japanese, still makes some kind of sense to a non-Japanese viewer. Verbal language, in other words, is secondary in film; the visual language of the camera and the editor, not to mention the body language of the actors and the musical language of the scorer, is apparently universal.

Arguments about the role of culture-bound verbal language in film have moved back and forth for some time now. The Swedish director Vilgot Sjoman for example, student of Ingmar Bergman and director of *I am Curious-Yellow*, said in a recent lecture at U.P. that the best parts of a film occur when the actors are not speaking and there are only sound effects or music being heard. Many film scholars still think that some of the best films of all time were silent movies. Charlie Chaplin, in some surveys of critical opinion, is still considered the best film director ever, despite the fact that he worked primarily only on silent films.

What is Asian about Asian films? What is Filipino

about Filipino films? If film is indeed a universal language, if Marshall McLuhan is right about the world having shrunk into a "global village," should we be looking for regional values in a universal medium? Satjayit Ray is interesting to me because I can relate to the situations he depicts in his films. I need not be an Indian to appreciate Ray; Ray need not be an Indian to produce in me a receptive reaction.

In the same way, Brocka should not be viewed as a great director because he is Asian. He should be judged as a director *period*. In other words, if he is really good, he should be as good as Chaplin, Kurosawa, Woody Allen, or George Roy Hill. If *Jaguar* is good (and I believe it is), then it should not be just a good *Filipino* film, nor just a good *Asian* film, but a good *film*. We should not make allowances for Brocka because he is working with untrained actors, uninspired scriptwriters, obsolete cameras, inadequate budgets, and unsympathetic producers.

Come to think of it, this Christmas, as with many recent Christmases, it isn't so easy just to count our blessings. (TV TIMES, December 23-29, 1979, p. 9)



1980

1980 was not a good year for Philippine movies. Agrix, which was doing good films, fell. Premiere tried to regain its former status as the country's producer of quality films, but failed with *Gabi ng Lagim Ngayon*. Regal continued to ignore quality, though it did produce the uncharacteristically good *City After Dark*. Former power LVN returned with *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?*, but the film did not make it at the box-office. The best producer of the year was Bancom Audiovision, which brought out *Aguila*, *Palaban*, *Pag-ibig na Walang Dangal*, and *Brutal*, four of the year's best. The taste of the local audience did not change from that of previous years: among the top grossers were the comedy *John & Marsha*, the action flick *Kalibre 45*, and the sex film *Under-age*.

The top directors did not produce their best work in 1980, except perhaps Ishmael Bernal, whose *City After Dark*, however, suffered from heavy censorship. Lino Brocka was disappointing in *Angela Markado* and *Nakaw na Pag-ibig*; so was Celso Ad. Castillo, who took all year to finish *Uhaw na Dagat*. Eddie Romero returned with *Aguila*, but his son Joey Romero's first film *Iwahig*

was a disaster. Maryo de los Reyes started the year right with *Apat na Maria*, but ended up doing disco potboilers. Among the new directors, the most successful was Marilou Diaz-Abaya, whose two films (*Tanikala* and *Brutal*) earned critical raves. The least successful was Christian Espiritu (*Alaga*). Laurice Guillen's first film *Kasal* was excellent, but her second film *Kung Ako'y Iiwan Mo* disappointed even her friends. An old director who returned was Mario O'Hara, whose *Kastilyong Buhangin* made a serious actor out of action star Lito Lapid.

Although the industry made more films in 1980 than in 1979, there were not many good ones. The best films of the year were: Ishmael Bernal's *City After Dark* (Regal), Mike de Leon's *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* (LVN), Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Brutal* (Bancom), Eddie Romero's *Aguila* (Bancom), and Laurice Guillen's *Kasal* (Trigon, formerly Agrix's). Among the worst films of year were *Makamandag na Rosas*, *Alaga*, and *Iskul Bukol*. (TV TIMES, December 28, 1980 - January 3, 1981, pp. 10-11.)



1981

It's almost the end of another year, and it's time once again to add up the pluses and the minuses of the local motion picture industry.

Clearly the newsmaker of the year was the formation of the Filipino Motion Pictures Development Board (Film Board, for short), the first comprehensive organization of movie people in 72 years of local moviemaking. Organized through the singlehanded efforts of Marichu Vera Perez Maceda and under the patronage of the First Lady, the Film Board is now fully operational, at least as far as two of its four branches are concerned—the Film Fund (which has funded three film projects and started work on several more) and the Film Academy (which has brought together most movie artists under various guilds). The other two branches still have to be fully organized—the Film Archives (to be housed in the ill-fated Film Center in the CCP complex) and the Board of Standards (still to be constituted, though President Ferdinand E. Marcos has announced that it will replace the incumbent Interim Board of Censors for Motion Pictures).

Another newsmaker, but not directly beneficial to the local movie industry, was Manila '81, a dress rehearsal of sorts for the coming International Film Festival. Although the foreign delegates to Manila '81 had no chance to see local films (that's what delegate Mel Tobias of Hongkong complained about), the international film event at least gave local movie personalities a chance to converse with some foreign producers.

The year clearly belonged to local directors. The Directors' Guild was the most active of all the guilds in the Academy, sponsoring seminars and film showings, even flexing its collective muscle by deciding to boycott rising star Gabby Concepcion. The biggest director of the year was Romy Suzara, whose films not only hit the jackpot at the box office, but even earned him a citation from the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (for *Pepeng Shotgun*). Of the new directors, Mel Chionglo (*Playgirl*) was clearly outstanding, although Diego Cagahastian (*Kambal sa Baril*) showed a lot of promise. Standing out as a director was Laurice Guillen, whose *Salome* not only got critics' raves, but who also found herself at the forefront of a battle with her line producer, Armida Siguion-Reyna of Bancom Audiovision.

Abroad, local films made some kind of splash, despite the poor showing of Lino Brocka's *Bona* in Cannes. *Bona* itself eventually made it to the London Film Festival. The Festival of Three Continents in France exhibited several local films. *Variety*, the bible of the international film industry, reviewed at least three local films: *Bona* ("a flawless visual style"), Ishmael Bernal's *City After Dark* ("The Philippines has finally made a film for the world market"), and Suzara's *I Confess* ("more of a Hollywood film than a typical local feature").

The lifting of martial law removed the legal restraints on publishing new magazines. As a result, numerous

movie magazines (with varying life spans) flooded the market. One short-lived paper, *Interlock*, could have been the first trade journal of the industry (it was patterned after *Variety*), but competition from the gossip-oriented fanzines quickly killed it.

The big controversies of the year had far-reaching implications for the future of the movie industry. The first was the quarrel between Guillen and Siguion-Reyna (resulting in two versions of *Salome*). The second was the quarrel between director Marilou Diaz-Abaya and actor Concepcion (leading to the boycott of the star and the probable eventual demolition of the star system). The third was the entrance of the film censors into print media, with the magazines insisting that print (especially nude and semi-nude photographs of bold actresses) should not be the concern of the Board of Censors, and the censors insisting that all movie-related photographs are subject to their censorship. The fourth was the power struggle between movie theatre owners (who formed a third association late in the year) and videotape sellers-renters (this controversy ended up in court). Not as dispassionate as the first four, but still a controversy, was the legal action of some movie stars against some movie reporters; libel suits became fashionable.

Whether the controversies will have lasting effects remains to be seen, but one thing is certain: 1981 had a lot of bad things going against it. For one, the box office collapsed: there were less big money-makers this year than in previous years (whether that was due to the quality of the movies or to the over-all economic slump in the country is not known). For another thing, various innovations backfired, such as forcing young stars to sing (almost all of them cannot hold a note), airing relatively recent films on television, and mounting expensive television promotional campaigns. Talk shows on the movies generally ended up as visual equiva-

lents to the gossip magazines (though two—*Tonight at the Movies* and *Let's Talk Movies*—attempted serious stuff). The Good Harvest philosophy of quickie pictures did the most harm, since it accustomed the public to bad movies. The biggest loss of all was the death of Gerry de Leon; also a loss was the mysterious death of screenwriter Enrique Dimacali.

In terms of the films themselves, 1981 was a very bad year. There were very few good films. Offhand, these were the films that mattered: *Salome*, *Pabling*, *Playgirl*, *Kontrobersyal*, *Uhaw na Dagat*, *Bakit Bughaw ang Langit*, *Ako ang Hari*, *Pepeng Shotgun*, *Pakawalan Mo Ako*, *Kumander Alibasbas*, *Burgis*, and *Hiwalay* (of course, the Metro Manila Film Festival films are not yet accounted for here). Of these, only *Salome*, in my opinion, is of international caliber. (*TV TIMES*, December 20-26, 1981, p. 6.)



1982

In Ishmael Bernal's *Himala*, a young filmmaker (played by Spanky Manikan) comes to record the *himala* or miracle that is happening not only to the lead character (played by Nora Aunor), but to the small town itself. Not a believer in God or in miracles, the filmmaker accidentally records on film something that can destroy the credibility of the lead character. Since he believes only in the truth that his camera records, the filmmaker faces a dilemma: shall he show the film or not? Shall he tell the truth or not? Does the truth really set man free?

The local film industry today faces a similar dilemma. Attacked on all sides by unsympathetic people, local filmmakers cannot decide whether their films will portray reality as they see it, or simply allow millions of viewers to escape reality. The dilemma may be put as a question of semantics; will our local industry make *films* or will they make mere *movies*?

Those who opt to make films have a difficult time with the year-old Board of Review for Motion Pictures and Television, known—to the dismay of its members—as the Censors. The Censors face a damned-if-you-do

and damned-if-you-don't situation: no matter what parts of a film they cut or do not cut, there are always outsiders who think they goofed. Censor Zeny Flores recounts how Chairman Maria Kalaw Katigbak got phone calls from irate, holier-than-thou citizens protesting the way students and teachers in school are portrayed as sex maniacs in the foreign film *Private Lessons*. Anyone who has seen this movie, of course, knows that there are no students nor teachers in it, since it is not about a school at all. Holier-than-thou citizens usually speak before they view. (One recalls the similar incident at the Batasang Pambansa when an assemblyman speaking against the BBC documentary on the Philippines was forced to admit, upon interrogation, that he had not yet seen the film.)

Not all irate calls, however, are ignored by Katigbak. Flores, in a speech at the First National Film Market on November 20, 1982, claims that Katigbak, on her own initiative, orders cuts in films already showing in moviehouses, even after these films have been approved by the Board. While she may, technically, have the power to do such a thing, Katigbak—by such action—clearly throws doubt on the competence of her fellow Censors.

Those who opt to make mere movies are not exempt from hassles. Their problem comes from their attempt to be entertaining. What really entertains local viewers? There are as many theories as there are theaters. Some say pretty, young faces, but films with Regal babies don't really make that much money. (It is only because Regal also has extensive theater holdings that it earns; it does not have to share its film earnings with theater owners.) One successful local producer, for instance, laughs off the fame of the Regal babies as "movie magazine fame" but not "box-office fame."

Others say pure action. It is true that the less dialogue a

film has, the more likely it will be understood by provincial audiences (who are not, despite propaganda by the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa, native speakers of Tagalog). One kind of film that does not need words is the action film, where the most meaningful sound uttered is the "hai" accompanying the karate chop. At one time, action stars such as Rey Malonzo and Lito Lapid were reputed to earn more than the word-oriented Nora Aunor. The acknowledged king of the box-office both in Manila and the provincial circuits, in fact, is action star Fernando Poe, Jr. Ramon Revilla's reputation as a box-office draw comes mostly from the provinces, and even non-action-star Dolphy always makes sure that his films end in action scenes.

Still others say the star system. It was once a general belief that, if you put Dolphy in front of the camera for two hours, you will have a box-office hit. But Dolphy has had his share of flops. Vaunted stars Vilma Santos, Niño Muhlach, and Alma Moreno can no longer make films on the strength of their names. Only Poe is still relatively a magic name, but his films—if you study them—are generally technically excellent. If we do have a star system, it is clearly not foolproof.

In the end, moviemakers end up saying that sex sells pictures. But the Censors—bless their souls—unite whenever that three-letter word is uttered. Any nudity on screen is automatically regarded as malicious unless proven otherwise. On some (rare) enlightened days, however, the Censors ask what relevance the nudity has to the film. *Ang Babae sa Ulog* (1981), for instance, cannot avoid nudity because it deals with ethnic women who happen not to think that their breasts are occasions of sin.

It would be wrong, however, to think that the only obstacle to a thriving motion picture industry is the Board

of Review. The Censors are a formidable obstacle, but they are just one in the gauntlet of "masters," as *Batch '81* would put it, that the neophyte filmmaker has to run. A bigger obstacle is the government itself, which refuses to ease the taxes imposed on the industry.

Johnny Litton, who runs the annual Manila International Film Festival (MIFF), raises his hands in helplessness as he notes that 40 to 45 per cent of the gross income of a filmmaker goes to the government. A long-standing sore spot is the flood tax. "Only theaters pay flood tax," grimaces Litton, "but don't all the stores along Avenida Rizal get flooded?" Early this year, hopes rose when the First Lady promised to see what she could do about the taxes, but like many bright moments in the life of the film industry, this one did not last.

The general economic situation has affected the movie industry so much that, for the first time in the recent past, the number of local films produced has gone down. Marichu Maceda, president of the Philippine Motion Pictures Producers Association (PMPPA), attributes the decline to censorship uncertainties during the first quarter of 1982 (the "slump," as it is now called). But just as important a cause is the general rise in prices of things needed by the film industry. The power bill of Avenue Theater, for instance, rose from P5,000 to P76,000 a month recently, primarily because of energy taxes (the consumption of the theater having remained the same). The cost of print advertising (hooked to the cost of newspaper) has risen from P10 to P54 per column inch. We do not even have to speak of imported materials, which become more expensive the more the peso plunges. "In 1950," says Maceda, "a film cost P50,000 to produce, while an orchestra ticket cost P1.20. In 1982, an average film costs two to three million to produce, but the orchestra ticket has risen only to P5." Anyone with a cal-

culator can see that income has not kept up with the expenses.

In the past year, of course, a few attempts to light a candle instead of merely cursing the darkness have been made. The Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP) is the most promising, because it promises censorship-free films made with relatively huge budgets. *Himala*, one of its first two products, is clearly a masterpiece, thus proving the ECP artistically viable. The ECP Short Film Competition, moreover, steps towards the right direction: in a country where resources are scarce, the short film may be the creative answer to the problem of art. The ECP, however, is not without faults. Its most glaring fault is its insistence on showing foreign films at the Manila Film Center. Since it was established primarily to encourage the production of good local films, there is no logical reason to get into distributorship of foreign films.

Similarly, the Film Fund, established to help local producers financially, has proven its worth with *Moral*, produced for the Film Fund by outstanding local producer Jesse Ejercito (one of the very few who believe that films should be both commercial and artistic). Its earlier choice of films to support has not been so happy, but the Film Fund, at least, funnels all its money into local films.

Another body which helps local producers by giving them tax incentives is the Film Ratings Board, a relatively new addition to the growing number of government film bodies. The Board correctly supported *Batch '81*, but its granting of a higher rating to *Haplos* than to Lino Brocka's *Cain at Abel* has raised questions about its competence. Like the Censors, the Film Raters are about to find themselves in a no-win situation.

The oldest and the most important film event that has brought life to the dying movie industry is the annual

Metro Manila Film Festival. Continuing the Manila Film Festival started in 1966 in the City of Manila, the Metro Manila Film Festival (taking over the festival in 1975) has annually provoked a flurry of creative activity among local producers. Today, in fact, it may be said that producers who generally make mere movies during the year go out of their way to make films for the Festival.

Even a partial list of films inspired by the Festival (if we include the Manila festival from 1966 to 1974) is as impressive as you can get: *Daigdig ng mga Api* (1966), *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* (1966), *Dahil sa Isang Bulaklak* (1967), *Manila, Open City* (1968), *Wanted: Perfect Mother* (1970), *Ganito Kami Noon ... Paano Kayo Ngayon* (1976), *Insiang* (1976), *Minsa'y Isang Gamu-Gamo* (1976), *Burlesk Queen* (1977), *Atsay* (1978), *Rubia Servios* (1978), *Ina Ka ng Anak Mo* (1979), *Ang Alamat ni Julian Makabayan* (1979), *Brutal* (1980), *Kisapmata* (1981). Clearly, creative energies have been released by the Festival in the past.

The present Festival has acquired a new dimension because of the January MIFF. Instead of merely aiming at the local market, the Metro Manila Film Festival now looks at the foreign market. Five of the entries this year, for instance, are going to get free subtitling from the Movie Workers Welfare Foundation (MOWELFUND), which is managing the Festival in preparation for showing in the MIFF. The stakes, as gamblers would put it, have been raised.

As a consequence, the criteria for entrance into the Metro Manila Film Festival have been slightly changed to gear them to the international market. "The general theme of the Metro Filmfest this year," says Joseph Estrada, chairman of the Festival, "will be universal appeal. It will be a blending of overseas commercial viability and positive artistry."

The "sub-criteria" of the Festival follow from that gen-

eral guideline: "(1) themes that portray positive realities without exploiting misery, desperation and the negative values that find no redemption; (2) themes that seek to establish the Filipino identity of strength, perseverance and triumph over odds; (3) new and relatively unorthodox themes that will find universal appeal regardless of race, creed or religion; and (4) themes that depict the rewards of struggle for betterment of life."

A fair look at the Festival, then, involves not only art, but also commerce. "A festival is a battle of giants," says Rolfie Velasco, the MOWELFUND man-of-the-hour who runs the whole thing. The festival, he explains, promotes local films, selling them not only as good artistic films, but as commercially viable films. Like everyone else in the industry, he is fond of citing the phenomenal box-office success of films such as *Brutal* and *Kisapmata*, which have no stars, hardly any sex or even action, yet made lots of money primarily because they won awards for their artistic merits. In short, one way to make a film sell is to make it a good film.

Without any doubt, it is the Metro Manila Film Festival that has placed local films on the cinema map. Before 1966, hardly any moviehouse showed local films. Today, local films often outgross foreign imports. Theater owners today fight for the privilege of showing a local film. Even without a festival, such exclusive theaters as Quad, Makati Cinema Square, Greenhills, and Virra Mall—all in the middle of plush sections of town where English, and not Tagalog, is supposedly the *lingua franca*—regularly show Tagalog films. Even the Betamax market is now supporting Trigon's venture into tapes of local films. In a sense, local films have democratized taste.

The year started dismally for the local motion picture industry. After the slump, however, there is an artistic resurgence. With the several extracurricular activities by

movie people (symposia sponsored by the ECP, workshops sponsored by the various guilds, scholarships given by MOWELFUND, awards given to short films, and—of course—the incessant talk in anticipation of the MIFF), we definitely have a more self-conscious, more responsible and more responsive motion picture industry. (*PANORAMA*, December 26, 1982, p. 9.)



Gina Alajar in *Salome*, 1981's best.

THE BETAMAX CONTROVERSY

Among the major issues raised by the 67,000 actors who went on strike in 1980 against film and television producers in the United States was the issue of videocassette rights. The number of videotape playback machines used either in private homes or in semi-private establishments (such as schools and restaurants) in the United States is large enough to mean a loss of millions of dollars in possible actor income.

An actor is usually paid a flat sum (plus at most, a percentage of theater income) for his work in a film. If the film is sold in the videocassette market as a tape, no royalty or income of any sort goes to the actor. Because videotape machines operate fairly much like xerox machines, in fact, it is difficult to keep track of how many videotape copies of a film actually are in circulation.

There was an attempt recently to regulate the flow of videocassettes into the country. Such an attempt met with heavy opposition, not only on the part of the Betamax merchants, but also on the part of those who find that they have no access to certain films except in Betamax form.

The videocassette market in the Philippines is very small, compared to that of the United States. Although

exact figures are not available, however, it is safe to estimate that a small, not insignificant portion of the income from the A market is lost by a local distributor when a film becomes available on Betamax. (Locally, all videocassettes regardless of brand are known as Betamax.) We are not yet in a situation where our locally-produced films get pirated by Betamax copiers, but we will eventually be. Are we going to wait until a strike is inevitable before we do something about the Betamax problem?

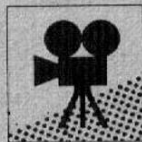
The question which must be answered, however, is not that of censorship, although that is clearly a major issue in itself. Neither should it be, from the point of view of those of us in the industry, that of taxation. We know very well that there are already too many taxes imposed on various aspects of filmmaking and film distributing.

The question that must be answered is a moral question. Is an artist entitled to financial compensation every time his work is exhibited? In the print media, such a question has already been answered positively. Copyright laws now allow a writer to demand royalty for such things as public recitation and xerox copies (with the notable exception of xeroxes for educational purposes).

It is my opinion that filmmakers (including actors and screenwriters) should also be entitled to all the financial fruits of their labors. Let us find some practical way of imposing on Betamax distributors some kind of fee. It is not yet our problem that foreign directors get nothing for the Betamax tapes we have in our own homes. But it will be our problem when our own films get seen for free by countless viewers on their home screens. Let us not wait for a strike to develop. Let us do something about it right now. (*INTERLOCK*, February 14, 1981, p. 4.)



Betamax watchers enjoy freedom from censorship of such shots as this one of Isabel Rivas in *Uhaw na Dagat*. (Photo by Romeo Vitug).



"Why buy a Betamax tape for fifty dollars when you can see the movie at your neighborhood theater for forty dollars?" quipped Johnny Carson in the Academy Awards for 1980. It may not have been one of Carson's greatest lines, but it certainly struck at the heart of one of the most dangerous foes the international movie industry has ever faced—the Betamax phenomenon. (Like the toothpaste brand "Colgate," the brand name "Betamax" is commonly used to refer to all brands of videorecorders and videotapes.)

In Metro Manila alone, there are hundreds of Betamax outlets, ranging from a store which boasts of a thousand titles to small neighborhood outlets lending out only around twenty tapes each. Most outlets rent out tapes, although a few merely sell tapes.

Rental rates vary from place to place, often without any perceivable logic. Three outlets in Quezon City, for example, have three different rental procedures. The first "sells" L-500 (or two-hour) tapes for P20, but the customer has to trade-in a comparable tape. The second (in

the same building) rents tapes for P25 for three days, but the customer has to leave a cash deposit. The third (just across the street) rents tapes for P25, also for three days, but the customer has to leave a tape as deposit.

There is a Betamax outlet in Mandaluyong which rents tapes for P10 per day, without any deposit, without any limit to the number of tapes the customer can rent. Not to be outdone, there is an outlet in a nearby shopping mall which rents tapes for P10 for three days, though a cash deposit is required. In general, rental rates average around P20 for a two-hour (L-50) tape for three days, and around P30 for a longer (L-750) tape.

Tapes sell also for varying prices, ranging from P110 to P160 for L-500 tapes and from P230 to P250 for L-750 tapes. Apparently, there is no relationship between the selling price and the quality of the tape. Most viewers, therefore, save money and aggravation by simply renting tapes, rather than buying outright. In any case, it is also possible for a customer to have two Betamax recorders; by renting a tape for P10 and buying a blank tape for P95, the customer saves a lot of money.

There are basically five types of tapes. The best kind is known locally as a "master tape." This is the kind that sells in the United States for fifty dollars (usually more). This is a legal copy made by the production companies in Hollywood. A film such as *Ordinary People*, for instance, is transferred to videotapes by the producer (or his representative). At least 100,000 copies are made, usually a lot more. (Remember the actors' strike in 1980 in the United States? Videotape royalties was the major issue in the strike.)

The second kind of tape is copied locally from one of these "master tapes" (they are not really "masters" in the technical sense, because they are all copies of one "master" in Hollywood). Naturally, being second-generation

tapes, so to speak, these tapes are less clear. They are also apt to have jumpy spots within them (attributable to local fluctuations in voltage and to sleepiness on the part of the local videotape operators). Nevertheless, these tapes are in great demand here.

The third kind of tape is copied from a "master" (a real "master" in the technical sense) which is made directly from a print of the film. For instance, a tape of *Ordinary People* may have been copied from a "master" tape of the film *Ordinary People*. There are a number of film-to-videotape machines operating locally. The question that comes up all the time, however, especially in the minds of the film importers who own the prints of the foreign film is this: where do the "masters" come from? When a film is delivered to a local distributor, it is, of course, in print form. The distributor does not make a tape from the print, since he loses money every time a videotape is shown (the videotape viewer does not go to the moviehouse anymore). The distributor, after the film is censored, gives the print (or prints) to moviehouse owners. These exhibitors, in turn, do not make tapes of the film, because they want people to go to their theaters, not to stay in bedrooms watching television. Since everybody involved in the movie business wants to keep the print from being transferred to videotape, who actually transfers imported films to tape?

The fourth kind is copied from cable television in the United States, where some first-run films are actually shown ahead of exhibition in movie theaters. It is a simple matter of taping broadcast tapes on cable TV and sending the tape (this becomes also a "master," in local lingo) to a friend here.

The fifth kind—the worst kind in terms of quality—is the tape that is recorded by enterprising individuals who bring a videotape recorder to a moviehouse in the

United States. Locally, this kind is known as a "film transfer," though the term is technically applicable only to the third kind. Because the transfer here is actually from screen to tape, the sound is almost always inaudible.

Why is Betamax syndrome a threat? Look at it this way. Suppose I rent a tape for P10 a day, and I ask a friend of mine to watch the Betamax with me. If I went to a movie theater to watch the same film, I would spend P10 also (for the two of us), plus transportation, not to mention the popcorn. If there are three of us watching the Betamax, we are saving money dramatically. If the whole family (and my friend's family too) watches, and if I play the tape three times during that one day when I have it, I have saved a considerable amount of money.

It may not even be the money. Suppose I want to watch *Fame* the way it should be watch (with the disrobing scene). Or *Dressed to Kill* with the crucial masturbation scene. Or *Manila By Night* (the banned version). Or *Caligula* (almost certain to be banned). Or any film censored for being too sexual, too political, or too violent. Or any film too "uncommercial" to be shown locally (such as Bergman's films). There's only one way to get around the Board of Censors or around the commercialism of our movie distribution system—the Betamax

Johnny Carson's words are as true here as they are in the United States. Why rent a Betamax tape for ten pesos when you can see the same film in a movie theater for five pesos? (*TV TIMES*, May 10-16, 1981, p. 6.)

WHY STUDY POPULAR CULTURE?

Why study popular culture?

Because it is there.

Such an answer may seem flippant, but in fact, it is precise. The serious academic scholar studies popular culture because it is his business to study reality, and popular culture forms a large part of social, intellectual, and artistic reality.

There are, of course, many ways to define popular culture. One derogatory sense of the term, for example, places popular culture at the opposite end of "high-art" or "Art" or "Culture." Such a sense, fortunately, is hardly ever used today in scholarly studies of popular culture. More useful are two definitions given by the American critic John Calweti, in his bibliographic essay on the subject. Popular culture may refer, in one sense, to culture which involves large numbers of people, spanning several classes in the society. In another sense, popular culture may refer to the culture of the masses, limited primarily to the lower classes of society.

In the Philippines, because the vast majority of the population belongs to the lower-income groups, the

word "popular" can be used in both of Calweti's senses simultaneously. Thus, a film by Dolphy is popular both because a large number of people view it and because the people who view it are mostly from the lower classes. In contrast, the opera *Turandot* staged at the Cultural Center is not popular both because hardly anybody saw it and because those who did see it came from the upper classes of society.

In spite of such scholarly definitions, however, problem cases exist. The top-rated television series *Charlie's Angels* is, according to surveys, viewed primarily by C and D audiences, but a large number of more privileged families also watch it. Lino Brocka's early films, appealed primarily to middle-income and upper-class audiences (which is why his films almost always lost money). The success of *Disgrasyada* (seven million pesos in Metro Manila alone) seems to imply that even the upper classes saw it, since films popular only among the lower classes (such as the Dolphy films) never make that much money in Metro Manila.

Exceptions, however, remain exceptions. In general, popular culture in the Philippines may be said to refer to the culture of the majority of the Filipino people, who are poor. Thus, there is no point talking about the Tagalog popular novel as opposed to the Tagalog novel, since Tagalog novels are always popular, being published serially in *Liwayway* or similar magazines. The distinction which American scholars like to point out between mainstream literature and popular literature is of little use in the Philippines, since mainstream literature in the United States commands a large audience, while there is hardly any mainstream literary tradition with a significant following in the Philippines.

Consider, for example, these figures: in the United

States: a "difficult" and "literary" novel such as *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* has tens of thousands of readers, surely not insignificant although still very much less than the hundreds of thousands who read *Scruples* or *Wheels* instead. A book like *Bloodline* sells over two thousand copies a month in Metro Manila, but what book by Nick Joaquin or N.V.M. Gonzales sells two thousand copies a year? Every novel by Carlo Caparas, however, is read by approximately sixteen million Filipinos every week. Surely, the scholar who confines himself to Joaquin and Gonzales and ignores Caparas has a distorted view of his responsibilities towards his people.

It is interesting that, even in the United States, the distinction between mainstream culture and popular culture is rapidly blurring. Critically acclaimed novels, such as those by Walker Percy and Kurt Vonnegut, are best-sellers as well. Film directors such as Alfred Hitchcock are now considered classic and worthy of scholarly study, although their films are certainly popular in the numerical sense. Science fiction has become an acknowledged literary genre. A number of big-name universities now offer courses in science fiction and fantasy literature. A scholarly journal entitled *Journal of Popular Culture* is now on its twelfth year. Outside the United States, of course, academic interest is of longer standing. Tzvetan Todorov, the major contemporary European critic, has come out with a whole book on fantasy. An excellent example of British scholarship on popular culture is Victor Neuburg's *Popular Literature: A History and Guide*, a recent book which builds on more than a century of earlier scholarship.

How is one to approach popular culture? In any number of ways, depending on one's field. The sociologist (and sociologists have pioneered in the study

of popular culture) sees popular culture as a social phenomenon, capable of being studied with standard sociological tools. The art historian sometimes sees popular culture as the background against which masterpieces can be viewed. The literary critic, especially the structuralist, sees popular literature as continuous with great world literature, containing the same themes, the same structures, the same consciousness.

It is ironic that those who complain most bitterly against the new scholarly attention on popular culture find nothing wrong with going to a movie, watching television, singing Christmas carols, reading Mills and Boon novels, subscribing to *Woman's* and *Newsweek*, riding a jeepney, following *Tisoy* and *Peanuts*. The scholar who refuses to deal with popular culture soon finds himself a hyphenated person—an intellectual on campus, an ordinary human being at home. The true scholar must see his experiences as a totality, not as fragments. He must view *Voltes V* in the same way that he views *Virgin Spring*. If he has to shift his mental gears in order not to be disgusted with a TV show that he knows he enjoys, then there must be something wrong not with the TV show, but with the scholarly standards that he is using. If life is meaningful, if it is a whole, then the scholar must be able to bring together Mozart and Aguilar, Arcellana and Aragon, Kurosawa and Bernal, Solzhenitsyn and Siguion-Reyna, *Turandot* and *Kiri*. (DILIMAN REVIEW, October-December, 1979, p. 53-54.)

THE SIYANGA PALA SYNDROME

"How can you stand Filipino films?" my friend asked me last week.

"They're not that bad," I replied, irked at my friend's snobbish tone. "They've improved a lot since the days of Avellana and Abalos."

"You're not saying that Zialcita is a better director than Avellana?"

"I'm not saying that. I'm only saying that local films, on the whole, have improved both technically and thematically."

"What do you mean by technically?"

"In terms of cinematography, for example. You can't deny that Romy Vitug is one of the best cameramen in the world today."

"If you mean he can focus better, keep his camera more steady, zoom in more gradually—he is one of the best. But if you mean he can keep his mind on what the film is about, I don't see how you can justify his penchant for butterflies and scaffoldings and cogon grass."

"How about art direction and production design?" I insisted. "Surely our films today are extremely creative

as far as design is concerned."

"Then how come, in films set in the fifties, you invariably see Toyota Corollas and Metrocom cars? And how about all those Paris fashions worn by actresses playing rural women?"

"What about the music? Our best composers are now doing original scores for our local movies."

"Then how come *Pinay, American Style* has terrible music? That's a high-budget film and yet the guy who put together the sound track has no taste."

"Sound! There, at least, we have progressed an immense amount. Think of the soundtrack of the Ishmael Bernal episode in *Bakit May Pag-ibig Pa?* That was worth a Manunuri citation."

"That's because there were hardly any sound effects in that film. Inevitably, when our sound effects men get going, they drown out the speeches and irritate our ears."

I was down to my last technical ace. "The direction. You're not going to say that Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal and Celso Ad. Castillo and Robert Arevalo and Maryo delos Reyes do not compare favorably with the directors of the past? If you look at how badly Hollywood films are directed in spite of their multimillion dollar budgets, you have to be thankful for our brilliant young directors."

"The fact that American directors are bad does not make our local directors good. Our young directors, no matter what their intentions and qualifications, find themselves up against mediocre designing, mediocre acting, and mediocre scripting."

"If not technically or in terms of acting, at least you have to admit that scripting is now much, much better in local films."

"Not if you abhor the *Siyanga Pala Syndrome*."

"What's that?"

"When I think of the *Siyanga Pala Syndrome*, I realize that it is not only in the dialogue our local films fail, but in a lot of other elements as well."

"When a director suddenly thinks of something, for example, he merely inserts a sequence, whether or not the sequence is related to whatever it is he is trying to say. That is the *Siyanga Pala Syndrome*."

"When a production designer sees a nice looking piece of furniture, he puts it in whether the piece comes from the same period or not. The period consistency is an afterthought, a *Siyanga Pala*."

"When an actress decides to wear a dress, she worries only about whether she will look good in it, not whether it is appropriate to her character or not. Logic is a *Siyanga Pala*, an irrelevant thought."

"Why are our writers afflicted with the *Siyanga Pala Syndrome*?" I asked my know-it-all friend.

"Because we don't want to spend time thinking things through to their local conclusion. We're an improvisational people. We like doing things which have no relevance to our goals. Filipino screenwriters merely exhibit in stark relief the worst of our Filipino traits: the inability to stick to the point." (*EXPRESSWEEK*, August 16, 1979, p. 31.)

CENSORSHIP

Browsing in the CCP Library recently, I came across a pamphlet published by the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, a London-based international service for communication research. The pamphlet, an issue of *Communication Research Trends* (Summer 1981), was on "Censorship in the Media." Consisting primarily of book views and bibliographies, the pamphlet seemed relevant to our local concerns today about censorship, permissiveness, and freedom of expression.

There is a book, *Censorship and Obscenity* (1978), edited by Rajeev Dhavan and Christie Davies (reviewed in the pamphlet), which describes the two fundamental positions about censorship: the "community standards tendency" and the "libertarian tendency." The first is for censorship, the second against it.

"The community standards tendency argues that many individuals need more than personal discretion to protect themselves." (All my quotes are from the pamphlet.) Those for censorship, in other words, believe that someone must protect us from pornography, violence, subversion, and whatever, because many of us cannot do

that ourselves. We lack the "personal discretion" to distinguish between harmless films and harmful ones, between art and propaganda, between love and lust. If we restrict ourselves to movies, the argument runs that we need Maria Kalaw Katigbak to screen for us the "bad" sequences in our films, because many of us cannot tell the "good" scenes from "bad" ones.

The old problem of who will protect us from ourselves can, of course, be raised. Plato—in one of the earliest treatises advocating literary censorship—believed that the philosopher has the right and the ability to excise objectionable lines from Homer's poetry, but nobody asked Plato to explain why he should be regarded as more authoritative than Homer himself. Who will censor the censors? Who chooses the censors?

Despite the obvious objections to the community standards position, however, all societies believe in it. The word "all" is no exaggeration. In Harry Clor's *Obscenity and Public Morality* (1969), anthropologist Margaret Mead is cited as having proven that "every known society has some public standards and exercises some explicit censorship in the area of sexual behaviour." Some Filipinos who have never been to America still believe, for instance, that there is no censorship in the United States. Those who have lived there know that the states have their local film censorship boards (which do not merely "rate" films, but actually classify theaters, cut films, sue filmmakers, and other such familiar censorship techniques) and their local school boards (one of which censored the story "The Lottery" in a famous case less than ten years ago.) In what is supposed to be the freest society in the world, there is explicit and elaborate censorship.

Those against censorship, however, are not fazed by the universal support of the idea of censorship. "The liberta-

rian tendency argues that there really is no common societal consensus of standard and that attempts to apply a blanket protection of the community restricts individual artistic creativity and the right of individuals to read or see what they like in privacy."

There are two basic arguments, then, against censorship. One is that there is "no common consensus of standard." In the Philippine context, this is dramatically apparent in the discrepancy between the standards held by our censors (not just our current Board, but even more clearly, the previous Board) and the standards held by many Filipinos. A simple, non-sex-related case will suffice as an example: although the cuss word "p.....ina" is said every other minute by jeepney drivers, sidewalk vendors, feuding housewives, even Makati executives, it cannot be heard on television because it is a "bad word." In some current local films (though not in all, because the Board members themselves have disagreements), the word is blipped out, even if everybody in the audience "hears" the word by reading the lips of the actor.

The second argument against censorship is more basic: censorship restricts individual freedom (of the artist to create and of the viewer to see). Unfortunately, not everybody agrees on what "freedom" means, and this argument, therefore, fails to convince legislators to do away with censorship. The usual distinction between "freedom" and "license" involves two terms with vague meanings for most people.

Those who argue for or against censorship in terms of the effects of censorable material on people are more open to attack. Those who want censorship claim that pornography, for instance, threatens "harm to personal safety, severe personality disorders, public security, aesthetic standards, protection of property, etc." For example, pornographic films are said to stimulate ado-

lescents to commit sexual crimes.

Those who dislike censorship are quick to point to "the evidence of the Denmark experience where virtually all obscenity statutes were repealed in 1969. In that country, parallel with the rise in the use of pornography, there were substantial decreases in all reported sexual crimes except rape which remained relatively unchanged." In fact, psychological studies show that "adolescent exposure to erotica is significantly less for all deviant and offender groups in comparison with non-deviant, non-criminal groups regardless of social class, education and socio-ethnic background." In layman's terms, this means that a male teenager exposed to *Penthouse* and *Deep Throat* is less likely to molest or rape women. Taken to its logical extreme, this means that, by removing pornography from local movies, our censors are actually promoting sexual crimes.

Both sides, however, are barking up the wrong tree in using socio-psychological studies to prove that pornography has good or bad effects, because the truth of the matter is, as the pamphlet points out, there is no firm evidence either way. No scientific or statistical proof exists that pornography has any harmful individual or societal effects. (*TV TIMES*, April 11-17, 1982, p. 4.)



I have summarized the issue of *Communication Research Trends* on "Censorship in the Media." Perhaps, reprinting the blurb of that issue will help recall some of the problems raised today about censorship:

The principle of freedom of expression in the press, book publishing and broadcasting has been one of the hard-won battles in human history. Without this freedom, a democratic society could not exist. Yet every community and nation has to make painful decisions about what will or will not be communicated. Libel and privacy are obvious examples. Otherwise our societies would virtually disintegrate. Does freedom of speech have limits? If so, how do we decide on these limits?

New forms of censorship are always creeping in. Currently it is insinuated that consumer protection groups such as Action for Children's Television in the United States are censors in disguise. ACT itself is accusing the fundamentalist religious group, Moral Majority, of censorship goals. What are the norms for judging who is a censor?

This issue reviews some of the profoundly new patterns of thinking about freedom and censorship that have

emerged in the last generation and the debate that surrounds the new logic for defending freedom of expression.

That's enough for the international scene. What about our own censors? Here are some questions I wish to raise about our local censorship practices. (Some of these I raised privately with Chairman Maria Kalaw Katigbak on the set of *Tell the City* some time ago.)

Here's a hypothetical case. Suppose we have a censor who is only 35 years old (the minimum age required by law.) Let us assume that his parents are still alive. That would make them around 60 years old. When the censor disapproves a film for showing to the public, he is, of course, including his parents in the prohibition. Isn't the censor here, therefore, placed in the position of telling his parents what they may see or not see?

Many of our Filipino films meant for children (such as those starring Dolphy, or Tito, Vic, and Joey, or even Niño Muhlach) have rape scenes or extremely violent scenes. One example is *Tropang Bulilit*, approved by the new Board, where there is a sequence showing Janice de Belen almost being raped by two goons. Why does the Board allow such sequences to be shown?

Some of the old Tagalog films shown on daytime television have rape or violent scenes (they were originally shown under more lenient censorship codes). These replays of Tagalog films are highly-rated. They have a lot of young viewers. But they are not edited for television. What does our Board intend to do about this?

Much of our censorship beliefs are based on individual surmises, prejudices, or ethnics. We have a lot of behavioral scientists who can form a kind of Filipino Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, like the American one of 1970. Is the Board planning to commission scientific research into the actual effects of permissiveness in local film? (One should recall that Mrs. Katig-

bak herself is a social scientist.)

Finally, something I really have no expertise to ask, not being a lawyer, but I'll ask it anyway. In our Constitution (specifically, Art. 4, Section 9, of the 1973 Constitution), the following passage occurs:

No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.

This article, say the lawbooks, prohibits "prior restraint," which means "official government restriction on the press or other forms of expression in advance of actual publication or dissemination." See *Times Film Corp. vs. City of Chicago* 365 US 43 (1961) and *Freedman vs. Maryland* 380 US 51 (1965). (How's that for a non-lawyer?)

It seems to me, being a legal layman, that this provision states that nobody can stop a film from being shown. Nobody has the right under our Constitution to censor films before they are shown. There should be "no prior restraint" on the form of expression known as cinematic art. Film is exempted from censorship, under our 1973 Constitution. Why, then do we have censorship? Isn't censorship unconstitutional? (*TV TIMES*, April 18-24, 1982, p. 4.)



The success of the entertainment industry's protest against Executive Order 868, reorganizing the Board of Review for Motion Pictures and Television, should not blind us to the fact that the root of the problem still exists—censorship. The manifesto (published in *Bulletin Today*, February 11, 1983)—signed by National Artists, cinematographers, dance personalities, fashion designers, film directors, assistant directors, production managers, film editors, soundmen, journalists, film critics, movie actors and actresses, musicians, painters, sculptors, producers, production designers, screenwriters, television personalities, theater personalities, writers, and teachers—protests against certain onerous practices of the censors (such as the cutting of negatives) and against contemplated future control of live entertainment (including stage plays, concerts, and fashion shows), but it does not question the idea of censorship itself.

I believe that we should go further. I believe that the Board of Review for Motion Pictures and Television should be abolished. I believe that censorship in the

New Republic should be completely done away with.

If we review the history of censorship in the world, we see that, historically, societies have moved from the more restrictive to the less restrictive. This is true of the three main objects of censorship—religious ideas, political ideas, and obscenity.

Religion was the first to suffer from censorship. Plato (otherwise an enlightened thinker) ordained in his *Laws* that falsehoods about God are crimes; Plato, incidentally, was also the first major thinker to attempt to suppress artistic freedom by banning poets from his *Republic*. Europeans generally followed Plato's lead, with Jews and Christians being the first to suffer persecution for their religious beliefs. Needless to say, even with Hitler and the Catholic Index of Forbidden Books (the last edition was only in 1948), censorship of religious ideas is now largely a thing of the past, except in totalitarian states such as Iran.

Similarly, there was a time when all political beliefs not consonant with the ruling power's philosophy were considered dangerous and even criminal. But today, only in the most repressive countries do we have political censorship. In China, the Cultural Revolution (when censorship was state policy) is now considered by the Chinese people themselves as a mistake. In most democratic European countries, Marxists are allowed, even encouraged to join public debates. In the United States, there are no political prisoners. Of course, in less secure societies (such as the Soviet Union and Latin American military dictatorships), political prisoners abound, 127,000 of them according to the *Newsweek* (February 14, 1983) report on "prisoners of conscience." Clearly, censorship—defined by the *Encyclopedia Britannica* as restriction before or after publication—still exists as far as political ideas are concerned, but it has certainly di-

minated since the reigns of Caligula (who burnt his critics alive), Domitian (who killed even the secretaries of his critics), Stalin, and Hitler.

Unlike religious or political ideas, obscenity is not a matter of reason, but of highly charged emotional prejudices. Up to now, despite all the scientific studies conducted about sex, there is no scientific proof that watching an obscene film or reading an obscene book encourages sexually deviant behavior. In simpler terms, nobody has proved scientifically that a young boy, after watching a rape scene on screen, will grow up to be a rapist.

In fact, the evidence points to the contrary. In Denmark, censorship of obscenity was abolished in 1969. Pornography proliferated, but the number of sexual crimes (except for rape cases, which remained the same) *dropped*. There are psychological studies of rapists that show that these sexual criminals read and watch *less* pornography than law-abiding men. In technical language, "adolescent exposure to erotica is significantly less for all deviant and offender groups in comparison with non-deviant, non-criminal groups regardless of social class, education and socio-ethnic background" (see *Communication Research Trends*, 1981).

The suspicion that obscenity ruins the morals of young people is nothing else but a modern superstition. It has absolutely no basis in scientific research, in reason, or in history. Historically, in fact, censorship of obscenity started in England only in the later eighteenth century, with the United States following suit in such famous cases as those against James Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1933, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1959, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* in 1961, and John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* in 1963. Again, as in the case of religious and political persecution, human beings soon be-

came less paranoid about obscenity.

I do not mean to say that obscenity is good. I say merely that it should be allowed, for the sake of the good that can exist only if freedom of expression is present. If an artist (whether writer or filmmaker) is forever shackled by censorship statutes that do not make any logical or scientific sense anyway, he is likely to falsify reality in order to publish or to exhibit his works. Artists have always been problematic individuals, existing on the fringes of societies, not believing in the values of civilization, questioning our most fundamental beliefs, shattering our superstitions. We should always remember the lessons of history. We still remember and honor such people as Euripides (prosecuted for impiety), Shakespeare (with his plays full of sex and violence), Michelangelo (with his nudes), Joyce and Lawrence, Jose Rizal, Aurelio Tolentino, and Amado V. Hernandez, all of whom had problems with the censors of their times. We also remember that the showing of the film *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* was stopped by the Board of Censors in 1965, making Ferdinand E. Marcos a popular hero by virtue of his having been censored. (*PANORAMA*, February 27, 1983, pp. 14, 16.)

FOR TEACHERS ONLY: USING FILM TO TEACH LITERATURE

The key word is *use*. We are interested in *using* film to help us teach literature better. We are not interested—in this paper for teachers, anyway—in film in itself. We are interested in film not as an end, but as a means.

Before we can use film as a tool, however, we should know certain basic things about film in itself. For our purposes, there are only three basic things: technical qualities, literary qualities, and cinematic qualities. These are the three things we should look for in a film.

Before a piece of work becomes a work of art, it must satisfy certain technical requirements. A novel, for example, should be written in grammatically correct language, unless (in rare cases) the use of ungrammatical language is necessary to the novel. A poem (at least before the coming of the concretists) should have words, lines, and meaning. Similarly, a film should have properly-focused shots, synchronized sound, appropriate sound effects, credible visual effects, realistic make-up, and various other basic technical requirements. If we cannot make out what is going on on screen because the lighting is too dim, if we cannot accept an actress to be

sixty-five because her make-up makes her out to be only thirty, if we cannot see the connection between one scene and the next, we say that such a film is technically bad.

Because a film is nothing else but "a story told with pictures" (the classic Hollywood definition), it must have the basic requirements of a story. It must have a plot, characters, a theme, a structure, and some kind of meaning. The plot must be unified, the characters properly motivated, the theme consistent, the structure evident, and the meaning suggested. What we look for in any short story or novel we should look for in any film. Once a film satisfies the technical requirements, we should look for its literary qualities.

A film, however, is not a short story or a novel or a play. It is an art form distinct from literature. What makes it different is its being cinematic. A film like Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night (City after Dark)*, for example, can give us a shot of Alma Moreno in a white nurse's uniform walking past a full garbage truck on a dirty, badly-lighted street and say immediately that Manila is full of contrasts, inconsistencies, hypocrisy, and trash. That is a cinematic statement made in less than three seconds by one of our best directors. A film like Lino Brocka's *Jaguar* can show Philip Salvador trying to escape pursuing policemen by crawling up a mountain of trash and say immediately that our poor people are trying to overcome the filth that fills up their daily lives. That cinematic statement is made through a complex combination of setting, character, and plot in the final sequence of Brocka's film.

When we see a film, then, we look basically for three things: technical excellence, literary value, and cinematic sense. Let us assume, from this point on, that we know what to look for in a film, what a good film is, how to ex-

tract meaning from a film. Let us now see how we can use films to help us teach literature in the classroom.

Most of our schools are located within walking or riding distance of moviehouses. Our students go to the movies anyway, whether we want them to or not. Many of our students get to see "For Adults Only" movies, whether they are legally allowed in or not. We can assume that the vast majority of them, even those in urban centers, share the general taste of the Filipino masses in movies, i.e., movies which feature the superstars Fernando Poe, Jr., Vilma Santos, Dolphy, Nora Aunor, and Niño Muhlach. These movies capture the imagination of our students, whether we like it or not. Several of their waking hours are spent either watching or dreaming about their favorite movie stars. If we are going to reach our student's sensibilities, here is a good place to begin—their captive imagination.

Can we get anything from these third-rate films (most of the films featuring the superstars are third-rate) which we can use in our literature classes? We can get, at the very least, the *literary qualities* we identified as the second thing to look for in a film. Every film has a story (no matter how ridiculous), a character (no matter how stereotyped), a theme (no matter how minimal), a structure (no matter how loose), and a meaning (no matter how insignificant).

One concrete thing we can do in our classroom is to take a few minutes of one class (not the whole class if the movie is really bad, since paying too much attention to a bad thing ultimately convinces the student that a bad thing is worth paying attention to) to discuss one element in a recently-shown superstar movie. Take a Poe movie. Ask the students why he acts the way he does in one particular sequence. What is his reason for behaving that way? What does he hope to achieve? How does he

perceive the events in the story? What is his motivation? Fairly soon, we will be dealing with the same kind of questions we deal with in a short story. It is a long step from this to character development in a novel, but it is a step. Enter through their door, the Ignatian principle of teaching states, and leave through ours. Start with Poe and end with Alfredo Santos in Manuel Arguilla's "Caps and Lower Case"; Poe and Santos are both oppressed and raring to take action.

Another aspect of any recently-shown film is structure. Ask the students how the film begins and how it ends, whether the ending sums up the entire film. Fairly soon, we will be asking about *closure*, that new preoccupation of formalist literary critics. We will also be asking about the more traditional Aristotelian norm of structure: every plot has a beginning, a middle, and an end. When we deal with a short story or a novel, we can refer to the film as the opposite of the literary work. The superstar film does not really end, but all literary works do (even the Theater of the Absurd plays, in a kind of meta-ending).

We can go into a more abstract discussion of the film. We can ask what the meaning is. Chances are that the superstar movie will have hardly any meaning. We can then ask whether a film should have a meaning. This question leads to the more general question of whether every work of art has a meaning. When we discuss the work of literature scheduled for the day, we can ask what its meaning is, whether that meaning is necessary to the work, whether it should have a meaning at all. Literary theory can come painlessly from literary criticism.

When we use a bad film in class, we should always use the bad film as a contrast to the good work of literature we have assigned. We should never give the students the impression that bad films are worth seeing. This would

be a disservice not only to the film industry (at least, to the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino) and to literature, but to the students themselves. We are, after all, in our literature classes because we want to develop the students' taste, to increase their sensitivity, to make their sensibility sophisticated.

It goes without saying that, in order to be able to use current movies in class, we have to watch the movies ourselves. Since most of us have sensitive sensibilities, we should not really subject ourselves to the aesthetic torture of sitting through bad films. One bad film is enough, if all we want to do is to use that film for a few minutes in one or two classes. Choose a film most of our students are likely to watch anyway. The figures currently available (1981) indicate that the vast majority of our students will watch a Fernando Poe, Jr., Dolphy, Ramon Revilla, or Niño Muhlach movie. It is fairly safe to say that everybody will know the story of the latest Poe movie. We are not talking here only of rural students, but of all students, including those in exclusive schools in Metro Manila. *Aguila*, starring Poe, earned over ten million pesos in Metro Manila, a clear proof that A and B audiences trekked to see it (yes, that includes people from Forbes Park). On television, the low level of taste of our moneyed students is even more explicit: the top shows, watched by all audiences including Makati and Greenhills people, are *John & Marsha* and *Chicks to Chicks*. Ratings do not lie; only rumors lie. There is no significant difference in movie and television viewing habits between the Makati village resident and his long-lost cousin in Tondo.

Watch a superstar movie, then. Chances are our students have all watched the same movie. When we talk about that movie in class, our students will be all ears. We do not have to watch all the superstar movies, only

the ones we will need for our class. Remember that the key word is *use*. If we can use the movie, let us go see it. If we want to be certain that the story or character or theme will be appropriate for the short story or poem we are scheduled to discuss during a particular week, we can ask around about the movie. Or we can read about the movie in the dozens of paid write-ups the movie publicity people churn out.

Discussing a bad film in class, however, is only half the fun. The real fun begins when we discuss good films in our literature. Yes, Virginia, there are good films showing in our neighborhood cinema. Some of these films are foreign; in practice, however, because of the peculiar booking situation in the country, hardly any good foreign film reaches areas outside Metro Manila. Students in Metro Manila can always be asked to go to the Quad or to Ali, where good foreign films are usually shown. The teacher has to be alert, however, since these films show for only two or three days. How do we know if a film is good? Normally, the advertisement for the film mentions that it has won an award or two. That is one indication that the film is worth assigning to students. Sometimes, a movie reviewer will write about the film in advance; that is a better indication that the film is worth watching. Occasionally, a film festival is held in Makati or Quezon City; films in a festival are usually good, but not always.

Let us limit our discussion here to Filipino films, since good foreign films do not usually reach the provinces. Filipino films—good or bad—always reach the provinces. How do we know that a film is worth assigning to our students? We do not know. Everything is hit or miss. The chances that a film will be good are better if the director is one of the following: Ishmael Bernal, Mike de Leon, Lino Brocka, Eddie Romero, Laurice Guillen,

Marilou Diaz-Abaya. Sometimes, Celso Ad. Castillo, Romy Suzara, Maryo de los Reyes, Augusto Buenaventura, and Mario O'Hara make good films. But some of these directors have been responsible for the worst films in Philippine movie history. One can never be sure. Read reviews of the movie first, if you have a chance.

The technique of using a good film is different from that of using a bad one. When we discuss a bad film in class, we spend only a few minutes on it, shifting immediately to a literary work whose merits stand out in clearer relief because of the faults of the bad film. When we discuss a good film in class, we can spend a whole class on it, devoting a lot of time to the literary qualities, maybe even cinematic qualities, of the film.

Take *Jaguar*, for example. We can learn a lot from the way the character of Phillip Salvador is handled by Brocka. We can ask about his original situation, his motivation for being so loyal to his employer, his epiphany at the end. We can point out that his character develops to a climax, where he has to confront his own self (or lack of self). We can differentiate his conflict (man against himself) with the other conflicts used in the story (man against others in the fight scenes, man against nature in the magnificent final scene). Fairly soon, we will be teaching our students what characterization really is. From *Jaguar* to Nick Joaquin's short stories is not too long a step. (In fact, the story of *Jaguar* comes from an essay written by Nick Joaquin under the pseudonym Quijano de Manila.)

Or take Laurice Guillen's *Kasal*. We can discuss Guillen's use of a feminine point of view during the film (a cinematic quality). Is it because she is a woman that her film is female in approach to the question of love and marriage? Shifting from Guillen to Estrella Alfon's short stories is not difficult. In Alfon, the same feminine point

of view forms the core of the fiction.

Or take Mike de Leon's *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* This film revolves around the theme of Japanese control of our economy. Reading a war novel like Stevan Javellana's *Without Seeing the Dawn* is like reading a fairy tale for the young student who was born a decade after the war. But after watching de Leon's film, the whole Japanese-Filipino conflict becomes more real, therefore more understandable. The young student will also appreciate the sense of loss (both historical and personal) in Joaquin's *Portrait of the Artist as a Filipino* when he sees the similar sequence in Eddie Romero's *Aguila*, when Poe as a guerilla officer poignantly asks why collaborators are being given top government posts after the war.

Whether the film we discuss is good or bad, we should not forget, however, that the main thing we are discussing is the work of literature listed in our syllabus. Film is an attractive mistress, but literature is our wife. We should be careful to follow a discussion of a film immediately with a discussion of a specific work of literature. There is no need to apologize for using film in the teaching of literature. After all, we use our own lives, current events, our student's family experiences, all the world, in fact, as examples when we discuss literature. Movies make up a huge part of our students' daily existence. Let us enter through their door, but leave through ours. Let us watch films with them, that they may read literature with us. (*Proceedings of the 1980 CETA Convention*, pp. 143-47.)

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE FILIPINO FILM

With their preoccupations, their ennui, and their formularized responses to stimuli, the critics go their complacent (or disgruntled) ways, finding movies better (or worse) than ever, but never noticing that movies *aren't* movies any more. Not so long ago, the movies, whatever their oversimplifications and distortions, still rested on the assumption that their function was to present some intelligible, structured image of reality—on the simplest level, to tell a story and to entertain, but, more generally, to extend the spectator's meaningful experience, to offer him a window on the real world.

— Manny Farber, *American film critic*

There are certain films which will leave us squirming in our seats while our neighbors sit laughing convulsively.

— Joy Gould Boyum, *American film critic*

THE KOMIKS CONNECTION

To the older movie producers in the country, the way to sell a movie is to "pre-sell" it, that is, to base it on a *komiks* novel with proven popularity. Because novels belong to a totally different medium, "pre-sold" films have been, in general, forgettable.

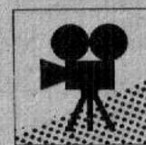
Joey Gosiengfiao's *Ang Kambal sa Uma* (1979), based on the popular novel by Jim Fernandez and Ernie Santiago, surprisingly turns out to be one of the best of the "pre-sold" genre. The novel, as serialized in *Kislap*, is full of impossibilities, improbabilities, inconsistencies, and inanities. The novel meanders through attempted rapes, mistaken identities, contrived confrontations, numberless minor characters, as well as morbid rat scenes.

The film rejects the plot twists of the novel and, instead, concentrates on making the implausible story almost acceptable. Joey Gosiengfiao, who used to direct artsy-craftsy plays for stage but has, until now, never made a serious film, wisely limits himself to the events which lead to the birth of the twins, to the inevitable death of Ela (Rio Locsin), and to the first days of Vira (Rio Locsin) in the hospital. Granted the scientific impossibility of

half-rat human beings, the film tells a logical story.

Rio Locsin has improved a lot from her *Disgrasyada* and *Alas at Reyna* days. At certain points during the film, in fact, when she plays both Vira and Ela simultaneously, she almost succeeds in becoming two persons. Unfortunately, her over-all characterizations are inconsistent. She needs an acting coach.

Gosiengfiao's main contribution to Philippine films is his timing. He edits much better than most Filipino directors. Even his earlier, otherwise insignificant films move quickly from one sequence to another. His sense of timing, however, does not save *Kambal sa Uma* from being painful to watch. It is probably not Gosiengfiao's fault. No director can compensate for the ridiculous non-acting that Al Tantay, Julie-Ann Fortich, and everyone else in the film (with the possible exception of Rio Locsin and Orestes Ojeda in a few sequences) impose on the viewer. (*TV TIMES*, August 5-11, 1979, p. 6)



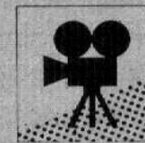
Komiks novelist Carlo Caparas, who wrote the novel *Mong*, is himself one of the directors of the movie *Mong* (1979). The other director, Artemio Marquez, wrote the screenplay for the movie. Surely, here, there should be no problem between writer and director. The problem here, however, is the old one of adaptation. Countless Filipino films have been adapted from comic strips, just as half of all American films have been adapted from novels, plays, or short stories. In the case of *Mong*, the adaptation is not too successful.

As the hundreds of thousands who read *Mong* in *Tagalog Klasiks* know (the figure could reach millions, according to a recent study), *Mong* is a gigantic dummy who becomes a professional basketball player. Tutored by his father Cachupoy and his coach Rudy Manlapaz, Bonnie de Jesus becomes a superstar, but only when Melanie Marquez is around.

In the comic strip, *Mong* is a lumbering, bumbling, pathetic, lovable character. Towering way above his teammates in height and stupidity, *Mong* becomes a Filipino version of Huckleberry Film. *Mong*, in other

words, is a growing-up story. In the film, however, de Jesus is not that much taller than Marquez in her high heels. In the basketball sequences, it is not easy to single him out from the other tall players (the director should probably have used short high school players to heighten the difference). De Jesus' bumbling is limited to sucking his finger and slipping; his lack of acting experience keeps the film from being consistently funny.

More important, Caparas' komiks novel is full of funny situations; one remembers, for instance, Mong's natural mistake of entering the first ladies' room he sees in Manila. The film, on the other hand, relies mainly on the slapstick antics of Cachupoy and Pugak. Because Cachupoy and Pugak are not funny, neither is the film. More imaginative direction would have saved this film. The Crispa Redmanizers have the potential to be real comedians (after all, the Harlem Globetrotters are excellent athletes). Melanie Marquez seems to be as talented as she is beautiful. Even Rod Navarro appears perfectly cast. It is too bad that the directors were badly chosen. (TV TIMES, November 18-24, 1979, p. 9.)



Arman Reyes and Freddie Sarrol's *Palengke Queen* (1982) is a commercial movie, if nothing else. There are the sure-fire elements: rich boy and poor girl, rags to riches, revenge, love. This is a film in the grand tradition of local cinema—based on the *komiks* phenomenon. One minor crisis follows another, exactly as one wants to read it in a weekly serial.

There's always a deep sense of loss when a promising director such as Arman Reyes loses his touch and turns out a terrible movie. This film is, no matter how one looks at it, simply awful.

Take the characterization of the three brothers, for instance. Why are they so ineffectual? How could Nora Aunor have remained the servile sister in such a household? Even the sequence in which Mat Ranillo offers them two cases of beer is inconclusive: we never know what the effect of the "bribery" is on Ranillo's courtship.

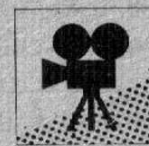
Or take Joonee Gamboa, who suddenly transforms into a responsible father when he inherits wealth. No logical explanation is ever offered for his fantastic

change of behavior. Even his chronic cough simply vanishes. Or take the supporting characters in the market: what ever happens to Louella, Ike Lozada, Inday Badi-day, and German Moreno? They seem merely to have gotten old (but not make-up-wise). If there are going to be minor characters anyway, why not make use of them to move the plot or the theme forward?

There is merit, of course, in the revenge theme. One applauds when Aunor refuses to have Celia Rodriguez kiss her foot. But someone used to the religious undertone of local movies can easily guess that our heroine, no matter how much she wants to get back at archvillain Rodriguez, will never go through with such an unchristian act. There are, in other words, no surprises in this film.

The only surprise is that Reyes has allowed himself to make a thoroughly commercial film. Perhaps the real problem lies with the *komiks* roots of the story. *Komiks* is a medium that has, in hundreds of films, proven to be unadaptable to the screen. This film proves it beyond a doubt. After all, anyone seeing Charlie Davao and Greggy Liwag look so lost in their badly written roles cannot help but give up on *komiks*-based movies.

One question says it all: what is the relationship of *Palengke Queen* to the film? Except for the first sequence, no use whatsoever is made of this ill-advised title. (PARADE, August 25, 1982, p. 35.)



The good thing about Eddie Garcia's *Sinasamba Kita* (1982) is that there are only four major characters. Otherwise, it would be impossible to keep track of the events, which rival eighteenth-century dramatic twists in quantity. One thing keeps following another, with or without benefit of logic. The fan of *komiks* magazines and radio serials will undoubtedly find nothing wrong with the meandering plot, but those with more sophisticated tastes will soon tire of the complications.

Viva Films started out with a holier-than-thou attitude that Filipino films should portray the true, the good, and the beautiful. With *Sinasamba Kita*, Viva Films takes an about-face. This film uses the two ingredients regarded as anathema by do-gooders—sex and violence. There's a lot of sex, with the four major characters changing partners. There's enough violence for the action fan, with one sequence showing a drunk Phillip Salvador defending himself in a particularly brutal way against several well-meaning toughies.

The whole film, of course, revolves around the question of sex, in particular, the question of Lorna Tolent-

tino's virginity. One sequence shows Tolentino necking and petting (when Christopher de Leon is holding her thigh) but stopping just short of deflowering. When Vilma Santos finally rescues Tolentino, the first question she asks is whether Salvador has touched Tolentino. Why, however, is virginity so important? How, moreover, can Tolentino kiss and pet de Leon and go with Salvador on a weekend trip and not expect to lose her virginity?

The acting is not spectacular, considering the track records of the four stars. Salvador is the most effective of the four, especially since Santos' performance is marred by bad dubbing (many lines are even dubbed by some other person). Among the supporting players, Irene Celebre is not bad, Luz Fernandez is credible, and Ramil Rodriguez turns in a good performance.

Despite such a distinguished staff (Romy Vitug at the camera, George Canseco at the piano, and Orlando Nadres at the typewriter), the film fails technically and artistically. The fault, however, may lie not in the technical persons, but in the original choice of material. The story is really bad, even for a *komiks* novel. No one can possibly believe anything in this film, starting from the extremely unlikely possibility that the woman de Leon almost runs over turns out to be his friend's younger sister. (PARADE, September 8, 1982, p. 37.)

FIRST FILMS

Everything about Maryo de los Reyes' *High School, Circa '65* (1979) smells of a bad film. It has a new director, for one thing. It has Eddie Rodriguez in his thousandth role as the man in the love triangle. It has Ike Lozada and his generation doing slapstick. It has a huge cast of teenagers who, in 1965, were not even old enough yet to go to kindergarten.

Maryo de los Reyes, however, turns the clichés into cinematic gems, the children into serious actors, and an unmemorable period into a fit object for nostalgia. *High School* has to be one of 1979's best films.

To another director, the years after 1965 would be more cinematically exciting, since the students can be shown indulging in drugs, politics, or sex. De los Reyes, however, takes up the challenge of recreating an apparently undistinguished period by paying more than the usual attention to production design. There are the old Pepsi bottles, the familiar *trumpo*, the awkward dance steps, the school programs, the one-on-one fist fight, and even Pepito Rodriguez signing autographs.

There is, of course, the expected story. A fresh U.P.

graduate (Charo Santos) becomes teacher-in-charge of the graduating class. She forms a close friendship with fellow teacher Eddie Rodriguez, husband of wealthy Lisa Lorena and father of student Margie Braza. Their closeness shocks students, teachers, and parents alike; Santos is forced to leave the school and Rodriguez voluntarily disappears from public sight.

Storyman Tom Adrales and screenwriter Jake Torresillas try a little bit to introduce new twists to the story. Rodriguez really loves Lorena; it is Lorena who is unfaithful because she spends her time attending social functions. Rodriguez does not love Santos; she is too intelligent to fall for a married man. In the end the family lives happily ever after and the value of family is affirmed.

But it is the director who transforms the cliché into a *tour de force*. The obligatory confrontation between wife and suspected mistress, for example, is particularly instructive. Having established early in the film that Rodriguez loves ice cream, the director makes Santos order ice cream in the restaurant where she meets Lorena. The ice cream becomes a visual symbol; Santos does not eat the ice cream. Instead, calmly and softly, she tells Lorena that Rodriguez has always loved his family and, in fact, has never been unfaithful.

The director succeeds in transforming similar trite episodes. Carrying a cake to a school celebration, a nasty old teacher trips on a string tied by a couple of mischievous students. As she gets up with the traditional "pie in the face," she berates Santos' students. Santos, in turn, berates her for assuming, without proof, that the students set the trap. Instead of regressing into slapstick, the sequence becomes a highly dramatic, crucial moment in the film. By taking the side of students against a fellow teacher, Santos breaks a professional taboo. When

the parents later complain against Santos' apparent adulterous affair, the teachers do not defend her.

The most impressive achievement of the director is molding the young talents into serious actors and actresses. In the classroom scenes, the students show different acting attitudes, superior to those shown by older bit actors in usual crowd scenes. De los Reyes brings with him, of course, years of experience with the PETA Kalinangan Ensemble, which emphasizes ensemble acting. Like Lino Brocka and Mario O'Hara, who are also PETA stalwarts, de los Reyes adopts for film the stage adage that there are no small roles, only small actors. In *High School*, the bit roles are played by veteran stage actors such as Soxy Topacio and Angie Ferro.

The film is not without its faults. Lighting leaves much to be desired; some medium shots have the actors' faces in shadows. Rodriguez' make-up in one sequence has the wrong texture. The close-up of the sand castle being washed away by the waves is too obvious an attempt at symbolism; it would have been better to build the sand castle closer to the waterline, so that the castle can be seen in the background of the earlier long shots. But such faults do not mar the film in any essential way. In fact, since this is de los Reyes' first film, it is a wonder that there are so few of these faults. (*TV TIMES, February 25 - March 3, 1979, p. 8*)



At a symposium held in U.P. in 1978, a major film producer remarked in all seriousness that, for a film to make a million, all a producer has to do is to make Dolphy stand in front of a blank wall and to run the camera for two hours. Such an observation appeared to be nothing more than a complacent hyperbole when *Darna Kuno* failed at the box-office, but Jett Espiritu's *Dancing Master* (1979) has, once again, proven the accuracy of the statement. Dolphy commands an audience.

Dolphy, of course, has a lot of help in *Dancing Master*. The film uses the cast of the once top-rated TV series *John en Marsha*; Dolphy, in fact, plays a character named Johnny. The film improves on the *Buhay Artista* team of Dolphy and Panchito. Panchito manages to have his own naughty moments, instead of simply playing straight man to Dolphy. True to his philosophy of riding on other money-making elements (he did *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay* with Niño Muhlach and *Jack 'n' Jill of the Third Kind* with Nora Aunor). Dolphy uses the Kung Fu formula which catapulted Rey Malonzo to superstar status.

The film itself has inspired moments. In one sequence,

Dolphy and Panchito are forced to play Russian roulette after the fashion of *The Deer Hunter* (complete with bamboo cage, river, and Vietnamese-sounding words). In another sequence, the film spoofs the snake technique idolized by Kung Fu fans; *Dancing Master* uses a real snake. In a dream sequence Dolphy and Nida Blanca appear to take their balletic *pas de deux* seriously, while the camera pokes fun at them. Just as in *Jack 'n' Jill of the Third Kind*, the training sequence is hilarious; Dolphy is at his best with visual satire.

Despite Dolphy, the cast, and the inspired moments, however, the film fails, because the screenplay and the direction leave much to be desired. Much of the humor is in the ad libs obviously contributed by the veteran comedians. Dolphy's visual talents are not fully exploited. One routine involving an exchange of gifts is done twice—a clear sign of loss of imagination on the part of the screenwriter. The characters act without clear motivation. The film is billed as Jett Espiritu's first film, but that is no excuse. Maryo de los Reyes' first film, *High School Circa '65*, was a masterpiece. (TV TIMES, January 17-23, 1979, p. 8.)



To get a good film, you need a good director and a good writer.

A good director is not enough. Take Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Tanikala* (1980), for example. Abaya directs a technically impressive film. From the opening credit sequence (heavily influenced by *Kramer vs. Kramer*) to the list of characters at the end (rare for Filipino movies), *Tanikala* moves firmly under her control. Except for a couple of editing slips (the first sequence involving the priest, for example, starts too early) and the anachronistic shirts worn by Romeo Vasquez, the film faithfully evokes the period around 1939. Using tight shots and sensible pacing, Abaya sets a technical standard other Filipino directors should strive to reach.

The screenplay of *Tanikala*, however, is one of screenwriter Edgardo Reyes' worst. Granted, he had to work with the inferior material of Pablo Gomez' *komiks* novel, but he already showed in *Atsay* that he can transform comic-book coals into cinematic diamonds. In *Tanikala*, sad to say, Reyes fails to establish motivations, develop character, plug logical holes, sustain credibility, exploit

the central metaphor of the *tanikala* (chain), or explore the Gothic possibilities of the character played by Rita Gomez.

Abaya and Reyes together produce a problematic film, a film well directed but badly written. *Tanikala* leaves the viewer with a nagging feeling that something important has been said but with no idea of what that something is. (TV TIMES, March 2-8, 1980, p. 9.)



Laurice Guillen directs Chanda Romero in *Kasal*.



Don't miss "*Kasal?*" (1980).

It is the first film directed by actress Laurice Guillen, but already, it shows a master at work. Guillen's directorial hand is strong from the opening credit sequence. The titles are simple, clear, and readable—something you cannot say of most title sequences in local films. In the first five minutes of the film, the technical accomplishments of Guillen's staff all announce themselves: tight editing (by Efren Jarlego), competent cinematography (by Ricardo Remias), supportive sound engineering (by Rolly Ruta and company), and appropriate music (by Jun Latonio). Even the theme song (lyrics by Nicanor Tiongson and sung by Kuh Ledesma) is exciting. Clearly, Guillen has succeeded in wielding together into one piece the several talents of her technical staff.

Only the story and screenplay leave much to be desired, and that is not really Guillen's fault. She has, after all, chosen one of the best Filipino screenwriters today, Mario O'Hara, who is himself both a good director and a good actor. O'Hara's screenplay, however, starts off with a bang, but ends with a concession too commercial to be

of any artistic value.

The screenplay tells the story of the day before Hilda Koronel and Christopher de Leon are married. Both Koronel and de Leon turn out to be in love with other persons. Her real love Jay Ilagan, however, is now married to her older sister Mia Gutierrez. His real love Chanda Romero—who turns out to be a callgirl—has been bought off by his father Johnny Wilson. Koronel and de Leon meet their real loves the night before the wedding. The thematic question, then, is: will they get married anyway although they do not love each other?

There are basically two things wrong with the screenplay. First, it is impossible that, of all the callgirls in Manila, Romero would be the one given as a gift to de Leon in his traditional "despedida de soltera." It is also improbable that, after having suffered for more than a year with Gutierrez, Ilagan will choose the night before the wedding to reiterate his love for Koronel. The ending, in other words, is not believable at all.

More important, however, is the failure of the screenplay to clarify the relationship between Koronel and de Leon. How much in love with each other are they? Why is there a sequence showing him, in a car, telling her such basic things about himself that, presumably, people about to be married already know? The screenplay fails to establish the intensity of the love between the two, or at least the intensity of their respect for societal traditions. The final decision of the two, then, to go on with their wedding is suspect. Again, the ending is problematic.

As a director, however, Guillen is responsible primarily for—at least—three basic things: the camera angles, the structure of the film, and the acting. In these aspects, as well as in the various other aspects connected with directorial craft, Guillen excels. The camera angles, for

example, are exciting, imaginative, and original. The cinematographer should be credited with the lighting and compositional values of the camerawork, but it is Guillen who decides where to place the camera. The camerawork in *Kasal?* has to be seen to be believed.

The structure of the film is also innovative. Guillen has to shift back and forth through time to tell stories of the two partners. Only once does she employ a standard flashback signal (she zooms into a close-up in the first flashback). All the other flashbacks are not signalled conventionally at all, but the viewer is never confused. The effect is stunning and appropriate: the film, after all, is not really about the present, but about the past's hold on the present.

It is in her direction of her actors that actress Guillen shows a form which should land her some kind of directional citation. *Kasal?* is filled with great performances. Koronel, as usual, is masterly, but even a newcomer like Gutierrez comes off well. In fact, in her scene with Koronel, Gutierrez manages to upstage the veteran Cannes performer. De Leon regains the level he set for himself in his first performances as a screen actor. With this film, de Leon strengthens his position as the best young actor in the local industry today.

Ilagan is excellent as the cheated lover. His "lip-synching" (should we call it "cheek-synching"?) of a saxophone solo is perfect. Romero shows, once again, that she is one of our rare, serious young actresses. Her performance is flawless. Only the older actors have some uncomfortable moments. Gloria Romero as the mother of Koronel looks the part, but seems ill at ease with the camera after such a long absence. Johny Wilson as de Leon's father gives just the right impression as the street-wise, decadent tycoon. Even Bobby Ledesma as Koronel's father manages to stay afloat in the tidal wave unleashed

by the young actors' performances, though he is no seasoned veteran.

The casting is excellent, not only because the actors are all good, but also because they all look alike (Gutierrez, in particular, really looks like Koronel's older sister). They also all act wealthy (again, something which cannot be said of almost all other films which deal with the life of the moneyed). By a strange coincidence, Guillen stages a directional debut similar to those of Maryo de los Reyes and Marilou Diaz-Abaya. *High School, Circa '65* had a bad plot, but de los Reyes compensated with his direction. *Tanikala* also had a terrible screenplay, but Abaya saved it with her direction. *Kasal?* does not have a terrible screenplay, only a flawed one, but Guillen extracts a diamond from it. If *Kasal?* is any gauge, Guillen should soon join the ranks of our magic three—Brocka, Bernal and de los Reyes. (TV TIMES, June 22-28, 1980, p. 48.)



Alaga begins with a germ of a good film, but the germ rapidly grows into a menace, poisoning the cinematic work.

Christian Espiritu has to be commended for daring to make a serious film about a serious subject. An "alaga" or sugar baby (Edu Manzano) turns out to be not the exploited one, but the exploiter of sugar mommy Charito Solis, bold actress Amy Austria, and innocent sweetheart Baby Degado. Manzano uses the three women in his attempt to gain fame and fortune. When his intrinsically evil design is discovered by Solis, sweet revenge is planned. He ends up more miserable than when he started out.

The subject clearly deserves serious attention. It is not only gigolos or the "alagas" of wealthy matrons in real life today who are victims of exploitation, but almost everyone else; who has not, at one point or other in his life, been forced to acquiesce to the irrational demands of a boss, a teacher, a parent, or a wealthy aunt? Being an "alaga" is part of surviving. Being an "alaga," however, is far from being part of being human.

The ironic twist Espiritu introduces in his story—that of the exploited being, in fact, the exploiter—is also, unfortunately, part of surviving in today's complex society. Who has not, at some point in his life, dreamed of climbing the social ladder and been willing to compromise principle for profit? The film intends to say something important; of that, there is no doubt.

What is doubtful, however, is whether the film—the way it is made—says anything at all. The technical aspects of filmmaking are so badly ignored that the film almost fails to be a film. The cinematography, for example, is more amateurish than usual; the hand-held camera moves like a tree during a typhoon. The dubbing is incredibly incompetent, with actors opening their mouths long before and long after any actual words are spoken. The writing is incomprehensible; the sequences seem either out of order or not ordered at all. The acting is painful to watch; not even Charito Solis gives more than a half-hearted performance. The editing is frustrating; the sequences start before the director shouts "Action!"

It is one thing to have something good to say. It is another thing altogether to be able to say it. Bancom Audiovision, which produced this film, has a good record of original and daring stories (*Jaguar* and *Aguila*, for example), but it still has to prove that it understands the technical aspects of filmmaking. Film is both an art and a science. We have a number of people (including Espiritu) who are creative and even brilliant. What we need—and this Bancom with its funds can provide—is technical expertise. *Alaga* could have been the first Filipino film with an unsympathetic anti-hero (also, a non-star) as the protagonist, but instead, *Alaga* is not even a film. It is merely the germ of a film. (*TV TIMES*, October 26- November 1, 1980, p. 47.)



A film is always a cinematic event. A first film usually represents a director's all-out attempt to master a new medium, as well as his initial statement to the world. Audiences are often willing to give the beginning director the benefit of the doubt, thus giving him an advantage over the veteran with a reputation to protect. Already in a first film, audiences can see the basic orientation of a director. Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Tanikala*, for instance, was overly concerned with the technical side of filmmaking, to the neglect of storytelling—thus revealing what promises to be her main contribution to local cinema, her academic training as a filmmaker. Laurice Guillen's *Kasal?* self-consciously cultivated a female point of view, to the extent of creating male caricatures—thus revealing what promises to be her main contribution to local cinema, i.e., feminist filmmaking. Maryo de los Reyes' *High School, Circa '65* highlighted ensemble playing—a heritage from his theater days.

Playgirl (1981), the first film of Mel Chionglo, shows clearly what Chionglo's strengths and weaknesses will be. His strength—expectedly enough—is in production

design. Chionglo has won several awards for his work as a production designer in local movies. As a designer, he is a stickler for details, as well as an excellent evoker of atmosphere. In *Playgirl*, the ambiance of the life of low-class prostitutes is very well evoked. The casting of the supporting characters, the choice of locations, the costumes—everything adds up to an excellent portrait of a limited *Manila by Night*.

A production designer, however, by necessity is more interested in things than in persons. Working in a production with a director, the designer usually ends up with the props, rather than with the actors. It is the director who handles the actors and the cinematographer. As a director, Chionglo fails to use his actors and his camera effectively.

The acting is abominable. Charito Solis is hardly believable as the aging, but still popular twenty-peso prostitute. The story demands that the woman she plays, a thirty-year veteran of Misericordia, earn a lot of money. She supports a young man (Phillip Salvador). She also supports her only daughter (Gina Alajar), who goes to a rather expensive school (by prostitute standards). There is a line in the script which describes Solis as "different from the others," but she plays her character too differently. There is a total lack of lasciviousness. Anyone who goes through thirty years of "serving" men is bound to cultivate some kind of vulgarity, or at least some semblance of sex appeal. Compare, for example, the way Solis plays the ex-prostitute in *City After Dark*. There, Ismael Bernal makes sure that she still looks like a prostitute.

Similarly, Gina Alajar is a complete disappointment, especially after her bravura performance in Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Brutal* (1980). She fails to bring across the sense of purpose that her character (according to her

explicit lines in one confrontation scene) calls for. The audience is left wondering how she suddenly becomes a prostitute; it is not enough to show that she has been drugged right before being raped by two men. Even Alajar's use of her face is unsatisfactory in *Playgirl*. In *Brutal*, she showed that she has the ability to portray conflicting emotions without saying a word. There is no such use of facial expression in *Playgirl*.

As director, Chionglo clearly failed to motivate his actresses properly, since in their other films, both Solis and Alajar have played similar characters competently. Much more inappropriate, however, is the cinematography. The director is responsible for deciding when to use long shots, medium shots, and close-ups. In *Playgirl*, most of the shots show more things than persons, more of the background than of the protagonists. In other words, there is a disproportionate number of long and medium shots in the film. This is particularly wrong because the film calls for a minute examination of the psychology of Solis and Alajar. The film must, then, have a lot of close-ups (Ingmar Bergman, for example, just like Lino Brocka, uses close-ups to delve into character). Chionglo, apparently, is more interested (understandably) in showing the excellent settings than in supporting the theme of the screenplay.

One particular sequence will serve as an example of Chionglo's strong and weak points. In the middle of the film, Salvador takes a train to Bicol; Solis sees him off. The train comes into view. We see other passengers with typical Bicol-type luggage. The eye for details of the former production designer is clearly there. When the train comes alongside the couple, however, they are thrown into darkness. This would be an excellent symbol, if it were deliberate. But it cannot be deliberate because light actually filters in between the cars. When the

train stops, Chionglo shows that he still has to learn more about blocking. Instead of Salvador boarding at the door nearest him, he walks all the way to the third door and boards there. The movement is unrealistic and distracting, but it does give Chionglo the opportunity to show the station in full shot. The design is excellent, but the blocking and the cinematography ruin the effect of the sequence.

Chionglo will certainly be a director to reckon with in the coming years, if only because he appears serious in his intentions and careful in his choice of locations and props. Most of our local directors have no eye for details; Chionglo's experience as a production designer clearly put him ahead of these directors. But directing a film involves cameras and actors too. When Chionglo learns to devote his attention not only to the objects in the shots, but to the persons in the shots and to the shots themselves, he will be one of our best. In *Playgirl*, however, he merely shows promise. (*TV TIMES*, February 15-21, 1981, p. 18.)



The style of the credits and the advertisement lay-out for Arman Reyes' *Dormitoryo* (1982) is misleading, because this film is not a comedy. On the contrary, it is a relentless exposition of the kind of dehumanization that occurs everyday in student dormitories around the university belt. It is, thus, not entertaining in the usual sense. It is disquieting.

1982 starts off with a bang with this film. Despite obvious technical drawbacks, the film succeeds in recreating the deplorable conditions of student life in the city. The power of the film stems from its screenplay, which is based on several short stories written by Agapito Joaquin. The most coherent of the stories involves Ariosto Reyes, whose transformation from impoverished to stone-hearted drug pusher serves as the hub of the events in the film. Reyes gives a performance decidedly superior to those of the other young actors in the film, as well as superior to most of the performances of young actors in 1981.

Also noteworthy is the production design, which positively helps generate sympathy for the characters

Without cluttering the screen with the usual poverty symbols, the designer manages to convey the sense of hopelessness that surrounds student life in the inner city.

Two interesting directorial touches show that Arman Reyes has potentials as an artistic director. In one sequence, the dorm residents are usually noisy. Having repeatedly failed to study in the past Arnold Gamboa is about to give up all hope of learning his lessons. One of the dorm residents is reading a book entitled *Amok*. The title of the book, of course, describes the action in the sequence.

Another such directorial touch involves the use of a quick cut to show time lapse. Reyes, walking home exhausted from his job, meets the neighborhood pushers. He looks at the face of one of the pushers. The face suddenly turns into his own. In the very next sequence, Reyes is already the school's established pusher. Time lapse has been successfully shown through a simple cut.

Nevertheless, the film rings several false notes. The most ridiculous is Lorna Tolentino's subplot, which tries to exploit that over-exploited Filipino situation: the rich girl falling for the poor boy. One can understand the need to get a superstar to help box-office prospects, but Tolentino comes out so infrequently and her role is so patently absurd that the film would have been much better off without her. (*PARADE*, January 23-29, 1982, p. 49.)



All that fuss about Tetchie Agbayani and her epochal appearance in a sexist magazine abroad has clouded the real issue, namely, is Agbayani a good actress or not? Whether she is pretty or not is clearly not the issue, since we have any number of other actresses who are as pretty. Whether she is the only Filipina willing to bare all for international fame is also not the issue: one can find (one version says an entire girls' school volunteered) any number of local women just as willing and just as endowed. Whether she did a disservice to Filipino womanhood (another sexist term!) or not is also not the issue: one woman clearly cannot represent the millions of Filipinas who would not be caught dead in a centerfold (or, conversely, would do everything to be caught dead in a centerfold).

The real issue is whether Agbayani can act or not. If she is a good actress, we might be willing to overlook her daring act as the idiosyncrasy of an artist. If she is not a good actress, however, we must look more critically at her action—which is daring because she dares to be called an actress.

In Lito Tiongson's *Hubad na Gubat* (1982), Agbayani really bares all, and I don't mean just her body. She finally stands revealed as someone who, honestly, cannot be considered a great Filipino actress. She should not even be considered a good one.

For one thing, she never gets into the character of the noble savage she plays. Phillip Salvador tames her, but the taming of this shrew takes too short a time. Without so much as a shake of her hair (which cleverly hides her assets 99 percent of the time), she becomes transformed into a village maiden. Whatever happened to the years of living alone among the wild boars and vicious headhunters? A good actress would have shown traces of wilderness that the character is supposed to have.

For another thing, she has strange, lowland manners. Her nails (criticized to death by numerous viewers) are manicured. She stands fiddling with the hem of her blouse while standing in the forest with Salvador. She assumes a couquetish look more proper to a city sophisticate than to a female Tarzan. Her scenes with either Salvador or Raul Aragon lack tension, primarily because she cannot stay on the same level as the two veteran actors. Her acting, in short, is a disaster.

Not that she is the only thing wrong with *Hubad na Gubat*. The direction of first-timer Lito Tiongson, for one thing, is also disastrous. He is unable to create tension in his scenes. He shifts his camera without shifting angle (an elementary mistake in camera direction). He fails to put cinematic techniques in their proper places, invariably being carried away by some Hollywood touch (for instance, the first sequence comes straight out of horror films such as *The Burning*).

The cinematography, while at times stunning, also fails to provide enough lighting for the indoor scenes. The forest scenes are well-lighted, but that is hardly the

cinematographer's achievement, since the sun clearly comes through the trees. The acting by the other actors and actresses is nondescript. Salvador delivers his usual competent performance, but Aragon tends to exaggerate his bad-boy character. Charlie Davao hardly generates any excitement with his monotonous performance, and even Mario Escudero, given a complex role, has a tough time being credible.

In short, it is not all Agbayani's fault, although—since the film's publicity clearly revolved around her—she shares the major part of the blame. The technical failure of the film is all the more regrettable because the screenplay happens to be of the best ever written for local films. Ed Maranan's highly intelligent and provocative script calls for flashbacks through Escudero's memories and Venchito Galvez's storytelling; parallels between Davao and Aragon, Escudero and Salvador, and Agbayani as the missing mother and Agbayani as the savage daughter; counterpoint between the lust (for women and gold) of the Christian lowlanders and the ethnic pride of the Tinguians; and a beautiful terse summary at the end where everything is finally revealed to the viewers.

Hubad na Gubat could have been a triumph of screenplay over direction and acting, but a film is still a director's medium, rather than a writer's. Despite the well-structured script, the film falls flat on its naked face. It is a safe bet that the vast majority of its viewers came to see Agbayani. It is perhaps the greatest irony of this film that the sexist persons who wanted to see a sex object came out of the theaters unsatisfied. They not only failed to see much of Agabayani, they did not even get to see a good film. (*TV TIMES*, July 18-24, 1982, p. 4.)



Antonio Jose Perez's *Haplos* (1982) is the story of an engineer (Christopher de Leon) who falls in love with a ghost (Rio Locsin) while he is having an affair with a POPCOM officer (Vilma Santos).

Clearly meant to be a Gothic movie, *Haplos* is supposed to scare the viewer to death. Unfortunately, it is the film that dies. The screenplay (said to have been drastically altered in production), incoherent enough as it stands, is rendered valueless by a ridiculous ending. The only good thing about the film is its sound, which imaginatively uses various background noises for thematic effect.

The reason the film fails is clearly its incompetent direction. Scenes obviously well-written (from the dialogue, anyway) come off stale because they are not dramatized. Because the director does not know how to direct his actors, the actors give terrible performances. Rio Locsin is the best of the leads, with Christopher de Leon a poor second. Vilma Santos apparently cannot decide how to approach her role. This is the comeback vehicle of Delia Razon and J. Eddie Infante, but frankly, they have had better films. (*PANORAMA*, December 26, 1982, p. 11.)



It is surprising how one screenwriter can come out simultaneously with one brilliant work and one terrible one. *Moral*, by Ricardo Lee, is an excellent work; Antonio Jose Perez's *Haplos* (1982), also by Lee, is a disaster. (Industry sources indicate that Lee's screenplay was horribly mutilated by the director, but whether or not this is true, Lee remains responsible for the screenplay as it appears in the film. This is unfortunate in the context of our unprofessional industry, but it is the only way to remain a critic and not to become a detective.)

The first major flaw in the screenplay involves the relationship between Vilma Santos (a POPCOM worker) and Christopher de Leon (a balikbayan from Saudi Arabia). Virginal Santos has her first taste at the hands of de Leon. In one scene, Santos says that she views the event as isolated. But in another scene, she says she has fallen in love with de Leon. Between the two scenes, however, she never sees de Leon. Does perception change with time? In general, yes, but only if there is cause to change. De Leon, for all intents and purposes, has disappeared from the life of Santos after the isolated

hed scene.

The second major flaw involves the time frame of the ghost (Rio Locsin). She is supposed to have been raped and killed during the Japanese occupation. She reappears to selected men (de Leon, in this case), in order to seduce them. That is the only logical explanation for the fact that she allows herself to be kissed so quickly (surely, women during the Japanese occupation were less forward). Since she is dead, she should not "die" again. When the house burns down at the end, therefore, her house should reappear (as it does). But she also should reappear. But she doesn't. Where's the logic?

If the screenplay is flawed, so is the direction. In fact, the direction is much worse. Antonio Jose Perez just does not know how to direct. One scene is ridiculous: Santos decides to scare de Leon by putting on a furniture sheet and acting like a ghost. The camera is placed such that we can see both Santos (masquerading as a ghost) and the unwary de Leon. We are not scared and—to top it all—neither is de Leon, whose face is hidden by the movement of Locsin. Even the worst horror-movie director can do better than that.

Or take the first shot of Locsin as she paddles behind de Leon, who is on a boat. She becomes a mere speck in the background. The correct way to direct the scene is to focus on Locsin in some way (through blocking, camera focusing, color contrast, or any number of directorial options). There should also be a reaction shot of de Leon who should certainly not think that this is a ghost. All we get from Perez, sad to say, is a straight, simple shot of two boats crossing.

I don't understand how the Film Ratings Board could grant this film a higher rating than Lino Brocka's *Cain at Abel* (1982). I am all for giving incentives to as many people as possible. In fact, I feel, like everybody else in

the industry, that taxation of movies is excessive. But it is one thing to encourage good movies and quite another thing to reward bad ones. *Haplos*, simply put, is a bad film. (TV TIMES, December 26, 1982, -January 1, 1983, p. 4)



Vilma Santos in *Haplos*.



Rio Locsin and Christopher de Leon in *Haplos*.



If sex and violence will sell a film, Peque Gallaga's *Oro, Plata, Mata* (1982) has both in large doses. There are sex sequences that are practically softcore. There is a shot of Kuh Ledesma (playing an insane woman, a kind of Sisa figure) with her brains splattering across the screen. There is a shot of man's face being ripped open. There are several shots of gunshot wounds spouting blood in generous doses. Clearly, this film is not meant for children or even squeamish adults.

It is impossible not to be impressed by this film. It is so good that, despite its being three and a half hours long, it maintains its hold on audience attention.

The most breathtaking element in it is its production design (not surprisingly, since director Peque Gallaga started out as Ishmael Bernal's production designer). Everything is authentic forties, from the furniture to the costumes, down to the smallest piece of property (or props).

Almost as breathtaking is the cinematography by Rody Lacap, who makes full use of the sets and costumes. Rarely does a Filipino cinematographer show such mas-

tery of color combinations, compositions, and sheer technical knowledge. One early shot, taking all of the minutes (without a cut), says it all: the camera moves back and forth through a crowded room, following and leaving characters who turn out eventually to be important in the story. The director, of course, must have told Lacap what angle to use, but the actual execution of the conception, the actual placement of lights in order to achieve such a period effect (highlighting the sets in various ways), and the actual physical handling of the camera are all Lacap.

The editing by Jesus Navarro is a bit problematic, particularly since the film is—no matter how good it is—too long. But the problem of the editor is easy to see: which shots should be shortened? Every shot is so elegantly composed that it is almost sacrilege to touch the footage. Nevertheless, certain scenes can do with a little (perhaps a lot of) trimming, such as the Pieta of the mother crying over her dead son, the tableau after the fight scene at the end, and the comic scene about the sale of tol fruits in the grove.

Performances are clearly above par. Maya Valderrama stands out in her role as the sex-starved doctor who is as earthy as she is compassionate. Ronnie Lazaro ably carries the longest and most complex supporting role. Fides Cuyugan Asensio is exceptional in her delineation of the haughty, half-crazed hacendera. Liza Lorena adequately paints the quiet, self-effacing mother of the two adolescent girls.

Not every film is perfect, even this masterpiece. For one thing, the fantastic shots of the man's face being ripped open, Kuh Ledesma's head being blown up, and the hospital battle scene are all unnecessary to the main plot, which is simply the growing up story of Joel Torre. The whole subplot of Ledesma is ill-advised. The se-

quences of Sandy Andolong and Joel Torre do not come off well, at least in comparison to the rest of the film. The delineation of the characters played by Lorli Villanueva and Abbo de la Cruz is not polished. The motivation for de la Cruz's revolt and turning into a bandit, in fact, is conspicuously absent from the film. As a result, his vengeance is not believable.

It has become fashionable of late to speak of flawed masterpieces. In this film, the stress is clearly on "masterpiece." (*PARADE*, January 26, 1983, p. 37.)



Mahjong is a major symbol in *Oro, Plata, Mata*.



To see how good a film Peque Gallaga's *Oro, Plata, Mata* (1982) is, let us study just one aspect of it—its structure. The film consists of three parts (*Oro, Plata, Mata*), framed by two party sequences.

The frame of *Oro, Plata, Mata* consists of two similar party sequences. In the first sequence (including the opening credit sequence), faces of Bacolod's beautiful people are shown. The faces are uniformly handsome and untarnished. Among the faces is that of a pretty young woman who assumes no significance in the rest of the film, except its ending. In the ending sequence, again at a party scene, this young woman is shown covering her mouth. When she shows her mouth to the audience, we find out that she has a scar right across her lips. It is a tiny scar, but it disfigures her face. The scar symbolizes a deeper disfiguration in upper-class society: the elite has also retained the scars of the Second World War, but these social scars are hardly noticeable though real. In fact, it is as though the war has never happened. Cheri Gil behaves like an innocent, righteous lady. Sandy Andolong has a new boyfriend (Joel Torre). The party rituals

are practically the same. In the middle of the scene is Andolong's old boyfriend (Antonio Alonso), a mute reminder of the reality the elite has just experienced, but is trying to forget. Nothing has changed, yet everything has changed.

The beginning and ending sequences are similar in other ways. There is the tentative kiss in the beginning, and the surer kiss at the end. There is the dancing and the moving about and even the same camera movements. There is the same exuberance that is broken only by the announcement of an accident in the first party scene. The implication is that the exuberance of the final party scene will be broken by some similar catastrophe. History must repeat itself, if only on film.

The first major part of the film is its *Oro* portion, portraying the short, happy life of the clan presided over by Hides Cuyugan-Asensio, but actually held together only by Manny Ojeda. The daily life in the aristocratic house is characterized by a mahjong game. Mahjong is well chosen not only because it is the game actually played by the idle rich, but also because it is a game of chance requiring a minimum amount of intellectual effort. It is not even a game exclusively for the rich. Mahjong is played on street corners, as well as in exclusive villages. Although it is established that the *Oro* players (Asensio, Liza Lorena, Lorli Villanueva, Maya Valdes) play for high stakes (twenty pesos at that time was a lot of money), there is nothing particularly richy about the game being played in the big house, except the incidentals: a maid peeling *lutong pakwan*, the "slaves" doing all the housework and garden work, the furniture, and the jewelry.

The *Oro* portion, just like the opening party sequence, is ended by a major crisis: the Japanese are seen coming in the distance. The final sequence of this first part has been justly praised: against the burning crops, the flee-

ing families are etched.

The second major portion of the film—the *Plata* portion—shows the aristocrats in their hiding place in the mountains, an idyllic, well-furnished house in beautiful surroundings. The shots of the natural wonders of the place cleverly hide the ugly nature of the situation: the elite are enjoying themselves while the rest of their countrymen are fighting the Japanese. Only twice does the war intrude into the make-believe paradise: once, when a group of wounded guerrillas comes for help, and second, when a dying Japanese soldier comes upon the hideaway.

The incident involving the Japanese soldier brings out a basic conflict in the group: the rich people, represented by the cowardly Torre, are ineffectual, while the poor people, represented by the macho Ronnie Lazaro, are superior to the Japanese.

The *Plata* portion ends with another disaster—the group is attacked by a gang of bandits, among whom is Abbo de la Cruz, a former hired hand. The attack is particularly vicious. Only Torre and Lazaro are spared, not being around at the time.

The third major portion of the film—its *Mata* portion—brings Torre and Lazaro to the hide-out of the bandits. Some questions have been raised about the relevance of Kuh Ledesma to the whole film. One possible reason for including her is the necessity to end the *Mata* portion with some kind of major event. Clearly, the acclaimed shot of Ledesma being shot right through the head is a major event.

The general structure of the film can thus be described this way: a joyous event is given, ended by something terrible. The first party is ended by an accident at sea. The *Oro* portion ends in the fire scene. The *Plata* portion ends with the massacre. The *Mata* portion ends with

Ledesma's brains splattering across the screen. The final party scene, it is therefore implied, will end in some kind of disaster (the overthrow of the elite?).

Incidentally, this study of the film's structure shows exactly where the film is strong and where it is weak. It is strong everywhere except in places which do not fit the structure or are forced to fit the structure. Thus, the mountain sequences after the massacre are unnecessary (these are sequences such as the revival of the four women through the mahjong game). There is a need for something like the brain-splattering shot, though some more scenes should have been included to make Ledesma less problematic at the end. Visual techniques not germane to the structure are dubious: the slow-motion shot of the sheep in the *Oro* portion strikes a completely false note. Slow motion ends the *Oro* and the *Mata* portions; a slow-motion shot should have been included in the massacre scene to end the *Plata* portion.

All we have discussed in this short review is the structure of the film. We have said nothing about its excellent technical elements (especially production design) or its masterly direction. It is impossible to dwell on all the merits (and all the mistakes) of this film. One thing, however, cannot be denied—*Oro, Plata, Mata* is the best proof that, given adequate financial support, our filmmakers can make internationally superior films. (PANORAMA, February 13, 1983, pp. 24-25.)

THE FILIPINO AS REBEL

Pablo Santiago's *Sierra Madre* (1981), as an action picture, succeeds: it has extended fight scenes, it has superheroes, it has confrontations, it has clear and simple plotting. In the context of local movies, it is no mean feat to put together two giants and to give them equal time. It is a bit like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (from where the ending was copied): two stars must share all the glory and all the blood.

If *Sierra Madre* had stuck to being an action picture, there would be no difficulty giving it a five-star rating. The trouble is that there is a deliberate attempt to make the film "relevant," in the worst sense of the word. The villains, for instance, are members of a private army (dressed strangely enough, like legitimate security guards). The archvillain, however, turns out not to be the rich man, but only his nephew. Rich men, the screenplay says, are actually well-intentioned, kindhearted, decent people: it's their aides who are mean and oppressive. In other words, the film sets out to defend the motives of land-grabbing rich men.

There is a bunch of student activists in the film. The ac-

tivists, led by Rez Cortez, mouth slogans against the rich man, but in their spare time, they go to beerhouses just like their decadent enemies. The film, of course, is perfectly within its rights to claim that an activist like Cortez has three hostess-girlfriends, but to imply that all activists have the money (or the inclination) to go beerhouse dancing every night is to seriously distort reality.

The laborers have legitimate grievances against the plant owner; at least, that is the implication of the labor unrest scenes. But the grievances are never articulated. Hence, the laborers merely appear as trouble-makers or, at best (since they speak of being threatened), cowards. In fact, the labor leader himself (Ramon Revilla) turns out to be the wanted bandit that the undercover soldier (Fernando Poe, Jr.) is after. What does the film really want to say, then? Apparently, the labor movements are fake, labor leaders are bandits, student activists are womanizers, factory owners are angels. Whether or not these things are actually true is not the question here. The problem is that the film belongs to a "social consciousness" genre, but violates all the rules of that genre.

Nevertheless, on the surface, as an action flick, *Sierra Madre* is terrific. It is one of the few films where Poe gets his clothes dirty (that is, again, no mean achievement). Poe does not actually get shot in the film (although, by implication, he is shot one second after the words "The End" appear), but his Superman image is properly compromised. Poe is not a bad actor. If he would only accept really dramatic roles (including those which show him dead), he could be a Marlon Brando—well-rewarded, well-awarded. (*TV TIMES*, March 29 - April 4, 1981, p. 4.)



The drawing power of Augusto Buenaventura's *Kumander Alibasbas* (1981) derives from its action sequences. There is blood all over the screen when Joseph Estrada and friends meet their foes. There is even a shot of Estrada's head after he is decapitated. There is no sex at all, but plenty of violence.

Nobody can do anything with a bad screenplay. This movie is a good example. The screenplay is almost incomprehensible. We never know what Estrada is fighting for. The people he liquidates are sometimes not even identified, giving us the impression that he kills out of a psychotic need for power. The sequences do not lead to a central climax, nor are they even unified by a central theme. Although the advertisements for the movie focus on the fact that the real-life Kumander Alibasbas was the third highest-ranking leader in the Communist military arm of the time, nothing is said in the movie about the Huk movement. The role of the PC is also not well delineated; they hardly ever appear, except in the ambush scene. (When they do appear, they wear what appear to be security guard uniforms.)

The real-life story of Kumander Alibasbas could have made a brilliant movie, if only because his death showed that even movements presumably intended purely to help the masses of our people are actually hotbeds of power struggles, intrigues, and assassinations (in other words, very much like the Old Society the Huks wanted to topple). Or the focus of the movie could have been the psychological make-up of the messianic (but misguided) Kumander Alibasbas; the movie, however, offers absolutely nothing by way of psychological or sociological insight. In short, the material is wasted by the movie because, in the first place, the writer does not understand the historical importance of the main character. (PARADE, June 14, 1981, p. 24.)



Two superstars confront each other in *Sierra Madre*.



Clearly the most incoherent of the 1981 Metro Manila Film Festival entries, Jose Yandoc's *Kamlon* (1981) is also one of the most boring. There is hardly an exciting moment, despite the inherent drama of the real-life Kamlon saga. The fault lies with the director, who cannot dramatize his sequences. The screenplay tries to do two things—play up the love triangle involving Ramon Revilla, Isabel Rivas, and Rosemarie de Vera, and tell the story of Kamlon. Unfortunately, the two things cannot go together, and the result is a confusing, frustrating, and insulting flow of events. Strictly speaking, in fact, there is no *flow* of events, since the episodes do not have logical connections. One glaring mistake will suffice as an example: in one sequence, Eddie Garcia commands his men to prepare for an assault on Revilla's mountain stronghold. In the very next sequence, labelled "After Six Months," Revilla is shown preparing for the assault. The conclusion is that it takes Garcia's men six months to put on their uniforms; obviously, that is not what the film really wants to say.

The acting is uniformly horrendous, beginning with Re-

villa (who seems not to understand the racial, religious, and political motivations which drove the real Kamlon into rebellion), Rivas (who seems to be a different person everytime she appears on screen), de Vera (who merely walks through her role), and even Garcia (whose characterization is uncharacteristically simplistic). Anthony Alonzo and George Estregan are wasted in essentially superfluous roles.

The direction is terrible, with Yandoc committing such elementary mistakes as reversing screen direction. The music is ethnic (as it has to be), but does not highlight the major actions in the film. The cinematography ranges from incompetent (out of focus) to unimaginative (not making use of the colorful motifs of the sets). (PARADE, January 9-15, 1982, p. 37.)



Lirio Vital and Dante Varona in *Indio*, another film treatment of the Filipino as rebel.



The ads for Leonardo Garcia's *Alfredo Sebastian* (1981) emphasized that "five hectares of sugar cane were burned and five bullets were used for total realism." On screen, however, the five hectares do not look more than three square meters. The cinematography is so bad that the sugar cane fire looks even less realistic than a similar one simulated through models or camera tricks. Live bullets may have been used for the scene where Ramon Revilla hysterically shoots at a pond but what's the thrill in seeing plants being shot at? The entertainment value of this movie can only come from the sugar cane sequence or the live bullet sequence, since the story is far from entertaining. Even the fight scenes are not as exciting as those in Fernando Poe, Jr., or Lito Lapid films, because the combatants merely shoot at each other from great distances, using thousands of bullets and hardly even scoring a hit.

The film has a thesis which is interesting, maybe even valid: that the dissident movement in the late sixties was nothing else but a power trip on the part of small-time goons. Care is taken to make the dissident movement as

realistic as possible: there is even a war council over which a guy named Ka Amadeo presides. Even granting the thesis of the movie, however, the viewer is disturbed by two clear distortions of reality. First, were all the NPA commanders in Tarlac in the late sixties as insane as Eddie Garcia? Second, were all the PC soldiers in the late sixties as ineffective as those shown in this film? Only the personal efforts of Revilla are effective; without him, the PC soldiers cannot even kill a single dissident. In fact, the PC provincial commander is satirized: he is more concerned about his press image than about the success of his campaign against the Huks. Is the film trying to say, then, that both the NPA and the PC were wrong in 1968? Who, then, was right?

Technically, the movie is full of errors. The production design, for example, is all mixed up. The events are clearly indicated to be happening from 1968 to 1970, but the costumes, sets, even dialogue, are all post-martial law. The direction has no life at all: during the crucial hospital sequence, for example, in which Revilla fights for his life, all the actresses merely stand around as though posing for a class picture. Since the film was promoted as a "quality film" (the producer "pledges to make only quality films the local movie industry can be proud of"), this is a clear artistic failure. (*PARADE*, May 3, 1982, p. 22.)



Bebong Osorio's *Kumander Elpidio Paclibar* (1982) does not really know what it wants to do. As an action film, it is tame, the action sequences being limited to the usual war scenes and too short peacetime gunfights. It thus fails to appeal to action fans. As a serious film, it lacks insight and truth, thus failing to appeal to intelligent viewers. It is hard to say, then, who exactly this film wants to entertain.

There are several good performances in this film. Rudy Fernandez, for instance, is good in his portrayal of a man forced by his principles to abandon his family and join the dissident movement. Rising above the level of acting generally expected of mere action stars, Fernandez manages to elicit audience sympathy for his character by using a minimum of face and body movements. It is rare to find such internalized acting in an action film.

Similarly, Amy Austria gives a performance within the high level of acting expected of her. Only the flimsiness of her role prevents her from giving another award-winning performance. Marianne de la Riva is pretty but not much else, but George Estregan ably supports the ef-

forts of the main stars. Among the supporting actors and actresses, Romy Diaz, Baldo Marro, and Rez Cortez are worth singling out.

If the acting is adequate, even outstanding, why then does the film fail? The fault lies in two elements of the film—the screenplay and the production design.

The screenplay is horrible. Given the possibilities of the material, the screenwriter removes all the significant angles and retains only the trite ones. A serious screenwriter would have focused on the reasons Fernandez first gives up fighting after the war (why, in other words, does he not follow the example of Austria?), then why he fails to do something earlier about Diaz's violence, then why he joins the Huks (the rational, not the emotional, reasons), then why he decides to surrender. What is involved in all these decisions is Fernandez's obsession with Communist principles. In the film, what the screenwriter actually does is to give Fernandez stock lines taken from Communist manifestoes (lines which make no sense taken out of context), make him a man torn between his duty to his wife and his sexual desire for Austria, and show his followers as unthinking men who act like hungry rats pouncing on a piece of cheese. In other words, the screenwriter completely misunderstands the character of Paclibar.

Osorio does his best with the inferior screenplay, but he cannot do much to lengthen the extraordinary short sequences. He also cannot do much to fill in the gaps left by the hit-or-miss writing. He tries, for instance, to visually jump the gap between the black-and-white war scenes and the postwar farm scenes (through newspaper headlines). He tries a similar transition from 1946 to 1951, again through newspaper headlines. But the transitions do not work because they merely span time, but do not show logical connections. Moreover, the first

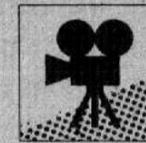
transition is wrong, because the black-and-white scenes actually turn into color scenes *before* the transition.

The production design adds to the confusion in the film. It is supposed to be 1946, but the actors wear 1982 clothes. The cabarets look like 1982 beerhouses. The Huks are supposed to be hiding out in the mountains for months, without supplies and often without food, but Fernandez is always clean-shaven, with clean shirts, the only thing he does not change is his hat, which he wears all the time, whether the sun is shining or he is indoors or what.

The real problem of the film is that it is simply not true. Why, for instance, are there no female Huks besides their leaders (Austria, Beth Bautista, and Lorna Tolentino)? Surely, if women can be commanders, they can be soldiers too. Instead, the women are all domesticated (mother types who cook and care for the sick).

Why do the characters speak in old-fashioned Tagalog, when their milieu clearly demands that they speak in rough-and-ready, street Tagalog? The ending is the worst of all the sequences: why do the families suddenly lead the procession back to town, when a real surrender would certainly involve all kinds of military rituals (identification, countings, tight security, and so on)?

What is the film trying to say? That the Huk movement was nothing else but a protest against private armies? That the army was always outwitted by Paclibar's tiny band? That sex and hunger were the two greatest temptations of the Huks? That going to beerhouses was a common Huk pastime? (*PARADE*, May 26, 1982, p. 35.)



Controversy often makes things appear more important than they really are. Take JE Productions' battle with the censors, for instance. Originally, the publicity would have us believe, *Pedring Taruc* was being blocked because no outlaw is supposed to be the hero in a film. Pedro Taruc, the communist leader, was an outlaw—as far as all our governments so far are concerned. No film, following the strict logic of our censors, can have Taruc as the protagonist.

As is usual in our cinema industry, compromise is the rule rather than the exception. The censors eventually relented and allowed the film to be shot and shown, but with an insignificant change in the title—*Pedring*, rather than *Pedro*. The change is insignificant, because the film—if it is to have any value at all—must revolve around the real life of real-life “outlaw” Pedro Taruc.

The disclaimer, in any case, is ridiculous. Take just one example from the film. There is a character in the film named “President Marcos,” who is portrayed as having listened to the grievances of the poor and instituted programs to help the masses. According to the dis-

claimer, this character called "President Marcos" is not the real-life President. Is the film claiming that our real-life President has not listened to the grievances of the poor and has not instituted programs to help the masses? But if the President Marcos in the film is truly our real-life President, then the Pedring Taruc in the film is also our real-life Huk leader. There is the rub.

In other words, disclaimer or not, the film must be judged according to its faithfulness to the life of Pedro Taruc. And that is where the film fails. There is no attempt in the film to tell us what it is that Taruc is fighting for. What political or religious or social ideology does he represent? Why is he being supported by thousands of people? (If he were not so supported, he would not be able to go to and from towns so openly.) Why is he—whether we like it or not—a folk hero?

A film about a rebel must deal with the issues that the rebel represents. One expects of the film some grand scope, with ideas clashing, with armies battling, with nations at stake. Instead, the film gives us a basic domestic drama, with Joseph Estrada ending up as a man without a cause, whose only concern is protecting his wife. Such a portrait is an injustice to any rebel, whether the rebel is on our side or not.

This could have been a good film. The screenwriters start out with a brilliant device: they focus the film on the wavering beliefs of spy Ronaldo Valdez. After coming into contact with Taruc, Valdez starts thinking that, perhaps, just perhaps, the aging Huk leader is right. Thus, when the time comes to kill Taruc, Valdez is faced with a personal and ideological crisis. When Valdez embraces Taruc, whom he has just shot, the intention of the screenwriters is obvious.

The trouble is that the device is not allowed its full dramatic impact. The viewer is puzzled by Valdez's

identity crisis. Why is Valdez so taken in by Taruc when Taruc is portrayed as a man without a cause? Why does a trained soldier, a top product of the Philippine Military Academy, hesitate to perform his duty to his country? The film should clearly have painted Taruc more sympathetically and more profoundly. That way, the viewer can believe in Valdez's crisis. In that way, too, by the way, the viewer's anti-communist beliefs can be better reinforced. The soldier who rejects communism because he understands it is much more praiseworthy than the one who rejects it out of ignorance.

I am speaking here merely of dramatic propriety, of what it takes to make viewers believe in a protagonist's internal conflict. For the protagonist here is truly Valdez, not Estrada. It is Valdez who has to make up his mind. It is he who has to choose between democracy and communism. Taruc is a mere catalyst in the screenplay as it is written. Technically, Estrada is merely playing a supporting role. But the trouble is that the filmmakers are not consistent. Estrada keeps getting center stage and Valdez is not given a realistic choice. In the end, Valdez kills Estrada out of self-defense, not because Valdez does not believe in communism. In other words, there is no real conflict in the film, and, as everyone knows, without conflict, there is no film. (*TV TIMES*, September 5-11, 1982, p. 4.)



One can be a Joseph Estrada fan and still throw up while watching Augusto Buenaventura's *Pedring Taruc* (1982), JE Productions' sequel to Buenaventura's equally horrendous *Kumander Alibasbas*. Admittedly, *Pedring Taruc* is much better written, much better planned, much better directed than the earlier saga of a Huk leader, but that is not saying much. In fact, it is saying much too little.

On the one hand, the problem with *Pedring Taruc* can be said to be mainly technical. Take the handling of point of view, for example. The whole film is divided into two interwoven parts: an ongoing narrative of events after Taruc's death, and a series of episodic flashbacks prior to Taruc's death. The flashbacks are technically justified through the memories of two persons close to Taruc, his wife (Coney Reyes-Mumar) and his killer (Ronaldo Valdez), and through Taruc's diary which Valdez discovers.

The first flashback, ostensibly through the memory of the dead-tired Valdez, is short and accurate. It tells of Valdez's attempt to get Mumar to leave her husband. The second flashback, however, justified through Taruc's

diary, is wrong. A political caucus of Taruc's enemies is shown, but Taruc (who is narrating the events) could not have been in that caucus. In other words, the point of view of Taruc is not kept. Similarly, a later sequence showing the crooked politicians panicking at the return of Taruc does not belong to Taruc's point of view. This is a technical mistake in the writing of the screenplay.

Another technical mistake, irritating for most of the early sequences, is the use of a lens made deliberately fuzzy near the edges. Presumably, the director wanted to create a memory effect, a kind of soft focus not possible locally (because we lack sophisticated equipment) and therefore approximated by rubbing some kind of dirty liquid around the edges of the camera lens. Knowing the financial limitations of local cinema, we might tend to forgive such a primitive ploy. But the problem is that the fuzziness is not kept throughout the flashback sequences (the point of view here is the diary). What apparently happens (this is a guess, but probably correct) is that some of the shots come from the earlier *Kumander Alibasbas*. In other words, stock footage seems to have been used. The cinematography thus shifts from the fuzzy to the clear, without any logical explanation.

Because Diego Cagahastian has proven his ability to create realistic and correct dialogue in his earlier screenplays, I am inclined to think that some of the lines in the film were either written by Augusto Buenaventura or contributed by the actors. A good example of a terrible line is this: "Kakamutin mo ang likod ko, kakamutin ko ang likod mo." This is a literal translation of the English idiom, "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." The idiom makes sense in English, but it is plain nonsense in Pilipino.

There are other technical blunders in the movie, the most obvious of which is the music, which ranges from

the blatantly inappropriate to the clearly derivative. In fact, at various points, such as in the meditative sequences involving Valdez, the music is ridiculous, causing laughter where there should be contemplation. The editing is technically clean (in the sense that the cement marks do not show), but there are many things to be said against the loss of camera direction because of the putting together of unmatched shots. In the sequence where Mumar's father and brother get killed, for instance, it is jarring to see the killers shift from one side of the screen to the other.

Of course, not everything is a technical disaster in the film. The sound, for example, is good; it would have been much better if the music were not there to hide the creative use of sound effects, background noise, and carryover crowd voices. The major screenplay device of shifting from Kapampangan to Pilipino is also well-executed. One hardly notices that the characters are speaking now in one, now in the other language. In fact, realistically, everybody is speaking in Kapampangan, but the unnoticeable shifts to Pilipino create a kind of instant dubbing.

While the problem with the film may be said to be mainly technical, the real problem is really, on the other hand, that of approach. As in *Kumander Alibasbas*, Buenaventura deliberately ignores the ideology behind the Huk movement. There is no sequence showing peasants being oppressed by hacenderos. In fact, the only quasi-hacendero is Mumar's father, who is avenged by Taruc! There is no conversation between Taruc and Valdez about the principles which the Huks are fighting for. When Valdez says to Mumar that he has seen the light and will join the movement, we wonder what light he has seen (even if he is only pretending at this point) and what the movement is all about. In fact, we wonder how

the movement (referred to as "ang kilusan" by Taruc's henchmen) can recruit so many members, when it is hunted by the authorities and it never takes the side of the oppressed (Taruc even kills those who kill an hacendero).

The approach to a hero (or anti-hero) who happens to be a rebel should be, even if unsympathetic, fair. We must know what it is that the hero is fighting for. We must know why he merits being a hero. We must know why he ultimately must lose to the agents of the government. A good example of an anti-Communist film with a Communist hero is Warren Beatty's *Reds* (1982). No one watching *Reds* will defect to Russia, since the Communists are shown up for what they are. But its hero is an out-and-out Red, with whom we can sympathize but not agree. Taruc (and using his alias "Pedring" does not fool anybody, especially since the theater billboards clearly say that the film is about Pedro) will not posthumously foment revolution in the Philippines. What will make people take up arms is something like the Board of Review, which keeps treating adult moviegoers like children, insulting them by telling them (through a disclaimer shown at the start of the film) that the whole thing is fiction (according to this disclaimer, these persons are pure figments of the imagination: Quezon, Magsaysay, Marcos, all of whom are referred to in the film). Ironically, then, the real subversive is not Taruc (who, according to army intelligence, was a mere figurehead anyway at the time he was killed, apparently unarmed, by persons unknown), nor even Joseph Estrada (who does his best acting and, at least, making films about people considered outlaws by our government), but maybe the Board of Review, which is making adult Filipinos so angry by insulting their intelligence, emotional maturity, and loyalty to democracy. (*WHO*, September 29, 1982, pp. 26-27.)

THE FILIPINO ABROAD

Now and then, Filipinos go abroad to make movies. Undoubtedly, there is a certain attraction inherent in movies made abroad. At the very least, the Filipino gets a chance to see other countries, if only on film. He also gets to see Filipino actors and actresses interacting with American actors and actresses. Given the still vital colonial mentality of many local viewers, going abroad seems to be a distinct advantage in terms of the box office.

What actually results from these expensive trips abroad, however, is usually not worth the trouble, the time, and the money. A good example is Muni Zaró's *Bullet for Your Music* (1978), shot in Los Angeles, with Rico J. Puno in the lead. The film is a total disaster, and it is good to know why. Perhaps, some lessons are waiting to be learned by producers still interested in going abroad.

Because local producers (or foreign producers eyeing primarily the local market) cannot afford to pay the usual Hollywood rates, Filipino films made abroad usually cast third-rate actors. Worse, many actors appearing in these

films are not even professional actors, but are friends or friends of friends. If they are professional, the actors almost certainly are not Equity members (American union members), since they are willing to accept what to them are substandard talent fees.

Think of the non-actors in *Bullet for Your Music*, for example. They deliver their lines like high school students memorizing an incomprehensible Shakespeare passage. They stand up stiffly. The leading lady (a particularly unattractive and fat American) even looks at the camera as she walks past it. Even the fight scenes are so badly acted that no credibility is ever approximated.

The cinematography is terrible. During the kissing scene, for example, the shadow of the camera is clearly seen behind Puno and the American woman. To hide the shadow, the camera tries to pan to the side, but the movement makes the shadow even more obvious. In the same scene, which is first in close-up, the cameraman suddenly pulls his camera back in order to get a medium shot, so he can zoom in slowly. The intent is so obvious and the camera movement so abrupt that the result is funny, not romantic nor erotic.

The direction is abysmal. Sometimes, there isn't even a master shot. The camera just picks up a person who is not, to the audience, even in the room. Screen direction is apparently something the director knows nothing about. Of course, the blame for the bad acting has to be put not only on the actors, but on the director, who could at least have cast right or coached extensively.

Perhaps the problem really lies with the screenplay, which is so minimal the film has to spend a third of its time showing Puno in concert. A long dance sequence in the very beginning, as well as an even longer disco sequence in the middle of the film, clearly exists to prolong the movie to an acceptable length. But no amount of stal-

ling can hide the sterility of the story and the absurdity of the screenplay.

Drug-related murder mysteries have been done hundreds of times by filmmakers in dozens of countries. At the very least, such mysteries have, within them, commercial values such as long fist-fights or beautiful actresses. Even the most worthless karate film offers some action thrills. In *Bullet for Your Music*, there is nothing—no exciting action scenes, no engrossing story, not even good music.

And that's really what is so disappointing in *Bullet for Your Music*. Puno is captivating on stage; he is one of our best live performers. But on film, he does not register at all, either as an actor or as a singer. The sound of the film dissipates the Puno magic. His having to speak in unintelligible English (both in terms of the writing and in terms of Puno's accent) makes things worse.

If this is the kind of film we show in other countries, we should ban all our films from ever leaving our shores. We are our worst enemies, as far as our national cultural image is concerned.

Some Brocka films are making waves in Europe, but for every Brocka film abroad, there are a dozen films similar to *Bullet for Your Music*. In fact, for several years now, old Dolphy films have been showing in the United States, giving foreigners the impression that we only do *Facifica Falayfay* movies. (TV TIMES, July 12-18, 1981, p. 29.)



One would expect that because of technical limitations, Elwood Perez's *Pinay, American Style* (1979), a Filipino film done mostly in New York City, would display terrible cinematography and even more terrible dialogue. The much publicized difficulties the cameraman had in New York lead the viewers to expect jerky hand-held shots, underexposed landscape shots, out-of-focus zoom shots. Given the difficulties, however, the cinematography is surprisingly good. Although bystanders do cross suddenly in front of the camera (a fault that the editor should certainly have corrected), the cinematographer manages to show New York without losing sight of the main story.

The dialogue is also surprisingly accurate. The actors speak in the second-hand American slang characteristic of many Filipinos living in New York, complete with the usual Filipino accent and mispronunciations. Toto Belano's concerns as a screenwriter are also the concerns of many New York Filipinos—immigration, employment, identity.

The technical achievement of the cinematographer

and the good material of the screenwriter are wasted however, in this very bad film, because director Elwood Perez not only does not understand the United States but filmmaking as well. Perez fails to weave visually together the scenes that Belano contributes. In several sequences with only music on the soundtrack, Perez does not supply visually meaningful shots, nor does he ask his actors to think about motivation.

Even less experienced directors would not make the mistake he commits in one scene: he shows the mother completely drunk one minute and, two minutes later, completely sober. The characters meet in the middle of the street, as though New York City were as small as the Quad (even at the Quad, it is very difficult to bump into one's mother at precisely the right time).

In many films, the director has to make do with inferior material. In *Pinay, American Style*, in spite of good material, the director succeeds in wasting both his producer's money and the audience's time. (*TV TIMES*, July 15-21, 1979, p. 9.)



Emmanuel Borlaza's *Romansa* (1980) does not make any logical use of its location. Filmed entirely in America, *Romansa* is not about America, nor about Filipinos in America, nor even about Filipinos. In fact, it seems not to be about anything at all. *Romansa* is, among Filipino films shot abroad, the least successful. Even *Miss X*, *Pinay, American Style*, and *Waikiki* have more important things to say.

On the surface, *Romansa* needs to be filmed in America because Vilma Santos faces deportation if she does not marry an American. But this immigration problem is not necessary at all to her character. She would still have the same emotional problems if her fiancé were a Filipino and the location were Manila. Her major source of conflict is her relationship with her mother (Mercy Oria), who is dominating. Similarly, Santos' relationship with Edu Manzano does not have to happen in America. If she had met him in Davao City while the young man was trying to get away from Manila, the story would still be exactly the same.

In other words, there is no reason for Borlaza to shoot

the film abroad. Everything that happens in the film can very well happen in the Philippines. This is especially true of the indoor locations, which are all available in Manila. Presumably because of budget limitations (maybe even American union problems), many of the outdoor shots are wrongly lighted, with the faces of Santos and Manzano often in shadows; this is a clear sign that good lighting techniques were not employed during shooting.

The screenplay of *Romansa* is terrible, even pretentious, with wrong references to the theories of Darwin and Freud. The cinematography of *Romansa* is amateurish, its postproduction (especially the dubbing) extremely careless.

Romansa is filmed in a country which has nothing to do with the film. Just as it was a waste of good money to film *Romansa* in America, it is a waste of good money to watch the film in the Philippines. *TV TIMES*, December 7-13, 1980, p. 24.)



There's nothing wrong with Elwood Perez's *Waikiki* (1980) that cannot be corrected with a pair of scissors. The first forty minutes of this film, for example, which are in black-and-white, should be removed completely. Nothing in this portion is worth saving, not even Alicia Alonso's excellent performance as the harrassed mother of three quiet girls and one careless boy.

There is no need, for example, to introduce the boy. In the final sequences of the film, the father (Raul Aragon) is shown with his new son in Hawaii. That a typical Filipino wants a boy for a child is so obvious there is no reason to waste precious film stock justifying it. In other words, all that Perez has to do is to show the Hawaiian boy at the end; there is no need to establish that Aragon has already lost a son.

Similarly, the personalities of the three girls are adequately established late in the film. There is no need to show what kind of childhood the three girls had. If the black-and-white sequences contribute anything, it is confusion. In the early sequences, Aragon is an honest, faithful, and model husband; in the Hawaii sequences,

he is dishonest (he lies to his Hawaiian wife), but he is still faithful (he does not try to make a play for Alonzo) and he appears to be a good husband and father. The later Aragon is, thus, not contrasted fully with the early Aragon the way the grown-up daughters Rio Locsin and Lorna Tolentino are contrasted with their spineless childhood selves. Without the black-and-white sequences, the confrontation between Alonzo and Aragon at the end would be much more logical and much more powerful.

A major mistake in the film occurs when Perez shifts from black-and-white to color. When such a shift occurs, there should be a reason (perhaps the filmmaker is saying that Manila is black-and-white, Hawaii is color, perhaps that childhood is drab, adolescence is not). There is absolutely no reason for Perez to shift to color in the sequence where he does. Alonzo spits blood; the screen suddenly turns bright with color. The intention must have been to show that the spit is bloody; in that case, only the blood should be in color, with the rest of the screen in black-and-white. The shift from black-and-white to color does not signal a shift from Manila to Hawaii (that occurs several minutes later) nor does it coincide with the transition from childhood to adolescence (the same child actress still appears in the color sequences). If Perez wanted to shift to color for some reason or other, he should have shifted during the airplane take-off shot. Better still, he should have made the entire film in color.

If the first forty minutes are cut out, as well as the unrealistic sequence where the three stars dance on the beach, the film is actually significant. This is Perez's first serious attempt at making a serious film (ironically, this film did not make money by Regal standards). The clash of cultures in the Hawaii sequences is well handled,

much better than in the parallel *Pinay, American Style* or even *Miss X*. Alonzo finds that her old-fashioned beliefs have no place in modern Hawaii. She is shocked to find that daughter Locsin has adopted the American way of raising a child. Locsin allows the child to have her own identity, instead of forcing the child to "behave." Ironically, Locsin adopts only the practices, but not the philosophy, of American child psychology. The child turns out to be a spoiled brat, instead of a balanced person. Alonzo knows only the old-style Filipino way of raising a child, namely, by spanking (in this case, by slapping the child's face). Naturally, Locsin throws out Alonzo (as any American mother would), but does a typically Filipino act of driving her to town any way. Locsin's character is well conceptualized: a Filipina who is American on the surface, but Filipino at heart.

Screenwriter Toto Belano's main contribution to the film is the Hawaii dialogue, which is realistically first-generation American—correct American idioms with occasional Taglish. Perez directs the dialogue very well: the persons who dubbed the voices of Locsin and Tolentino exhibit a faulty American accent, occasionally mispronounce their words, and speak Tagalog ridiculously. The production designer should be congratulated for spotting Hawaii-looking Philippine locations. The house in Tagaytay is not perfect (it has a telltale light switch, for one), but it is credible as a pineapple plantation house. The upper class mansion is well chosen as well as the interiors of Locsin's apartment and of the night club. Of course, in the last analysis, it does not really matter if the locations look American or not. What the film is about is our notion of Hawaii, our Filipino version of the great American dream. Judging from *Hawaii Five-O* (since, unfortunately, I have no personal knowledge of Hawaii except for its airport), we can say that the

Hawaii of *Waikiki* is a hundred times cleaner, more peaceful, more civilized than the Hawaii of *Hawaii Five-O*. Perhaps this is what Belano and Perez are really trying to say: the Filipino's dream of the good life in America is an illusion. (TV TIMES, November 30 - December 6, 1980, p. 24.)



Alma Moreno in *Waikiki*.



Gil Portes' *Miss X* (1980), is an example of a film well written but badly directed. Written by Ricky Lee (Jaguar), *Miss X* is supposed to depict the tragedy of a woman fooled by an illegal recruiter into travelling to Europe. She is forced into a life of prostitution in Amsterdam, a life completely meaningless and desolate.

One sequence will suffice to show how Lee's efforts go for naught in the hands of Portes. In Amsterdam, Vilma Santos receives word that her only child has died in the Philippines. Dazed, she walks through the streets, seeing children alive and well, but not seeing the famous sights of the city. It is a crucial point in the film: Santos has just learned that she is all alone in a world of strangers. It is also an excellent chance to exploit her considerable acting abilities. What does Portes do? He makes the camera focus on everything but Santos' face. Carried away by the tourist sights, he forgets the whole point of the sequence. Instead of watching Santos grope in shock and terror, the viewer merely gets a guided tour of Amsterdam. Lee is trying to make a statement; Portes blurs that statement into incoherence and insignificance. (TV TIMES, March 2-8, 1980, p. 9.)



As a tourist film of Brazil, Gil Portes' *Carnival Queen* (1981) is entertaining. It has ample footage of the colorful carnival in Rio, including bare-breasted women and couples making love in public. In short, if you remove all the Filipinos who appear in the film, this is not a bad documentary about Brazil.

As a film, however, *Carnival Queen* is one of the worst Filipino films made abroad. For one thing, screenwriter Ricky Lee has done much better work (think of *Brutal*). In this movie, the material is extremely flimsy, with large logical holes in the beginning (how can a provinciana like Alma Moreno who calls her aunt "Tiang" seem so comfortable in modern Rio?), the middle (why does Moreno walk the streets and slums of Rio in the obviously vain hope of finding her brother among the millions of people in the city?), and the end (how can Moreno die of a hallucinatory drug which she is working off by dancing hysterically?).

For one thing, the acting ranks among the worst in Philippine cinema. Moreno's acting ranges from plain bad to just awful. Martha Sevilla does not even approxi-

mate the liberated expatriate she is supposed to be portraying. William Martinez acts worst of the trio: he is consistently stiff, mechanical, and unmotivated.

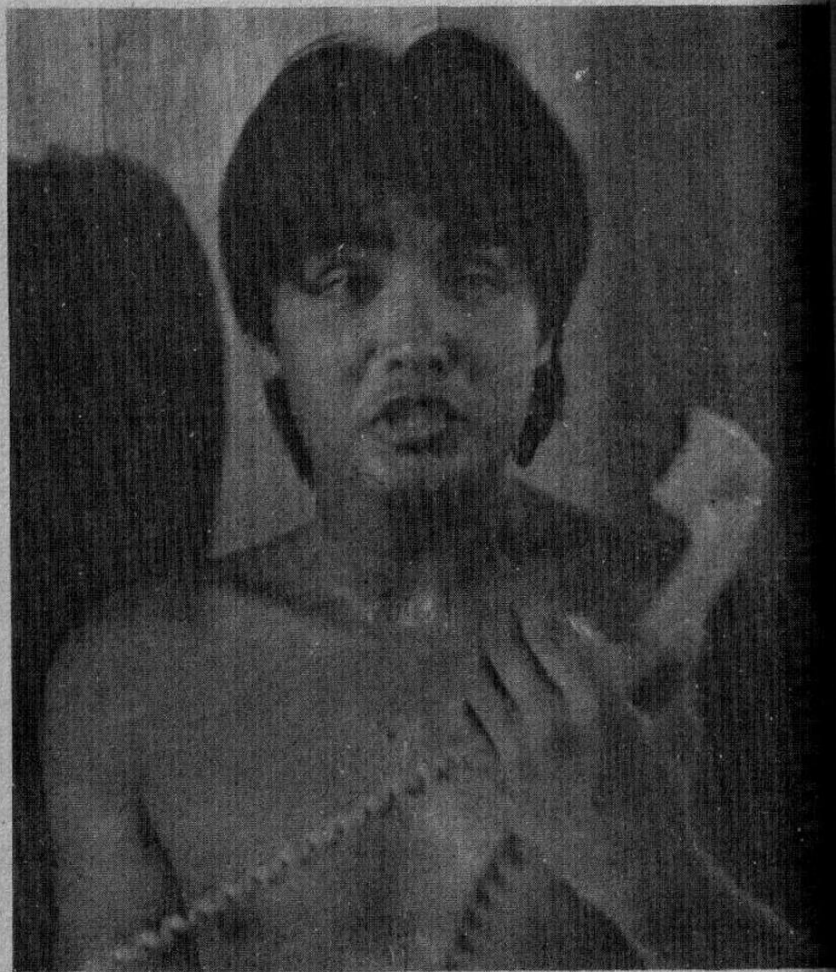
The cinematography is way below Ely Cruz's usually professional level of competence. The photography is consistently either over-exposed or under-exposed. Cruz is particularly bad in his panning shots; he always pans much too fast.

The editing is admittedly surprising, but the editor should have cut out at least 70 per cent of the carnival shots. In fact, that is really the problem with the movie. The carnival shots have nothing to do with the plot. Instead of serving, say, as a symbol of the incestuous relationship, the carnival merely dissipates whatever tension starts to build between the characters. It is almost like watching a movie with a whole lot of tourist commercials in between. The movie constantly shifts from being a travelogue to being a feature film.

We have to appreciate the problems of local filmmakers who film abroad. After all, they lack abroad the kind of logistical support they have on local locations. But certain things cannot be excused. Why, for instance, is the death sequence so dramatic? If nothing else, Moreno should have been hit by a car, or hit on the head by a drunken Brazilian, or—at least—she should have slipped and hit her head on the pavement. The reason for filming abroad should always be that the film cannot be filmed here. But the story, the characterization, and the theme of this movie have nothing to do at all with Brazil. The Ati-Atihan could have served as well, maybe even better.

If the controlling intelligence behind the film is the director, then director Gil Portes must take most of the blame for the artistic failure of this movie. In fact, since the talents of Ricky Lee, Ely Cruz, and even William Mar-

tinez (in Ishmael Bernal's *City After Dark*) have already been proven in previous films, the disastrous performance of both cast and crew must be blamed on poor direction. A lot of money went into the making of the film. If a lot more thought had also entered into it, it might not have been the disaster that it is. (*PARADE*, July 26, 1981, p. 21.)



William Martinez in one of his best roles, as the addict in *City After Dark*.

PLAGIARISM, INFLUENCE, AND SPOOFS

Velarde and Associates Productions is one of the very few film companies which consciously set out to improve the quality of local movies. Its first offering, Gerardo de Leon's *Lilet* (1972), was a pioneer of sorts. If not for its weak screenplay, something which de Leon tried desperately to underplay. *Lilet* could have been one of the first genuine Filipino art films.

Velarde's second offering, unfortunately, is not directed by de Leon. The director of *Roulette* (1972) is Ding M. de Jesus, and de Jesus is not able to conceal the faults of his screenplay.

The elements of the plot of *Roulette* come straight out of *Dirty Harry*. Charlie Davao, a police lieutenant who employs third-degree methods, hunts a small-time hood who has just killed Davao's fellow cop. The hood, however, is under the protection of an influential rich man, who in turn is responsible for the promotion of the Major, Davao's immediate superior. Ronaldo Valdez, Davao's close friend, is recruited by the rich man to stop the cop from pursuing the cop-killer. But Davao cannot be stopped. In an obligatory fight scene, all the bad guys

get killed. In the exchange of fire, Valdez gets killed, too.

Although neither Rosanna Ortiz, Davao's girl who once had relations with Valdez, nor Rosemarie Gil, the rich man's girl who falls in love with Valdez, has very much to do with the story, the two women occupy much screentime. That Valdez is shot in the end is predictable, of course, since his presence complicates the love angle, but that is not the greatest fault of the screenplay. It is the dialogue that really destroys the film. Characters speak in English, then *translate* these English lines into Tagalog. The result is an inexcusable repetition of unbearable, clichetish, and meaningless prattle.

The only good things about *Roulette* are the flashback sequences (when Valdez and Ortiz remember what they did years ago) and the title. Unfortunately, the flashback sequences can be completely removed without being missed. The title, which hints at life being nothing but a game of chance, has very little to do with the story. (PHILIPPINES HERALD, April 13, 1972, p. 72.)



It was just a matter of time before somebody came up with a local version of *The Champ*. After all—one can almost hear local producers thinking—if Filipinos cry for Jon Voight and newcomer Ricky Schroder, they'll surely cry for superstar Fernando Poe, Jr., and veteran tearstimulator Julie Vega. Another film about a father's self-sacrificing love for his child is bound to succeed.

The trouble with such reasoning is that Franco Zeffirelli, one of the best directors in the world today, directed *The Champ*. Armando Herrera, who directs *Durugin si Totoy Bato* (1979), is not even one of the best directors in our country today. The result is obvious: *Durugin si Totoy Bato* is a far cry from *The Champ*.

The local film could have been a good one. Eddie Romero, after all, one of our good directors, wrote the screenplay. Carlo Caparas, the recognized major figure in popular culture today, wrote the story. Fernando Poe, Jr., using his directorial pseudonym Ronwaldo Reyes, directed the climactic fight sequence. The cast includes such acting stalwarts as Charo Santos, Anita Linda, and Paquito Diaz.

But the emotional appeal of the story, the logical screenplay, the exciting pace of the final fight, even the intelligent cinematography of Ben Lobo, all go to waste because of the director's inability to elicit good performances from his actors and his unwillingness to cut unnecessary shots. Only the sequence directed (and probably edited) by Poe is cinematically satisfying. The sequences directed by Herrera tend to be flat, overextended, and purposeless.

Ironically, however, the biggest flaw in the film is not the fault of the director, but of the superstar. The story demands that Fernando Poe, Jr., a has-been fighter trying to earn enough money to pay for medicine for his daughter Julie Vega, die in the ring. There is even a funeral scene. But (surprise!) he comes walking in at the end, completely unharmed and in great spirits. No amount of explanation that the police staged the "death" merely to stop illegal gambling will ever justify such an illogical and self-serving ending. Because superstars cannot "die" in their films, they never make super films. (TV TIMES, November 25 - December 1, 1979, p. 9.)



Don't bother watching any of Danny Zialcita's films. You are better off watching the original American films.

Take his *Ikaw at ang Gabi* (1979), for example, a film nominated for Urian Awards for Best Picture, Best Direction, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Best Cinematography, and Best Editing. Zialcita had everyone—including me—fooled.

Ikaw at ang Gabi is a Tagalog version of Delbart Mann's *Torn Between Two Lovers*, a made-for-TV film released in Manila only in 1980. In the American film, Lee Remick, married for 14 years to Joe Bologna, falls in love with George Peppard. Bologna leaves her, she leaves Peppard, and the audience is left wondering at the end whether she and Bologna will come together again.

Zialcita (who also wrote the screenplay of *Ikaw at ang Gabi*) takes not only the basic situation from the American television film, but even snatches of dialogue, crucial scenes, and the entire final sequence. Bologna's line "I am what I am," for example, is used untranslated in Zialcita's film. Dindo Fernando, like Bologna, offers to take his wife on a plane trip. Fernando's packing scene is

identical to that of Bologna. After he leaves Beth Bautista, Fernando has a brief affair with another woman (Chanda Romero), just as Bologna sleeps with an officemate. The confrontation scene between Fernando and the lover (Ronaldo Valdez) is blocked and scripted just like the parallel scene between Bologna and Peppard.

The entire last sequence of *Ikaw at ang Gabi* is copied almost shot by shot from *Torn Between Two Lovers*. It is the same after-hours office set, the same interruption by a cleaning woman (the Tagalog version has a janitor instead), the same walk out the glass door, the same suspended ending. What everyone thought was a brilliant scene written and directed by a Filipino turns out to be a brilliant scene written and directed by an American.

Similarly, *Si Malakas, si Maganda, at si Mahinhin* (1980) is a direct copy of an American film, Paul Aaron's *A Different Story*, not yet released in Manila but already available on Betamax videotape. The story of the Tagalog film is attributed to Toto Belano, but, in fact, the Tagalog film is a line-by-line, character-by-character, shot-by-shot copy of the American film. The only major difference between the two films is their endings: *A Different Story* ends up with the homosexual (Perry King) having an affair with a woman after he marries Meg Foster. In the Tagalog version, the lesbian (Elizabeth Oropesa) dies—*la Love Story*—of leukemia.

Before the endings, however, the two films are practically identical. King marries Foster because he wants to avoid being deported as an illegal alien; for a while, they both remain strictly homosexual. Dindo Fernando marries Oropesa because, in a moment of heterosexual passion, they forget themselves and she gets pregnant. Zialcita tries here, at least, to "Filipinize" the situation: marriages for immigration purposes are common in the United States, just as marriages due to unexpected pregnan-

cies are common in the Philippines. But the American film is more realistic: the two homosexuals get physically attracted to each other only after they have become emotionally intimate. In the Tagalog version, Zialcita falsely assumes that once a gay male touches female flesh, he will instantly turn into a real male.

If Zialcita had consistently tried to adapt the American situations to Philippine realities, his film would be worth-while, at least as an adaptation. But he copies the American film much too closely. The scene in *A Different Story* where Foster comes home late to find King waiting up with a cold dinner occurs unchanged in the Tagalog version. Foster comes home one day to find her place completely cleaned up; so does Oropesa. Fernando fixes a dress for Oropesa in the same way that King (also a tailor) fixes Foster's dress. Oropesa's remark about the old sewing machine is a direct translation of Foster's remark about a similar sewing machine.

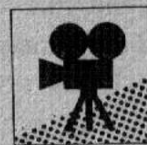
Before going to bed, Foster does sit-ups; so does Oropesa. King folds his clothes neatly before retiring; so does Fernando. There is a door-to-door salesman in both films, selling the same kind of goods and getting the same response from the lesbians. The celebrated kissing scene between Oropesa and Alma Moreno with Fernando outside the bedroom trying to calm down Oropesa's lover (Suzanne Gonzalez), is scripted and directed exactly like the parallel scene in *A Different Story*.

Si Malakas, si Maganda, at si Mahinhin, then seems like the same old story. It isn't any different from *A Different Story*, just as *Ikaw at ang Gabi* is *Torn Between Two Lovers*, Filipino style. At least, *Ikaw at ang Gabi* is well-crafted and well-acted. Dindo Fernando is a much better actor than Joe Bologna. It is difficult to sympathize with Bologna's character, who seems to be too straight, even chauvinistic. Fernando makes his character human, even

tragic. Remick appears merely to be a woman torn away from her husband by a lover; Bautista (because of Fernando's performance) really appears torn between two lovers.

Similarly, it is only Fernando who saves *Si Malakas, si Maganda, at si Mahinhin* from being a total waste of time. Without overplaying his effeminate gestures, Fernando manages to convey the falseness of his homosexuality. He is not really gay; that's why he shifts almost instantly to being a heterosexual husband. (*A Different Story* is actually a worse film than the Tagalog version, because the American film makes the transition from gay to straight much too easy.)

A film need not have original material in order to be good. Numerous good films have been adapted from novels, plays, comic strips, newspaper articles, even other films (witness *Godfather, Part II*, the Dracula series, the remakes of film classics). One can cite a whole body of brilliant thinkers, from Plato down to present-day structuralists, who have argued correctly that it is not only history which repeats itself, but just about everything else. But it is one thing to be heavily influenced by earlier films; it is a different story altogether to copy a foreign film line by line, shot by shot, sequence by sequence. (*TV TIMES, April 13-19, 1980, p. 9.*)



In Danny Zialcita's *Dear Heart* (1981) millionaire's daughter Sharon Cuneta, though engaged to be married to Ting Jocson, develops an infatuation for Gabby Concepcion. Concepcion has a lot of personal problems, brought about chiefly by his mother Rosemarie Gil's being the mistress of respectable Fred Montilla and being, at the same time, the lover of taxi driver Ronaldo Valdez. When Cuneta and Concepcion are forced to seek shelter one night because Concepcion's motorcycle runs out of gas, all sorts of complication arise, all of them solved by Jocson's surprise decision to let Concepcion have Cuneta. After all, it is revealed, Jocson and Concepcion are really brothers.

If the story appears confusing, that's because the story-writer must be confused. So is the viewer, after 15 minutes of this comedy of writing-errors. Only the pretty faces of Cuneta and Concepcion save this film from being a total waste.

Much has been made of Zialcita's habit of copying American movies shot for shot, prop for prop, even dialogue for dialogue (manifested most recently by the

first part of *Mahinhin vs. Mahinhin*, which comes from an American made-for-TV movie about a man being raped by a woman). But *Dear Heart* appears to be original, and that is the problem with it. If it were copied, we could at least blame somebody else. As it is, we have only Zialcita to blame for the awfulness of the movie.

The basic situation (two brothers competing for the hand of the same woman) is so farfetched and coincidental that it strains the viewer's belief. The crucial moment which triggers off the overnight stay—Cuneta handcuffing chaperon Suzanne Gonzales to a dress rack—is ridiculous, given the effort taken earlier by Zialcita to establish that, everywhere Cuneta goes, an entire security detail (four cars in one sequence) goes with her. The acting is terrible: the shortcomings of Cuneta and Concepcion are brought dramatically home to the viewer when Zialcita flashes an excerpt of his much-better *Langis at Tubig*, with Vilma Santos and Dindo Fernando showing what it means to really act; in contrast, the efforts of Cuneta and Concepcion are pathetic. True enough, the performances of Gonzales and Josephine Estrada are competent, but two gems in a sea of blah are much too few. (PARADE, August 9, 1981, p. 23.)



Director Danny Zialcita wisely centers *Tinimbang ang Langit* (1982) around Kuh Ledesma's songs. Ledesma's voice is enthralling, thus making up for the technical weaknesses of the film. The songs, in other words, make the film worth seeing (or hearing, at any rate). Local fans who love to see fancy sets are also bound to enjoy this film, which features some of the loveliest indoor locations in local cinema.

No one seriously expects Kuh Ledesma to be a great actress. Thus, no one should be disappointed with the level of acting she manages throughout this film. Limiting herself to thoughtful facial expressions, Ledesma lends a certain credibility to her role—that of a singer obsessed with her career, but distracted by a man. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that, with a more experienced actress, the role could have been played with more warmth, vitality, humor, and humanity. Instead of merely being serious all the time, another actress could have created a full person, not just a singer.

In contrast, Christopher de Leon delivers a performance which is among the best of his career. He is credi-

ble as the wealthy composer whose mind may be on his music, but whose heart falls easily for kindred souls. His delineation of the sincere artist-lover redeems the sketchy writing. Without de Leon, in fact, the film would fail as dramatic vehicle.

The supporting roles are strong, as one expects of a Zialcita film. Zialcita has the proven ability to bring out the best in his actors, and this film is no exception. Suzanne Gonzales steals the show several times with her light-hearted portrait of the self-effacing but sexy manager. She is particularly effective because she never allows herself to overdo her role. Similarly, Odette Khan is delightful as Ledesma's aunt, especially in the earlier sequences. Rio Locsin, despite a badly written role, is impressive as the unpredictable balikbayan.

But the kudos really belong to the composers - Butch Monserrat, Ed Formoso, and Gilbert Gregorio - whose melodies fit both the character of de Leon and the voice of Ledesma. Zialcita has never been noted for the musical scores of his films, since he usually uses canned music; here, there are still traces of canned music (influences, not outright copying) in the songs, but the cannedness fits the characters (who are, after all, English-speaking). I hope that, in his next films, Zialcita continues using locally composed music.

Something has to be said about the screenplay, which has excellent dialogue but a terrible plot. The plot is made up of all sorts of clichés: the conflict between love and career, the lover dying of leukemia, the price of success. There is even a major flaw in the plotting: how can Ledesma rise so fast from rags to riches? Surely, big money comes from concerts (which come later in a singer's career, as Ledesma herself says in the film as she dreams of having her own concert) rather than from record royalties. Khan says that the new house is all in

hock, but surely, installment plans only go so far. It is unbelievable that Ledesma can have such a grand house so soon after she meets de Leon.

The dialogue, however, although mostly in English, is excellent. By judicious repetition, in fact, the dialogue links several of the more important sequences (the final concert, for instance, with the proposal scene outside Ledesma's house). Lines such as "I said *Take to your life*, not *Take your life*" and "cry for the living, not for the dead" perfectly summarize the love theme of the film. (PARADE, June 16, 1982, p. 17.)



Two of our better performers—Hilda Koronel and Christopher de Leon.



That Danny Zialcita's *T-Bird at Ako* (1982) is entertaining cannot be doubted. The plot situations are funny. The lines are witty. The pacing is fast. The lesbian love of Nora Aunor for Vilma Santos, moreover, is extremely clever, since the two superstars in real life would not be caught dead in such a relationship.

Zialcita has made a career of doing impossible things. He made he-man Dindo Fernando a homosexual in the *Mahinhin* series. He now makes Aunor a lesbian. When he tries to make Santos a low-class beerhouse dancer, however, he fails. That makes his record two out of three impossible things, not bad for normally sedate local cinema.

This film shows Zialcita at his best—irreverent, tongue-in-cheek, unconcerned with larger themes, focused on obsessive sexual relationships. Let's take the dialogue first, which cleverly juxtaposes the fiction of the film with the reality of the careers of the two superstars. Thus, references are made to Santos' being a "burlesque queen." One character is even named "Rubia," after *Rubia Servios* (1978), Santos' competition film against

Aunor's *Atsay* (1978). More than these allusions, however, the film features sparkling exchanges between Santos and Aunor. Most impressive of all the lines perhaps are those in the court room sequence, since the opposing arguments are easy to follow, yet logical in structure.

The direction is tight and masterful. Although one always gets reminded in a Zialcita film of sequences from foreign films, there is a minimum of unmotivated blocking in this film. Each sequence contributes to the whole film (if there is copying, in other words, and I do think there is in this film, the copying is not done simply to be cute or clever, but in accordance with the logical requirements of the plot).

The performances, as expected of a Zialcita film, are excellent. Aunor is more effective as the confused lesbian, primarily because Santos is not able to get the rough and ready quality of low-class hospitality girls. Tommy Abuel is terrific in his role as the patient suitor. Fernando is given too little space to develop his character, but what he has, he makes good use of. Captivating is Suzanne Gonzales, though she has to learn to use her face a bit more to express varying emotions. In their brief roles, Anita Linda and Odette Khan are delightful. (PARADE, September 22, 1982, p. 37.)



In Angel Labra's *A Man Called Tolongges* (1981), the comedy is both verbal and visual. The verbal fun consists mainly of puns, such as "Saloon Paz," "Las Bigas Caseno," and "Bar Ado." The visual fun is more varied. One long sequence, for example, is devoted to a spoof of Lito Lapid's *Ang Pagbabalik ni Leon Guerrero*. Cachupoy mimics Lapid's bow-and-arrow gimmick, but instead of finding the mark, Cachupoy's arrow almost hits Redford White's neck. The "apple" on White's head, incidentally, is a tomato: that's an extra spoof on the familiar William Tell theme. White tries to outdo Lapid's stunt of rotating around a horizontal bar; instead of shooting his gun, however, White gets very dizzy (as any real person would). George Javier does Lapid's gun tricks, strangely enough with more skill (helped by a slowed-down camera, of course). Other tried-and-true entertainment numbers are in the film, such as extended fight scenes, a dance by Pia Moran, even panoramic "desert" scenes.

The film takes *MAD* Magazine's "Scenes We'd Like to See" to their ridiculous extremes. In other words, the

film is an out-and-out spoof of the Western, Philippine style. All the elements of the Western are here: barroom brawl, desert trek, man dragged by a horse, good guys versus bad guys. But the elements are deliberately turned upside down. The good sheriff, for instance, gets a cut (the local term is "tong") out of Javier's reward money. With the help of a split-screen, Javier does a disappearing act behind a thin tree. Entering the bar through swinging doors becomes a major accomplishment for the farcically clumsy Javier. Dynamite sticks have detachable fuses. The six bad guys who track down the good guys become more (instead of less) every time one of them is killed. Seen sympathetically, then, the film makes fun of the Western genre. By implication, it satirizes pseudo-Western local films (such as those made by Lito Lapid and Fernando Poe, Jr.). No one will claim any kind of artistic success for *A Man Called Tolongges*, if only because the cinematography is awful. Nevertheless, it is clear that everyone in the movie is out to have a good time, and the audience cannot help but be infected with the wholesome humor of the writers and the actors. (PARADE, April 19, 1981, p. 24.)



Mike Relon Makiling's *Mag-Toning Muna Tayo* (1981) is entertaining, and not in the typical Tito-Vic-Joey manner. There is an isolated instance of vulgarity (when De-braliz urinates on the statue of the lion on the road to Baguio), but overall, the film is several notches above the usual Tito-Vic-Joey films. The horror sequences, played tongue-in-cheek, are delightful.

It is ironic that Tito, Vic, and Joey are reported to have disliked this film, because it is their best. It lacks the things that make their usual films trash. Though there is still slapstick, it is kept to a minimum. The situations are allowed to occasion the laughs, instead of the laughs being provoked by horsing around. When they restrain their broad movements, the trio can be very funny; in this film, Mike Relon Makiling succeeds in keeping the comedy within tolerable bounds.

Makiling deftly uses horror-film conventions in a comic context. One shot, for instance, is from the point of view of the killer, as the victim looks behind her (a horror cliché, but a comic comment). Another sequence copies *The Exorcist* and dozens of such films: Vic is thrown

around by the ghosts. But when the next sequence shows Vic in physical disarray as he comes out of his room, the film gets a laugh, precisely because *The Exorcist* is satirized. The best part of the film is the satire on psychics. Joey boasts of communing with spirits, until a slight noise makes him hide behind his wife.

The worst thing about the film is its title, which has nothing to do with the story. The toning part appears to be an afterthought, with a couple of sequences newly shot in order to justify having such title. Of course, the satire on toning is well-intentioned; the entire toning phenomenon is fit matter for ridicule.

Perhaps the cause of the film's success in some measure is the deemphasis on the slapstick style of Tito, Vic and Joey, and the corresponding focus on plot elements. There should have been better use of the talents of Soxy Topacio, Jennie Ramirez, Opalyn Forster, and Lito Anzures. If the report is true that Makiling and the trio have parted ways, then Makiling can say good riddance. Now, Makiling should develop the promise he showed in his critically acclaimed *Ako Ang Hari* (1981). (*TV PARADE*, November 28 - December 4, 1981, p. 34.)



Cleverly making use of tried-and-true entertainment gimmicks, J. Erastheo Navoa's *Rocco, Ang Batang Bato* (1982) is far from boring and at certain points, in fact, is exciting. Although the plot line is hard to follow, there is no problem following the fight sequences, which combine special effects and swordplay effectively. Children have been heard to cheer wildly for the hero; this film certainly knows its proper audience.

It is so seldom that local cinema tries sophisticated special effects that, even if the effects in this movie are below par, congratulations are still in order. The laser-beam attacks on Muhlach during the death sequence are not technically perfect, but they are interesting and adequate. The giant effect, done by double-exposing the left-hand corner of the film, is better here than in previous attempts by more respected filmmakers to create giants on screen. In short, the special effects in this film, though primitive by Hollywood standards, are marvelous by local ones.

There is even an attempt by the writer and the director to make social comments during the film. The poisoning

of the sea by chemical waste from factories, for instance, is a good example of how to make our children ecology-conscious without being obvious. The character played by Jimi Melendez, an army doctor who has come to investigate the chemical poisoning of the sea, is clearly a good guy. That makes the factory owners automatically the bad guys. Here is a subtle lesson our children should not forget: water pollution is a weapon used by the bad guys in our society.

The problem with the film, however, is neither technical nor social, but fundamental. The screenplay is based on a foreign model that is itself full of holes. This is, of course, *Clash of the Titans* from which the film takes its land-of-the-gods sequences (Niño Muhlach gets sword and shield from the gods, just like Perseus in the foreign film; Muhlach has to face all kinds of monsters; Muhlach is searching for his mother). The film even names some of its characters Minerva, Janus, Vulcan, and so on. *Clash of the Titans* is a bad foreign film; why model a local film on such a bad film? More important, why use foreign mythology when we have enough local monsters which can be used in fantasy films?

There is however, a directorial touch I like in Navoa's films. Navoa tends to do tongue-in-cheek violence. One scene in this film stands out: when Muhlach is cornered by the twin monsters, he sees Excalibur imbedded in a rock (he is a rock, get it?). He tells the monsters that their time is up, since he will be king if he draws the sword. Here is a spoof of the Arthurian legend which redeems the triteness of the situation. Needless to say, when Muhlach finally tries to draw the sword, the blade is stuck in the rock. (*PARADE*, July 14, 1982, p. 41.)

A LEGACY OF MEDIOCRITY

It's not only nostalgia that attracts audiences to old Dolphy films. The success of Dolphy films in the United States, as well as the success of his old films on local television, clearly points to something inherent in the films themselves. When you come right down to it, the answer is obvious: Dolphy is funny. That's what makes people see his films, new or old.

Luciano Carlos's *Facifica Falayfay* (1969) set a trend in Dolphy comedies, namely, the caricature of the male homosexual. What Dolphy satirizes is the outward behavior of homosexuals (their language or swardspeak, their effeminate body movements, their outlandish costumes). Dolphy does not—except in the unique *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay*—talk about the emotional or sexual crises that homosexuals undergo. That is why Dolphy's homosexuals are funny: effeminacy is funny, but sexual identity crises certainly are not.

In *Pacifica Falayfay*, we see the major stock situations or characters (structuralists would call them "signs," others would call them clichés) that make up the typical local comedy. There is the domineering mother who

runs her household like Hitler. There is the henpecked husband, who finally gets his way only when the wife dies. There is the training sequence, where the effeminate brother is given lessons in boxing, karate, and fencing, all to no avail. There are the stock macho occupations (burglar, lifeguard, detective) and the obvious masculine initiation (prostitutes). There is the fantastic chase (ending up in a jungle, of all places). There is the dream sequence (in a well-choreographed dance by Al Quinn). There is the disco sequence (though 1969 was too early for the disco, but not too early for a disco-like dance routine), lighted in red in the usual local manner. There is the sudden wealth (Panchito wins in the sweepstakes). There is the spoof on funerals (this film does this better than *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang*).

Revivals offer the young viewer a chance to see how things were done in the old days. *Facifica Falayfay* should prove that there is little new in local film comedy; Dolphy did it all in 1969. (PARADE, April 28, 1982, p. 33.)



There are a hundred things you can say against Jose Wenceslao's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1972).

You can say that the title has nothing to do with the story. The attempt to portray hippie Amalia Fuentes as a modern Magdalene fails because Fuentes undergoes neither depravity nor conversion.

You can say that, as in many local screenplays, the language is unrealistic and inconsistent. Characterization is poorly done.

You can say that acting is amateurish. Only Ike Lozada is delightful in the fight sequences, but only because of his body.

You can say that the singing is terrible. Whoever told Victor Wood he could sing is undoubtedly a subversive, out to undermine our rich musical heritage.

You can say that the technical aspects are neglected. Editing is bad. Sound does not synchronize with lip movement. Lighting is illogical.

You can say that direction is unintelligent. Wenceslao does not know what makes film different from stage or television.

But if these are all you can say of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, you would have done the local film industry a real disservice. For finding fault is only half the task of helping our local producers make better movies. The other half is pointing out the good points that our producers can build on.

Wenceslao should be credited for his pacing. Unlike many other local films, *Jesus Christ Superstar* has faster cuts, varied shots, and less beating around the bush. In particular, Wenceslao should be congratulated for employing the American system of shooting an entire (called "master") shot first from one angle, then editing short close-ups or short reaction shots into this master shot. (*PHILIPPINES HERALD*, March 26, 1972, p. 18.)



Techie Agbayani in one of her forgettable films.



In terms of form and technique, Philippine cinema is the equal, if not the superior, of foreign cinema, except for the few top Hollywood companies. But in terms of content and meaning, Philippine cinema is primitive and provincial.

This characteristic of our local film industry is a paradox. For technique in film is largely determined by technological knowhow and devices, which in turn depend on the money and the level of industrialization in a country. Contents, on the other hand, is determined only by the resources of the unaided human mind.

Our native ingenuity has more than made up for our lack of scientific equipment in film. The strange thing is that, in terms of human thinking power, for which we need neither money nor equipment, we are way behind other countries.

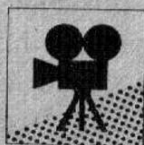
A good example is Emmanuel Borlaza's *Don't Ever Say Goodbye* (1972), the latest offering of Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions, one of the few serious film companies in the country today. In terms of form and technique, this

film, though not perfect, is remarkable. The pacing, for example, is excellent. The sequence showing Edgar Mortiz being chased by Peter Cassidy on a winding road is a good example of how varied camera angles contribute to suspense. The long shots of the skiers are notable in comparison to the normal medium shots of other Philippine films.

But whatever merits this film can claim in terms of technique are completely overshadowed by the lack of meaningful content. In other words, the story is of little value. The film revolves around the fact that the dead Edgar Mortiz has a twin who looks, acts, thinks, loves, and dreams exactly like him. Vilma Santos naturally falls in love with the live brother, just as she fell in love with the dead one. But the identity of the twins' personalities is highly improbable. The plot, then, is unbelievable.

There are other faults in the scripting. There is the *deus ex machina* at the end (when the statue of Jesus intercedes). There is the colonial orientation of the film (even when lip service is given to anti-American sentiments). There is the inexcusable Filipino practice of calling characters by the actors' names (Peter for Cassidy and Jeffrey for Jeffrey Ayesa).

But the greatest fault of the film is the same fault of most Filipino films, a fault that is all the more surprising because it does not depend either on money or equipment, but on plain brains. The fault is a very bad screenplay. (*PHILIPPINES HERALD*, April 3, 1972, p. 15.)



Armando Garces' *May Lihim ang Gabi* (1972) is a bomba film. This is not to say that it is a bad film. This is simply to say that this film has to be judged in reference to the bomba genre, and not in reference to other types of film.

As a bomba film, *Lihim* is good. It is not as explicit as the other bomba films showing at the same time (such as *Ang Magtatalong*). It is not as experimental as serious bomba films (such as Lino Brocka's *Tubog sa Ginto*). But it is a good film, principally because it has a good story and a logical screenplay. The story is not original and the screenplay has a few howlers (such as Vic Vargas remembering something that he could not have possibly seen), but the film succeeds because the sex scenes are motivated and not overdone.

Lihim is the story of Eva Linda, a young girl who has strange urges. One of these urges is to get into bed with Vargas as many times as possible. Such a personality leads naturally to bomba sequences.

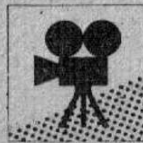
If the film is seen as belonging to another genre, however, *Lihim* fails miserably. Seen as a suspense thriller,

for example, *Lihim* is illogical, for why would the tough guys carry such heavy ammunition in this routine hunt for Linda? Seen as a psychological study, *Lihim* is incomplete, for the character of Linda is not developed. Seen as a realistic film (with method acting and all), *Lihim* fails because Linda's acting ability is limited to feigning orgasm after about two seconds of foreplay.

Garces' direction makes sense only if the film is viewed as a sexual potboiler. Otherwise, the direction is whimsical, inconsistent, and amateurish. One thing, however, is going for Garces. This is that he knows what type of people will see *May Lihim ang Gabi*. (PHILIPPINES HERALD, May 3, 1972, p. 17.)



A rare still from a typical *bomba* film of the early seventies. Burt Zamonte and Emmaruth in Zoilo de Baron's *Atrevido*.



Vilma Santos is a good actress: As Sandra in Ishmael Bernal's *Ikaw ay Akin*, she was brilliant, holding her own against Nora Aunor's challenging performance. As the title character in Lino Brocka's *Rubia Servios*, she was even more brilliant, handling the subtle and difficult role with ease and maturity.

Not even Santos' acting, however, can save Emmanuel H. Borlaza's *Coed* (1979) from being a very bad film. It is a little bit like Richard Burton acting in a war movie; no amount of admiration for Burton can keep viewers from falling asleep. Borlaza succeeds in neutralizing Santos' magic. Screenwriter Allan Jayme Rabaya delivers a story which does not allow Santos a chance to display her talents.

Coed portrays today's college student as sexually liberated, emotionally mature, and financially stable. Whether in fact this portrait is true is not the issue, although questions can indeed be raised about the absence in the film of such obvious problems as drugs and frat wars. The issue, rather, is whether this portrait generates a coherent and believable film.

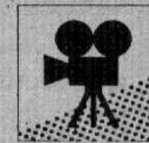
That Vilma Santos would throw herself into the arms of a handsome professor (Romeo Enriquez) is not far-fetched, but that she would then have a miscarriage at a fun center carries things a bit too far. The parallel miscarriage scene in Celso Ad. Castillo's *Burlesk Queen* (1977) was the worst scene in that controversial film, but it at least grew out of the logical requirements of that story. In *Coed*, since Santos proclaims her maturity about such things, the illegitimate baby could very well be born.

Borlaza, moreover, handles this particular scene with particularly bad taste. The *Burlesk Queen* scene was bloody enough, but after Eddie Garcia showed, in *Atsay*, that all a director needs to denote a miscarriage is to put a tiny pool of blood on the floor, there is no excuse for Borlaza's lack of imaginative direction. (Why are miscarriages, by the way, fast becoming obligatory scenes in Filipino films?)

If 1979, as one columnist puts it, is going to be Santos' year, *Coed* is a poor way to start. Santos should choose her writers and directors with more care. Even Richard Burton cannot turn war movies into Shakespearian classics. (TV TIMES, February 11-17, 1979, p. 20.)



Bad writing is at the root of the failure of Armando A. Herrera's *Isa Para sa Lahat, Lahat Para sa Isa* (1979). The screenwriter cannot decide whether he wants to write a nice story about four nice kids romping around in the countryside or a tough story about four tough guys trying to make it in the city or a comic story about rip-off artists or a murder mystery or, last but not least, an old-fashioned fistfight extravaganza. Ironically, it is only the fight sequences which work well, primarily because this is what Fernando Poe, Jr., is good at and, secondarily, because the appearance of basketball and movie stars ends the film with something of a surprise. Unfortunately, that is the only surprise in the film; everything else in it is a big bore. (*TV TIMES*, March 11-17, 1979, p. 8.)



In Cesar Gallardo's *Maynila, 1970* (1979), screenwriter Edgardo M. Reyes (*Atsay*) paints a portrait of Manila as a jungle where violence, both physical and emotional, is the only reality. Phillip Salvador and Rudy Fernandez, two rookie cops, are both sons of outstanding policemen. Salvador remains a good guy like his father Eddie Garcia, but Fernandez, after resorting to taking protection money, ends up a criminal.

Reyes takes pains to spell out character motivation. Fernandez is out to win the love of Beth Bautista who has married him only because he raped her. Salvador is out to follow his father's footsteps. Garcia has a mistress only because his wife Anita Linda has been forbidden by her doctor to make love.

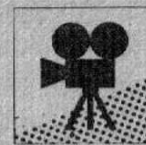
Ironically, it is Reyes' success in fleshing out the background of his characters which highlights his failure at crucial moments in the film. Salvador finds out, for example, that his father did not die in the line of duty, but was in fact shot by his mistress. Since Salvador's main ambition in life is to be like his father, the viewer expects this terrible revelation to lead to some identity

crisis, but no such crisis occurs.

Fernandez's father has long been disappointed with his son, but when he shoots Fernandez at the end, some emotional upheaval must surely still result. Instead, the father reacts as though shooting one's own son is the most natural thing in the world. The complicated build-up at the beginning of the film, in other words, leads the viewer to expect more complications at the climax of the film. Instead, the film has a simplistic ending: the rescuers arrive just after the fateful moment and Fernandez repents.

The non-fulfillment of the viewer's expectations is the crucial flaw of the film. The film starts, in fact, with a remarkable credit sequence: the titles are flashed against newsreel shots of pre-martial law student demonstrations. Such a promising beginning, however, leads nowhere since, aside from the availability of firearms, there is really nothing in the film which belongs specifically to the year 1970. The beerhouse sequence, for example, is right out of 1979. The police uniforms are taken from the Integrated National Police, which is a New Society innovation.

The film, moreover, has nothing to do with the 1970 student unrest, nor even with the issues from which that unrest grew. The film is simply a character study of two friends. Rudy Fernandez's role is well thought out. Salvador's character is a cardboard figure straight out of the early Fernando Poe, Jr., movies. He can do nothing wrong, and nothing wrong can affect him. Salvador has gone a long way under Lino Brocka's direction, but Cesar Gallardo does not handle him well in *Maynila, 1970*. There is no complexity of interpretation in Salvador's performance. (*TV TIMES*, June 17-23, 1979, p. 8.).



Screenwriter Beybs Gulfin has an exciting story to tell in Eddie Rodriguez's *Halik sa Paa, Halik sa Kamay* (1979): a man (Eddie Rodriguez)—sleeps with a woman (Vilma Santos) who, unknown to him, is his own daughter.

Incest has fascinated playwrights and screenwriters no end, but in Gulfin's hands, it loses much of its impact. Gulfin includes all kinds of irrelevant material in her screenplay. Ronald Corveau has an affair with a stereotyped librarian (Rosemarie Gil). Santos is appearing in a play. Rodriguez wants to build a hospital which, by the way, he never does in the film. Disco dancers waste a lot of the audience's time. The irrelevant footage renders the incest powerless.

The fault, of course, may not be Gulfin's, but Rodriguez's. Rodriguez, after all, can neither act nor direct in this film. The climactic sequence, for example, when Rodriguez realizes that he has just committed incest, has him running to the bathroom to throw up. Maryo de los Reyes would have made Rodriguez stand perfectly still for ten seconds, then run out to the street, then get stinking drunk. Lino Brocka would have held Rodriguez's

face in a close-up for three minutes. Any other director would have realized that Filipino men (even balikbayan doctors like Rodriguez) will not throw up at an emotional shock, but rather will shout obscenities for all to hear.

There is especially no excuse for the unrealistic theater sequences. No stage director rewrites a play because the lead actress fails to attend rehearsals. No stage actress, no matter how good, is allowed to perform in a play after attending only the dress rehearsal; only the director—certainly not the lead actor—can make such a decision anyway. A dress rehearsal, in fact, cannot even take place if one of the roles is still unfilled. Because there is little evidence that the screenwriter or the director knows his material, *Halik sa Paa, Halik sa Kamay* loses much of its credibility. (TV TIMES, October 21-27, 1979, p. 9.)



Even a good actress like Vilma Santos has to depend on her directors.



Two recent films exemplify what is good and what is bad in Philippine movies.

Manuel Cinco's *Huwag* (1979) showcases the talents of Beth Bautista (1978 Urian Best Actress for her role in *Hindi Sa Iyo Ang Mundo, Baby Porcuna*). *Sino'ng Pipigil sa Pagpatak ng Ulan* (1979) is directed by Robert Arevalo, alias Robert Ylagan (whose *Hubad na Bayani* won the Urian award for Best Film in 1977).

Both films develop the basic theme of the love triangle. In *Huwag*, Liza Lorena forces herself upon George Estregan, the man her sister Beth Bautista is about to marry. Six years after Lorena and Estregan are married, Bautista comes to live with them. Despite her heroic attempts not to get involved, Bautista has an affair with Estregan. He abandons Lorena and lives with Bautista.

Sino'ng Pipigil sa Pagpatak ng Ulan features, as one point of the triangle, the dead first wife (Charo Santos) of Robert Arevalo. Arevalo's second wife Pilar Pilapil finds out that he has no love either for her or for his son Jay Ilagan. It appears that Arevalo is really still in love with his first wife.

What is good about *Huwag* is, as expected, Bautista's acting. She develops from an adolescent with a crush to a young woman with a hard, if hurt, heart. Bautista is an expert in combining confusion, pain, lust, and love in one facial expression. She holds the film together; in fact, it may be said that the film exists for her sake.

The supporting actors and actresses are not brilliant, but they are not incompetent either. Estregan as the weak, vacillating husband falters at some crucial moments, but his over-all characterization is adequate. Noteworthy is Eddie Garcia's tongue-in-cheek performance as the social opportunist; it is especially noteworthy because the role is irrelevant to the film.

What is bad about *Huwag* is just about everything else. The story is pure cliché. Despite the clever echoes (Estregan's crucial encounters occur during baths), any viewer can predict the entire story from the first few sequences. The exposition, 45 minutes of it, is much too long; the gist of the film, after all, is the affair of Bautista with her brother-in-law. The middle portion of the film (meant perhaps as a copy of the famous marriage sequence in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*?) should have been edited out of the film completely.

The editing is particularly bad. In one scene, Estregan sits at a table with one fork in front of him. One split second later, a second fork materializes in front of him. The editor, obviously, took frames from a discarded take. Similarly, the sound is terrible and even disappears at certain moments.

There is also a good side and a bad side to *Sino'ng Pipigil sa Pagpatak ng Ulan*. The basic situation is promising: a man is totally crushed by the realization that his only son was actually fathered by his wife's previous lover. Eager to have his own son, the man remarries, only to find out that his second wife is barren. His immaturity

leads him to an emotional breakdown.

Robert Arevalo, Pilar Pilapil, Jay Ilagan, and Charo Santos contribute sensitive and intelligent characterizations, at least as far as the roles go. There are some moments of typical local excess, but on the whole, the acting is not bad.

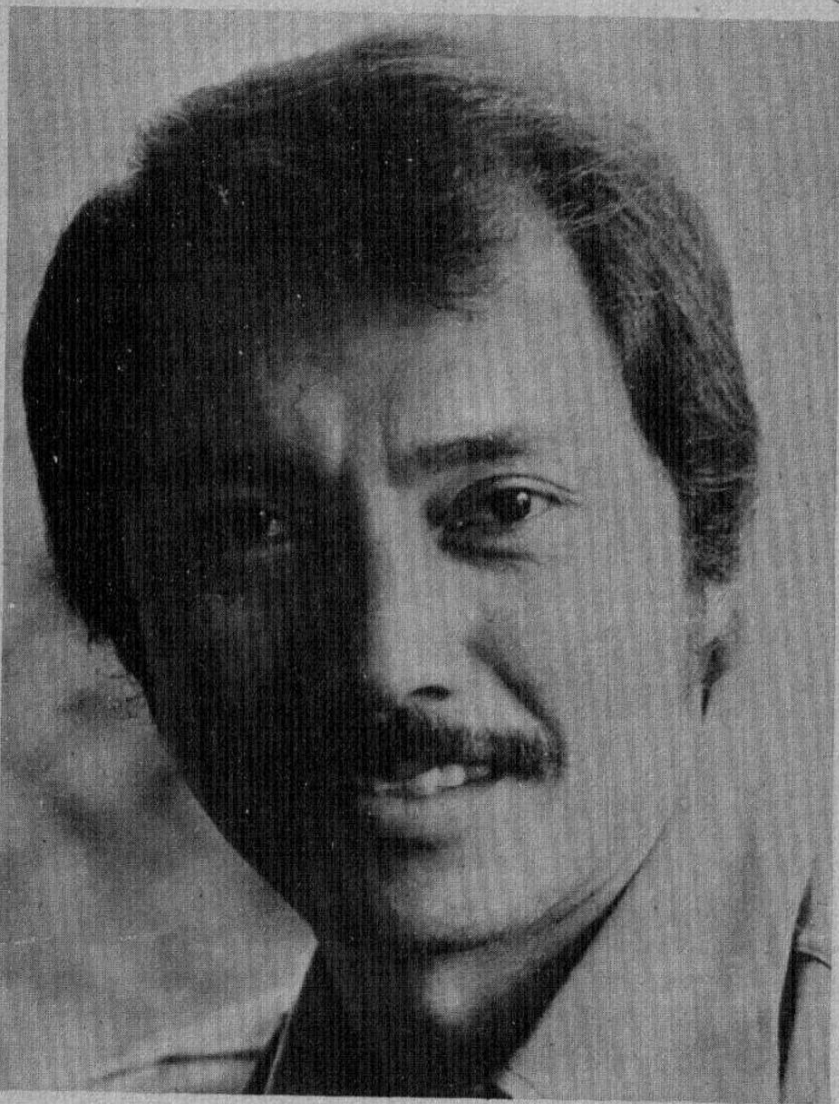
The problem with the film, however, is Arevalo's insistence as director, actor, and scriptwriter (yes, he wrote the script, too) on an intellectual approach to the main character. Instead of treating him as an immature, emotional self-centered fellow, Arevalo paints him as a man searching for his identity. Identity searches are guaranteed to go over big with adolescent audiences, but adult audiences know that the story does not make sense unless the guy is immature. Many healthy males will simply take a mistress and have a son by her; more mature men will forget the past and either accept the boy as a real son or just simply throw him out. The emotional masochism that Arevalo imposes on himself belongs to the literature of adolescence or to the literature of psychosis.

Because the character is incredible, the film as a whole also becomes incredible. That is too bad. Arevalo, after all, is not a bad director. His early sequences, which do away with transitional shots, are impressive and point the way for other local directors. Unfortunately, the transitional shots return at the end in the guise of flashbacks; whatever applause the early sequences generate is, therefore, quickly transformed into catcalls.

What is good in local films? Acting has improved quite a bit. It is significant that these two recent films do not have superstars. (Even superstars like Dolphy and Nora, of course, have their moments of brilliance.)

What is bad in local films? Primarily, the writing. A film is basically a story. Without a good story, a film inevitably fails. A good story not only features realistic

dialogue and interesting themes, it must first be logical and credible. Local films, unfortunately, cannot boast of intelligent scriptwriters. That is too bad, since writing does not require expensive technology, but only honesty and thought. (*TV TIMES, August 19-25, 1979, p. 9.*)



Robert Arevalo—actor, screenwriter, director.



Cirio Santiago's *Ang Galing Galing Mo ... Mrs. Jones* (1980), has 40 sequences too many. There is not a single good sequence in the film. The rape scene is particularly bad; Vilma Santos is knocked unconscious by a blow to her stomach, but she manages to hold on to a tabletop and to shout out a curse on rapist Vic Silayan. The shooting scene also verges on the ridiculous: Santos, now a sideshow personality (it is never clear if she is a fashion model, an a-go-go dancer, a burlesque queen, or a vaudeville star), manages to make a long, unrealistic monologue, to shoot accurately at a man holding her mother close to him, to kill the guy without the guy shedding a single drop of blood (so many shots and not even one drop of catsup). But, at least, the film does not try to cloak the central question of justice in a display of good directing and good acting. Santiago is pointing his finger at the legal system of our country: are our laws capable of dealing with Mrs. Jones? (*TV TIMES, September 28, - October 4, 1980, p. 46.*)



How did a film badly directed, badly acted, badly photographed, badly edited, badly scored, and badly designed win the Best Picture Award in the 1980 Metro Manila Film Festival? In the same way that, in 1979, the inferior film *Kasal-Kasalan, Bahay-Bahayan* was named Best Picture. Augusto Buenaventura's *Taga sa Panahon* follows the criteria set by the judges for the festival, criteria which have nothing to do with cinematic worth.

Granted, for the sake of argument, that the screenplay of *Taga sa Panahon*, written by award-winning screenwriter Jose Carreon, is better than the screenplay of Ricardo Lee for *Brutal* or Baby Nebrida for *Langis at Tubig* or Nicanor Tiongson for *Kung Ako'y Iiwan Mo*. This is granted only for the sake of argument because, while Carreon's dialogue is clearly superior, his specification of visual images (if he included them in his screenplay) leaves much to be desired. Carreon won the Best Screenplay Award; it is an award he deserves, if only because his lines do offer profound insights, as well as homespun wisdom.

But even if the screenplay is good, the film itself is not

necessarily good. In fact, in this case, the film is positively bad. Take, for example, the directing. The screenplay calls for the building up of a three-sided conflict: *development* as represented by the woman engineer (Chanda Romero) and the benevolent feudal lord (Vic Silayan), *agriculture* as represented by the agriculturist (Christopher de Leon) and the farmer (Bembol Roco), and *power* as represented by the rich man's son (Michael de Mesa). Instead of carefully tightening his scenes in order to build up tension, however, director Augusto Buenaventura gets carried away by carabaos and ducks. Local color, in effect, replaces genuine struggle. Carreon's screenplay is betrayed by the director's lack of understanding of the basic conflict involved in the story.

Take, as another example, the acting. There are good actors and actresses in the cast, but they are not given chances to develop their characters. Roco, for instance, maintains the same look the whole time; the director could have asked him to put some complexity into the role. Similarly, de Leon fails to internalize the conflict his character should be feeling—that of a *balik-probinsiya*, intellectually alienated from his barriomates, but still one with the land. Suzette Ranillo is excellent as the helpless wife, but she is not given any chance to relate her characterization to the main plot. Good acting is not a matter of keeping a serious face, but a matter of changing expression to display complex emotions. Unfortunately, *Taga sa Panahon* has more caricatures than persons.

No film should be given any award of consequence (least of all a Best Picture Award, no matter what the theme of a festival) if it is technically careless. In *Taga sa Panahon*, elementary mistakes are committed by the cinematographer, who cannot keep his light values on the same level during short sequences. More ridiculous mistakes are made by the editor, who puts together

close-ups and medium shots so carelessly the viewer often cannot figure out who is facing whom. For example, when de Mesa enters the dining room early in the film, the editor puts together shots of the other characters looking left, looking right, looking everywhere but where de Mesa is supposed to be standing. In a later sequence, while talking to Roco, de Leon jumps screen left to screen right.

The music is terrible, to say the least; no attempt seems to have been made to relate music to shot. The production design is competent only in the sense that no airplanes zoom into the screen. Otherwise, there is no sense of place nor of time evoked by the settings. In fact, if anything, the nipa huts all look brand new. This may not, however, be the designer's fault, but the cinematographer's. It is, in addition, the director's fault that Roco, who has been on the land for years, appears in an early sequence as constructing his house.

Every year, after the annual filmfest, doubts are raised either about the competence of the judges (after all, only one of the jurors apparently is a practising film critic; the rest are laymen as far as film art is concerned) or about the criteria themselves. There is clearly something wrong with criteria which allow a bad film such as *Taga sa Panahon* to be named Best Picture, even though the bulk of the other awards went to *Brutal*. It does not follow that the director of the Best Picture should be named Best Director, but it does follow that, if a director cannot possibly be named Best Director because he is unimaginative, careless, or incompetent, his film should not be named Best Picture. No bad director can make a good film especially if no one else on the technical staff does a good job. *Taga sa Panahon*, like *Kasal-Kasalan*, *Bahay-Bahayan* before it, has to be named the Most Over-rated Failure of the Year. (*TV TIMES*, January 18-24, 1981, p. 14.)



There are a few laughs provoked by Mike Relon Makiling's *Palpak Connection* (1981), the latest product of local cinema's Three Stooges, but the laughs are too few to last a whole film. Most of the gags are over-extended: they are cut long after the audience has gotten the punch lines. An example is the red and yellow car (shamelessly inferior to a similar car gag in one of Dolfy's films). The car should have been funny if seen for two seconds; it is boring as anything after the whole minute it is on screen. Once again, the humor is basically of the toilet type, with even otherwise intelligent comic Dencio Padilla being handcuffed to a toilet door.

Relatively less gross than previous Tito, Vic, and Joey starrers, this film is still, nevertheless, right smack in the middle of one of the worst traditions in local movies. There are green jokes all around; the jokes would not be so bad if they were at least original (the decades-old jokes about *bibingka* and *longganisa*, for example, are still used in this film). The direction is particularly inept. When the wives are unveiled, for example, the director keeps everybody in a long shot; instead of seeing each

face close-up, the audience is left frustrated, as the furniture gets more screen space than the actresses. The adequate performances by Arturo Moran and Lito Anzures are wasted in the over-all sloppiness of the acting. Even stage discovery Debraliz appears to have overstayed her welcome in the world of cinema. Clearly, local comedy takes a giant step backward with the appearance of the Tito, Vic and Joey potboilers. (*PARADE*, April 19, 1981, p. 24.)



Tito, Vic & Joey take film one giant step backwards in their potboilers.



Cloyd Robinson's *Pick-up Girls* (1981) is not entertaining in any sense whatsoever. The story is completely illogical, the disco sequences over-extended, the sex non-erotic. Even the actresses do not bare enough flesh to make the movie at least prurient.

Everything that can possibly go wrong in a movie goes wrong in this one. The camera goes out of focus. The faces of the actresses are often covered by shadows. The editing leaves in preliminary footage (you can see the actors waiting for the director to shout "Action"). The music is intolerable. The sound jumps out of the screen every so often. One actress even repeats a line she obviously does not get right the first time. Whole sequences are out of order (such as the sequence establishing that Wendy Villarica's mother-in-law is antagonistic). The kissing scenes show the actresses completely motionless and emotionless. The writer cannot keep time relationships straight. The director cannot control his cast and crew. Villarica shows promise with her flexible voice and impressive face, and supporting actresses Odette Khan and Anita Linda do their best, but they all waste their talents

on a movie terribly written, horribly directed, and intolerably acted. (*PARADE*, July 5, 1981, p. 25.)



Two directorial styles: Eddie Garcia in *P.S. I Love You* and Maryo de los Reyes in *Gabun*.



You can't ask for anything more. It's directed by a competent, meticulous, serious director. It's photographed by the best local cinematographer. It's written by a multi-awarded writer. It also reputedly had one of the biggest budgets ever given to a local production. Above all, it's a project of the Film Fund, the producing arm of the Film Board.

And yet, Eddie Garcia's *P.S. I Love You* (1981) is a resounding artistic failure. Think, for example, of the cinematography. Romy Vitug has already proven that he is not only technically brilliant, but also artistically sensitive. He can create mood through his camera. He can portray character through the way he handles light. But in this film, his work is uninspired. There is no mood which he creates. He does not distinguish roles through distinctions in lighting. In fact, at certain points, he is even technically disappointing. In a shot of Gabby Concepcion and Sharon Cuneta sitting on the floor, shadows fall on Concepcion's face. In a shot of Concepcion and Cuneta on a boat, the foreground (part of the boat) is in focus, but the figures of performers farther away from

the camera are out of focus. In fact, several of the shots are out of focus. Some panning shots are even jerky.

Or think of the screenplay. Edgardo Reyes has already shown a socially-conscious bent, coupled with structural skill in handling plot. But in this film, he forgets the basic elements of a good screenplay. The character of Concepcion, for example, shifts from happy-go-lucky in the first part to emasculated in the second part. The dialogue of the characters (all belonging to the upper class) shifts from straight English to such street Tagalog as "pinit-sarahan ko siya" and "mag-toning ka na lang." Reyes even falls into the trap that much less sophisticated writers always fall into: he does "instant translations" in his dialogues. For example, one of the lines of Boots Anson-Roa goes this way: "You don't understand. Ikaw ay nalalabuan." Other screenwriters often indulge in this ridiculous redundancy; one is surprised to see Reyes commit such an elementary error.

The dialogue, in fact, is absolutely incoherent. The characters shift from English to Tagalog without any apparent reason. It may be argued that wealthy people actually speak in Taglish, but they typically speak in a language appropriate to subject matter, occasion, and addressee. In other words, a highly emotionally disturbed wealthy person (such as Cuneta when her mother Roa keeps her away from Concepcion) may indeed speak in straight English to her mother, but she will then speak in Taglish during analogous situations. But in this film, Cuneta, in times of emotional stress, speaks either in English or in Tagalog or in Taglish. In other words, there is no reason, linguistic or emotional or whatever, for the shifts in language.

Even the direction leaves much to be desired. The dramatic sequences, for instance, lack building up; the actors seem merely to be reciting their lines. Of course,

part of the problem may be that Cuneta cannot yet handle dramatic scenes (she is excellent in the cute-type courting scenes), Concepcion tries hard but does not quite have enough sophistication to approach a potentially complex role, and Barbara Perez is given too little scope for substantial characterization. It may also be part of the problem that Roa is acting against type (she is a villain in this film); she is an excellent actress, but there are limitations to anybody's talent, especially if the role is not properly written. But the director should have remedied the situation by de-emphasizing the actors (as he does in one scene where Cuneta and Concepcion are photographed in an extremely long shot, thus hiding their facial expressions). He should also have used Vitug's considerable technical abilities to create a film where settings overpower acting (the settings are fantastic, anyway). In short, since there is not enough substance in the film, the director should have done something to disguise the lack of depth in the story and in the acting.

The film could have been excellent. In fact, it starts off on the right foot, with Concepcion acting like a kid in front of Norma Japitana (his father Eddie Garcia's secretary), Roa and Garcia entering into a subplot about banks and personal grudges, and a well-handled scene showing Concepcion casually drinking Cuneta's drink at the Manila Polo Club. But the complex treatment of the first few sequences rapidly gives way to a lackadaisical, cliché-ridden portrait of two pretty people encountering opposition from an unreasonable parent. What starts out as a promising film showing the true, the good, and the beautiful, ends up merely as another boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-gets-girl flick.

P.S. I Love You is a big disappointment, especially since the creation of the Film Fund brought up the hopes

of those who feel that our movie industry can become one of the best in the world. So far, however, all the products of the Film Fund seem to head in the wrong direction. There was *Dear Heart*, which was bad enough. Then there was *Free to Love*, which was worse. Now, there's *P.S. I Love You*, a film that clearly does not achieve what the Film Fund wants to achieve, namely, to present a good image of the Philippines here and abroad. If this latest film is all foreigners will see of our country, they will think that we are a people who spend all our time playing polo, having dinners, watching *Deep Throat*, and building big houses, instead of—as our government keeps telling us to do—developing our country's natural and human resources. (*TV TIMES*, November 22-28, 1981, p. 22.)



Don't look now, but this film belongs here.



Alma Moreno is a sex siren, but she does not get to display any of her sexual charms in Jose Miranda Cruz's *Sisang Tabak* (1981). Instead, she attempts to become an action star, something she definitely is not. The fights are repetitive, the story muddled, and the suspense nonexistent. In short, this is a most boring film.

The story is ridiculous, with blind swordsman Vic Vargas suddenly ending up as Moreno's father, Moreno suffering amnesia but remembering everything her father taught her, totally evil bandits suddenly letting the unconscious Orestes Ojeda live after he has killed some of them, and (most ridiculous of all) a one-day-old baby being sent to college (a "kolehiyo" and returning after no time at all as an eight-year-old girl.

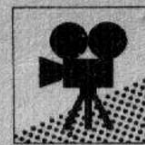
The lack of continuity in the cinematography is classic: in one sequence, Moreno fences with a trainer in broad daylight; the reaction shot of the spectators shows the sky at early evening. Even the dialogue is incredibly bad: wanting to reassure Moreno, Dante Rivero says, for instance, "nakahanda akong lumaban sa iyo," instead, of course, of "lumaban para sa iyo." Moreno, shown to be

trained only in swordplay, ends up killing more people through the use of a rifle (which she has never handled before).

The ending ranks among the worst in all Philippine cinema: the bitter Vargas suddenly forgives Ojeda, Moreno—remembering the love she shared with Ojeda—suddenly gives up Ojeda, the long time bandit Rivero suddenly decides to surrender to the government. If the viewer is still awake when the ending comes (the incessant use of the zoom lens is guaranteed to make anybody fall asleep), he doubtless surrenders, too, to the realization that things really look hopeless for Philippine cinema. (*PARADE*, December 19-25, 1981, p. 44.)



A vintage shot of Butz Aquino (with Charo Santos).



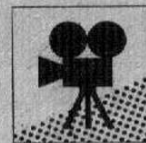
The entertainment value of Bebong Osorio's *Kami'y Ifugao* (1981) is zilch, since almost everything in it has already been seen by local audiences. An example is Rez Cortez' sadistic treatment of Dina Bonnevie, which is a pale imitation of Jay Ilagan's parallel enslavement of Amy Austria in *Brutal*. Even the Ifugao rituals are completely boring, since we have all seen better cinematic treatments of these in the twin Aliw-iw films. In short, it is a rare viewer who can stay awake during this entire film.

This is clearly one of the worst movies of 1981. It features an inane screenplay, incompetent direction, intolerable cinematography, pathetic acting, repetitive action sequences. The only mildly interesting sequence involves guest star Nora Aunor as a masculine thief, but this sequence has nothing at all to do with the rest of the film. As a whole, the film is made up of ridiculous scenes (the fault of the screenwriter, obviously), with the most ridiculous scene of all ending the movie: fully (scantly) dressed in an Ifugao costume, Efren Reyes, Jr., goes headhunting right in the middle of a crowded slum, but

absolutely no one pays any attention to him. Despite the lack of interest on the part of any bystander, however, the police come anyway, right on cue, in time for Reyes to raise the severed heads of Cortez and George Estregan. Clearly, we have here a failure of reason and of imagination. (TV PARADE, December 5-11, 1981, p. 36.)



Niño Muhlach blows hot and cold in his films. With Phillip Salvador (*above*) and less serious actors (*below*).



J. Erastheo Navoa's *Juan Balutan* (1982) ranks among the most boring of Niño Muhlach's films. The story is incoherent, making it difficult for the viewer to follow the now-fantastic, now-realistic events. The editing is guaranteed to make the viewer sleepy, in order to keep him from noticing the bad special effects by Tommy Marcelino. All in all, a very bad film.

Special effects are the life of a film such as this. With bad effects, *Juan Balutan* simply fails. The flying scenes are not even matted, but simply double-exposed, something even the untrained eye can spot. The other technical aspects are uniformly substandard, including the cinematography (which should have been easy since it is so straightforward). Muhlach's acting talent cannot save this disaster. Whoever thought of making the two kids sing ought to be imprisoned in a church tower and made to hear their song for 24 hours a day for a year. Navoa has done much, much better work. About the only thing worth seeing in this film is Dencio Padilla's offbeat portrayal of a parish priest. Too bad his performance is wasted in a meaningless movie. (PARADE, March 23, 1982, p. 42.)



What is the result of all that sound and fury attending the showing of Efren Piñon's *Bagong Boy Condenado* (1982)? You guessed it—an absolute zero of a film.

Like similar holier-than-thou uproars (such as the protests against Techie Agabayani), the banning, permitting, reshooting, and cutting of this movie have all been much ado about nothing.

After charges and denials of bribery, charges and denials of libel, self-congratulatory announcements and doubts about box-office success, the public has once again been the loser. For what is currently showing in downtown theaters is nothing else but trash.

The censoring may have had something to do with it, because the film—as it now stands—is incoherent. One sequence is enough as an example: When Rudy Fernandez (Boy Condenado) meets Greggory Liwag in a dark alley, he pounces on the poor guy. When Liwag's father intercedes, Fernandez explains that they have been friends a long time, but that Liwag has done something treacherous. But this is the first time the audience sees Liwag in the film. Never before—and never after—is the

audience told what it is that Liwag has done to deserve the beating.

When Liwag and Fernandez subsequently raid a syndicate hideout, the audience is kept wondering what keeps the two together. When Liwag dies because he does not want to reveal where Fernandez is hiding, the audience may appreciate the loyalty, but cannot possibly appreciate the fact that Fernandez nonchalantly walks in a few moments later. Everybody in the area knows Fernandez (they all more or less greet him), and all the syndicate has to do is to wait a while to meet him. But for some strange reason, the bad guys just leave.

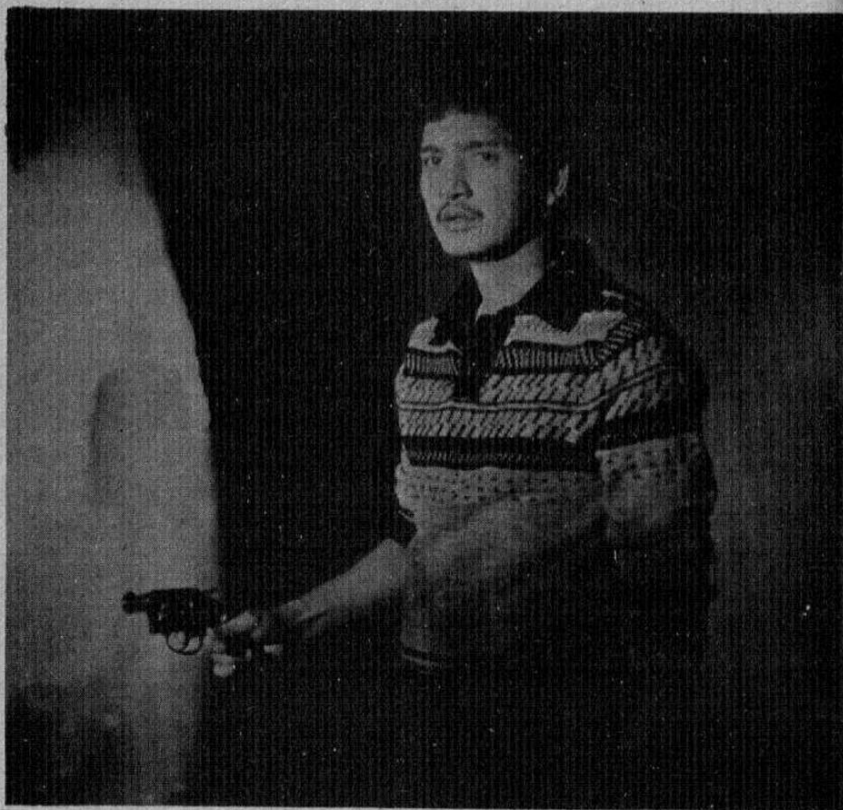
Perhaps the censors cut sequences which may explain all this. Perhaps. But not even the most ruthless censorship can explain away the incoherence within the sequences themselves. One sequence, set in Mindanao, has gangster boss Charlie Davao saying to his henchman to go to the island (the syndicate headquarters). The implication is that the island is within, say, an hour or two of Mindanao. But a subsequent sequence involving Dexter Doria locates the island as being in Luzon. Surely, that is not the censors' fault, but clearly the scriptwriter's.

Scriptwriter Mauro Gia Samonte is to blame for many of the logical flaws in film, but director Efren Piñon has to share much of the blame. Only the director, for example, should be castigated for the most hilarious mistake of the film: shot and wounded by Mario Montenegro, Fernandez is trapped inside a flaming squatter area surrounded by the police. Despite that, Fernandez appears miraculously alive and well in a following sequence with Doria. Not even a word of dialogue is given to explain the miracle (that's Samonte's fault), but the director could have staged the fire scene in such a way that Fernandez will appear to have a way out.

The fire sequence requires comment, because it is am-

bitious in the context of local productions. Given the limitations of the local industry, the sequence is not bad, but it could have been better. In itself, the sequence shows off Piñon's ability to create fast-paced action and exciting situations. But within the film, the sequence makes little sense.

Bagong Boy Condenado typifies the misguided approach of local movie promotions. Much is made of its being controversial (the Board of Review having unwittingly played into the hands of movie promoters), but too little attention is given to the film itself. (*TIMES JOURNAL*, May 7, 1982, p. 12.)



Rudy Fernandez shines in action films.



The only people entertained by William Pascual's *Puppy Love* (1982) are diehard Gabby Concepcion fans, but even they fall silent after the first three squeals of delight at seeing his face fill the screen.

This is a film made more ridiculous by its pretensions. Believe it or not, there is a black-and-white sequence in this film, using stills no less. Why there is such a sequence is anybody's guess, probably including the director's.

The music is the worst ever heard on local screens, with totally inappropriate canned music coming in loud and unclear almost the whole time. The only time the music does not drown out the dialogue, Concepcion reads a poem entitled "If I Were King." Ironically, this is the time the music should have drowned out the reading, because the "poem" is sophomoric and Concepcion's reading is soporific.

Other blunders: Janice de Belen is introduced to Concepcion's mother Josephine Estrada long after both have been together in emotional scenes such as Greggy Liwag's death and Concepcion's hospital confinement.

A balletic *pas de deux* is superimposed on the impassive faces of Concepcion and de Belen, presumably to signify their having sex. Practically the whole film is repeated at the end, in an overdrawn summary sequence. (*PARADE*, September 29, 1982, p. 33.)



Rio Locsin started a trend in the late seventies.



It is hard to say who is entertained by Joey Gosiengfiao's *Bakit Ba Ganyan* (1981). Certainly not the viewer, who has to sit through bad dancing, worse singing, and horrible acting. This is supposed to be a musical in the same tradition as *The Sound of Music* and *My Fair Lady*, with the bit actors and extras dancing on the streets. But the music is uniformly bad, the lyrics are among the worst ever written by Filipinos, the singing far from acceptable even in neighborhood talent shows, the dancing totally unimaginative and repetitious.

Often, we mistake effort for talent. The effort that went into this movie must have been great, since there are several production numbers. But although the film gets an A for effort, it fails when it comes to merit. The lyrics are as good (or as bad) an example as any: they rarely match the music. The production design (or choice of sets) is another example. Viewed from the outside, Dina Bonnavie's house is pure slum, with makeshift roof and all, but inside, the bedroom is as large as those we find in wealthy houses, with corresponding rich furniture. To say that Bonnavie plays a girl who thinks rich is no ex-

cuse. There is nothing in the film which justifies her having money. The makeshift quality of the film is shown dramatically in one dance sequence: the Nailclippers hold a plate each; four of the plates belong to a set, the fifth—for no reason at all except lack of foresight—does not belong to the set.

Everybody in this movie performs below his or her usual level. Bonnevie has grown into an awkward, hesitant dancer; as a singer, she has reached her level of incompetence. Albert Martinez acted much better in the otherwise unremarkable *Bata Pa Si Sabel* (1981). Unlike on television, the Nailclippers do not register well on the movie screen. Geleen Eugenio's choreography is way below her achievement in *Bongga Ka Day* (1980); in this film, in fact, the dances are simply annoying. The cinematography is typified by one particular shot—that of Bonnevie standing with her head completely out of the screen. Let us hope that the whole concept of Regal babyhood is thrown out of the movie world. It is not only critics who cannot stomach this kind of cinematic nonsense; even viewers have made their voices heard. Like the previous Regal baby films, this one attracted very few viewers. (*PARADE*, August 30, 1981, p. 22.)



Whatever entertainment possibilities Carlo Caparas' *Ang Babaing Hinugot sa Aking Tadyang* (1981) has remain unexplored, since its sequences are not related to each other or to the film as a whole. Even the bed scenes are too mild to constitute a box-office draw. The much-publicized stunt of Vivian Velez (jumping from a building) is not properly exploited by the camera angle; she does not appear to be in any real danger. In short, this film is as boring as a film can get.

Although Caparas is an extremely successful writer of *komiks* novels, his screenplay for this film lacks narrative interest, not to mention logical motivations and imaginative insight. The direction is careless and uninspired. There is an attempt to allude to Greek mythology (Eddie Garcia is "Homero" and Velez is "Proserfina"), but the story has nothing to do with the Proserphine myth. The symbol of being barefoot could have worked, if Velez had stuck to only one dress (how can a barefoot woman with no visible means of support and no permanent address change clothes so often?). The worst aspect of the film is its cinematography, which consists primar-

ily of unmotivated slow-motion photography and inadequate lighting. This is clearly one of the worst films of 1981. (*PARADE*, March 29, 1981, p. 22.)



Contrasting directors: Carlo Caparas in *Indio* and Ishmael Bernal in *Himala*.



The road to hell is paved with good intentions, our catechism teachers once drilled into our heads, and critics today have not ceased reminding us that the value of a film is not measured by the intentions of the filmmakers.

Obviously, both Carlo Caparas and Ed Palmos have the best of intentions. Caparas' *Indio* (1981) is a period film, set in the last years of the 19th century, when nationalistic feelings were spreading up and down our archipelago. If only for its setting and its theme, then, *Indio* is clearly a serious film.

Similarly, Palmos' *Ang Babae sa Ulog* (1981) is a period film, set in the early days when tribes waged tribal wars and maidens were not supposed to talk of love. Again, the setting (the rice terraces) and the theme (love against tradition) make this film a serious artistic effort on the part of MOWELFUND scholar Palmos.

But artistic intentions are one thing, and artistic achievement is another. Both *Indio* and *Ang Babae sa Ulog* are artistic failures. True, *Indio* says that Filipinos will always use violence to fight off foreign imperialists. True,

Ang Babae sa Ulog attacks the ways of the old ones, who use tradition rather than reason to run the affairs of the community. Nevertheless, because both films do not jell as films, because they are both technically sloppy, they fail.

Indio has a valid premise—that the Filipino (represented by Dante Varona, nicknamed “Indio”) is not a coward, that he can tear up his *cedula* (as Bonifacio did) in front of his foreign masters, that he will not go down to the level of the foreigner (cleverly shown by a sequence where Varona does not rape Chiqui Hollmann, though his sweetheart, Lirio Vital, has been brutally raped by Spaniards Subas Herrero and a *berdugo*). The story (serialized as a *komiks* novel) is clearly interesting, even significant. (After all, Carlo Caparas is still our most significant *komiks* novelist).

But the screenplay of *Indio* does not alter the story; it merely transposes the *komiks* novel to the screen. Print is one thing, however, and film another. *Komiks* cannot translate into film. What Caparas should have done is to rewrite the entire story from the cinematic point of view. Instead of having a *komiks* structure, the film would then have a cinematic structure. A specific example of how the *komiks* mentality ruins the film occurs in the false ending. Varona and his small band of nationalists finally engage the Spanish troops led by Romy Diaz. This should be the grand finale (in every other film about revolutions, wars, and such things, the grand finale consists of the hero's troops fighting the villain's men), but Caparas' *komiks* mind does not see that the film should end here. Instead, Caparas keeps the story going, until Varona finally ends up climbing a flagpole to tear down the Spanish flag. But the actual ending of the film is cinematically uninteresting (actually unbelievable, since Varona is fatally wounded sequences before). What works in the *komiks*, then, destroys the film.

Ang Babae sa Ulog has the opposite problem. Palmos obviously knows what film is all about. He plays down dialogue in favor of visually interesting vignettes. He envelops his film with mist, in order to evoke a mythic atmosphere, appropriately set by a story-teller who serves as frame (she comes out in the beginning and at the end). But Palmos forgets that a film is also a narrative, that it also must tell a story (even if the story is not the main thing). *Ang Babae sa Ulog* simply does not have a story to tell.

What passes for a story is so sketchy that one cannot blame the actors and actresses for failing to hold the attention of the viewer. There just is not enough to chew on; Jean Saburit, for instance, tries her best, but she does not have a role which allows her any subtlety or complexity. Ricky Belmonte is a pure disaster, not only because he is much too old for the role, but also because his face does not convey changing emotions. Alan Bautista looks good, but the moment he opens his mouth, all the viewer hears is shouting, not emoting.

The real sign of the failure of the film is that the male viewer cannot take his eyes off the busts of Saburit and the other actresses. In a good film which has nudity, most viewers forget about the nudity after two scenes, simply because the story is too compelling or the acting too intense. But in *Ang Babae sa Ulog*, the nudity is the main attraction, not the film. (By the way, why does Maria Victoria wear that ridiculous white costume, like a modern tube? She stands out like a sore thumb—though thumb is not the proper word.)

Although both *Indio* and *Ang Babae sa Ulog* are failures, however, one must commend both directors and their producers for attempting films which deal with serious Filipino problems—imperialism in the case of *Indio* and tradition in the case of *Ang Babae sa Ulog*. (TV TIMES, January 10-16, 1982, p. 4.)



Like all Dolphy movies, Frank Gray, Jr.'s *Good Morning Professor* (1982) has many genuine laughs, some duds, and a few bits of toilet humor. It should be a wholesome film for children, but for Alma Moreno's seductive dancing. Nevertheless, the thousands who expect very little from a Dolphy film should not be disappointed.

One genuine laugh is not original, but still effective: Mary Walter, aging, reveals that she has a father (older) whose mother Katy de la Cruz (much older) is still alive. De la Cruz, in turn, reveals that her mother and her maternal grandfather are waiting for her outside the foundation. Such playful fun poked at old age is typically Filipino.

But the slapstick involving the aged is not typically Filipino, nor is it funny at all. Although the filmmakers obviously meant no harm in their caricature of old people, the fight scenes and the jealousy scenes are in bad taste. Real-life old people should be treated with respect, not ridicule.

Other genuine laughs come from Dolphy's unique use of local comedic tradition as exemplified in the old-time

stage show, *bodabil*, and *zarzuela*. His songs and dances are fun. Moreno's dancing errs on the provocative side. Her singing—or rather, her lack of singing—is simply pathetic; nobody really enjoys hearing a bad voice singing off-key.

But whatever merit the genuine laughs have, it is negated by the toilet humor that again and again, here as in other Dolphy films, rears its ugly behind. The film begins, for example, with Dolphy defecating in public as his house is carried by a truck through downtown Manila. A sequence soon after shows a man urinating right in the face of Moreno, who is hiding under a car. Such toilet humor is completely unnecessary. Why can't Dolphy get away from such low level comedy?

As in other Dolphy films, the fight sequences are fun, primarily because they are bloodless. No one really seems to get hurt, not even those shot frontally (since there is never any blood and the villains die without much ado). The final fight sequence in this film, however, pales in comparison with those in his earlier movies. Moreno has some action talents, but Dolphy's angels are technically better at martial arts.

Dolphy can do a lot for local cinema in terms of craftsmanship, since he is—in person—concerned with the plight of his fellow actors. If he would only extend his concern to the technical aspects of filmmaking, he could easily do away with the technical sloppiness, crude scriptwriting, and bad choreography of his films. One can see that, in the professor sequences, Dolphy really wants to moralize and to uplift the sense of responsibility in his audiences. If he would only try to improve their artistic taste as well, he could do Philippine cinema an incomparable service. (*PARADE*, June 23, 1982, p. 41.)



Elwood Perez's *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* (1982) is the story of an honest accountant (Robert Arevalo) who finds himself framed for embezzlement. His wife (Liza Lorena) and his mother (Mary Walter) stand by him, but his son (Gabby Concepcion) loses faith in him. Subplots involve the son's poor friend (William Martinez) and his mother (Alicia Alonso).

The title is a good gauge of the inanity of this film. Competent performances by Robert Arevalo and Liza Lorena cannot make up for the incoherence of the screenplay, the ineptness of the technical personnel, and the inadequacy of the direction.

Bring your children to this film only if they threaten to disown you if you don't, but do not be surprised if they disown you afterwards anyway for taking them to such a waste of time. (*PANORAMA*, December 26, 1982, p. 14.)

A GALLERY OF FILM ARTISTS

What sort of person does it take to be a film critic? The answer is very simple. You just have to love films. You have to love films enough to be prepared to sit through hours of rubbish, waiting for the nugget of pure gold that makes all the waiting worth while.

— Mel C. Tobias, Hong Kong film critic

When burning incense, if you use aloeswood, the smoke will smell like aloeswood; if you use sandalwood, the smell will be that of sandalwood. Why? Because each kind of incense has a different nature.

— Yuan Tsung-tao, Chinese literary critic
(16th century)

ISHMAEL BERNAL

The sex-comedy *Menor de Edad* (1979) by Ishmael Bernal, turns out to be disappointing as a sex flick, but delightful as a comedy. Starring five "campus pussycats" and promoted through a "figure-guessing contest," the film leads the viewers to expect torrid scenes of undressing, kissing, and lovemaking. Unless they were all cut by the Board of Censors (which announced that the film had been disapproved for showing), there are no such scenes in *Menor de Edad*. There is only one extended bed scene, and it is treated in such a comic fashion that the audience laughs rather than giggles.

Menor de Edad portrays the student generation after the onset of sexual permissiveness. The affair of her father (Vic Silayan) with his mistress (Amy Austria) is taken as a matter of course by a convent girl (Rio Locsin). The single girls living in their own apartment are annoyed, rather than surprised, by Locsin's own sexual escapades and by the constant bickering between a young married couple (Chona Castillo and Ronald Bregendahl). Not even his mother bats an eyelash when scholarly boy Marco Sison is pursued heavy-handedly by a rich

young woman (Sandy Andolong).

Realistically naughty and deliberately tasteless, screenwriter Franklin Cabaluna's dialogue is the main comic element. Cabaluna's double entendres cannot be said to be strikingly original, but they serve as a heterosexual equivalent of the shocking dialogue in the stage play *Boys in the Band*.

Menor de Edad, however, is marred by two serious inadequacies. One is the direction. Ishmael Bernal correctly senses that the pacing has to be fast, but he fails to complement the verbal comedy with visually funny moments. The film is much too verbal. More attention should have been given to the visual and situational possibilities of the story.

The other glaring fault is the series of superimposed disclaimers at the end of the film. The whole point of the film is that young people have to learn through their own mistakes. Enough hints are given that this learning process has already begun. The couple who gets married too early serves as living proof to the single girls that early marriage is always a mistake. The grotesque character of Locsin's mother is traced to her own early marriage to Silayan. In a very real sense, the film is a telling diatribe against early marriage. In that sense, it is a moral film.

To state at the end that all the characters eventually become model adult citizens is to destroy the whole impact of the film. If adolescents who rebel against their parents are all going to end up just like their parents anyway, then why not get married early just like their parents did? If the sixteen-year-old newlyweds who are now finding out that marrying was a mistake are eventually going to build a happy home, is not the early marriage a good thing after all? If Silayan is going back to his wife to live happily ever after, does that not vindicate his own early marriage? Whoever decided to put in those dis-

claimers at the end has rendered what could have been a moral film highly immoral. Ironically, the censors should have banned not the film, but the disclaimers.

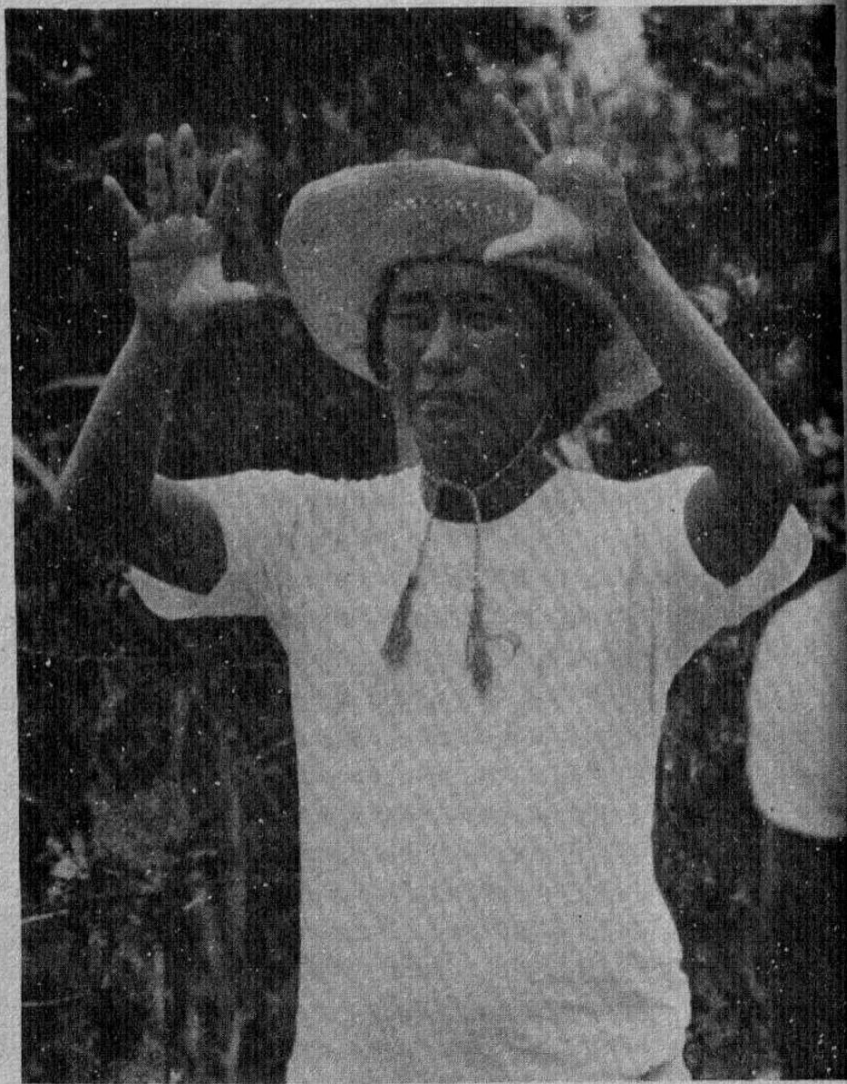
Ishmael Bernal fares much better in *Boy Kodyak* (1979). With the same team that was nominated for 1978's Urian Awards (screenwriter Jose Carreon, cinematographer Sergio Lobo, designer Mel Chionglo, and musicians The Vanishing Tribe), Bernal weaves a tale of raw courage and devotion to duty. If *Menor de Edad* subordinates the visual to the verbal, *Boy Kodyak* does exactly the opposite: Bernal's visual sensibility overpowers Carreon's undistinguished dialogue.

Boy Kodyak (Bembol Roco) is really Detective Teo Rosa (the similarity to TV's *Kojak* is ill-advised), a young plainclothesman still imbued with idealism. When he finds out that a small-time punk (Walter Navarro) is fighting the syndicate, he decides to track him down, both to arrest and to support. The syndicate sends three professional killers, and the hunt ends in a small barrio in the hills.

Carreon, who originally entitled his prize-winning screenplay "Huling Sultada," uses the cockfighting as his controlling metaphor, but *Boy Kodyak*'s existential rage is much too complex to be likened to the blind fury of fighting cocks. Bernal's use of visual symbols such as darkness (for evil and for life), a crutch (for weapons), and a farmers' plow (for society) works much better.

Bembol Roco redeems himself after his disastrous performance in *Parolado*. He is at his best in the last sequence, where he combines the physical problem of fighting with a bad leg and the psychological problem of figuring out whether he will just give up or fight to the death. Charo Santos as Navarro's sister does not have a role meaty enough for her to display her considerable talents, so she wisely stays in the background.

The last sequence, in which the injured and unarmed Boy Kodyak fights the three armed killers, marks a high point in Bernal's career. The pacing, editing, verisimilitude, and intensity of the sequence show a master director at work. (TV TIMES, March 18-24, 1979, p. 9.)



Ishmael Bernal at work.



Bakit May Pag-Ibig Pa (1979) offers the viewers a rare chance to compare the styles of two major directors. Ishmael Bernal directs the first episode from a screenplay by George Arago. The episode tells of a chance encounter between a spirited ex-nun and a dispirited architect. Celso Ad. Castillo directs the second episode from his own screenplay. This episode tells of another chance encounter, this time between two former lovers.

Obviously influenced by meditative Western films such as Woody Allen's *Interiors*, Bernal uses an almost esoteric intellectual approach in his episode. There is little background music or even noise. All the viewer hears for most of the film are the voices of Christopher de Leon and Nora Aunor. There is little movement; de Leon and Aunor in one sequence, for example, sit on separate chairs and simply declaim.

The viewer is thus forced to listen to the dialogue. Arago's dialogue, however, though witty in places, does not deserve the attention the viewer is forced to give it. Instead of concrete language pregnant with wit and meaning, what the viewer gets is abstract language bar-

ren of transitions, naturalness, and sense.

Because Bernal is betrayed by his screenwriter, his best sequences are those without words. In one such sequence, de Leon rapes Aunor; the rape, however, is a pure act of power rather than of lust. The verbal battles which rage earlier in the film are made meaningful by this one nonverbal act of violence. In another sequence, de Leon dreams of killing his psychiatrist-father, but finds himself mocked by a religious statue. In a third nonverbal sequence, de Leon cleans up an old house, removing the *santos* which symbolize his mother's hypocritical religiosity.

If Bernal's episode is intellectual, Castillo's episode is highly visual. Alona Alegre lives in an old tenement; cinematographer Romeo Vitug explores the visual possibilities of what, to the unaided eye, is merely a whitewashed box. Romeo Vasquez has a motor home; the vehicle gives Castillo an excuse to set some of the scenes in Baguio. Alegre and Vasquez first meet each other at the Ati-Atihan in Aklan; Castillo and Vitug incorporate a little documentary on the festival.

Bernal allows his scenes to last forever, or what seems like forever; Castillo cuts and intercuts so frequently that, if the bed scenes were not so bold, the viewer would miss them. The only time Castillo allows a scene to drag is during Bert Nievera's first song, a song that is not necessary to the story anyway. (Not cutting music is one of Castillo's recurring mistakes; in *Burlesk Queen*, he also overextended the climactic song-dance.)

Castillo's main strength lies in his ability to use real people and real events in his films. The tenement dwellers as well as the Ati-Atihan revelers are as important to the film as the extras who merely dress up the party scene or the beer-drinking scene. Castillo's films have an improvisational quality, diametrically opposed to the

studied, almost theatrical design of Bernal's works.

With actors other than Aunor and de Leon, Bernal's episode would be a minor classic (minor only because it is barely an hour long). Despite their considerable acting talents, the two superstars do not have the depth and sophistication demanded by the roles. In contrast, the roles of Alegre and Vasquez are badly-written. Vasquez botches up his fairly simple role. Alegre, on the other hand, manages to inject complexity into a flat role; she should be nominated, if not actually given, an acting award for this film.

Ironically, the film does not start on a promising note. The opening credits are not appropriate to the film. The animation of the growing heart is not well done (with the highest cost of local animation, however, such a flaw is perhaps best forgiven). Bernal's episode, moreover, opens with an unnecessary sequence between de Leon and his mother. But the film quickly takes shape once de Leon and Aunor meet at the door of the old house. (This is, in fact, where the film should begin.)

The conflict between the sexes which starts in Bernal's episode carries through to Castillo's. Man will forever be at odds with Woman, not just physically, but psychologically (as in the Castillo episode) and spiritually (as in the Bernal episode). But, as the film's title suggests, there is that little thing called love. Man cannot live with Woman, but because of love, Man and Woman cannot live without each other. (*TV TIMES*, June 24-30, 1979, p. 8.)



Ishmael Bernal's *Salawahan* (1979), at least, has no commercials, but then it doesn't have much of anything else, either. Bernal had a good thing going in *Bakit May Pag-ibig Pa?* Christopher de Leon and Nora Aunor understood the sexual politics in the story very well. But in *Salawahan*, Bernal has two stars who do not even come close to de Leon and Aunor. The result, as expected, is that Rio Locsin and Mat Ranillo make fools of themselves, trying to do justice to a script which neither of them understands.

The script, however, might be at fault here. Jose Carreon is one of the better screenwriters around, but he should not have insisted on having another de Leon-Aunor situation. *Salawahan* is actually the story of Jay Ilagan, whose love for Andrea Andolong is put seriously in doubt because of his relationship with Rita Gomez. Ilagan wants to have the best of both worlds, but so do the two women in his life. Here is a situation that may very well be comic, if only Carreon could write comedy.

Unfortunately, the film tries to be funny, but isn't. True, there are sequences which are hilarious, such as

the scene involving Rene Requiastas. But the scenes that are supposed to be hilarious are not. In the scene where Mat Ranillo is drunk, for example, Bernal loses his audience by taking so long to develop what is really a predictable sequence of events.

Since Ilagan, Gomez, and Andolong do as good a job as they can (and compensate, in the process, for the ineptness of Ranillo and Locsin), the reason for the failure of the film must be sought elsewhere. Perhaps Carreon should stick to non-comedies; he is, after all, a young man with a lot of serious things to say and the talent to say them. Perhaps Bernal should forget about directing comedies. His *Menor de Edad*, we remember, was not successful as a comedy; *Salawahan* is even less successful than *Menor de Edad*. (TV TIMES, October 14-20, 1979, p. 9.)



Bernal always wants to see what the camera sees.



Ishmael Bernal's *Aliw* (1979) is the story of three nightclub hostesses; Joey Gosiengfiao's *Bedspacers* (1979) is the story of three university coeds. The three hostesses make a living selling sex; sex is at the center of the lives of the three coeds. Both films have the same message: poverty leads women to lead lives of meaningless dissipation. Both films star today's hottest sex goddesses: *Aliw* has Lorna Tolentino, *Bedspacers* has Alma Moreno and Rio Locsin. The two films even have a common star—Amy Austria.

One would expect *Bedspacers* to be pretty much like *Aliw*, but there is actually a very important distinction. *Aliw* is one of the best films of 1979. *Bedspacers* is one of the worst.

In *Aliw*, sex takes only second place to the theme of finding happiness. Lorna Tolentino, Amy Austria, and Suzette Ranillo practice the world's oldest profession for women, that of giving pleasure to men. Ironically, none of the women get any real pleasure from their work; although they dispense happiness, they never attain happiness.

Ranillo, already the mother of a child by a lover (George Estregan), has to sell her body to keep not only her child, but her mother and brother alive. Her former lover returns to his wife. Her mother marries a fat tramp (cleverly named "Pulistico"), who, of course, becomes another mouth to feed. Her brother shows no interest in working. Even her present lover, a neighbor, gets married to someone else. With no future and no present, she tries to drown her past in drink.

Austria dreams of becoming a decent woman. To earn money, she sells not only her body, but various PX goods to customers. She finally strikes it rich with a generous sugar daddy, but a naive college boy ruins it all by showing up at her new apartment. She considers marrying the college boy, but the thought that they would only be making P500 a month unnerves her. In the end, she is forced to return to a life of pinching centavos.

Tolentino is the only one of the hostesses who is out to enjoy her sexual encounters. She enjoys sex so much, however, that she falls prey to a ruthless gigolo on the club band. She ends up paying for her thrills. When she discovers a sugar daddy (Butz Aquino), he turns out to be a pure male chauvinist pig, ordering her not to step outside the house without permission. She cannot stand the tyranny of being kept. She ends up, once again, at the club.

The screenplay not only has a clever, ironic plot, but also features realistic dialogue. The obscene gestures are done in good taste (that, in itself, is an achievement); the obscene words are not offensive. The situations are apparently typical. Even the customers are played by Japanese actors.

Ishmael Bernal, of course, is one of our best directors. *Aliw* is Bernal through and through. There is little actual flesh visible in the film (in other words, the film is,

for insensitive moviegoers, "harang"). But the film is not concerned with flesh and sex. The film, rather, is concerned with the problems of exploitation and poverty, with the tragedy of little people trying to rise above their social class.

Bernal fully fleshes out his characters. Austria is unforgettable. She is constantly counting her money, constantly trying to save enough to go to school. Amy Austria plays her role with maturity and understanding. The canteen sequence where she decides to leave her college friend is excellent. Austria, using only her face, conveys the hope, the doubt, the sadness, and the final hopelessness. Bernal uses a voice-over for the shot, but he doesn't need it.

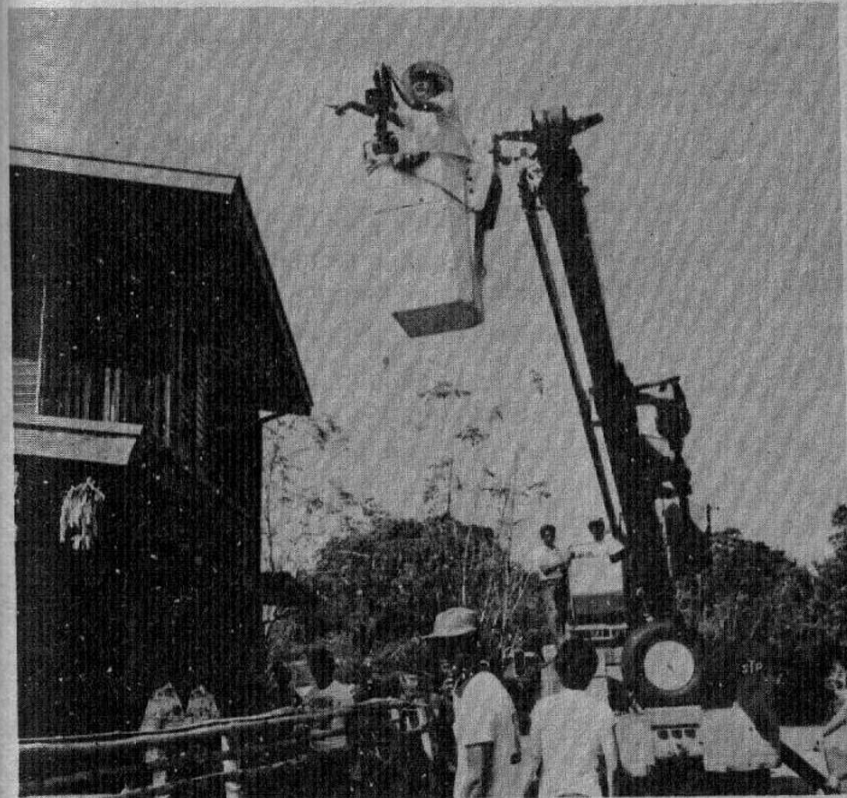
In contrast to the masterly writing and direction of *Aliw*, Joey Gosiengfiao's handling of *Bedspacers* is a betrayal not only of bedspacers at the university belt, but of the local movie industry. If we were to believe *Bedspacers*, coeds regularly visit men's dormitories to be gangbanged, teachers are threatened at gunpoint to change their grades (and their clothes), rural weddings are more elaborate and more stylized than the Bayanihan performances at the Folk Arts Theater.

Gosiengfiao spares no means to make his film as unrealistic as possible. The social climbing Rio Locsin is either taking a bath (alone or in company, the better to show off her body) or being raped. The supposedly intelligent Al Tantay, who even delivers a valedictory address during the commencement rites, knows that Alma Moreno is a prostitute, but is shocked nevertheless by her dancing in a beerhouse. Amy Austria undergoes an abortion and joins a strenuous physical education class, but still keeps her baby alive.

The only bright spot in *Bedspacers* is Laurice Guillen's portrayal of a professional stage actress forced to act in a

school play. She will be tickled pink (once again) if she gets nominated for acting awards for this role, because of course, her role has nothing to do with the movie. Even Amy Austria, whose performance in *Aliw* should get a nomination somewhere, is a complete disappointment in *Bedspacers*.

Needless to say, *Bedspacers* shows plenty of flesh (it is not "harang", but the titillation does not make up for the lack of substance and reality. *Bedspacers* will undoubtedly earn more, but *Aliw* will be remembered longer. (TV TIMES, December 9-15, 1979, p. 9.)



Nothing is too dangerous for the perfectionist.



In Ishmael Bernal's *Good Morning, Sunshine* (1980), Anita Linda puts on a good performance and so does new film actress Debraliz (a stage actress from the Metropolitan Theater). Liza Lorena is also excellent; you can see from this film why she was nominated for the Urian Best Actress award for *Gabun*.

Whatever merits the screenplay has—written by no less than Teatro Pilipino's Rolando Tinio—are obliterated, however, in the director's mad rush to get to the song-and-dance routines. The film clearly belongs to the disco genre, together with the ill-fated *Annie Batungbakal* and other such disappointments, but that is no excuse. Perhaps the problem is that this genre is beyond salvation; it is too much of a throwback to the early days of film when the camera simply took shots of actors moving on a stage. (*TV TIMES*, February 17-23, 1980, p. 9.)



Another disappointment is Ishmael Bernal's *Girlfriend* (1980). Every writer is a frustrated director, says the adage, just as every director is a frustrated writer. Bernal wrote the screenplay of *Girlfriend*, and, frankly, he should stick to directing.

The film is supposed to portray the life of Cherie Gil, a pretty factory worker who lives in a drepressed area (now euphemistically called a "compassion area"). She is sleeping with Al Tantay, a jeepney driver whose main asset is his ability to fetch water from the neighborhood faucet. The characters, however, though they all come from the slums, regularly spout words such as "post-pone," "statement," and "neophyte," and all in grammatical English!

There are upper-class characters such as Mat Ranillo III and his friends, but they, in turn, speak and act like lower-class people. His friends at the climactic party are particularly ridiculous; they look like house-drivers pinch-hitting for their bosses. Ranillo, at least, because of his fair skin, looks rich, though one has problems trying to figure out how anybody that rich would have

fallen seriously in love with a skinny factory worker all covered up by a non-flattering white uniform.

In short, Bernal means well when he takes over the writing chores from his usual writers Franklin Cabaluna and Jose Carreon, but Bernal is not Ingmar Bergman nor Woody Allen. Bernal is an excellent director, in some ways as exciting as Bergman and in many ways as competent as Allen, but he is not a writer. *Girlfriend* is clear proof of that. (TV TIMES, June 8-14, 1980, p. 9.)



"Action!" shouts Bernal.



There's a love-hate relationship at the bottom of Ishmael Bernal's portrait of Manila in *Manila By Night* (1980). This film is both a tender and a harsh look at a city which Bernal obviously loves, but which he just as obviously cannot stand. The city has been treated as a living creature before in Philippine films, but never to this extent.

The film revolves around the stories of four persons, all of them more or less male. The first, a student (William Martinez), gets hooked on drugs. Starting from harmless sticks of marijuana, Martinez graduates quickly into hard drugs. Although the film forgets to show how he actually becomes addicted (a scriptwriting lapse), his rapid decline to a junkie clearly unifies the film. At the end, in a kind of death image, Martinez lies down on a bed of flowers as all around him, Manila's healthy people start the day right by physical exercises (T'ai Chi, arnis, boxing, jogging, and calisthenics). In a sense, *Manila by Night* may be said to be Martinez' story, from his being a model member of a middle-class family to his being one of the nameless hundreds roaming the streets at night.

The second male person is a taxi driver (Orestes Ojeda), who has two children by a woman he no longer lives with. He is now living with a low-class prostitute (Alma Moreno), who walks around in a nurse's uniform. (The nurse device is taken from a real-life motel slaying case about a year ago.) Ojeda also manages to sleep with a waitress (Lorna Tolentino) newly arrived from the province. To keep himself solvent, Ojeda passes himself off as the boyfriend of a successful fashion designer (Bernardo Bernardo). Although he is streetwise, Ojeda is taken in by Moreno's nurse disguise. He even faints at Moreno's "wake," although the director deliberately leaves the identity of the murderer mysterious. Ojeda may or may not be Moreno's murderer, but he is clearly his own murderer, since he has killed everything good in himself not only by lying to Tolentino, but also by initially accepting like a mouse Moreno's treachery.

The third person is Bernardo himself, who is not really male ("a woman in a man's body," as the homosexual cliché goes). His is the most interesting story of all, perhaps because he is the only actor in the film who gives a convincing, even inspired, performance. Bernardo has a little boutique where Manila's fake sophisticates (hilariously portrayed by Maya Valdes) gather. He has a heart of gold, at least in his non-sexual moments. He feels genuine compassion for Tolentino when she gets pregnant out of ignorance, for Ojeda's sick child, for the lost Ojeda himself. He is, however, no angel of goodness, for the first chance he gets, he takes advantage of the helpless Martinez. Like everyone else in the film, Bernardo is both victim and predator. He is, in Bernal's view of the city, a true Manileño.

The fourth person is male only in sensibility. She is, to invert the cliché, a man in a woman's body. A drug pusher (Cherie Gil), she doubles as a pimp for her "true

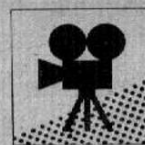
love," a blind masseuse (Rio Locsin). The strongest of all the film's characters, Gil devotes herself to other people's joys. She sells drugs and women; she brings sexual ecstasy to Locsin. She manages, despite the filth which surrounds her and with which she surrounds her clients, to be a person. Cherie Gil, incidentally, gives the performance of her career here; none of the other actresses in the film deserves any kind of critical attention, but Gil is at once exciting, skilled, restrained, tragic, and real. Because of her outstanding performance, in fact, the film appears to be about her (this is not at all her fault; if the other actresses were only more competent, her character would not stand out the way it does).

If a film is supposed to be about only one person (and this is what all textbooks in screenwriting tell us), *Manila by Night* should be a bad film, since it is about four persons. In fact, it is not just about four persons, but about all the persons in the film. It is about the manic-depressive ex-prostitute (Charito Solis), who keeps washing her hands with alcohol in a symbolic gesture of guilt. It is about Martinez' girlfriend (Gina Alajar), who is economically superior to, but morally as degenerate as the prostitutes. It is about the inept husband (Johnny Wilson), who fails to understand Solis' deep-rooted guilt.

Actually, however, *Manila by Night* is not about the several persons who move about Manila in the dark. Rather, it is about Manila himself, that living creature of man. The final sequence where Gil and Martinez get chased by undercover policemen clearly shows this. Bernal takes his characters through a tour of the city by night, through the gutters behind the nightclub row to the false sophistication of Harrizon Plaza. The chase sums up Bernal's thesis: the city is a monster which devours the unwary, but glorifies the wise. It is an old Western idea—the daring knight of the round table has

to be thankful that there are dragons; otherwise, he will not have a chance to show off his prowess. Manila is a place, a thing, a person. To the naive, Manila is a threat to life and morals. To the sophisticate, Manila is a chance to be what one really wants to be.

Bernal both loves and hates Manila. The final shots of the physical fitness freaks exercising against the rising sun confirm this. The evils of night are washed away by water and light. There are numerous shots of people getting wet in this film, not necessarily for a commercially-valuable "wet look," but to symbolize the washing away of guilt, filth, and evil. There are also several shots of light entering badly-lighted places, again to symbolize the cleansing effect of day. It is too bad that, unlike other Bernal films, this one suffers from amateurish cinematography, sound engineering, musical scoring, and editing. But the Bernal magic comes through despite all the technical shortcomings. *Manila by Night* is one of the best films of 1980. Anyone who does not cry after seeing it must not be a Manileño. (*TV TIMES*, October 5-11, 1980, p. 45.)



It's a laugh a minute, once the viewer gets the hang of Ishmael Bernal's unique brand of tongue-in-cheek humor. Nothing is sacred in *Pabling* (1981), not even the police nor Metro Manila aides nor the Rizal monument itself. "My cousin is buried there," Maricel Soriano tells Rene Requiastas, who plays the photographer who discovers her kneeling in front of the monument. That piece of irreverence is typical of the visual gags and verbal punches in this film.

Clearly one of the best films produced in 1981, *Pabling* ranks among the best of Bernal. *City After Dark* is, of course, still better, and *Nunal Sa Tubig* still the most serious, but this film shows Bernal at his best—witty, irreverent, satiric, and light. Bernal is head and shoulders above the other local directors (yes, that includes Lino Brocka) as far as cinematic sophistication is concerned.

The screenplay is not as good as that of *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* but the viewer can see that Bernal can crack a good joke when he wants to. The references to film art itself (a technique picked up from Bertolt Brecht via the absurdist dramatists) are hilarious. One scene, for instance,

has William Martinez (playing the Filipino midnight cowboy) looking at a television set and poking fun at—you guessed it—"that fellow William Martinez." Another scene has Soriano telling her provincial boyfriend that she will ask the director (Bernal, who else?) to give him a close-up.

The film spoofs are not limited to such alienation effects. Every now and then, Bernal uses a shot or a sequence taken straight out of Filipino movie clichés. One sequence, for instance, has Martinez and Soriano spoofing old musicals where beautiful native costumes hide the lack of musical quality. (That is the only way to justify the use of Martinez's voice in the songs; in other words, he sings only for comic effect. Otherwise, whoever put him up to singing has done Philippine music a grave injustice.)

There are some delightful gems which should enter the Filipino Comedy Hall of Fame. Sandy Andolong, caught in Manila's traffic jams, for instance, holds a plant that keeps growing like Jack's magic beanstalk. Jay Ilagan asks Soriano if she has any experience at all as a singer; when she says no, he hires her. The scene with Soriano kneeling in front of the Rizal statue is classic: don't all non-Manilans (including foreign guests) pay homage to Rizal as though he were a saint?

Martinez's acting, unfortunately, seems to be confined to gaping and looking cute. But Soriano is excellent in a role which demands that she act not only naturally, but also abnormally (in the absurdist scenes); in fact, she even has to move in the now-familiar Bernal way (a kind of half-dance, half-trance). Bernardo Bernardo puts in a great cameo performance.

The production design (by Peque Gallaga) is excellent, though the dream sequences could have been less repetitious. But the costumes in the very first sequence are

very well chosen; they set the mood (loud, spoofy, unnatural) for the entire picture. The cinematography is competent, though not extraordinary. As in any Bernal film, the sound is creative.

Because 1981 is one of the worst years in Philippine cinema, the achievement of *Pabling* may not seem that impressive. But seen in the context of the entire Bernal canon, this film ranks better than *Aliw* and—in terms of accomplishing what it sets out to do—might even be more successful than *Nunal Sa Tubig* (*PARADE*, August 2, 1981, p. 25.)



Bernal motivating Nora Aunor in *Himala*.



Ishmael Bernal's *Galawgaw* (1982) should have been a film with a laugh a minute, but the laughs are so few and so spaced apart that most of the film falls flat. It is fun watching William Martinez and Maricel Soriano get into all kinds of slapstick scrapes, but slapstick only goes so far—it cannot fill up two hours of true fun. When it is entertaining, this film is really entertaining, but when it is not, it is plain dragging.

This is a sequel to *Pabling* (1981), and like most sequels, this is not as good as the original. Where *Pabling* subtly introduced social and political commentary into its spoofs, *Galawgaw* merely takes the surface humor of *Pabling* and drags that humor out for two hours. One example will suffice: in the earlier film, Ishmael Bernal successfully satirized the Nida Blanca - Nestor de Villa type of half-serious romance around a tree in an open field. In *Galawgaw*, the same sequence is merely self-conscious, not inspired.

There are, however, some inspired moments. Manny Castañeda's portrayal of Soriano's gay friend is marvelous; only Castañeda can combine verbal wit and body

movement in such an effective comic way. Making Opatyn Forster chant her lines is also a stroke of genius; it effectively bursts the stereotype of the haughty *contravida*. The spoof of goodbye sequences, with Bayani Casimiro dancing around men dressed in identical costumes in what appears to be a train station, is excellently conceived, though badly photographed; when a jeepney appears instead of a train, the spoof is complete. Finally, having four telephones in a sari-sari store is great, though the joke is a bit overextended.

Most of the film, however, fails to hold the viewer, because of repetition. One sequence showing bicycles is enough. One sequence showing Edgar Mande jumping down into the screen is enough. To repeat the visual gags is too much; if they were intended to be running gags, then they should have been repeated again and again, not just once or twice. I personally liked the attempts (already in *Pabling*) to alienate the audience through such devices as Soriano's hiding behind the camera and the characters referring to *Pabling*, but Brecht's epic theater techniques may not really appeal to Filipino audiences. There is such a thing, after all, as using artistic devices in their proper artistic contexts. (*PARADE*, March 31, 1982, pp. 42-43.)



Those looking for a straightforward narrative will be disappointed with Ishmael Bernal's *Ito Ba Ang Ating Mga Anak?* (1982). Bernal weaves a tale here of adolescence, without giving fleshed-out stories. The conservative viewer should get confused with the shifting narrative lines, but the more knowledgeable should understand what Bernal is trying to do. In a cerebral sense, then, this film is entertaining.

Clearly influenced by American director Robert Altman, Bernal creates a kind of sequel to *City After Dark*. Just like *Galawgaw*, the sequel to *Pabling*, however, this film pales in comparison to its predecessor. *Ito Ba Ang Ating Mga Anak?* is to *City After Dark* what *patintero* is to soccer.

The problem with this film starts with its screenplay, which shares the same weakness as the screenplay for *City After Dark*: it tries to keep some kind of main plot line. Instead of being a portrait of different individuals with the same problem (bad parents), the film tries to create logical connections between the stories. As a result, the film loses its credibility.

One cannot believe, for example, that of all the people in the world, William Martinez has to become a gangmate of his half-brother Albert Martinez. That is too much of a coincidence. Neither can one believe that all the problems come to a head at roughly the same time (Joel Alano apparently dies of tuberculosis—unusually fast for such a disease—just before Cherie Gil has her nervous breakdown). Gil's breakdown is also unmotivated; she claims that the others see her as a pillar of strength, but her scenes with the others do not justify that self-image.

Nevertheless, the film is significant because it dares to be different from the usual Filipino film with a single plot line. Like other Bernal films, this one breaks new ground. That it does not hit pay dirt must be attributed to bad luck, rather than to bad intentions. (*PARADE*, April 14, 1982, p. 37.)



Finally in Ishmael Bernal's *Relasyon* (1982) we have a film made explicitly for adults. There is no explicit sex sequence (adults don't really go for that sort of thing; only adolescent boys do). But the psychological problems faced by the film are comprehensible only to adults, those who know what it means to live with someone one loves (or, at least, used to love). This film is, thus, not entertaining in the usual prurient sense, but in a deeper, psychological, intellectual sense.

There are basically two themes that this film tackles: sex roles and divorce.

Vilma Santos represents womanhood in the film; Christopher de Leon represents manhood. The Filipina woman is commonly thought of as a *martir*, or long-suffering masochist. Santos portrays a mistress who is an out-and-out *martir*. She serves de Leon hand and foot, ministering to his every need, including fetching beer for him, washing his clothes, serving as his shoulder to cry on, even baby-sitting his child. In return, all she gets from de Leon is chauvinistic love, void of tenderness, full of immature aggressiveness.

De Leon represents chauvinist maleness. He portrays a character who is totally insensitive to his woman's needs. He wants the house done exactly to his own taste. He expects his woman to be there when he needs her, but does not even think that he should be there when she wants him. He finds nothing wrong with having a wife and a mistress at the same time. On the other hand, he sees everything wrong with Santos entertaining suitor Jimi Melendez in the house. He's even jealous of Manny Castañeda, Santos' gay acquaintance. In short, he is selfishness personified.

The trouble with sex roles in our society, the film argues, is that they are widely accepted without question. Men are supposed to have mistresses, and women are supposed to be faithful. Men are supposed to make the decisions (about where to live, what job to get, when to dine out), and women are supposed merely to follow. The Philippines may justifiably boast that, in politics, women are almost as powerful as men, but it is undeniable that in every other field including the home, it is the men who are the masters and the women who are the slaves.

The other theme tackled by the film is that of divorce. Again and again, the characters discuss the lack of divorce in the Philippines. If de Leon could only annul his marriage, if he could only divorce his wife, if he could only get to Las Vegas and marry Santos there... Such possibilities remain mere possibilities, because Philippine law, unfortunately, still does not allow for divorce. In the film, it is made clear that the marriage of de Leon and his wife is totally beyond repair. With de Leon being the male chauvinist pig that he is, and with his wife being the non-entity that she is, there is no hope for the loveless couple. On the other hand, Santos and de Leon clearly love each other, clearly deserve a chance to be

man and wife, clearly should be helped (not damned) by society. It is an implicit case for divorce, made even more convincing by the fact that the characters are so familiar, so realistic.

Technically, the film does not rank high in Ishmael Bernal's canon of films. The dubbing of Santos' voice, for instance, is despicable. The production design, presumably lower-middle-class, raises questions (especially about the fact that Santos can withdraw a thousand pesos from a bank at a moment's notice: lower middle class persons do not have that kind of instant money). The music is undistinguished, and the cinematography sometimes places the actors in shadows. There is one technical achievement worth watching for: de Leon's death scene, covering more than one minute, is taken with one continuous shot (no cuts). Otherwise, the editing is spotty, especially with one sequence completely out of its proper place (before Santos says in one sequence that they have been together only for eight months, a sequence is shown in which she asks de Leon how many *years* they have been together; even allowing for hyperbole, that is too much of an exaggeration).

Santos' acting is adequate, but not extraordinary, especially since her lines are spoiled by the bad sound and the dubbing (not her own voice at times?). De Leon gives another of his solid performances, though he could have worked harder to show how inconsiderate his character is. The supporting cast do not stand out; the three girlfriends, in fact, should have been prettier, since two of them are supposed to be mistresses themselves, and the third loses much of her credibility when she starts lecturing on man's selfishness. (*PARADE*, July 21, 1982, p. 29.)



Director Ishmael Bernal, not known for concocting commercial hits, hits the jackpot with *Hindi Kita Malimot* (1982). He blends melodrama and comedy together so masterfully, the audience is clearly entertained throughout. The tongue-in-cheek scenes, especially in the courtroom sequence, effectively dispel the melodramatic mood. There is something here for everyone: there's pathos for the easy-to-please, and camp for the more sophisticated.

This is either one of Bernal's best films or one of his worst. It could be seen, for instance, as a magnificent spoof on the melodramatic genre. Bernal plays with all the elements of melodrama. The scene before the wedding, for example, shows Maricel Soriano and William Martinez approaching each other in slow motion, in the time-honored cliché of long-lost lovers. The soundtrack has violins (what else?). The setting is a symmetrically laid out garden (of course!) Martinez holds Soriano by the waist and lifts her up (naturally!). It is a great scene, taken right out of the worst Hollywood movies. Seen as a spoof, it succeeds.

Or take the dialogue, which is deliberately ridiculous. With words taken right out of the *balarila* (something not even Pilipino teachers today use), the dialogue literally sizzles with boredom. It is like reading the prose of those who learned Tagalog from books, rather than from people. Again, the dialogue is a terrific attack on the unrealistic language of old Tagalog movies.

The subplots are out-and-out clichés. For example, Alicia Alonso is a poor woman who has a love affair with the rich Don Miguel (dead by the time the film starts). He gives up everything for her (in the grand tradition of Hollywood romances). She tends his hacienda faithfully, to honor his memory. She is the great *martir*, as traditional as the *santos* cleverly placed by production designer Racquel Villavicencio (also the writer) in a chapel scene.

A romantic movie is not complete without shots of the full moon; there are several in this film. There has to be, of course, a scene where a dance is interrupted by rain; this film has that, too. The heroine has to be devoted to her father, who should preferably be in his grave; this film has that, too. There is, of course, the obligation to keep the camera steady on a crying character; Alonzo has more than her share of crying scenes.

The typical love story, comedy, melodrama, or Hollywood B-movie has the same plot all the time (Northrop Frye thinks this the plot of *all* drama, from the Greeks to today): a young man wants a young woman, but someone (or something) comes in the way. Eventually, the young man marries the young woman. In this film, that is exactly what happens. Martinez wants Soriano, but Rosemarie Gil and the murder charge are in the way. With help from the scriptwriter, Martinez marries Soriano at the end. It is a grand satire on the melodramatic genre.

There is a distinct possibility, however, that the film is not meant to be a spoof, but is in fact a serious attempt at reviving melodrama. In that case, this has to be one of Bernal's worst films. Nothing is worse than using tired old conventions. Pretty settings, wholesome characters, anemic plots, simplistic conflicts—these characterize melodrama, and these characterize this film. If Bernal is serious in this film, he has just produced his greatest failure. If, on the other hand (and I think this is the case), he is poking fun at the genre and at the audience that loves the genre, then he has just succeeded in, once again, overturning the tradition of Philippine cinema. (PARADE August 4, 1982, p. 42.)

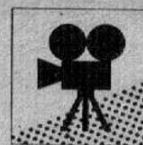


Bernal sitting on top of a production.



Ishmael Bernal's *Himala* (1982) is the story of the barrio lass (Nora Aunor) who thinks she has a vision of the Blessed Virgin. When she starts curing people, visitors from near and far come to her sleepy town. The town is transformed. Crime, prostitution, police brutality, political tyranny—all sorts of bad things are introduced into the town. An atheistic filmmaker (Spanky Manikan) becomes the sole eyewitness to a rape scene involving the lass and her childhood friend (Laura Centeno). What happens after the rape is brilliant.

The strong performance of Nora Aunor makes her the odds-on favorite for the Best Actress award. Outstanding performances are given by Spanky Manikan, Laura Centeno, and the hosts of extras who are either actually disadvantaged or made up to look disadvantaged. The music is excellent. Only the editing and (sometimes) the cinematography fail to come up to the high standards of the film. This is one of Bernal's best films; it is certainly much, much better than the over-rated, though similar *Nunal Sa Tubig*. (PANORAMA, December 26, 1982, p. 12.)



Ishmael Bernal's *Himala* (1982) is not your usual Filipino film. In fact, it is not even your usual international film. Deliberately made slow, the film slows down the action (which actually takes only a few weeks). Thus, to those unused to art films, this movie may seem boring. Those, however, who are more enlightened, should be wide awake during this wide awake film.

There are different miracles going on in this film. The first *Himala*, of course, is Nora Aunor's vision of the Blessed Virgin. Her eventual denial that there was ever a vision does not detract from the very first sequence showing her hearing something. In fact, the sound track clearly gives her and the viewer a voice calling her name. In other words, there is indeed a miracle.

The second miracle happens to the town. A sleepy town where hardly anything happens, the town of Cupang suddenly comes alive when the visitors come. Everyone is suddenly a vendor. One sells candles. Another sells bottled blessed water. Another sells herself. Still another sells his daughter to tourists. Anything that can be sold in the town is sold. Clearly, religious feeling has turned

the town into a marketplace (a clever allusion to Jesus' rage at the Temple).

The third miracle happens to Laura Centeno, whose belief in Aunor is completely shattered by the rape. Rape is a particularly good choice for the screenwriter, since Centeno is established earlier as thinking of giving herself (like a vestal virgin) to her sweetheart. Centeno kills herself, a miracle of sorts because it is the first time she really does something for herself.

The fourth miracle is the rain that comes after the drought (called a "curse" by the townpeople). This is a real miracle, because there is nothing to cause rain. (In fact, this is where the film should have ended, since the rain dramatically sums up the themes in the film).

But the greatest miracle of all is the film itself. This film is *Nunal Sa Tubig* without the pretentiousness and the uncertainties. This is Ishmael Bernal at his mature best. The crowd scenes are excellent, the quiet scenes of Aunor are great, and the whole concept is almost—excuse me—supernatural. In any case, this is a film much, much better than *Moral*, and *Moral*—we must not forget—is a thousand times better than most of the films of the last decade. (*PARADE*, December 29, 1982, p. 41.)

LINO BROCKA

Lino Brocka's *Rubia Servios* (1979) does not dilute its message. Phillip Salvador, the son of a powerful and wealthy figure, is portrayed as totally evil, devoid of any redeeming quality. To screenwriter Mario O'Hara and director Brocka, the province is the same as the city. Vilma Santos is raped both in the city and in the country. Violence unites all places.

In unity of conception, scriptwriting, design, and direction, *Rubia Servios* is excellent. Brocka does not waste shots in his attempt to create a Filipino classical tragedy. He subordinates everything to the building up of one emotion in the viewer, that of hatred for Salvador. So despicable does Salvador become at the end that, when he is murdered, no viewer can say that Santos is at fault. And yet, morally speaking, no one is allowed to take the law into his own hands. The law, in fact, put Salvador in prison for the first rape. There is no reason to think that the law will not put him to death for the second rape. By conditioning the reader to condone revenge, Brocka succeeds in questioning one of our deeply rooted moral beliefs. (*TV TIMES*, January 14-20, 1979, p. 16.)



If you're still keeping away from local films on the theory that local filmmakers have nothing important to say, you're missing the boat. Local films may still not be as technically impressive as Hollywood blockbusters, but in terms of subject matter and message, the Tagalog film has come a long way.

Take for instance, Lino Brocka's *Jaguar* (1979). Much more significant than the over-rated *Ina, Kapatid, Anak* and much better directed than the now-classic *Tinimbang Ka, Ngunit Kulang*, *Jaguar* may very well be Brocka's masterpiece. It may, in fact, be the best film this year, local or imported.

Jaguar tells the story of slum dweller Phillip Salvador who works as a security guard at a publishing firm. After he shows remarkable courage, devotion, and skill in protecting his boss Mengie Cobarrubias, he is invited to join Cobarrubias' group. Christened "Jaguar" (from "guwar-diya" or "guar-ja") by Cobarrubias' archenemy Johnny Delgado, Salvador tastes the free-wheeling, expensive, irresponsible, and meaningless life of the moneyed class.

When the life of the young man erupts into violence and Delgado is shot, Salvador is left holding the bag. Cobarrubias, his protector and friend, turns out to be watching out only for himself. Forced to go underground, Salvador finds all his dreams of becoming wealthy shattered. Flushed out in a raid by the military, he is easily caught. The film ends with him in jail and likely to remain there forever.

Screenwriters Jose Lacaba and Ricardo Lee take the story from National Artist Nick Joaquin, whose 1961 article on the notorious 1960 brown Derby shooting paints a romantic portrait of a killer as "the boy who wanted to become 'society'." (The article is reprinted in Joaquin's *Reportage on Crime*.) Lacaba and Lee, however, correctly decide to strip the story of Napoleon Nocedal to its two basic elements: the shooting at the restaurant and the slum origins of the killer.

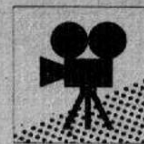
In his article, Joaquin compares the tragedy of Nocedal to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, where the rich are described as "careless people—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made." The killer Nocedal serves as scapegoat for the rich goons. In *Jaguar*, Salvador is the scapegoat for Cobarrubias.

The screenwriters' insight that the rich use the poor becomes the base upon which Brocka's genius works. Combining a meticulous direction of his actors and a sense of visual appropriateness, Brocka guides the film from the early fistfight sequence involving only personalities to the final capture sequences involving whole classes of people. The film, in other words, starts off being merely an adventure film exploiting Salvador's macho image; it ends up being a film about exploitation.

The acting is evenly competent. Salvador displays talent that used to be only promise in his earlier films. Amy Austria is not as good as she is in *Gabun*, but she performs much better than any superstar. She is, in fact, the best serious performer among our young actresses. Cobarrubias deserves special mention for his consistent characterization of the villain. Anita Linda, after a thousand bit parts in recent movies, finally gets a meaty role; her striking performance proves that she is still one of the best of our older actresses.

Less impressive than the acting is the cinematography, which occasionally becomes much too dark or much too light. The riot sequence, for example, fails to evoke the terror of a Tondo fight because the characters are dressed in too colorful (also, too new) clothes. It is fiesta time, but there is a limit to the quality of clothes a Tondo hoodlum can buy or steal. The cinematographer should have compensated for the failings of the wardrobe mistress.

There are, it is true, other things wrong with the film. There are, for instance, the occasional lapses in language; the otherwise realistic dialogue carries lines such as the obsolete *spoofing* and the inappropriate *pa-casual casual lang*. There is the unmotivated wet look of Austria. There is, as in all Brocka films, the infuriating tendency to extend sequences beyond human endurance. It has been said that Brocka is a great director who needs a great editor. Editing in *Jaguar*, as usual, is a great liability. *Jaguar* could be the masterpiece of the decade, if it were cut down to two-thirds of its length. (*TV TIMES*, September 16-22, 1979, p. 9.)



Ina Ka ng Anak Mo (1979) is Brocka in his element—intense emotional conflicts within a limited family structure. Lolita Rodriguez, in her attempt to commiserate with her son-in-law Raul Aragon, has sex with him. True to what one writer has called the Myth of Filipino Fertility, the one-time sex act leads to a child. Rodriguez's daughter Nora Aunor cannot forgive the betrayal and even takes the adulterers to court. In the end, however, Aunor adopts as her own child the baby who is, curiously enough, both her brother and her son.

Filipino movies are nothing if they do not have confrontations, and *Ina Ka ng Anak Mo* has one confrontation after another. The best one occurs when Aunor sees Rodriguez and the baby for the first time. Aunor silently moves from shock to hurt to rage to hysterics. The scene is spoiled only at the end, when she bursts out that she will see the pair in court; in the heat of such passion, no Filipina will think of impersonal legal proceedings. More characteristic would have been a search for a weapon or for an exit door.

Brocka specializes in acting vehicles. Aunor clearly de-

serves the Best Actress Award. In fact, she deserves it more than Rodriguez, if only because she is younger and has less experience. Before *Ina Ka ng Anak Mo*, only Charito Solis could stand up to Rodriguez; now Aunor is on par with both veteran actresses. Even Aragon, not one of our best actors, gives an adequate performance opposite the two women; his success must be largely due to Brocka's direction. (*TV TIMES*, January 20-26, 1980, p. 9.)



A make-up artist prepares Nora Aunor for shooting on the set of *Ina Ka Ng Anak Mo*.



Of course, it is unfair to compare Lino Brocka's *Nakaw na Pag-ibig* (1980) to Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925). Comparing a film adaptation to the original novel is, at best, dangerous, and at worst, irrelevant. Moreover, *Nakaw na Pag-ibig* is definitely not one of Brocka's best films. *An American Tragedy* is Dreiser's masterpiece; in fact, the novel is still considered one of the major works of American literature, even of world literature. But the credits of *Nakaw na Pag-ibig* clearly state that the film is based on Dreiser's novel. A quick look at the novel, then, does not seem too much out of place.

Based on the true story of a man who killed his pregnant girlfriend, Dreiser's novel is primarily a study of society, of how powerless men are to control the force of social organization. Although the novel does dwell on the main character's sense of guilt, Dreiser is less interested in individual psychology than in collective oppression. Dreiser's main theme is that men are not created equal: those who try to rise above their predestined social class are bound to be punished by society.

In the novel, Clyde Griffiths dreams of joining the

world of the wealthy. He has an affair—more physical than emotional—with a factory girl named Roberta Alden, who becomes pregnant. At the same time, he meets Sondra Finchley, a wealthy but silly woman who pays attention to him “just for fun.” Because Sondra is about to marry him and thus fulfill his dreams of becoming rich, Clyde decides to kill Roberta. Alone with her on a rowboat, however, he hesitates, unable to commit murder. Unexpectedly, the boat capsizes and Roberta drowns. Half the novel is spent on the events after the accident: Clyde is arrested, tried, and executed for the “murder” of Roberta. Dreiser’s intent is clear: he means to point out that society punishes those who fall for its traps, who seek the wealth that society itself puts up as desirable.

Nakaw na Pag-ibig, however, is not a social film. Although there are two or three lines about the gap between rich and the poor, the film is really a study of Philip Salvador, a law student working in a textile factory. He sleeps with Nora Aunor, a worker at the same factory, until the owner of the factory hires him as a family driver. Hilda Koronel, the daughter of the owner, falls for him; they have an affair. Both Aunor and Koronel are pregnant. Marriage to Koronel is planned and Salvador finds himself in an impossible situation. In the last ten minutes or so of the film, Salvador takes Aunor to the top of a mountain in Baguio, she falls accidentally to her death, he is tried and sentenced to death.

Like Clyde, Salvador dreams of escape from poverty. Beside studying law at night, he tries his best not to offend his superiors at the factory. In fact, he is left alone with Koronel because her father orders him to be her bodyguard. There is a scene where he looks with longing at a group of Koronel’s rich friends; we can see in his eyes that he wishes to be one of them.

One of the clichés of Filipino films is the slapping sequence; almost every film has a confrontation scene complete with characters slapping each other. Brocka uses his cliché to advantage in *Nakaw na Pag-ibig*. The first time Koronel tries to slap him, Salvador fights back, unwilling to compromise his dignity as a human being. In the second slapping sequence, he is slapped by Aunor; he allows her to hit him, revealing a loss of his strong self-will. In the third slapping sequence, he allows Koronel to hit him again and again; he has lost all his self-respect in his search for wealth. In the last confrontation scene, he hits Aunor, thus reversing the social roles: he now no longer respects other people’s dignity.

The film succeeds as far as the psychological portrayal of Salvador’s character is concerned. As he rises in social class, he falls in strength of will and integrity. In the beginning, he works and studies hard; towards the end, he becomes completely servile to Koronel and her father, to a point where he cannot even murder Aunor on his own. It is nice irony that the first classroom sequence shows the law professor discussing “involuntary servitude”; Salvador is a slave to his desires, to Koronel’s passion, to her father’s wealth.

The film fails, however, as far as the social content of Dreiser’s novel is concerned. (This is where comparing film with novel becomes tricky.) Dreiser was more concerned with the events after the accidents; Brocka uses only the last minutes of his film to show the trial. Society is not really to blame for Salvador’s tragedy; his sex drive—or his heart—is more clearly at fault.

By focusing attention on Aunor and Koronel, Brocka diverts the viewer from the crux of the problem. The story is really Salvador’s; in a sense, both Aunor and Koronel are only supporting actresses. But because the two actresses are more popular than Salvador, Brocka is

forced to give them equal screen time. That is a mistake. Aunor and Koronel are merely indispensable objects of Salvador's lust and love. They are there to clarify his situation; it is he who develops in the story.

When *A Place in the Sun* (1951)—an earlier screen adaptation of Dreiser's novel—was released, it was criticized for having "downplayed Dreiser's relentless cynical observations on the malaise of American society." A similar criticism can be made about *Nakaw na Pag-ibig*. The latest film by Brocka is an excellent study of an individual's tragic loss of will, but it is not Dreiser's novel. (*TV TIMES*, February 10-16, 1980, p. 9.)



Lino Brocka spends a lot of time discussing characterization with his actors and actresses. Here, with Raul Aragon and Nora Aunor.



I hate writing apologia. I wish I did not have to write on the Urian Awards night held at the CCP Little Theater on February 29, 1980. But Lino Brocka's dramatic refusal to accept his award as Best Director calls for some kind of response.

I feel I should write something about what Lino said that night. My remarks, of course (as always), should be regarded only as my own and not the Manunuris'.

Lino and I go back a long way. My first theater experience, in fact, saw me as a bumbling prompter in a student production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* at U.P.; Lino was already playing a lead role in that production (it was 1962, I think). Lino and I were in the first PETA Kalinaungan Ensemble formed by Cecile Guidote; he was mostly acting and I was mostly writing. I was already abroad when Lino made his mark on Philippine cinema. I saw *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang*, in fact, in a theater in Washington D.C. I remember being terribly impressed by it.

When I returned to the Philippines in late 1977, I made it a point to see Lino's stage productions at Fort Santiago.

We had drifted apart by then; he had gotten deeper into the cinema and I had gotten deeper into literary theory and other academic jungles. But he seemed always glad to see me whenever I congratulated him for a play or a movie well directed. When I received dozens of angry letters protesting my views on *The Deer Hunter*, Lino even went out of his way to tell me, "You're right, *The Deer Hunter* is a lousy movie!"

It was with stunned disappointment, then that I listened in silence to Lino as he castigated the Manunuring Pelikulang Pilipino—and, therefore, me—for being "prejudiced." He did say that he realized that "one critic does not represent the Manunuri," but his overall attack on the integrity of the Manunuri did not discriminate between myself and whoever it was he was particularly disgusted with. While I hold, in several cases, exactly opposite views to those of the majority of the Manunuri, I still am a Manunuri. Any attack on the Manunuri I have to construe as an attack on me.

If I have been guilty of prejudice, that prejudice has always been in Lino's favor. True, because I know him personally, I have been particularly careful not to close my eyes to the defects in the films he directs. I have a sense, however, of what he is trying to do. When I criticize his editing, for instance, it is with the intention of suggesting avenues of improvement, of reminding him of areas he has tended to ignore, of helping him see his own blind spots. In my review of *Jaguar*, for example, a film I consider his masterpiece (and a masterpiece of Philippine cinema), I observed that the film could be edited differently, more tightly, more imaginatively. (In fact, *Jaguar* has been re-edited for Cannes.) I had no intention of downgrading his accomplishment; I was merely trying to be objective about a film I had already described as great. (There is a lot of sense in that classical fable about

the beautiful woman with a mole on her face: the true admirer knows that, if the mole is removed, the face will cease to be beautiful.)

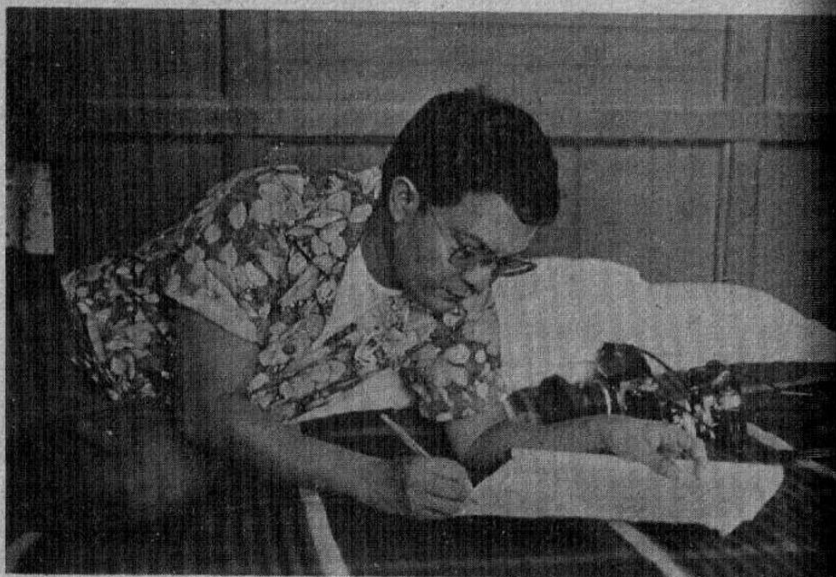
In his prepared speech, Lino asked why Amy Austria was given an award as Best Supporting Actress, when she should have—he implied—been nominated for Best Actress. Ideally, of course, in a post-Stanislawsky period, there should be no distinction between Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress. No actress can perform well without good supporting actresses; on the other hand, good supporting actresses waste their time appearing in films with bad lead actresses. Acting is acting; there is no qualitative difference between a Best Actress and a Best Supporting Actress. Ideally also, in a feminist age, there should be no sexist distinction between Best Actress and a Best Actor. No one distinguishes between Best Male Cinematographer and Best Female Cinematographer, or Best Musical Score Composed by A Man and Best Musical Score Composed by A Woman. Again, acting is acting.

Unfortunately, our film awards still copy the categories created for Hollywood's Oscars. Abroad, actors and actresses are classified according to their roles. The character the film is about is automatically a lead role; whoever plays that role (well-known or unknown) is a candidate for Best Actor or Best Actress. Everyone else in the film is a Supporting Actor or Supporting Actress. Thus, in *Jaguar*, the protagonist is Poldo (played by Phillip Salvador); his name, in fact is the title of the film. Cristy (played by Amy Austria) serves only as an ironic parallel to Poldo; the film is not about her. Rather, her character illuminates a facet of Poldo's situation. According to the traditional (actually, American) way of classifying actors, then, Amy Austria is a Supporting Actress in *Jaguar*. It will take a long time before Filipino

critics can come up with a distinctly Filipino aesthetics of film. Until that time, we are stuck with the present system.

Although it was not me whom Lino quoted in his speech (the quoted passage was apparently written sometime in 1978, before I became a member of the Manunuri), I felt personally hurt by his sweeping attack. His speech left such a bad taste in my mouth that I could not relish the more pleasant memories of that evening at the CCP.

Floor director Roger Velilla meant well when he tried to console me after the show. "That was a great script! You even had Lino Brocka playing a part!" But I did not think that was very funny. (*TV TIMES*, March 16-22, 1980, p. 4.)



Preparation is the secret of Brocka as a director.



Murder is committed in Lino Brocka's *Angela Markado* (1980), not in the name of the law, but in the name of justice. Hilda Koronel, distrustful of the law, decides to avenge her rape at the hands of five white slavers (Johnny Delgado, Ruel Vernal, Tonio Gutierrez, Rez Cortez, Dave Brodett.) In a tale told a hundred times before (*The Bride Wore Black* and *Ang Galing-Galing Mo, Mrs. Jones*, for example), Brocka and screenwriter Jose Lacaba paint a picture of society in which personal revenge is the rule of the street. At no time during the film does the viewer doubt that Koronel's course of action is the right one. The Filipino movie fan, in particular, has seen Fernando Poe, Jr., Lito Lapid, and Rudy Fernandez act in the same way dozens of times before. It is, however, definitely still a sad day when murder has to be committed in order to obtain justice.

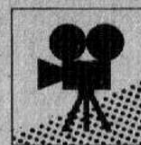
Angela Markado is one of Brocka's best films. It is not as good as *Jaguar*, but it is a hundred times better than *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang*. Compared to most of Filipino films made in the same period, this film is a masterpiece in cinematography, acting, editing, and

screenwriting.

The last two minutes are something else. In the last two minutes, Brocka includes a written epilogue which brings the film down from the level of a masterpiece to the level of a television thriller. Apparently this time, it is not the Board of Censors which is at fault; Brocka reportedly included the epilogue before the censors saw the film. If Brocka wanted to say that the law is still to be respected, he could have ended the film right after Koronel shoots Delgado and added the sound of police sirens to indicate the welcome coming of the law. Even that is not necessary, however; *Ang Galing-Galing Mo, Mrs. Jones*, a film of much lesser value, ends simply with Vilma Santos shooting her rapist. (*TV TIMES*, October 9-25, 1980, p. 45.)



Bona — Brocka's competition entry in Cannes.



There are several marvelous sequences in Lino Brocka's *Bona* (1980), but the trouble is that these sequences have nothing to do with the story of the film. In fact, the sequences in the film may be roughly classified into those unnecessary ones which are well-done, those necessary ones which are not well done, and those few well-done sequences which also happen to be necessary.

Take, for example, the scenes showing Nora Aunor going to the neighborhood faucet to get water for her idol Phillip Salvador. The scenes occur again and again in the film, almost like commas in a long, convoluted sentence. Commas, however, serve at least to indicate pauses in thought; the water-fetching sequences serve merely to fill up the gaps in Brocka's imagination. One water sequence is enough, if all that Brocka wants to say is that the poor have to spend all their time fetching water from the only running faucet in their neighborhood. The repetition is unnecessary, particularly because the blocking, the design, and the impact of each faucet scene are the same in all the shots. Nothing is gained by repetition.

The best sequences in the film involve Brocka's favorite topic: the life of the poor. In shot after shot, the life of the dispossessed is clearly delineated, from abortion (pre-life) to infancy to adolescence to ultimate death (the funeral scene which, by the way, is a repetition of Brocka's funeral scenes in his earlier films). But the problem is that the life of the poor has nothing to do with the story. Aunor will still have the same psychological problem and experience exactly the same shock at the end if Salvador were middle-class.

It is well and good to depict the life of the poor in our country. But the story should be about the poor. The story of *Bona* is about a rich man, although a rich man in a poor man's clothes. Salvador's motivations are *nouveau riche*. Particularly incredible is the action of a poor man is his penchant for being bathed by Aunor. (The scene, in fact, appears to be an adaptation of similar scenes in American films, with a batya replacing an American bathtub and a bucket of hot water replacing the hot water faucet.)

When Brocka handles a sequence which is necessary to the narrative, he fails to give it life. For example, crucial to the film is the first scene with Aunor boiling water. Brocka puts his camera in such a position that the viewer cannot see the pot of boiling water. Salvador, in fact, faces the table (and thus faces the right edge of the screen), while Aunor, her back turned to him, faces the invisible stove (and thus faces the left edge of the screen). Their turning their backs to each other may be significant, but only for two seconds. Since the shot is allowed by Brocka to take more than a full minute, the viewer is bored to death.

The only two sequences which are both well-done and necessary are the Raquel Monteza sequence and the final sequence. In one sequence, Aunor fights another woman

(Raquel Monteza). The sequence begins inside the house, then spills over to the street. In this sequence, Brocka succeeds in integrating production design with narrative. Aunor, as she is in almost all the sequences, is excellent here. The viewer feels her rage at the challenge to her private world.

The final sequence, where Aunor finally assaults Salvador, is excellent, although it is, of course, in the same vein as *Insiang*. The typical Filipino film thrives on the theme of revenge. *Bona* is no exception. When Aunor finally dumps the boiling water on her non-feeling master, the viewer cannot help but be moved. The sequence is effective, perhaps because the rest of the film is not.

In the end, it is Aunor's acting which saves the film. Despite the incoherent screenplay, the erratic direction, and the irrelevant production design, the film is gripping because Aunor is excellent. Aunor is indeed a signal phenomenon in Philippine film. She broke the color barrier (she is not a mestiza). She broke the marriage barrier (she is not single, nor is she even happily married). She broke the superstar barrier (before her, superstars were supposed to be beautiful, but not good, actresses). She has now broken the untouchable barrier: in *Bona*, she is subjected to the most degrading physical abuses. Unlike Hilda Koronel who remained a madonna even during the rape scene in *Angela Markado*. Aunor really becomes the penniless, dumb, neurotic alalay Bona is supposed to be. Who can imagine Fernando Poe, Jr., beaten to a pulp by nameless villains? Who can imagine Lloyd Samartino made up to look like a vampire? In *Bona*, Aunor really looks like an *alalay*, rather than a superstar. That is why she is, in fact, a superstar. (*TV TIMES*, January 4-10, 1981, p. 4.)



The campus scene has long been proven a sure foundation for getting laughs, and Lino Brocka's *Burgis* (1981) makes the most of teachers who terrorize, students who have no interest in studying, and parents who think of education as an excuse to get rid of the children. The situations in the film are unfortunately familiar to everyone who has been to school: no education gets done in this "educational institution." The laughs are provided by everyone in the cast, although special mention must be made of Louella, Maya Valdes, and German Moreno, who are funnier than ever. Even Elvira Manahan gets laughs without laughing.

The intent of the film is clearly commercial: to exploit teenage girls' fascination with Gabby Concepcion. Brocka takes pains to give Concepcion ample screen time, with the most flattering camera angles. But being commercial is not a bad thing, especially if the director is able to transcend exploitation and achieve art. *Burgis* does not attempt much, but it achieves what it attempts.

The film is very well written. The language shifts from "colegiala English" (technically known as "pidgin

English") to straight "urban poor Tagalog." There are a few mistakes, but none significant enough to lessen the accomplishment of the writer, who has proven Higgins' dictum in *My Fair Lady* that one can always tell a speaker's background from his language. The situations are stock, but what writer Jose Dalisay, Jr., does with the stock situations is what counts, and he keeps surprising the viewer with provocative lines.

The film is very well directed. Even the shots of Concepcion are organically incorporated in the visual continuity of the film. The production design helps set the deliberately broad character of the comedy. The acting—as in any Brocka film—rises above the usual. Isabel Rivas is much better here than in *Uhaw na Dagat*. Amy Austria is her usual brilliant self, though Brocka could have made more use of her comic talents (which she displayed magnificently in *Cover Girls*). Even Concepcion acts well; this is surely a tribute to Brocka's coaching ability, since Concepcion's previous screen appearances were not exactly memorable. Only Johnny Wilson is tentative in his characterization. The rest of the supporting players deliver the level of performance expected of PETA's Kalinangan Ensemble (which forms the basic support in this, as in other Brocka films). Particularly memorable are teachers Ike Lozada (who sells refrigerators to his clerks), Valdes (who pronounces students' names with a false American accent), and Lilian Laing (who is thrilled by her own name).

There are those who feel that commercial movies can never be memorable, who expect all films to say something profound about mankind. That is a bit like asking every college professor to have a Ph. D., asking everybody with a Ph.D to publish a book, asking everybody who has published a book to be a genius. In other words, those who look down on commercial film set standards

that they themselves can never reach. There are commercial films and commercial films, but if a film is both commercial and artistic, it should be a cause for celebration, even if it does not say very much. (After all, films by Bergman and Fellini and Kurosawa make a lot of money, much more than Filipino films, in fact.) In *Burgis*, Brocka has succeeded in making a commercial film without compromising his artistic integrity. (*PARADE*, July 12, 1981, p. 25.)



Brocka's theater background makes him partial to character motivation.



If the viewer is able to pretend that the last 10 years of Philippine cinema never happened, he may actually enjoy an old-fashioned movie. After all, Lino Brocka's *Hello, Young Lovers* (1981) uses the tried-and-true Hollywood formula of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl. Everything in the film is predictable, including the cartoon characters and the cardboard performances. In the same way that a Mills and Boon novel (which always has the same plot, no matter what far-away country the heroine finds herself in) and an episode of *Charlie's Angels* (which always has the Angels figuring out at the end, almost too late, that they have mistaken the villain for a good guy) are enjoyable, this movie is enjoyable.

If it were some other director who had made this film, it wouldn't be a critical disaster. After all, we expect much less of many other directors than we expect Brocka. But because it is Brocka who directed this film we have no choice but to declare *Hello, Young Lovers* a critical failure. Not that the acting is extraordinarily bad. On the contrary, Bey Vito puts in shining moments. But Snooky, Gabby Concepcion, Jennie Ramirez, Mackoy Symaco,

and Rosemarie Gil (who plays Snooky's snobbish mother) do not come up to the expected Brocka level of excellence. Neither does the cinematography, which is competent but not imaginative (as Conrado Baltazar has been in earlier Brocka movies). The production design by Joey Luna cannot be said to be incorrect, but it does not contribute to the meaning of the film in the way the production design, say, of *Jaguar* does. Perhaps most glaring of all is the music, which actually includes canned music (something Brocka is certainly not known for). In other words, while we may applaud lesser directors for making a neat and well-knit movie, we must decry Brocka's decision to make a potboiler. It is way below his artistic stature to make a movie as unimaginative, as exploitative, as ordinary as *Hello, Young Lovers*.

Perhaps the fault really lies in the original choice of genre. The rich-girl-poor-boy convention is just too conventional. As one of very few Filipino *auteurs*, Brocka is known for exploring character and setting, for offering insights into the way Philippine society warps individual personalities, for filming stories full of human anguish, suffering and conflict. But in *Hello, Young Lovers*, Brocka offers only a romantic lie: that love conquers all. Concepcion, so poor he has to borrow Symaco's motorcycle in order to "kidnap" Snooky from her wedding, falls in love at first sight with Snooky, despite the fact that they have not spoken more than three words to each other and that Snooky's driver doubles as a security guard. The adolescent Concepcion even falls completely for the sexual wiles of liberated Ramirez. Despite financial, logistical, emotional, and sexual obstacles, boy gets girl. That was the fairy tale even Hollywood gave up so long ago (and so did Philippine movies, when Brocka himself entered cinema a decade ago). For Brocka to make a movie belonging to a tradition he himself helped

destroy is a sad; sad thing indeed. (*PARADE*, September 20, 1981, p. 26.)

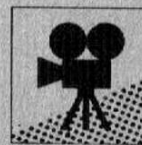


Two typical Brocka shots—a tight study of a decaying marriage in *Ina Ka Ng Anak Mo* (top) and an intense shot of a man in anguish in *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay* (bottom).





Lino Brocka's *Dalaga si Misis, Binata si Mister* (1981), is one of the worst movies in his career. The problem is simple enough: Brocka is out of his milieu. Since he had made his reputation doing films about poverty (such as his three Cannes films—*Insiang*, *Jaguar*, and *Bona*), this film dealing with the superficial lives of two wealthy, superficial persons is just not within his area of competence. The result is trite and unrealistic. The film even inadvertently supports a totally unacceptable, old-fashioned, pre-feminist double standard: the husband is forgiven for having a mistress, but the wife is expected to remain faithful. The technical elements, surprising for a Brocka movie, are awful: the music, the location sound, and the editing, for example, are intolerably sloppy. Despite an excellent performance by Anita Linda, the film brings Brocka's reputation down to a new low. (TV TIMES, September 27 - October 3, 1981, p. 24.)



Clearly commercial, *Caught in the Act* (1981) shows no signs of being directed by Lino Brocka, if by a Brocka film we mean a film with a strong socially conscious theme. Although it is not a pure exploitation film, *Caught in the Act* comes close to being about nothing but sex. Even Phillip Salvador's being a loser is hardly explored. In effect, the entertainment value of this film comes completely from its sex sequences.

The story is clear and logical. The screenplay is extremely competent, with distinct personalities being developed for the four main roles. The situations are dramatic and well-structured. Given the constraint that Regal Films seems to have wanted to do a sex film, the screenplay is about as logical as one can get: the sex sequences are all motivated and in context.

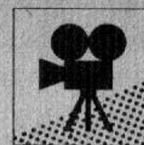
The film, however, suffers because of its technical elements. The print I saw was very badly processed, with the

colors usually washed out. The lighting is spotty, with the kissing scenes sometimes ending up in unplanned shadows. Even the direction is careless: screen direction, for instance, in the Lorna Tolentino-Phillip Salvador hotel kissing scene is wrong.

As in any Brocka movie, however, the acting leaves little to be desired. Amy Austria is excellent as expected, though Gina Alajar is better in her role. Tolentino is adequate, though not of the same caliber as Austria or Alajar. Salvador, sad to say, has done better films. (*TV PARADE*, December 12-18, 1981, p. 40.)



Brocka likes to show his actors how to play a scene. Here, he directs Dolphy and Phillip Salvador in *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay*.



The story of Lino Brocka's *Mother Dear* (1982) is, at least, logical. Despite the several familial and personal relationships between the many stars, the flow of events is clear. The viewer does not get confused. Certainly, that is no mean achievement in the context of Philippine cinema.

Charito Solis, mother of Maricel Soriano, has long been abandoned by Tony Carreon, who is legally married to Ester Chavez, who, in fact, has son Joel Alano by her. Alano's girlfriend is Kristine Garcia, sister of Albert Martinez and daughter of Gloria Romero and Nestor de Villa. De Villa brings illegitimate daughter Julie Vega to live with his family when Vega's mother dies. Albert Martinez's girlfriend is Snooky, the adopted daughter of Anita Linda. When Snooky's real father (Linda's brother-in-law) dies, she learns that her real mother is Alicia Alonso, once her father's nurse and now her own *yaya*. Linda's husband is the lawyer in an inheritance suit filed by Solis in behalf of Soriano.

In other words, the plot is as full of coincidences as the rest of Filipino soap operas. Many of the sequences in the

film, in fact, come straight out of such classics as old Gloria Romero films and such current standbys as *Anna Liza*. But at least, writer Jose Javier Reyes manages to put some logic into the plotting, providing motivations for the characters and attempting to keep time and space frames coherent.

The trouble is that the very genre itself—melodrama—is incapable of providing new insights into the Philippine situation. We now expect of Brocka's films that they give us new ways of looking at our society. It is not enough to give the excuse that he is merely doing a commercial film because he needs money (he may or may not need the money, for all we know). Even the "commercial" films of other great directors tend to add to their canon; a director's style normally permeates even his worst films. Take Ishmael Bernal, for instance: he is always Bernal even in his potboilers.

But *Mother Dear* is a rejection of all that Brocka stands for. Brocka has built his reputation on challenging our accepted ways of looking at reality. But *Mother Dear* is a rehash of old cinematic conventions, specifically of Tagalog melodrama, complete with silly poses (Gloria Romero's) and midnight meetings in a garden (Albert Martinez and Snooky).

The film fails primarily because Brocka forgets that his main tool is the camera. In his previous, more serious films, Brocka showed himself adept at using camera angles and compositions to convey meaning. But in *Mother Dear*, the camera shoots and moves without apparent reason. One example should suffice: again and again, Brocka moves from long shot to medium shot without changing the angle and without any motivation from dialogue. If the camera is a director's brush, then *Mother Dear* is a child's drawing, not an adult's painting.

Aside from the logical screenplay, there are only two elements of the film worth noting. One is a sequence in-

volving William Martinez and Soriano, near the end of the film. Here Martinez and Soriano engage in what they do best—a free-wheeling, tongue-in-cheek, Bernalian conversation. The sequence succeeds, ironically because it is the only sequence in the entire film that is not melodramatic, but comic. The second is Anita Linda's acting in one of her best short roles. By refusing to take anything seriously (or lugubriously, as the film seems to warrant), Linda infuses the screen with lightheadedness, clearly welcome in the midst of all that crying.

Since the film is tremendously popular, one should ask what the effect is of the melodramatic clichés on our popular audiences. Are we doing the country a great disservice by feeding them such a low-calorie intake of intellectual food? Are we encouraging illegitimacy by making Soriano, Vega, and Snooky the heroes of this film? Worst, are we encouraging the *martir* tradition among Filipino women by moralizing about how wives should understand their husbands? One thinks of Brocka as a person who has dared to ask questions about the legitimacy of our present society. In *Mother Dear*, it is instead the illegitimacy of the melodramatic genre that is proven. (TV TIMES, June 13-19, 1982, p. 48.)



The unrelenting pace of Lino Brocka's *Cain At Abel* (1982) keeps the viewer glued to his seat. Brocka spares no technical and artistic effort to make a good thriller. It is impossible not to be caught up in the feud of the brothers. Clearly, this is one of the most gripping films of 1982.

Strong performances are the hallmark of a Brocka film. This film is no exception. On second thought, it is exceptional, because everybody gives an outstanding performance.

The best performer is Cecille Castillo, in a quiet role demanding minimum speech, but maximum emoting. She plays the devoted housemaid who has a child by Christopher de Leon. Brocka clearly realizes the depth and scope of Castillo's talent and does not hesitate to give her the kind of close-up he gives Nora Aunor and Hilda Koronel. Despite the smallness of her role, Castillo gives a powerful performance almost over-shadowing the leads.

Rising above her usual level of acting is Baby Delgado, in the role of the strong wife of weakling Phillip Sal-

vador. Her best scene occurs during the confrontation where she loses her baby. Shifting from hysterics to shock, she continues her sensitive portrayal all the way to the jeep scene, where she dies of hemorrhage. Again, although her role is relatively minor, she is able to infuse it with complexity and realism.

Mona Lisa as the mother of the feuding brothers chooses to underplay her role. This is a wise decision, since she thus serves as a counterpoint for the vocal Delgado and the starry eyed Castillo. Nevertheless, Mona Lisa's unquestioning love for de Leon is clear from the way she uses her eyes when looking at him. The only weakness of her performance is the lack of consistency in her viciousness, which is called for by the plot. If she were really the heartless mother she is supposed to be as far as Salvador is concerned, she should display a more hardened countenance.

Even Michael Sandico in an extremely minor role makes a memorable impression on screen, especially in the final sequence where he serves as back-up for the cowardly de Leon. The scene before the climactic day, where he puts out his cigarette just before sleeping, is also a good one for Sandico.

Salvador delivers a stirring performance in one of the two lead roles. Because his character calls for various changes in attitude, he is able to display his versatility in showing internal conflict. His best scenes occur with his young sons, the first when he tells them not to fight, the second when he stops them from fighting and admonishes the older one for not giving way to his younger brother.

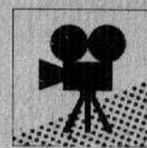
A big disappointment is Christopher de Leon, who does not come up to the level of acting of the rest. Adequate but not great, de Leon's acting merely gives us one facet of his character, lacking in the complexity and

subtlety required by a role which shifts from that of a coward to that of a killer to that of a lover and so on.

The acting is clearly the best thing in this film. The screenplay is not particularly distinguished, since Ricardo Lee is coming from such masterpieces as *Brutal* and *Salome*. The reason for Mona Lisa's preference for de Leon, for example, is not explained early in the film. When we find out about the preference, in fact, it is only in words: we are told, not shown. The biggest plot hole of all is the killing of Carmi Martin. Ruel Vernal merely says that it was an accident. But given the explosive nature of the situation, surely the protagonists would have been more careful about accidents. The death of Martin is *deus ex machina*, a flaw in an otherwise well-orchestrated, inevitable sequence of events.

One false moment in the film stems from the death of Martin (in film, as in life, one mistake often leads to another). De Leon, upon seeing Martin's body, throws up. The theater I was in immediately buzzed with the question: "Why is he throwing up?" Given his character, the setting, not to mention the Filipino audience, de Leon's throwing up is a ridiculous action absolutely out of place in the film. (Have you ever seen a Filipino throw up upon seeing a dead body, even if the dead body belongs to someone he knows?)

"Imperfection" is the in thing nowadays, however (remember the "imperfect democracies" of the *Wall Street Journal*?), and Brocka's film will probably be raved about precisely because it is imperfect. Imperfections aside, nevertheless, the film deserves to be in the list of Brocka's ten best, if only because the performances are strong, the screenplay generally logical, and the direction competent. (*PARADE*, October 27, 1982, p. 38.)



Violent fare seems to be the fashion among leading Filipino directors today. Close on the heels of Mike de Leon's *Alpha Kappa Omega Batch '81* comes *Cain at Abel* (1982), Lino Brocka's critically acclaimed entry to the recent San Sebastian Film Festival in Spain.

Brocka's film, in fact, emphasizes not so much gore as fate. The first shot—a spider caught in its own web—establishes the deterministic premise of the production. Like the sons of Adam, two brothers (Christopher de Leon and Phillip Salvador) are fated to be each other's doom. The predestined feud, which takes place in a small Philippine town, leads to the disintegration of the family, the destruction of their friends and farmlands, and ends only when the two are themselves killed.

Having started his career as a stage actor, Brocka has received universal applause for his handling of performers. Not afraid to expose his players to long, cruel close-ups, he has built his films primarily around big confrontation scenes requiring theatrical, as well as more clearly cinematic, talents. Performers who have been undistinguished in previous films tend to shine in Brocka

movies. In *Cain at Abel* we see some inspired acting. Most memorable are the strong women characters: underrated Cecille Castillo as the stoic housemaid raising de Leon's child, Baby Delgado as the fighting wife unwilling to simply stand aside, Mona Lisa as the irrational mother and Carmi Martin as de Leon's liberated fiancée. These are portraits of the Filipina radically different from the long-suffering, weak, virginal, religious stereotype of conventional productions. (*ASIAWEEK*, December 3, 1982, p. 49.)



Brocka patiently coaches Niño Muhlach in *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay*.

CELSO AD. CASTILLO

A film reputed to be one of the most expensive local movies ever made, directed by the controversial Celso Ad. Castillo, and produced by award-conscious Bancom Audiovision cannot be taken lightly. But it is because *Uhaw na Dagat* (1981) is taken seriously that the film fails.

Castillo, who both wrote and directed this intriguing film, obviously intends to construct a modern-day biblical tale. There are religious symbols all over the film. The father of the three women—Magda (Gloria Diaz), Adelfa (Elizabeth Oropesa), and Teresa (Isabel Rivas)—is named Godo, in an obvious borrowing from Nobel Prize winner Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In Beckett's play, the character Godot (the word is obviously related to the word *God*) never arrives, just as in Castillo's film, the man Godo—long the object of search by the three sisters—is always talked about, but never appears. Magda's name is itself derived from *Magdalene*, and her character approximates that of the woman loved by Jesus. Christ appears in the character of a soldier named Crisanto (Dennis Roldan). Roldan, expectedly, gets crucified at the end of the film. There is, in addition, a flock of goats—an

obvious reference to the crucial biblical passage where the Eternal Judge separates the sheep from the goats. There is, finally, a statue of the resurrected Jesus, buried by Godo under the sea, serving as a kind of forbidden fruit for the sisters.

Aside from the religious imagery, there is full use made in the film of a modern symbol for the world—the freak. Into the world of the three sisters wanders a traveling freak show, with an oversized, flesh-eating ogre (Roland Dantes), several dwarfs, three dancing girls, and an impressario (Lito Anzures). The grotesque characters turn out—as in many such tales—to be the only normal ones. The misshapen personalities are instead assigned to the sisters themselves and to a pirate (Eddie Garcia) who also wanders into the island paradise. The greatest deformity of all occurs to the seemingly normal Diaz who sleeps with Roldan; Roldan is revealed at the end to be her own half-brother.

There is a clear attempt to situate the grotesque characters and the absurd story in an ironic setting. The island looks like a paradise. Its rock openings reveal exotic caves. Its marine life is beautiful and peaceful. The setting, therefore, contrasts sharply with the people acting so weird, so inhuman. Moreover, there is a war going on, though it only surfaces, for most of the film, through artillery attacks on a nearby island. It is an unreal war with real repercussions for the three sisters.

Because the film obviously means to say something significant about human character, the viewer cannot help but try to figure out what it is that the film is saying. Unfortunately, the film does not really say anything, because the symbols and the ironies do not make up a complete whole. On the level of the screenplay, the ineffectiveness of the plot is not that damning. But on the level of the cinematic resources of the film, the lack of coher-

ence is fatal.

Take the sequence where Dantes—the ogre—makes primitive love to Oropesa. Dantes has his pants on; Oropesa has her shorts on. It cannot be said that Castillo is merely being careful, for fear of the censors. In another sequence, the dwarfs are all seen without their pants on. In several shots, the three women are practically naked because of the flimsiness of their dresses. The visual impact of the sex scene, therefore, is that Dantes and Oropesa are making love in a totally unnatural, not to mention impossible way. This visual impact has nothing to contribute to the film. Making the performers strip and then shielding their full bodies from the camera through clever angling or lighting would have been much more appropriate. Similarly, the postcard-type cinematography detracts from the violence that is meant to explode in the final sequence. Where there should be close-ups, Castillo uses long shots (for example, the long shot of the dwarfs taking shelter).

The final sequence is actually to blame for much of the film's incoherence. Castillo uses a cross-cut from the sisters (about to kill each other) to the strongmen (also about to kill each other) to the pirate chief (just waiting to kill someone, anyone). The cross-cutting is called for by the plot, but it is not cinematically justified. The viewer cannot figure out how the three sisters are not disturbed by the gunshots that they must obviously be hearing (in several earlier sequences, shouts from one island to another are clearly audible). The symbolism attached to Oropesa's stabbing of the goat is clever, but it is bought at too great a cost. The symbol stands out too much when it should be evoked by the sequence as a whole.

What is, then, wrong with *Uhaw na Dagat* is that it has several symbols which are not integrated within a meaningful context. One can spot the literary allusions and

perhaps even cinematic influences, but it is extremely difficult to put all the allusions, influences, images, symbols, and ironies together. One should credit Castillo and Bancom, however, for making a film meant only for intelligent audiences. The film challenges the viewer to make some sense out of the grotesque elements. Perhaps, come to think of it, the very effort of the viewer to put religion, sex, violence, war, and morality together is the meaning of the film. In that case, *Uhaw na Dagat* may actually be less of a failure than it appears to be. (*TV TIMES*, February 22-28, 1981, p. 16.)



Celso Ad. Castillo—a total director.

GERARDO DE LEON

The story of Gerardo de Leon's *Lilet* (1971) is full of holes. It starts with a doctor accidentally running into a woman with amnesia. With the doctor's help, the girl (Celia Rodriguez) discovers incest, murder, attempted murder, and near-insanity in her family. Right at the start, the audience is puzzled. Why is the doctor there at that time? Why does it have to be a doctor and not somebody else? How is the doctor able to stop his car in time?

The first sequences can be accepted, for the sake of argument, as the given of the film, but the problem is that the questions of the audience never stop. Why does Rodriguez wake up in time to save herself from being stabbed? How does the ghost of the dead brother appear and disappear, with all the lighting paraphernalia? If the sound of his voice comes from the tape that the grandmother (Tita Muñoz) has prepared, how come Rodriguez can hear the voice when she is in the garden, way beyond the range of such a small tape recorder? How is the grandmother able to change costume so fast?

If the story of *Lilet* is illogical, the (published) screenplay is even worse. The ending is not only abrupt,

but also unmotivated. The actual dialogue of the film is also not noteworthy. The shifts from English to Tagalog are arbitrary and do not seem to have any purpose.

Clearly, only the direction by de Leon saves the film. In *Lilet*, de Leon uses not only the standard horror techniques (lighting effects, sound effects, close-ups of Rodriguez's frightened face), but also a flashback method used by the classic master Ingmar Bergman. When the father (Vic Silayan) tells the story of the kids, de Leon places the two children right on the set without the stage technique of "freezing" or the cinematic technique of blurring. De Leon's flashbacks, even without the Bergman touch, are well-paced and well-planned. (*PHILIPPINES HERALD*, April 19, pp. 16-17.)



Manong—Gerardo de Leon and His Films, presented by the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines from September 12 to 19, 1982, was a fitting tribute to the man who—if we are to believe European film critics—was the best film director our country has ever produced. No Filipino—not even equally internationally known directors such as Lino Brocka—begrudges Manong this distinction. In fact, Brocka himself was a moving spirit (having lent his copy of one of the films) behind the tribute.

Much has been written about Manong's numerous achievements—his 70 films, his 25 trophies, his National Artist award—but not too much has been said about what makes his films tick. The reason for the paucity of critical comment on his films is simple—few of today's young film buffs have seen his films. The ECP tribute, therefore, was one of the best things that have happened to local cinema. It afforded critics, students, filmmakers, and fans the chance to see for themselves what Manong had done.

What exactly did Manong do? The answer is evident in the very first minutes of *The Moises Padilla Story* (1961),

the first film of the mini-festival. A busload of people, including hero Leopoldo Salcedo (as Moises Padilla), is stopped by gunmen in uniform. The gunmen are special police (in real life, they would be part of a private army) protecting the interests of the provincial governor. The gunmen steal the belongings of the people, maltreat them, even rape one of the women within earshot of the rest. As the woman is violated, a train passes by the group. In that one sequence, Manong communicates everything all at once—the Negros problem of law and order, the symbolic deflowering of the woman, the inexorable force of violence, the beginning of Salcedo's conscientization.

Manong's films are built on strong sequences. Practically every sequence in each of his films is designed to tell the entire story of the film. A minor sequence in *Noli Me Tangere* (1961) can serve as an example. Lina Cariño (playing Sisa) is wondering what has become of her sons. Her face is shown reflected by a framed picture of the Blessed Virgin. Sisa—Manong is saying, in his own interpretation of Rizal's character—is as long-suffering, as virginal, as holy as Mary. By implication, the country which Sisa represents is also suffering.

Unlike most of our film directors who pay little attention to detail, Manong looked at detail as the soul of film. The production design of his Rizal films (it is impossible to detect that the films were done in modern times) has been amply praised. Of all the elements of production design, background was Manong's special forte. In this films, so much is said by the backgrounds.

In *Noli Me Tangere*, for example, the background is invariably a church, a church bell, a statue, a cross, something related to religion. Religion, to Manong, is what Rizal's novel is all about. It is religion (in the person of Padre Damaso) which has bred Maria Clara (clearly por-

trayed by Rizal as a kind of villain). It is religion which rules the state. The choice of strong actor Oscar Keese to portray Padre Damaso, in fact, is one of Manong's achievements. Keese's presence dominates every scene which includes him. By cinematic implication, religion dominates the world of *Noli Me Tangere*.

In *El Filibusterismo* (1962), religion is not Manong's primary concern, but it reappears in some memorable shots. One shot, for instance, has Padre Fernandez telling Isagani that "*ang karunungan ay hindi para sa lahat*" ("knowledge is not for everyone"). The friar argues that not everybody should be taught, that education should be restricted to the elite. Manong sets the scene in a room dominated by a huge painting showing Jesus teaching from a boat. What Manong has done is simple: without saying anything about the friar, he has torn down the friar's argument. Unlike the friar, Jesus himself never restricted his teaching.

If a film is just as good as its weakest point, then Manong's films are as good as films can be. Every sequence, even every shot, is carefully planned and executed. In an interview he granted just before his death in 1981, Manong told interviewer Jose Reyes Hisamoto that "each shot must tell a story." Each shot in a Manong film does tell a story.

Because Manong paid so much attention to detail, he did not care as much for overall structure or plot or theme. What one remembers of his films are single shots, self-contained sequences, short masterpieces within long masterpieces. One shot from *The Moises Padilla Story* tells it all. Leopoldo Salcedo, tortured in various ways for a good length of time by the gunmen, is left momentarily alone. A small boy who has been following the gory proceedings approaches him and gives him a drink from a tin can. Salcedo looks the boy in the eye and

tells him to look at him, to take in his bruised body. "Pagmasdan mo ako," he says, "ito ang iyong nagdurugong bayan." ("Look at me; this is your suffering country.") This line, said within a tight shot of Salcedo and the puzzled boy, is so powerful that the opening night crowd, despite the presence of ECP Director-General Imee Marcos and her host of security men, applauded. A full two decades after it was first shown, *The Moises Padilla Story* was still stimulating viewers to protest against the bad guys in our society. That spontaneous burst of applause was as much a tribute to Gerardo de Leon as ECP's long-planned retrospective. (*PANORAMA*, October 3, 1982, pp. 24-25.)



The climactic sequence of *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* Symbolically, the Filipinos are worshipping Japanese technology.

MIKE DE LEON

There is no doubt in my mind about it. Mike de Leon's *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* (1980) is a great film.

Just take, for example, the subtitles. The subtitles are all in Tagalog, or—more precisely—deliberately in the Tagalog condemned by academicians as sub-literate. The Chinese characters all speak in (I am told) real Chinese, but the subtitles translate the Chinese into pidgin Tagalog. The Japanese characters also speak in Japanese, but in a "Japanese" overflowing with multilingual puns. In fact, since neither the Tagalog subtitles nor the original foreign languages are faithful to grammar, linguistics, or plain logic, the viewer is quickly led to accept the multilingual chaos as pure farce. When the written Chinese characters start fighting with the written Japanese characters (as the actors playing the Chinese villains fight the actors playing the Japanese villains), all linguistic rules fly out the window (or into the multilevel elevator leading nowhere in the climactic sequence). You can't possibly remain serious throughout the verbal anarchy.

There is, thus, no element of racism in the film. Only a

viewer who has never laughed in his whole life can possibly take offense at the farcical treatment of the Chinese and the Japanese in the film. True, there is a strong condemnation of Japanese technological colonialism in the song that Johnny Delgado sings at the end. But since it is Delgado singing, how can you take the song seriously? Delgado plays his part the way it should be played—unbelieving, broad, tongue-in-check. The censors who originally voted to ban the film are not at all different from the Jews who refused to listen to Jesus because He came from a hick town called Nazareth, or the conquistadores who refused to take Lapu-Lapu seriously because, after all, the native chieftain was not white. In short, to condemn the film because it portrays the Chinese and the Japanese (not to mention the clergy) as objects of fun is to miss the whole point.

There is hardly any element in Mike de Leon's film which can be faulted for lack of imagination or lack of technical quality. Take, for example, the plot, which moves on with inexorable "logic" from the opening impossibilities to the closing improbabilities. There are even attempts on the part of the screenwriters to mock the lack of the usual detective-story logic: at one point in the film, Leo Martinez shrugs off the question of how he managed to be in Baguio at precisely the right time.

Take the acting. Armida Siguion-Reyna tackles the role of the Chinese godmother with gusto, but not with malice. She plays the part with just the right amount of insincerity. A heavy portrayal of the role would have rendered the climactic revelation that she is, in reality, an image of another Madame Lily vicious, maybe even libelous. Instead, what we have is Siguion-Reyna at her most delightful. Similarly, Nanette Inventor plays the fake Mother Superior with exquisite glee. The visual detail of her stockings is a stroke of genius; it summarizes

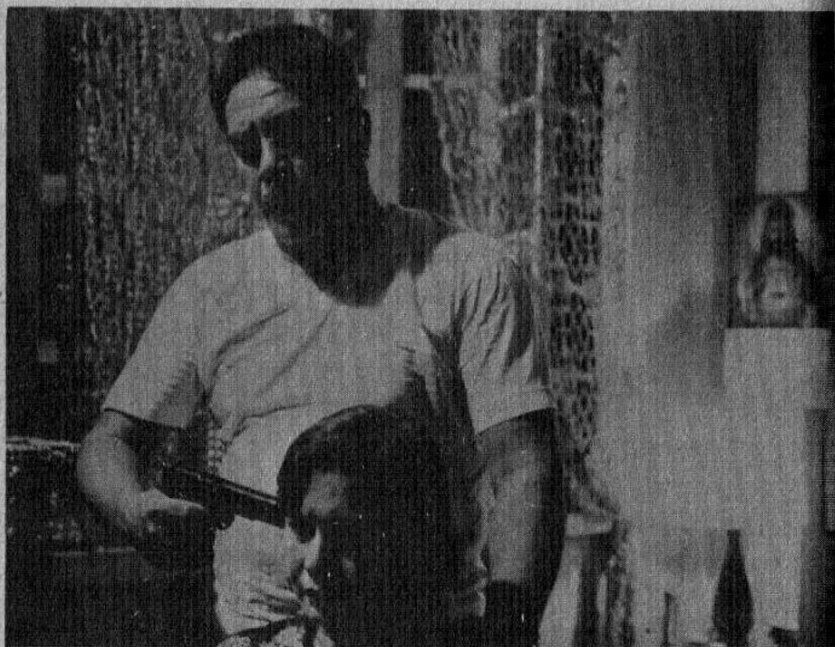
in one close-up the ludicrousness of the entire drug operation.

There is, of course, the brilliant script. What can one say of a script which does everything all at once? There is the story (the little that there is of that), but there are, in addition, all the gags. If this is the first motion picture you have ever seen in your life, you will laugh. But if it is the thousandth movie you have seen, you will laugh even harder: in this film are satirized all sorts of Hollywood clichés (not to mention, Tagalog-movie stock situations). This film is a bit like the old Marx Brothers movies: the viewer laughs while watching the film, but laughs even harder recalling afterwards the funny lines and situations.

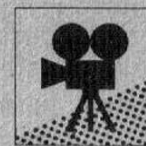
Finally, there is Mike de Leon. He has not done a lot of movies; in fact, in terms of quantity, he is a novice at moviemaking. But in terms of quality, de Leon is way above even old hands like Lamberto Avellana or more experienced hands like Lino Brocka. The film shows off de Leon's many talents. The animation tends to overshadow the cinematographer's achievements, but there is a delicate balance among the visual elements. De Leon's direction of his actors is also flawless. Christopher de Leon and Jay Ilagan team up in a dazzling display of perfect comic timing. Even Charo Santos, not noted for comedy, is funny. Sandy Andolong, unfortunately underrated at the box-office, shows why she is a favorite of critics. The four leads are ably supported by a host of new faces, but these faces are only new on screen. Offscreen, they are well known in singing, acting, and dancing. (I am speaking, of course, of the members of the UP Concert Chorus, who help make the final sequence hilarious.)

With an excellent screenplay, an excellent cast, and an excellent technical staff (in particular, an excellent ani-

mation teanì), Mike de Leon, of course, is already assured of a good film. By adding his own brand of absurdity, de Leon creates a great film. True, there are a few lapses (the blocking is sometimes repetitive, the light bulb gimmick is trite, the split screens too many), but what's a few unfunny moments in a film which has you laughing your heart out? If you're Chinese or Japanese, you might be uncomfortable the first three minutes, but you will soon find yourself laughing with the Tagalogs (who might not even realize that they are also being satirized). Priests and nuns are expected to find the film revolting, but I doubt if they will. The priests and nuns I know are more intelligent than that: they will all enjoy this non-serious irreverence. In fact, the film is meant for intelligent audiences, those who can distinguish between ridicule and respect, satire and farce, fiction and fact. (TV TIMES, August 10-16, 1980, p. 49.)



Vic Silayan terrorizes Charito Solis in *Kisapmata*.



In *Itim* (1976), Mike de Leon already proved that he can create films which hold audiences, *Kisapmata* (1981) is a mainstream Mike de Leon film. The viewer cannot but be carried along by the singleminded tragic tone. The suspense is killing, as the cliché goes, though the word "killing" here has a more precise meaning.

Mike de Leon is to Philippine film as Edgar Allan Poe is to the American short story. Poe strove to create stories with single effects. His stories are gripping as they are read, but they are hardly talked about afterwards. Similarly, de Leon's films hold the viewer, but what the films actually say (if anything) seldom becomes clear. This is not to say that a de Leon film is simply art for art's sake. Poe's stories, for instance, despite their obvious preoccupation with craft, have significant insights to offer about human nature. De Leon's films, similarly, have ideas to offer, but the way he offers them is always more important.

The comparison of de Leon to a short story writer is not irrelevant to *Kisapmata*, since this latest de Leon film is based on a narrative essay by Nick Joaquin (writing

under the pseudonym of Quijano de Manila). "The House on Zapote Street" (now anthologized in Joaquin's *Reportage on Crime*) tells of a real incident where a man murdered his daughter and her husband, wounded his own wife, then killed himself. Joaquin remakes the gory real-life incident into a first-class horror tale (almost like a short story, in fact).

Writers Doy del Mundo, Raquel Villavicencio and Mike de Leon revise Joaquin's story in one significant way: they introduce incest into the situation. In *Kisapmata*, Vic Silayan is explicitly shown having sex with Charo Santos (through a close-up of Silayan's groin area, not through an actual bed scene) and implicitly shown as the possible father of Santos' baby. The incest theme adds the one thing missing in Joaquin's story (as well as in the real-life incident): the motivation for Silayan's insane jealousy.

De Leon visually develops the theme of jealousy through the use of what is called in theater as the "triangle." In the very first sequence, for instance, Silayan sits at the bottom of the screen, Santos sits on the upper left side of the screen, Silayan's wife Charito Solis sits on the upper right side of the screen. What the viewer sees is a triangle: this is the first love triangle in the film. Silayan actually sleeps with Santos, with the knowledge of Solis. The man is thus in love with two women—his wife and daughter—and this love is sexual in both cases.

The second triangle involves, of course, Jay Ilagan, Santos, and Silayan. Silayan, who has sex with Santos just like Ilagan (though Silayan does it in Santos' bedroom, while Ilagan has to rent motel rooms), is jealous of Ilagan. This is unnatural for a mere father (that is the problem with the original story), but completely understandable for a lover. Silayan as both father and lover of

Santos has no emotional choice but to feel threatened by Ilagan.

What sets this film apart from other explorations of incest is not the gory ending, but the way the writers make the entire situation ambiguous. If you listen to the dialogue carefully, you will notice that the words used can be interpreted in various ways. At the hospital, for instance, when someone asks who Silayan is, the answer comes this way: "*Baka asawa ni Mrs. Manalansan.*" Silayan, needless to say, is in a real sense the husband of Santos. When Silayan says at the end that he has a right to Santos' baby, he could mean that, as the grandfather, he indeed has familial rights to the baby, but he could also mean that he is the father of the baby.

Such ambiguity (treasured by those who believe in the paradoxes and ironies of literature) runs throughout the film. But there is much more to *Kisapmata* than purely literary values. There is, for instance, the strong de Leon visual style. One haunting shot shows Santos in close-up, framed by barbed wire. The meaning is clear: she is being held prisoner by her own father.

Like any other Mike de Leon film, this one is only for those who want to think while watching films. The insensitive viewer may not even catch the incest theme. The typical local film fan, in fact, may fall asleep because of the unvarying pace of the film. But the moviegoer who can tell a good film from a bad one will not miss anything in the film. He will, in fact, hail Mike de Leon as the best craftsman among our directors. The sensitive moviegoer will come out of the moviehouse saying to himself that this is how films should be made. (*PARADE*, December 26, 1986-January 1, 1982, p. 34.)



When *Kisapmata* won ten of the fourteen awards given at the 1981 Metro-Manila Film Festival last December, nobody was surprised. Enigmatic Filipino director Mike de Leon makes relatively few movies—in a country where a film is usually finished in two months—but *Kisapmata* swept awards for both technical and acting competence.

The screenplay, built round a short story by National Artist Nick Joaquin, is based on an actual incident. It is a character study of a retired policeman (Vic Silayan) whose incestuous relationship with his daughter (Charo Santos) drives him to kill his son-in-law (Jay Ilagan), his wife (Charito Solis) and himself. While feeling in the film was obviously intense, however, the sensitivities of those involved in the incident were ignored: as an unfortunate sequel, the real policeman's wife, who in fact survived the gruesome ordeal, tried unsuccessfully to prevent the show's screening. She could have gained little solace from the high esteem in which the film is now held. (*ASIAWEEK*, February 26, 1982, p. 6.)



Mike de Leon's fifth film is actually entitled *AKO*, short for Alpha Kappa Omega, but everybody knows it by its original title *Batch '81*. The film was finished several months ago. In fact, it was premiered March, 1982, at Greenhills Theater by the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines. Producer Marichu Maceda could have released the film earlier, but she chose instead to watch how the new Board of Review would handle similarly explosive material.

As a result, *Batch '81*, except for the privileged few who managed to catch the premiere showing and the even fewer who were invited to several small previews, has been seen primarily by foreign audiences. At Cannes, the film got good reviews, thus acquiring an international reputation before it gets a national one. Following the grand tradition spelled out by Jesus at Nazareth, the prophetic *Batch '81* is honored everywhere else except in its own country.

Simply put, *Batch '81* is one of the greatest Filipino films ever made. When compared to such heavies as *El Filibusterismo*, *Jaguar*, *Manila by Night*, and *Salome*, Mike de Leon's latest is easily the best. *Batch '81* is also clearly

de Leon's best, and that's saying a lot, since *Itim* and *Kisapmata* tower above most other Filipino films.

As in any de Leon film, the technical credits are superior. Cesar Hernando's production design, for example, accurately and creatively evokes the atmosphere that makes monsters of ordinary students. Rody Lacap's cinematography makes full use of the production design in order to create a visual ballet or—to use another art form—a moving painting. Jess Navarro's editing is excellent, consistently supporting the directional design of the film.

Although acting is not usually a strong point in de Leon's films (with the notable exception of the performances in *Kisapmata*), the acting in *Batch '81* leaves little to be desired. The performances are even more astonishing if one remembers that most of the cast are neophytes in front of the camera; even the veteran performers do not have too many films behind them. Clearly the most outstanding is Ricky Sandico, but not far behind are Mark Gil, Noel Trinidad, Mike Arvisu, and Jimmy Javier. No one acts poorly; it is simply that Sandico is extraordinary.

A gross generalization about Philippine cinema would describe de Leon as a director concerned with form at the expense of meaning (in the same way that Lino Brocka emphasizes meaning at the expense of form), but *Batch '81* proves that de Leon can concentrate on meaning as well. What makes the film classic, in fact, is its use of the technical virtuosity displayed by de Leon to convey political, social, and philosophical meaning.

The political meaning is clear enough for those who try to see beyond the fraternity setting. De Leon is saying that our country is run like a fraternity, with blind obedience being the primary rule. In an explicit torture sequence, de Leon places his neophytes on an electric chair.

There, they are asked a political question. According to their answers, they are either subjected to electric shock or not. This sequence is inspired by a famous experiment at Yale University by researcher Stanley Milgrams. The experiment proved, among other things, that all human beings are capable of inflicting the most brutal pain on their fellow human beings, in the interest either of conformity (not rocking the boat) or of science.

The social meaning is also clear, even within the fraternity setting. Men will do anything to achieve peer acceptance. If society says they should withstand hazing, they will. If society says they should haze, they will. Almost like the naturalist plays of the last century, *Batch '81* portrays man as a product of his environment, rather than of his own beliefs. In a school where being a "brother" is having friends, even teachers, married men and intelligent students will willingly allow themselves to be beaten up, humiliated, and degraded.

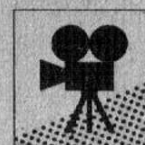
The philosophical meaning, finally, is also clear. Life is not the supreme value. Belonging is. The neophytes face death for one another. In an unforgettable climactic sequence, the neophytes face a rival fraternity in a battle to the death. The violence, in the hands of de Leon, turns into a ballet rather than an orgy. The facing of death for the sake of friendship becomes heroic rather than stupid. Beauty, says the film, can be found even in the ugly, if the ugly is created in the name of friendship.

The physical and psychological violence pervading the film may turn off some squeamish viewers, but it is precisely the squeamish who should stare at the screen as bodies are electrocuted or decapitated. The violence in the film is meant simply to make us realize that, in the real world all around us is violence existing for the sake of violence. The film is a mirror in which we can see our true selves.

Those interested in how writer Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr. sees the film may want to read his book *Writing for Film* (Communication Foundation for Asia, 1981) where he uses *Batch '81* several times as example. But it is not necessary to read anything to understand what the film is trying to say. All one has to do is to open one's eyes. That, Marichu Maceda and Mike de Leon know fully well, is the hardest thing to do in today's violent society. (PHILIPPINE PANORAMA, November 14, 1982, p. 50.)



Mike de Leon's allegorical treatment of today's society as Nazi and Fascist. Noel Trinidad and Mark Gil in *AKO Batch '81*.



Mike de Leon's *AKO Batch '81* (1982) is one of the most violent Philippine movies ever made, and how our conservative censors will ever let it be shown commercially is a great mystery. Definitely not for the weak-hearted, this film is a violent movie about violence itself. Almost everything you can think of that you do not want your children to see is in this film, and after you see the film, you will wish that your children had also seen it. Except for an extremely short sequence involving Chanda Romero, there is no sex in this film. There is also hardly any character analysis, complex plotting or deep argument: there is only, from alpha (the beginning) to omega (the end), violence.

This is Mike de Leon's best work so far. He elicits outstanding performances from his young actors, especially Mark Gil, Noel Trinidad, Mike Arvisu (as the rival fraternity member), Jimmy Javier and—best of all—Ricky Sando. He unifies the excellent work by his technical people, notably production designer Cesar Hernando, editor Jess Navarro, and cinematographer Rody Lacap. The screenplay, which he wrote with favorite col-

laborators Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr., and Raquel Villavicencio, organically offers a shocking view of what happens to young men when their minds are captured by irrational campus organizations. Like his previous films, this de Leon masterpiece is technically polished, but unlike his previous work, this one goes beyond technique and into meaning. In other words, this film says something extremely significant.

What this film says is simply this: our society is violent and we are responsible for it. That sounds like a far cry from the fraternity setting of the story, but in fact, the film merely uses the fraternity context to talk about our entire society. Again and again in the film, the outside world is brought into the tiny room in which the neophytes are being tortured. In explicit and extended monologues, for instance, the neophytes talk about their lives outside. In a revenge sequence, professor Trinidad gets back at one of the masters by humiliating him in class. In the fraternity rumble, de Leon carefully omits any mention of law-and-order authorities, in order to imply that the police are absolutely powerless to stop murders. In a scene with the mother of one dead neophyte, the statement is made that the batchmates have lied successfully to the police. In other words, de Leon is saying that all the violence (including murder) happens without anybody doing anything about it.

De Leon attacks everybody in this film — doctors who sadistically inflict pain on their patients, teachers (represented by Nanette Inventor) who intellectually torture their students, nuns who close their eyes to what is happening in the world (in an excellent subtle sequence, two nuns walk nonchalantly on the street where the almost-nude neophytes are streaking), artists who merely copy foreign models (represented by a marvelous spoof of a scene from *Cabaret*). Even political authorities are placed

on the stand, in a sequence in which the masters ask the neophytes whether martial law really helped the country or not.

Nevertheless, the film is not perfect. One glaring error involves a videotape camera which zooms in by itself (through some miracle) on Romero having sex on a sofa. Another error involves a lack of knowledge of real fraternities. When the rumble occurs, a lot more full-fledged members of the fraternity should have joined, since two of their brothers (the masters, not the neophytes) are involved. The most important error, however, involves characterization: we are never shown why Gil is so set on joining the fraternity, why Trinidad—already married and a professor—allows himself to be subjected to such immature goings-on, why Sandico agrees to fool his batchmates in the electric chair sequence (it is not enough to merely say that he is forced, because he has already been shown to be hesitant).

This film is going to Cannes to join the Directors' Fortnight. It should, instead, be competing. I daresay that, if it were competing, it would win, at the very least, a special jury prize. (*PARADE*, April 2, 1982.)



Mike de Leon's latest film *Alpha Kappa Omega Batch '81* (1982), proves once and for all that there is no separation of art and state in the Philippines. Producer Marichu Maceda waited a year for a chance to exhibit the film, fearing—rightly—that its scenes of violence and explicit attacks on martial law would not be appreciated by the censors. She felt that even her position as director-general of the country's Film Fund (a state-sponsored film financing agency), an appointment made by Imelda Marcos herself, would not help. The movie seemed doomed: newly-installed chief censor Maria Kalaw Katigbak sent strong reminders that the film would have to pass her board before any public screening, and, since two fairly harmless local films had recently been banned, there seemed to be little hope. But to the rescue came President Marcos's daughter Imee, not long ago given the stewardship of the state's Experimental Cinema of the Philippines; defying the law, she held a premiere of *Batch '81* at a plushy suburban theatre.

Those lucky enough to squeeze into the jampacked screening-hall were treated to the best film in de Leon's

career. Ostensibly the story of seven men who join a college fraternity (the Alpha Kappa Omega), the film turns out to be an orgy of physical, psychological and social violence, complete with torture scenes. Probably the most violent Philippine film ever, *Batch '81* makes a clear statement: Filipinos have only themselves to blame for the insane violence of their society. In a take-off of Stanley Milgram's famous Yale experiment on obedience, one sequence shows a neophyte strapped to a chair and subjected to an electric shock every time he fails to answer the question, "Did martial law help the country?" The implication is unmistakable: martial law rendered Filipinos insensible.

Excellent technical work by cinematographer Lacap, production designer Cesar Hernando and editor Jess Navarro support the provocative screenplay by Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., Raquel Villavicencio and de Leon. An entry in the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes, *Batch '81* should confirm de Leon's stature as Lino Brocka's archrival for international fame. (*ASIAWEEK*, June 4, 1982, p. 48.)

MARYO DE LOS REYES

Gabun (1979) is only Maryo de los Reyes' second film, but he has already surpassed the achievements of classic directors such as Lamberto Avellana and modern masters such as Robert Arevalo. Younger than Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal, de los Reyes has earned a spot beside the young geniuses of the local movie industry.

De los Reyes gets a lot of help from his material. *Gabun* is based on a one-act play by Tony Perez, the Dulaang Sibol product best known for *Hoy, Boyet* (1968) and *Anak ng Araw* (1970). Set inside a church, the play *Gabun* (1969) has only two characters, Adrian and Jaime, two sixteen-year-old boys born of the same father but of different mothers. Adrian has come to tell Jaime that their father has just died.

In the film *Gabun*, the play is retained as the climactic sequence. The rest of the film is devoted to exploring the character of the father (Eddie Rodriguez). By showing the events leading up to the church scene, the film does the play a great service. Because it is only one-act, the play has sketchy characterization and occasional contrived plotting. The film makes the story logical, believa-

ble, and complex.

Screenwriter Tom Adrales deserves praise for his development of the motivations behind the play. Similarly, the other production staff members of the film have to be congratulated for inspired work. In particular, whoever edited the sound should receive a major award. No recent local film even comes close to the masterful blend of musical score, echoes, sound effects, and voices that *Gabun* exhibits.

The major credit for the film, however, must go to de los Reyes. His direction of the actors, for example, is almost miraculous. Charito Solis gives a performance even more impressive than her Catholic Award-winning accomplishment in Lino Brocka's *Ina, Kapatid, Anak* (1979). Liza Lorena redeems herself for her forgettable performance in Manuel Cinco's *Huwag* (1979). Even Eddie Rodriguez, who has played the role of the man in the love triangle ten thousand times, manages to contribute an adequate (though still not extraordinary) characterization.

Even Amy Austria, in a minor role, displays a form which should land her a nomination for an award as best supporting actress. Laurice Guillen, appearing very briefly as a friend of Solis, proves the adage that there are no small roles, only small actors.

Only Lloyd Samartino and Michael Sandico fail to cope with the complexity of their roles. Who else in the local movie industry at this moment, however, can tackle such difficult, mature roles? Samartino and Sandico are, unfortunately, the best that we have right now.

De los Reyes manages to draw from his actors and actresses restrained, sustained, and meaningful performances. Never in the film, for example, do the actors scream. The film never descends to the level of other local movies, where speeches usually become screeches and

confrontations quickly degenerate into contortions.

In the most tense confrontation sequence in *Gabun*, for instance, when Solis and Samartino come face to face with Rodriguez, Lorena, and Sandico, de los Reyes keeps the scene wordless. Solis simply walks away from the scene. Even in the car, she keeps a poker face. Thus, at the hotel later, the inevitable emotional outburst, delayed but still strong, becomes much more effective and, in fact, more realistic.

De los Reyes' use of the mirror motif is also very effective. In an old locket, the photographs of the two boys face each other. In Austria's apartment, the camera shoots part of the scene through the mirror; she is, of course, the kind of person Samartino would have been if his father had not been a good father. The suicide scene is motivated visually by the sight of a broken mirror. The father finally sees himself and, with the very instrument of seeing, kills himself.

Not that the film is flawless. The most glaring fault is the old woman who appears at every encounter of the two boys as an obvious omen of tragedy. Aside from the inappropriate comic effect of her change of dress at the end, the woman is of no use to the film and, in fact, is a positive nuisance. The film is realistic, not symbolic. The father's conflict is psychological, not supernatural. The woman is perhaps the only clue in the film that de los Reyes is still young. Like many young men (and ex-seminarians like himself), he is fascinated by the idea of the gods (or fate) interfering in the affairs of men. Adults like Solis and Lorena know that tragedies are brought about only by man himself.

Left unanswered by the film are the religious question raised by the subliminal background sounds of the Mass and by the religious statues that Perez makes much of in the original play. The father is supposedly committing a

grievous sin by having two wives, but he is portrayed as the best of fathers (and husbands) to his families. Is the situation moral? At the end, the viewer has the same feeling he has after reading a classic such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: there is something wrong with a society which condemns a man for following his conscience. (*TV TIMES*, August 26- September 1, 1979, p. 6.)



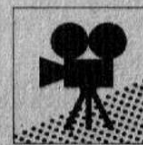
Character against set in Maryo de los Reyes' *Gabun*. Notice how the shot visually pits youth against tradition.

Maryo de los Reyes was good in *High School Circa '65* (1979), and great in *Gabun* (1979). But he cannot compensate for the inferior material in *Annie Batungbakal* (1979). He tries—and his handling of the dance sequences proves that he has a fine directorial sense. He even manages to incorporate the best animation sequences ever done in local movies.

But Nora Aunor can't dance, Lloyd Samartino can't sing, Jake Tordesillas can't write (although he did write *High School Circa '65*), Chichay isn't funny, and Nida Blanca isn't pathetic. Not even de los Reyes can save the film. He does well in not allowing Alma Moreno and Rudy Fernandez and all the guest stars to save the film either. Only Aunor can save the film, and she doesn't. (*TV Times*, October 7-13, 1979, p. 9.)



De los Reyes motivating Nora Aunor and Geleen Eugenio on the set of *Bongga Ka, Day*.



Maryo de los Reyes's *Disco Madhouse* (1980) is admittedly a failure, but it is an important failure. It is the first box-office flop of Maryo de los Reyes; it is also his most resounding critical flop (worse than *Annie Batungbakal* and way below his masterly *High School, Circa '65* in quality). The film has many positive aspects. It is the first Filipino film, for example, to attempt to do away with plot. Tony Perez contributes a story which is based on a single visual conceit: Mr. Azul (Junior), who loves the color blue, is looking for the bluebird of happiness. The film could have been a stunning visual experience.

But the joke wears thin early in the film. Mr. Azul is a blue baby. His office is filled with blue things (a blue ledger, a blue-and-white jar, other blue decor). When he goes bold and shows off his physique, he wears a blue

string brief. At the end of the film, he finds his bluebird: Charo Santos, wearing blue, in a blue mood, announces that her name is Maya.

There are some brilliant touches in the film (one expects only brilliance from de los Reyes). Each employee in Azul's office, for instance, has an oversized placard above her head, saying such things as "Clerical Staff." Lirio Vital comes out briefly as a prim and proper bookworm whose heart is filled with lust. Because she is the Maria Clara type, she comes out for her bold scene wearing an old-fashioned *camison*. The slapstick sequence at the end, showing Lorna Tolentino, Rio Locsin, and Myrna Velasco taking turns breaking bottles over Junior's head, is excellent: de los Reyes has a good sense of comic pacing.

Unfortunately, the brilliant touches are only touches. The film as a whole fails because of a failure of nerve. Perez and de los Reyes should have gone all out to do a Monty Python type of film: no plot, ludicrous situations, visual gags, pure fun. Tolentino and Locsin show some comic talent in this film; Myrna Velasco, of the three female leads, is the most delightful. Junior is completely miscast; someone should whisper in his ear that he cannot act, sing, speak, or dance. *Disco Madhouse* is a significant failure because it shows how a brilliant screenwriter and a brilliant director can produce a terrible movie (it's like two geniuses producing a retarded child). Who is to blame? Perhaps LEA Productions, which reportedly did not sympathize with de los Reyes' objectives. Perhaps the bluebird of happiness, which is a totally foreign myth with no local meaning. Perhaps the whole local movie industry, which insists on doing disco movies and does not realize that, by so insisting, it has turned into a giant madhouse. (*TV TIMES*, May 18-24, 1980, p. 9.)



Maryo de los Reyes' *Schoolgirls* (1982) could have been a really entertaining movie. Hints of this occur in the sequences involving Maricel Soriano and Joel Alano. In tongue-in-check style, the two play out a most unconventional courtship. Unfortunately, the rest of the movie fails to match the energy of Soriano and Alano.

Something happens to actors and actresses when Maryo de los Reyes directs: they rise above themselves. Edu Manzano's performance in this film is a good example. Here, he competently portrays the *baduy* college professor falling for someone much younger, but more sophisticated than him. This is Manzano's best performance so far in his short film career.

Similarly, Anita Linda has always excelled in dramatic roles, but in this film, she shows herself excellent also in a tragicomic role. As the alcoholic nightclub owner, she conveys the sense of futility that faces aging women in the big city.

Soriano displays here the kind of tomboyish femininity that is now her hallmark. But Joel Alano clearly outshines everybody in the film, with a performance much better than those in his earlier films. Completely matching Soriano line for line and action for action (and that's a tall order for any young man), Alano ably portrays the young man with mixed feelings towards a girl who does not behave like a girl.

The acting achievements of these young people, however, are ruined by so many other elements of the film. One can't believe, for instance, that a folkhouse as prestigious as *My Father's Moustache* will hire someone who sings as badly as Edgar Mande. The production design is a big letdown from de los Reyes' previous films (where production design normally is a strong element). Here, one cannot understand how Dina Bonnevie can have such an intellectual-looking room (when her mother is a nightclub owner and she herself spends more time with boys than with books), how Manzano can have such an expensive pad (even the most exclusive schools do not pay their teachers that much), how Soriano can live in such a rich house (when her behavior, as well as the behavior of her sister and her mother, smacks of lower middle class), how in the first place all three well-to-do girls are enrolled in an obviously lower-income university.

Even without mentioning the bad dubbing, the bad sound, the wrong pace of editing, and such other technicalities, we can see that the film leaves much to be desired. The screenplay, for instance, features the wrong level of language; it uses swardspeak where it should be using colegiala English (there is a very big difference!). The story is patently ridiculous, with the girls getting into the most incredible situations (who can believe, for instance, that a college girl, after having been raped by a

college professor, is simply going to forget the incident?). The ending is the worst in de los Reyes' movie, with a completely unmotivated and unconvincing attempt by Maya Valdes to patch up everyone's life. (*PARADE*, July 7, 1982, p. 39.)



De los Reyes, screenwriter Tom Adrales, and actress Liza Lorena collaborating on a film.



Gabun—one product of such a collaboration.



Despite the cuts by the censors, Maryo de los Reyes' *Diosa* (1982) remains entertaining, primarily because of its erotic, as well as its mythological, content. The film moves on at a generally fast pace. The sex sequences, having been cut, leave the viewer hanging, but the general idea is kept: Lorna Tolentino as the Diosa is the mysterious combination of sex and violence.

Definitely a serious film, this achievement by Maryo de los Reyes clearly proves that he can certainly produce provocative pieces when he wants to. The subject matter is well worth exploring. The plot, despite its relative complexity for a local film, is easy to follow. Even the acting of Tolentino and Lloyd Samartino is appropriate and adequate.

The problem with the film is mainly technical. The editing, for one, is erratic. The cuts from one identity to another of Tolentino in the forest are well done, but the lack of point-of-view shots in earlier sequences (for example, when Tolentino disappears in front of Samartino's eyes, we do not get a shot of the empty rock at the waterfall) is annoying.

Similarly, the dialogue ranges from the brilliant (because subtle) to the unacceptable (because redundant). Here's an example of something this film has in common with other local films: after Alfie Anido says "I left Joanne for you," he immediately says "*Iniwan ko si Joanne para sa iyo.*" This is what is called INSTANT TRANSLATION. Fortunately, instant translation is kept to a minimum in this film. (*PARADE*, September 1, 1982, p. 35.)



Charito Solis—actress *par excellence*.

LEE, ABAYA, GUILLEN

Much has been made of the fact that Marilou Diaz Abaya is a woman, but one should remember that, although as a person she is a woman first before she is a director, as a film artist she is a director first before she is a woman. To praise her *Brutal* (1980) on the sole basis that it is a woman's film is to be guilty of the basest form of male chauvinism. *Brutal* is a good film; it is only incidentally a woman's film.

What is so good about *Brutal*? One cannot help but first mention the most obvious success of the film—its cinematography. Manolo Abaya photographs the film with both sensitivity and technical expertise. Take, for example, the sequence in which Monica (Amy Austria) dances with a single male partner. The camera caresses Austria, moving with her, almost feeling with her. The mechanical device (apparently an invention of Manolo himself) on which the camera is placed allows the cinematographer to achieve artistic rapport with the actress. The camera, without calling attention to itself, reinforces the acting; that is a true sign of a cinematic artist.

There is the acting. Austria, whose role calls for her to

be alternately silent, juvenile, oppressed, and angry, gives one of her best performances (almost better than the award-winning one she gave in *Jaguar*). By using minimal face movements, she projects the sense of helplessness that defines the character she plays. Instead of evoking in the viewer mere sympathy, Austria is able to evoke the classic emotions of pity and fear. She acts not only oppressed, but tragic.

Similarly, Gina Alajar as the sex-obsessed Cynthia is not only credible, but brilliant. Without overstepping her part as a supporting actress (as she has already had, let us not forget, her own picture), Alajar succeeds in creating Monica's opposite. The result is a kind of ensemble playing currently found only in theater.

Just as brilliant is the screenplay of Ricky Lee, which revolves around the theme of brutalization. Monica is brutalized by Tato (Jay Ilagan), who rapes her physically both before and after their wedding. But just as brutalized is Clara (Charo Santos), who is "raped" intellectually by her imported feminist ideas. Because her feminism is not rooted in sincerity (her clothes are anything but feminist), Clara has to admit at the end of the film that she has used everyone around her, in the same evil way that men use everything around them.

Also brutalized is the minor character Jake (Johnny Delgado), who is emasculated by Clara ("Don't make me a woman," he tells Clara before he leaves her). Perhaps most brutalized of all is the villain Tato, whose existence as a rapist and a drug addict is a symbol of human degradation. Tato's brutalization is pure: he is not torn by guilt or any other recognizable human quality. The shots reinforce Tato's perversion: Ilagan is usually shown distorted, through a low-angle close shot. One sequence is excellent in summing up Tato's character, as well as the

film's theme: Tato beats a drum exactly as an ape would stomp on the ground.

There is, best of all, the direction, whose brilliance explodes in such motifs as the corner shot (in two separate sequences, Jake and Monica are seen in long shots sitting in corners of rooms), which translates in cinematic terms the linguistic idiom "being pushed into a corner." In terms of plotting, the challenge of the screenplay lies in the flashbacks (which are so complicated there is even a crucial flashback within a crucial flashback). Abaya meets the challenge not by resorting to the tried-and-true out-of-focus method, but by mixing sound signals, superimpositions, and simple trust in the viewer's intelligence.

The flashback technique, it is true, is now old-fashioned; *Brutal* may conceivably be better with a straightforward narrative method. But the flashbacks do give the viewer a certain mystery to savor. More important, by forcing the viewer to share Clara's point of view, the film evokes in the viewer Clara's sense of helplessness. In a sense, the film may be said to be the viewer's own attempt to escape his own brutalization.

The best thing about the film is that, after the technical expertise has dazzled the viewer and the story has kept him glued to his seat, there still remains the question that the film raises. For the film is, in reality, a woman's film. It asks the basic question about women: are women being brutalized by present-day society? Cynthia is clearly a victim of physical abuse. Clara is a victim of cultural colonialism. But the film goes beyond the individual problems of the individual characters. *Brutal* talks about marriage itself and suggests that, in all marriages, not just in that of Tato and Monica, the woman is brutalized.

The marriage of Monica is obviously oppressive, but

so is the marriage of Monica's mother (Perla Bautista), who accepts the superior status of men with blind faith. Monica's mother articulates the belief, unfortunately shared by many Filipinas, that a wife should obey all her husband's whims. In the climactic court sequence, the futility of the love of Monica's mother is revealed for all to see.

The relationship of Clara and Jake, however, is just as oppressive, because Jake—despite his liberated views—does not get from Clara the love he seeks. Neither does Clara get from Jake the support she needs; the excellent short sequence with Jake watching television while Clara talks about her writing portrays this. Jake is married, in fact; at the end, Clara appears actually hoping to get married (which, of course, is impossible). Since neither Jake nor Clara actually becomes happy in their relationship, the live-in arrangement is also oppressive. *Brutal* then, raises a valid question; can wives (and lovers) ever be truly liberated? *Brutal* is, in this sense, a woman's film, for only women—understandably—are urgently interested in this question. Like any other good film, this film by Abaya does not answer questions, but only points to the solution: when persons are accepted for what they are (symbolized beautifully by Monica reaching out to Cynthia at the end of the film), brutalization may finally be overcome. (*TV TIMES*, December 28 - January 3, 1981, p. 22.)



In this period in Philippine cinema history when everything seems so bleak, one piece of good news stands out. For the first time ever, a book of screenplays written by a Filipino has been published. This is Ricardo Lee's *Salome/Brutal* (1981), a dual volume featuring stills from, as well as the screenplays of, the much-awarded *Brutal* and the much-heralded *Salome*.

If only because it is a first, this book makes up for all the disappointments of the last few months. In fact, when placed in the context of the recent teenage flurries over idols William Martinez and Gabby Concepcion (flurries which did not help establish them as box-office draws), the fact that a serious book of screenplays has come out must be a minor miracle. Philippine film is now floundering in the wake of Lily Monteverde's five straight box-office flops, the breakdown of a producer's gentleman's agreement to limit the size of advertisements, the uncertainty brought about by a tougher Board of Censors facing possible extinction at the hands of the First Lady, the unionization of at least one of the guilds in the newly-born Film Academy, the relative chaos of movie magazines proliferating at the rate of a new one

every week or so, the precipitous drop in quality of motion pictures in the last half year. Yet, despite all that, a solid book by one of the very few serious scriptwriters in the industry has come out. That is a miracle.

Since *Salome* as of this writing has not yet been released, let me study only the screenplay of *Brutal* right now. There are a number of surprises in store for the careful reader and viewer. One of them is glaring: the lead character in the script is Clara (played by Charo Santos) and not Monica (played by Amy Austria).

It is Clara who develops in the course of the story. She starts out thinking that she is a liberated woman, living with a married man who has left his wife, entering a field women do not always enter (police reporting), eager to champion the cause of Monica—a person she feels has been oppressed because of her womanhood. As the script develops, however, Clara soon realizes that she is actually a sham liberated woman, since her relationship with her lover is exploitative, her skills as an investigative reporter are not adequate, and her motivations for pursuing Monica's case are suspect.

With Jake (played by Johnny Delgado), for example, Clara is shown as being passionless. In a sequence handled differently by director Marilou Diaz Abaya, Clara keeps talking in the middle of having sex with Jake. (In the film, Santos and Delgado talk sitting up in bed.) Lee's point is clear: Clara cannot step out of herself in her relationship with Jake. In the party sequence, in a part omitted by Abaya from the film, a transvestite tells Clara that she looks like a woman. Again, the line drives home Clara's lack of femininity.

When she goes deeper into the case of Monica, however, Clara realizes her own selfish motives for being liberated. Being liberated gives her some kind of identity in place of the genuine one she lacks. Jake articulates the

screenwriter's point of view. "That's true, Clara," says Jake. "*Hindi ka naman talaga interesado sa relationship natin. Nang maipakita mo sa ibang meron kang liberated relationship. Maski sa trabaho mo. Hindi ka naman talaga interesado kay Monica. Gusto mo lang makapagsalita siya, dahil gusto mong makuha ang 'storya niya. Ginagamit mo lang siya. Ginagamit mo lang kami. Lahat kami para sa'yo ay mga kasong puwedeng maisulat. Hindi ako magtataka kung balang araw ay magsulat ka rin tungkol sa pagsasama natin.*" The point is again clear: Clara is using other people to achieve some kind of image as a liberated person.

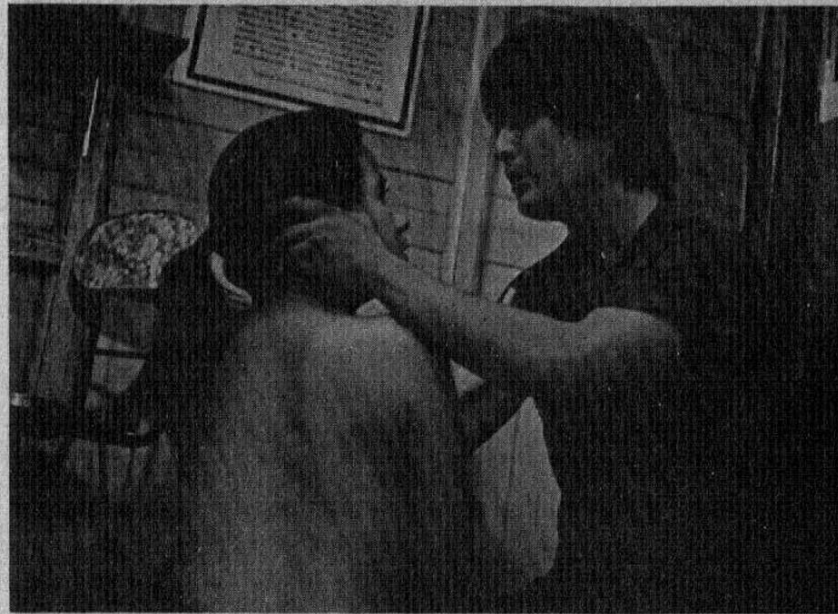
Soon, Clara herself realizes how selfish she has become. In a crucial scene (not emphasized in the film), Clara confesses to Monica, who is still silent, that she has been extremely selfish. Clara confides that she has been using Monica to further her own ends.

The character development of Clara is clear from the screenplay. In the film, however, it is Monica's character which becomes the focus. In fact, Monica's character is the weakest element of the film. Questions have already been raised about the film, such as the relevance of the ballet sequences, the over-emphasis on the supporting character Cynthia (played by Gina Alajar) to the point where she becomes a lead actress, the inconsistency of the point of view (presumably Clara's), and the lack of proper psychological study of Monica's motivations. None of these objections can be raised against the screenplay, since the screenplay is not about Monica, but about Clara.

Lee's screenplay is about Clara, while Abaya's film is about Monica. Even if—as the Manunuri see the film—Abaya's film is about the four women (Clara, Cynthia, Monica and Aling Charing), it is still not at all the same as the screenplay, which clearly makes Clara not only the

point of view, but the central character of the story.

I am not saying that the screenplay is better than the film. In his speech at the book launching on July 24, 1981, in fact, Lee insisted that the screenplay should not be compared with the film. But screenplays are always compared with films, especially when—as in this case—both screenplay and film are excellent. Using Jesse Ejercito's analogy of the screenplay as the architectural blueprint for a movie, we can say that one should not judge a building by its design, but by whether it stands the test of time. Similarly, *Brutal* the movie should not be judged by *Brutal* the screenplay. But the movie becomes more understandable when the screenplay is read, strangely enough not because they are the same, but because they are different. (*TV TIMES, August 2-8, 1981, p. 6.*)



Lorna Tolentino and Michael Sandico in a non-exploitative scene in *Moral*.



Filipino screenplays have been published before (just recently Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night* and Clodualdo del Mundo Jr.'s *Maynila Sa Mga Kuko Ng Liwanag* in *The Review*), but this is the first time screenplays written by a Filipino have ever been published in book form. If only because it is a first of its kind, Ricardo Lee's *Salome/Brutal* (Cine Gang, 1981) is a signal event in the history of both Philippine cinema and Philippine literature.

But Lee's volume is not valuable merely because it antedates similar efforts by our other screenwriters. It is valuable in a more significant sense: Lee is probably our best screenwriter and these are his best works.

It is as screenplays that the two texts in Lee's volume should be first approached. Just like foreign screenplays which can stand on their own even in the absence of their respected films, Lee's screenplays deserve a close reading as literary texts, even if their cinematic values are thus unjustly deemphasized.

Taken together, the two works reveal Lee's primary concern—the plight of women in Filipino society. Since he is neither a woman nor a feminist, Lee's concern is

thematic, not personal nor ideological. He explores the relationship between woman and society; he places women in situations which call for them to assert their womanhood while, at the same time, acquiescing to the demands society imposes on them.

Salome in *Salome*, for example, is cursed, as far as society is concerned. She is a nymphomaniac of sorts; at the very least, she is a seducer who deliberately entraps men. That is how the "Greek chorus" of Aling Tale, Aling Salud, and Aling Basyon sees her. Even the young Boboy perceives Salome as a temptress, mixing her up with the mermaids who are said to inhabit the sea. Society, in other words, has only one name for a woman who obeys the demands of her body—the unprintable name of prostitute.

In herself, however, Salome is no prostitute. Lee constructs a deliberately ambiguous character who first lies about Jimmy attempting to rape her (thus implying that she is a woman ready to kill for her honor), then just as facilely reveals that she has had an affair with Jimmy. The fact that she does not reveal everything, however, shows how complex her character is, far too complex for Filipino society, which wants its women pure and simple.

Lee's thematic concern about the role of women in Philippine society is even more obvious in *Brutal*. Here, the main character Clara is a journalist trying very hard to appear liberated. She is liberated, but not in the sense that American feminists are. She follows the rules of liberation much too literally: she cooks only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays; she pays half the apartment rent; she takes offense when a transvestite kids her about her clothes. In other words, she concerns herself too much with the external qualities of the liberated woman, without thinking first of the internal es-

sence of liberation. (In contrast, American feminists appear very much like other women on the outside, but inside, where it counts, they are obsessed with the idea of women's rights and female philosophy and male chauvinism.) In fact, ironically enough, it is Clara's boyfriend Jake who penetrates her facade: he correctly argues that Clara is just using him to prove her being liberated. He has become, in other words, an "object," something just as objectionable to true feminists as a "sex object."

Lee, however, does not let Clara become a model for women, because she is clearly a warped character. Lee cleverly contrasts the hypocritical Clara to the honest Cynthia, who knows that she is using her body to survive. Similarly, Monica serves as a corrective to the pseudo-intellectualizing Clara: Monica is all experience without the abstraction brought about by thinking. Even Aling Charing as the typical Filipina wife (suffering silently under the chauvinistic whip of her husband) has something to teach Clara: false liberation is still much better than true subservience.

What Lee does in both *Salome* and *Brutal*, then, is to create different types of women. Although he does not favor any single type, it is clear that Lee disdains the structures that society has created to oppress women. Whether women want to be long-suffering wives or out-and-out prostitutes or adulterers or gossips, Lee suggests that society should let them be. Let women be what they want, not what men want.

It is interesting to note that the movie of *Brutal* uses Monica as the central character. In the screenplay, Clara is clearly the central character, since she is not only the point of view and the narrative consciousness, but also the character who develops because of the plot. In a short speech he delivered at the book launching on July 24,

1981, Lee claimed that the screenplay as published is neither his original script nor the filmscript (like published foreign screenplays). Instead, the text is a third thing altogether. In fact, the text is a different thing from the film, at least as far as the central character is concerned. It may be even be different in terms of theme; the film understandably focuses on the question of how one woman (Monica) can be degraded by society, but the screenplay focuses on how all women (as represented by Clara) are forced by society into molds.

If the two texts show how concerned Lee is with the plight of women, they also display two of his technical contributions to Philippine screenwriting. The first is the image of the mute actress. In *Brutal*, Monica is silent for most of the scenes set in the present, because she is in shock. In *Salome*, Salome is similarly silent at end of the text, since she is, in Lee's words, "*mistula nang patay*" (dead to the world because she has killed the man who was her whole world).

The second is the flashback, which is Lee's major formal weapon in approaching his theme. In *Brutal*, after 14 sequences set in the present, Lee goes to a long flashback narrated by Cynthia (sequences 15 to 52). When he returns to Clara's story (sequences 53 to 66), he is back in the present, but not for long. He returns to the past through Monica's story (sequences 68 and 69). The film, of course, ends with Clara's story (sequence 70) being resolved. (Note that only sequence 67 is really devoted to Cynthia's story.)

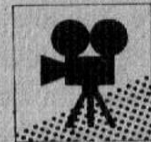
The flashback is even more useful to Lee in *Salome*, where the device carries much of the plot. After establishing the situation (sequences 1 and 2), for example, Lee goes straight to his first flashback (sequences 3 to 10), where Salome falsely claims that Jimmy tried to rape her. After a short return to the present (sequences 11 to 19),

Lee uses another flashback (sequences 20 to 31) to show that Salome is really partly to blame. The murder has to go to court (sequences 32 to 39), but Lee soon returns to the past again in an isolated flashback (sequence 40). After setting up Kario as his last narrator (sequences 41 to 57), Lee reveals through Kario the entire story in flashback (sequences 58 to 75, with a brief return to the present in 69). The ending is obligatory (sequences 76 to 79), but Lee improves on the ending of *Brutal* by including a symbolic, non-literal sequence (sequence 80) as his final word.

In other words, Lee's mind travels from present to past in regular fashion. He is dealing, after all, not only with the problem of women today, but the problem that has been with us as long ago as we can remember. Even if Filipino women have more opportunities than their American feminist counterparts, they are still very much in need of liberation. Lee's liberational insight, however, is probably correct: Filipino women should not see liberation only in terms of equal rights, but in terms of being fully and truly women. (*OBSERVER*, August 18, 1981, pp. 44-45.)



Gina Alajar as *Salome*. (Photo by Ricardo Lee)



Once again, a Filipino filmmaker has transcended the technical, temporal, and financial constraints of the local motion picture industry and produced a classic. *Salome* (1981), only the third film of Laurice Guillen, is one of the best Filipino films ever made.

Everything works in this film. There is, first of all, the excellent screenplay by Ricardo Lee (now available in book form). Lee's screenplay revolves around the notion of truth. The theme of the screenplay is articulated by the judge (Francisco Trinidad). "Sa batas ng tao at sa batas ng Diyos," he says, "laging isang malaking problema and pagtitiyak kung ano ang tutoo at ano ang hindi." Truth, indeed, is always a problem, in this film as in real life.

The question is, simply put, does Gina Alajar kill Dennis Roldan to defend her honor or not? The film is structured around three different answers to that question. The first answer is given by Alajar to the inves-

tigator. The second is given again by Alajar, this time to the defense attorney (Carpi Asturias). The third—and correct—answer is given by Johnny Delgado to the town idiot (Bruno Punzalan).

In the first answer or version, Alajar is portrayed as an innocent barrio lass who becomes the victim of an attempted rape. In the second version, Alajar falls for Roldan. Their affair is discovered by Delgado, who vents his anger through raping Alajar. She kills Roldan only when Roldan insists on continuing their relationship. In the third version, Delgado forces Alajar to kill Roldan, as a kind of "punishment" for her unfaithfulness.

It is impossible here to study the details of the screenplay, but one example should suffice to show how careful Lee is in his writing. In the first version, during the murder scene, Roldan says, while attacking Alajar, "Pag natikman mo to'y siguradong hahanap-hanapin mo ako." In other words, he assures her that she will like sex. In the second version, he says, "Hahanap-hanapin mo ang ginagawa natin." He adds, "Gusto mo 'to, di ba?" The first line recalls the first version, with the important difference that now, the affair is full-blown, rather than aborted. The second line looks forward to the third version, where it is Alajar and not Roldan who says "Gusto mo 'to?" (In the film, Alajar actually says "Gusto mo 'to, di ba?"—an improvement on Lee's script.) The versions are, thus, clearly differentiated from each other; on the other hand, they are clearly similar.

The screenplay is unquestionably first-rate. But so is the direction. A careful comparison of the screenplay and the film shows that Guillen follows practically everything in the screenplay, but that is not what makes Guillen good. If that were all she did, she would be no better than lesser directors who can follow a screenplay just as closely. Guillen adds a sensitivity that makes the film

less abstract than it appears from Lee's screenplay. Instead of being merely a study of the several faces of truth, the film becomes a powerful portrait of an individual who is repressed by her environment, both physical and social.

In the film, Alajar is seldom photographed by herself in close-up. Instead, Guillen usually situates Alajar in the middle of forces which call for her destruction. An early example of the way Guillen improves on the screenplay occurs in the first version. At the beach, Bongchi Miraflor has left. Alajar bids goodbye to the sitting Punzalan, the town idiot. Roldan is in the far background. As the camera remains focused on Punzalan, we see in the background Roldan intercept Alajar. The meaning is clear: the idiot (here representing the narrow-minded community) is ever-present, as Alajar, a small figure disappearing in the distance, is accosted by the man whose size matches hers (or whose personality therefore completes hers). In the screenplay, Lee thinks of the shot in completely different terms: he asks for "tatlong levels ng direksiyon ng mga taong naglalakad," an abstraction that fits his screenplay but not Guillen's interpretation.

In more conventional terms, direction is often praised if the acting is good. Even in these terms, Guillen's direction merits high praise. Only Roldan fails to hold the screen with his presence (he is, after all, a neophyte actor). Delgado gives a performance that surpasses even his award-winning ones. His is a particularly difficult role. He portrays a man too weak to fight his wife's lover face to face, who has to ask his wife to kill the lover for him, a man perverse enough to watch his wife making love to her lover, a man strong enough to haul his nymphomaniac wife from barrio to barrio, a man decisive enough to kill her and himself in a grand final gesture.

A measure of Guillen's skill (as well as the talents of her

several actors) is the way the smaller roles are performed. Armida Siguion-Reyna is the archetypal devil-woman, a triumph in acting, since she is far from that in real life. Punzalan steals the show with his bravura portrayal of the idiot. Even Miraflor, though still exhibiting the unnaturalness of child actors, is credible.

The plum role, of course, is Alajar, and Alajar could not have done it any better. Alajar has been an excellent actress for some time now, but in this film, she surpasses even herself. Her role calls for three different interpretations (one for each version), but she is able to distinguish her three selves very well, through her body movements and her voice control. To Alajar, one can only say, "Bravo."

The technical achievements of this film are numerous, not the least of which is the choice of location (a function of the production designer). The cinematography is sensitive. The final shot of Alajar and Delgado being swallowed by the waves—only Romeo Vitug could have done that. Congratulations, Laurice and Bancroft and Armida (who, despite all the controversies, is still the film's moving force)! Let's have a second classic at once! (*TV TIMES*, August 16-22, p. 35.)

(opposite) Sandy Andolong and Gina Alajar share a tragicomic moment in *Moral*.



Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Moral* (1982) is the story of four women—a promiscuous drug addict (Lorna Tolentino) who loves a student activist (Michael Sandico); an inept singer (Gina Alajar) who sleeps her way to fame; a lawyer (Sandy Andolong) who loves a homosexual husband (Juan Rodrigo); and a teenaged bride (Anna Marin) who finds her personal ambitions frustrated by her male chauvinist husband (Ronald Bregendahl)

The film tackles major feminist issues, such as the right to work, abortion, the double standard in sexual behavior, prostitution, the querida system, and motherhood.

Outstanding performances by Gina Alajar, Lorna Tolentino, Michael Sandico, Mia Gutierrez, Dexter Doria, Laurice Guillen, among others, make this film one of the best films of 1982. (*PANORAMA*, December 26, 1982, p. 14.)



So much praise has been heaped on Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Moral* (1982) that the viewer unfamiliar with the sociology of Philippine cinema might be misled into thinking that it is the greatest Filipino film of all time.

Actually, *Moral* is very good, but it is not that good.

Let us take the good things about it first. It is clearly one of the first Filipino films to take women seriously. In bad films before *Moral*, women are usually prostitutes, rape victims, or *martir* housewives. In other words, they are hardly human beings. Even in good films before *Moral*, women are usually crazy (as in Gerry de Leon's Rizal films), almost crazy (as in *Salome*), prostitutes with golden hearts (as in *Jaguar* and *Aliw*), killers (as in *Brutal*) or unrealistic do-gooders (as in *Bakit Bughaw ang Langit*). Rarely have women in Filipino films been real human beings.

In *Moral*, the women speak, laugh, love, lust, and live like real women we know. More precisely, they are very much like the women we turn out not to really know. *Moral* is advertised as woman's film made by a woman. That it is.

The best moments in the film, therefore, involve women. Lorna Tolentino's distaste for children (since she looks at the sexual act as absolutely divorced from procreation) is cleverly shown in disastrous encounters with kids. Sandy Andolong's love for her homosexual husband, Juan Rodrigo, defies all masculine reason; as in *Making Love*, women are shown with never-dying loves that can forgive even homosexuality in their husbands. Anna Marin's awakening to her value as a human being (with the same right to work as men) is captured well in her loveless bed scenes with her husband, Ronald Bregendahl.

The best lines in the film come from feminist jargon. "Ang babae'y ipinanganak upang manganak," says Marin's mother-in-law. "Ginagamit lang ako," complains Marin. These are shades of the early women's liberation movement in the United States, when the big thing was to get the ERA approved.

This brings us to what is not that good in the film. The film is solidly entrenched in the early liberation movement, when women thought all they had to get were equal rights and everything would turn out fine. Thus, in the film, the moment Marin insists that she become a working wife, her male chauvinist husband immediately agrees. But that is the whole problem with the early, naive approach (as today's feminists realize). Male chauvinism is not that easy to get rid of. In reality, no male chauvinist husband is about to let his wife get away with such a victory. She may well work, but he will find ways to get back at her. He can take a mistress, or leave the care of the children to her anyway (thus saddling her with two full-time jobs), or make all the major decisions himself anyway (such as where to live, what car to buy, how to invest). In other words, Marin's victory in the film is not only impossible (given Bregendahl's charac-

terization), but even if possible in reality, is not much of a victory.

Tolentino's inverted-male character is also a case in point. She runs after men the way men are supposed to run after women. She looks at men as pure sex objects. That is equality, the early feminists would say. But today's feminists know that aping a wrong is not undoing the wrong. In other words, it is just as bad to look at men as sex objects as it is bad to look at women that way. Today's feminists insist that women's liberation involves liberating men as well. To look at a human being as a sex object (no matter what his gender) is wrong. It doesn't make a bit of difference if it is a man or a woman doing the wrong thing; what is wrong is wrong. The film tries to remedy the situation by showing Tolentino reforming and becoming (of all incredible things) an orphanage volunteer worker. That ending for Tolentino is not only impossible (given her characterization), but also a cop-out. Just like any chauvinist of either sex, she should have been made to suffer for her sins.

All this does not mean that I do not like *Moral*. On the contrary, I love it. I think it is a breakthrough of sorts. I think much of the praise heaped upon it is earned. But I do not think it is a great film. It is, first of all, not Ricardo Lee's best (his best is still *Salome*). It is Marilou Diaz-Abaya's best, but then, she's coming only from *Tanikala* and *Brutal*. It will definitely be the most most-discussed film of 1982, if only because male viewers will hate its distorted male characters, female viewers will cheer its liberated female characters, and homosexual viewers will applaud the way the film sets up homosexual love as the only tender, totally human love (in contrast, the bed scenes of Marin, Tolentino, and Andolong are all exploitative).

(TV TIMES, December 19-25, 1982, p. 4.)



The most celebrated Filipino screenwriter, Ricardo Lee, has published still another screenplay, that of director Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Moral* (1982).

Those provoked by the movie should buy the book *Moral* (Seven-Star Productions, 1982), in order to catch the finer points of the Abaya masterpiece. The viewer-reader can also compare the screenplay with the finished film, a procedure that is guaranteed to sharpen both viewing and reading skills.

The book, just like the film, deals with the modern Filipina—her neuroses, lusts, desires, ambitions, and loves. None of the Filipinas in the book match the old stereotypes of the *martir*, the victim and the prostitute. Instead, Lee offers us Filipinas who are liberated like Joey (Lorna Tolentino in the film), mature like Sylvia (Sandy Andolong), able to take criticism like Kathy (Gina Alajar), unwilling to remain a housewife like Maritess (Anna Marin), and strong like Nita (Mia Gutierrez).

Some interesting parts of the book have been changed or deleted in the finished film. One sequence, for exam-

ple, shows Joey with her father. In another sequence, Joey tells Sylvia about a traumatized boy.

Lee and Abaya (together with their producer Jesse Ejercito, one of the very few producers to whom art is as important as commerce) work very well together. Their *Brutal*, for instance, was a real collaboration, instead of merely a director's interpretation of a writer's script. *Moral* is another true collaboration. Many of the effects in the film, in fact, are directorial touches, not present explicitly in the screenplay. Lee is lucky to have Abaya as the director of his feminist films. Similarly, Abaya is lucky to have Lee as screenwriter of her serious films.

Lee has started what should be a continuing practice among writers and producers. The budget for local production runs into a million and a half pesos. Surely, all local producers can afford to have their screenplays published. What Lee is doing on his own should be adopted as standard practice by the industry as a whole. (*TIMES JOURNAL*, December 30, 1982, p. 22.)



Lorna Tolentino in *Moral*.

MARIO O'HARA

Mario O'Hara's *Kastilyong Buhangin* (1980), the latest attempt by a serious local director to produce a serious film, is more of a failure than a success.

This film achieves thematic unity through the use of a simple, almost trite symbol—the "kastilyong buhangin" or sand castle. The symbol first appears when the young boy and the young girl construct a sand castle on a beach in a sleepy fishing town. As the camera slowly zooms into a close shot of the castle, the fragile structure is trampled by the feet of several children. The meaning is obvious: the life the mature man and the mature woman will try to build will be destroyed by other people.

As the film progresses, it becomes clear that the man and the woman are indeed doomed not to have a permanent life together. Even when Lito Lapid and Nora Aunor, now young adults, reconstruct the sand castle on an urban beach, the impending doom is near: the young couple will not be allowed by society to live together in peace.

As the film ends, another shot of a sand castle fills the screen. There is always hope that things will turn out for

the best, but because violence has claimed Lapid's life, the shot is ironic. There is no hope for Lapid, who is dead. There is no hope left for Aunor, even if she is alive. Sand castles, by their very nature, have to disappear at high tide.

O'Hara's theme is clear: man is the victim of circumstances. Lapid is sentenced to youth prison for killing Aunor's uncle, although the killing is clearly shown in the film to be unpremeditated and even accidental. He is sentenced to adult prison for killing a neighbor, although the killing is shown as self-defense. Similarly, Lapid's attack on the gangster at the end is as much a product of fear for his own life as it is revenge for the death of his friend. In a sense, Lapid is guiltless, both legally and morally. Despite his innocence, however, he is convicted, discriminated against, and finally killed.

The film also succeeds in putting violence in its rightful place. The bathroom sequence at the end is particularly well-done. It is a violent scene, with ruthless men going at each other's throats the way only caged animals do. The instruments of killing are crude, makeshift knives, far from the more sophisticated, less bloody rifles and guns of non-prisoners. There is blood all over the room, flowing from the multiple stab wounds of Lapid and the gangsters. O'Hara succeeds in balancing gore with significance; blood is there, but it is there for a purpose. The scene is violent, but only because the film can end only in violence.

A directorial decision, however, is at the root of the film's failure. O'Hara (also the screenwriter) chooses to begin and end the film with Aunor in the middle of a recording session. Aunor, now a popular singer, cannot continue singing the theme song because of the memories which crowd into her mind. While she waits for her composure to return, she relives in her mind the

entire experience with Lapid. In other words, the whole story turns out to be a catharsis of sorts for Aunor.

This narrative frame (Aunor in the present/Lapid and Aunor in the past/Aunor back in the present) fails because the whole story of Lapid revolves around the theme of being a victim. In the flashback portion (practically the entire movie), there is no indication that there is any hope for victims of societal prejudice. Like Lapid, in other words, Aunor should be a victim of society.

In the final sequence, however, Aunor says that she is now free, meaning, one supposes, that she is now free of her past, of circumstances, of society. Such an ending betrays the theme of the Lapid story. If there is anything we learn from Lapid's plight, it is that there is absolutely no hope for the poor and the oppressed, that victims will always be victims, that man is forever enslaved by forces much bigger than himself. The film should end with Aunor dying too, or at least failing to finish her song. To have an optimistic ending after such a pessimistic middle is to lose the entire unity of the film.

On the whole, then, if we ignore the narrative frame of the film, *Kastilyong Buhangin* is one of our more significant films. It says what has to be said about human nature—that it is not supreme, that it is subject to various attacks, that it is brutal and violent. If we take the film as it stands, however, with the opening and the closing sequences of Aunor at the recording studio, the film fails. This is a film that almost says something significant, then loses its nerve. The film affirms precisely what it has taken so many pains to deny. The film fails precisely where it should have succeeded. (*TV TIMES*, September 7-13, 1980, p. 56.)



There's no doubt about it: Mario O'Hara is a major director. In *Bakit Bughaw and Langit?* (1981), he tackles the same basic situation Lino Brocka deals with in *Bona*. In the comparison Brocka suffers. Where *Bona* fails, *Bakit Bughaw and Langit?* succeeds.

The situation is ordinary enough: a woman (Nora Aunor) falls in love with a man (Dennis Roldan). To say that she "loves" him, however, is an oversimplification, because he is a retardate. What she feels is a mixture of pity, sympathy, maternal love, and—of course—sexual love for him. On the other hand, though a mere child as far as his brain is concerned, he is physically grown-up, as portrayed in a clever drunken scene where he mimics raping the mistress of a neighbor.

The film opens with her family (selfish mother, lazy father, and haughty sister) moving into a small apartment compound in Metro Manila. The film ends with her family leaving the compound and she herself leaving not just the compound, but her family as well. Between opening and ending, the film explores the way family and community inevitably stifle genuine love.

Her family treats her in the tried-and-tested Nora Aunor fashion: they make her an *atsay*. Aunor, having played this role for the nth time, makes full use of her experience. She is convincing as the oppressed younger sister. In fact, she is not only convincing, but brilliant. The lessons of *Atsay* and *Bona* have not been lost on her.

Like the rest of the apartment community, Aunor's father treats Roldan as a freak. Roldan is still a man after all, says the father, who refuses to believe that Aunor is safe in the company of the retardate. O'Hara suggests in two scenes that, indeed, Roldan is a full-grown man, sexually speaking. In the drunken scene, Roldan attacks a woman already established to be a sex object (the woman is there only because of her sexual attractiveness to a philandering husband). In a separate scene, the community homosexual takes Roldan inside his parlor, ostensibly to attack him sexually (the use of double entendre words is significant).

In a crucial early scene, Aunor mistakes Roldan's sleep-walking for a sexual attack. Her shift in attitude towards him, in fact, is possible only because of this early scene. In a later scene, she sees him naked. O'Hara dwells on Aunor's face, to suggest that she is not just amused, but actually intrigued. O'Hara, however, does not take the easy way out: he does not allow the relationship of Aunor and Roldan to become actually physical. If there is a sexual love between the two, it is too deep inside them to be articulated.

True enough, there are some glaring mistakes. The most obvious occurs when Roldan utters the key line "Bakit bughaw and langit?" The camera pans up to the sky as expected, but instead of the sky being clear and blue (which is what "bughaw" means), the sky is cloudy and white. The symbol is totally destroyed by such a simple cinematographic mistake. In fact, almost all of the

mistakes in the film can be attributed to the cinematographer, who seems not to know how to light a set. Night scenes appear brighter than day scenes, light filtering into houses has no clear sources, camera movements are jerky, shadows are not expressive. O'Hara should learn from this film: he should not use the same cinematographer again.

Aunor's performance here proves that her winning of the Urian Award for *Bona* is justified. She remains one of the best of our young actresses, especially in the hands of a director who understands film acting. In a film whose screenplay has undistinguished (in fact, even inane) dialogue, Aunor is able to express her emotions primarily through her silent moments. The mark of a true film actress is her behavior when she does not speak. Aunor is destined to become an all-time Best Actress. It is appropriate that Anita Linda—herself an all-time Best Actress—plays her mother in this film.

The acting cannot be faulted, not even the acting of newcomer Roldan. The community actors (or bit players) are particularly excellent. Apparently mostly PETA actors, the bit players manage to convey what O'Hara seems to be bent on conveying, namely, that if people would just leave other people alone, life would be a million times happier. The retardate suffers enormous psychological, even physical (he is chained, he is beaten up) oppression, all at the hands of the community. (Is O'Hara now directing films which develop the character he acted in Brocka's *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang*?) Only the fringe persons in a community really are important, says O'Hara. Aunor, the discarded sister, is one. Roldan, the retarded ex-basketball player, is another. In a community as narrow-minded as that of the apartment compound (and O'Hara really symbolizes here the entire Philippine—even world—community), persons who

really care, really love, really live, are doomed. (TV TIMES, March 15-21, 1981, p. 14.)



Two scenes from *Bakit Bughaw ang Langit?*

POE: ACTOR AND DIRECTOR

Augusto Buenaventura's *Magiting at Pusakal* (1972), can boast of something that very few local movies have. It is spiced by clever and imaginative dialogue.

The story is typical of war pictures. Fernando Poe, Jr. is a guerrilla leader being hunted by the Japanese. Joseph Estrada is a thief who thinks of war only as a chance to steal. The two get involved in a gold hunt, where Rosanna Ortiz is bandit leader.

Magiting at Pusakal could have failed if Buenaventura had not insisted on realistic dialogue. The dialogue is earthy, vulgar, naughty, and real. Double entendre saves the unnecessary sex scenes between Estrada and Ortiz. Estrada's *putang-ina* saves the unbelievable fight scene at the end. (Although no one is surprised at *son of a bitch* in American movies, the audience still giggled at Estrada's Tagalog curse.) There are a few standard clichés (such as "I'm not a girl, I'm a woman"), but they are insignificant in the context of the whole production.

There are other notable achievements by Buenaventura in this film. The fistfight sequence has faster cuts than most local fight scenes. There is an attempt to make

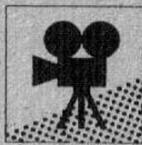
the remarks against the Japanese apply to today's oppressors. There is also an attempt, although half-hearted, to show Poe and Estrada as Butch Cassidy characters.

But it is principally the dialogue that makes up for the directorial inadequacies of Buenaventura. The faults of the film are legion. Examples are Poe killing the entire Japanese army (if Poe were really a guerrilla leader we would have won the war), the shaky handheld camera during the river fight sequence, the abrupt change in Estrada at the end, the bare back of Ortiz (to show her off, although there is no relation to the plot), and the cursilista-like warning against masturbation. With these faults, any other film would have been a disaster.

But *Magiting at Pusakal* succeeds, even if only a little bit. (*PHILIPPINES HERALD*, April 24, 1972, p. 15.)

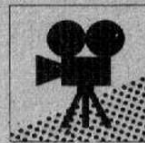


Poe behind the camera.



Ronwaldo Reyes's *At Muling Nagbaga ang Lupa* (1979) keeps the Western format, although not blatantly. A wealthy businessman, out to buy the land of the peasants, tries the usual formula: money and terrorism. Fernando Poe, Jr., a policeman, dares to fight the businessman and, of course, wins. There is the usual showdown between the good guys (the outnumbered policemen) and the bad guys (the hired goons), with the good guys predictably winning. Although he does not end up as spotless as he used to, Poe keeps the John Wayne image of his earlier films: no villain is allowed to give him even a slight skin wound.

This film, however, at least tries to convey a social message: money and guns cannot cow the lowly peasant into giving up his land. There are at least no horses and no six-guns. But the bars reappear as beerhouses and the lovely lady (Beth Bautista) still needs help. There are a lot of good intentions evident in *At Muling Nagbaga ang Lupa*, but the Western format renders all these intentions moot. Until Filipino actors stop acting like cowboys, nobody is going to take them seriously. (*TV TIMES*, May 27, - June 2, 1979, p. 9.)

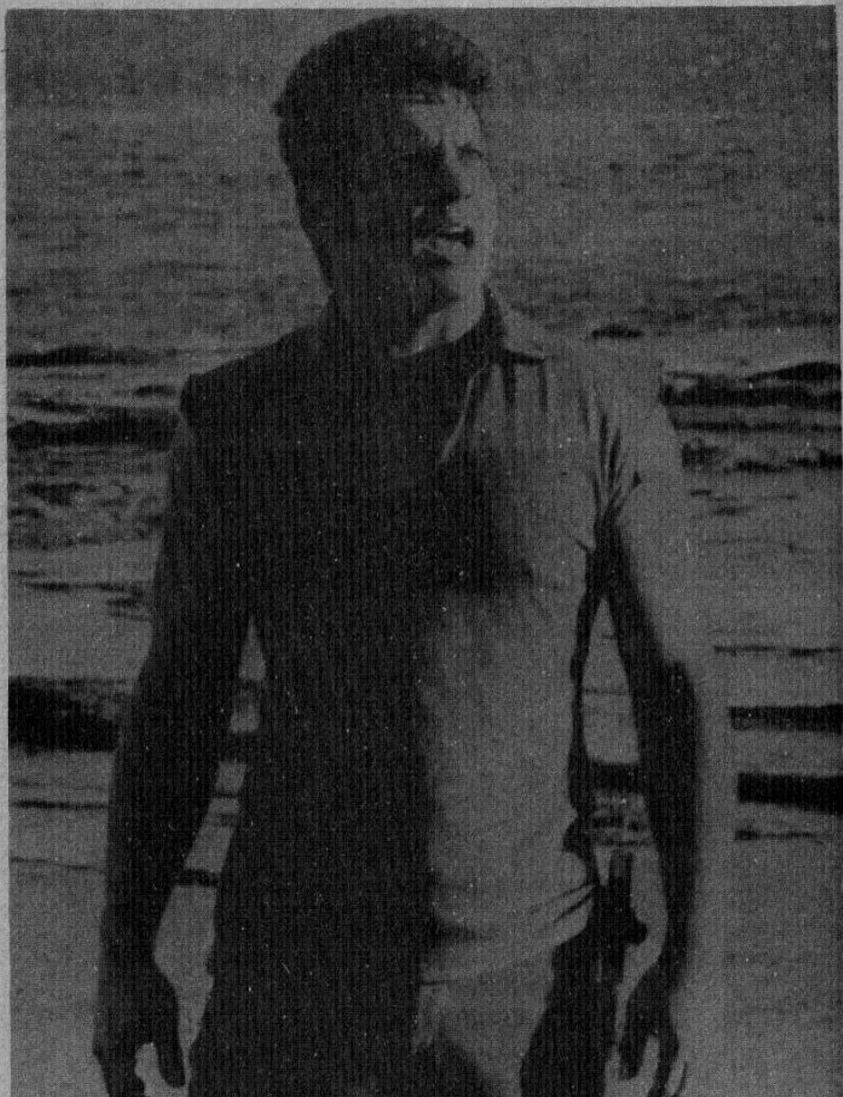


Fernando Poe, Jr. is one of the remaining superstars who automatically command an audience today. Pablo Vergara's *Mahal ... Saan Ka Nanggaling Kagabi?* (1979) cannot resist showing Poe in his characteristic fistfight form, but the fight lasts for barely a minute. The rest of the film is refreshingly different from Poe's typical cowboy role.

Poe plays a naive husband whose wife Susan Roces sews baby clothes for a living. Poe is a model husband until he gets promoted and becomes a salesman. Prodded by his sidekick Dencio Padilla, Poe discovers the world of extramarital sex: beerhouses, sauna baths, night swimming, single women's apartments. He repents at the end, of course, but only because his wife refuses to become a modern-day Sisa (the so-called *martir* complex). A gratuitous (and ridiculous) murder brings the couple together again, to live as happily ever after as they can.

As a film, *Mahal ... Saan Ka Nanggaling Kagabi?* has little to recommend it, but it should be recommended anyway for all wives who wonder where their husbands go

when they claim to be doing overtime work at the office. The film will probably be protested by all husbands. Poe will find himself in the same situation as Rod Navarro in the film—the object of hatred for having told the truth. (TV TIMES, July 8-14, 1979, p. 9.)



The King of Philippine Movies.



Fernando Poe, Jr.'s *Ang Maestro* (1981) is not really an artistic movie, but it is a commercial film done artistically. One can fault many things in the film, such as the mixed-up production design, the coincidences, the sloppy sound engineering, the superficial characterization, the unrealistic form itself, but after all is said against it, the film still captivates. Perhaps it is the right control exerted by the director on cinematography and editing. As an action film, this one is in very good taste. One hopes Poe will soon tackle something of the scope and insight of *Lion of the Desert*. (PARADE, September 20, 1981, p. 26.)

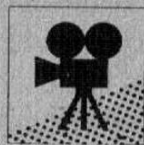


Like the typical Poe movie, Pablo Santiago's *Bandido sa Sapang Bato* (1981) has lots of fistfights and gunbattles. The stunts look dated, however. The non-action sequences, sad to say, are far from exciting; in fact, much of the film is totally boring.

This is not an FPJ Production film, and therefore, does not have the visual excitement, technical care, and larger-than-life ambiance characteristic of Poe's own productions. *Bandido sa Sapang Bato* boasts only of Poe and of nothing else. Vic Vargas, for instance, is given no chance to show his acting talents, since his dialogue is limited to the phrase "Anak ng Damulag." Ruel Vernal is shot at unflattering angles. Paquito Diaz comes out very briefly. The women are either annoying (like Rosemarie Gil, who tries too hard to bring to life a lifeless role) or superfluous (like Marianne dela Riva and Martha Sevilla).

Unlike in *Maestro*, there is no conscious attempt in *Bandido sa Sapang Bato* to think out the story in logical terms. Why, for instance, are the fake policemen not exposed? Why does Vernal not tell Poe (his close friend) that the police did not kill Hero Bautista? Why does Poe not kill Vernal (he only wounds him, though he shoots pointblank), when everyone else Poe shoots is killed with a shot (one close-up even shows a Poe victim shot between the eyes)? What does Gil want to achieve with her trail of blood? Why is there a melodramatic sequence at the end with everybody masked? Why does Gil become insane?

The title itself is remarkably ill-thought-out. Who is the bandit of Sapang Bato? It should be Vargas, but he dies in the middle of the film. It could be Poe, but he does not live in Sapang Bato, but in town. It cannot be Paquito Diaz or Romy Diaz or any of the villains, because nobody really knows them nor do they appear on screen for any significant length of time. In short, there is no "bandido ng Sapang Bato." One wishes there had not been a film entitled *Bandido sa Sapang Bato*. (TV PARADE, November 28 - December 4, 1981, p. 34.)



Fenando Poe, Jr.'s *Pagbabalik ng Panday* (1981) is one of the best films of the 1981 Metro Manila Film Festival. In terms of what it sets out to do, in fact, it is even better than *Kisapmata*, though *Kisapmata* tries to achieve more. *Pagbabalik ng Panday* aims merely to entertain children (that is what Fernando Poe, Jr., claims) and entertain them it certainly does, if one listens to the screams, squeals, and applause of the audience in crowded theaters.

What makes this film work is clearly its special effects. It is rare for a Filipino film to have flawless matting (when the *taong-lawin* or bird-people fly) and Star Wars-type laser beams. FPJ Production has often been criticized for making fantasies, but one thing can be said in their defense: at least, Poe tries to use local materials. In *Pagbabalik ng Panday*, for example, some monsters are local (the *lamang-lupa*), though others (such as the *taong-patay* and the river monster) are of foreign origin.

The theme, of course, is neither foreign nor local, but universal: the grand battle between good and evil. Poe is good, the townspeople are good, Bentot, Jr. is good; Max

Alvarado is evil, the monsters are evil, Rosemarie Gil is evil. The good guys all pray to God; the bad guys all pray to the Devil. The good guys win, of course, as they must in such stories (this is a fantasy, remember?). It is a fairy tale with adult trimmings, or an old-fashioned morality play told in modern technological style.

The theme is timeless, and that is why the production design (often criticized in Poe movies) cannot be faulted. What can be faulted, however, is the cardboard characterization (a fault of all morality movies).

One more thing: Poe as director includes comic touches which keep the fantasy from becoming real. One bird-boy, for instance, bumps into a tree for lack of flying experience. One ghost does an old circus mirror routine with Bentot, Jr. Cruel Lilian Laing is shocked to hear her pet lizards "say" to her that they want her for dinner.

It is obvious that this film does not want to take its message seriously, though it takes the art of filmmaking seriously. Perhaps, that is why many people still do not take Poe seriously, despite the fact that he makes movies which not only entertain, but also satisfy the cinematic eye. (*PARADE*, January 9-15, 1982, p. 37.)

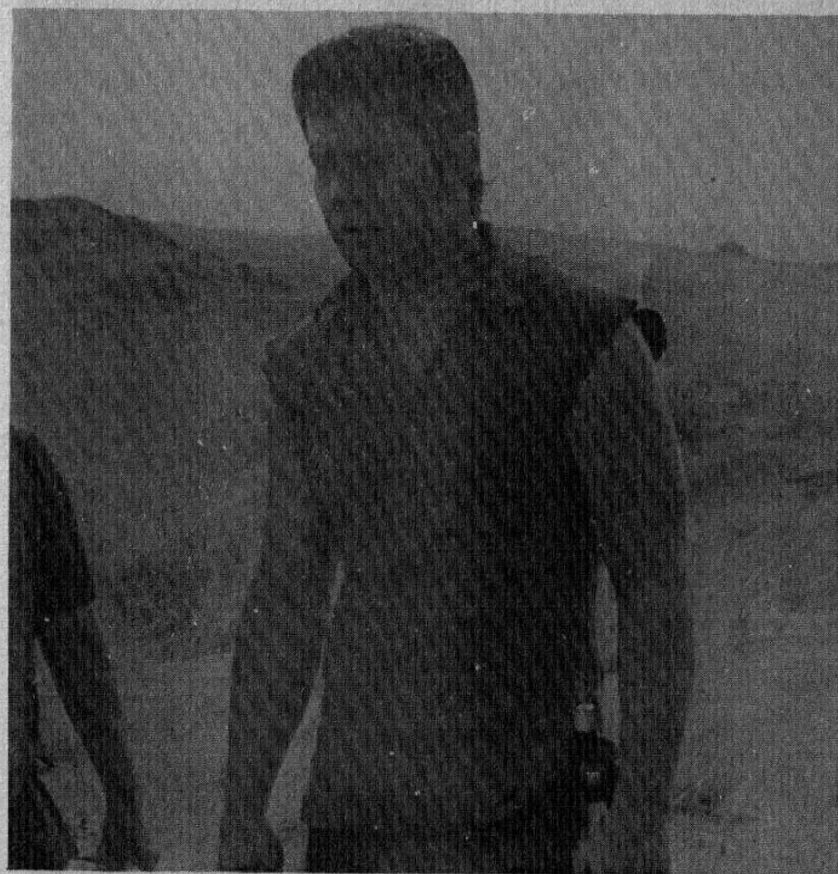


The delighted squeals and cheers of the audience are proof enough that Pablo Santiago's *Manedyer...Si Kumander!* (1982) is entertaining. Through tight editing and clever juxtaposition of the scenes, this film manages to poke fun at, and have fun with, the age-old local stereotypes of the Filipino marriage—the philandering husband and the suspicious wife.

As a comedy, this film is truly funny. It succeeds in using stock characters in ingeniously new situations. It has something, in fact, that most local comedies do not have: its plot is logical and straightforward. Even the coincidences (apparently unavoidable in local comedies) are explained: Carmi Martin, for instance, wants to have the beach resort, thus leading to the almost discovery scene with her sugar-daddy Leopoldo Salcedo, who wants to give her the resort.

The big thing wrong with the film, ironically, occurs when it stops being a comedy and starts moralizing. In a sequence near the end of the film, Fernando Poe, Jr., confesses his guilt to his daughter Janice de Belen, as Susan Roces eavesdrops and decides to forgive her erring hus-

band. The sequence is completely out of place. There would have been nothing wrong with leaving this sequence out, letting Poe get caught by Leopoldo Salcedo, having Poe's family trying to escape the goons in the final sequence, and Carmi Martin suddenly coming in at the end to ruin things. The ending of the film as it stands now—with a freeze—would apply anyway. In other words, there is no reason either to justify or to condemn adultery. Adultery—as in any other comedy—should be a given, not something to explain. (*PARADE*, August 18, 1982, p. 29.)



The modern epic hero—the Panday.



The first part of Argel Joseph's *Roman Rapido* (1982), set during the Japanese occupation, is as boring as anything. But the second part, set in postwar Philippines, where the collaborators have become enshrined in places of wealth and power, is exciting. The audience is with Fernando Poe, Jr., throughout as he fights for justice and for his family.

Clearly the best part of this film is its ending, where Poe meets the forces of evil head-on. He doesn't get far and, in fact, almost gets killed. But the children—who are the hope of the future—decide to use violence themselves. They throw Poe his guns and he starts firing away. The moral of the sequence—that innocent children will opt for violence once pushed to the wall—may raise some eyebrows, but it is definitely prepared for by careful pacing in the final fight sequence.

Johnny Delgado's acting is excellent. Helen Vela's acting, as well as those by Poe and Ruel Vernal, is merely adequate and not memorable. The children are terrible; they look like they belong to a different movie. Johnny Wilson is nothing but a ham in this one; perhaps the role

of a villain does not really challenge him.

The technical elements are uniformly horrid, especially the music. Musical scoring is one of our weakest areas; this movie shows how a composer can misunderstand the import of sequences, the importance of continuity, and the whole point of a film. The editing is not bad, especially in the final confrontation, but some dragging scenes (such as the dinner scene with the children and the party scene) could have been cut very short.

Many films have been using Huks as characters. This film could have dealt more with the lives of Delgado and spouse after the war, during the period of the rebellion. In fact, the whole film should have concentrated on the postwar period, instead of wasting time on the preliminary war scenes. (*PARADE*, December 1, 1982, p. 43.)



Another shot of Poe as the Panday.



The cheers and applause of the theater audiences when Ronwaldo Reyes's *Ang Panday Ikatlong Yugto* (1982) opened are the best proof that Poe (as director and producer) really knows the Filipino audience. Rarely does a local film get such enthusiastic and vocal responses from an audience used to the most outrageous gimmicks and tricks. Despite the technical inadequacies of the film, local viewers still involved themselves fully in the film, in a way they never did with similar foreign films such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Zombie*. Clearly, when it comes to entertaining everybody (not just the kids), Poe is still the best in local cinema.

The glaring absence of blood in this film (where so many people die) is one of the best things about it. It is not necessary to fill the screen with gore in order to show violence. By eliminating all bloody shots (primarily done through minimum use of close-ups), Poe as director manages to get the idea through that the hero has to fight for his life and the lives of the children, without alienating the children in the audience.

It should also be pointed out that, unlike previous Poe

movies primarily involving fistfights, the fights in this film are short. One or two sword stabs and the enemy promptly dies. That is the way it should be—fights to the death should be as short as possible, in order that our children will not romanticize fighting itself. (Where's the thrill in a swordfight, after all, if the enemy dies in two seconds?) Young viewers are less prone to imitate a swordfight than a long, overdrawn fistfight.

Although this is an entertaining film, however, it is not as artistic as the earlier *Pandays*. There are no particularly spectacular special effects. The whole technical effort seems to have been concentrated on make-up, which frightens a little bit but not very much. The corpses, of course, are rehashes of those in *Panday II*, thus limiting their shock value. The light beams coming from the magic swords, in fact, sometimes even appear to be painted on (as they probably were).

Editing is still the strongest element in Poe movies. Despite a couple of shots prematurely cut, the film generally displays intelligent and effective editing. Poe has perfected the art of anticipating audience reaction. He knows exactly when the audience is lulled into false security. Again and again, the film surprises the unwary viewer.

Music is not as good here as in *Panday II*. Sound is particularly horrendous. This is a shame, because some scenes particularly need good sound (such as the cockcrow scene with Bentot, Jr., about to be eaten up by corpses). Some of the dialogue is not even lip-synched properly. Cinematography, while generally competent, sometimes does not make sense; when Criselda Cecilio shows Bentot to the upper room, for instance, the source of the back light is not established.

What makes the *Panday* series attractive to local viewers? I suspect it is the epic tradition from which the series

derives. Just like in our old epics, the hero goes on a journey, meets his death, is resurrected, fights monsters, and remains the symbol of everything that is good in the world. The Panday series proves that we are not too different from the pre-Spanish Filipinos who listened with awe to their storyteller regaling them with the tale of man against the unknown. Perhaps we, too, need to be reassured that we can face forces stronger than us, as long as we have faith and a sword. (*PARADE*, January 12, 1983, p. 37.)



Poe on the set of *Sierra Madre*.

EDDIE ROMERO

The ideal film is made by a good director who is himself a good writer, like Ingmar Bergman or Woody Allen. Eddie Romero has proven himself both as a screenwriter and as a director. *Aguila* (1980), therefore, should be a good film.

Well, yes and no. Romero is not a Tagalog writer, and his unfamiliarity with the language shows in his dialogue. His characters say things, for example, like "alam mo?" (translated literally from "you know") and "masusuya ka sa sarili mo bukas ng umaga" (from "you're gonna hate yourself in the morning"). Charo Santos says she fell in love with Fernando Poe, Jr. because she saw his "salawal": the line is ridiculous in Tagalog, but a clever pun in English (the word "brief" refers to her being a lawyer).

But if we excuse the inept language and the occasionally outrageous make-up (Amalia Fuentes, for example does not appear to get older), *Aguila* is a great film, clearly one of the best in Philippine movie history. The film has a single thesis: the bad elements in Philippine society will remain with us forever. Romero uses the story of

one man to prove his thesis. He has no time to go through the entire biography of Poe (despite the three-and-a-half-hour length of the film); he selects eight separate years of Poe's life.

In Manila, 1898, Poe (born 1892) sees his father gunned down by Spanish soldiers. His father's revolutionary troops have been betrayed by opportunist Eddie Garcia. In Cotabato, 1918, Poe—now a soldier in the American army—sees his mother Fuentes die because of a conflict precipitated by Garcia and his new-found American friends. In Laguna, 1924, while handling the case of religious fanatic Joonee Gamboa, Poe discovers that Filipinos cannot tolerate freedom of speech if that speech is aimed against them.

In Rizal, 1936, Poe's half-sister Elizabeth Oropesa, who has been sleeping with her own father Garcia, tries to have sex with Poe, but sleeps with his son Jay Ilagan instead. Evil does not spare his own flesh and blood. In Nueva Ecija, 1945, Poe joins forces with Huk commander Behn Cervantes to capture a Japanese stronghold, but finds out soon after that Filipino collaborators are to be given high posts in the postwar government. In one of the most poignant moments of the film, Poe asks, "Then why did we have to go fight the war?" In Manila, 1953, Poe watches with increasing disenchantment his son Christopher de Leon run for congressman under Mag-saysay's wing. In Manila, 1969, Poe sees the young Ricky Sandico castigate the Aguilas for being "fascists."

The film actually opens in 1978, with Christopher de Leon searching for Poe, who has suddenly disappeared and, in fact, has been given up for dead. De Leon finds Poe in an Aeta village. Poe, disillusioned with society, has turned his back on it and symbolically lives with the noble savages of the country. Understanding comes to de Leon only in the last few seconds of the film: Philippine

society is too evil to change. The only logical solutions are to go back with Poe to the roots of our civilization, or to emigrate to the United States like Orestes Ojeda. Whether one agrees with Romero or not, *Aguila*—filled with despair and cynicism—makes this point well. (TV TIMES, March 2-8, 1980, p. 9.)



A different Poe (with Daria Ramirez) in *Aguila*.



Now let us praise older directors. Because most of the good local films produced recently have been done by young directors, the contributions of our established directors have not been that well emphasized. In *Palaban* (1980), Eddie Romero gives everybody, including younger directors, a lesson in directing. Romero proves in this film that experience, when informed by intelligence and talent, still triumphs over youth.

The lesson begins with the first sequence—the credit sequence. We are in a beerhouse, just as we are in a beerhouse in so many other local films. But the beerhouse sequences of other local films are invariably done in bad taste, depending for their effect on generous shots of flesh. Romero does his beerhouse sequence artistically, capturing details which show the inhuman character of a beerhouse. The camera does close-ups of hands playing with skirts, medium shots of men dropping drunk, full shots of hostesses eagerly waiting to be “tabled.” Other directors would have taken half their films to show how gross, how asexual, how mechanical beerhouse sex is; Romero says it all in his credit sequence.

As the credit sequence promises, the film is about the mechanization or depersonalization of sex. Alma Moreno, a beerhouse hostess, finds herself with child by customer Ting Jocson. Naturally Jocson wants to have nothing to do with the child, which, in any case, may not even be his. His sister Amalia Fuentes, still hurting from the death of her child and the departure of her husband, steps into the fray. She volunteers to fund the pregnancy provided the child is turned over to her. Three years later, Moreno wants to have the child back.

Everyone in the film is depersonalized. Moreno thinks of the child in her womb as merchandise, to be sold at a profit of ten thousand pesos. Jocson enjoys sex with Moreno but has no feelings at all towards her; she is, in the language of feminists, a sex object. Fuentes wants only a child—any child—to replace the daughter she just lost. When the baby comes, in fact, she will have nothing to do with it; she leaves the baby completely to the *yaya*'s care. Fuentes' separated husband Eddie Garcia thinks that, perhaps, he is still in love with her, but he does not hesitate to become the legal counsel against her.

Another word for depersonalization is alienation. In *Aguila*, Romero treats the alienation of the Filipino people from their roots. In *Palaban*, he continues his study of alienation. Mothers are alienated from their children, husbands from their wives, brothers from their sisters. The alienation takes several forms. In the hospital right after delivery, Moreno refuses to see her baby. At home Jocson is beaten up by Fuentes. Fuentes watches with quiet hatred the sleeping Garcia and his latest bed-mate. Moreno's father Joonee Gamboa, interested only in money, sells his daughter's child to Fuentes, and even leaves Moreno without money or home. Baby Delgado finds herself rich (she is given a condominium by her sugar daddy), but with absolutely no cash. Josephine Es-

trada has a solid distaste for her job at the beerhouse.

The film succeeds because of the direction. Romero is able to capture, in one sequence or even in one shot, various aspects of his theme. *Palaban* is thematically unified, fairly much in the same way as *Aguila*. How many of our other directors can keep their minds focused on the same thing (even just sex) throughout an entire film?

The perennial problems with a Romero film are, however, still in *Palaban*. The dialogue is still in "translatese," i.e., in English translated literally into Tagalog. Moreno, for example, says she is no longer taking birth control pills because they are "*nakakasuka*"—wrongly translated from "causing me to be nauseous"; the Tagalog word has a connotation that the pills are "ugly" or "disgusting." The English idiom that a liar gets hit by lightning becomes the unidiomatic "*tatamaan ng lintik*." Even "they say," which has no actual equivalent in Tagalog, becomes "*sabi nga nila*." The best example of Romero's non-Tagalog is perhaps "*gulat lang kasi ako*," which is supposed to mean "You startled me" (or maybe "I'm shocked?"); the Tagalog "*gulat*" has a connotation of being "impressed."

There are also inconsistencies in the story. Delgado, for example, says that her sugar daddy does not give her any money, but she is able to invest cash in a textile store. The focus of the plot is Moreno's problem, perhaps with a little bit of Fuentes' problems, but there is no need, in terms of plot, to dwell on Garcia's problems. In terms of theme, of course, Garcia is as much a major character as everyone else. The plot, in other words, is not as unified as the theme.

Palaban is so well directed that the viewer can excuse even the slight directorial lapses, such as Jocson leaving the hotel room key outside the door and the maid not preparing the baby's bottle in the kitchen (where the hot

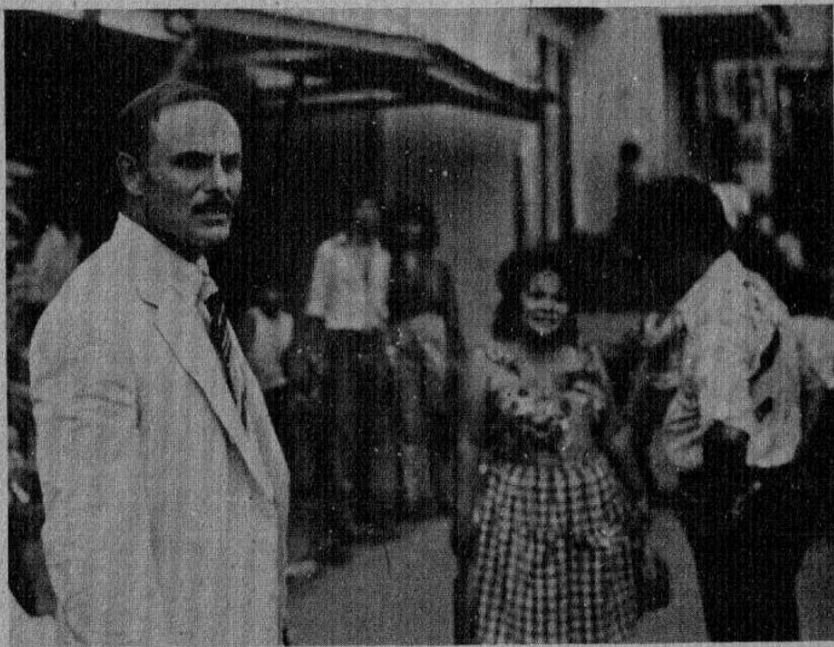
water airpot is located). Nobody's perfect, not even Romero, but he is head and shoulders above everyone else in the business. (*TV TIMES*, June 29 - July 5, 1980, p. 45.)



Butz Aquino the actor, in *Desire*.

Romero's *Desire* (1982) is the story of an American executive (John Saxon) who discovers that a Filipina (Tetchie Agbayani) may be his daughter by his former lover (Charito Solis). Meanwhile, however, he has to solve the financial problems of the company run by the husband of his lover (Judith Chapman).

Eddie Romero is our Hollywood connection (he has helped direct a number of international films), and here, he shows his Hollywood finesse. The film runs like an American film, with the same innocuous screenplay, the same sexual explicitness, the same no-frills dialogue, and the same no-nonsense acting. John Saxon is good as the lead character, but Judith Chapman is brilliant. Tetchie Agbayani shows here that she has negligible acting talent. (*PANORAMA*, December 26, 1982, p. 10.)



John Saxon looks lost in a Filipino movie.

Because most of us are afflicted with colonial mentality, most of us will enjoy Eddie Romero's *Desire* (1982). It is interesting to watch Filipino actors and actresses mix it up with veteran John Saxon and relatively new Judith Chapman.

Not that Saxon is a brilliant actor. He is, however, perfectly cast—as an American who bumbles through his encounter with his long-lost daughter. Chapman is much better than Saxon; she is, at least, seductive.

The direction by Eddie Romero of his American actors is very good. He is able to create a Hollywood ambience in his American sequences. Clearly, his vast experience in co-productions has served him in good stead.

His direction of Filipino actors, however, is something else. Tetchie Agbayani is embarrassing; she cannot act the complex role that she is given. She is supposed to be an adolescent just beginning to discover her own body, just starting to live her own life, torn by the realization that she has a living father, who is, unfortunately, also attractive as a sex partner. That is a mouthful, even for an experienced actress. Agbayani, sad to say, just cannot cope.

Charito Solis is not given any chance to shine. Neither is Ruben Rustia or Manny Castañeda. It is the writing, actually, rather than the direction, that is the root of the problem here. Longer and subtler sequences could have brought out the complex emotional problems encountered by the Filipino actors, especially Agbayani. (Of course, needless to say, someone else should have been cast in the role of Agbayani.)

The technical credits, however, are good, if a bit slick. Manolo Abaya's cinematography is adequate to the demands of the screenplay. Ryan Cayabyab's music does not detract from the main action. (*PARADE*, January 5, 1983, p. 37.)



Once again, the Film Fund has disappointed us. It has come out with a film which is inferior in a hundred ways to, say, the out-and-out commercial picture *Pagbabalik ng Panday* (1981). In fact, at a reported cost of more than three million pesos, Eddie Romero's *Kamakalawa* has to rate as one of the biggest wastes of money in 1981.

The problem with *Kamakalawa* starts right at its very root—the concept of making a film about the mythological creatures of our country. As a child, every Filipino hears of the *nuno sa punso* and the *diwata*. What Filipino child has not had nightmares about the *lamang-lupa* attacking him as he unthinkingly steps on their homes? Even adult Filipinos sometimes believe in *duwendes*, elves who bring fortune or misfortune.

But childhood fantasies are one thing, and movie fantasies are another. Childhood fantasies grow or diminish depending only on one's imagination and memory, but movie fantasies have to compete with the technological achievements of the international film industry. In other words, the Filipino may or may not have a vivid image of the *nuno sa punso* in his mind, but every Filipino viewer

knows what a movie monster looks like. *Kamakalawa*, unfortunately for writer and director Eddie Romero, cannot be gauged according to the illustrations in a children's book, but must be compared with the mythological creations of *Star Wars*, *Superman*, and—yes—*Pagbabalik ng Panday*.

To attempt to make a film about mythological creatures is, in the Philippine context at this moment, foolhardy. We do not have the technical expertise, for example, to create a believable *diwata*. Tommy Marcelino, in charge of photographic effects for *Kamakalawa*, is simply out of his league. The supposedly gigantic Agos looks very much like Tetchie Agbayani with a few inches added; at no time during the film does the viewer feel that she is a *diwata*. Similarly, Jimmy Santos appears and disappears, as gods do, but the camera moves everytime there is such a disappearance; the viewer knows all the time that the trick is merely in the (bad) editing. A good magician, whether on stage or in film, never lets his viewers know how he does his tricks, but *Kamakalawa* is so technically primitive nobody is fooled.

The disastrous special effects would have been slightly tolerable if, at least, the film had other things going for it. Sad to say, there is nothing else in the film worth the price of admission. The screenplay, for instance, is confused: one never knows who the story is about. Is it about Christopher de Leon? Then, why is so much made of the identity crises of the gods? Is it about the two warring tribes (or factions of a tribe)? Then why are they forgotten midway through the film? Is it about the gods? Then why all the emphasis on the people? Is it about— heaven forbid—the dawn of civilization? or is it about—as the pretentious speech of Ruben Rustia seems to indicate—man today and his rejection of religion?

The acting is uniformly horrendous. De Leon has

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