

People, we are told, see the kind of film they deserve, but, of course, it is not as simple as that. The relationship between film and its audience is invariably unique to the particular context of respective cultures. This is true for the Italian cinema as it is for American motion pictures or Tagalog movies.

Since its inception here, movies in our national experience have been composed of foreign and local film productions, and this is a dichotomy which exists to the present day. Indeed, this situation occasioned in our society a cultural segregation so pronounced that it was possible — not so long ago and perhaps even to a certain extent now — to distinguish between an audience exclusively patronizing foreign films and another larger, less affluent public frequenting Tagalog movies.

What most defines then the common everyday experience of seeing movies within a Philippine setting is this duality of patronage and fare and, by extension, of attitudes, associations, and aspirations. No one who reads Andres Cristobal Cruz's nostalgic reminiscences of his youthful moviegoing days can fail to see the contradictions latent in his experience. What matters to us is that it is also *our* experience; and our movies, precisely because they are the most popular and public of our art forms, cannot but reflect this collective confusion which ulti-

(Continued on back flap)

CINEMA
Edited with an Introduction by
Rafael Ma. Guerrero
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mately colors our own expectations of life, our own understanding of ourselves.

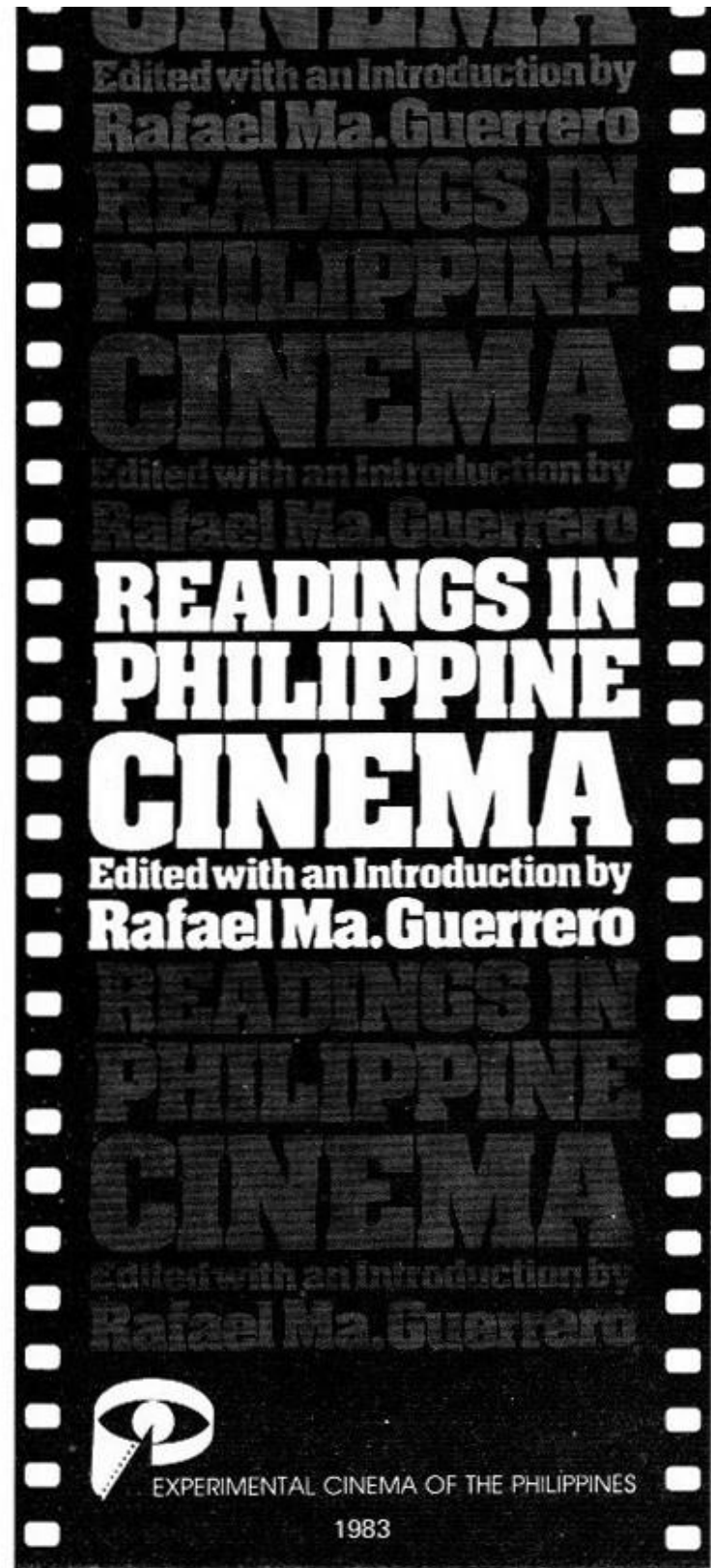
Whether one sees in this the disparity between *bakya* and "class", to use Jose Lacaba's proffered terminology, or the progression from traditional forms of local dramaturgy to the westernized conventions of cinema, as Nicnor Tiongson opines, it cannot be denied that Tagalog movies appear to us now as a far more complex expression than ever we thought possible.

The obligation, common to all the arts, to portray the reality of social change even as it pursues the unchanging ideals of the true, the good, and the beautiful poses a renewed challenge to our filmmakers today. Now, more so than ever, relevance as a criteria has become particularly vital to our popular arts, especially where these touch on the significant aspects of Philippine life. Too long beholden to the standards and models of the foreign cinema, the Filipino film-maker can no longer concern himself merely with esoteric themes and formal considerations. Indubitably, the Philippine cinema is of the Third World; and though the language of film is a universal one, the growing complexities of life in our ever-changing society, increasingly obliges our cinema to be most universal by being most Filipino.

From the Introduction
by Rafael Ma. Guerrero



This book is for my mother,
herself an editor and a critic in her time.



EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA OF THE PHILIPPINES

1983

A

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Introduction

People, we are told, see the kind of films they deserve; but, of course, it is not as simple as that. The relationship between film and its audience is invariably unique to the particular context of respective cultures. This is true for the Italian cinema as it is for American motion pictures or Tagalog movies.¹

It is not so much the fact that the characteristics of a country's cinema reflect the peculiarities of its society which accounts for this relationship, but rather the larger and less obvious fact that the artistic and moral worth of movies as a popular medium ultimately corresponds to a society's collective mentality.

Thus, Americans, for example, regarded the gangster movies of the thirties as thrilling diversions for their time; while a generation of French cineastes saw in these same films profound thematic motifs which revealed the guiding hand of film *auteurs*. Similarly, the Western — to take only the most popular of genres — is a far more enriching experience for an audience weaned on the idea of a frontier than for a people whose historical experience has been one of colonialism. By the same token, the film *Roberta* is a genuine phenomenon of Philippine movies, while *Star Wars* — regardless of its worldwide box-office grosses — is not.

Since its inception here, movies in our national experience have been composed of foreign and local film productions, and this is a dichotomy which exists to the present day. Indeed, this situation occasioned in our society a cultural segregation so pronounced that it was possible — not so long ago and perhaps even to a certain extent now — to distinguish between an audience exclusively patronizing foreign films and another larger, less affluent public frequenting Tagalog movies.

This fact, at once implicitly contained and explicitly obvious in our public life, has led to the Filipino's curious conception of motion pictures as a cultural artifact: there

¹ "Tagalog movies" is the term most commonly applied by Filipinos themselves to their local films, so called after the language spoken by natives of Manila and surrounding provinces. Through a legislative act in 1935, Tagalog was made the basis for Pilipino, the name given to the Philippine national language.

are foreign films, and then there are Tagalog movies. One hastens to add that this distinction stems not from a studied appreciation for, say, the stylistic tendencies of the French cinema as compared to local films; but rather from something as uncomplicated as the knowledge that certain of our movie-houses exhibit only imported movies while others exclusively screen local vehicles.

Only the dedicated film buff among us seemingly recognizes and attaches any significance to the provenance of foreign films or to the nationality of their stars and directors. For the greater majority of our movie-going public, no such distinction is necessary between a film by Franco Zeffirelli or one by Robert Altman, between Catherine Deneuve or Goldie Hawn, or then again between Belmondo and Redford. The foreign film as a known entity carries to our shores the blanket and archetypal nationality of a Hollywood product; and in this specific sense, Hollywood is truly a never-neverland to the nameless, faceless Filipino film patron.

What most defines then the common everyday experience of seeing movies within a Philippine setting is this duality of patronage and fare and, by extension, of attitudes, associations, and aspirations. No one who reads Andres Cristobal Cruz's nostalgic reminiscences of his youthful moviegoing days can fail to see the contradictions latent in his experience. What matters to us is that it is also *our* experience; and our movies, precisely because they are the most popular and public of our art forms, cannot but reflect this collective confusion which ultimately colors our own expectations of life, our own understanding of ourselves.

Whether one sees in this the disparity between *bakya* and "class"², to use Jose Lacaba's proffered terminology, or the progression from traditional forms of local dramaturgy to the westernized conventions of cinema, as Nicanor Tiongson opines, it cannot be denied that Tagalog movies appear to us now as a far more complex expression than ever we thought possible.

It is not solely the fact that contemporary Philippine cinema and its practitioners have grown apace alongside creative developments elsewhere that leads us to this con-

2 *bakya* and "class" — See Jose F. Lacaba's *Notes on Bakya: Being an Apologia of Sorts for Filipino Masscult*, pp. 117-123 in this volume.

All footnotes for succeeding articles may be found in the section "Notes," pp. 264-279 in this volume.

clusion. The Tagalog movie has always had its share of genuine artists and visionaries, as the appreciations collected herein on the work of our senior directors will readily attest. Rather, what has given an essential impetus, perhaps, to this emergent awareness is the fact that the Tagalog movie has only so recently acquired a recognizable and tangible past for our generation. Bienvenido Lumera is surely correct when he states that the loss of all but a handful of pre-war Tagalog movies, coupled with the absolute dearth of scholarly documentation on this period, rendered the first 40 years of film-making in our country a veritable pre-history. What had effectively been obliterated was the first, pioneering period of our movies; and as such, we have had to wait out all these years to re-acquire the necessary perspective in time to arrive at a second history. One cannot exaggerate the enormity of this loss, not only as a matter of archival interest, nor even that of artistic patrimony. Verily, it has been a psychic loss; and the disrepute to which we, deservedly or undeservedly, relegated our movies until so recently was perhaps both a symptom of and a complication arising from this trauma.

In contrast, quite another set of symptoms may presumably be diagnosed from a consideration of the stars that the Filipino public has deigned to canonize and take to heart. In this regard, the Tagalog movie amply fulfills the cinema's inherent capacity for mythology. This is not to say that the charisma of these enduring personalities has purposefully been fabricated or enlarged; but rather that these stars embody — through the roles with which they have been identified — a fortuitous fusion of person and public expectation that is as unprecedented as it is unique in each of their respective cases.

No one epitomizes better the mystique of stardom in Philippine movies than Nora Aunor whose "legend" — such as Virgilio Almario chooses to call it — can no longer be dissociated from her life. Though it in effect reduces the scheme of things entire to show-biz values, as it were, the saga of Nora Aunor must be told, not only because it is the quintessential success story of our time, but quite simply because it *did* happen, it *is* true. In a sense, even before she had acquired her fans, Nora Aunor had come to represent their collective will made flesh; and it is in this respect that she is a genuine phenomenon.

Admittedly, our male idols elicit a less histrionic response from their public, but this is only in keeping with the qualities of masculine restraint, honor, and fortitude that

they personify. Fernando Poe Jr. surely stands at the head of the line of such heroes, but there are others — like Joseph Estrada and Ramon Revilla — who command their own following and embody their own validity as icons. While certainly none of these macho heroes want for recognition, they await definition and analysis by the critics, for which reason alone they are absent from these pages.

Similarly, Dolphy is not our only comedian, but he is undoubtedly our funniest and our most original. Whether he mimes the underdog, the transvestite, or then again the complacent Filipino, he touches something basic in the national psyche as surely as he tickles its funny bone. The laughter he elicits in so doing may be palliative, but it would be a mistake to simply dismiss it at that. As with the precincts of comedy and its many talented purveyors in our cinema, Dolphy's art — for it can be called that — warrants a more careful and attentive appreciation from both critics and the public alike.

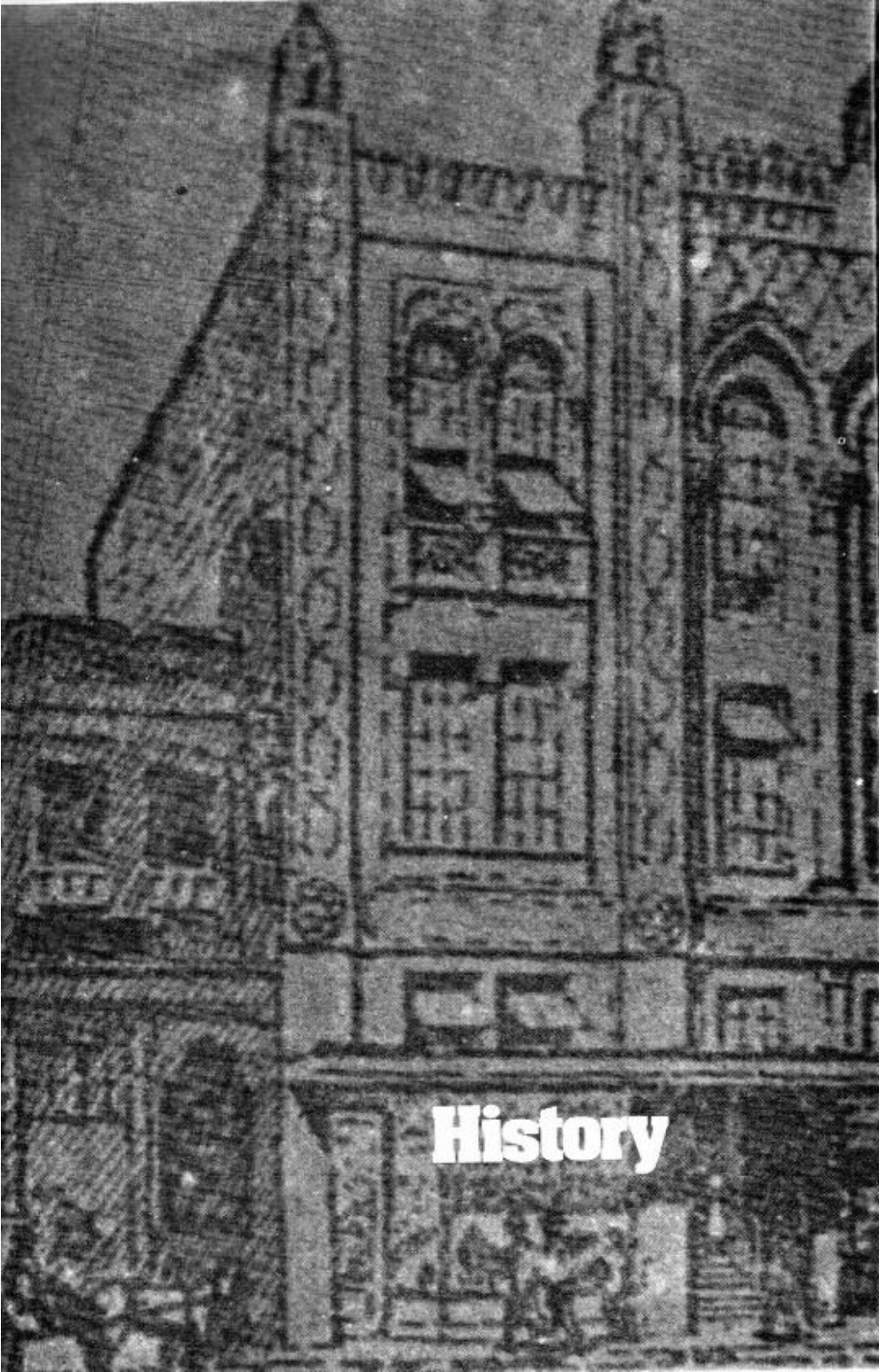
While the Filipino comedian's incisive perceptions are oftentimes overlooked in the din of laughter, the local film director has within the last decade or so gained an uncommon stature among his peers and public. In a way, the supremacy of the film director has always been tacitly recognized within the Philippine movie industry — as witnessed by the likes of Carlos Vander Tolosa and Gerardo de Leon, two departed presences who still inspire awe in recollection — but it has only been within this last period that directors have vied with their stars to become as much household names and media celebrities. Not the least of these is Lino Brocka, whose fame has gone far beyond that of any other Filipino film director. In Europe, he has become synonymous with the Philippine cinema itself and through this recognition he has provided a wedge into the European film markets through which other local directors may seek access, as did Mike de Leon who followed Brocka to the Cannes Film Festival in 1982. As of this writing, Ishmael Bernal, a Brocka contemporary, is slated to bring his multi-awarded film *Himala* to the equally prestigious Berlin Film Festival where it is hoped he will achieve an equally significant breakthrough.

This interest in the best of our contemporary film directors — and the list is by no means limited to those above-mentioned — is without prejudice to the achievements of the past. Certainly, Manuel Conde's place in Philippine cinema is assured even if his *Genghis Khan* had never gone to Venice. That it did and thereafter propelled him to the final

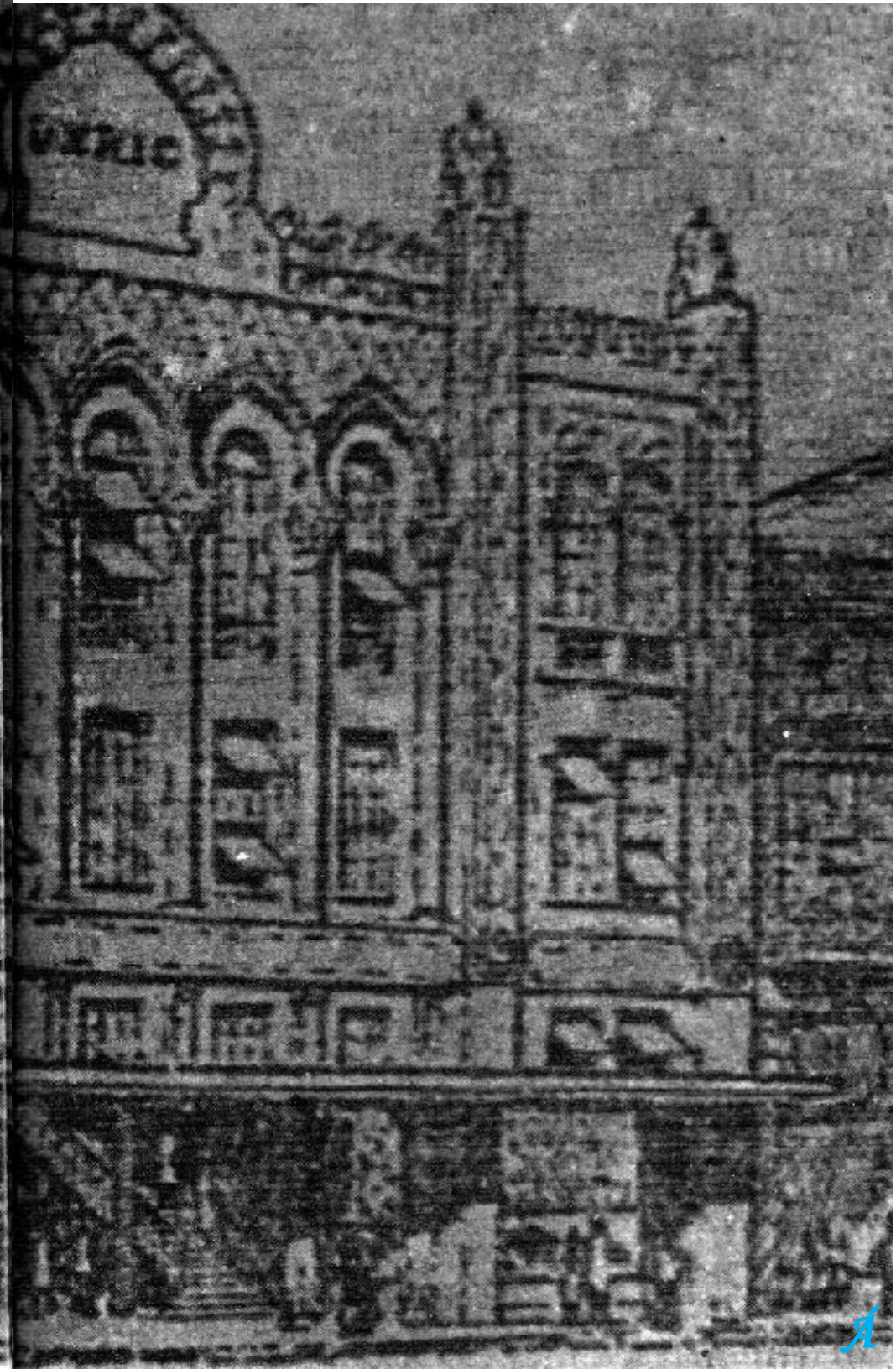
ly fruitless odyssey that Agustin Sotto records in these pages is an object lesson to all those who, as it were, would ride the tiger. It is indeed unfortunate that Conde's very real cinematic gifts should have been discovered and promoted by foreigners, only to meet with an indifferent reception at home. Charles Tesson's excellent analysis of the formal qualities found in Gerardo de Leon's films, reprinted here from the pages of the influential film journal *Cahiers du Cinema*, is another instance of the truism that there are certain truths a people can learn only from strangers or from experience. The very concept of a "prestige" film, i.e., one made to garner awards without a faint hope of recovery at the box-office, that is implicit in Lamberto V. Avellana's best work is further evidence of an apathy that hopefully we have outgrown.

Owing to the local movie industry's own efforts to marshal its ranks and to professionalize its standards — an enterprise blessed with the encouragement and incentives of government — signs abound towards the unravelling progress of the Philippine cinema. For the first time it has become possible to believe that Tagalog movies cannot but become better; and yet, even as one affirms this, problems exist as a matter of course for the industry. Prevailing norms of production, hampered by a traditional and pervasive limitation of available capitalization, remain a premier obstacle which only the ingenuity and dedication of our film artists can surmount at present. The necessary evil of censorship is increasingly being questioned, not only as regards its militant application and enforcement, but in principle itself. The obligation, common to all the arts, to portray the reality of social change even as it pursues the unchanging ideals of the true, the good, and the beautiful poses a renewed challenge to our film-makers today. Now, more so than ever, relevance as a criteria has become particularly vital to our popular arts, especially where these touch on the significant aspects of Philippine life. Too long beholden to the standards and models of the foreign cinema, the Filipino film-maker can no longer concern himself merely with esoteric themes and formal considerations. Indubitably, the Philippine cinema is of the Third World; and though the language of film is a universal one, the growing complexities of life in our ever-changing society increasingly oblige our cinema to be most universal by being most Filipino.

by Rafael Ma. Guerrero



History



THE EARLY MOVIES

From stage to screen was the only step

by Santiago A. Pilar

Movies were shown in the Philippines for the first time during the alarming days of the revolution against the Spanish regime. While armed encounters raged between Filipino revolutionaries and Spanish colonial forces in the countryside, Manila followed a leisurely pace or perhaps a false daring, for its theaters had never been as full and as thriving as they were in those tense days.

On August 31, 1897, or fully a year after the revolution broke out, two Swiss businessmen – Messrs. Leibman and Peritz – opened a movie viewing hall at No. 31, Escolta near the corner of San Jacinto, now Tomas Pinpin Street, in the Santa Cruz district, the hub of the middle class business and residential area at the time. That evening, the series of film strips included *The Czar's Carriage Passing Place de la Concorde*, *An Arabian Cortège*, *Snow Games*, *Card Players* and *A Train's Arrival*.

"Come and see everyday scenes and newsmaking events in actual size and captured in motion by Lumiere of Lyons" – said the advertisements.

Emboldened by the novelty of moving pictures, Leibman and Peritz charged one Mexican dollar for a front seat, *preferencia*, and half a dollar for general entrance. There were four viewing sessions that evening, every hour on the hour from six p.m. to ten p.m., simply billed as "Cinematografo." The term was to acquire significance in the later years and, shortened to *cine*, was to become the generic name for movies in the Pilipino dialect. "Cinematografo" was the patent label of the film projector invented by Louis and Auguste Lumiere, which was the first projector used in Manila. Subsequently other moviehouses in Manila, up until 1909, followed Leibman and Peritz and called themselves *cinematografos* or *cine* for short.

Actually a ticket to the *cine* at that time cost more than double the entrance fee to a stage presentation. In August 1897, the Teatro del Troso was showing three excerpts

from musicals performed by Compañia Ratia-Carvajal for which tickets were selling at 40 cents for a front row seat and three cents for general admission. Nevertheless, the movie showings enticed a good crowd and continued nightly for two whole months.

However, in November, attendance began to slacken. Leibman and Peritz transferred the viewing hall to a warehouse in Plaza Goiti and reduced admission to 40 and 20 cents for first and second row tickets, respectively.

But if the transfer of venue and reduction in ticket prices weren't bad enough, yet another feature had to go. At every showing of the film strips, a string quintet under the direction of Professor Francisco Rabat played appropriate music. In November, the musicians were dismissed. Instead, the advertisements promised that music from the sound track would be "furnished by a phonograph from Paris."

Why the slump? One reason may have been the fact that the program was hardly changed. At first, it was promised that there would be a change every eight days. There was none. Instead, films were intermixed and replayed on different weeks. The turmoil of the times may have caused delay in delivery of the films which were shipped all the way from Europe. By the end of November 1897, the movie hall closed down.

Film showings were not resumed until 1900 – by which time, things had changed quite drastically in the Philippines. With the Treaty of Paris signed in 1898, Spain had ceded the Philippines to the United States. Once a Spanish colonial city, Manila began to take on the looks of a new American garrison in the Orient. However, the man who first re-opened the *cine* in Manila was not an American but a Britisher named Walgrah. Naturally, the movie house was called Cine Walgrah and it was located at No. 60, Calle Santa Rosa, in Intramuros.

Two years later, in 1902, another moviehouse was established, this time in the very center of another residential and business area, Quiapo. It was owned by a Spanish businessman named Samuel Rebarber, who gave it the name Gran Cinematografo Parisien, located at No. 80, Calle Crespo.

Competition was keen as may be deduced from the banner style of program notices from the two theaters in the periodicals. It was a matter of outshining the other in offerings. When Walgrah showed *Coronation of Edward VII*, for example, Gran Parisien ran an equally crowd-

Overleaf:
The Lyric Theater at the Escolta, as it was before WWI. Built at a cost of only P400,000, it had a seating capacity of 1,600.

drawing headliner, *Assassination of President McKinley*. Both films were not documentary newsreels but were scenes acted in front of artificial settings. Walgrah and Parisien, incidentally, mainly showed films of the camera trick genre, then the favorite in Europe, experimental films like those by George Mclies, investigating the characteristic versatility of the medium to create magical illusion by means of editing, camera work and artistic intervention upon the positive.

In 1903, Jose Jimenez, a Manila scenographic painter set up the first Filipino-owned movie theater, the Cinematografo Rizal. This was located in Azcarraga Street, in front of the Tutuban train station. With the opening of another Filipino-owned *cine*, Cinematografo Filipino in Tondo, following closely, film showing as good business became a foregone conclusion among enterprising Filipinos.

Perhaps, no contemporary description recreates the local movie scene in early 1900 more picturesquely than an Englishwoman's memoir published in 1906. Disdainful about Philippine lifeways, the author, Mrs. Dauncey, recorded — or distorted to her own bias — details which are now useful in the reconstruction of moviehouse manners of the period. For example, she mentioned the close watch on "stray, non-paying enthusiasts from getting a free peep." She also noticed that the *cine* she went to was an "empty basement" — actually, the proto-movie theaters were remodeled *accesorias* or warehouses — "carrying a large sign in glass letters lighted from behind by electricity in the most approved European fashion." The comfort of viewing was primarily assured by the number of electric fans at the disposal of the moviehouse, (here, Mrs. Dauncey spoke of suffocation). Interpreters were hired to translate the French, German, English etc., subtitles that were projected after every sequence or scene, as well as to explain what was foreign to the culture of the audience.

The quality of music furnished by the pianist or band engaged to score the pantomimes helped diminish the drudgery of watching the positives, which often unpredictably became either insufficiently or inordinately illuminated.

A lot of music was needed to offset the technical or artistic crudity of the early cinema which indeed had still another decade of experimentation and refinement to undergo before it could gain the respectability which favored the stage arts. Consequently, in Manila or elsewhere, the gentry and conservative circles frequented the stage theaters while the more adventurous trooped to the vaudevilles.

Mrs. Dauncey, thus, did not espy members of Manila's *haut monde* among the motley crowd of balcony patrons that evening she went to the cinematograph. There were only: "one or two Englishmen and other foreigners; some fat Chinamen, with their pigtailed done up in chignons . . . ; a few missionaries and schoolma'ams in colored blouses and untidy coiffures *à la* Gibson Girl; and one or two U.S.A. soldiers with their thick hair parted in the middle, standing treat to their Filipina girls. . . . A funny little Filipino near us, rigged up in a knickerbocker suit and an immense yellow oilskin cap, was frightened at old Tuyay, who insisted on coming to the show and sitting at our feet."

The quality of the film as entertainment began to turn about in the Philippines in 1909. The change reflected certain developments abroad, particularly in the United States where movie companies were gaining the enthusiasm of stage actors who wanted to appear in films. This reversal of attitude among the players was brought about by the new trend of adapting classic dramas and novels as film story subjects, hence, the term, photoplays. Actors naturally preferred their roles in the photoplays than their previous assignments wherein they were made to perform different actions or display different emotions in front of the camera for sheer demonstration of movement. Ardent admiration of movie stars ensued, contributing to the prosperity of film distributing companies.

The steady progress of European and American film productions resulted in the establishment of film distributing agencies in Manila. The first of these, Pathé Frères Cinema, began leasing and selling film projection gear in July, 1909. The assurance of abundant supply of films at cheap introductory prices brought a landslide of movie theaters. The first of these was Cine Anda which opened on August 8, 1909, operated by Monsieurs Goulette and Teague. Others followed it: Paz, Cabildo, Empire, Majestic, Comedia, Apollo, Ideal, Luz, and Gaiety appeared between 1909 and 1911. Zorilla, the vanguard of *zarzuela*¹ and opera presentations, switched to showing films in late 1909 while Grand Opera House began to include movies in between vaudeville numbers in 1910. Likewise, moviehouses sprouted in the provinces which had electricity.

The next logical impetus was the production of films. Locally produced films became a challenge as soon as movie shooting equipment became available in the country.

In the beginning, only short films with novelty appeal

such as the annual carnival fairs and a *Bullring of Manila* were taken in the style of news clips or documentaries. Story material was discovered aplenty in the life of Dr. Jose Rizal. The Rizal cult was by then a national trend initiated and encouraged by American rule which declared him the national hero.

The honor of producing the first local full-length film belongs to the American H. Brown, the operator of Gaiety Theater. He knew Dr. Edward Meyer Gross, the author of a play, *La Vida de Rizal*, which became a stage box-office hit.

The idea of filming his play was fascinating to Dr. Gross. He was an avowed Rizalist, much as he was also bent in garnering more recognition from his Rizalist colleagues. A surgeon, pharmacist and linguist, he arrived in the Philippines in 1898 with the troops of Gen. Arthur MacArthur. He became involved in theatrical activities in the country with his marriage to Titay Molina, popular zarzuela vedette. All Mr. Brown needed to do was shell out capital to finance the shooting of Gross' package play production, whose cast was Titay Gross' dramatic troupe, Molina-Benito Company.

Confusion arose when Albert Yearsly, manager of Oriental Films, Co. and owner of Empire and Majestic Theaters, smelled the project. He immediately engaged actors to create his own version of the same subject. While the Brown-Gross team went on a quiet shooting pace in places where Rizal truly spent his life, Yearsly's group shot his film in a rush in order to catch up with August 24, the opening day of Brown's movie. In August 22, he was shooting the Rizal execution episode, not in Bagumbayan, the authentic place, but in Manila's North Cemetery. He showed the public the rushes of his version that same night and exhibited its entirety the following day, a night ahead of Brown's movie premiere at Grand Opera House.

Bitterness ensued. Yearsly attacked Brown's claim of having spent the fabulous sum of twenty-five thousand pesos by announcing: "This film cost only P4,500 and not P25,000 nor did any film produced in Manila cost this much." In answer Brown declared: "You can fool all the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time, but we are getting all the people and they are satisfied."

Yearsly's version of Rizal's life was a 20-minute re-enactment of his last hours; *La Pasion y Muerte de Dr. Rizal*, he called it, or at other times, *El Fusilamiento*



de Rizal. Many people confused it with the hour-length Brown-Gross movie. Whatsoever was Brown and Yearsly's reap in the tills and in the public mind, their quarrel brought attention to their subsequent projects and awakened Philippine society to the many possibilities of locally produced films.

For his second venture, Yearsly made a photoplay of a stage favorite, *Walang Sugat*, performed by the Gran Compania de Zarzuela Tagala of Severino Reyes, the author of both the stage and screen play. This movie was also Yearsly's last for fire destroyed Majestic Theater and left him bankrupt.

Brown and Gross, on the other hand, went on to produce more movies: namely, *Gomez, Burgos y Zamora*, *La Conquista de Filipinas*, *La Bailarina*, *Enchong*, *Ang Medikong Laway*, *Nena La Bozcadora*, *El Filibusterismo* and *Florante at Laura*. The list of movies is of subjects which the producers knew would draw audience enthusiasm: historical topics, stories of religious miracles, zarzuela hits and literary classics.

The shooting of *Los Petalos de Lao-Tze* in 1919.

The appeal of these notwithstanding, Brown and Gross observed that their patronage increasingly dwindled.

Their films could not compete in matters of technical superiority with imported ones, most especially upon the arrival of photoplays in color. Eventually, they closed shop, leasing their gear to two small movie units, Manila Films Company and Sirena Movie Company which in turn were only able to come out with a film each, *Apache de Manila*, a takeoff from a Hollywood hit, and *La Purga de Suarez*, a photozarzuela.

In 1917, a film company was organized and was to spur the development of the Philippine movie industry. The company was Malayan Movies, founded by Jose Nepomuceno and his brother Jesus. Offices and studios were located in Tondo, Manila. Their new company declared as one of its goals adapting the movie industry to the conditions and tastes of the country, "*a las condiciones y los gustos del pais.*" The sentiment was a dig at the pervasive influence of American films on the upper classes and the young who were increasingly preferring American goods and acquiring American customs. Such tone in turn reflected current

La Venganza de Don Silvestre produced in 1919 was a sequel to the highly successful first feature of Jose Nepomuceno's Malayan Movies, *Dalagang Bukid*.



aspirations for independence from the United States.

A lot of talent in many aspects of the performing arts and a stubborn dedication earned for Jose Nepomuceno the honor of being "Father of Philippine Movies." At the outset of Nepomuceno's career, locally produced films had already acquired the notoriety of technical inferiority to imported ones. He had to literally beg moviehouse operators to book in his movies. His financiers however found him difficult to turn down on account of his credentials. Not only was he born to a clan of painters and sculptors, he also had professional degrees to confirm his artistic talents. He obtained a bachelor of arts degree from a Benedictine college and one in the arts from the state university. From another institution, he finished a course in electrical engineering. The latter trained him to improvise photographic equipment which was quite expensive to procure from abroad. For example, he devised transformers for his arc lamps utilizing big jars of water containing salt and galvanized iron coils. With these artificial lights, evening parties, carnival season affairs and political rallies were able to be shot during night time. Nepomuceno's success as a photographer could be measured by the rise of his studio building, Electro-Photo Studio Parhelio, which occupied a whole streetblock in Sta. Cruz, Manila. He readily sold this, however, in order to embark on his movie producing career.

Although Malayan Movies was formally established in 1917, Nepomuceno was able to make his first film, *Dalagang Bukid*, only two years later. A photoplay based on a stage hit written by Hermogenes Ilagan, *Dalaga* was premiered on September 12, 1919, starring Atang de la Rama and Marcelino Ilagan, stage idols. It was a silent picture but live actors declaimed and sang their lines to their moving images on screen. The crowd was delighted over such quaint conventions. The film equalled the financial success of the stage version and Nepomuceno was able to start filming a sequel, *La Venganza de Don Silvestre*, the following month.

In the early Twenties, he made the following: *Mariposa Negra*; *Hoy o Nunca*, *Besame*; *Estrellita Del Cine* and *Un Capullo Marchito*.

Soon there was competition. To inject the razzle-dazzle of Hollywood into Philippine cinema was the project of Vicente Salumbides, a former extra of Lasky Studio's Famous Players, Hollywood. Coming back from the States, he founded his own movie outfit in 1925. For his first film,

he produced, wrote, directed and edited *Miracles of Love*. Among the many American innovations he introduced in the film was editing through parallel cutting or breaking the sequence of actions in a particular episode in order to mix them with those of another for synchronization. The result aroused feelings of mounting suspense which served Salumbides' purpose in the elopement and chase scene in *Miracles*. This particular type of film pace was unknown in Nepomuceno's films which moved with the progress of plot development and denouement patterned after *zarzuela* scenarios.

To avoid the slow pace of the *zarzuela* in the Nepomuceno films, Salumbides persuaded non-*zarzuela* stars to act in his films. He had a penchant for inviting members of Manila's high society who were precisely the people who looked down on the *zarzuela* and looked up to Hollywood for their mannerisms. Aside from using English titles like *Miracles of Love*, *Collegian Love*, *Fate or Consequence*, to give his films imported appeal, he also employed many of David Griffith's latest shot-angle innovations like close-ups to register inner emotions.

Salumbides' Hollywood orientation notwithstanding, he did not have Hollywood equipment to put veneer and sophistication into his films. Like Nepomuceno, he was hampered by camera limitations. Most of his cameras were too cumbersome to move around for interesting, realistic angles. As a last resort, he — like Nepomuceno — had to direct his actors to limit their movements within the camera's narrow field of vision.

Such limited acting convention was just like blocking on stage. On film, the actors looked like relief sculptures. As a result, local films gained an audience who did not mind such static frames. To this group belonged city as well as provincial folk who wanted to keep up with their *zarzuela* preferences or who, because they could not buy tickets to the imported films, did not mind the limitations of local films (with cheaper admission) so long as they could get to see the movies.

Nevertheless, despite old-fashioned cameras and stilted movements, many local films had remarkable aesthetic merits.

The most highly acclaimed of these was Malayan Movies' film of 1930, *Noli Me Tangere*.² Alfredo Litiatco, the most diligent and astute critic of the period commented, "*Noli* is undoubtedly the best Filipino film to date, from all indica-

tions, the most costly too; no expense was spared to make the movie faithful to the incidents and period of Rizal's novel. The lavish banquets, the San Diego town fiesta procession, the river party . . . even little touches of the nineteenth century, for example, cleaning the shoes with banana peelings. *Noli Me Tangere* should be a lesson: resort to intelligent authors . . . the adaptation merits tribute; it would take unusual talent to screen the novel from offensive tones but Mr. Nepomuceno has done it. It is interesting to speculate just exactly when shall we have another photoplay as good as *Noli Me Tangere* and how long it will be before another — naturally higher — standard is set for Filipino films."

By 1930, however, the talking picture was already one year old in the country with the showing of *Syncopation*, the first American sound film, in Radio Theater, Plaza Santa Cruz. The arrival of sound in films brought setbacks to the progress and development that Litiatco had speculated about. Not only were there technical problems to overcome, but stylistic discrepancies were created for Filipino productions.

Early local movies, deriving their artistic conventions from highly developed stage traditions, easily adjusted to the pantomimic nature of the silent cinema. The use of sound called for laconic dialogue and restrained acting. Stage conventions appeared redundant to the visual nature of the medium now aided by loudspeakers. Local styles of emoting and rendering dialogue had to be unlearned to give in to the demands of Western-evolved rules of editing.

Curiously, the first film with sound produced in the country was silent for the first part and talking in the concluding portion. That was because George Musser of Manila Talkatone had already shot the first part of *Ang Asuwang*, starring Mary Walter, when the sound camera arrived. Nepomuceno made the first entire film with sound in 1932, *Punyal Na Ginto*, based on a novel by Antonio Sempio.

"The talkies are going to be attempted soon. In what will the dialogue be? English, Spanish, Tagalog?" speculated Litiatco. He lived to see that local films adapted Tagalog, now called Pilipino. Time proved too that the movies more than any other factor was most effective and pervasive in spreading the language all over the country. It is a wonder, however, if Litiatco knew that more than English, Spanish or Pilipino, the country adapted film language to express the obvious and the elusive in its soul.

THE "SILENT PICTURES" ERA IN THE PHILIPPINES

A review of the cinema's early years

by P.T. Martin

When was Philippine cinema born? How did the industry get started in the Philippines? Who were the pioneers who risked capital and talent to make the first Filipino films?

Anyone who attempts to write a full and comprehensive report on the first years of "moving pictures" in the Philippines will have to face the problem of historical gaps and silences. The pauses, as it were, are due to paucity of facts. To begin with, many pre-war films were burned or lost during the Second World War. Likewise reduced to ashes were the newspapers, magazines and other documents that recorded Philippine film history during the American Occupation and the Commonwealth. Moreover, memories of the period are fast growing dim in the minds of the few artists and film makers who still survive from that time.

Nevertheless, in reconstructing the history of film in the Philippines, one does not exactly grope in the dark. There are details and leads that can be tracked down. There are a few albeit incomplete rolls of negative left. One who wishes to study the early years of Filipino films must be like a director diligently aiming his camera at stray pieces and scattered scenes made cloudy by time to compose a clear and meaningful picture.

Tracing the Beginnings

It is far easier to trace the beginnings of film in the Philippines than in some Western countries. In the United States, for instance, there is a long-running dispute over dating the birth of the American cinema. Should it be with the invention of the motion-picture camera or with the first public screening of a film? If it dates back to the latter, which should be considered: Edison's so-called "kinetoscope" (a machine through which each viewer must peek to see the projection), or the big screen? We do not have this problem

Translated from "Ang Panahon ng 'Silent Pictures' sa Pilipinas", *Sagisag*, July 1975. English translation by Ma. Teresa Manuel.

because this art form came to us in a neat package — camera, projector and finished film.

But it helps a lot in understanding the history of the Filipino film to trace back the Filipino's readiness for this form. Even during the Spanish era, Filipinos were already familiar with watching moving forms on a white screen. This familiarity helped much in the spread and acceptance of the camera-and-celluloid art which the Americans later brought to the country.

One of the popular forms of entertainment during the Spanish period was the *carrillo*. Shadows were projected on a white sheet through the use of cardboard cut-outs of persons, animals, plants and other objects. This visual entertainment — a primitive cinema, really — told the tales of Don Quixote, Don Juan Tenorio and other metrical romances, legends and myths; even the Passion of Christ was a favorite subject for the *carrillo* especially during Lent. But these shadow plays gradually disappeared from our front-yards, houses, even warehouses, when the big theaters of Manila (which used to be exclusive venues for *sarsuwelas*¹, *bodabil*² and similar stage shows) started showing 10-15 minute films.

Most of the first films shown to Filipino audiences came from the West, especially France, Italy and Denmark. In time, however, American films flooded the market, particularly with the outbreak of the First World War, and



Jose Nepomuceno's *Sampaguita* was exported to the United States where it earned favorable critical notice.

films from Europe were bowled over.

The first film showing in Manila, one account claims, was actually an advertising trick. In his book, *Motion Pictures in the Philippines* (1952), Vicente Salumbides, one of the pioneer Filipino film-makers, says that foreign films were first shown here in 1904 when a huge screen was unfurled at the Escolta² for a free public exhibition. After this public introduction by way of a free sample, a Frenchman and three Filipinos whose names he could not recall hurriedly tore down an old warehouse behind Quiapo Church and erected what Salumbides considered the country's first moviehouse, the Orpheum.

But newspaper ads from 1904 belie Salumbides's story. At that time, the Orpheum only staged local vaudeville. The introduction of film in the country must have taken place much earlier than Salumbides claims, because as early as November 20, 1903, the Cervantes Cinematograph, a moviehouse on Cervantes street, was already advertising films like *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (250 meters long), *The Career of Napoleon* (500 meters), *The Siren* (about the assassination of the Serbian Crown Prince) and others.

We cannot now determine when and where the first film was shown in the Philippines, but definitely, moviehouses had started to multiply in Manila in 1903-1904. Even the theaters that used to show only *sarsuwela* and vaudeville were showing movies. As a result, the gradual collapse of the *sarsuwela* began. The public had found a new pastime and films were much cheaper than stage performances.

Although these movies were silent, the dialogue and other explanations of the plot appeared on printed frames in between scenes. But they could hardly be understood as subtitles were written in languages other than English, Spanish or even French. To keep customers who paid an admission price ranging from 20 to 50 centavos from griping that they didn't get their money's worth, the cinema owners devised ways to sustain viewers' interest.

According to Jose Jimenez, who owned the Rizal Cinematograph on Paseo de Azcarraga (located across the street from what is now the PNR main terminal), they would hire "someone intelligent" to narrate the story of the film. He would be seated in a corner where he could watch the screen and deliver a running commentary on what was happening.

When Alejandro Roces, Sr., showed *Cabiria* at the Opera House, the silent action on the screen was accompanied by the *Stabat Mater* sung and played by the choir and orchestra he had hired. This was the usual technique when the film merely showed scenery or when colored slides were projected. Sometimes, instead of an orchestra, a phonograph provided the music.

Types of Films

Moviehouses then were open only from 6:30 to 11:30 p.m. For 20 centavos, three to five films were shown in a program. The usual length of a film was 15 minutes.

Let us look, for instance, at the advertisements of two cinemas, the Ideal on Plaza Goiti, and the then newly-opened Gaiety, in the first weeks of January 1912.

At the Ideal, there were three films on the program: the first was *Sardinian Drummer Boy*, a story of the Austro-Italian War of 1848; the second was billed as "funny scenes of war," with all kinds of animals popping in; and the third was *From Rags to Silk*, said to be "full of human interest," which was all about the welcome for the King and Queen of England in India. The opening program of the Gaiety had four films, but the advertisement described only one. These films were *Sisters*, *Voyager*, *The Actor's Artifice* and *Enoch Arden* (said to be a heart-rending dramatization of the poem "Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred Tennyson).

In those days, the films showed not only dramas and historical events, but also miscellaneous subjects like the 1911 Olympic Games in Stockholm (shown at the Lux theater), the fight between the middleweight champions of France and the United States, Georges Carpentier and Willie Lewis (shown at the Empire moviehouse), or scenery, like *Swiss Alps in Wintertime* (at the Majestic).

For almost a decade the Filipino was bombarded with stories and pictures from the West to a point where the moviehouses boasted in their advertisements about showing "cosmopolitan programs for cosmopolitan audiences" with "only the best American and European stories." This way, the first silent movies from across the seas became an effective agent of Western culture and colonial thinking. These films helped to develop in the Filipino moviegoer a taste for the imported, a preference that placed a competitive burden on the films to be made by Filipinos themselves in the years to come.

The First Filipino Film

The genesis of the first film in the Philippines was controversial. This first film was an occasion for claim-grabbing and cut-throat competition in its exhibition, practices that still happen not infrequently in the film industry today.

Two big ads in the highly-circulated dailies *Manila Times* and *Cablenews-America* announced that on a Friday night, August 23, 1912, a film on the life and death of the hero Dr. Jose Rizal would open simultaneously in two Manila cinemas, each purporting to be the first film ever made in the Philippines. Of course, by 6:30 that evening, crowds were streaming to the Majestic and the Grand Opera House. For several nights, the public flocked to the films which showed till September 1 at the Majestic and till September 5 at the Grand Opera House.

Why the simultaneous exhibition? Were there two films on the same subject, or just one film with two versions made by different parties?

Those who have tried to review the history of Filipino films say there were two different films. One was about the life of Rizal while the other only depicted his death. In an interview given by the novelist Teodoro Virrey on December 2, 1938, at the Villamor Hall of the University of the Philippines, he said the first was *Vida de Rizal* made by Edward M. Gross, an American, with performances by his wife Titay Molina and the members of her *sarsuwela* troupe, shown at the Teatro Zorilla. The other film was *Fusilamiento del Dr. Jose Rizal*, made by another American, A.W. Yearsly, from a script by the noted Rizal biographer Austin Craig, and performed by the artists of the Gran Compañia de Zarzuela de Severino Reyes. This was shown at the Majestic. In his book, *Salumbides* also hews roughly to Virrey's accounts.

The matter is better clarified in a news item that came out on August 25, 1912, in the *Cablenews-America*, two days after the showing of the films:

"The past week has been one of sensation in cinematograph circles owing to the sharp competition between the management of Gaiety Theater in Malate and the Oriental Moving Picture Company in the production and display of a film depicting the life and death of Jose Rizal.

"The story of the competition is an interesting one. The manager of Gaiety, H. Brown, together with

E.M. Gross, organized a company and raised the necessary funds to take the picture and after extensive rehearsing the taking of the film started.

"But the Oriental Moving Picture Company was not asleep. The actors in the scene, having completed their agreements with Mr. Brown, called upon the other company and offered their services and the offer was at once taken up, and once the picture and a number of copies for exportation and provincial use had been taken, the film was exhibited at the Majestic Theater where it drew immense crowds, so much so that the aid of the police had to be called to prevent overcrowding and to keep the people from taking the theater by assault in their eagerness to see the film.

"When the original picture was shown at the Grand Opera House, it drew a like crowd and created like conditions and still the merry war goes on.

"The claim was made that the making of the film cost P25,000 but the Oriental Moving Picture Company ridiculed the idea of the great cost. It has been stated on reliable authority that it cost between P4,000 and P4,500 to produce."

The rivalry between the two films may be read clearly in their newspaper ads which were full of slighting references to each other. In the ad of the Grand Opera House (where the Brown-Gross film was showing), there was this announcement: "Note: Exhibition nights can be arranged with H. Brown of Gaiety Theater." In the other ad, big letters emphasized: "Film taken by the Oriental Moving Picture Company" (the company owned by A.W. Yearsly). It also underscored that "This film did not cost P25,000 nor did any film produced in Manila cost near this figure." But Brown-Gross had the last word on the last day of their film's exhibition: "You can fool all the people some of the time, some of the people all the time. But we are getting all the people and they are satisfied."

This controversy helped much to promote public patronage of the movie. Of course, this was the public's first opportunity to see on screen Filipino performers and historic sites, like Fort Santiago (used in the prison scenes) and the North Cemetery (used in the execution scene). This first film was 5,000 feet long (about an hour's run at silent-picture speed) and according to an official of the Oriental Moving Picture Company, it was made in a day! Neverthe-

less, from this time on, film production went on uninterrupted in the Philippines.

Alien Control

It is hard to explain why Filipino businessmen did not invest in film-making early on. One possible reason is that the Filipinos lacked sufficient knowledge about running the business. It was the American businessmen, arriving here with film-making paraphernalia, who pumped in capital in a field already accepted by the Filipinos as cultural entertainment.

The American monopoly of film-making in the Philippines lasted quite a few years. Brown and Gross produced more films than Yearsly. They filmed *Noli Me Tangere*, *El Filibusterismo*, *La Conquista de Filipinas*, *La Fiesta de Obando*, *Los Milagros de la Virgen de Antipolo*, *Medikong Laway*, and *Nena la Bozcadora*. Yearsly had bad luck: his company offices were burned even before his first film was shown; the Majestic also burned down shortly after the showing of *Fusilamiento de Dr. Jose Rizal*.

One will notice from the listing of the first films that other than historical or religious subjects, the materials were drawn from the *sarsuwelas*. Virrey says a good example was *Walang Sugat*. People flocked to see the film version of this very popular *sarsuwela*. It is said to have established an exhibition record: seven successive weeks at the Majestic. It was obvious that the movies had appropriated much from the *sarsuwela* — its theaters, performers, stories and even audience.

The Filipino Producer

The first group of Filipino silent-picture producers was led by Jose Nepomuceno, Vicente Salumbides, Julian Manansala and Carmen Concha. Other Filipinos rushed into movie-making when the Americans had left the field. Among them, the brothers Silos (Cesar, Octavio, Manuel and Augusto), Carlos Vander Tolosa, Jose Domingo Badilla, and Rafael Fernandez. But it was the first group which dominated the era of silent movies. Each of them left his own exceptional contribution to Philippine cinema.

Of the four, Nepomuceno was the most expert at handling the camera. Even before purchasing film-making equipment from the two American pioneers, he was already



known as one of the best photographers in Manila, being the owner of the Electro-Photo Studio Parhelio on Plaza Goiti. Thus, he was the first Filipino to make a film. Before doing his first feature film, *Dalagang Bukid* (1919), from the *sarsuwela* by Hermogenes Ilagan, he was already making documentaries and newsreels, or placing English and Spanish subtitles on films coming from Europe. This experience helped him a lot in turning out many silent pictures of the era, like *La Venganza de Don Silvestre* (1920), *La Mariposa Negra* (1920), *El Capullo Marchito* (1921), and *Hoy o Nunca, Besame* (1923).

On the other hand, Vicente Salumbides was the only one among the pioneers who had the opportunity to observe film trends and film-making in Hollywood. Two years after the first film was made here, he left for America to study law but it was film which attracted him more. A working student, he took a job as head usher at Los Angeles' biggest cinema and became an extra at the Famous Players Lasky Studio in Hollywood, where he had a chance to meet movie stars like Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Wallace Reid and others.

Because of his gradual infatuation with film, Salumbides wrote a comedy script entitled *The Greenhorn* (all about his experiences as a Pinoy newcomer in America). When he showed his script to a Hollywood director, he was asked to invest \$1,000 for its production which, for Salumbides, was like asking him to get the moon. But this did not discourage him. Instead, he went on observing even more conscientiously the different aspects of film-making, like set decoration, acting and the use of the camera.

On his return to the Philippines after 11 years, he was

In 1930 Jose Nepomuceno produced and directed the most highly acclaimed production of the time, *Noli Me Tangere*.

just the right partner for Nepomuceno. Salumbides had a chance to apply all he had learned in America.

For instance, he had spotted glaring defects in the screen appearance of Filipino performers. Yearsly and Gross did not use make-up on their actors who, consequently, looked too dark on film. On the other hand, they looked too fair when Nepomuceno powdered them up too much. Salumbides employed the make-up techniques he had learned in his first film, *Miracle of Love* (1925). He claims to have used several obvious innovations in the film, like the use of the "close-up" to show emotion on the actor's face, "vision" to visualize a character's thoughts, and "cutback scenes" to speed up scenes of horror. Besides these, Salumbides did not contribute much more that was new to the Filipino film. The silent pictures he made were all stories of love and romance, like *Fate or Consequence* (1926) and *Soul Saver* (1927).

Julian Manansala distinguished himself by his film themes. His first film, *Patria et Amore* (1929), created a stir when the Spanish community tried to prevent its showing because of its political implications. But nothing came of the objection because the colonial administration allowed the film to be shown, and the public patronized it well. His other films, like *Dimasalang* (1930), *Ang Kilabot ng mga Tulisan* (1934), *Pag-Ibig ng Kadete* (1929) and even the talkies he made, all had political themes. The nationalist tradition in Filipino films may be traced back to Manansala's films.

As a silent-picture producer, Carmen Concha distinguished herself from the others, not only by her surprise choice of actor for her film *Oriental Blood* (1930) — she managed to get the famous poet Jose Corazon de Jesus to appear on film — but because in this film, she introduced the use of authentic costumes and weapons (Muslim). She carried over her concern about using authentic props and costumes even to the talkies she made.

Despite the weaknesses of locally-produced silent pictures like primitive props and sets (painted canvases used for background moved when the wind blew), few camera tricks (showing fires, typhoons, or a spirit rising from a corpse), and poor photography (sometimes the picture was too faint that the actors seemed to have been shot behind cellophane), the audience kept crowding at the tills. Even a glut of foreign films failed to kill the local industry.

Leslie Reith, the local representative of Hollywood-

based RKO Radio Pictures, Inc., was impressed by the local film industry. An entire Filipino film cost just about as much as what Hollywood would spend on a single scene. In spite of the unbelievably low cost of local films, Reith said, the Filipinos could still turn out some fine pictures.

The Advent of "Talkies"

Talkies began in the United States in 1927. With this development, Nepomuceno immediately attempted to show talkies, even if he did not have the equipment to make them. He would accompany singing scenes in his movies with the appropriate tunes played on a gramophone hooked to a loudspeaker. Often, however, the tune could not synchronize with the lip movements of the performers on the screen, and so this trick didn't come off with the spectators. But Nepomuceno's bright idea wasn't too far off the actual talkie shown at the Photophone Radio Theater on Plaza Sta. Cruz on August 5, 1929. The sound came from a phonograph record. The film was entitled *Syncopation*, and was billed as a "100 percent all-talking, all-singing, all-playing extravaganza." The next film at Radio Theater, *Lucky Boy*, was better appreciated because it had a sound track. This time, both dialogue and songs were heard.

The introduction of talkies in the Philippines boosted technical developments in Filipino film-making. *Ang Aswang*, the first Filipino talking picture produced by George P. Musser, was shown at the Lyric in 1932. Encouraged by the success of the film, Filipino producers followed the lead. For Nepomuceno, this transition was unforgettable because it was actually recorded in his film *Punyal na Ginto* (1933). Halfway through filming this novel by Antonio Sempio, Nepomuceno decided to use the sound equipment he had purchased from American technicians in Hollywood. Hence, only the second half of the film had sound.

The coming of the talkies to the Philippines was, as the *Manila Times* commented on August 6, 1929, one day after *Syncopation* opened, truly a historic event because it marked the start of "a new era in language," hastening the dissemination of English throughout the islands. At the same time, the talkies helped shape a national language for the Filipinos as local films made more popular the use of the native language. At this juncture, the silent picture made its exit. And the word filled the silence.



EARLY YEARS OF PHILIPPINE MOVIES

by Celso Al. Carunungan

The year 1912 was one of the most memorable in the history of motion pictures. That was the year when the world's first feature film was shown in New York. It was *Queen Elizabeth*, a four-reeler starring Sarah Bernhardt and produced by Adolph Zukor. That same year, in Italy, what was then the world's longest movie, *Quo Vadis?*, was produced; it was an eight-reeler that ran two hours on the screen. At about the same time, in the Philippines, the very first Filipino movie was made by Cine Manila, a film company capitalized at ₱12,000 by its sole owner E.M. Gross, who was married to the popular Filipino stage actress, Titay Molina.

The film was Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, which was a three-reeler, and it was shown at the historic Zorilla Theater, at the corner of Azcarraga (now Recto) and Evangelista streets. Like America's *Queen Elizabeth* and Italy's *Quo Vadis?*, this film was an instant success. In fact, Gross was so gratified at the enthusiastic public reaction to this picture that he produced three more films: *Life of Jose Rizal*, *Enchong Laway*, and *Nena la Bozcadora*. Unlike its present namesake, the old Cine Manila was a very profitable enterprise.

This was fortunate, because the success of Cine Manila encouraged others to make more movies. The owner of the old Lerma Stadium, a certain A.W. Yearsly, was so excited by Gross' box-office achievement that he formed Yearsly & Company, which produced another version of Rizal's life and, later, the first film version of Severino Reyes' celebrated zarzuela, *Walang Sugat*.

Then Francisco Lichauco organized Victoria Pictures, which was one of the very first newsreel and documentary ventures in all of Asia. The company concentrated on "reviews and views" and it failed. Lichauco then tried his hand at feature films, under a new company called Mayon Photo-play Corporation. The new organization started filming

Opposite page: Stage idols Atang de la Rama and Marcelino Ilagan in Jose Nepomuceno's first film *Dalagang Bukid*. This was a silent picture that had its actors declaiming and singing their lines to their moving images onscreen.

These pre-war movie posters reveal much about the content of early Philippine movies. In a way, nothing much has changed, except the lay-out.



Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, starring Gregorio Fernandez and a young Muslim girl, Sofia Lotta; it was, however, too ambitious a project at that time that the company ran out of money and was forced to abandon the work.

Another American named Elser put up the Manila Movie Studio, but it failed before it even left the ground. Then, with Joaquin Pardo de Tavera as one of the owners, Orient Pictures Corporation was born. This outfit covered the first world championship fight in the Philippines — that of Pancho Villa, world's flyweight boxing champion then, versus Clever Sencio — using the services of a well-known French cameraman. It was the first documentary picture of its kind in Asia, but the venture did not make money, and this company also collapsed.

Then came the Nepomuceno brothers, Jose and Jesus. They had no movie experience, like all the others who came before them. But they knew photography, being owners of a first-class photo studio at Plaza Goiti (now Plaza Lacson) for a long time. In those years, the photographer was the most important person in movie-making, and the good ones were extremely expensive and hard to find. And so, the Nepomucenos had a great advantage over all the others. They put up Malayan Movies in 1919.

From the very beginning, however, the Nepomucenos were bedevilled by lack of capital. They never seemed to get enough money for continuous expansion and improvement. After ten years of movie-making, the Malayan Movies was still capitalized at only P100,000; Jesus Nepomuceno was quoted then as saying that with about P100,000 more, "Malayan Movies could produce better pictures." But that was not all. Handicapped as it was by a meager capital, Malayan Movies suffered two serious setbacks when, one after the other, their processing plant in Pandacan and their studio in San Juan del Monte were gutted by fire.

In spite of all this, however, the Nepomucenos moved doggedly on and produced some of the more significant movies then. Two of these, *The Filipino Woman* and *Sampaguita*, were considered by the critics then as "good enough for exhibition anywhere in the world, without fear of arousing much unfavorable comment." These two productions were even exported to the United States, and written about in Europe.

In 1921 and 1922, the Nepomucenos were commissioned by the United States government to make a series of documentary films, showing the most important industries

in the Philippines. The purpose was to show the American people the richness of our resources and the Philippines' tremendous potentials for industrial development. One of the most impressive of these fourteen films was the one about the hemp industry, which showed all the facets of abaca production, from planting to exportation.

The first Nepomuceno feature film was *Dalagang Bukid*, based on the popular zarzuela, written by Hermogenes Ilagan, the grand old man of the Ilagan clan that produced such motion picture stalwarts as Gerardo de Leon, Angel Esmeralda, Tito Arevalo and now, Robert Arevalo.

Honorata (Atang) de la Rama and Marcelino Ilagan, who starred in the stage version, also appeared in the movie. Writing in the *Graphic* at that time, M.S. Martin, who was, later, general manager and leading novelist of Liwayway Publications, said "The first venture, while it received flattering comments, was of poor quality compared with the highest developments of the times. Nevertheless, the result showed a better hope for the future than those early attempts, especially in photography. The earlier ones were blurred and too faint, showing poor control of light."

Malayan Movies was perpetually hounded by lack of adequate financing. Jose Nepomuceno, owner of the firm, had to be technical man, property man, photographer, director, scenario writer, and even electrician, all in one, in order to save on production costs. As M.S. Martin said: "A glimpse of the interior of the Malayan Movies studio, and the meagerness of the furnishings and equipment compared with foreign producing companies will be appreciated. The good quality of the work obtained can hardly be expected from such poor equipment. . . . The moving picture industry in the Philippines has some peculiarities of its own. The accepted ideas and practices for the control of light in the temperate climates cannot be used in the Philippines with satisfactory results. Hence the need of research for the peculiar needs. Aside from the use of different chemicals for proper treatment of films for tropical exposure, Malayan Movies has given an original contribution to effective light control."

Soon the fame of the Nepomucenos in motion picture photography spread everywhere; they became the local correspondents for Paramount News and Pathé News. In fact, in 1923, when a disastrous earthquake hit Japan, Pathé News commissioned them to cover it, instead of getting anybody from either Japan or Shanghai, which had

a Pathé correspondent and which was nearer to Japan than Manila.

In 1928, Jesus Nepomuceno spent eight months in Hollywood for observation and study; because of his enviable reputation as a moviemaker, he was accorded every opportunity by the producers to learn all he could from veteran motion picture technicians. In spite of their handicaps, the Nepomucenos were making more movies than any other single company in Asia, including Japan.

However, they were always in need of fresh capital. In 1928, when asked about the most pressing need of the industry, Jesus Nepomuceno said: "It's capital. With it, we will have more equipment, we can spend more to improve the technical side of the industry, we can train actors and actresses, and thus improve the quality of the acting. At present, for lack of working capital, we cannot take any risk, and naturally under this condition, progress will be rather slow. We have to be sure of the box-office returns before we can produce anything at our own expense. But we are willing to share expenses with anyone who wants to produce. We furnish the technical needs, but the producer must pay the rest of the expenses. *The Soul-Saver* (1927), the latest produced by Malayan Movies, was not a production of the company in the real sense. Vicente Salumbides wrote the play and paid for all the expenses outside of purely technical matters. The same is true with the latest local production, *Lumang Simbahan* (1928), by Florentino Colantes. The story was adapted for the screen by Jose Nepomuceno and Vicente Albo financed the production."

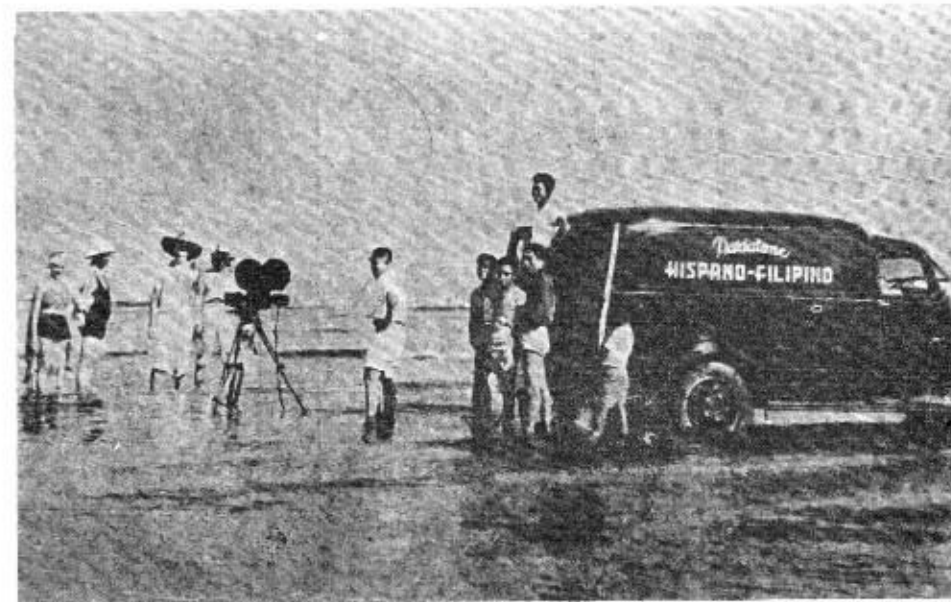
Malayan Movies made several Spanish films, notably *La Venganza de Don Silverio* (1920), *Un Capullo Marchito* (1921) and *Hoy o Nunca, Besame* (1923), in which the subtitles were in Spanish. In 1926, the Nepomucenos shocked the country with a movie called *Tatlong Hambog*, which has become a notorious landmark in Filipino film history, since it was the first locally-produced motion picture that showed passionate kissing scenes. It starred one of the most popular vaudeville stars then, Elizabeth (Dimples) Cooper, and Luis Tuason.

In the 1920's Vicente Salumbides, a young Filipino student in America returned to the Philippines after a stint in Hollywood, and went into movie production with the Nepomucenos. He was a World War I veteran, a practising attorney, and he had some fresh and exciting ideas in movie production. Salumbides produced *Miracles of Love*, which

he wrote and directed, also playing the starring role. It was filmed by Malayan Movies. "It was not by any means the best show one could have for his money," the *Graphic* critics said then. "But it was, from the standpoint of Filipino movies, significant. It sold native moving pictures to the public, and what was more, it undoubtedly inspired ambitions in the hearts of the youth of the land to appear on the screen."

Most of the movie personalities then were also stage performers, like Atang de la Rama, Juanita Angeles and Dimples. But it was Salumbides who sought "discoveries" everywhere. For his picture *Fate or Consequence*, he appeared with a Muslim girl with royal blood, named Pina-gandu Magadi Sinambel Malibutang. She was, according to him, "from the untamed regions of Cotabato," a dancing girl, an ex-nursing student and school teacher. She was, also, a beauty queen called Miss Cotabato. Salumbides called her Sofia Lotta, and she became one of the hottest stars in Philippine movies then. Although she achieved immediate fame for her torrid kissing scenes with Salumbides in *Fate or Consequence* and with Gregorio Fernandez in *Lumang Simbahan*, she was, nevertheless, a fine actress in her own right. According to the movie critics of the *Manila Tribune*,

Jose Nepomuceno's Malayan Movies had a monopoly of production for nearly six years, from 1919. Vicente Salumbides provided competition in 1925. By the middle of the thirties, there were seven other production outfits: Del Monte Pictures, Sampaguita Pictures, Parlatone, Philippine Films, Salumbides Brothers, X'Otis and Excelsior Pictures. LVN started production in 1938.



after the premiere showing of the film in 1928: "Such a sincere, realistic, convincing, powerful yet natural, performance has seldom been seen, even in great American productions, in which prominent players of world-wide fame take part. Combining with the most consummate art the elements of tragic drama and the most winsome, delightful humor, she seems to live her part — a difficult one, and one that would tax the genius of the most famous actresses."

Another big star of the early twenties was Eva Lynn, a fifteen-year-old discovery of the Nepomucenos, who was a talented painter and classical dancer. She appeared in *Flo-rante at Laura*, later known as *La Mujer Filipina*, where she appeared in three roles: Laura, Laura's mother, and the "bad girl" or villainess. She chose her own leading man for the movie, and he was Marvin Gardner, who later became popular as Eduardo de Castro, and who went to Hollywood but returned after a few months.

Both Salumbides and the Nepomucenos can be credited as having discovered some of the artists that, later, rose into spectacular prominence. Among them were Gregorio Fernandez, Rogelio de la Rosa, Leopoldo Salcedo, the Padilla brothers, and Rosa del Rosario.

Barely five years after Al Jolson said the immortal lines, "You ain't heard nothin' yet, folks; listen to this," which was the first dialogue spoken by an actor in a motion picture, an American in Manila, George P. Musser, produced a horror movie, *Ang Asuwang*, the first Filipino talking picture. Premiered at the fashionable Lyric Theater at the Escolta which, previously, never showed Tagalog movies, the film was a huge success. It starred Patring Carvajal who was known as a comedienne, but who performed admirably as a dramatic star in the film. Later, she became known as the "funny girl" Monang who, with the gifted director and motion picture genius Manuel Silos (as Sano), made several hit comedies during the depression when humor was so prized.

Jose Nepomuceno, likewise, made talking pictures, like *Punyal na Ginto* with Alma Bella, and *Makata at Paraluman*, and one horror film, *Ang Kuba*, with Don Danon. Among the top names in the Filipino movie world of the early thirties were Mary Walter, the Del Rosario sisters (Tina, Norma and Rosa), Rosita Rivera, Manuel Barbeyto, Domingo Principe, Salud del Valle, Maggie Calloway, Gregorio Fernandez, Rogelio de la Rosa, Alma Bella, Flora Vidal, and Paquito Villa. By the mid-thirties, the Filipino movies came out in torrents. Some of those pictures can compare in creativity

and perception to those of today. These were pictures like Lamberto Avellana's *Sakay*, made when he was hardly out of his teens; Gerardo de Leon's *Ang Maestra*, which starred Rogelio de la Rosa and Rosa del Rosario; *Huling Habilin*, and some of the most scintillating musicals in Philippine movie history, like those done by Carmen Rosales and Rogelio de la Rosa (using the voice of a singer named Gordon), and those of Elsa Oria and Ely Ramos.

Stars like Leopoldo Salcedo, Mila del Sol (mother of Jeanne Young), Elsa Oria, Serafin Garcia (now in the foreign service), the late Fernando Poe, Angel Esmeralda, Corazon Noble, Tita Duran, Carmen Rosales, Lucita Goyena, Fely Vallejo (now Mrs. Gerardo de Leon), made Filipino movies soar into unprecedented popularity everywhere. A film called *Zamboanga*, produced by Philippine Films, and starring Rosa del Rosario, became popular in the United States — and up to the fifties, it was still showing in some little movie houses even in New York as an exotic South Sea island movie.

Color came into the Filipino screen in a brief sequence in *Ibong Adarna* in the late thirties. It was a thrilling moment when the enchanted bird in full color started to sing its magical song. It was produced by LVN.

When World War II broke out, all the movie companies ceased production. Throughout the entire war, only one Filipino picture was made. It was *Tatlong Maria*, with Carmen Rosales, Ely Ramos, Norma Blancaflor, Jose Padilla, Jr., Liwayway Arceo, and Fernando Poe. Gerardo de Leon directed it from a story by Jose Esperanza Cruz. *Tatlong Maria* was an idyllic story in which the "return to the farm" idea was exploited with lyricism and fine detail. It was not a propaganda picture, although it was produced by the Japanese in the Philippines and distributed by Eiga Haikyusa.

The greatest boom in motion pictures came immediately after the war. All the movies — like *Garrison 13*, *Tagumpay* and *Orasang Ginto* — made a lot of money, and actors like Leopoldo Salcedo could demand as high as ₱30,000 per picture then.

The Big Four — LVN, Premiere, Sampaguita and Lebran — made phenomenal strides in movie-making, and two first-run theaters in Manila — Life and Dalisay — showed nothing but Filipino movies. Co-productions with other countries began with Premiere's *Sekretang Hongkong* in 1948; others followed suit. Filipino movies gained recognition in foreign film festivals. New stars came to gleam in the movie heavens, while old stars faded away. But the progress of Filipino mo-

vies could no longer be stopped.

Today the local motion picture industry is a gigantic world of indescribable activity. Multi-million peso productions have become commonplace, and some stars demand about half-a-million pesos per picture. While only two theaters were showing Filipino pictures before, now there are no less than a hundred of them in the Metro Manila area alone. Today more movies are made in Manila than in Hollywood every year. Some Filipino movies make more money now than foreign ones. The outlook, therefore, seems really promising.

But after everything has been said about our present movie era, it can never recapture the sheer, joyous enchantment, the carefree abandon of those early days when ingenuity and creativity compensated skillfully for lack of equipment, and when stars were real actors and actresses, and when the Filipino imagination soared with amazing lucidity without the stain of foreign influences that can pollute and undermine the glory of our own inherent flair, flavor, idealism, and fortitude. Those were, indeed in its purest, finest sense, the *good*, old days of Philippine movies.

THE GOLDEN DECADE OF FILIPINO MOVIES

by Jessie B. Garcia

The history of Filipino movies can perhaps roughly be summarized as follows: from 1) the glimmering, daguerreotype-figures broadly acting out one-dimensional roles in cut-and-dried situations of the crude silents; to 2) the Pepe-and-Pilar-are-in-love-so-they-sing-a-duet-under-the-tree stage; to 3) the pseudo-sophisticated spy-thriller which spells oomph, karate chops and nothing else; to 4) the labored, orgasmic gasp of our coital cinema.

Storywise, film-making in the Philippines has indeed degenerated. Filipino movies of the '30s, '40s and '50s vintage also ran the gamut from saccharine to syrup, but they manifested an overriding earnestness, a sort of dubious honesty. For all their calculated gasps and sniffles, homilies and heehaws, they treated about typically Filipino characters within typically Filipino settings.

The direction may have been unimaginative and plodding, the acting broad and silly, the technical aspects ostentatiously crude and antediluvian — but what the heck, these films were as native to us as *puto* and *dinuguan*!¹

If the movies of yesteryears illustrate the crude, good-natured crumminess of movies without art, the bumper crop of present Filipino films exhibit the last word in gross dishonesty, vulgarity and plain stupidity. Most local films today have simply jettisoned the idea, or even the semblance, of a storyline.

The present formula of most local producers apparently runs this way: just let the hero and villain confront each other with six-shooters in the town plaza, add a liberal dose of bare tits and gaping pudenda, further add a dash of gore, spice it with erotic goings-on which are not even hinted at in the Kama-Sutra, mix well with tears, slapstick and hysteria, and — presto! — you have a superhit!

It is true most Filipino movies of today may be technically superior to their counterparts of past decades, but

this advancement manifests itself in no great measure other than the sedulous aping of pseudo-sophisticated technical devices from foreign films as zoom shots, soft-fading-into-focus and other fancy innovations. Artistically, the best output of present film-makers pale significantly in comparison to what the past decades, most especially the Fifties, have brought us.

Aaaaaahhhhhh — the Fifties! Any avid Filipino movie fan who is past twenty may still treasure fond memories of those gay Fifties when local movies rode the waves of cash and ballyhoo. For local producers, it was indeed the days of wine and roses. Film materials were comparatively cheaper then; the prospects of making hay at the box-office were tremendously endless; any relative unknown, with enough studio hootedoodle and fanfare, could be launched into superstardom.

The acknowledged “Big Four” of local movies — Sampaguita, LVN, Premiere and Lebran Productions — ground out movies like potted meat, and canned them like pork-and-beans. For the movie stars, it meant a fairy-tale existence onscreen — an ugly duckling who turns overnight into a dazzling beauty; prince now, pauper tomorrow.

For the dearly-beloved movie fan, the situation then was as it is now, only even more so. Omnipresent talent scouts sometimes “discover” an *artista*² anywhere — in basketball backlots, in dingy *turo-turos*³, during studio open house. Starry-eyed, teenaged *provincianas*⁴ — not yet weaned from their *Nanay*⁵’s influence, not even out of high school — hitched their wagons to a star, both in the literal and figurative sense. To any impressionable lad and lass, being an *artista* meant money, fame, glamour—in that order. Then, as it still is now, to be an *artista* was the Great Filipino Dream.

Decolonization

The only difference is that a sort of decolonization had taken place in the superstar image. During the Fifties, for instance, the stereotyped image of the *bidang babae*⁶ — the vestal virgin type — prevailed in Filipino movies: pretty, tall, well-shaped, fair-complexioned, preferably with Caucasian features. In other words, someone who looked like Gloria Romero. If you did not possess such physical endowments, it was better to go back to cigarette-hawking, *hija*⁷, unless you wanted to compete with Aruray.



Apat na Alas, 1950, directed by Manuel Conde, was just one in a long line of swashbuckling adventure yarns. It starred Conde, Delia Razon, Mario Montenegro and Johnny Monteiro.

Nowadays, however, anybody who is as plain as brown wrapper can aspire to superstardom, provided she can cry a little, dance a little, and sing a lot. If there is one thing the Horatio Alger story of the little Bicolana marvel⁸ has wrought on the values of Filipino movies and moviegoers, it lies in having elevated poverty and physical plainness to veritable virtues.

The same thing holds true with the present crop of our *bidang lalake*⁹ — the *pogi*¹⁰, well-built *tisoy*¹¹, although far from being extinct, is as believable to present cinegoers as, well, Prince Charming of the fairy tale. Being plain, being *barako*¹², being undoubtedly Filipino-looking is no hindrance to being a movie star nowadays. After all, if someone with Max Alvarado or Bino Garcia’s pugnacious looks can make the grade, why can’t others of infinitely pleasanter features do the same?

It was the Fifties which supplied us with stars whose luminescence has not dimmed even after the passing of decades. Gloria Romero and Nida Blanca — the two superstars who dominated the local flickerville of the Fifties — are still very much around, well and kicking. The mid-Fifties brought into orbit two relative unknowns who assumed the screen monickers of Amalia Fuentes and Susan Roces. Chosen from among a galaxy of pretty faces, the late Fifties witnessed their stars on the ascendancy, which later waxed fully and dominated the screenland’s Milky Way all throughout the Sixties.

This decade in Filipino movies was ushered in by films of unbridled fancy, light hearts and heavy budgets. An industry reeling from the effects of war immediately set its sight on the commercial possibilities of films dealing with the never-neverland of whimsy and imagination. Why was this so?

One may hazard a psychological guess: after living for several years under the shadow of Japanese atrocities, local moviemakers may have been simply letting off steam, so to speak, using the film medium as an escape hatch for their creative faculties that were suppressed during the Japanese domination.

But that's even going a bit too far. It can be surmised, too, that local audiences were plainly channeling their instinctive desire to forget their wartime travails through patronage of films dealing with the supernatural, the fantastic, the incredulous. But more likely than not, the answer lies plainly in the fact that fantasy films have always been very good investment at the box-office.

Thus, the most fantastically popular and top-grossing movies at the turn of the decade up to the mid-Fifties came primarily from the now defunct LVN studio, which was then enjoying its heyday. The studio costume epics of this period can lay claim to being some of the best kitsch local movie-makers ever turned out.

Indeed, *Prinsipe Amante*, its sequel *Prinsipe Amante sa Rubitanya*, *Rodrigo de Villa*, *Doce Pares*, *Prinsipe Tiñoso*, *Singsing na Tanso*, *Sohrab at Rustum* belong to that type of film which, sad to say, they don't make anymore.

These films were an admixture of the Arabian Nights, King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, the Cid, Alice in Wonderland, Robin Hood and his merry brigands of Sherwood Forest, the swashbuckling exploits of Zorro, the amorous adventures of Don Juan with assorted characters from local mythology and demonology also thrown in for good measure.

One may reason out that at present, only the kiddies are likely to sit through such bushwa. However, the genre's phenomenal success was reflective of moviegoers taste during the Fifties, in much the same way that the mass appeal of *Love Story* is indeed symptomatic of the present film audiences' jaded appetite for cheap sex-and-violence stuff and their desire for a return to the basic essentials — love plus romance.

The world of eternal romance — this, fantastic photo-

plays supply, and much more. These films were ablaze with color, reeling with action, pomp and pageantry. The romance is swathed in decor, the violence innocuously portrayed with tomato ketchup and composed corpses.

Such films bring one back to the crumbling temples of one's youthful, hooky-playing days at the nearby bug-infested theater — you know, when the volcano finally blows up and the evil monster is slain, and the prince saves the princess from the clutches of the dastardly villain.

The logic of the never-neverland of make-believe and magic lies in its keeping depression out of sight and out of mind, though mostly for only a good two hours. One can watch them secure in the knowledge that the world inhabited by Mario Montenegro (as Rodrigo) and Delia Razon (as his ladylove, Princess Jimena) is as distant as the stars and won't in any way interfere with one's thread of life as soon as the two hours are over.

"It's all just stardust, see," these films seem to say. In the one-dimensional portrayal of good-looking heroes and beautiful heroines triumphing over all obstacles in the cloud cuckooland of imagination, we see an elemental image of ourselves being projected on the screen, larger than the canvas of our uneventful lives, our daily burdens and frustrations.

Other variations of the fantastic and the unreal suffused the screens of the early Fifties. Lamberto Avellana's *Satur* — with Manuel Conde playing the Beelzebub role — was a new reworking of the Mephistopheles myth. So was Gerardo de Leon's *Kamay ni Satanas*. Sampaguita Productions' *Bernardo Carpio*, an Alicia Vergel-Cesar Ramirez starrer, deals with the exploits of the famous strongman of Philippine mythology.

Fernando Poe Sr.'s definitive version of Mars Ravelo's *Darna* — which starred Rosa del Rosario — started a whole cycle of female-superwoman flicks which reverberated up to the late Sixties as Liza Moreno, Gina Alonzo and Gina Pareño took turns in donning the famous cloak and *Alakazam*-ing their way across the starry heavens.

Darna and *Og*, the local *Tarzan*, were the culture heroes of the kiddies during the Fifties, in a manner akin to the hero-worship accorded by American kids to their own comic book heroes like *Superman* or *Batman*. Other notable screen creations of the Fifties which caught our movie public's fancy were: *Exzur*, the mysterious visitor from outer space; *Ramadal*, the local invisible man; *Bondying*, the middle-aged

baby; *Silveria*, the talking horse; *Kapitan Berong* and the *tulisang pugot*; ¹³*Kenkoy*; ¹⁴the cigar-chomping *Dalagang Ilokana*; ¹⁵*Dyesebel*, the beautiful, lovelorn mermaid; and later on, the members of the *Lo-Waist Gang*.

Manuel Conde, the acknowledged showman of the Fifties, widened the horizons of the fantastic film genre as no moviemaker of his time did. His film incursions into the world of the magical, the fantastic, the supernatural have resulted in such memorable, lavishly-budgeted blockbusters of the Fifties like *Siete Infantes de Lara*, *Apat na Alas*, *Prinsipe Paris*, *Ibong Adarna*, to mention a few.

All were done in Ansco color, a novelty during those days. Conde's best works are indeed the closest thing to the film epic that local movies have ever essayed. His films have scope and a sort of primitive grandeur. The budget for his films — certainly astronomical by local standards — manifests itself overtly; in the lavish costumes and sets, expressly designed for his films by artist Carlos V. Francisco, and in the impressive camera tricks whipped up by Richard Abelardo, then acknowledged as the dean of Filipino camera wizards.

One of Conde's famous super-spectaculars is Lebran's *Sigfredo* in which he played the mythical hero Siegfried,

Fred Montilla (shown here with Lolita Rodriguez) is the overgrown "baby" of Mar S. Torres' *Bondying*, a comic-book fantasy figure who enjoyed wide popularity in the 50s.



with Elvira Reyes as Brunhilde, and Erlinda Cortes as Kriemhilde of the German myth. The film, loosely based on Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, featured fire-breathing dragons, giants, dwarfs and other legendary denizens of the bogey world. The "miracles" Conde created on the one-dimensional screen in fact earned him the flattering title "the Filipino Cecil B. deMille."

Undoubtedly, the crowning glory of Conde's achievements is his pseudo film-biography of Temujin, or, as he is popularly known, Genghis Khan, the savage Mongol conqueror of the 13th century. In a series of broad episodes, Conde's film chronicles Genghis Khan's struggle on the Gobi plain with the dominating Karait tribe and its leaders; his miraculous escapes from his enemies; the rise of the Mongol military power; the courtship of Princess Li-Hai; and finally the victorious "earth-shaker" swearing the oath of world conquest, which later he almost fulfilled.

Genghis Khan was the official Philippine entry to the 1952 Venice Film Festival, the first attempt whatsoever of the fledging local movie industry to crash a prestigious international filmfest. The attempt did not go unrewarded, however. It was adjudged as one of the outstanding pictures entered in the said filmfest.

To date, no other Filipino movie has duplicated the feat. In fact, the film created quite a big stir in that great European festival that United Artists decided to take it for American distribution.

In the print released all over the US, the Tagalog dialogue had not been scrapped, but from time to time the sound is muted and the action explained in an English narration written by the late James Agee, considered to be the best film critic America has ever produced. What must have motivated United Artists to take *Genghis Khan* for American distribution was the *succès d'estime* of a previous Venice Festival winner — Akira Kurosawa's masterpiece *Rashomon* — which played to capacity audiences when it made the rounds of America's art-house circuits.

Favorable Reviews

Of course, *Genghis Khan* is no *Rashomon*, but all the same, it painted the Philippines red in America's respectable film circles. The reviews of *Genghis Khan* which appeared in widely-circulated American magazines, were generally favorable.

Arthur Knight, film critic of the *Saturday Review of Literature* had this to say: "The Philippines' *Genghis Khan* is a romanticized account of that half-legendary Chinese conqueror's formative years, but omitting none of the bloodshed commonly associated with his name. Primitive in most respects — including acting, make-up, sound and processing — it still has moments of curiously impressive power and intensity, a delight in the sheer production of a film."

Knight further heaps praises on the film's fresh approach, the certain roughness of execution and crude earnestness of intention which are not the least of its recommendations.

The critic of *Time* magazine made much of the film's striking resemblance to a rudimentary Hollywood western: "Manuel Conde plays the part of Genghis Khan as a rather handsome, ferocious, cunning but likable fellow, a sort of medieval Shane roaming the Gobi desert. The picture traces his career from his youthful nomad days to his campaign of world conquest. Although the movie may offer nothing much of historical significance, it is undoubtedly an excellent outlet for the pent-up aggressions of well-behaved moviegoers. Filmed on a large scale, it has both barbaric splendor and fighting frenzy."

In an article entitled "The Screen — Authentic Comments on Films in the field of Nature, Geography and Exploration" published by the *Natural History* (the magazine of the American Museum of Natural History), a long column was expressly devoted to *Genghis Khan*. Dr. Walter A. Fairservis, an eminent scientist who had conducted many explorations in Mongolia — the very territory from which the Great Khan originated — has made many astute remarks about the film:

"Technically the faults of the picture are many; the geographic background (it is told in the narration that the territory represents the Gobi plains, but is actually the Philippine Islands), and the material culture are scarcely Mongol. Nevertheless, the Filipino awe at the famous leader, combined with a wonderful enthusiasm for the story, has brought out a kind of contagious spirit, which may well be akin to that of Temujin and his contemporaries. The Tagalog language, the enthusiastic broad acting, the zeal expressed in the scenes of feasting, quarreling, intriguing, and fighting, and the excellent music effects have a strong appeal.

The story is told without subtlety or refinement, which is perhaps more nearly valid for the Mongols than the pale imitations Hollywood often uses, for people of this ilk."

Film critic Parker Tyler of the *Theater Arts* believed that the film sometimes appeared "amateurishly awkward and thin"; at other times, though, the savage legend of the Mongolian "world conqueror" appeared "majestic and eloquent in its straightforward manner." The highest tribute ever accorded to Conde's film was in Tyler's opinion that *Genghis Khan* was slightly reminiscent of old-style, Russian hero-sagas, such as *Storm Over Asia*, an acknowledged masterpiece of Russian classic cinema.

No other Filipino photoplay has ever earned such generous plaudits from American critics.

The American *TV Key Movie Guide*, a pocketbook edited by Steven H. Scheuer, also recognized the artistic superiority of the Philippine version of the Temujin counterparts. In the book's rating, Conde's version earned three stars (meaning "good"), whereas, the expensive, name-freighted Columbia Pictures' super-spectacular *Genghis Khan* — made in 1963 with such famous names as Omar Sharif, Stephen Boyd and James Mason in the cast — merited only two stars ("fair"). Another multi-million dollar production of Genghis Khan's story — RKO's *The Conqueror* which starred John Wayne and Susan Hayward — was good for exactly one star ("poor").

Conde later went on to make other big-budgeted film ventures — "mammoth spectacles" and "monumental blockbusters", to repeat the jargon of movie mags. In fact, he tried to surpass himself during the succeeding years in such ambitious undertakings as *The Fire and the Shadow* (later entitled *Krus na Kawayan*), the first joint Filipino-Vietnamese movie undertaking in history; *Juan Tamad Goes to Congress* and its sequel *Juan Tamad Goes to Society*.

The budget and scope of *Krus na Kawayan* was later on surpassed by Gerardo de Leon's *Saigon*, which starred Leopoldo Salcedo, and whose impressive credits included being the first Philippine movie venture in Vietnam. The unique cast featured top Vietnamese actresses, officers and crew of the American warship, the USS *Seminole*, and thousands of Vietnamese refugees fleeing from Communist-dominated North Vietnam.

As for Conde's *Juan Tamad* series, they are virtual masterpieces of that very rare genre — the satirical film.

Done in a humorous, sometimes bitingly-acidic vein, the series poked fun at our cherished political, social and cultural institutions, as well as highlighting the foibles and the "little murders" which plague modern Filipino life.

The film's characters may be the stereotyped buffoons of a comic strip, and may be garbed in outlandish costumes, but they are as true as one's next-door neighbors. The series was an attempt to reflect what the great mass of people felt as it contemplated the passing scene during the Fifties. Another effective use of satire on film was in the movie version of Fr. Horacio de la Costa's popular radio serial *Kuwentong Kutsero*, which portrayed a low middle-class urban Filipino family as it copes with the day-to-day vicissitudes of modern life.

A further extension of the big-budgeted, power-packed trend in local filmmaking during those times manifested itself in the Biblical costume epics which were not only an ubiquitous presence onscreen during the Lenten season, but infinitely more exciting than a long drawn-out novena.

This was the specialty of Lebran Productions which turned out such worthy contributions to the genre as *Kalbaryo Ni Hesus* (with a star-studded cast, among them Norma Blancaflor as the Virgin Mary and Elvira Reyes as Mary Magdalene) and *Ang Pagsilang ng Mesiyas*. Both films were directed by the late Carlos Vander Tolosa. Another famous religious film of the Fifties was *Himala ng Birhen ng Mga Rosas* with Tita Duran as a novice.

The Fifties also turned out a spate of historical films based on the famous sagas of local legendary heroes. There was Premiere's *Diego Silang*, with Jose Padilla, Jr. as Northern Luzon's famous revolutionary hero, and LVN's *Dagohoy* and *Lapu-Lapu*, with Mario Montenegro portraying both valiant fighters for freedom.

One of the best film biographies ever cranked out by local film-makers is Ramon Estella's *Ang Buhay at Pag-ibig ni Dr. Jose Rizal*, with the phlegmatic Eddie del Mar turning in a subtle and dignified performance as the Great Malayan.

The blood-and-thunder photoplays of the Fifties — for all their one-dimensional characters, stereotyped plots, and contrived endings — have a crude vigor, an innocent earnestness. With stony panache, these films hurl the viewer into the gangbang affair of film-making and there is never a lag of interest, never a dull moment. They are pure hokum all right, but compared to the present shoot-them-for-the-mo-

ron trade dished out practically overnight by our producers, the Fifties brand of horse operas are infinitely blessed with style, charm and childlike gusto.

Eddie Romero's *Ang Huling Mandirigma* — which tells about the tribal feud between the Mandayas and the peaceful Subanons of Southern Mindanao — is one of the best examples of the genre. *Ang Kampana sa San Diego*, *Kamandag*, *Condenado*, *Venganza*, *Kilabot sa Makiling* and many others treat about simple, humble men-of-peace who become fearless outlaws as a result of the injustices and persecution perpetrated on them and their loved ones by the *guardia civiles* and the Spanish government.

These pictures stick to the old formula of love-vengeance-violence, like icing to a cake. Even Gerardo de Leon's much awarded *Ifugao* uses one of the oldest Western film archetypes, the "cavalry and injun" stuff, the film's locale as well as characters having been merely transposed to the Philippine setting. Thus the Ifugaos merely replace the redskins to give the picture the local touch. Expensive co-production ventures between local moviemakers and foreign film-producing outfits — like *The Day Of The Trumpet*, *Sanda Wong* and *Treasure Of Yamashita* — also fit into the well-worn groove of blood-and-thunder sagas.

It was also the Fifties which saw a number of "firsts" in local movie history. Premiere made the first quartet — four separate stories in one picture — the historic *Apat na Kasaysayang Ginto*. Patterned after the British film *Quartette*



Eddie del Mar as the Great Malayan in Ramon Estella's *Buhay at Pag-ibig ni Dr. Jose Rizal*.



which was adapted from four of William Somerset Maugham's stories, *Apat* had an outsize posse of feature players. It belied the popular opinion among detractors of Filipino movies that local films could never make peaceful bedfellows of box-office and artistry.

A clutch of omnibus films later came in quick succession after the success of *Apat*. There was *Bicol Express*, also from Premiere, *Casa Grande* and *Medalyong Perlas*, both in Ansco color, from LVN. The last one is possibly the best of its genre. It tells the story of a mysterious pearl and how it affects the lives of those who happen to possess it.

Other noteworthy "firsts" in Filipino movies were chalked up during this period:

Sampaguita's *Pagoda* — the first Filipino movie filmed abroad.

LVN's *Hawayana* — the first co-production venture between the Philippines and Indonesia.

People's Picture's *Obra Maestra* — the first Filipino movie filmed in five key Asian cities.

Premiere's *Exzur* — the first Filipino sci-fi photoplay.

LVN's *Tuko sa Madre Kakaw* — the first local film which deals with an atomic monster.

Premiere's *Tokyo, 1960* — the first Filipino monster film shot abroad.

Premiere's *Low-Waist Gang* — the first of a lucrative series which spawned a host of imitations, like *The H-Line Gang*.

The decade was not bereft of its share of controversial films. *Sex Gang* was a good film exposé of the white-slave market. A 1957 thriller, *Objective: Patayin si Magsaysay* recounted the plot to assassinate the late President before his untimely death at Mt. Manunggal. Gerardo de Leon's *Hanggang Sa Dulo Ng Daigdig* started out as a cinebiography of the notorious criminal Nardong Putik.

However, military authorities objected to the project, on the ground that the film might subsequently glorify the criminal and his crimes. After several changes of title and script, the finished product megged by De Leon bore very little resemblance, if any at all, to the originally-conceived film.

If one were to use the Asian filmfest as gauge for an Asian nation's artistic maturity in the art of film, the Philippines can indeed be considered as having long "come of age," as early as the mid-Fifties.

In fact, the Philippines was one of the few member

Opposite page:
Tessie Quintana and
Armando Goyena,
a favorite love team
of the 50s, as they
appeared in *Hawa-
yana*, an LVN South
Seas romance shot
in 1953 in full color.

countries — along with Japan, India and Hongkong — which dominated the annual festival during the late Fifties.

For instance, during the First Asian Film Festival held in Tokyo in 1954, the Philippines collected the Best Screenplay Award for Luciano Carlos' script of Sampaguita's *Ang Asawa Kong Amerikana*.

In the second filmfest held the following year in Singapore, the Philippine entry, *Ifugao*, bagged three major awards: Best Actor (Efren Reyes), Best Director (Gerardo de Leon), and Best Screenplay (Cirio Santiago and Ding de Jesus).

1956 was a banner year for the Philippines. Two Filipino entries, both coming from LVN studio — Lamberto Avellana's *Anak Dalita* and Gregorio Fernandez's *Higit sa Lahat* — battled it out for the coveted honors in the annual filmfest held that year in Hongkong. Avellana's film romped away with the Golden Harvest Award for Best Picture, while Gregorio Fernandez and Rogelio de la Rosa bagged the Best Director and Best Actor Awards, respectively.

As though to prove that its winning the major prizes in the prestigious annual event was no fluke, LVN studio again girded itself in 1957 and submitted an entry which was made expressly for the festival, held that year in Tokyo. That entry was *Badjao*, which snagged four plum prizes; Best Direction (Lamberto Avellana); Best Screenplay (Rolf Bayer); Best Cinematography (Mike Accion); and Best Film Editing (Gregorio Carballo).

Award-studded Years

The fifth Asian filmfest held in Manila the following year favored the Philippines with three awards: Romeo Vasquez walked away with the Best Actor trophy for his juvenile role in *Ako Ang May-Sala*; perennial screen villainess Rebecca del Rio charmed the jurors with her portrayal of the boozy, slatternly mother in LVN's *Malvarosa* and copped the Best Supporting Actress Award; Boy Planas was chosen as Best Child Actor for his stint in *Day of the Trumpet*.

The Philippines laid a big egg in the sixth filmfest held in Kuala Lumpur in 1959. However, local producers vindicated themselves the following year in Tokyo when Leroy Salvador, who portrayed a deaf-mute in *Biyaya ng Lupa*, gained the jurors' nod for Best Supporting Actor, Steve Perez won the Best Black and White Photography for his



work in *Isinakdal Ko ang Aking Ama*, and LVN's *Bayanihan* was given a special award for cultural promotion.

Philippine participation in the yearly event during the Sixties was a veritable series of debacles.

The Fifties lasting contribution to the art of the cinema in the Philippines would undoubtedly include Avellana's *Badjao* and *Anak-Dalita*.

Badjao — a down-to-earth account of the nomadic life of the local south's sea gypsies — was not without ethnological, sociological, even scatological, importance. At times, it had the hard-grained realism of a documentary reel.

Anak-Dalita — despite its contrived ending and occasional lapses into bathos — still remains a haunting, neo-realistic ballad of the losers and the disenchanting in our society, those who are born on the wrong side of the tracks. Maybe Manuel Silos' touching *Biyaya ng Lupa* can join this select circle. Other respectable turn-outs of the Fifties include Eddie Romero's funny and moving *Buhay-Alamang*, and Avellana's filmization of Yay Marking's war-time novel,

Rogelio de la Rosa in *Higit sa Lahat* directed by Gregorio Fernandez in 1955. This role won for de la Rosa his first FAMAS Best Actor award. It was also the year's Best Picture and Fernandez won for it the Best Director award. At the Asian Film Festival that year, de la Rosa also won the Golden Harvest award for Best Actor.

The Crucible, entitled *Cry Freedom*.

There were other dramatic films which failed — but were nevertheless interesting, even impressive, failures. Gerardo de Leon's *Bagong Umaga*, based on a script by Nick Joaquin, heads the list. Made in a semi-documentary style, the film attempted to dramatize the working men's plight, how the down-trodden common man can uplift himself from a life of servitude and backbreaking toil.

The story is about a sugar cane plantation worker, *asacada*,¹⁶ who establishes a union in the plantation to stop the rampant abuses of the capitalist owner. The union is infiltrated by communist elements, however, so it goes kaput and the poor *sacada* gets sacked. The film's main weakness lies in its blatantly propagandistic espousal of the free labor movement.

Slick Propaganda

Lamberto Avellana's *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay* which starred Jose Padilla Jr. and Celia Flor, was another sorry miss. Written by Rolf Bayer, the film treats about the EDCOR experiment of the early Fifties, the effort of the government to relocate reformed members of the dissident movement in the promised land of Mindanao. Halfway through, however, the film becomes a slick piece of propaganda for the government.

Another Avellana photoplay, *Kandelerong Pilak*, with Teody Belarmino and Lilia Dizon, shows how a promising beginning can come to naught. The film concerns itself with guerrilla activities for the greater part of its first half, only to degenerate toward the end into a mess of sentimental claptrap.

On the whole, the great majority of the films of the Fifties may be pieces of calculated pseudo-innocence. They may have raised the pabulum of romance and adventure to the level of a tic, waved clichés about as if they were victory flags. But for all their supersaturated-crying-towel appeal, they never left the viewer untouched.

It may be the plain instinctive gee-whiz reaction, the old-fashioned gosh or just an oohaah. But in their exquisite escapism, they provided us with plastic dreams to counter the hard edge of reality. After all, when we leave the technicolored intoxication of movie palaces, there are always annoying problems to be lived with, routine jobs to be faced, lonely rooms that await.

THE CELLULOID ROUTE OF 'GENGHIS KHAN'

by Agustin V. Sotto

It is ironic that the foreigner, not the Filipino, should remember *Genghis Khan*.

More than twenty-years after its release, some European cineastes still recall the movie fondly and ask the question why no Filipino film has appeared in the continent during the interval. Luc Moullet, author of numerous books on film (among them, the *Cinema D'Aujourd'hui* monograph on Fritz Lang) recounts vividly certain scenes while sipping mint tea in a Tunisian restaurant. Jean-Claude Cluny, film critic of *Cinema*, begins his rave review of *Insiang* with a paragraph on *Genghis Khan*. John Gillett, one of Britain's leading film historians and a pillar of the National Film Theater, is able to discuss the style of the movie though he criticizes James Agee's cutting.

Genghis Khan has the distinction of being the only Filipino film with an index card in the British Film Institute. It is filled with references to reviews in many European magazines — among them, *Bianco e Nero*, *Films Français*, *Cinema Français*, *Daily Film Renter*, *Variety*. Another compendium, *Index to Film Periodicals*, contains a bibliography of American reviews on the film from *Saturday Review* to *Commonweal*. (Jesse Garcia, in his *Graphic* article — May 3, 1972 — has amply written on the American reaction to the movie; he has generously quoted from *Natural History* and *TV Key Movie Guide* and from critics Arthur Knight and Parker Tyler.)

Genghis Khan's breakthrough into the international scene is perhaps ill-documented locally. The initial Philippine reaction had been one of incredulity and jealousy turning into doubt and derision when the much publicized international follow-ups fell apart at the negotiation table. The immediate consequence was a form of skepticism enveloping the enterprise; and in the following years, writers were to refer to the achievement with a mixture of awe and suspicion. In the sixties, when our *ilustrados*¹ were busy

condemning the Filipino film, the achievement was completely forgotten.

A resumé of the events with an annotation of its *dramatis personae* is needed to put the film in its rightful place in Philippine film history. In view of the sad state of film preservation in the country, a re-evaluation according to our present concerns is hampered by the inavailability of prints. Until a central film archive is finally established, the cause for a valid Philippine film history may have to rest on secondary materials and decades-old viewings.

In 1950, Manuel Conde won the *Philippine Herald* – DMHM popularity poll, the prize of which was a trip to Hollywood. Manoling left the following year and there showed the film at the WB studios to many celebrities including Carl Foreman, the blacklisted scriptwriter of *High Noon*. This was the time of the McCarthy witch-hunt and Carl was being investigated for his supposed Communist activities. Impressed by the film but unable to push for its recognition, he referred Manoling to James Agee, former *Time* critic and Oscar nominee for *The African Queen*.

A screening was arranged for him at Consolidated Lab. Jim liked the picture. "O.K. son, I'll work on it," he announced. He suggested that the film be entered in the Venice Film Festival. Manoling was distraught as he had no money to pay for the expenses it entailed. "I couldn't even afford to pay for the cup of coffee we were drinking," Manoling avers. The Oscar nominee countered, "I don't want to lose my professional standing. I will charge you one dollar."

Manoling describes the fortyish Pulitzer-prizewinning novelist as a tall, gangling Texan with as much friendliness and sensitivity as his huge frame would allow. "His sincerity was so thick you could cut it with a kitchen knife," Manoling reminisces. He was a very informal person, moving about in a *camisadentro*.² He stammered a little. He and his wife, Mia Fritsch, would like to go to Manoling's apartment for *adobo*³ cooked by Serafin Garcia, Philippine boxing champion and Manoling's guardian. "If I had known who he was," Manoling muses, "I would not have fed him leftovers."

James Agee is described by Dwight McDonald, former film critic of *Esquire*: "He had a positive genius for the wasteful and self-destructive; always ready to sit up all night with anyone who happened to be around or to go out at night looking for someone – talking passionately, making love too much and in general, cultivating the worst set of

working habits in Greenwich Village . . . I had always thought of Jim as the most broadly gifted American of my generation, the one who, if anyone pulled it off, might one day write a great book."

Jim died in 1955 at the age of forty-five. Accused of frittering away his talents on the trivial, he was finally able to direct his energies on the important when death overtook him. He did not leave much to carve a niche among the giants of American literature, but he wrote enough film reviews to be dubbed as America's leading film critic. Pauline Kael pays homage to Jim in her article *Circles and Squares*: "The greatness of critics like Bazin in France and Agee in America may have something to do with their using their full range of intelligence and intuition rather than relying on formulas. Criticism is an art, not a science, and a critic who follows rules will fail in one of his most important functions: perceiving what is original and important in a work of art and helping others to see."

It is this combination of intuition and intelligence that prompted James Agee to go beyond the decorative value of diplomas and the glimmer of literary reputations and to see talent in a citizen of the boondocks like Manuel Conde – to the point of collaborating on a script with him. Manoling describes their relationship as casual rather than literary. There was one tussle though when Jim called Henry Wadsworth Longfellow a lousy poet. Jim took the poem *Hiawatha*, examined it meter by meter, and explained how its contents were being forced into the cadence. Manoling was nonplussed, "*Hindi ba pinaghirapan natin 'yon sa high school?*"⁴

Manoling's art is homegrown. It is not studied. He did not go to film school to study the art of film-making. He developed his expertise through the various stages of his apprenticeship and learned literature in the streets. He got his materials for his films from the life that surrounded him – a fact that eludes many of our Ezra Pound poets and our Marguerite Duras novelists. He learned the brutality of life through the sagacity of experience.

James Agee worked for a month on the movie. He re-edited the film to a manageable hour and a half. Manoling remembers that they worked from nine p.m. Christmas Eve to seven a.m. Christmas Day. Jim did not complain. He added a narration delivered by the actor John Storm. Vincent Price was originally set to do the narration but his voice was found too manneristic. "It was very poetic,"

Manoling talks of the narration. Jim attempted to set the cadence to the inflection of the actor's voice.

Whether Jim improved or butchered the movie is debatable. John Gillett feels that the cutting has made the film open to many loose ends. At the same time, the narration disturbs the eye from the film when subtitles would have been adequate. It is impossible to confirm or contest the judgment as the original Tagalog version is forever lost.



Manuel Conde astride a "Mongolian" horse in the title role of his film *Genghis Khan*. The blocking and angling of this still demonstrates why foreign critics inferred the influence of Eisenstein in Conde's work.

Road to Europe

A screening of *Genghis Khan* was arranged at the Museum of Modern Art. (Sources differ on whether it was before or after Venice.) The guest list included James Wong Howe, the famous cinematographer who wanted Manoling to act in a proposed film, *The Rickshaw Boy*, and Arthur Knight, film critic. Ben Pinga of the Film Institute of the Philippines was also present. Arthur Knight was later to write a glowing review of the film in *Saturday Review*: "It had moments of curiously impressive power and intensity, a delight in the sheer production of film." Manuel Conde remembers this particular incident vividly as the local film critics had earlier panned the film in Manila.

In Venice, there was a lot of pre-publicity for *Genghis Khan*. It was featured prominently in magazines like *Cinema Français* and later proved to be one of the most popular films in the festival. It competed with twenty-plus pictures including Kenji Mizoguchi's *The Life of Oharu*, Charlie Chaplin's *Limelight*, John Ford's *The Quiet Man*, Alessandro Blasetti's *Altri Tempi*, Howard Hawks' *The Big Sky* and William Wyler's *Carrie*. There were also films by relatively unknown directors then — *Summer with Monika* by Ingmar Bergman and *The White Sheik* by Federico Fellini. The winner was Rene Clement's *Forbidden Games*.

Manoling attended the festival with vice consul Manuel Alsate who was dubious about *Genghis Khan's* participation in the renowned festival. They were happily surprised to see the Philippine flag by the Palais du Congres in Lido and on the day of the screening, neon lights blazed the title of the movie.

Manuel Conde's impressions of Venice were those of a country bumpkin let loose in a big city. The two Filipinos clad in barong Tagalog were a curious sight even to the daring bikini-clad beauties. Manoling posed all too happily with starlet Myriam Bru and accomplished ballerinas like Ludmilla Tcherina of *The Red Shoes*.

Yet Manoling had friends to help him create an impact in Venice — among them, Judge E.A. Musmanno of the Philadelphia Supreme Court, whose labor cases had been the bases of many American movies, Jacques Grinieff who bought all the existing Conde films from *Siete Infantes de Lara* (retitled *Seven Devils*) to *Sigfredo* and Countess Doria de Ranvich who offered Manoling the chance to direct *Attila the Hun* for Coni Films.

Manoling remembers that during the screening at the Lido, he slowly dropped in his seat when the sequence involving the horses was shown. The Countess hanged on to his shirtsleeve and motioned to him not to be embarrassed. The Philippine Constabulary had earlier reneged on its promise to lend its sleek, well-groomed horses and Manoling found himself in a spot where he could not postpone the shooting. He directed Botong Francisco⁶ to scrounge for horses in the nooks and crannies of Avenida Rizal. Botong brought in these short horses on which the actors rode with their feet six inches above ground. It was riotous. "*Pinagtawanan kami sa Times Theater*," Manoling repeats time and again.

After the screening, Manoling was congratulated for having employed the authentic Mongolian horses — a breed now difficult to find. Botong Francisco's judgment had been unerring. Sensing that a drawback had turned into an advantage, Manoling replied somewhat cockily, "I delayed my production for six months to look for those horses."

Genghis Khan was one of the few films found worthy of a critique in the prestigious Italian journal, *Bianco e Nero* (August, 1952). It is four pages long and precedes that of *The Life of Oharu*. Though many commentators have found the style of the article too oblique, it is worthwhile to point out some of the thoughts of the unidentified Italian critic:

"There is no doubt that among the Russian directors of the classical period, it is Eisenstein that has had a direct influence (on Conde). It is shown in figurative composition of the framing and the rhythm of the editing. It is a form rich and masterly but rather wanting in content, not poor as there is an unfolding of events but in the quality of the sentiment."

The comparison to Eisenstein is at first jolting, especially since Filipino directors have been maligned for the lack of textbook knowledge. The film chose to concentrate on the rise to power of the Asiatic barbarian. According to Manoling, what attracted him to the historical figure were the guts and tenacity of an illiterate warrior who subdued one of the most powerful kingdoms on earth. The Eisenstein form with its emphasis on events rather than sentiments best suited the material. A neo-realist approach would have only highlighted the neurosis.

As a measure of its popularity, *Genghis Khan* was invited to participate in the Edinburgh Film Festival the following year. Its action scenes proved notorious and was

adjudged too bloody for the English palate. The film was a *cause célèbre*. "A local film critic who said that if it were submitted to the censors, it would emerge with four X ratings," the *Daily Film Renter* (August 7, 1952) reported, "was exaggerating by at least two X's." However, it further added: "Nevertheless the film which tells the early part of the story of the great warrior is the very antithesis of the drawing room comedy. It brought the breath of the East into the program."

A note on the last sentence. In 1950, *Rashomon* swept Venice and introduced European audiences to the Japanese film. *Rashomon's* Western theme surmounted the gritty Occidental prejudice towards a foreign culture and made the Asian film acceptable to a cautious intelligentsia. Japan strengthened its reputation with the films of Teinosuke Kinugasa and Kenji Mizoguchi. India had been sending entries to film festivals for a long time but it was only with the triumph of Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* that India's film industry was able to attract critical attention. The path to Western acceptance is marred by politics and myopia but this is the reality.

Genghis Khan was distributed worldwide by United Artists to countries like France, Spain and the United States. We have the exact date for the French release — August 23, 1953 — at the cinema *El Dorado*. The French press was favourable. *Film Français* (Sept. 11, 1953) reported:

"A very good action film . . . while it has been produced by Filipinos no doubt advised by the Americans, the film retraces with a lot of verisimilitude the first days of the Tartar conqueror. It is composed of a number of violent scenes but not bloody . . . the actors portray primitive characters but are not devoid of intelligence. Manuel Conde is a robust and strong *Genghis Khan*."

In the sixties, the film was shown over American television. Steven Scheur of *TV Key Movie Guide* (1966) wrote: "A Mongol tribesman rises to be a powerful ruler by overcoming all opposition. Unusual novelty offering has plenty of well-staged action scenes to compensate for some technical weaknesses." The editor awarded the film three stars as opposed to two stars for Omar Sharif's version (1964) and one star for the John Wayne movie, *The Conqueror*.

According to Ben Pinga, the film was shown several times at the RKO studios to the director and cast of *The Conqueror*. There had been no previous research done on *Genghis Khan* and Botong Francisco's production design

was copied for the movie.

The Philippine reaction to *Genghis Khan's* success was initially warm. *The Conde Miracle* was one of the headlines of *Kislap*⁸ (October 1, 1952). It hogged the limelight for some months until it died a natural death. FAMAS⁹ awarded a special citation to Manuel Conde for his success in Venice. Some years later, 1959, it chose to ignore his masterful *Juan Tamad Goes to Congress* for the Best Comedy trophy in favor of a Sampaguita inanity, *Ipinagibili Kami ng Aming Tatay*. (Alas, *Juan Tamad Goes to Congress* is still missing. The reported screening of the film at the UP¹⁰ Film Center never happened. The B&W *Si Juan Tamad at si Juan Masipag sa Pulitikang Walang Hanggan* was shown instead.)

Albanian Politics

It is always critically difficult to accept cultural transpositions of foreign images whether totally adapted into the Filipino environment, on one extreme, or presented in a completely foreign production with accidentally Filipino actors, on the other extreme. Filipino journals are replete with condemnations of local imitations of foreign idols — i.e. a Filipino Charlie Chaplin, a Filipino John Travolta, etc., though the hypocrisy is in the bourgeois acceptance of films like *Superman* where children are whisked off by the thousands to watch and then to imitate the actions of an American *komiks*¹¹ figure.

To be fair, bastardized images are always scorned worldwide whether created by famous people or by hack writers. Puccini's opera, *The Girl of the Golden West*, is seldom performed in the United States. Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns are panned in America though they are considered brilliant by the *Sight and Sound* critics and the French cineastes.

Our own literature is full of examples of cultural transpositions which, according to some commentators, serve only to emphasize its inferiority. The most famous example is the nineteenth century poem, *Florante at Laura*, which is on royal misadventures in the faraway kingdom of Albania. Many critics have pointed the social dissent inherent in such pageantry despite the fact that the images thus presented are foreign personages with singularly Filipino modes of behaviour.

In the late forties and the early fifties, there was a proli-

feration in our cinema of costume dramas which doted on physically foreign characters with distinctively Filipino traits — *Tres Muskiteros*, *Apat na Alas*, *Ang Prinsesa at ang Pulubi*, etc. The furor that ensued is the precursor of the current debate in our theater though on a slightly different level.

The unlikely controversy was triggered off by a communication published in the *Manila Times* between Joaquin Roces, columnist of *Our Daily Bread* and A.B. Millena of the University of Manila. In his letter to Joaquin Roces, A.B. Millena complained of movie versions of Tarzans, Supermans, Wonder Girls, and Monte Cristos. "Why we even have a Tagalized version of *Romeo and Juliet*," he emphasized. "The public is waiting for an announcement that local movie producers will present movies about the American Civil War with Gen. Custer and the Indians as well. Imagine Custer speaking Tagalog and the Indians uttering their curses in Ibanag and Ilongo¹²."

On his part, Joaquin Roces berated local producers for their failure to promote Oriental culture. He wrote, "Their idea of progress must be the day when we discover a Filipino Hopalong Cassidy."

Such perfidious dialogue must have enraged Lamberto Avellana, film critic, LVN's wonder boy and director of films like *Prinsipe Amante*, and *Haring Solomon at Reyna Sheba*. In the pages of *Kislap* (October 1, 1952), he wrote his defense of Filipino movies entitled "A Letter to A.B. Millena and other Millenas to Come."

In his article, he refuted Roces' statement that Filipino producers have been remiss in the spread of Filipino culture. He mentioned such films as *Diego Silang*, *Padre Burgos*, *Heneral Gregorio del Pilar*, *Tayug (Ang Bayang Api)* and *Bernardo Carpio*. On the question of mediocre intentions, Bert jokingly faulted the Filipino scenarists for not revealing their sources. "Some have done Mark Twain, others have copied from Dumas, from King Arthur, from Shaw's *Pygmalion*, from Victor Hugo, from Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Far from being a cesspool of illiteracy, Filipino movies have exhibited tendencies for the great themes."

Bert further added, "Let's admit we filched the story idea from Dumas. If Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* and there are strong indications that he did, let us acknowledge the pilferage with at least the common, 'based on the original Shakespeare play of the same name'."

Bert admitted, "The ideal Filipino movie should be

concerned with Filipino themes." But there had been problems in the Fifties on its application. Bert deplored the absence of such English writers as Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil, Lyd Arguilla, Estrella Alfon-Rivera and noted that only Lina Flor Trinidad wrote for the movies.

He listed down the reasons for their non-involvement. "First, they feel writing in Tagalog is of the essence and second, they do not think they can write down to the level of the Filipino audience." He wrote further: "Times have changed, I wish I could tell them one can write in English and have a core of Tagalog translators who would be more than willing to do the translation for them for a small part of that big pie. These would indeed be formidable names to carry on our movie credit titles. It would be a welcome change from the continuous diet of pirated stories that we have been getting."

Bert stated the problem of adaptation as a necessary stage in the development of a nation. "It's what you might call growing pains," he wrote. "Our scenarists feel that rather than trust our own history for tales of adventure and swash-buckling romances, it is easier to rely on the time-tested works of such gentlemen as Shakespeare and Dumas."

Bert forecasted, "Soon enough, we shall abandon these but only when we can produce equally engrossing substitutes taken from our own history, written by such competent writers in the light of authenticity and seen together with some semblance of plausibility."

Finally, the letter written by J. Amor (*Kislap*, October 29, 1952) in response to Avellana's article summed up the future. "The peak of progress of the Filipino movie industry is the day when we witness an American interpretation or a European imitation of a real, down-to-earth, pure and unadulterated masterpiece of and by a Filipino!"

'Sarangani' and other Remnants

Back in Manila, Manuel Conde prepared the production of *Sarangani*. The film was to dramatize the construction of the Banaue rice terraces in the first millenium before Christ. Based on his research and on his incredibly rich imagination, Botong Francisco recreated the era's tools, costumes, buildings, etc. — drawings which, if they were mounted in a retrospective, would baptize him as a modern-day Leonardo de Vinci.

The project was to have cost half a million dollars

—a huge sum during those days. The principal investor was Don Andres Soriano. After a year of negotiation, Central Bank refused the huge dollar allocation and turned down the project. The push into international recognition became a lost cause.

There were other movies halted in some stage of planning: *Elias*, *Umbra*, *The Brown Rajah* and *Twilight of the Pagans*. Of *Umbra*, which was on the fictitious unification of the Philippine Islands, a television pilot starring Rita Gomez still has to be traced. Of *Sarangani*, a few drawings by Botong Francisco remain. Of *Twilight of the Pagans*, a twelve-page story outline, written by James Agee and Manuel Conde in Hollywood, exists with James Agee's handwritten corrections.

It is interesting to examine the story outline of *Twilight of the Pagans* and note the features of what could have been a movie. It is a Paradise Lost set in a Polynesian island. It aims to record the growth of two castaways away from their respective cultures — one European, the other Asian. Attesting to be plotless, the movie aims to depict the legends and rituals of the place of innocence before the coming of the Westerner. In the end, the three symbols of Western civilization are seen setting foot on the island — a syphilitic sea captain, a Chinese businessman and a missionary.

The authors express their intentions in the foreword: "Our purpose is to show one kind of human and natural perfection — the version of the ancient dream of an earthly paradise during the last days before its invasion and destruction."

For the approach: "It must have the accuracy of a good documentary film and properly handled will greatly transcend that — will stand as a good passage of heroic poetry."

The outline further stated: "There is a great deal of this kind of wild, naive, legendary material to draw on. What we propose to assemble is a set of adventures through which every major aspect of courage, skill, wisdom and honorableness of a whole man may be displayed and developed in visually exciting or pleasing terms and through which any 'incomplete' man is bound to come to grief. Some of these obstacles are to be human, others non-human, some will be tinged with the supernatural."

It is difficult to evaluate the movie on the basis of a story outline as the script would still undergo transformations in the drafts. Nevertheless, the intentions have

been fully spelled out. The movie is an attempt at heroic poetry though some critics will object to its somehow naive beginnings.

It would be interesting to have seen how the tandem of James Agee and Manuel Conde could have resolved the material Pierre Rissient¹³ feels that the movie could have been another *Tabu* — the film on the South Seas by F.W. Murnau. Certainly the film would be enveloped with James Agee's pre-occupation with the darker side of religion as in the Robert Mitchum character in *The Night of the Hunter*. Manuel Conde's expertise with action scenes, Botong Francisco's set design and James Wong Howe's cinematography could have given validity to the enterprise and transformed it into a highly original movie.

After the collapse of the project, James Agee went on to write another story on the South Seas, though this time the plot is factual. He was writing *Noa-Noa*, based on Paul Gauguin's struggle to preserve Polynesian culture. The three symbols of corruption, the sea captain, the missionary and the Chinese businessman, are present in the second script.

After these traumatic attempts, Manuel Conde returned to the LVN backlot. He first directed the forgettable *Señorito* and then the highly successful Nida-Nestor¹⁴ comedies. The taste of the big adventure was somehow bitter on his lips.

The same fate hanged over his collaborators. James Wong Howe never got to direct *The Rickshaw Boy* and died last year. James Agee never wrote the Great American Novel or saw his *Noa-Noa* into production. Botong Francisco died a pauper in the hills of Angono.

It is a sad ending to what could have been a glorious chapter in the history of Philippine movies.

PROBLEMS IN PHILIPPINE FILM HISTORY

by Bienvenido Lumbera

Film-making in the Philippines has a history of over 60 years, long enough to warrant periodization on the basis of economic and artistic development. Present knowledge of the men, events and films that have figured in that history allows us to offer a framework providing for four periods.

Beginnings and Growth (1900-1944)

With the loss of all but three (*Tunay na Ina*, 1930; *Giliw Ko*, 1939; and *Pakiusap*, 1940) of the approximately 350 films made between 1919 and 1944, this period has become a veritable pre-history of Philippine cinema. To compound the problem of the historian, very little written information is available about films made prior to 1935, and where that is available, it usually comes in the form of quaintly English-ed publicity blurbs published to announce exhibition dates. Nonetheless, it is possible even now to discern certain historical landmarks.

Motion pictures were introduced in 1897 by two Swiss businessmen named Leibman and Peritz who opened a "movie house" at No. 31, Escolta St., Manila. In 1912, two American business competitors vied with each other for the commercial rewards of being the first to make a feature film with Philippine life as subject matter. Edward Meyer Grossman and Albert Yearsley both used the life of the hero Jose P. Rizal as material for their respective films. The first feature film made by a Filipino was *Ang Dalagang Bukid* (The Country Maiden), a silent feature directed in 1919 by Jose Nepomuceno. Sound was incorporated into silent pictures in 1930 when Vicente Salumbides made *Collegian Love*. Two years later, talking pictures arrived in the Philippines when an American director named George P. Musser made *Ang Asuwang* (The Witch). Also in 1932, Nepomuceno made *Sa Pinto ng Langit* (At Heaven's Gate), which was partly talkie, and in 1933 completed the first

Filipino talkie, *Punyal na Ginto* (Golden Dagger).

The only book-length account of Philippine cinema from the early years to the mid-1950s is *Motion Pictures in the Philippines* (Manila, 1956) by the pioneer director Vicente Salumbides. Much of the information in the book seems to have been culled from the author's memory and what must have been cursory notes. Nevertheless, Salumbides has given us the only first-hand account of the early years of film-making in the Philippines, and this is the value of the book as a historical record. The researcher looking for a fuller account will have to compensate for Salumbides' omissions and inaccuracies by painstaking perusal of Philippine periodicals, particularly those in the vernacular, for news items, publicity write-ups, still photos, movie advertisements, and occasional articles. To supplement what he will find, he will have to obtain the oral histories of actors, actresses, directors, and technical personnel who worked in the industry prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War.

Economic historians might find it interesting that the film industry had its beginnings in the efforts of artist-producers like Nepomuceno (Malayan Motion Pictures, 1917), Salumbides (Salumbides Film Corporation, 1927), and Julian Manansala (Banahaw Pictures, 1929). As the industry grew in complexity, artist-producers gave way to corporations. Philippine Films was founded in 1934, Parlatone Hispano-Filipino Corporation in 1935, Excelsior Pictures and Sampaguita Pictures in 1937, LVN Pictures in 1938, and X'Otic Films in 1939. There are two peaks in the growth of the industry during this period — 1932, when the number of silent pictures leaped to 23 from 9 in 1931; and 1940 when production climbed to a total of 57 films from 28 in 1937, 48 in 1938, and 50 in 1939. By the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, the industry had come under the control of corporations dominated by single families like the Veras and the de Leons.

As an enterprise that developed under conditions set by U.S. colonial policy, the Philippine film industry had had to compete with the high-powered American film industry based in Hollywood. As early as 1914, Hollywood had the Philippine market all to itself, its products monopolizing the best outlets in Manila. Potentially, films using a language understood by the majority of filmgoers ought to have enjoyed wider patronage than American films. However, in view of limited capital, technical skill and equipment, the local industry could turn out only a few

films, and the long interval between one film and the next gave American films, which came in one steady flow from Hollywood, the advantage of great visibility. More important, the greater technical polish and the international reputation of American films could not but show up the faults of the local products. Against these odds, Philippine film companies had no choice but to aim their products at a special market consisting mainly of viewers whose low socioeconomic status had impaired their ability to fully comprehend the language and the content of Hollywood cinema. Gearing its products to this public was to goad the industry to typify the audience for local films as clog-wearing yokels (at a later period, they were to be called pejoratively as the *bakya* crowd¹) whose taste was forever lower than that of city folk. The result was films that made a virtue of naiveté and simple-mindedness, products that the better-educated and sophisticated sectors of the populace tended to regard with condescension. At the same time it was grinding out films addressed to its special market, however, the local film industry yearned for respectability as only patronage by those who favored American films could confer it. This could be seen in advertisements that were unaccountably worded in English, but most especially in its attempts to pattern its products after Hollywood films. The early genres developed by the local film industry were recognizably borrowed from Hollywood but modified according to the presumed simple taste and low level of comprehension of the public for Philippine-made films.

Research into film relations between the U.S. and the Philippines is likely to yield a wealth of insight into the dynamics of cultural oppression. For instance, a study could be made of American films exhibited in Manila during the formative years of Philippine cinema in order to bring out the images of America projected through films on the Filipino mind. Another study could describe American film genres that were either copied outright by Filipino filmmakers, or reshaped in concession to the values of Filipino audiences. Still another area worth investigating would be the amount in box office earnings that U.S. film distributors amassed from their most culturally receptive market in Asia.

Relations between film and theater, or between film and literature, offer rich areas of inquiry. Traditional Philippine theater provided film-makers with forms, themes, and conventions already familiar to the Filipino masses. The *sinakulo*, *komedya*, and *sarsuwela*² doubtless exerted

a tremendous influence in the Filipinization of such genres as melodrama, romantic comedy, action picture, and adventure/costume epic. Capitalizing on the popularity of serial novels in weekly magazines, the film industry during the first period often billed authors of widely read novels ahead of the stars when film versions were made of those novels. Clearly, the use of forms with a built-in following among the populace was a convenient tactic in a situation where Filipino films had had to compete not only among themselves but also with American products that were better made and better advertised.

Recovery and Development (1945-1959)

The Pacific War closed down the film industry when the Japanese military forces appropriated filming equipment for their own use in producing propaganda materials. But the industry recovered quickly from the effects of the war as shown by the fact that in 1946 more than 30 films were released. New film companies had arisen, but the industry was to be dominated by three big studios — Sampaguita and LVN, which were in existence prior to the Pacific War, and Premiere Productions, a new company founded in 1946. From these film companies would issue the most characteristic and the best products of the period, with each company leaving its own distinctive stamp on a specific genre. Sampaguita Pictures was to be identified with melodrama, LVN with comedy, and Premiere with action pictures. All three, however, tried to outdo one another in developing a new genre, the war/guerrilla film which invariably glorified the underground struggle against the Japanese and celebrated Filipino-American friendship.

This period being the time of the Hukbalahap³ insurgency and of the Cold War, the Board of Censors for Motion Pictures (BCMP) was a vigilant force in shaping the film industry's response to the realities of urban poverty, peasant and labor unrest, graft and inefficiency in the bureaucracy and rampant criminality. Much has been written about censorship in relation to specific BCMP policies and particular films, local and foreign, but a history of film censorship in the Philippines remains to be written. A more profound understanding of the directions the film industry has pursued or evaded could result from an account of the work of the BCMP as a control body regulating the content of local films.

The second period was the time when the rest of the pre-war directors reached their maturity as artists. Gerardo de Leon, Gregorio Fernandez, Lamberto Avellana, Ramon Estella, and Manuel Conde made their best films during these years, and new directors like Eddie Romero, Cesar Gallardo, Efren Reyes, and Cirio Santiago bore great promise. In sorting out the significant from the trivial products of the industry, award-giving bodies played an indispensable role. As film after film was being exhibited without critics and historians to celebrate the finer ones, the film industry was in danger of not leaving behind a record of its more substantial products. Thanks to the institution of the Maria Clara Awards by the Manila Times Publishing Company in 1950, artistic quality began to be highlighted where before only box-office receipts had been the standard gauge of a film's worth. In 1952, the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts & Sciences (FAMAS) was founded by a group of magazine and newspaper writers connected with the film industry. In its long and sometimes controversial history as an awards body, FAMAS has provided students of the Filipino film with guideposts that could be consulted in mapping out the artistic development of the film industry. FAMAS and the film industry have been inseparable institutions, and a history of FAMAS will go a long way towards shedding light on the industry itself and its vacillating quest for respectability.

Respectability had begun to be earned by the industry during the second period. In this, awards won by Filipino entries in the Asian Film Festival contributed considerably. Set up by the Southeast Asian Federation of Film Producers in 1954, the festival was intended as an annual affair during which the best products of the film industries in member Asian countries would compete for awards. In the first years of the festival, Filipino member film companies (Sampaguita, LVN, Premiere, and Lebran Productions) took pains to produce at least one film that would qualify for festival awards. In this way, the best Filipino directors got the opportunity to direct so-called "prestige films", films which could prescind from box-office appeal and instead aim for artistic quality. Although not every "prestige film" succeeded in winning awards, a number of the more artistic and technically polished films in the entire history of Philippine cinema had their origins in the impulse towards artistry occasioned by the annual festival. Philippine participation in the Asian Film Festival put the local industry in touch with



other Asian film industries and opened up possibilities for co-production ventures and even a foreign audience for Filipino films. To what extent these possibilities were realized deserves study.

In spite of the growing awareness among film-makers that motion pictures are more than commercial commodities, the industry during the second period continued to depend for material for film stories on the popular arts. Radio serial drama at this time commanded a wide following, and many film scripts drew from this form many a tale of



Gerardo de Leon's *Sanda Wong* was a co-production venture between the Hong Kong-based Vistan-Chapman outfit and Premiere Productions. Belatedly acknowledged as one of de Leon's major works, this film has sadly been lost to posterity.

love, infidelity, and marital martyrdom. A new popular art form, however, was rapidly gaining the attention of the film industry. This was the *komiks* novel, actually the old serial novel but using more pictures than words. In the years that would follow, the obvious affinities between this form and film would endear the *komiks* novels to producers. How much the influence of the *komiks* novel contributed to the development of a more visually oriented film style quite noticeable in the 1960s is a matter for film scholars to investigate.

Rampant Commercialism and Artistic Decline (1960-1975)

Towards the close of the 1950s, an intensifying labor movement in Manila was subjecting the studio system to a great deal of stress. Demands for higher wages and better working conditions were made by unions that had been organized within the big studios. The first studio to close down was Premiere. Then LVN also closed down. The commercial and artistic consequences of the passing away of the studio system were to become manifest in two phenomena that left an imprint on the films of this period. The first phenomenon was the proliferation of various types of exploitation films, the pursuit of commercially tested formulas by the independent companies that sprang up in the wake of the big studios. The second was the emergence of the "superstar syndrome", characterized by dependence among producers on the known box-office power of an actor or an actress to sell a film.

Film production under the studio system seemed to have been a planned affair which involved lining up a variety of genres so that the company's offerings would attract, in the course of one year, as many sectors as possible of the

Efren Reyes and Leila Morena in Gerardo de Leon's *Ifugao*. This film garnered the Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Screenplay awards at the 1955 Asian Film Festival, but no print or negative of it exists today.



audience for Filipino films. When independent companies took over the industry, such long-range planning was out. Because many of them were making pictures on per-production basis, it was important to recover production costs immediately so that another picture could be started. Under this condition, film companies found it to their advantage to ride on whatever was the audience-drawing trend. In the 1960s, the foreign films that were raking in a lot of income were action pictures sensationalizing violence and soft-core sex films hitherto banned from Philippine theater screens, Italian "spaghetti" Westerns, American James Bond-type thrillers, Chinese/Japanese martial arts films, and European sex melodramas. To be able to get an audience to watch their films, the independent producers had to take their cue from these imports. The result was a plethora of films that tried to outdo foreign films in the depiction of sex and violence, giving rise to such curiosities as Filipino samurai and kung fu masters, Filipino James Bonds, and, most notorious of them all, the *bomba*⁴ queen.

As reflections of rising social ferment, the films of the 1960s would be of interest to social scientists who might investigate, for instance, the correlation between the beginning stages of mass unrest and their symbolic eruptions in the popular arts. The declaration of martial law in 1972 would put a temporary halt to the trend, but the exploitation of sex and violence as film subject matter would reassert itself in spite of periodic sanctions against it by the BCMP. Under martial law, action films depicting shoot-outs and sadistic fistfights usually append to the ending an epilogue claiming that the social realities depicted had been wiped out with the establishment of the New Society. Sex films are now tagged more modestly as "bold" instead of *bomba*, meaning that more resourcefulness has gone into the costuming and photographing of couples.

Without studios that would tie them down to long-term contracts, top film stars found it possible to make several films with different companies at the same time. Competition for the services of actors and actresses who had proved themselves successful box office attractions jacked up fees inordinately, earning for the stars concerned besides much money the appellation "superstar". In the 1960s, it was mainly male action stars who qualified for the title. Beginning in 1972, which brought about a clampdown on the *bomba* film (which invariably starred minor, sometimes unknown, actresses) female stars willing to go "bold" have

achieved "superstar" status. A number of films have even made commodities of the personal amours of female "superstars" and cashed in on them.

A study has yet to be made of the economic returns of film-making in the 1960s when, it had been claimed, certain Filipino films outgrossed for the first time the top earners among foreign films. Judging from the number of investors who went into film production, it must have been quite a lucrative business then. Needless to say, film making as artistic expression that had begun to earn respectability for Filipino films in the 1950s suffered a relapse from which it is still trying to recover.

Its vacuousness during the third period notwithstanding, Filipino cinema was able to expand its audience somewhat during the 1960s. In 1964, a city administration riding on the cresting nationalist movement instituted the Manila Film Festival. For the 12-day duration of the festival, only pre-selected, new Filipino films were to be exhibited in all the first-run theaters in the city, thus allowing these films to compete only among themselves for the city audience. Although the films shown were not always superior examples of Filipino film-making, the festival performed the important service of attracting a new sector of the urban middle class to be acquainted with Filipino films. Other factors had been at work to widen the audience for local films. In colleges and universities, nationalism had become a force that was inspiring young people to seek integration with the masses. Nationalist students were drawn to local films, hoping to gain understanding of the masses as represented by the audience for Filipino films and of the cultural forces that intensify oppression of the masses. Elements from the upper middle class, mainly young professionals, were drawn to Filipino films through the *bomba*, in which they found a reflection of their own rebellion against repressive social conventions relating to sex.

In the years covered by this period, the political and cultural foundations of Philippine society were being questioned by the nationalist resurgence. However, on the level of direct reference, there was generally studious avoidance in film of the demonstrations and rallies that daily filled news reports and radio and TV broadcasts. The questioning stance of nationalist youths confronting the institutions of the establishment could only be vaguely inferred from the subject matter of some films. In the one genre that was specifically aimed at the young audience — the jukebox musical — flimsy

narrative was employed for the sole purpose of stringing together musical numbers performed by teenage pop singers glamorized by television and the recording industry. What the producers seemed to be waiting for was a safe perspective from which their films could view the troubled society of the 1960s without bringing upon themselves attack from either the nationalists or the government.

Martial law in 1972 imposed on the industry the political perspective of the New Society, and film companies have been most willing to have their products serve as thinly disguised vehicles for the promotion of New Society goals and projects. When the Manila Film Festival was revived as the Metro Manila Filipino Film Festival⁶ in 1975, each of the entries, as per requirement of the BCMP,⁶ carried a specific message of the New Society. Such blatant use of the feature film for propaganda purposes has been discontinued, but whenever the industry touches on such subjects as political corruption, widespread criminality, agrarian unrest, unemployment, etc., producers are careful to state or imply that their films are portraying the past, not the present.

Of course, in the history of Philippine film-making, producers have never been averse to propagandizing for the government or any other institution as long as it would help their business. In more recent times, feature films have promoted the political virtues of three presidential candidates (Magsaysay, Macapagal, and Marcos). They have been used to sell softdrinks, cigarettes, and kitchen appliances.

New Forces in Contemporary Cinema

The close scrutiny to which political ideas in media are subjected has had the unintended effect of bringing new screenplay writers into the industry, and of fostering the development of film reviewing in newspapers and magazines. To safeguard against films that might attack or downgrade the New Society, the BCMP early in the regime had ruled that film companies should submit a finished screenplay before actual filming could be started. With a membership that was generally sympathetic to the artistic problems of film-making, the BCMP made the politically motivated ruling work for the upgrading of products of the film industry. The requirement of a finished screenplay pushed producers to turn to established young writers

for scripts. In 1976, there was a brief flowering of creativity in the industry as shown by the surprising number of good films that competed for various awards that year.

Ganito Kami Noon . . . Paano Kayo Ngayon by Eddie Romero was awarded as Best Picture by the Metro Manila Filipino Film Festival and by the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino*. FAMAS chose as Best Picture *Minsa'y Isang Gamu-gamo* by Lupita A. Concio. Other noteworthy films from that year were *Insiang* by Lino Brocka, which a few years later was to receive good reviews at the Cannes Film Festival; *Nunal sa Tubig* by Ishmael Bernal; and *Itim* by Mike de Leon, which later won as Best Picture in the Asian Film Festival of 1978. Each of these films was scripted by writers new to the industry.

These films were the result of the collaboration between young talented directors who had joined the industry late in the 1960s and young writers new at film work and therefore relatively free of the clichés of previous Filipino films. The meager box office returns of the new films quickly disheartened the producers, however, and consequently the industry reverted to the tested formulas of the trade. In the meantime, the BCMP came under fire for approving films that seemed guilty of backsliding from "bold" to *bomba*. Its membership was reconstituted to an interim body that has not shown any inclination to pursue the policy of combining political/moral control with artistic admonition.

Since 1976, evaluation of Filipino films has been augmented by the formation of the film reviewers' group known as *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino* (MPP). Under the restrictions imposed by martial rule, cautious editorial boards of newspapers and magazines had all but banished political news and commentary. This left plenty of space to fill with "developmental" and entertainment news and features. Writers on film thus found for their reviews and articles hospitable pages in a number of publications. To give themselves a regular forum for the exchange of ideas on current films, these writers organized themselves into a cohesive group that has so far survived accusations of "elitism," "Westernized standards," "selfish motivations," etc. In its annual choices of award-worthy films, MPP has consistently preferred cinema that deals with Philippine social realities over those which are merely skillfully or artfully made.

The return to mediocrity notwithstanding, there is

actually enough to be hopeful about in contemporary cinema. Securely entrenched within the industry are a number of directors who have demonstrated a fresh and more craftsmanlike touch in their respective films. Because each one of them has proven his ability to make money for producers, Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal and Celso Ad. Castillo, to name only the more established ones, command respect in an industry which is traditionally distrustful of "artists". Each in his own way, these directors have shown themselves to be literate film-makers aware of innovative changes in world cinema since the 1960s and equipped with a "feel" for audiences that see Filipino films. Thus far their attempts at grappling with the circumscribing conditions within the country and in the country at large have resulted in cinema that might be flawed by compromises in content and form but is nevertheless indicative of genuine talent. Together with Eddie Romero, now the reigning elder master, they are the contemporary directors who make it still necessary to tell the history of Philippine film.

Given the multifarious problems of preparing a history of Philippine film, how ought we start? Four things suggest themselves as priorities.

First, an annotated filmography. This will not only describe films that have been made in the entire history of the industry, but should also locate copies of films still available.

Second, a selective bibliography. Since the 1930s, reams have been written in Philippine periodicals of every type about films, actors, actresses, directors, and the industry in general. What is needed is a selective listing with the stress on *selective*, so that would-be researchers could be spared the chore of having to plod through a mass of trivia that used to be the standard material of entertainment articles.

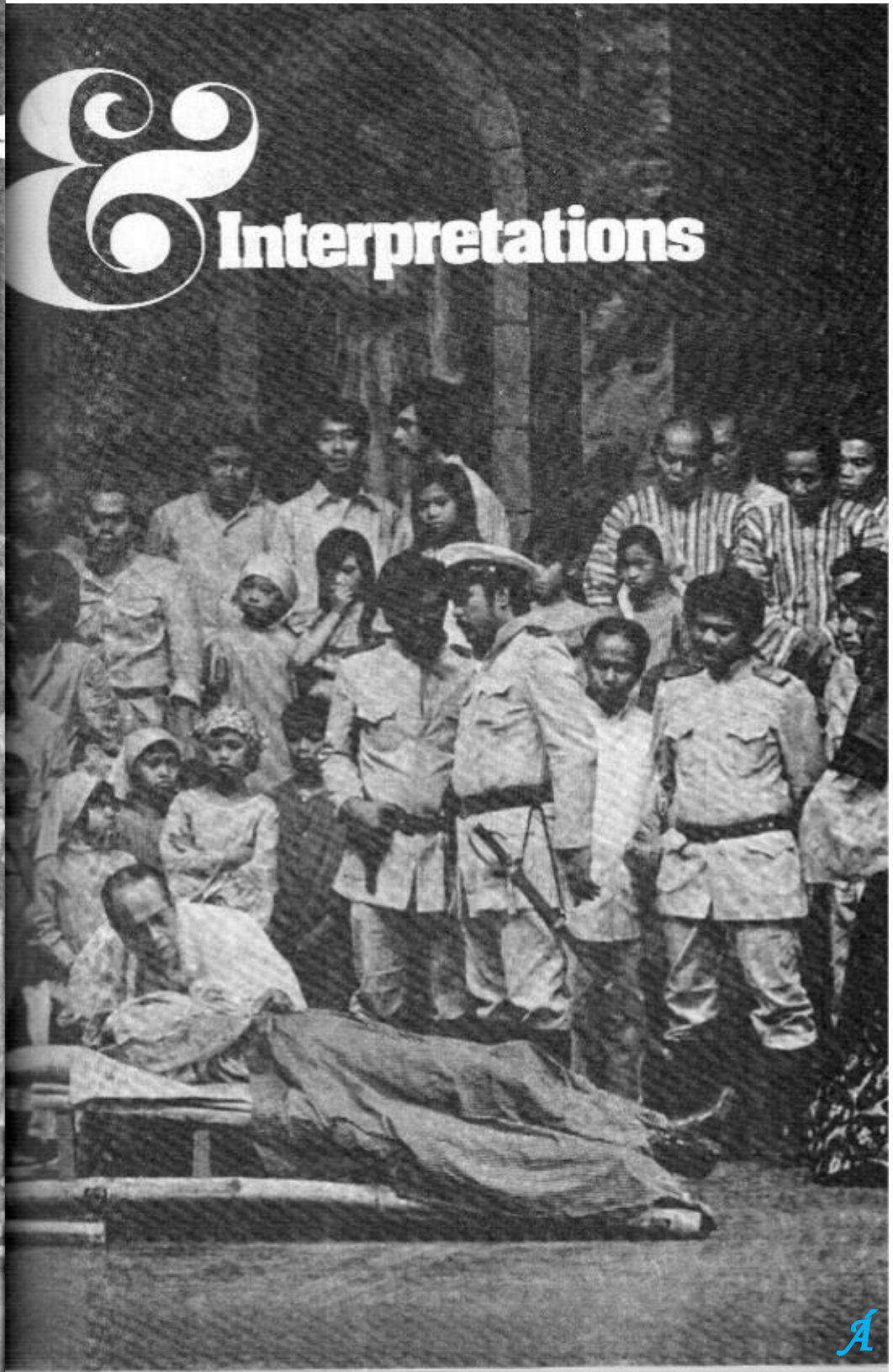
Third, oral histories of surviving film workers from the first period. It is essential that the new, bare data that have been recorded be supplemented with first-hand accounts of the early years of film-making in the country.

And finally, a film archive. War, natural disasters like fires and floods, and the indifference of the industry itself have destroyed invaluable artifacts absolutely essential to the writing of the history of Philippine film-making. Unless an institution is set up soon to recover and preserve films of historic and artistic value, the time will come when the history of Philippine cinema can only be read about when it ought to be experienced through direct contact with films.

Themes



Interpretations





A light moment from *Florante at Laura*, 1949, showing Leopoldo Salcedo and Celia Flor in the title roles. This film was based on the epic poem of the Tagalog bard Francisco Balagtas.

Overleaf:
A scene from Severino Reyes' immortal zarzuela *Walang Sugat* as staged by the Zarzuela Foundation of the Philippines.

FROM STAGE TO SCREEN: Philippine Dramatic Traditions and the Filipino Film

by Nicanor G. Tiongson

In the late fifties a Filipino director was casting about for a term to describe the "poor" taste of the local audiences who failed to appreciate the artistry of his films. The word he hit upon was "bakya," literally, the wooden clogs worn by the lower classes. *Bakya* is the adjective now invariably applied by Filipino critics influenced by Western criteria of art to vulgarity in Filipino taste.

How, these critics ask, could this *bakya* crowd shout and scramble over each other in excitement, over unrealistic scenes like Ramon Zamora battling and overcoming — with his bare fists and feet — ten musclemen double his size and armed with samurai swords, chakus, iron balls and all shapes of deadly weapons? Must they slobber and scream over Nora Aunor singing "Alone Again Naturally" and Vilma Santos limping through the salsa? How could they possibly wallow in tears over Eddie Rodriguez leaving his paralytic wife, Lolita, for his new mistress, Marlene Dauden? Why must the *bakya* giggle, titillated, as Tirso plants a perfunctory peck on Nora's cheek?

Why must fantastic coincidences be introduced to prop up a falling plot and give problems a happy ending? And why, for heaven's sake, must the films be so blatantly plot-oriented and narrative and totally lacking in psychological depth? Why are these potboilers so hopelessly interminable? Why, oh why, must they be so *bakya*?

All these objections are valid, for no person in his right mind can deny that the typical Filipino film is inordinately fond of *bakbakan* (fighting), songs, dances, tear-jerking situations and long narrative stories fraught with a million coincidences. All this alienates an audience hoping for films that do not, at the very least, insult its intelligence. Filipino films are so bad that they cannot do anything except improve.

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Tradition and the Filipino Film

Any attempt to change the Filipino film must be premised on an understanding of its traditions. It cannot be elevated from mid-air — but from the concrete situation in which it is found. Many an “artistic” film by a new, budding and obviously talented director has flopped precisely because the director has not understood the traditions of the Filipino film. Change cannot be imposed from above. It must rise from and transform traditions recognized by the people.

The present state of Filipino cinema derives from the tradition of Philippine theater. The content and form of traditional Philippine drama “migrated” from the theater into the medium of film and created the cinematic taste among the masses which is now scorned as *bakya*. More specifically, contemporary Filipino films descend in content and form from the *komedya*, *sinakulo*, *sarsuwela*, *drama* and *bodabil*.

The Komedya

Komedyas are plays with stories usually taken from or patterned after those of Philippine metrical romances called *awits* and *koridos*. Also known as the *moro-moro*, the *komedya* tells a long-winded story (usually taking from three to nine days to finish) about struggles between the Christian and Moorish kingdoms of medieval Europe, made more colorful by love stories (*palasintahan*) between princes and princesses of the warring kingdoms. Important features of *komedyas* are the *torneos* (tournaments) at which courtiers and peasants of various kingdoms fight each other to win a princess' hand and the battles between princes and princesses and armies, which are inevitably ended in favor of the Christian kingdom, with the *moros* being baptized into Christianity:

In many cases, the *komedya* was simply transplanted into the film medium. In the same manner that townspeople flocked to see the *komedya* during town fiestas, so cinema audiences since the twenties have packed movie theaters to watch their favorite *komedyas* on screen: *Florante at Laura* (1939), *Ibong Adarna* (1941), *Siete Infantes de Lara* (1950 and 1973), *Prinsipe Paris* (1949), *Prinsipe Tinyoso* (1947), and other famous *komedyas* and *awits* like “Rodrigo de Villa” and “Mariang Alimango.” Often, however, screenplays were made of “*komedya*-type” stories like

Alimudin, *Awit ni Palaris*, *Polaris*, *Genghis Khan*, *Prinsipe Amante*, *Ang Prinsesa at ang Pulubi*, (*The Princess and the Pauper*), *Dalawang Prinsipeng Kambal* (*Twin Princes*), *Aladin*, *Lola Basyang* and many others churned out by LVN Pictures.

Today the *komedya* survives in the so-called “action films” in which the clear-cut forces of good and evil engage each other in combat. Just as *batallas* of sword, dagger and spear (displaying the *arnis de mano*, an ancient Filipino martial art) provided excitement in the *komedya*, so battles featuring fists, karate chops, guns, swords, sticks, stones, spears, chains, jeeps, trucks and what have you mesmerize urban and provincial audiences today. Local folk-heroes of *komedyas* have been replaced by glamorous, bigger-than-life counterparts like Fernando Poe, Jr., Joseph Estrada, Jun Aristorenas and Ramon Zamora. As of old, the film is really nothing more than a flimsy excuse for displaying fighting prowess.

Both *bakbakan* and *palasintahan* (love) scenes abound in contemporary films. Heroes always fall in love with the beautiful daughters of their enemies and vice-versa, courtship follows, and the two are united after the defeat of her tyrannical and boastful but rich father.

The Sinakulo

The *sinakulo* is a theatrical version of the *pasyon*, a verse narrative tracing the human race from the creation of the world through the life and sufferings of Christ up until the assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven. This Lenten play is usually presented from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday in the barrios of Luzon. In the *sinakulo* a meek, harmless, suffering Christ is pitted against the minions of darkness, Judas, the kings and priests, the devil and the Jews, with Christ triumphant in the end.

The *sinakulo* survives in movies billed as “Lenten offerings” which have the Christ story for their subject matter. To date, one of the most notable screen *sinakulos* is *Kalbaryo ni Jesus* (*The Calvary of Jesus*).

The *sinakulo* survives most strongly in the Filipino mental framework, or value system, which always favors the underdog. In most Filipino movies meekness, servility and patience in suffering, coupled with the ability to shed buckets of tears, are regarded as obligatory characteristics of leading female and child characters.



Child star Tessie Agana is the neglected and maltreated orphan in Olive La Torre's *Roberta*, 1951. Based on Mars Ravelo's popular *komiks* novel, this film was a phenomenal box-office success in its time, enabling its home studio, Sampaguita Pictures, to recover from a disastrous fire.

In films like *Roberta*, one of the most popular and sentimental pictures of the fifties, as well as in movies pitting the Edna Lunas against the Carol Vargas, the maudlin heroine suffers insults, mis-interpretation, physical injury and trials, only to end up as the wife of Jaime de la Rosa. This simplistic sort of story is the intellectual descendant of the *sinakulo* mentality.

The Sarsuwela

Probably the most prolific of all the dramatic progenitors of the Filipino film was the *sarsuwela*, after the Spanish *zarzuela*, a musical comedy which supplanted the *moro-moro* in Manila from 1900 to the 1930's. Presented regularly in Manila and during fiestas in the provinces, *sarsuwelas* were love stories with songs and dances as highlights. Romantic love between modest-pretty heroines and kind-handsome heroes (underscored by comic love between their servants or parents) is obstructed by *matapobre donyas* (snobbish rich women), ultra-modern *alembong* females (flirts), or suave be-moustached *mestizo* play-

boys (from the Spanish, understood to mean a Filipino with Western blood).

Many *sarsuwelas* were transplanted directly from stage to screen: Severino Reyes' *Walang Sugat* (*Unwounded*), Servando de los Angeles' *Ararong Ginto* (*Golden Plow*) and Hermogenes Ilagan's *Dalagang Bukid* (*Country Girl*). The last *sarsuwela* (1919) was the first Nepomuceno film and starred the original *sarsuwela* stars, Atang de la Rama and Marcelino Ilagan. Film *sarsuwelas* have never ceased being churned out by movie outfits (especially Sampaguita Pictures): *Bituing Marikit* (*Beautiful Star*) and *Señorita* (*Young Lady*) in the late thirties; *Batangueña* (*Batangas Girl*) and *Waray-Waray* in the fifties; *Roses and Lollipops* and *Gift of Love* in the early seventies.

The *sarsuwelas* had for stars the famous singing personalities of the era like Yoyong Fernandez and Nemesio Ratia, Atang de la Rama and Horacio Morelos. Film musicals showcased famous singing tandems like Rogelio de la Rosa and Carmen Rosales, Rudy Concepcion and Elsa Oria ("Singing Sweetheart of the Philippines"), Tita Duran and Pancho Magalona, Nida Blanca and Nestor de Villa, Gloria Romero and Luis Gonzales, José Mari and Liberty Ilagan, Nora Aunor and Tirso Cruz III, Edgar Mortiz and Vilma Santos.

These pictures have featured a long line of *kontrabidas* (anti-heroines), *mestizas* with too much make-up, low-necked dresses and piles of costume jewelry, like Rosa Rosal, Carol Varga, Patria Plata, Bella Flores and Daisy Romualdez. There have been *mestizos*, with or without moustaches, like Gil de Leon, Johnny Monteiro and Eddie Garcia, as well as fan-wielding *donyas* born with arms akimbo like Etang Discher, Rosa Mia and Patricia Mijares with their henpecked husbands played by Alfonso Carvajal and Jose Vergara.

With their heroes (*bidas*) and anti-heroes (*kontrabidas*), musical comedies have retained the simplistic views of life and the simplistic endings of the *sarsuwela*. In Carmen Rosales' time, as in Nora Aunor's, the same conflict of rich and poor — a very real conflict in Philippine society — has been glossed over or prettified by being seen from a middle class point of view (usually the writer's) which understands neither the rich nor the poor and thus inevitably has them marrying each other, ignoring the real conditions in the society. In real life a beautiful peasant girl will be taken advantage of by the rich *hacendero's* (landlord's) son; in

the sarsuwela she marries him and lives happily ever after. In the musical film traditional problems and worn-out solutions are presented as mere entertainment, a vehicle of escape from the real and cruel conditions of society.

The Drama

Like the sarsuwela, the *drama* was transplanted from Spanish into Philippine soil in the 19th-century. The vernacular drama could present either comic or melodramatic situations. Traditional comic dramas usually made fun of familiar, if unpopular, characters in Philippine society like sex-obsessed friars and their equally lustful ilk, as in Tomas Remigio's *Mga Santong Tao* (*Holy Men*, 1901). These later fell under the influence of American comedies in the late 30's and eventually evolved into the one-act situation or mistaken-identity comedies, typified by Julian Cruz Balmaceda's *Sino Ba Kayo?* (*Who Are You?*, 1943).

The term *drama* was, however, more usually associated with one-act melodramas in prose or verse that showed the course of "dull, sublunary lovers' love" troubled by a host of misfortunes: illness, usually tuberculosis, so that the hero can exhibit a dramatic cough, misunderstandings between the lovers, past histories of unchastities (ranging from puppy love to prostitution), prodigal sons and pious daughters, and most of all, abject poverty with the attendant evils of poor education, low status, and shabby clothes. No matter how hopeless the situation, the "drama," whether comic or melodramatic, is required to unravel all these complications, no matter how many coincidences it takes so that by the film's finale love can reign in peace and order.

Comic dramas are seen most frequently today in television, in shows like *Si Tatang Kasi* (*It's Father's Fault*) and in film comedies like *Bondying*, *Jack en Jill*, *Hootsy Kootsy*, *Silveria*, *Susanang Daldal at Amaliang Mali-Mali*, *Facifica Falayfay*, and many other movies starring Tugo and Pugo, Lopito, Patsy, Dely Atay-atayan, Cachupoy, Chiquito and Dolphy. Although these comedies derive much of their slapstick and many of their witticisms from American movies, their basic plots, which begin with misunderstandings and end with an unraveling, are patterned after traditional comic "dramas."

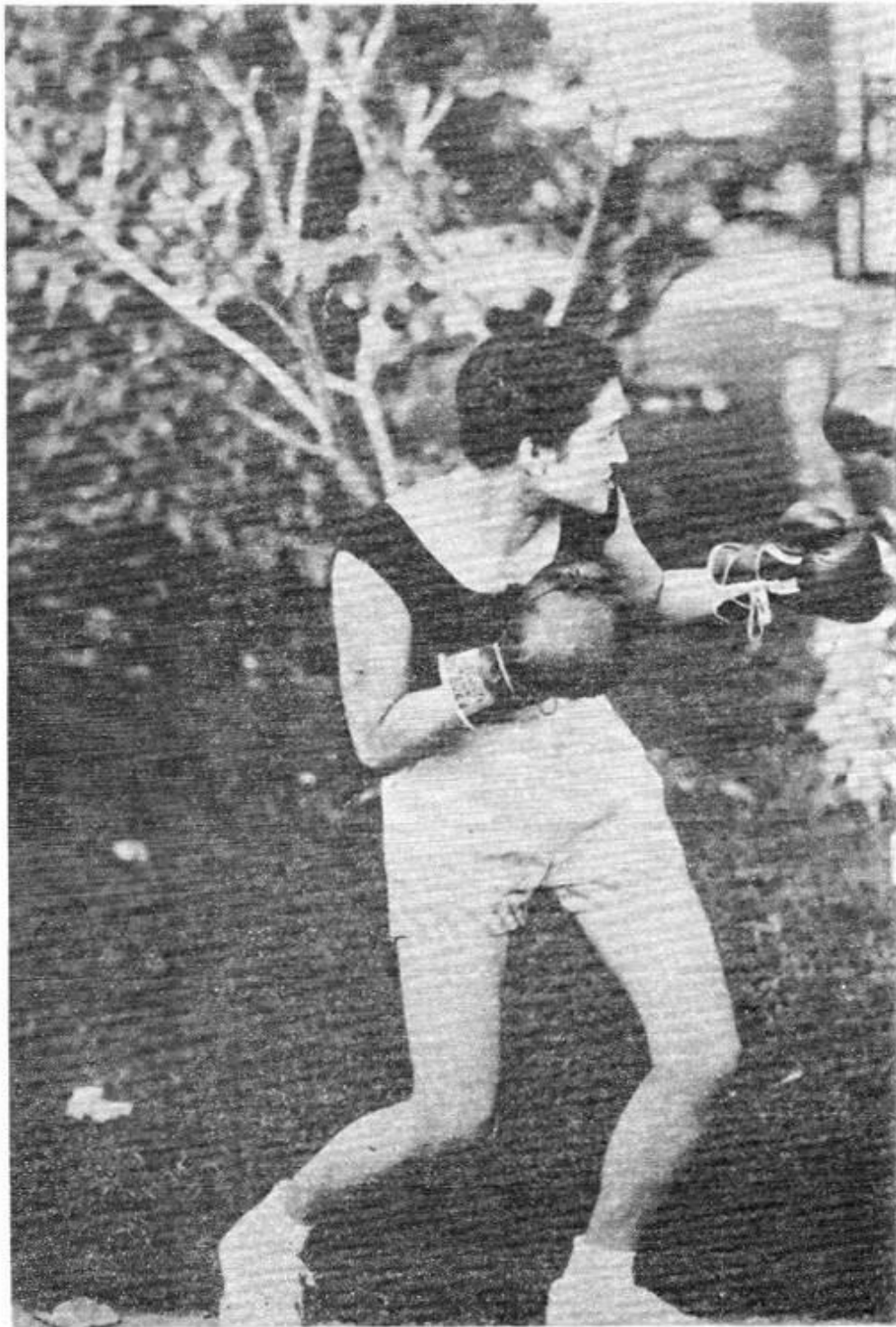
Dramas specializing in saccharine sentiments entertain housewives and maids by focusing on parent-child and husband-wife problems. *Siete Dolores* (*Seven Sorrows*,

1929) towered above all other dramas with its story of a mother made miserable by every one of her seven sons. Its success spawned equally famous tear-jerkers like *Ang Luha ng Ina* (*A Mother's Tears*), *Ang Kalbaryo ng Isang Ina* (*A Mother's Calvary*), *Sino ang May-Sala* (*Who is to Blame?*) and, pre-eminently, *Inang Mahal* (*Beloved Mother*), in which the queen of tear-jerkers, Rosa Mia, performed the unrivalled feat of crying in each of the film's 45 sequences.

Two pre-war dramas, *Ang Magsasampaguita* (*The Flower Vendor*), starring child actress Tita Duran, and *Punyal na Ginto* (*Golden Dagger*), featuring child actor Angelito Nepomuceno, started a seemingly inexhaustible stream of persecuted-child movies. These starred the cutest, crying-est tykes in the Philippines, Tessie Agana (*Roberta*), Liberty Ilagan (*Ang Selosa* or *The Jealous One*), Mila Nimfa (*Basag na Manyika* or *Broken Doll*), Vilma Santos (*Trudis Liit* or *Little Trudis*), and Snooky (*Golden Child*).

The most numerous sentimental dramas by far are those that focus on the problems of husbands and wives. The eternal triangle provides the principal framework for films like *Cadena de Amor* (*Chain of Love*), *Sapagkat Kami ay Tao Lamang* (*Because We Are Only Human*), *Iginuhit sa Buhangin* (*Written in the Sand*), *Kapantay ay Langit* (*High as the Sky*), *Angustia*, *Bawal: Asawa Mo, Asawa Ko*, (*Hands Off: Your Wife, My Wife*), among many films featuring Eddie Rodriguez and Dante Rivero, opposite Lolita Rodriguez, Marlene Dauden, Liza Lorena, Boots Anson-Roa and Amalia Fuentes in a round-robin of roles as faithful wives or vampy mistresses.

As in stage dramas, the sentimentalism of these films derives from a lack of psychological depth in the portrayal of characters. The actor ends up playing a role rather than a character. Eddie Rodriguez as a husband with flourishing office and beautiful family, Lolita Rodriguez as a beautiful all-suffering wife, Marlene Dauden as a beautiful mistress: all end up as cardboard characters in spite of their acting talents because the personalities and emotional make-up of the roles they play have not been fathomed. Consequently, empathy is forced from the audience through the artificial means of involving characters in pathetic situations: divorce or death of a spouse or child, robbery, rape, adultery, accidents, sickness, suicide, imprisonment and injuries. Such sorrows, accompanied by syrupy language enunciated in rhetorical



Overleaf:
Nida Blanca and Nestor de Villa clowning around in the 1954 LVN musical-comedy *Waray-Waray*. The movie's theme song, an anthem of the 50s, was recorded by Eartha Kitt and is still occasionally reprised today by local entertainers, most notably by the Visayan comedienne-singer Elizabeth Ramsey.

tones, elicit stereotyped tears from an audience trained to respond to this sort of thing.

As the drama's plot thickens, its solution becomes more and more difficult. Now that Eddie has fallen in love with Marlene, what is to happen? Morality declares that he cannot have two wives. Coincidences galore must therefore descend like *dei ex machina*. An unexpected sum of money makes an heiress of the poverty-stricken heroine; a long-lost friend of the heroine appears to unmask the *kontrabida*; perhaps even a miraculous light shining from the Virgin's hand points to a wad of much-needed hospital money. In the end the masses pour out of the theater with soggy handkerchiefs and renewed hopes in the status quo.

Bodabil

Bodabil or the "stage show" was the most popular dramatic form in the early twenties. Like its French grandfather and American father, vaudeville, the Filipino bodabil was a potpourri of dances, songs, comedy skits, dramas and production numbers. Since its inception to its present decadent form as burlesque, the bodabil has been the most popular outlet for whatever is fashionable in American pop culture. At various times it has featured native versions of American dancers (Bayani Casimiro as the "Filipino Fred Astaire"), American comedians (Canuplin as the "Filipino Charlie Chaplin"), singers (Diomedes Maturan still sings as Perry Como no longer does) and singing groups (the Reycard Duet started out as a Jerry Lewis-Dean Martin tandem).

The dramatic tradition of bodabil crept into television and the movies via the actors and directors who worked simultaneously for stage and screen or who moved into film upon the decline of bodabil. Almost all of today's screen comedians and comediennes started on the stage or *entablado* while many actors and actresses, especially singers, started their careers doing American songs at the Clover Theatre or the Manila Grand Opera House, two moviehouses famed for their stage shows.

Bodabil reinforced and "enriched" film comedies both with performers and the stage conventions of bodabil: slapstick of the pie-throwing variety, comedy based on physical handicaps (Doro's eyes, Popoy's pig-face, Eddie's chin, Panchito's nose, Apeng's teeth), *double-entendre* repartee and versatility in song and dance (typified by Dolphy and Chiquito).

Bodabil also took the sarsuwela tradition and, in the manner of American musicals, made it more spectacular. Filipino film's lavish production numbers, in which a singer might descend a tinsel mountain underneath a rainbow of multi-colored lights while dancers in tulle and tights swirl, sail, and squirm around her, are influenced by both bodabil and American film musicals of the late forties and fifties. The convention of singer-actresses stopping the action to sing current top hits, like Nora Aunor singing "Alone Again Naturally" in *A Gift of Love* or a star showing off his terpsichorean prowess in obviously *de numero*¹ renditions of latest dance steps, the boogie-woogie, cha cha, rumba, mambo, jerk, salsa or hustle, are also derived from the tradition of bodabil dance numbers and song jamborees.

Using Conventions – And Not Being Used By them

It should by now be clear that the contemporary Filipino film cannot be understood without uncovering its roots in Filipino theatrical tradition. These traditions still form the basic framework of many Filipino films today. For the most part Filipino film artists, with the exception of a few directors, do not regard the film as an artistic medium distinct and different from theater. Scriptwriters still emphasize the theatrical characteristics of "talkiness," of "action," and "variety" of song and dance. Cinema lighting specialists follow the practice in traditional drama of illuminating a scene instead of heightening the emotion. Cameras create an imaginary stage proscenium because they are accustomed to shooting a scene frontally; even when they zoom in it is not to show depth of feeling or reaction but to record every glistening tear that rolls down the actress' cheek or every twitch of the *kontrabida's* eyebrow. Most Philippine film actors still put on a show as black-and-white characters, victims of a conspiracy of scriptwriters, directors, lightsmen, and cameramen who believe that the screenplay is nothing more than a filmed theater production. The contemporary Filipino screen's *palabas* or outward tendency, therefore, betrays its inability to struggle free of the conventions of theater.

The Filipino cinema's heritage from traditional theatre explains its backwardness and its popularity (folk had become pop). Should Filipino films throw tradition out the window? No. For tradition will linger and the enlightened director will still be faced with an audience whose tastes

have been mis-educated for centuries by traditional theater and film. While he should not perpetuate tradition's simplistic outlook, the director should nevertheless respect the conventions deriving from traditional theater — the *iyakan*, *bakbakan*, *sayawan* and *kantahan*². These conventions, however, should be reinterpreted by the director within the framework of realism. If the audience must have "action," let the action be culled from actual events in society. If the audience must have *sayawan-kantahan-ligawan*³, let these grow out of the realistic development of the story. If the audience must shed tears, let those tears spring naturally from empathy with characters who, being real, move them. In short, the challenge to the Filipino director of the present is nothing less than the final transubstantiation of stage into screen, and the conversion of rhetorical outpourings into real, painful tears.

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE AND THE FILIPINO CINEMA

by Petronilo Bn. Daroy

The critical assumption that no art is neutral is best exemplified in the Filipino cinema. The worst film makes a comment somehow on men in general, hence the division of characters into good or bad individuals. Or on human behavior: the following, for instance, are usually condemned — adultery, drunkenness, disobedience to parents or authority, negligence of family, etc. Or on social classes: the "haves" are often bad; the poor, generally stupid but essentially good. At the moment, I cannot think of a movie that is exempt from the tendency. Even the so-called *bomba*¹ movies, with their debased intent to be nothing more than commercial successes, somehow make a point of censuring certain things; the most profligate character is usually punished at the end or the most sexually abused woman finally given a husband and a stable domestic life.

The fact is that at the turn of the century, the popular theater — such as the *zarzuela* and *comedia*² — which were imported from Spain had been thoroughly assimilated into the mainstream of Filipino culture and their pure entertainment value pre-empted by an assertive nationalism. Filipino playwrights themselves had adopted the form and used the medium as a vehicle for commentary. Later, as has been pointed out elsewhere, the cinema in the Philippines was to appropriate the material of these popular plays, translating into the new medium the emotional and intellectual content of those plays.

The question of significance in art is not really as controversial or as relative as is usually supposed. On one level, artistic significance derives from the modification or revision which a particular art piece — a painting, a novel, a film, or a poem — is able to make on the established conventions or tradition of that art form. Abstract painting is significant in relation to what it introduced into the conception of technique and imitation in painting; in other words, in the sense of its having revolutionized the mode and conventions

of visual representation.

In film, the simple act of moving the camera had a revolutionary effect, in contrast to the conventional technique of shooting scenes from a fixed tripod. The technique of camera movement was supposed to be the contribution of Griffith, Carl Mayer and Lubitsch to the cinema. In the early days of film-making, sequences of considerable length were done in a number of separate shots; in *Intolerance*, Griffith used an elevator in a moving tower with a descending ramp to bring the camera down from a long shot into a close-up of Belshazzar. Mayer and Karl Freund went further by simply moving the camera backward and forward as well as up and down. MacGowan records the excitement that Mayer produced in *The Last Laugh* with that technique: ". . . In the first scene of the film, (the camera) took us down in the elevator, through the busy foyer of the hotel and out to the doorman on the sidewalk."

For such an effect, Freund, the cameraman, mounted himself and his camera on a tricycle in the descending elevator and rolled out into the lobby and through the door of the hotel. "In another scene, the camera rode on a fireladder . . . it also traveled on an overhead cable (anticipating the modern crane)." In one scene where the porter was drunk, Freund achieved the subjective effect — that of identifying the camera with the eye of the porter — "by strapping a light camera to his chest and staggering around the set." These have become common practices in film-making today, in the same way that deliberate distortion in painting, has itself become conventional. But the practice of camera movement did a lot to advance the method of movie-making.

On another level, significance in art derives from the statement it makes on human affairs. Rizal's *Noli* and *Fili*³ are significant because of their analysis of 19th-century Philippine society; because of the scope of the social data they present, and because of what they suggest about the way society should be organized. It is also in this sense that Gerry de Leon's *Daigdig ng mga Api* or Celso Ad. Castillo's *Daluyong at Habagat* are significant.

Significance, in this sense, has something to do with the nature and scope of the subject of art or film. A perfect poem on a mouse that went up the clock or an excellent film on the life of the amoeba may have, in either case, entertainment or instructional value, but they do not have significance as art. Most Filipino movies are no more than this; most of them are even just tautological: they show

us how an impotent man can no longer fornicate; or that the rich have money while the poor have none; or that a man and a woman, if they love each other, tend to engage in sex; or that homosexuals prefer males. Although in the process of showing us these tautologies they may bring the camera to squatter areas or give us several shots of a drought in Nueva Ecija, they do nothing to advance our consciousness of reality.

On the other hand, there are films that make no pretense at all about concerning themselves with reality but on the contrary, deliberately evade the actual, or suggest that the esoteric or isolated is general. *Let's Do the Salsa* would have us believe that everybody is crazy about the dance; that the salsa, in fact, is a social issue bigger than poverty or over-population. In this sense the film performs a negative social function by making people concentrate on the trivial.

But if salsa is triviality, reality is still somehow connected to it (it is true that the dance has become a vogue). Horror films, on the other hand, completely sever themselves from the actual. They may confirm our latent fears or signify our hidden neurotic tendencies and, therefore, have an emotional or purgative value but they have no larger significance.

As against these stupid movies, there are films that suggest an alternative way of life or point to a terrifyingly eminent human condition. Peter Fonda's *Easy Rider* takes the hippie life and drug consciousness as a means to freedom and an escape from the rigidity of American culture. The bankruptcy of this proposition, however, was exposed soon enough with the failure of the hippie lifestyle itself.

On the other hand, Jules Dassin's *Never on Sunday* operates on two levels. On one level, it depicts and satirizes so-called civilized values as promoted by the American cultural foundations. A Greek prostitute is civilized into the study and cultivation of culture, isolating her, in the process, from the mainspring and reality of Greek artistic heritage itself. Dassin seems to be saying that civilization, as promoted by the American cultural foundation, is a form of death insofar as it isolates the individual from the actuality of life. On another level, it celebrates and affirms the anarchic life, and in this sense, Dassin is not original but simply repeating the simplistic philosophy of Henry Miller or Kazantzakis in *Zorba, the Greek*.

Dassin, in *Never on Sunday*, celebrates the life of sen-

sation, spontaneity, and honesty. He is on one side of the age-old dichotomy in Greek humanist thought itself, on the Dionysian rather than the Apollonian way of life.

On a less philosophical but practical plane is Gerry de Leon's *Daigdig ng mga Api*. The film, originally, was conceived as a propaganda for then President Diosdado Macapagal's land reform program on his re-election slogan of the Unfinished Revolution. De Leon, however, made another version of the film, revising slightly its ending.

Daigdig presents a factual situation in Philippine society, namely, the truth of the semi-feudal nature of our economy. Although concerned with the peasant situation obtaining at the time, de Leon provides a historical reminder into his depiction of prevailing feudal conditions by the use of Mount Arayat as an omnipresent image in most of the shots. The reference here is to what is common knowledge: the fact of peasant revolt which has always attended the agrarian question in Central Luzon, Mount Arayat having been for a time the sanctuary of the Huks. This suggestion of history gives a larger dimension or perspective to the literal truth that the film depicts, namely, the condition of the landless peasants.

As tenants, they make the land productive but share little in the produce. De Leon shows this fact not only in terms of the poverty of the tenants but, conversely, in the wealth and excess of the landlord. Owning the land, the landlord not only controls the tenant's means of livelihood or survival but nearly everything else, his leisure and his freedom, and even determines his opportunities. The growing consciousness of the peasants of their deprivation leads to the inevitable revolt.

De Leon confines himself to depicting the decision of the peasant to seize the rice in the landlord's *bodega*.⁴ He evades, therefore, a historical fact in the agrarian situation in Central Luzon which, at the time, led the peasants to organized armed uprising. In the end, the hero loses courage and instead of leading the peasants in their decision to wrest power from the landlord, halts them and announces to them the new legislation, the land reform law. The film ends with the resolution of the hero to finish his law studies in order to assist the tenants in the interpretation of the land reform law.

The film clearly presents an alternative way of life; it rejects prevailing conditions and, as with the *Fili*, shows how such conditions could lead to a revolutionary situation.



Barbara Perez as a tenant farmer's wife in Gerardo de Leon's *Daigdig ng mga Api*. A FAMAS winner for Best Picture, *Daigdig* was a timely indictment of the feudal agrarian system.

Below:
The worker's strike in Celso Ad. Castillo's *Deluyong at Hahagat*, a film about the social and economic unrest of the early post-war era. Daroy was to write elsewhere that this film evaded the historical issues of its material by equating proletarian anger with a reflex brand of banditry.



But as with Rizal's novel, it frustrates the revolution and affirms reforms. By identifying its alternatives with a particular legislation, *Daigdig* also limits the scope of its perspective and its affirmation. Proof of this limitation is the fact that Macapagal's Land Reform has since been revised and its scope amended. Thus, the social vision in *Daigdig* suffered from the same tentativeness and narrowness of the land reform law.

There are films, however, which do not suggest any alternative way of life or behavior but whose importance derives from the range of their content or from the cogency of their observation or perception of reality. There had been a few films, for instance, about the movie industry and movie personalities, but their perception of the reality of the industry or of the people in it are either shallow or downright idiotic. One common representation is that it is a glamorous world where people are immoral because of their sophistication. This is the perception of a neophyte movie scribe or a backward provincial and it is obviously not true.

The other perception is slightly debased and thoroughly cynical. According to it, you can have all the money and all the glamor in the movies if, in exchange, you are willing to sell your soul to the devil. If you are a man, you surrender yourself to a faggot, who may be a director, a producer, or a movie scribe. If you are a woman, you have to offer your body to a movie tycoon. This observation has an element of truth to it which has been used as the basis for justifying pomography, especially against the Board of Censors. It took Ishmael Bernal and Lino Brocka to give us an authentic depiction of what really happens within the industry and in the lives of movie personalities in their films *Pagdating sa Dulo* and *Stardoom*, respectively.

Both Bernal and Brocka knew the world of the movie industry from the inside; both were involved in its operations, but both went into it with a critical eye, with a sense of irony, and with the sophistication that enabled them to hold their own perspective.

Whether acting on a general or isolated truth, Bernal and Brocka recruited the central characters of their films literally from the gutter; in *Pagdating* from a seedy nightclub where Rita Gomez works as a taxi-dancer; in *Stardoom*, from the slums. In tracing the rise of these characters, Bernal and Brocka are able to provide a larger framework against which to examine the sectoral world of the movie industry.

Pagdating is autobiographical in the extent to which

it identifies the director (Eddie Garcia) as the moral center of the film. Garcia knows the world of the movies is bankrupt morally and intellectually but, as an artist, believes it need not be so and rather finds it necessary for his own search of meaning and reality. He is the bourgeois artist who also views his world with detachment, indifferent to people, really, except as they become material for his art. In need of a substitute for an actress Garcia goes back to the nightclub where he had first met Rita Gomez while shooting on location and builds her up as an actress.

In the process of developing herself as an actress, Gomez begins to construct her own biography according to the demands of her PRO, careful to prevent the truth of her life from leaking to the press and her fans. Garcia tries to instruct her in his art, but her mind is too uncultivated to understand him; besides, she is in movies for the glamor and the money.

Meanwhile, her lover when she was still a taxi-dancer (Vic Vargas) and who is a married man, sinks deeper into poverty. In order to help him, she introduces him to the movies and becomes her leading man. As the two of them rise to stardom, their relationship, initially founded on genuine love for each other, becomes more corrupted. Vic Vargas becomes a sex object for homosexual scribes, while Rita Gomez becomes more morally unsettled between the conflicting demands of truth and publicity in her life. Her rise to stardom starts her fall, as well, morally and spiritually. Glamor is indeed a form of falsification; popularity, a form of death.

It is the cogency of his observations and moral judgment that make Bernal's *Pagdating* a significant film. *Pagdating* is, as we usually say, an important film. On the factual level, Bernal examines with irony the nature of the system in the industry; its directors are illiterates; they work entirely on stupid improvisations; most of the people in it come from the gutter, bringing into the operations of the industry their instabilities, their pettiness and their barbarism. The factual elements do indeed confirm what Avellana and T.D. Agcaoili⁵ and almost any civilized individual who knows the movies have been saying about it.

Bernal, however, does not stop with mere reportage; as with any artist, he knows that his responsibility is to make the factual material of his film the basis for general — or what we usually say, philosophical — conclusions. He examines the facts of his material in terms of a moral and intellectual

framework and, in the process, comes to a definition of certain values. This is what we mean when we say that a piece of art — in this case, a film — has something to say. In *Pagdating*, Bernal seems to be saying that if the taxi-dancer, and the taxi-driver (Rita Gomez and Vic Vargas, respectively) had only the same moral center or perspective towards the movies as the director, if they could only share Eddie Garcia's attitude towards film as art, tragedy would not have befallen them; they would not have suffered the moral and spiritual corrosion that they did.

The effectivity of *Pagdating*, however, does not merely consist in its statements, but rather, in Bernal's ability to give support, visually, to those statements. The principal action of *Pagdating* concerns the rise of both Gomez and Vargas to stardom and the illusions which this generated in them. Bernal makes use of the stairway as a controlling image of the film; in the final sequences, we see Rita Gomez, numbed from drunkenness, preparing to go to the premiere of her movie. Bernal establishes the disorder and chaos in her life by ringing telephones while Rita Gomez is being massaged to make her recover from her drunken stupor.

Then he cuts and, using a shoulder shot, frames her before a mirror. To show the tragedy of her confusion between truth and illusion, Bernal allows her to try, on top of her glamorous premiere gown, the dress she used to wear when she was still a taxi-dancer. These parts are the

most poetic images in the entire film; for a while, Gomez confronts her image before the mirror, but finally discards her old dress and descends down a stairway, unable to steady herself, into the arms of Vic Vargas who is waiting for her at the foot of the stairs. In this scene, Bernal makes Gomez collapse into Vic Vargas' arms like a wilted rose, her dishevelled costume scattering around her like fallen petals.

Where *Pagdating* is poetic and lyrical in mode, Brocka's *Stardoom* is realist. The rise of the hero to stardom is traced in the picaresque manner, so that we are able to have an overview of a larger segment of society. An ambitious mother from the slums pushes her favorite son into show business, hoping that through his success she will be able to escape her sordid life.

Based on a Mars Ravelo story, the film contains several elements of a traditional movie: there is, for instance, the ugly duckling stereotype, the brother of Walter Navarro whom the mother (Lolita Rodriguez) neglects and discriminates against in order to follow the whims of the favorite son.

Walter Navarro's rise in show business opens up for him a world which Lolita Rodriguez had dreamed of crashing into: the gaudy world of the rich. As in the traditional movie, this world is presented as morally decadent, represented by a homosexual and a bored woman of leisure who uses Navarro as some sort of emotional stimulant in her boredom. The irony, however, is that as Navarro secures entry into this world, it becomes necessary for him to prevent his illiterate and unsophisticated mother from getting into it, for fear that his social background will be exposed.

His brother (Mario O'Hara), on the other hand, accepts the truth of his origin and endeavors to improve his life through sheer industry. He becomes a worker, marries a simple girl who helps him in the struggle to improve their lot. Gradually, they are able to acquire a house and some appliances — all the appurtenances of a simple worker's aspirations — and take care of the mother who has by this time turned to the bottle out of her disappointment with Navarro.

What Ravelo intended as a stereotype, Brocka transforms into a foil for Navarro and as some kind of suggested alternative way of life. It is from his TV set that they witness the killing of Navarro during a premiere of his film. Mother and son rush to the empty lobby of the theater, the mother surveys the colored lights which emblazons the name of her son but fails to understand that this is part of

Vic Vargas and Rita Gomez reach a metaphorical "end" in their resolute climb to the top in the final sequence of Ishmael Bernal's *Pagdating sa Dulo*, 1971.





the mirage that she had conceived in her dreams and illusions.

Significance in film, therefore, derives from a number of factors, primary of which is the scope or quantity of felt life or actuality in a given film. Quantity here means largeness of perception, not variety of scenes. A *Dog Day Afternoon* takes place virtually in one location only but is able to integrate so much observation within a limited setting.

In contrast, there are a number of Filipino films that are shot in several places but reflect very little of life or social actuality. Of so many films produced in a year, for instance, one is surprised at the boring repetitiousness and tediousness of Filipino films. Lately, there has been a tendency to concentrate on one location: the slums; and on a few types of characters: hostesses and prostitutes (*Si Raquel at si Rafael*, *Hindi Kami Damong Ligaw*, *Piknik*, etc.) goons and pirates (*Beloy & The Kid*, *Ang Leon at Ang Daga*, *Unos sa Dalampasigan*, *Alupihang Dagat*, etc.) Where are the residents in Project 6, the hangers-on at the stock exchange, the families of Forbes Park, the public school teacher, the college student, the new military recruit, the journalist, the apartment dwellers, the bus driver, etc., who will be presented as themselves and will not be involved in a love-triangle or will not be made to undress in order to rape a nymphomaniac?

Now and then these characters appear, but their roles are often *non sequitur*. In *Lord, Give Me a Lover*, for instance, a girl brought up in bourgeois comfort is compelled to become a seamstress because her parents become insane. Given such a problem her prayer is hardly logical: Lord, give me a lover! Occasionally too, a worker is depicted but we seldom see him in his place of work. He is either drinking or scolding his wife. About the only profession that is really shown is prostitution.

Significance also derives from the ability of the director or scriptwriter to make general conclusions from the material data or extent of actuality that the film encompasses. Most Filipino films just sprawl with facts or action; there is no organizing framework, except the fact that it must begin and end. The question of what the film is saying about its material is seldom answered.

A favorite idea among movie scribes, directors, and producers is the so-called "dramatic picture" which is usually an emotionally harrowing film. But we are harrowed for nothing; we gain no insight into the problems presented.

Opposite page:
A scene from Behn Cervantes' *Sakada*, 1975. Based on the stage play by Mauro Avena, *Sakada* mirrored the economic plight of migrant field-hand workers in the sugar plantations of the South.

In *Mrs. Teresa Abad, Ako po si Bing*, a husband goes mad, a mother is killed by her son-in-law, a boy of the slums leaves his mother, and a public school teacher fornicates with a student — a tall pile of problematic episodes which is resolved by the teacher going to the United States!

In a recent third-rate movie, *Mga Reynang Walang Trono*, there is an episode which promises to be rich in social significance but which is prevented from fulfilling the promise by the interest of the film in telling a detective story. In the second episode of the film, Amalia Fuentes is a famous actress who is hounded by a man with scars who is later revealed to us as her husband (Robert Arevalo).

Arevalo, it appears, has gone to jail and incurred those scars trying to protect the honor of his wife. But during his term in Muntinlupa, Amalia Fuentes has become a famous movie star and has begun an affair with a matinee idol. She is now ashamed of acknowledging Arevalo as her husband; she tries to evade him whenever they meet.

There is an excellent scene where Arevalo finally visits her at home. Unable to turn him out of the house for fear of creating a scandal, Amalia Fuentes tries to be civil, gives him a good dinner. While he is eating, she observes his crude table manners; the way he gobbles up his food; his shabby appearance, etc. Finally, Arevalo demands his privileges as a husband and it is while attempting to make love to Amalia Fuentes that she knocks him off with a bronze statue, killing him.

I do not know if the scriptwriter was aware of it, but the framework of the story has some similarities with Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* which was made into film twice. Essentially, Dreiser's novel involves a similar situation: a poor boy works in the factory of a rich uncle. As a worker, he falls in love with a working girl, who becomes pregnant with his child. Meanwhile, his good looks and charm attract the rich uncle's daughter who introduces him to high society.

It is from the perspective of the very rich that he begins to notice the ordinariness of the working girl. He thinks of eliminating her by murder but cannot bring himself to do it. While sailing with her on the lake, they quarrel. She lunges at him and, while protecting himself, accidentally hits her with the tripod of a camera, pushing her into the lake where she drowns. As a consequence, he is charged with murder and the novel's resolution is that it is society that pushed him to commit the crime, since it was society that

taught him to despise poverty and adore wealth.

In the novel, this judgment is given in the summary of the case and sentence rendered by the judge, set against the background of the outrage of the community. It was the final passages in the novel that fascinated Eisenstein into making a film of it, as well as the opportunity to investigate the life of the factory workers in Atlanta the novel provided.

The episode referred to in *Mga Reyna* falls basically into the same pattern. Amalia Fuentes's spite for her crude husband, after she has had a taste of the giddy, gilded life of a movie actress, could have been the opportunity to investigate manners and morals, the impact of false social values on her consciousness. It could also have provided the necessary contrasts and counterpoint in images which the film needed to firm up its structure and give its material data a larger scope, dimension, and texture. But the movie forfeited all these opportunities in its preference for the shallow and its interest in telling a straightforward crime story.

As an art form, therefore, the cinema, like the novel or the drama, is expected to do its job of investigating reality, particularly, the actuality of social classes. The only difference consists in methods. Actually the cinema is expected to be more explicit in the sense that while it is required to fulfill its own aesthetic integrity, it functions as a vehicle of communication as well. It is no accident that it is classified among the mass media.

This explicitness is inherent in its form which developed out of newsreel; in this sense its development is analogous to that of the novel, the plural of the French term of which means *news*. Indeed, when the Russians revolutionized filmmaking, they initially handled film as newsreel. Eisenstein and most Russian directors used real soldiers, real workmen and, even after the October Revolution, real czarist generals. Eisenstein preferred to go "to the original place and person" for his films, following his motto of "away from realism to reality." It was the capacity of the cinema for authenticity that made Lenin hail it as "the foremost cultural weapon of the proletariat."

In the Philippines, as in the United States, although the cinema developed in close association with the theater and literature, it has been outstripped by both drama and the novel in incisiveness, verisimilitude and relevance. The distance between the cinema and the drama is even more acute today when we take note that the theater seems even to compete with the headlines in descriptive accuracy,

range of observation, and in relevance.

In less than a year, for instance, the theater in Manila has come out with the following productions: *Si Tatang at Iba Pa*, based on the Lapiang Malaya movement⁶; *Ang Walang Kamatayang Buhay ni Juan de la Cruz*, based on the Batangas concentration camp put up by the American occupation army at the turn of the century; *Sakada* and *Batilyos*⁷, which are self-explanatory; *Tao . . . Hayop o Tao*, based on the saga of Dagohoy; *Unang Alay*, based on the biography of Bonifacio and Gregoria de Jesus, etc.

Although at the moment the cinema is still commanding the audiences, it has no influence or impact upon the consciousness of its mass audiences. It is less effective than the newspaper which has relatively fewer patrons and, certainly, less influential than the drama or literature. The reason for this is that, on the whole, it has nothing to say about the urgent issues that confront us. It is an entirely passive vehicle, unable to interfere with the lives of the masses that keep flocking to cinema houses. Its popularity derives either from the present interest of the patrons or their need to escape from themselves.

People flock to see *bomba* movies the way they would do to watch, say, a couple of freaks fornicating in the park. If this will continue, it may invalidate itself out of our cultural scene as a debased form of entertainment, like the pre-curfew floor shows at some seedy night club, or a fugitive indulgence, like kinky sex. The cinema must somehow bridge the gap between it and the other art forms and media of communication if it is to survive as a legitimate enterprise.

TAGALOG MOVIES: A NEW UNDERSTANDING

by Rafael Ma. Guerrero

If the achievements of the local motion picture industry — like those of the French or Eastern European cinema, or even the Japanese film — could objectively be equated with the undertakings of literature, then perhaps Tagalog movies would not be so anomalous a topic on the agenda "Literature and the New Generation" at hand. But, alas, there are no Filipino directors as yet whom we may refer to as *auteurs*; and the looming questions of whether there are any literary values to be found in the Philippine cinema or whether it depicts themes of any consequence or relevance must be deferred in favor of these momentary musings.

Certainly, one hesitates to categorize the variety of concerns mirrored in the Tagalog movie under any recognizable literary form or style. There is no Rose or Blue Period in the Filipino film as in Picasso's art; and while the German cinema has had its era of expressionism; the French, a genteel humanism; the Italians, neo-realism; and the British a documentary brutalism; there are no such critical signposts to guide the film scholar in tracing a discernible progression through the six decades or so of Philippine movie-making. Indeed, there are no "isms" in local movies; there are only trends.

And trends, by nature, are the most transient of things; doubly so in the fickle flux of a mass medium like the movies. Why disaster movies are enjoying an unprecedented vogue these days in the world film market is not a question of art, but a question of psychosis, reflecting shared persuasions between film-makers and film audiences alike. Similarly, the Tagalog movie formulas that are resurrected time and again as box-office demands warrant, reveal deep-rooted, tacit, and even covert aspirations, frustrations, and complexes of more pertinence to the national character than to the established genres of the cinema. To understand these peculiari-

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ties in part, one must indulge in a kind of informal social commentary and unlicensed psycho-analysis; but such are the hazards and rewards of viewing, writing, and making Tagalog movies.

Themes, Dreams and Myths

The irrefutable worth of the Filipino motion picture lies in its ability to entertain its public. In this regard, it is inimitable; for far more than the national sport, our women, or our vices, our movies afford us the chance to project and fulfill our fondest and most private fantasies as a people. Verily, dreams may be the stuff out of which our movies grow, but to be sure, the end product of so widely disseminated an art form is more realistically recognized as myth. For what are myths, after all, if not our dreams institutionalized?

It seems only fitting at hindsight that our moviemakers should neglect the development of themes in their films as perhaps too alien a conceptual approach to their material, favoring the making of myths instead, harking back in so doing to our rich folkloric tradition of legend and fable. This is not to suggest that the Filipino film has consciously chosen a mythopoetic function for itself, for though isolated instances of just such an artistic choice exist (e.g. Manuel Conde's *Juan Tamad* series, Celso Ad Castillo's *Ang Mahiwagang Daigdig ni Pedro Penduko*), the more prevalent expressions are those that have evolved along with an ascendant popularity. It would seem in fact that the more widely held myths are those that have insinuated themselves unnoticed, so to speak, into the collective consciousness of our moviegoing public and just as surreptitiously asserted themselves into the canon of the Philippine cinema.

In and of what do these myths consist?

The Caucasian Ideal

The first myth, perhaps impossible now to avoid, since it figures as a matter of course in local movies is the myth of the Caucasian as an ideal of beauty. Indeed, on just such a cornerstone of colonial mentality is the whole star system of Philippine movies based. Lightness of skin and sharpness of features have been the prevailing standards of matinee good looks hereabouts; and invariably, the actors and actresses who have made the grade have had foreign ancestors to thank for their good fortune. Of course, there have been

exceptions, but these actors of a more native cast have, more often than not, found their niche as comedians (e.g. Pugo and Tugo) and/or as stock characters (e.g. Pedro Faustino, Joseph de Cordova, Ruben Rustia), certainly not as the object of mass adulation and identification. Given such ground rules for fame, is it any wonder that none of our established stars have had unmistakably Tagalog screen names?

Only within the last decade or so has it been possible for a more endemic physicality to surface within the ranks of the country's top movie stars; but the majority still remain disproportionately non-Malay. Moreover, the extent to which the minority make-up their facial features so as to render them more aquiline and hence, more pleasing, is mute testimony that the Caucasian ideal still obtains.

Needless to say, the dominant influence in the perpetration of this attitude has been our Hispanic experience as a people. 400 years of having had to deny our ethnic identity has left its mark on the psyche of Tagalog movies. Still, it is interesting to note that this cultural orientation is not without its undercurrent of ambivalence. And perhaps, it is a measure of historical justice that we should, consciously or unconsciously, repay the tutelage by likewise installing the image of the goateed and/or bemoustached Spaniard, the image of the grandee, as the archetypal villain of the Philippine cinema. So inured is this stereotype in the thinking of our local audiences that when darker-skinned character actors (e.g. Max Alvarado) have been made to play the rogue, they have done so with the obligatory facial growth and by mimicking their screen precursors with an unabashed creole campiness.

Machismo and Masochismo

Another myth which has evolved out of the cultural trauma of the Spanish era is the exaggerated machismo of our male movie stars. Superficially, a seeming affectation designed to bolster a box-office following, this native machismo must be differentiated at the outset from its more familiar Latin counterpart. We are not dealing here with a simple emulation of values, the mere passing off of a pose from the colonizer to the colonized. To be sure the outward manifestations of both overlap; the swagger, the sneer, the bravura that has come to characterize male exhibitionism.

More important than these, however, are the motive forces which impel such behavior; and it is in these wherein



our home-grown masculine prototypes part ways with their Spanish exemplars. Latin machismo, as one understands it, involves a wilful confrontation with elemental forces: the innately different and therefore challenging sensuality of womanhood which must be tamed; the pressing inevitability and therefore nagging presence of death which must be faced. Hence, the moral impetus arising from these grounds lends to such staples of Latin machismo as the flamenco and the Apache dance, its balletic insouciance, and to the bullfight, its ritualistic daring.

On the other hand, these dimensions are wholly missing from the heroic figures of the Tagalog cinema. Theirs is a baser pre-occupation with masculinity stemming from a revulsion and backlash against the emasculating dogmatism of Spanish Catholicism. Whereas the Latin attempts to assert and temper his maleness through a relentless flirtation with sex and death, the Filipino is more concerned, not with the refinement, but rather with the retrieval of his manhood. For

our proud, hardy, and brave forbears, to be Christianized was to be symbolically castrated; and as such the impact that religion has had on the male psyche of our race has conceivably been more psychologically telling and hence, more passionately resented, than the larger fact of our historical subjugation as a people. Certainly, its reverberations can still be felt up to the present in the nominal Catholicism of most Filipino men.

In cinematic terms this re-affirmation of the Filipino's masculinity takes the form of the action picture, invariably a tale of vengeance (e.g. *Ang Mananandata*, *Esteban*, *Pagbabalik ng Lawin*). This last device is not without its merit, for in casting the male protagonist as an aggrieved party, the movie not only metaphorically approximates his historical plight as an unwilling convert, but shrewdly pre-disposes audience sympathy on his side, thereby allowing the hero to perform in the course of the film all sorts of exploits and mayhem with impunity. So much for the derring-do side of machismo. Of even greater significance are the moral implications present in the tale. For premised as it is on the idea of revenge, the hero is consequently placed outside the pale of convention and, as such, he becomes theoretically an outlaw. However, it is a local cinematic cliché that, be this ever so true, the hero is never lawless. On the contrary, the code by which he lives and pursues his solitary mission is usually more fundamental, if not also more cold-bloodedly practical, than the opposing ethos of Christianity. It is no coincidence that its primal harshness echoes the pre-Hispanic codes of our forefathers. For it is in this manner that the conflict is adroitly transformed into an ethical clash. "Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord," but the Biblical admonition is roundly ignored by our protagonist who ultimately settles matters by taking upon himself the role of judge, jury and executioner. Only by so flagrantly defying the Catholic tradition dominant in our society can the Tagalog movie redeem the masculinity of its heroes.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is what we may as well call the *masochismo* of the female, which, as another myth of our movies, perpetrates the by now Victorian delusion about the modesty of our womenfolk. Referring to the innate and enduring capacity of the Tagalog movie's female protagonists to suffer untold trials and tribulations wrought upon by the indifferent hand of fate and by the equally insensate knavishness of man, *masochismo* is the operative principle of the tear-jerker (e.g., *Angustia*, *Dahil*

sa Isang Bulaklak).

Like *machismo*, it is also intrinsically linked with the Catholic faith in the Philippines. Now, one must understand that in our society, religion as a lived activity has been relegated by and large as a female pre-occupation. There is a precedent for this since it was Juana, Rajah Humabon's wife, after all, who first accepted the faith in the figure of the Christ Child given her by Magellan, thereby formally acknowledging the coming of Catholicism to our islands. Apart from this, Filipino women have always been identified with virtue, an association which, coupled with the insistently scrupulous pietism of the Friar teachings, has given rise to that mentality so dearly beloved by the Tagalog movies which equates virtuousness with the most repressive Christian attributes: chastity, perseverance, humility and the like. By this reckoning, suffering becomes synonymous with virtue, and by extension, the greater the suffering, the more virtuous is the penitent. Consequently, to project the desired image of Filipino womanhood on the screen, it has become necessary to beset her with every conceivable emotional, physical and spiritual dilemma so much so as to transform our heroines into veritable martyrs. Women in Tagalog movies endure much, because — as Heine said of God — it is their job.

Class Consciousness as a Myth

Myth in the Philippine cinema is not only confined to its ideals and to its protagonists, but covers as well certain of its most revered and favored plots. The most interesting for our purposes is the one dealing with the myth of our social classes. In the formula plot which embodies this myth, the capitalist-proletarian dichotomy is restructured into a love story between the rich landlord's son and the poor tenant farmer's daughter or vice-versa. Other versions may have it as an employer-employee and/or master-servant relationship, but whatever the variations, what is unique in this home-grown genre is the unconventionality of the romance itself, the fact that it confronts the social disparity of the lovers. If the plot offers interesting possibilities for social commentary up to this point, the resolution which invariably follows effectively dilutes any such considerations. As it turns out this type of Tagalog movie is not meant to be taken as a social drama at all, but rather as a morality play, wherein the individual worth as human beings of its

Opposite page:
Machismo in Action, Fernando Poe Jr. in *Pagbabalik ng Lawin*, an action picture produced and directed by Poe himself under the pseudonym Ronwaldo Reyes.



protagonists is more the point rather than the idea of social amelioration. The objectives and obstacles to the romance arise from character flaws and they have more to do, we learn, with simplistic values such as pride as opposed to humility, honor as opposed to shame, rather than with the larger issue of class consciousness. Indeed, apart from the situation drawn by this type of plot, the awareness that the rich are very different from the poor stops short of the costumes and props which deck out the characters. Reverse the trappings of the players and you have reversed their roles as well — a clear indication that the characterizations drawn are too shallow to contain a genuine appreciation of social stratifications. "Rich" and "poor" become simply convenient classifications, if not merely descriptive expedients utilized to flesh out a film homily on the naive but widely held notion that "love conquers all" and, one might add, even hurdles class barriers.

Inadvertently, the myth propagated by so careless a depiction of a human situation is that class stations are readily transcended — a "consummation devoutly to be wished," surely — but a fanciful fallacy nonetheless. We who have been politicized know that social classes represent not just an intellectual, nor a political reality, but in point of fact, an incontrovertible reality whose shape and power, whose workings and effect and whose very hold on our puny lives we have not come to fully understand.

Conclusion

The myths modestly sketched in the foregoing make up as yet too meager an account of the emphases and resonances to be found in the Tagalog movie. Far too many factors have had to be omitted because of obvious limitations. This paper does not even begin to suggest the interdependence that exists between certain of our movie myths, nor the accretion of significances to be gleaned from a comparative study of this interaction.

Suffice it to say that we have herein merely hinted at a way to recover essences we did not know existed in our country's cinema. However we may judge our findings, it cannot be denied that we shall begin to create the Filipino cinema of the future only at such a time when we shall have completed an exhaustive re-examination of the Filipino cinema of the past. So fellow Filipino cineastes, to the darkened theater with you! Projectionist, to your task!

NOTES ON "BAKYA" Being an Apologia of Sorts for Filipino Masscult

by Jose F. Lacaba

Let's begin with a little quiz. Identify the following:

- a) *Mardy*
- b) *Orasyon na naman*
- c) *Nora Cabaltera Villamayor*
- d) *Pilyo, nguni't clean fun*
- e) *Ricky na, Tirso pa*

If you don't even get one answer right, you are, if not a foreigner, either a hopeless bourgeois or an incurable egg-head. But if you guess that a) *Mardy* is an Eddie Peregrina top tune and the title of one of his movies; b) *Orasyon na naman* is the standard opening line of Johnny de Leon's afternoon radio program, *Lundagin Mo Baby*; c) *Nora Cabaltera Villamayor* is the real name of Nora Aunor; d) *Pilyo, nguni't clean fun* is the slogan of *Pogi* comics-magazine and e) *Ricky na, Tirso pa* is the movie that brings together for the first time those real-life first cousins, Ricky Belmonte and Tirso Cruz III, congratulations: you are a true connoisseur of "bakya."

Bakya, in case you don't know, literally means the wooden slippers worn in lieu of shoes by the poor in the barrios. The meaning of the word has so expanded that "bakya" is now also a description of a style and sensibility—the style of popular culture, the sensibility of what Dwight MacDonalderisively labels "masscult." Thus, bakya now means anything that is cheap, gauche, naive, provincial, and terribly popular; and in this sense it is used more as an adjective than as a noun.

The term "bakya crowd" came first. Director Lamberto V. Avellana is said to have coined the phrase in his rage against an audience that failed, or refused, to appreciate his award-winning movies. For a long time after that, bakya crowd was the shibboleth on the lips of every movie director who cranked out low-budget quickies for mass consumption. They were not to blame if their works could not be classified as art, the directors said; their audience was



The durable and highly successful Reycard Duet. Now based in Las Vegas where they are a regular attraction, this duo's musical-comedy act once represented the quintessence of *bakya*.

made up of morons indifferent, if not entirely hostile, to "prestige" or "quality" pictures. The bakya crowd became the favorite whipping-boy of those critics who, while shying away from Tagalog movies as a rule, never ceased to bewail the absence of Tagalog movies that could compare with wholesome Hollywood hokum like *Ten Commandments* and *Sound of Music*.

That the so-called bakya crowd could recognize excellence if it was presented to them on their own terms, in movies without pretensions to "prestige," became apparent with the popularity of the Joseph Estrada proletarian pot-boilers. The advent of *bomba*¹ carried the bakya crowd even farther. The *bomba* phenomenon may be seen in two ways: as a symptom of decaying morals or, because it implies adult entertainment, as a sign of growing up. The very words are significant; from the *bakya*, symbol of the backward, barrio, to the *bomba*, symbol of 20th-century power, was a long way to go, and the distance seemed to indicate that the bakya crowd was on the way out.

Then toward the late '60s, along came the word "bakya" divorced now from "crowd" and no longer limited to movies. Its use probably began on the campus, particularly of exclusive schools, where naturally the inhabitants heaped additional layers of odium and ridicule on the word.

In its present meaning, bakya is whatever isn't in with the In Crowd, whatever is non-mod or non-hip. Its antithesis is "class", also used as an adjective, meaning classy, stylish, elegant, sophisticated, fashionable, expensive. Tagalog movies in general are bakya, and so are the moviehouses that show them; Hollywood movies are usually class, and suburban theaters like Rizal and New Frontier particularly so. *Turo-turo* restaurants are utterly bakya; the eating places of the big hotels like Hilton or Savoy are the height of class. The poor man's idea of elegance in dress — something shiny or frilly or riddled with eyelets for a girl, a single-color scheme (otherwise known as *ternong-terno kung magdamit*; light-brown shirt, dark-brown shirt, dark-brown pants light-brown socks, dark-brown shoes) for a boy — is derided as bakya, dressing like an Amboy,² that is, *Esquire*-mod or plastic-hippie style, is class. The early Elvis hairdo, a high-rise fluff buttressed by pounds of greasy kid stuff, is bakya, and from the way Tom Jones sideburns have been expropriated by the politicians they, too, will probably end up being bakya; the 50-peso Iper³ haircut is definitely class. Pleats and cuffs on trousers if seen today are simply unbelievable, but

very tight pants and colorful plaids should be bakya, by now; what's class is the bell-bottom and the "straight cut."

Top tunes are particularly susceptible to the charge of being bakya. In fact, the word is most often used in this context: "*Bakyang-bakya naman 'yang kinakanta mo.*"⁴ What's bakya is usually the new syrupy ballad which sounds as if it had been written for Neil Sedaka or Joni James: *I Only Live to Love You*, *One Day Soon*, *It Hurts to Say Goodbye*, all Eddie Peregrina hits. There are some songs, however, that start out as the exclusive property of the In Crowd but become bakya by getting to be too popular, e.g., the Beatles' *Obladi-Oblada* and Sinatra's *My Way*. (The great performers are like Shakespeare; their appeal extends from the eggheads to the groundlings.) American folk songs, Bob Dylan, the Doors, by having a limited appeal, are indubitably class.

Bakya, then, suggests the class distinctions in Philippine society, and class here is used in its ordinary English sense. It's usually what the urban and rural poor enjoy, embrace, support, and idolize which falls under the category of bakya. It is usually the upper classes who employ the epithet with a snccr, with condescension, with a tremendous feeling of superiority. The class distinctions are suggested in the joke: "*Class nga, low-class naman.*"⁵

This feeling of superiority manifests itself in the many jokes about a bakya movie idol. Practically all these jokes involve malapropism or Filipino English; and obviously 99 percent of them are apocryphal, made up by the kind of people who use Tagalog only with the maids. A few samples will suffice.

Movie idol on seeing the chandeliers at the Cultural Center: "Wow, what beautiful chamberlains!" To a fan: "Would you like my mimeograph?" To a waiter in a crowded, smoke-filled restaurant: "Please open the door. I'm getting sophisticated." On being offered a glass of wine, after a companion has replied, "I'm afraid not": "Me, I'm not afraid." At the dinner table: "Please pass the salt. My hands cannot arrive." On seeing a black cat pass by: "That's a bad ointment." After singing a song that has met with appreciative applause: "Thanks for the clap."

Remember the jokes about Ramon Magsaysay?⁶ Told that high prices were due to the law of supply and demand, he is supposed to have ordered: "Repeal that law!" And there is the story about Joseph Estrada⁷ when, as Mayor of San Juan, he raided a *monte* joint. In warning the operators of

the joint, he is said to have solemnly declared, meaning to say he meant business, "I mean monkey business." Our movie idol should find consolation in the thought that he is not the only bakya idol whose knowledge of English, such as it is, may be one reason his bakya fans take to him. They speak the same language; they understand him; they identify with him; they can see themselves in him. They are not bothered by the malapropisms, just as they couldn't care less if Eddie Peregrina commits tautology when he sings, in *Mardy*, "Though I can't but I have to forget you." Of course, they are also willing to accept a perfumed accent and reasonably correct grammar: Helen Gamboa and Jeanne Young⁸ are stars. The noteworthy thing here is that the bakya does not put such a high premium on perfect English — there are things that are important beyond all that fiddle.

This brings up another quality of bakya: the preference for things native. The imported is never bakya (though perhaps Italian Westerns and Chinese swordsmen epics are perilously close to it); the local often is. Colonial mentality is not necessarily involved here, since many items in the bakya canon are slavish imitations of foreign fads and heroes. There is no way of telling which is more colonially minded, the audience of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, or the audience of *Omar Cassidy and the Sandalyas Kid*; the bakya crowd is more likely to go for Chiquito in *Che-Charon*⁹ than for Omar Sharif in *Che*, but that does not make the bakya crowd more nationalistic. Still, the fact is that the sensibility here called bakya tends to favor something which is one's own, though it be ersatz, and to reject something entirely alien, though it be the original. Kapitan Kidlat may be just a little brown Captain Marvel and Darna nothing more than a xerox copy of Wonder Woman, but at least they speak a native tongue, they fly over nipa huts and bamboo groves. In this sense, it is not wrong to say that, however fantastic they may be, however remote from reality, Kapitan Kidlat, Darna, and other such bakya figures are closer to the Philippine experience than anything directly obtained from abroad. The image of the Filipino can still be, somehow, discerned in the distortions of our local cowboys, samurais, and secret agents.

Curiously enough, recognition abroad can change the status of bakya. The Reycard Duet was the quintessence of bakya when it was still appearing at the Clover,¹⁰ but after Rey and Carding returned from Las Vegas, complete with endorsements from Elvis Presley and Sammy Davis, Jr.,

they became good enough for the Hilton, though they had not changed one bit in style or repertoire. On things local, the taste of the In Crowd lags behind that of the bakya crowd, which is quick to recognize and support native talent. The bakya crowd, however, might in the end not enjoy the fruits of what it has nourished. When the rich take up the heroes of the poor, they become too expensive for the poor to appreciate.

The class distinctions exposed by the word bakya point to another truth, and it's this: bakya is a social condition — the condition of the majority of Filipinos. To be poor is to be bakya; what sociologists call cultural deprivation brings about the bad taste of masscult. It is the children of the proletariat and the peasantry who buy the postcard-size photographs of Vilma Santos and Edgar Mortiz from the improvised stands on the sidewalks of Quiapo; the children of the privileged, in the exercise of "good taste," get their giant posters of David Hemmings and Vanessa Redgrave from bookshops or fancy boutiques where Charlie Brown T-shirts are also sold. And the difference between these two species of picture collectors is simply money, its abundance and its absence. To make fun of the devotees of bakya is therefore to make fun of poverty — the poverty that deprives a person of the financial and educational resources needed to free himself from the bondage of bad taste.

It may be argued that many who have acquired the necessary money — the *nouveau riche*, the *parvenu* — do not cease to be purveyors of bad taste, remain bakya at heart. True enough. But even if at heart they are really bakya, in appearance they are not. A Mustang and a Pierre Cardin shirt and a speech-clinic accent have magical properties; they confer an aura of class and remove the stigma of bakya, and unless their possessors spout malapropisms like "No more rice, thank you — I'm fed up," they can easily join the In Crowd in the society-page columns. Then they can afford to be snobbish and supercilious; they too can sneer with impunity at the culture of the bakya.

This alone should put us on our guard. For clearly it is not the true artists and intellectuals who mock bakya culture; they usually have great tolerance (and sometimes even genuine affection) for it. But the mockers are themselves strangers to true culture, and if they despise *Ricky na, Tirso pa*, it is not because they prefer movies by Godard; if they turn their backs on Tagalog Komiks, it is not because they would

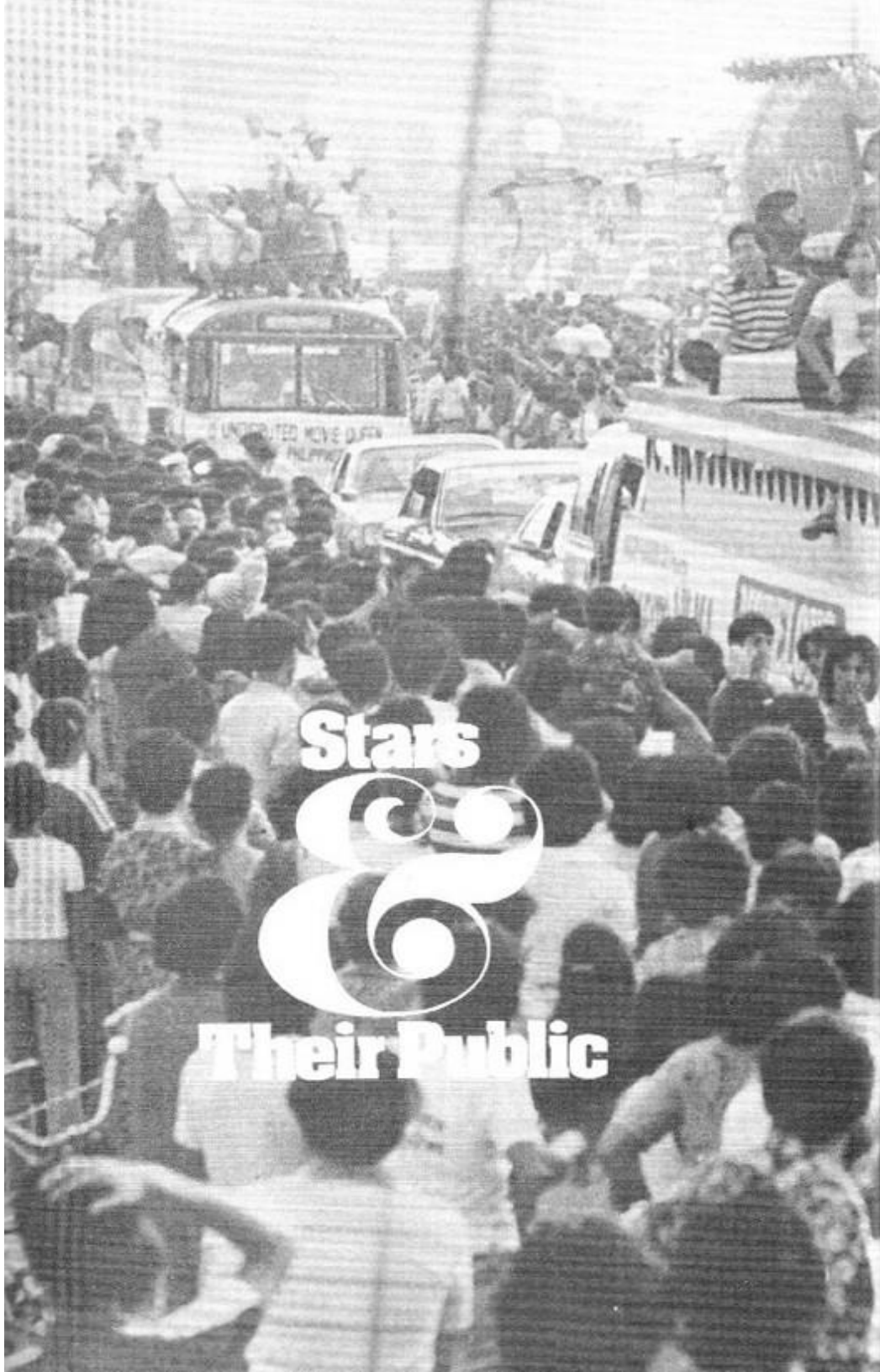
rather read *Finnegan's Wake*. As a matter of fact, they are as hostile to true art as they are to bakya.

Leslie Fiedler, in a disquisition on comic books, makes a point that applies to our subject:

"The problem posed by popular culture is finally, then, a problem of class distinction in a democratic society. What is at stake is the refusal of cultural equality by a large part of the population. It is misleading to think of popular culture as the product of a conspiracy of profiteers against the rest of us. This venerable notion of an eternally oppressed and deprived but innocent people is precisely what the rise of mass culture challenges. Much of what upper-class egalitarians dreamed for him, the ordinary man does not want — especially literacy . . .

"The middle-brow reacts with equal fury to an art that baffles his understanding and to one which refuses to aspire to his level. The first reminds him that he has not yet, after all, *arrived* (and indeed, may never make it); the second suggests to him a condition to which he might easily relapse, one perhaps that might have made him happier with less effort (and here exacerbated puritanism is joined to baffled egalitarianism) — even suggests what his state may appear like to those a notch above. Since he cannot on his own terms explain to himself why anyone should choose any level but the highest (that is, his own), the failure of the vulgar seems to him the product of mere ignorance and laziness — a crime! And the rejection by the advanced artists of his canons strikes him as a finicking excess, a pointless and unforgivable snobbism. Both, that is, suggest the intolerable notion of a hierarchy of values, the possibility of cultural classes in a democratic style; and before this, puzzled and enraged, he can only call a cop. The fear of the vulgar is the obverse of the fear of excellence, and both are aspects of the fear of difference; symptoms of a drive for conformity on the level of the timid, sentimental, mindless-bodiless genteel."

The connoisseurs of bakya, if they are at all aware of their bakya-ness, need not be ashamed of their affections. One thing they can do if they would proclaim their difference, if they would take pride in being outsider to the exclusivist culture of the In Crowd, is to use a term of reproach, bakya, as a badge of honor — the way their forebears used the word *Indio*.¹¹



Stars

Their Public



REMEMBRANCE OF MOVIES PAST

by Andres Cristobal Cruz

Some time ago, I saw the rushes of *Death Was No Stranger*, a movie about Terry Adevosos's famed Hunters guerrillas. Ronald Remy portrayed the resistance leader and Bert Avelana directed the film, which, according to what I heard, was scripted by Rolf Bayer.

What stands out in the film is a scene where a roll is called and the men are given assignments by the guerrilla leader. I thought the scene was dragging.

That the Filipino movie should hear the bells toll should not be cause for fear. At the rate it is going, the Filipino movie is no stranger to death. As many times as critics have pulled the ropes on the bell, the Filipino movie has survived. Thanks to its audience, the *bakya* crowd,¹ whose taste is not necessarily their fault but that of a society whose values in entertainment and in art have been determined and are developed in the context of socio-economic conditions. The people see the kind of films they deserve.

We have been going to movies since we were knee-high. Our experience with the Filipino movie is mostly sad and it is just about the same with Hollywood movies. What we enjoy now is remembering our movie-going childhood in Dagupan and youth in Tondo.

1

A horse comes up Dagupan bridge. Clipping down, it pulls a *calesa*² and passes three boys on the sidewalk. The boys dart out one after the other. They hang from the rod at the back of the *calesa* for a free ride, looking pretty much like monkeys. But the ride is short-lived. The *cocheró*³ lashes a horsewhip of curses and the boys drop away, laughing as they walk towards Cine Rizal. Not *palco*, but the *butaca*.⁴ The seats are pew-like. A pungent smell rises from under some of the seats.

Reprinted from *The Insurance Line*, 1 (Series of 1963).

2

Flash Gordon. Ray guns. Space ships. Come rain, come shine, the next chapter must be seen. Money from Father. More from Mother. A little brother loses a centavo or two. A *carretela*,⁵ walled on three sides with billboards of what's showing, tours the streets of the town. A drum is heard from within. The *programa*⁶ is shown and the streets are littered with boys. Rudy Concepcion and Elsa Oría! The synopsis in Tagalog and the songs in the movie are printed.

3

The *cines*⁷ in Tondo: Cine Gloria, Katubusan, Venus. From a story —

"... We would go to Cine Esa down at Herbosa where if we had five centavos between us we could see a double feature: Indians and bang, bang, bang, Tarzan and big monkeys and elephants and his shout — aaah-aahaAHH-aHAaa! Rin Tin Tin. Tim McCoy."

4

The joys of going to a movie. *Pan de sal*⁸ and sardines in a Chinese restaurant. And back in the *estero*⁹ neighborhood to be Tarzan or Fernando Poe (*Palaris*)¹⁰ slicing, hacking, and swinging away with a sword fashioned from bamboo.

Monang and Sano and Tembong¹¹ frighten and delight us. Manuel Barbeyto and Nati Rubi are really *kontrabidas*.¹² We learn to sing *Babalik Ka Rin*, *Pakiusap*, *Bituing Marikit*. Jose and Carlos Padilla, Ernesto La Guardia, Leopoldo Salcedo are the men we hope to be. One weeps, strangely, for Tita Duran selling peanuts (*Ang Magmamani*) and we are Angelito Nepomuceno protecting her. Carmen Rosales and Rogelio de la Rosa in *Señorita* provide intimations on social classes. Rosa del Rosario is a *Katipunera*. That *Sakay*¹³ is a bandit.

5

More and more Hollywood attracts. Oliver Hardy and Stan Laurel. Douglas Fairbanks, Errol Flynn. But Shirley Temple anytime. Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator* brings laughter before the shadows of war.

6

Which is movie and which is life? Holocaust of flames. Dogfights above the city. Hobnailed boots. The Occupation. Tugo and Pugo in *Life*, in Avenue. Bert Avellana, Daisy Hontiveros, Atang de la Rama. Japanese films are shown. But the stage flourishes. *Tiya Mameng* is our first play at the Metropolitan theater in Plaza Lawton. In *Pritil*, Armando Garces brings to Cine Gloria hysterical dramatics, while we eat *kastanyog*,¹⁴ and for meals the Tondo people have *sisid*¹⁵ rice and *azucena*.¹⁶ We sell *butchi*¹⁷ and buy bottles all over Tondo and its surroundings. And we are employed as office boys in the *Borneo Bussan Kaisha*.¹⁸ The Americans come. Camps in North Bay Boulevard. Evenings with GIs and their USO movies. There are new faces and new names. Van Johnson. Frank Sinatra. Danny Kaye. James Cagney. Bogart is also new. Clark Gable is Rhett Butler to Vivien Leigh's Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With The Wind*, at the Ideal where high school students flock after a meal of *chili con carne*, or boned chicken, sardines and more sardines, and corned



The incomparable team of Pugo and Tugo in *Magkumpareng Putik*, a 1950 LVN comedy with a touch of the macabre.

beef hash. In reconverted fatigue and khaki and with boots for the best of shoes available one sees *Sarunbanggi* and *Anak ng Dagat*. Rogelio de la Rosa, Leopoldo Salcedo are at work again.

7

It is high school time. Classes are cut. Dates are made in fear and trembling. The dimmest corners of the balconies are discovered. More night scenes the better for the whispering and holding hands. Have more from love, go to the movies. Luneta is not enough.

It is college time at once. Comparative Literature. One learns about art and its disciplines, learns though quite confused. A scene is remembered:

"Peping, Mari, and Ludy and I went to a movie. I think it was *Macbeth*. It had Orson Welles in it, and we came out feeling great and poetic at the same time . . . it was while we stood on Quezon Bridge, standing by the railing and looking into the glowing horizon that Marie told us she was quitting school. She was going to get married to that provincemate of hers."

8

The Rickshaw Man is remembered. Beautiful the color, and powerful the story of life and love, and of the death that comes like a chill in the bone. It is seen over and over again, and really not quite seen. Because: beside you is one that is all love and life and desire. It is the same: *Paris Blues*, *Strangers When We Meet* (remember, she cried, feeling like Kim Novak). *Black Orpheus*! To sing and descend into what hell there be, for the Eurydice that one has become by the magic of the art.

CLOSE-UP

Why do dialogues in most Tagalog movies sound bombastic and florid, as though their delivery were the be-all-end-all? Faces twitch to an emotional strain. Who among the Filipino movie actors could deliver the invisible gestures of Alec Guinness? Or the conviction of Lawrence Harvey? If the audience could not desire better performances from their idols, perhaps it is because an intimacy be-

tween them has been developed. Look at the marquees. Just the first names are mentioned. Their popularity is not for their acting, we fear, but because there has been a great number of write-ups on them. A Fellini, a Clouzot, a De Sica, or an Ingmar Bergman is a long way off for Filipino movies. Get more out of life, a slogan rallies, go to a movie: But we get out of the moviehouse feeling that it was not Man we saw but only Mannerism.

9

Streetcar Named Desire, Glass Menagerie, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls, The Old Man and the Sea. Such films are seen for the by-line that goes with them. One learns about them and studies these works in the classroom and outside. One goes, however, to see if they did justice to Mars Ravelo's *Roberta* or to the *Liwayway* serials of Angel Fernandez (A.S. Fabian in real life). One sees *Anak-Dalita* and *Badjao* for the director is dependable and competent, or a Gerry de Leon or a Chat Gallardo, even as Nemesio Caravana megs his own novels into fantastic films. The Zaldy Zhornacks come up with the Fernando Poes. From articles one copyreads for a magazine one learns about the likes and dislikes of this and that actress or actor. And the movie articles are *pare-pareho*,¹⁹ and the writers really don't even get to interview the stars. Will success spoil Susan Roces? How long will Bamba and Robert last?

10

One reads Lina Flor's *Sparklers*, the Joe Quirino tidbits, but it is from T.D. Agcaoili or from Ophelia San Juan that one gets a sense of criticism. And new scripts from Adrian Cristobal, in spite of what was done to his *Filibusterismo* or from Jess Banguis who scripted the FAMAS film documentary for the PACD, *Give us this Day*, and *Madugong Daigdig* for the Red Cross and a film festival in France. *Entertainment* and *Variety*, supplements to two Sunday magazines, could be more informative on Filipino movies. One wonders why vernacular magazines feel they could thrive only by having movie actors and actresses on their covers.

The boy-meets-girl formula still works as effectively as the poor-gets-rich theme. But run a successful Hollywood



Opposite page:
Rosa del Rosario
was the first in a
line of action he-
roines to play Mars
Ravelo's wonder
woman *Darna*.



Carmen Rosales and Rogelio de la Rosa, two of the brightest stars to grace the local movie firmament in the late 40s and 50s. The movie is LYN's *Kampanang Ginto* made in 1949 and for which Carmen Rosales was paid the highest fee ever received by an actress at the time.

Class B with a good title like *Magnificent Seven* and the Filipino movie version ramifies into *Samahang Siyete*, *Pito Sila*, *Walo Kami* and *Laban sa Pito*, or there really must be safety in numbers. Why are dramatic movies so few and far between on the Filipino silver screen? A failure of sensibility and nerve perhaps, or fear of ideas simply because they are new.

IF

If we were a movie censor, we would ask for the banning of cowboy and Indian movies; of scandalous pictures; sub-B movies are out, foreign or Filipino.

And if we were mayor of the city, we would ask the board to require the movies not to show advertisements of beauty aids and cigarettes and show instead shorts about Philippine life, or quotations from national heroes.

The Foreign Affairs office could look into the Filipino films that are to be sent out.

If we were a senator or a congressman, we could perhaps author a bill requiring movie producers to put out within a year four or five films about national heroes. It might not be good for a lawmaker, but it could be good for the country. Perhaps even promote the film-making of the best of novels in English or Filipino, of the myths and legends like *Lam-ang* or *Indarapatra*.²⁰

If we were a movie producer, we would have cartoons. *Gorio*, *the Jeepney Driver*, or *Sakay and Moy*, or *Hugo, the Sidewalk Vendor*, *Malang's Beelzebub* or *Chain-gang Charlie*.

If . . . We are glad, though, that we are only what we are.

The Filipino movie is show business. It is when it aspires to be art and sustains the aspiration with dedication and commitment, when it can look itself in the eye, that it can become more meaningful and purposive. For the movie industry in the Philippines to do this, it must first command the respect of its public by respecting itself and the public.

DISSOLVE

Percussion from the background. On the horizon, a sun bringing a new day. Camera moves up to a stem on foreground, closes up on a flower that is like the sun. Day brightens.

And life and love and work.

— THE BEGINNING —



CINDERELLA SUPERSTAR The Life and Legend of Nora Aunor

by Virgilio S. Almario

The life of Nora Aunor is like a dream — it is too beautiful, too good to be true. To the vast majority of a populace grown familiar with hand-to-mouth ways, salvation seems to lie only in the hands of a fairy godmother who might wring out a miracle. In a country like the Philippines, it is next to impossible to rise to fame and wealth when one is but a poor, small, dark-skinned, and barely educated country girl.

But it has happened to Nora Cinderella, the tiny, dusky superstar whose legend has become word-of-mouth among millions of Filipinos. For her legion of fans, she is "the dream made flesh," the one and only idol in the tinsel firmament.

NORA: I myself cannot quite believe that this would happen to me. I never really saw myself becoming a movie star. I had wanted to become a teacher. With the way I look, how could I have even dreamt of fame? We led such a hard life. I did enjoy singing, but all I could do was listen to the radio. We didn't even have one, so I had to go to a neighbor who had a radio. I would memorize the songs I liked. I would borrow "song hits" magazines, or rent them, at five centavos a reading. I had no money to buy my own. We were really so hard up.

Born in Iriga, Camarines Sur, on May 21, 1953, Nora was the fourth of five children of Eustaquio Villamayor and Antonia Cabaltera. Her father was a porter at the train station. Like most children of poor families, Nora had to help out even as a child. When not in school, she would be with her mother selling vegetables in the market, or vending drinks at the station. Thin and tiny, Nora would often get into fights when her playmates teased her. "*Negra! Negra!* (Black girl! Black Girl!)" was the familiar taunt, something like a stigma she had to bear along with her poverty. Even when she was receiving acclaim as a singer and actress, many

Opposite page:
Nora Cabaltera
Villamayor, a.k.a.
Nora Aunor.

Translated from "Cinderella Superstar: Ang Alamat at Karera ni Nora Aunor," *Sagisag*, May-June, 1977. English translation by Alfred Yuson.

of her fair-complexioned fellow performers still looked with disdain at the young, dusky upstart of an idol and her "lumpen" following.

Her's is an extraordinary voice. "A natural contralto," says composer Lutgardo Labad. "Not a trained voice, but one tailor-made for her personality. With further training, as with correct breathing, she can do wonders. She'll certainly attract more followers."

While in grade school, she was constantly asked to sing in programs. She joined amateur contests during fiestas, and for practice, sang along with a transistor radio in one hand and a borrowed songbook in the other. Her dream took gradual shape until she gathered enough nerve to join the Liberty Big Show in Naga in 1964. Clad in a faded dress and an old pair of shoes, she climbed up the big stage. "Well, little girl, are you sure your mother didn't just send you off to buy some vinegar?" jested the announcer. The entire studio cackled at this, but when she opened with "You and the Night and the Music," everyone fell silent.

It was her first big triumph. She was a Liberty Big Show champion for a fortnight.

While she was in second year at the Mabini Memorial College, her Mamay Belen (Mrs. Belen Aunor, her mother's sister) invited her to Manila. Mamay Belen was equally fond of music, and promised to help her start on a singing career. She decided to take the chance.

NORA: I told myself I had nothing to lose. I could even get lucky. Mamay Belen had great confidence in my voice. She said she thought I could join Tawag ng Tanghalan. For us in Bicol, that was one ladder to success. But I almost got discouraged at the start. I didn't know it was that difficult. I was so nervous even during auditions that I wanted to back out.

Her Mamay Belen brought her to the studio to watch the proceedings and to try her hand at auditions. The tiny country girl joined the long queues before the ABS-CBN studios at Pasay, swooning at the stars who arrived and asking them for autographs. Her favorite then was Susan Roces. Lately she's also learned to admire Amalia Fuentes for her "frankness and smart ways."

She failed her first audition for Tawag ng Tanghalan. She competed in the Tita Betty Show and lost. She passed her second audition for Tawag ng Tanghalan and even became champion for the evening. But she lost out with her

"You and the Night and the Music" to the reigning champion, Jose Yap.

Nora enrolled at the Generosa de Leon Memorial School, a branch of the Centro Escolar University in Parañaque. But she continued to watch stage shows whenever she had a chance. She'd occasionally guest in radio talent shows, learning proper timing from the pianist Romy San Mateo.

She took another crack at Tawag ng Tanghalan, and with the song "People" managed to dislodge the then champion, a policeman balladeer named Oscar Antonio. She held on to the crown for 14 consecutive weeks, after which she gave it up voluntarily. She represented Central Luzon in the Grand National Finals and wound up the year's grand champion. This was in May, 1967. She had a string of appearances in radio and television programs, and became a regular talent in Oras ng Ligaya. She guested once in Carmen on Camera, where she impressed the TV hostess and veteran singer with her singing. Carmen convinced Buddy de Vera of Alpha Recording to give the young Nora a break.

Her first single featured "I Almost Called Your Name" flip-sided with "I Only Came To Say Goodbye." It didn't make it as a hit, but on her third single, "The Music Played" flip-sided with "Don't Tell My Heart", Alpha made a mint and Nora Aunor became the studio's hottest property. Her first album was *Nora Aunor Sings*, followed by *Among My Favorites* and many other best-selling albums for Alpha. Another studio offered her ₱100,000 in cash and ₱1,000 per single, but she turned the offer down in a display of loyalty and gratitude to Alpha.

It was the time of the Beatles, Everly Brothers, Cascades and various other foreign singers. As a rule, only foreign records were making money, with isolated hits coming from local singers like Sylvia la Torre, Bobby Gonzales, Fred Panopio and a few others. Most local singers had to follow whatever craze prevailed as dictated by Tin Pan Alley, although a few original talents were then rising, among them the likes of Meici Molina, Carmen Soriano and Pilita Corrales, but the track record set by Nora was unprecedented.

She changed the history of the recording industry, Philippine record producers agree. She set the local recording industry on its present prosperous course and assured thereby the future of local records.

Alongside her career as a recording artist, Nora also ven-

tured into acting. It was German Moreno¹ who convinced Dr. Jose Perez of Sampaguita Pictures to cast Nora in films. She was paired with Jose Yap for a small role in the film *All Over the World*. It is said that when she sang in the film, movie audiences applauded. Sampaguita Pictures signed her to a contract and gave her supporting roles in their musicals. Before 1967 ended, she had appeared in *Way Out in the Country*, *Cinderella A-Go-Go*, *Pogi*, *Sitting in the Park* and *Ang Pangarap Ko'y Ikaw*.

NORA: Sampaguita helped me a lot. Doctor Perez was kind and helpful to newcomers like me. But there was a lot of competition in Sampaguita. At that time, it had all the veterans and the superstars. It was Director Marquez² who gave me my biggest role.

In September 1969, Tower Productions paired her with Tirso Cruz III in *D' Musical Teenage Idols*. The film clicked at the box-office. Pretty soon, the young superstar was attracting hordes of fans. Like ants drawn to sugar, they gathered wherever she performed, wherever she appeared, wherever she sang, wherever she was.

Her films were always box-office hits, especially when she was paired with Tirso Cruz III or Manny de Leon. The former queens of the silver screen, like Amalia Fuentes, Susan Roces, Nida Blanca and Gloria Romero, gave way to the little idol. Other young stars got on her bandwagon, like Vilma Santos, Perla Adea, Esperanza Fabon and Florence Aguilar. She had three programs of her own on television — *The Nora Aunor Show*, *Nora Cinderella* and *Superstar*. The “bomba”³ wave swelled and overwhelmed the movies; Merle Fernandez, Yvonne, Stella Suarez and Rosanna Ortiz came and went, but Nora could not be dislodged from her perch. Even now, against the newer stars Elizabeth Oropesa, Gloria Diaz, Alma Moreno and Hilda Koronel, her films continue to guarantee success at the box-office.

With the passing of the years, the legend of the Cinderella Superstar grows brighter. She is beyond doubt the biggest and the brightest star to rise and shine in the firmament of Philippine entertainment.

When she celebrated her 18th birthday in 1971, thousands of Noranians flocked to her house, leading one reporter to comment that the affair was better-attended than a demonstration at Plaza Miranda.⁴ When, in Iloilo, Nora and Tirso were stranded by typhoon Rosing, they could not leave the ship for two days because of the hordes of people



who kept vigil, rain or shine, at the pier. When Nora sang the commercial jingle, “Aren’t you glad you use Dial?”, the soap’s sales suddenly zoomed up.

Once, it was bruited about that that the young superstar had been summoned to Malacañang. The First Lady herself, according to the report, talked to Nora. “She was asked to live in Malacañang; she would go to school with Imee and Irene; and she would be sent to America to study voice,” so went the rumors. True or false, this indicates the extent that Nora’s popularity has been taken into account even in politics.

Along with her matchless popularity as singer and star, Nora has enjoyed unimagined material wealth. The Villamayors’ small house in Triga was soon replaced by one costing ₱200,000. Nora herself has changed homes many times; each house she buys has been in a wealthy neighborhood, including the big house and lot she now occupies in Valencia, San Juan.

Nora, it is said, was paid a mere ₱200 for her first film at Sampaguita Pictures, small change compared to her asking price these days of almost half a million pesos per film.

NORA: Of course, I’ve been used to handling responsibility since I was a child. But I have so many problems now. If I had taken it all to heart, I could only have gone one of three ways — go crazy; commit suicide; or quit show business. I’ve also learned a great deal from marriage and motherhood. It’s as if my outlook has matured. So, although my problems may be heavier now, I just laugh them off. As though they were of no account, no matter how painful, truly. I also like my new place. It feels more like home. The others were huge but they made me feel strange. Here, I feel just fine. When I don’t have to work or go out, I really like just staying home, lying around, playing with Ian.⁵ Perhaps this is where I will settle down.

In films, fawners and freeloaders are an occupational hazard. More than half of the news in the world of Philippine

The pairing of Nora Aunor and Tirso Cruz III, fondly known to their legion of fans as Guy and Pip, occasioned a phenomenal mass-cult following in the late 60s in such films as *Orlando Nadres' Nora*, *Mahal Kita*.

entertainment may be about Nora, but it is not all praise and admiration. The superstar is often the target of scurrilous gossip, her downfall repeatedly predicted.

In fact, Nora as a movie star has gone through ordeals that have been painfully public.

Her separation from Mamay Belen was a sorrowful experience. In late 1969, a few magazines were claiming that Nora was being exploited by her aunt, that it was the latter who profited from the girl's income. Nora was forced to leave the Aunor house in Nichols. With her mother, she rented an apartment near the house of Director Marquez. The next year, Nora bought a three-story house in White Plains for P260,000. It was here she celebrated her 17th-birthday, as well as her absolute reign as queen of Philippine entertainment.

In July, the news broke that Nora was being sued by Sampaguita Pictures, demanding from her P750,000 for alleged breach of contract.

It turned out that the family feud was tied up to this case. When Nora signed up with Sampaguita on October 2, 1967, it was the Aunor couple who signed for her, as her guardians. When Mamay Belen, her aunt, and Mamay Tonying, her mother, had a falling off, someone reportedly urged the latter, being Nora's mother, to sign up with Tower Productions. The prodding worked, and on April 2, 1970, Mamay Tonying signed Nora's contract with Tower.

The case has been docketed as Civil Case No. Q-14667, with Senator Jovito Salonga pleading for Nora, and is still pending.

Like ripe fruit on a tree, Nora attracts the aim of most people — reporters, her fellow actors, and others. The publications are ever quick to print anything new in the life and career of the superstar. Take the feud between Noranians and Vilmanians.⁶ Or Nora's alleged love affairs with Tirso, Manny, Edgar Mortiz, Sajid Khan, even Victor Laurel and Joseph Estrada! The slightest rumor that she is ailing provokes a crossfire of gossip. When she fails to keep an appointment, eyebrows are raised as if to say: "Now, do you see? She's really a no-show, a fathead, irresponsible, arrogant!"

In 1972, the publisher of Liwayway publications banned all news about Nora in his magazines. The reason: Nora failed to show up for her coronation as Queen on Philippine Movies on May 20 (the eve of her 19th birthday), an event sponsored by Liwayway. Only recently has her

name re-appeared in *Liwayway*, *Bannawag*, *Bisaya*, *Bulletin* and *Balita*.

Not too long ago, Nora was roundly castigated in Teodoro Valencia's column.⁷ It seems Nora had agreed to join a group of stars that would travel abroad to plug the Balik-bayan program, but on departure day, Nora didn't show up.

On January 27, 1975, Nora got married to Christopher de Leon.⁸ The unique and unexpected wedding, performed on a seashore at dawn, was a special event for all the news media. After a year, Ian was born. A contest was held to guess the exact time when Nora would give birth. Like her wedding, her hospital confinement also rated television coverage.

Now, there are all sorts of speculation. What will happen to her adopted daughter Lotlot⁹? Will Guy and Boyet's¹⁰ marriage last?

At the start of 1977, there were loud rumors that the couple fought often. Some said the two superstars had split up, that Nora kept to her Valencia house, that she drank often and too much, that she always seemed tense and smoked a lot.

Was Nora passé? Why were the fans suddenly lukewarm? There was a time such gossip wouldn't get by without a big to-do from the fans. In June 1972, for instance, the magazine *Now* assailed Nora's dealings with her fans, and the Noranians picketed for days at the publication's offices.

The Noranians used to be as busy as bees in the service of their queen. Coordinated by Corazon Azul, a librarian at the Graciano Lopez Jaena Elementary School, the National Nora Aunor Ltd. reached an active membership of 100,000. Nora's house and yard were packed on Saturdays, fan's day.

"Guy is just too busy these days," says Cora Azul, who is now an assistant at NV Productions.¹¹ "She doesn't have time for everyone who needs her attention. In fact, for a while, there was no fan's day. We've resumed it lately due to the insistent demand of the fans, who are feeling a little left out."

It hasn't been all lollipops and roses for Nora. But she gains new ground with every rotten tomato, every sour grape thrown her way. The more of it, the more she earns sympathy from the common man. It sharpens her image as their tiny Dolorosa, not unlike the many who are poor and abused in this country. To the fans, she is just like them, a victim

of derision in a society that refuses to concede success to one who comes from the masses.

In a world lorded over by the fair of skin and the well-bred, Nora is a wonder. In spite of her shortcomings, Nora turned around the conventional prejudices that had prevailed in theater and film. In the past, even talents of her caliber could only be extras in the presence of a Carmen Rosales or an Amalia Fuentes.¹²

Consider the new goal Nora has set herself. She wants to get away from being the goddess of musical potboiler films to become a serious artist and a producer.

NORA: I must do this to help my fans. I can't just sing for them all my life. They are also growing up. They have helped me, and I must pay them back by giving them all I can. I have a greater responsibility as a producer. I would still want to make money, but also, to make everyone happy.

In 1972, Nora made her debut as producer with the film *Carmela*. This was followed by *Paruparong Itim*, *Super Gee*, *Ander di Saya si Erap*, *As Long as There Is Music* and *Niño Valiente*. The films made money. But they were still very much like her earlier films.

When she made *Banaue*, Nora's extraordinary courage and serious intentions as a producer were evident. Her NV Productions spent ₱1.3 million, an extraordinary budget, then, for *Banaue*. She hired veteran director Gerardo de Leon to do it. And it was while shooting this film that she fell in love with her co-star, Christopher de Leon.

The film flopped at the box-office. People said it was because Nora's role in *Banaue* was completely different from the roles her fans had gotten used to. It was a painful experience for someone just starting to invest time and money in order to advance her artistic career.

But like a soldier, Nora kept on marshalling her forces. "She's saving up more money," a reporter said. Not long afterwards, NV came out with *Mrs. Teresa Abad*, *Ako Po si Bing* starring Christopher de Leon. The film was praised for its unusual theme and for achieving a certain degree of polish.

In 1976, two NV films reaped praise and admiration from movie critics. First, *Alkitrang Dugo*,¹³ followed soon after by *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos*. They were directed by two newcomers to film — Lupita Concio and Mario O'Hara, respectively. The excellent crafting of both films has already led to predictions that these two directors would

play a big role in the renewal of the Filipino film.

Nora has the lead role in *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos*. As a teacher who falls in love with a guerrillero and with a Japanese officer during the second World War, she pits her acting prowess against that of Bembol Roco¹⁴ and Christopher de Leon.

Her performance was so admirable that she surprised even the most demanding critics. This was followed by her performance as a nurse who dreams of going to the United States, in *Minsa'y Isang Gamu-Gamu*.

Her transformation as an actress was quite rapid. An unbelieving reviewer in English said her acting was "Oscar caliber." It was well said, for in the first Urian Awards given out by the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino¹⁵ Nora was acclaimed the best actress of the year. Shortly thereafter, the FAMAS¹⁶ likewise honored her.

Where will Nora's career lead to?

NORA: If I had my way, I'd like to stop singing. I'd like to concentrate on being a producer. This is much more difficult. It's hard to make only "quality" pictures. I don't have the money. But I'd like the moviegoer to benefit even from a commercial film. Like *Tisoy*.¹⁷ And I would like NV to be able to produce at least one good picture every year. With that, I shall be happy. After all, there are other sensible producers around, aren't there?

MR. BOX-OFFICE¹

by Quijano de Manila

Location for the new Poe starrer is a ranch in the lake and hill country of Binangonan, where dirt road and scrub growth and a background of eroded peaks do look like range.

The ranch belongs to society sportsman Johnny de Leon (he's married to a Madrigal girl) and is a chain of paddocks looped around the ranch houses. Just outside the gate, on a horse, Paquito Diaz is doing a scene where he just sits bowed on his mount, looking like an Apache in his long hair with a band around it. The arch over the gate bears the name of the ranch: a J and L linked in the shape of an anchor. Up the driveway, blocking it, is a wagon roofed with blue canvas, unhitched for the moment, the moment of the lunch break.

The first ranch house on the driveway is a nipa bungalow with a wide polished-bamboo veranda running around three sides of it. One side of the veranda is at the moment littered with the bodies of cowboys snoring the siesta. On the other side are tables where other members of the crew are playing poker or black jack.

Fernando Poe, Jr. — who's properly Ronald Poe — rises from a card game to stretch his legs in the orchard downstairs. He's in a blue shirt open to the navel and wears no paint. The week before, he had won the FAMAS award for best actor — and wasn't it too bad, he shrugs, that awards night should have been spoiled by the Cabaluna incident. Movie reporter Franklin Cabaluna had been slugged in the jaw at the FAMAS dinner, allegedly by Tony Cruz, one of Ronnie Poe's men.

"I didn't know about it," says Ronnie. "I only found out from Liza Moreno. After I received my award I went to congratulate her. She was crying. She said Cabaluna had been beaten up. I asked Tony, 'Why did you do it?' He said Cabaluna had said bad words, something like *leche*."²

Ronnie has heard that Cabaluna is filing charges not only against Tony Cruz, for physical injuries, but also against Ronnie, for "threats." Ronnie thinks that what Cabaluna



Tall in the saddle: Fernando Poe Jr., in his mythic persona as a tireless, fearless paladin of justice.

is referring to happened a year ago — “and it was not a threat.”

All this is part of an older, larger war: the war between show-biz folk, who are at once so avid and so touchy about publicity, and the entertainment columnists, who too often have to make news out of non-news.

Ronnie says he has been accused of being uncooperative with the press when, actually, he fears it.

“Reporters, I am scared of them. They expect me to know who they are, and to greet them. If I don’t, they start hitting me. They make it a guessing game: you have to guess they are reporters. But me: those I know, I greet; those I don’t know, I don’t greet.”

So, the movie beat thinks he’s trying to win a lemon award from the press.

(One recalls a woman movie reporter — an ex-reporter now — telling why she turned snide on a top movie actress: “*Pumasok ako sa party. Aba, hindi tumayo. Lagot siya!*”)³

Sitting down on a bench on the slope of a shady orchard overlooking a paddock where two colts are frisking about in the sun, Ronnie waves aside proffered coffee and the admonition to lunch.

“I had a plate of *champorrado* with fried ham. Ham goes as good with it as *tuyo*.”⁴

On the far side of the paddock, fans, mostly women with parasols, have gathered along the fence and are shouting “Ronnie!” or “Nanding!” Poe slides around on the bench to smile and wave at them. There’s an easy indolent grace to his body that not even the topic under discussion can vex.

“I don’t know how I offended Cabaluna but he was already hitting me even before I met him last year. One night last year I went out with reporters; we went to the Round-Up; and Cabaluna was with us. That was the first time I knew who he was. I said to him, don’t hit me so personally; hit me as an actor, say my acting is lousy; but no personal attacks. Because he was hitting everything about me, my character, my reputation. I told him I had younger brothers and sisters going to school. Such attacks affected them. So, I said, don’t make it too personal, don’t go too far. Now he’s calling that a ‘threat.’ When what he wrote about me was mostly hearsay.”

That reminds him of his days in the Lo-Waist Gang, which the public so tended to see as a real-life gang that Ronnie, like the other members of the gang, often found himself provoked and set upon by *kanto* boys⁵ wanting “to test

me out.” Actually, says Ronnie, Lo-Waist was a gang only onscreen; offscreen, they went separate ways: Zaldy Zshornack had his own *barkada*⁶ and so did Boy Sta. Romana; and the only members that Ronnie moved around with after working hours were Berting Labra (because Labra had worked for Poe senior) and Boy Francisco (because Boy and Ronnie were both courting Corazon Rivas at that time). “I didn’t become really close to Zaldy until after Lo-Waist,” says Ronnie.

The infatuation and resentment that combine into the public’s attitude towards its movie idols have got people like Ronnie into worse scrapes than challenges from *kanto* boys and may explain the other case that’s spoiling his time of FAMAS honor.

This other case involves a garbage truck which, he says, was, at around two in the morning about a month ago, hogging Dewey Boulevard and then stopped so suddenly that Ronnie, whose car was behind, would have rammed into it had he not swerved in time. As Ronnie tells it, he slowed down alongside the truck to tell the driver that such sudden halts were dangerous, especially since the truck didn’t have any warning tail lights. There was a man beside the driver and a third man on top of the truck, and this third man, as the truck drove away, threw or dropped a tin can on Ronnie’s head. Ronnie, who was alone, gave chase and forced the truck to a stop. Then he pulled out the man sitting beside the driver; meanwhile the driver had jumped down and was approaching Ronnie from the other side. Ronnie put out a hand to stop him. “*Huwag kang lalapit.*”⁷ And that, says, Ronnie, was all there was to it. “I didn’t use my hands on them.” The men said “*Paciencia na lang, pare, hindi sinasadya.*”⁸ And they went their way, he went his. Next thing he knew they were suing him for having “mauled” them. Apparently they knew who he was; and so it was all right to admit having been mauled, though there were three of them and only one of him. Ronnie has filed counter-charges.

That his FAMAS award should coincide with such annoyances recalls to a grinning Ronnie that a mishap also marked “the first time I won an award for my acting.” This was when he was seven or eight. It was a family custom for the Poe children (there are six of them; Ronnie is the second child) to present a play on Christmas, in the living room, with their parents and other relatives as audience. That Christmas, Ronnie was playing St.

Joseph — “with beard and all” — when he tripped on a wire and crashed into the Christmas tree. “I ruined the set!” He looked so wretched his parents decided to name him the best actor that year. His first acting prize: a cellophane bag of marshmallows.

His first prize on FAMAS night, you might say, right after he heard himself proclaimed the winner and his table burst into uproar, was Susan Roces leaning towards him to shout: “Kiss me . . . On the *cheek!*”

That FAMAS award had been tantalizing Ronnie since 1958, when he was first nominated, for his work in *Kamay ni Cain*. Under Gerry de Leon’s direction — “I learned a lot from him” — Ronnie had smolderingly played the bad brother to Zaldy’s good brother. The allotment of roles indicates that, up to then, Ronnie had been somewhat in the shadow not only of Zaldy but of other big teenage stars then, like Romeo Vasquez; but *Cain* was the last time Ronnie would get a part that was, however remotely, second-lead or *contra*vida.⁹ By 1961 he had his own company and the first picture he produced, *Batang Maynila*, established him as the Mr. Box-Office, the *Batang Taquilla*, of Philippine show business, a peak he has been straddling for a decade.

It also established, now that the Lo-Waist years were behind him, the mature Poe screen character: soft-spoken but relentless, do-gooding but a loner, and distant with mystery. Ronnie early developed the serious mien. Where Zaldy is happy-happy and Estrada the bristling victim of the Unjust Society, Poe is fairytale hero, embodying the pitiful populist dreams of salvation that get translated, mythically, into a Bernardo Carpio or, politically, into a Magsaysay. If Poe lacks the Nowness of the young Zaldy or the present Estrada, it’s because he feeds an older hunger in the masses; though this muting of contemporary impact may be the reason he had been missing out in FAMAS, though nominated almost every year since he became Superstar No. 1. When he finally won, it was for a contemporary role, still kin to the miracle liberator, but this time a priest in a modern slum.

“I had been doing too many cowboy and war pictures,” says Ronnie, “and we decided on a change. So, my script-writers, Teodorico Santos and Fred Navarro, dug up this story, a true story, about a priest who tamed a slum. It was really funny: me wearing a *sotana*,¹⁰ and I felt strange.”

Mga Alabok sa Lupa wasn’t supposed to be a super-production; just a routine picture shot in the routine two

months, and singular only because it’s one of the few films where Ronnie has a sexpot for co-star. He goes for demure leading ladies. But: “Divina Valencia was a different treat. She was fun on the set. And she was very good, especially in her scenes with Paquito Diaz.” If Ronnie expected his company to snag any FAMAS nominations, it was for Divina in *Alabok* and for Andy Poe in *Matimbang ang Dugosa Tubig*. Ronnie had co-starred with Andy in that film, one of the best-scripted of the season’s crop, and had deliberately hugged the background to give his brother the full spotlight. But it was the good *kuya*¹¹ who climbed onstage on FAMAS night for a trophy. He had handled the priest role better than he had thought himself capable of doing.

The curious thing is that Ronnie might have been in real life what he played in *Alabok*.

“As a child I wanted to be a doctor but my father had already said I was to be a priest. He was very religious, because of my grandmother. They wanted me to be a priest and I was willing.”

In pre-adolescence, Ronnie was sent to live, for months at a time, with a religious community, first with the Benedictines of San Beda (where he studied the grades) and then with the Recollets of San Sebastian. He served Mass and assisted at other rites. The idea was to condition him for the life his father had chosen for him.

“My father was very strict — you know, like that father in *Sound of Music*. Every morning we had to line up and file by to salute him, before going to school.” Poe senior had his own film company, the Royal Poe Productions, but the movie world was kept away from the Poe children, who had only a vague idea about their father being a movie star. “We were not allowed even to go to the studio to watch shooting. When movie people came to the house my father talked with them on the porch.” Poe senior demanded three things of his children: good grades in school; skill in swimming (he himself had been a swimming champ in college); and the ability to play at least one musical instrument. Ronnie was assigned the violin and he learned it well enough to play the National Anthem and *Ramona*, an old tune from the ’20s.

Poe senior’s tragic death, from dogbite, abruptly ended the sheltered life. The Poe company was in debt; the family lost their house; and Ronnie, only eleven at the time, writhed to see his mother struggling to make ends meet. “*Gipit*

kami, talagang gipit."¹² Here began one of the true legends of Philippine show business, the legend of Ronnie Poe as the Good Son, almost neurotically obsessed with the responsibilities of his role as head of the family. The first thing he did with his first movie earnings was "buy a stock of food for the house." By that time, of course: "My becoming a priest, that was already out."

When he played a priest in *Alabok*, the childhood dream was too distant to help him feel at home in a cassock. "I had to change my style of walking, and the way I moved my elbows, and I wore my hair shorter."

The hair, a mass of curls, is back to thick sideburns and the Ronnie slouched in the orchard is cowboy again. The picture he's shooting, *Ang Pagbabalik ni Daniel Barrios*, is one of his company's entries in this year's Manila Film Festival.

"The hero of it is a legend," explains Ronnie. "He always comes back when people are in trouble."

Home on the Range

Beer and ice arrive in the orchard and Ronnie proves himself quite a beer man. "But however much I drink of it," and he smugly pats his flat belly, "I don't get a stomach." He recalls that beer was what he mostly got for his first movie bit. He had dropped out of second year high (the farthest he got in school) to work as messenger for a film exchange at P18 a week. He was around 16. Some friends of his at Everlasting Studio thought of him during a scene where a knife had to hit a leaf on a tree. Knives are usually wired for such scenes; but Ronnie was called in when the director heard he could hit the target with an unwired knife. He did — and got treated to a beer blowout by the crew.

Marksmanship and horsemanship were what really got him into the movies. Those childhood summers in Baguio when he rode the ponies on Burnham Park, all the riding lessons he ever had, stood him in good stead when he turned movie "double." That career started when Lilia Dizon, who was doing *Simaron* with Johnny Monteiro, sprained an ankle and couldn't do a riding scene. Asked to do it for her, Ronnie put on a skirt, tied on a bandanna, made like a girl on a horse, and exhibited such riding skill he was presently a regular stuntman at Everlasting, where he doubled in riding and other action scenes for about a year.

No, it wasn't at Everlasting that Ronnie Poe became Fernando Poe, Jr., an actor carrying on his father's name. At first, though, he had felt more at ease as double than as actor. Having lines to memorize and speak was an ordeal. "When I heard the clapper, my mind went blank," laughs Ronnie, pouring himself another beer. But he protests when a photographer aims a camera at the empty bottles: "Be sure the caption says it was the other guy who drank all these." He muses that his real life has really been "rather dull," even when he was already a star. "After shooting, I'd just go home, fetch my brothers and sisters from school, then stay home with them. Even now, I go out nightclubbing only once in a blue moon."

In a way, his father, too, helped get him into the movies. One of Poe senior's big hits was *Palaris*, a cloak-and-dagger historical romance. Poe senior had made his fame on such films, an extension into the cinema of the *moro-moro*¹³ tradition. In 1956, Mario Bari, who had worked for the elder Poe, thought of doing *Anak ni Palaris* and he cast Ronnie in it, making the boy assume his father's name to emphasize the picture's relation with the old *Palaris*. For his first movie role, Ronnie got a thousand bucks and co-star billing with Rosita Noble and Mario Escudero — but the picture proved disappointing. "One thing I know, it didn't make money." Then Everlasting finally noticed him and put him in *Babaeng Mandarambong*, another swashbuckling *moro-moro* with Celia Fuentes and Johnny Monteiro. Ronnie got P380 for four days' work, enough to buy "another stock of food for the house," and it looked as if he might become the new prince of the cloak-and-dagger romances. But in 1957, while playing basketball in San Francisco del Monte, he was spotted by the Santiago brothers, who were casting *Lo-Waist Gang*, and Ronnie moved from the historical movie into movie history.

Lo-Waist was the big break, but Ronnie's smile is rather sad as he reels off the once-famous gang's names: Zaldy, Labra, Sta. Romana, Bobby Gonzales, Tony Cruz, Mario Antonio, Butch Bautista, Boy Francisco . . . "Let me see, have I forgotten anybody?" And melancholy does resound in the litany as one thinks of Boy Sta. Romana, violently dead; or Zaldy, who soared and slipped and came back; or of the others for whom the moment of glory was as brief as youth, though the '50s are forever young in their faces. For *Lo-Waist* not only summed up a generation, the *barkada* youth of the 1950s; it was also a land-

mark in Philippine movies, as may be seen in Ronnie's transformation. From the escapist unreality of the costume pictures he had been doing, he shifted, in *Lo-Waist*, along with the Philippine cinema, to the contemporary world and became topical, wearing the look of the '50s, speaking the idiom of the '50s. It was the Santiagos who made Philippine cinema of our times.

"We had the benefit of being handled by a good director, Pablo Santiago," says Ronnie, who has finally started at lunch. He has passed up the *fiambread*¹⁴ lunch of *lumpiang togue*¹⁵ and good spicy fish *sinigang*¹⁶ for what's left of the fried ham he had with the *champorado*. As he eats the ham from its tinfoil wrapper, he tries to remember how many *Lo-Waist* pictures he did — six? seven? — but does recall that his price per picture went up from a thousand to a thousand and half. For him, personally, however, the memorable picture of this period was the 1957 *Tough Guy*, because it was where he first starred all by himself — "I had more experience" — though the picture itself was "just fair: not a hit, not a flop." But when he signed a two-year contract with Premiere, in 1958, at ₱3,000 per picture, he was already box-office, as was proven by *Kamay ni Cain*.

When the contract was to be renewed, Ronnie held out for a raise in pay to ₱4,000 per pic. "Premiere wouldn't bite." Ronnie found himself a top box-office star who couldn't find work. In the local movie world, still to be fissured by the independents, the big studios still formed a tight circle that shut doors to anybody who dared defy any of them. Ronnie was making history again, by being the first of the movie-star rebels. For some six months he was out in the cold, reduced to becoming Boy Francisco's "extra." Boy Francisco was then working as doorman in a plush office building in Port Area, behind the Manila Hotel. On Boy's days off, Ronnie took his place, opening the door and saying the proper greeting to the executives. "I had to rehearse the dialogue!" The stint earned him five pesos each time and, anyway, the office building was tucked away in a place "where my fans couldn't see me."

Then a new company, Hollywood-Far East, one of the first of the "indies,"¹⁷ contacted him about doing *Markado*. Ronnie decided to bluff it out. He demanded, not ₱4,000, but double that sum. "It was a gamble. But my family really needed the money. I had been out of work for so long." Hollywood-Far East, staggered, took three

weeks to think it over. Ronnie got his ₱8,000. He had started the escalation of star prices that was to end the star-stable system.

Markado (1959) was Ronnie's first in a genre, the Philippine western, that Efren Reyes started with *Bandido*. Ronnie has since become very much at home on the range. Philippine cowboy movies are a cultural outrage, but can be more or less justified as still a further extension of the *moro-moro* form, with the chivalry of the Spanish frontier replaced by the chivalry of the American West. The traditional screen cowboy is a knight on horseback, rescuing damsels in distress and fighting the dragons of tyranny. If our westerns are mocked for their anachronisms, so were our *moro-moros*.

Ronnie explains Paquito Diaz's long hair in this picture that's shooting: "He's not an Apache, he's a kind of Sakay."¹⁸

After *Markado*, Ronnie didn't have to extra for Boy Francisco any more. In fact, he found himself doing three pictures at the same time — *Apollo Robles*, for Premiere, *Sandata at Pangako* for LVN, and a final *Lo-Waist* picture for the Santiagos — all at ₱10,000 per pic. Even Premiere, which once balked at ₱4,000, had bit. But Ronnie had learned his lesson: one shouldn't be at the mercy of the big companies; and he saved his earnings, which, by 1960, had gone up to ₱15,000 per pic, at a time when he was doing up to eight films a year.

In 1961 he had ₱60,000 saved up and he invested it in a company of his own, the first of his generation of stars to become his own producer. Hitherto, the pattern had been of fading stars whom nobody would place under contract trying to produce their own pictures. Ronnie changed the pattern: he was young and box-office when he refused contracts and risked his own capital on himself. The "indies" and Ronnie Poe together broke up the local movie Establishment.

Ronnie today is as much a big-business as a box-office name, one of the youngest (29) of Philippine tycoons, and still growing. FPJ Productions branched out into such subsidiaries as Jafere and D'Lanor (*Ronald* spelled backwards) which he has now fused into a single unit called Rosas, for an obvious romantic reason. FPJ Productions did six films last year, has eleven scheduled for this year, already had a major FAMAS award — for *Sigaw ng Digmaan* — before its chief executive got crowned as Best Actor this year.



A young Fernando Poe, Jr., in one of his earliest starring roles in *Apollo Robles*, a prize-fight melodrama directed by Gerardo de Leon.

On his way onstage on Famas night to get his statuette, Ronnie was waylaid by Joseph Estrada.

"Brod,¹⁹ at last you got it!" cried Joseph, who has won the award three times.

"Well," drawled Ronnie, "I only wanted to break the monotony of you winning it every year."

Tall in the Saddle

The lunch break is over. A woman hovers at Ronnie's side, pinkening up his face as he continues talking. The complexion is brown and pitted, deepening to dusky under the eyes. None of the Poe boys took after their father. "But my two younger sisters have his cleft chin and dimples. He was six foot one; I'm five ten and a half." Andy, the real junior, was in fourth year architecture when he had to leave school because of poor health; is now in the movies too. The youngest boy, Freddy, was studying aeronautic engineering in the States: "We had to bring him home; they were getting him for Vietnam."

It's time for Ronnie to change into his costume. He rises and stretches and ambles back to the veranda, which has come alive. The cowboys are up and strapping on their hardware. The blue-covered wagon is being hitched to a horse and Director Armando Garces, in psychedelic pastels, is rounding up the crew.

On the veranda, Lou Salvador Sr. is having his head bandaged; he's supposed to have been wounded. Lou Jr., also in the film, is posing for stills with the heroine, singer Ruby Villareal, who's being introduced in the pic-

ture. She is petite and sweet-looking, with a patrician nose. Ronnie reappears in black shirt and tight trousers *bitin*²⁰ at the ankles. "My only pants," he says, "for shooting, I mean." The elder Salvador, veritably patriarchal with his white pate and stumps of teeth, is reminiscing on the last days of vaudeville, when he was at the Inday²¹ and Señor Zarah²² was at the Star. Now he heard that Señor Zarah was dead, in Portugal, but the rumor was unconfirmed.

The veranda holds a history of Philippine show business, from *moro-moro* to lo-waist to horse opera. Old Lou was young when *moro-moro* and *zarzuela*²³ were in flower and he had seen the great days of vaudeville too. Lou Jr. still twiggy and lad-looking, had ridden the wave of teen-age movies that followed *Lo-Waist*. Armando Garces can stand in for the insurgency that moved forward from there to the street-corner and slum-alley realism that peaked in the best of the Estrada films. And Poe is the other movie revolution in triumph, the revolt of the stars that changed the movie world in the '60s. If there's currently a new development, it's the return of the "women's picture" exemplified by the Charito Solis sob-epics and this year's FAMAS prize film. It's an odd reactionary trend for a decade that began insurgent.

Ronnie is saying how, this year, as in other years, he had one of the biggest tables at the FAMAS dinner. From the Plaza, where the dinner was held, his party had transferred to the Sulo for a victory celebration. Helping him to celebrate were Susan Roces, Estrada, Gerry de Leon, Robert Arevalo and Barbara Perez. Robert and Barbara sighed about the movies not having anything for them and Robert talked of wanting to do *The Man From La Mancha* on the stage. Ronnie danced with Susan all night. It was three in the morning when he took her home.

The romance has been going on for three years. Will there be a wedding at last?

"Maybe this year," smiles Ronnie. "As soon as I have built a house for her. I start it next month."

The company moves to where the scene is to be shot: a stretch of country road that will look lonely onscreen but is actually crowded with sightseers during the shooting.

"*Tahimik na!*," shout the crew to the crowd. "*Walang tawanan!*"²⁴

The blue-covered wagon, which carries Lou senior, Miss Villareal and a young boy, is being held up by bandits. Then Ronnie comes riding to the rescue, tall in the

saddle, and showing no sign he had beer for lunch.

"Reflector! Reflector!" shout the crew.

The hushed crowd is massed solid around wagon and horsemen and camera platform.

The shooting is leisurely now but had been hectic when the company was at the same time doing *Kulay Rosas ang Pag-ibig*, also a festival film, with Susan Roces. Ronnie had wrapped up that film yesterday and can now relax. In fact, after today's shooting, he is taking his all-star basketball team to Biñan for an exhibition game. Stern he may look as he sits tall in the saddle, but he's already looking forward to that golden *puto*²⁴ of Biñan, for which he avows a weakness.

"They asked what they should give my team. I told them: Just have enough soft drinks for the players and be sure there's a lot of *puto* for me."

DOLPHY: THE WAY OF A CLOWN

by Denise Chou Allas

The man appears to be a real loser. Directionless. Good for nothing. At middle age he is still slithering from job to thankless job. As a dancer he loses his G-string in mid-performance and his job along with it; as a janitor for a sinister martial arts expert he is caught sleeping on the job and wakes up to a taste of his employer's rib-cracking medicine.

He has not gotten very far with the woman, surprisingly also close to mid-life, whom he has been courting for what seems like a long period, except in an embroidered fancy that summons the far-fetched help of Taoist temples and old China's opulent satins. The woman's mother berates him mercilessly and nags her daughter about better prospects.

How the man treats them both to a nightclub on his meager income is mystifying, even if he does pick them up in a limousine borrowed from a funeral parlor. How he also affords a neat, rather roomy if simply furnished apartment and the Chinese cook who secretly happens to be a kung-fu "snake" is just as much of a mystery.

The only things going for him are a big heart and the low-key endurance of a true survivor. With these he tackles his many problems — everyday types that include a blind orphaned niece, his phlegmatic romance and erratic work pattern, and non-everyday affairs that involve a glib private eye, a drug ring, murder, kidnapping and Russian roulette, real thugs with unreal guns that bend upon the slam of a door.

Of course, the man eventually comes to live quite happily ever after.

For two hours and 10 minutes on an early Friday afternoon, the sweaty crowd in one of more than 30 theaters jostled, thickened and laughed their way through the incredible life and times of the hero in the latest Dolphy starrer, RVQ Productions' *Dancing Master*.

The movie is typical of Dolphy's sense of the comic. It is a hodgepodge of many things: splurges on disco-dancing, cocaine, kung-fu or whatever else can be lifted straight off

the pages of contemporary fashion, a tidy virginal General Patronage-type romance, cow dung humor, a dash of heart-rending pathos that lasts no more than the ten minutes calculated to spare the audience their tears, an impossible plethora of wretchedness, and the shameless miracle of the underdog-hero's final spurt to victory.

The audience's appreciative response to this routine is also typical. Since Rodolfo Vera Quizon, now better known as Dolphy, struck upon this magical rapport with his audience over 30 years ago, he has altered his basic style little. It remains largely a combination of the old and the new; standard plot woven of favorite local traditions and values, and generous concessions to the passing scene's fads and fancies. Often where too much ground is covered, there is little depth. As it happens, *Dancing Master* dangles one too many loose threads, explores Filipiniana no deeper than a foot and wastes itself on, among a few other sequences, an awkward unedited dance number that was totally unnecessary.

The audience at large did not seem to mind. They probably got what they had come for — wit, or what passes for it, a gagglesful, beautiful color, gung-ho drama, a cinematographic slice of opera. They demanded sheer entertainment in the tradition of Dolphy and, not expecting any less or more than the old routine, they were satisfied. Nor did they mind the fact that the flick was another family affair with one son producing and two others in supporting roles.

Somehow through all these years it has always been that way. This strange relationship Dolphy has with his fans is what catapulted him to a superstardom all his own and is what keeps him there to this day.

It is commonly contended that Filipino comedy is a form of vengeance and catharsis. "Everything You've Always Wanted To Do But Didn't" suddenly unfolding on the wide screen as society's lesser mortals deliciously deliver the *coup de grâce*. The bungling beau, the bickering mother-in-law, the philandering lover, the omnivorous landlady, the crisp competitor, the vain boss, the ambitious underling, the luckless fool. No one is sacred. You ridicule them, insult them, clobber them. And maybe afterwards, you laugh at yourself, too.

If this is true, then Dolphy's success is proof that he has so rightly grasped the marrow of the Filipino funny-bone and captured its essence.

But while the comedian is a mirror of the national

temper, he is also a caricature of the Filipino as an entity less than admirable — someone quick to hurt but slow to act, this creature with an inordinate capacity for enduring exploitation and suffering, and who, if at all moved, is inclined to strike back violently, blindly and with a Judas kiss, becoming himself a victim of his own rage. Such a person, moreover, has yet to learn the articulation of woes, the infinite possibilities of transcendence and the wiser strength of concerted directed effort.

"*Ang Pilipino ganoon*," Dolphy explains. "*Gusto nilang 'yung naaapi ang nagwawagi. Kita mo 'yon kay Nora Aunor. Gusto nila ang humor ng everyday life, medyo aping-gago, ganoon, tulad sa John en Marsha. Maski mahirap ka, ang pinakamasarap sa buhay — 'yung pagmamahal at sense of humor — ay nandoon. Iyon lang naman ang pinapakita namin. Parang ginagawang joke lang ang paghihirap, which is true in real life.*"¹

Yet the comedian is not exactly at ease with the realization that the national concept of laughs is rooted in the earthy and the slapstick. He feels himself a prisoner of his own success, so to speak, as well as of his audience's unchanging values and attitudes. Perhaps this is the prime reason that although Dolphy has long ago arrived, he is yet to come of age. The consoling thing is, he knows where he's at.

"Personally, I don't like slapstick," he says. "I do it because I'm being paid for it. Although even in America the slapstick of Gene Wilder in *Young Frankenstein* and Mel Brooks' *Silent Movie* was a success . . .

"I also do it because it is what the audience expect of me. In this way, commercial *nga ang lumalabas kaya na-frustrate ako*. It's like even if I wanted to do a dramatic feature or something Jack Lemmon-style, I cannot get away with it. If ever I have pathetic scenes, *kaunti lang*, just so the final victory is made sweeter. *Mahirap talagang baguhin ang taste ng tao. Kung may pelikula kang naging hit, 'yung klaseng 'yon na lang ang gusto nila. Pag gumawa ka ng musical, ayaw nila. Pag horror, ayaw rin. Samantalang pag iba ang gumawa niyon at di naman silang kasing-sikat, kumikita naman. Kung minsa'y suwerte rin. Kailangang ma-tiyempo mo ang panlasa ng tao, ang gutom nila.*"²

"Even Lino Brocka," he adds, perhaps a bit defensively, "is doing commercial films now. *Nagsa-sacrifice siya kasi hindi pa natututo ang mga tao dito sa atin.*" But no real resentment lurks in his statement: "*Hindi ka naman puwe-*

deng magalit sa audience. The customer is always right, I believe that. Sila ang nagbabayad. Sila ang una mong critics."³

Dolphy's desire to do a film with more substance or more depth is itself buried in the debris of calcified "ifs" and "buts".

What, for instance, if someone of his stature gave it a hard try? Dolphy replies, "Yah, I made such a movie. And I don't want to do it again. It's a business risk and I'm not that rich." He shakes his head, remembering the lukewarm reception films like *Cyrano at Roxanne*, and *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay* got at the box-office. Even *Omeng Santanasia*, for which he bagged an award, disappointed the people because, he thinks, it had a sad ending.

Of his own disappointments he continues: "I'm sorry to say *karamihan ng nanunood sa amin ay hindi naman nanunood ng intellectual na sineng Tagalog. Bihira. Kung minsa'y napre-pressure ng anak nila o dahil sa may (movie) passes. Karamihan sa kanila'y 'yung tinatawag na bakya crowd. Di naman sa low I.Q. sila, pero bihirang manuod ang mataas na tao dito ng Tagalog movies.*"⁴

Dolphy is a name familiar if not respected in every household, rich and poor. The ace funnyman whose genius reputedly springs to the fore in repartee is not considered an institution in Philippine comedy for nothing. So for someone who himself admits that he rarely views local films despite the fact that movies are not only his occupation but also his main form of recreation, as frequent as four times a week, the problem is more obviously one of money.

"We do not have any Woody Allen in the Philippines! " he suddenly retorts in a rare moment of pique. "He's a comic genius. An exception. He makes about one movie a year so he has all the time to think about it. I have to make about four or five . . . *Pero suwerte ako sa comedy.*"⁵ As long as people laugh the movie is saved, even if it lacks in quality."

Judging how wealthy a man is by the amount of money he makes can sometimes be inaccurate. Just how much he earns per picture Dolphy refuses to disclose. Reliable sources place the amount in the area of seven figures but the literal multitudes who feed off him regularly are another matter. "Well, I can die with something in my pocket but I'm not rich" is Dolphy's assessment.

His coffers took a tragic spill with the financial scandal that wracked and split his own movie outfit wide open two years ago. The scandal at RVQ Production allegedly involved



Opposite page:
The erstwhile comedy duo of Panchito Alba and Dolphy in *The Big Broadcast*, a 1962 Sampaguita musical-comedy directed by Tony Cayado.

no less than Dolphy's own sister and brother. It also reportedly involved his booker and his bookkeeper who have since cemented their lucrative partnership in their own outfit, the company that produced some kung-fu flicks starring a hot action star. Aside, that is, from the rest of the ticket checkers, checker inspectors and theater owners particularly in the South who collaborated to make extra profits on the surreptitious sale of X-tickets, that vulnerable hole in the contract between movie producer and theater owner. When the aberrations were discovered and all hell broke loose, Dolphy's problems were just beginning. RVQ had lost more than ₱1 million, newspapers refused him ad space, and he was so neck-deep in debt he had to mortgage his ₱1.6-million house in New Manila.

Even now that two years have passed, many pieces remain to be picked up, if not mended, from the shattering experience, somewhat reminiscent of director Brocka's own blues with Cine Manila Films.

"RVQ is still under dextrose," Dolphy says, managing a chuckle. But he is tight-lipped about the details. He calls the whole fiasco "a misunderstanding" and refuses to open old wounds, as he says, even if it is obvious those wounds have hardly closed. "It was also my fault," he says generously. "*Kasi nakatanga ako. I spoiled people and trusted them too much. Pero ayokong magsalita tungkol sa mga kaaway ko noong araw. Walang kuwenta e. Basta bahala na ang Diyos sa amin.*"⁶

With plain relief and optimism he talks about plans for Dragon Lion Productions, Inc. Like a breath of fresh air, his new movie company will free him from the handicap of moldy memories, impossible debts and personal cold wars, and allow him a new lease. The outfit is named for his birthsigns, both in the Chinese and Western astrologies. The dragon's luck and the lion's royalty, Dolphy hopes, will prove a more winning combination.

And what of bitterness?

The man Dolphy is not quite the clumsy clown you see on the screen. The only real aspects the person and the persona share are a genuine generosity of spirit and a sense of innocence, unspoiltness.

The man can sit there awaiting his turn before the cameras so quietly and patiently you forget he's even around. He hardly speaks out; he whispers. The voice is low and rambling, weary and prone to trailing off every now and then. Only chuckles here and there and an occasional familiar

lopsided is-that-so? look punctuate the monotony. He can talk to you for hours between the drone of flies and the stink of a garbage dump six feet away and not seem at all to mind. He is a bit stiff; it takes him time to warm up to a person and even then he remains formal when other people are around. Decades of show business have failed to teach him the art of ease with crowds and other strangers.

Rodolfo Vera Quizon describes himself as a very serious person. Pal Panchito Alba, his comic partner since vaudeville days, describes him as a genuine person who has to be really drunk before he can show anger. Others close to him even believe him to be downright sad. Dolphy protests, "*Ganyan talaga ang mukha ko.*"⁷ I always look sleepy and sad."

Sadness is sometimes said to be the way of a clown and in Dolphy's case the theory strikes home.

For one whose altruism is as renowned as his wit, he has time and again been robbed of belief. Now he will not be robbed of, at least, his regrets. After such a life only an idiot will claim no pain.

At first Dolphy hesitates, "I'm the same old me. I may sometimes be bitter — *pero sa bibig lang*. I can forgive people *kahit na masyadong mabigat 'yung kasalanan nila*. I'm a sucker for sob stories . . . *Madalang akong magalit pero matindi. Pero, sandali lang. Pag sumobra kasi ang bait mo, gago na ang labas nuon.*" Finally he admits to the follies of goodness: "*Kung baga sa bata, hindi ko pinalo kaagad noong nagkamali, kaya lumaki nang lumaki 'yung sungay.*"⁸

For the second time around he's aware he's taking an old path. Every venture should be a matter of teamwork, he believes, and to run the RVQ team he got together Pacquing Diaz, Rey Payona, Cora Salvador (whose son Phillip is also in the movies), another sister Mrs. Laura Coopernurs, and his eldest son Manuel, better known as Boy. This time, however, he's taking no chances: "I'm now personally concerned with all that's going on in my outfit. Actually I'm just starting to know the business in spite of my long years in it . . . It's not just that millions of pesos are involved per picture. *Puhunan ko rin dito kasi ang dugo at pawis. Masakit pag nawala.*"⁹

Outside of his company it's even a more dangerous world.

"Showbiz is dirty," he affirms. "*Ika nga e, it's a dog-eat-dog world. Masyadong maraming heartaches, di ba? Maski na successful ka, marami pang penalty. Maski na malinis ka,*



Clockwise, from top: Daisy Romualdez and Dolphy clowning with chopsticks in Sampaguita Pictures' *Hongkong Holiday*; Dolphy in a transvestite take-off from *Jack & Jill of the Third Kind*; romantic lead Luis Gonzales plays foil to Dolphy's antics in Octavio Silos' *Boksingera*; Dolphy as a Pierrot executing a dance number from Sampaguita Pictures' *Vacacionista*.

marumi pa rin ang tingin ng iba sa iyo. Talikurang sina-saksak ka."¹⁰

Unlike lesser mortals who made made it the fashion to branch out to other pastures as soon as they make a dent in their own fields, Dolphy is keeping his hands off politics, the bold bandwagon or whatever else is in vogue. There are games and there are *games* but he's wisely not playing.

"Politics is even dirtier than showbiz," he reasons. "*Talagang dito sa atin, mina-massacre ka pa . . .* I have many friends. I want to make more. In politics I will lose friends. It's bad enough as it is in the movies." He muses: "*It's funny. Kung kailan ka naging successful, 'tsaka ka nagkakaroon ng kaaway. Noong nobody ako, wala akong kagalit.*"¹²

From the increasingly young breed of newer, bolder stars and star-aspirants, he fears no competition: "*Hindi pang-matagalan 'yon.*"¹³ They'll last only as long as their assets last."

What he has against the trend jabs at the flesh of issues beyond skin-deep. "*Masyado tayong Westernized,*" he thinks. "*Tingnan mo ang disco music at Pinoy rock — Western pa rin ang beat. Karamihan sa mga sine natin ngayon try to follow the trend in the States. Mas realistic daw. Pero double-standard pa rin tayo. We cannot do what the American people are doing. It comes naturally to them. Sa atin ay palabas. In Pilipino films we can use 'sonovabitch' but not 'P — inamo' kasi mas masamang pakinggan daw sa Tagalog. Di ba pareho lang 'yon? O sa lifestyle natin, wala nga tayong divorce pero mas maraming hiwalay rito kaysa States. Mas maraming may No. 2. Ultimo 'yung taxi driver may dalawa, tatlong asawa. Komo Catholic country tayo, walang divorce. Pero mas masahol pa tayo . . . I hate to say it but talagang medyo ipokrito ang Filipino, ang way of life natin.*"¹⁴

His personal life is not exempt either from savage assault of ill winds and misplaced dreams.

Consider this man. In his mute sober moments there is nothing much about him that attracts attention. He is medium tall, talented, wealthy. He carries his drinks and clothes well. He is also 50 and balding and sports a paunch where his belly used to be. He is not one to be easily found if he does not intend it.

But which is fact and which is fiction? It is said he holds about seven steady simultaneous relationships with various women, all attractive, young, and probably with careers of their own — aside, that is, from a number of brief casual flings on the side. It is also said he has never been

formally married. That it was the mother of his well-known set of children who committed the first indiscretion with another actor more than 10 years ago. That in between their subsequent estrangement and now, the man had other affaires d'amour, the most publicized of which was to a then aspiring actress he consequently dropped as she turned out, reportedly, to be a gold-digger.

Of the six children now grown, it is also said, only the youngest is independent and a source of pride to his father. Most if not all did not finish school. Two are into bad trips. And the only daughter married a man her father did not approve of.

Who is this man? He sounds like a character out of a script. And it is just as well.

Dolphy refuses to comment on the scenario. Says he, "Let people talk. My life is complicated enough as is. Maybe one day I'll have my life published in a book. But later."

Of women, he claims liberal, supposedly as opposed to strict, views. "Kanya-kanyang concept 'yan. Simple lang ako. Basta we get along, okay na. Ayoko 'yung garapal. 'Yung grandstand player, mahirap na. Kasi ako, ganoon, simple lang sa tabi. Pag kilala ka na, you don't have to rub it in."¹⁵ Then he laughs, the sheepish unspoken is-that-so? remark peeking out one corner of his mouth. "Me a lady-killer? It's not true . . . Just say I like women, beautiful women, just like any other man. I think all men in their own ways are all lady-killers. Siguro hindi lang halata sa iba — 'yung mga tahimik lang pero mapanganib. Mas nakakatakot nga, you know, pero marami diyan."¹⁶ For a while you feel sorry there seems a lot of tongue-in-cheek to this reply. Or could it all have been a part of his gallantry? The discreet responsible shepherd protecting his flock rather than the shaky sheik flaunting his harem? If so, this is, for womanhood, a tangential victory over all those brash young men and dirty old men whose hour of greatness lies actually in the telling, not the kissing.

At least Dolphy loosens up a bit and admits that marriage is scary and should be especially so from a woman's point of view. "It's a gamble. Pambihira kasi 'yung sasabihin ng lalaki dito sa atin na iisang babae lang sa buhay niya, I mean sa buong pagkatao niya. Hindi totoo 'yan, palagay ko. Nagsisinungaling 'yung lalaking nagsabi niyan."¹⁷

It is, however, with no falseness that he says he loves children in general and is happy with his own. "Except," he qualifies, "for some of those who are big by now and live a life that is wrong. I feel guilty pagka medyo naliligaw sila."¹⁸

Father instinct *siguro* or something like that. But they disappoint me often . . . I respect their individuality but not when they're wrong. *Siyempre, lahat ng tao'y may bisyo. Pero dapat lahat ng bagay ay dinadala nang maganda.*"¹⁹

Loving and living, for him, are matters not exclusive of responsibility and being the man that he is, Dolphy pays the price of his lifestyle, his pleasures and his foibles with grace and blood. If a sigh of shame escapes his lips now and then, a wish for a normal existence just like anyone else's — it is only the breath of humanity, perhaps the gentle wisdom of age.

If life grips him, the inevitability of death and the thought of the lonely trek downhill haunt him.

His most painful fear in show business is to become a has-been. "*Siyempre. Resigned ako doon* although I fight it," Dolphy says. "It's like death, you know. *Maiiwasan mo ba ang pagtanda?* But if it comes I'll have no regrets — *natikman ko na ring lahat ng kabutihan sa pagiging artista.* I consider myself so lucky," he smiles mildly, also claiming it is his prime asset. "In spite of my youth — eh, my age, I'm still around, you see. *Halos wala na 'yung marami sa contemporaries ko.*"²⁰

"You see a lot of actors who were something in their heyday but who died poor or now look like bums and have to live in apartments they can hardly pay for. I don't want that to happen to me . . . If I have investments and property, they're for my old age. Life is also a gamble. Who knows what's going to happen tomorrow?"

These fears are not phantoms of mortality. Come July 25, Dolphy will be 51. Surely his cup runneth over even now.

Fond, telling memories of old times. His father's own funny stories. The asthmatic growing years in Tondo where the youth peddled coconut oil to help support nine brothers and sisters through the Japanese Occupation. Vaudeville at the Orient Theater, then the main vehicle for any entertainer worth his salt, with the cousins Bert and Totoy Avellana, Tugo and Pugo who was to become Dean of Comedians; with Doc Perez who christened him and Fernando Poe Sr. who gave him his first job in the business as a chorus boy; and with, of course, Panchito, with whom he endures as a well-loved laugh team. Then the electronic age of television and the silver screen: from bit parts in first movies *Dugo ng Bayan* and *Sa Isang Sulyap Mo, Tita* to the big time with hits like *Jack and Jill*, *Buhay Artista*, *John en Marsha*, *Facifica Falay-fay* among 300-plus films and a variety of awards from the

FAMAS, PATAS and the Manila Filmfest. From ₱40 a week at the Orient Theater to today's megabucks is a long stretch.

As the country's premier comedian and his own private person, Dolphy's phenomenal success is not a prank of schizophrenia. He's a natural actor with a flair for versatility and ad-lib, and a belief in the added advantages of discipline and professionalism.

It is also to the influence of the celebrated Charlie Chaplin that Dolphy attributes his development, both as entertainer and as human being. "Chaplin taught everyone what humor is. I used to watch his films when I was small, together with the movies of Pugo. I even read Chaplin's biography, *Millionaire Clown*. . . *Bihira akong magbasa ng libro* but that I read. What was special about him was that *parating may message ang movies niya, may human touch. Start from scratch din siya. Malungkot ang buhay niya . . . dahil lang sa prinsipyo.*²¹ As a person he's very likeable. As a comedian he's the best . . . I believe the reason he is so effective is that he has carried more than one man's share of sorrow."

Does it get increasingly hard to look forward when one has already come from so far?

Dolphy seems one not to be bothered with such a notion. Instead he defies the welter of his experience, dips into his favorite files and makes no bones about admiring Hepburn and Olivier, Paul Newman and Ingrid Bergman, Eddie Garcia, Christopher de Leon and Bembol Roco, Lolita Rodriguez and Nida Blanca. He particularly respects Vilma Santos and Nora Aunor "for their capability and the way they have managed to stay on top all these years." He admonishes movie neophytes to "study and work hard, be more friendly and patient, and try to do only one picture at a time."

"Life is a gamble," he repeats. "No, no, I'm not superstitious. But I believe in fate. I think everything is scheduled." Dolphy also believes in foresight. He thinks it's another reason he's still around. Already, his looking glass is full. When he finishes *Max en Jess*, a Tagalog Komiks serial, for 4-N Productions with Lotis Key and Panchito, he will do *Buhay Artista Ngayon* with Vilma and hopes to wrap up, among other things, another *John en Marsha* package.

There is this certain sense of relief and pleasure in sitting back and just watching him when the interview is finally over. This man for whose story it took no less than all of 45 phone calls to friends and strangers alike, cloak-and-dagger exchanges with juvenile spies and one's own Deep Throat,

yellowed files and someone else's yoga.

Looking back again, looking forward now — does it matter which? — the man is saying, "*Siyempre ang isang tao, di puwedeng successful in everything. Lahat ng tao'y may kanya-kanyang problema.* That's the beauty of living: to have problems and solve them and have other problems . . . *Walang kuwenta kung walang challenge.*"²² And so he delivers the final *coup de grâce*, these brave clichés on a fabled, turbulent, much-romanticized existence that has made of him a legend in his own time.

There is only one Dolphy. People say he's really something. Only, like the man himself, the remark is an understatement.

THE EDDIE RODRIGUEZ SYNDROME

by Julie Y. Daza

It takes two to tango and three to create a triangle, but it takes only one man to make thousands of women understand that as "all men are the same," their problems with their husbands are not really all that unique and therefore not really all that unbearable.

Eddie Rodriguez, who in more than 20 films has played and replayed the role of the man in the middle of a love triangle, is that man. He is that role, and the character is Eddie Rodriguez. While most people go to the movies to escape reality, Rodriguez lives a very real part of his personal life in such movies as *Sapagka't Kami'y Tao Lamang*, *Kapag Puso ay Sinugatan*, and *Lalaki, Kasalanan Mo!* — a role that his fans, mostly women, identify and empathize with for its close-to-the-heart impact.

In many ways, Rodriguez' role as the man caught between two women is a reflection of Filipino mores and morals. The character who gets under his skin is almost a universal man — husband having a fling, husband deeply in love with another woman, husband unhappy with wife, etc. — and in that sense, the men in the audience also identify with him, if not envy him.

More than a study of domestic dilemmas that plague Filipino society, the Eddie Rodriguez role affords an intriguing view of male-female relationship in a country that is uptight about sin and morality, but daring and raring to be as permissive and as "in" as the rest and the best (?) of the Western world.

If his movies (produced in conjugal partnership with Louise de Mesa, alias Liza Moreno) have been consistent hits in spite of the fact that the plot is beginning to sound like a nagging wife, it is because, as Louise, or Liza, or Mrs. Luis Enriquez (Luis Enriquez being Eddie Rodriguez the director) puts it: "There is nothing new under the sun — and what can be more timeless than love and the battle of the sexes?"

Over and over again, that sort of plot and its variations



have been raking in a neat little fortune for Eddie and Liza through their Virgo productions. But the people keep coming for more. In the seven years since Eddie and Liza first came upon the Open Sesame of box-office profits via lachrymal love, they have been turning out an average of four to five films a year, all revolving around the same theme of domesticity, infidelity, adultery. The movies have been making money, of course, although the real-life husband-and-wife team is quick to add that as the cost of film-making keeps going up, the returns are becoming smaller.

Behind the success of Virgo's heart-and-hearth melodramas are ranged a spectrum of factors, not the least of which is the fact that the Virgo audiences see in them an honest and true-to-life reflection of their own problems which, though unresolved for the meantime, can afford to be hopeful of a permanent solution or, at the very least, of temporary relief — just like in the movies. The relief is temporary, for as long as the movies affords a view of a door ajar through which a slice of light shines. Since the movie is so close to home, the moviegoer can, subconsciously, bank on a like solution to a like problem.

In other words, the Eddie Rodriguez role acts as a psychological cushion upon which the tears of mankind and womankind fall, to be absorbed and to disappear within its soft folds, and though the teardrops may stain the cushion, they do not destroy it.

The Eddie Rodriguez character is, first and foremost, an incurable womanizer, but he is also representative of an emergent middle-class sensibility.

What is it about the Eddie Rodriguez role that makes the character an archetype for all Filipino men of all seasons?

Eddie Rodriguez the man, dressed in checkered polo-jack, white pants, white loafers, loafing in his music-and-TV room in his comfortable house in San Juan, of an evening before supertime, capsulizes Eddie Rodriguez the movie character:

"He is 35 years old, well-dressed, and married. He is a successful executive and is a good family man who is nevertheless chased by a woman who can't help falling in love with him, although she knows he is married. He drives a beautiful car and is usually a self-made man. If he is driven into another woman's arms, it is not because the other woman is bad or he is bad, but because of circumstances and incidents or events often created by the wife or the domestic situation."

Eddie Rodriguez the man is that man that he has just described, except possibly for that bit about being chased by another woman. Take out that part and the rest of the paragraph is Eddie Rodriguez the movie star through and through.

Like the character he portrays, he is soft-spoken and enjoys the quiet, leisure-laden life of the affluent: stereo, TV, an occasional drink alone or with friends. He is 5'10" tall and weighs 160 lbs., and although he watches his figure and loves to eat, has no time-consuming obsession with sports.

Wife Liza, relaxing beside him around the card table, garbed in loose shirt and jeans, explains the need for the Eddie Rodriguez role:

"Our fans don't want to see him as a poor boy. It must be that they need some psychological consolation, that being surrounded by harsh realities all their life, they want only to see the picture-pretty side of life and its glossy furnishings when they are in the moviehouse. At the same time, we try to teach a moral lesson to the wives in the audience, to open their eyes to the appealing qualities of the other woman, and if the lesson does not apply to them, they can nevertheless get some things off their chest."

After more than 20 films, Liza has learned her own lesson: that the audience prefers to see the Eddie Rodriguez character in a *pilyo*¹ role, meaning, that he gets his flings and enjoys them without being too deeply involved with the other woman or women. "They cry with the wife, prefer-

ring that the movies end with Eddie going back to the wife," Liza points out and, in that statement, synthesizes the whole purpose of Virgo movie-making.

With or without meaning to, Virgo's triangular treats are a mirror of present-day society because Liza, who writes the screenplays, culls her story content from "friends who come to me to tell me of their crises, big or small." Such stories are not hard to come by, and in fact constitute a bank where she deposits and withdraws according to need.

"Many people we do not know have told us how surprised they were to see their own stories unfold on the screen. Maybe this is one reason our movies are being patronized," Liza says, sitting back in her chair. Eddie beside her is silent and is beginning to look somewhat bored by all this pontification on a subject that is, the more you analyze it, the more difficult it becomes for vivisection because it is too close to the eyes.

But somewhere, behind one's eyes, one can see why the Eddie Rodriguez role in the Eddie Rodriguez movies is so well understood. Triangles and problems with husbands exist everywhere, in every stratum of society. Even in the middle class, where morality holds the strongest sway, they exist as a threatening spectre: "If it happens among the poor and it happens among the society rich, it can happen to us, even if we are very moral, very good."

In this context, Liza's announced intention to teach some lessons to the women who pay P2.25 and 100 minutes of their time to see her movies should be taken in the light of "developments" in marital mores. Much has happened since the "other woman" of the vintage Bella Flores in the 1950s. The "other woman" of today, of Virgo Film Productions' persuasion, is, as Liza and Eddie paint her, "nicer, sweeter than the wife." She is, truly, a woman to whom a harassed husband can turn for sweet feminine comfort.

And because the new "other woman" is nice and sweet, not anything of the mean, aggressive, vulgar type who grew her nails long and her hair in petrified towers, the resolution of the conflict in the Eddie Rodriguez movie is that much harder to bring about. "Resolving the triangle in our movies is mostly a matter of time," Liza comments, as if to say that the script cannot kill the other woman just like that, or do away with her arbitrarily to force a quick and forever-after happy ending.

Not only do the sympathetic qualities of the other woman prevent a simple denouement, but the fact that our so-

cio-cultural pattern leaves no elbow-room for the scriptwriter to effect a happy ending by a divorce: "We cannot offend the sensibilities of the women in the audience by making Eddie write off his wife in the picture. We recognize no divorce, our women cling to their husbands no matter what, they feel they have to save the marriage at whatever price or cost. To be said of them that they were *'iniwanng asawa'*² is the worst fate of all. They are afraid to face the accusation of being wives who failed their husbands."

Thus, the Eddie Rodriguez character, while enjoying his women for a time, often comes to a sad end, which is the happy ending for his viewers: he can't have his cake and eat it, too. Usually, the "other woman" recognizes the futility of a three-cornered arrangement, or she is afflicted with some malignant disease that destroys her in tender ways, or the wife performs some mighty miracle to win him back and all is forgiven.

The point of all this, my dear Eve, is that the universality of the Eddie Rodriguez' character is not a monopoly. The Eddie Rodriguez movie fan, you see, is just as universal. If there is an Eddie Rodriguez who lives the role, there are thousands of Eddie Rodriguez fans who recognize themselves in the wife — or perhaps, the other woman — in the movies that he makes. All men are the same; and so are women.

MOVIES, CRITICS, AND THE BAKYA CROWD

by Jose F. Lacaba

The term *bakya crowd*¹ was coined back in the Fifties by a prestigious director to describe the mass audience which, he felt, was incapable of appreciating the merits of his award-winning films. These days we can't use the term with the same cavalier attitude that attended its coining. Largely as a result of current attacks on elitism, we can no longer contemptuously dismiss that large chunk of the population encompassed by the term *bakya crowd*; and the word *bakya* itself, like *indio*² before it, is fast becoming a badge of honor in certain circles.

Still, the opprobrium once attached to the term has not been entirely eradicated. Traces of it may be detected, for instance, in a movie critic's recent witticism: "There's no such thing as a *bakya crowd*. There are only *bakya producers*."

That the term *bakya* in its extended meaning has both pejorative and acceptable connotations indicates the ambivalence of our attitude towards the crowd called *bakya*. When you come right down to it, *bakya crowd* is synonymous with *masa*,³ and nowadays everybody pays lip service to the masses. We cannot afford to look down upon them as a social class or a political force. But the masses as patrons of culture? The idea seems preposterous.

We may profess to find some of the forms and aspects of mass culture charming, particularly if, as in the case of the *moro-moro* and the *cenaculo*, these are virtually extinct or are threatened with extinction. But confronted by forms of mass culture that are alive and current — radio soap operas, television variety shows, *komiks*,⁴ the general run of Tagalog movies — we are bewildered and appalled.

Our attitude towards Tagalog movies is instructive.

The local movie industry, where the term *bakya crowd* originated, classifies Tagalog movies into two major categories. In the lingo of the industry, they are either *commercial* (also known as *bakya*) or *hindi commercial* (also known

as *pang-FAMAS*).⁵

The commercial movie is anything aimed frankly at the box office. The producer's intention here is primarily to make a profit, and though the intention does not always succeed, it dictates what type of movie is to be made, how it is to be made, who its stars will be, etc. For this reason, the commercial movie prefers tried-and-true formulas to innovation and experiment, sticks to genres or follows trends proven to have box-office pull, and generally provides escapist entertainment.

The non-commercial movie — sometimes referred to as prestige picture, quality picture, or art film — has aims more ambitious than mere profit and more serious than mere entertainment. Those who indulge intermittently in its production are either incurable romantics with noble intentions and boundless optimism, or thoughtful veterans who have made a lot of money on commercial flicks and feel it's time to try for a FAMAS statuette or two.

A few films which fall under this category have turned out to be sleepers — that is, unexpected commercial successes. *Tinimbang Ka, Nguni Kulang* is a notable example. But such movies are rare, very rare, exceptions. As a rule the non-commercial movie is box-office poison, however much it may blow the minds of critics.

The Popular Nerve

There's a joke in local movie circles that it's a bad thing to be praised by the critics. A rave review is supposed to spell death at the box office. The joke smells of sour grapes, and the industry obviously does not take it too seriously. The truth is that producers are dimly aware of both the potential and the actual power of critics, as indicated by the fact that they occasionally threaten to withdraw movie ads when reviews get too nasty, and liberally quote the critics in those same movie ads when the reviews happen to be favorable.

Still, there's a bit of truth in the joke. Those of us who care about the "art of the film" and are at the same time interested in Filipino movies do tend to favor the non-commercial variety. The movies made expressly for the mass audience usually leave us cold — or even arouse the killer instinct in us, so that we feel an urge to tear those movies to pieces and hold up to ridicule the people who have inflicted such banalities on us.

Our reaction is understandable. Though commercial Tagalog movies have been made that exhibit a modicum of sense and a measure of technical finesse, the bulk of this particular commodity is indeed so shoddy, so inept of craftsmanship and inane of content, that we are justified in our contempt.

But our reaction reveals as much about ourselves as it does about the movies we react against. It is, in part, a reflection of the extent of our alienation from the mass of Filipinos who make up the bakya crowd. We cannot appreciate mass culture, we cannot even view it with sympathy and understanding because we have been conditioned — by our social origins, our educational background, our cultural orientation — to regard as inane and inept whatever does not measure up to our exalted notions of art and culture.

This is particularly true in the movies. As a result of ongoing re-evaluations in the field of drama, for instance, and also because of the influence of the tourist industry, we have learned to regard with equanimity the presence of Castilian knights and Roman centurions in folk theater. We can even accept the anachronism and unintended comedy of a *cenaculo*⁶ Christ wearing a wrist watch and rubber shoes on his way to Calvary. But Filipino cowboys and samurais on our movie screens! The very idea insults our intelligence.

Part of the reason for this may be that film is a 20th-century medium, and we expect more from it than from folk theater. But we tend to forget that the social and historical conditions which gave rise to Philippine folk theater still exist in the country in this seventh decade of the 20th-century. This explains why the creators and patrons of folk theater are still very much around, dictating the shape and content not only of vanishing theatrical forms but also of the very much alive "art form of the 20th-century." Thus, the peasant mind, still befogged by feudal miasma, makes possible the *anting-anting*⁷ movies of Ramon Revilla.

The point here is that there is a bakya crowd — or rather, since the term can be both offensive and misleading, there is a mass audience out there whose tastes and cultural level are different from ours, whose very conception of culture does not coincide with ours.

In other words, the existence and proliferation of bakya movies is not solely the fault of bakya producers, although they certainly bear a great part of the blame. The bakya movie exists because there is an audience for it, because it is

popular. And it is popular because it provides escapist entertainment, besides allowing moviegoers to forget the oppressiveness of daily living, besides helping to take their minds off inflation and poverty and the immediate problems that beset them, also — paradoxical as it may seem — touches something vital in the popular nerve.

The Formalist Tradition

In his essay "An Approach to the Filipino Film," literary and film critic Bienvenido Lumbera points out that a major concern of the film student in evaluating a Filipino movie should be "the centrality of content."

Elaborating on this point, Lumbera writes: "What does the film say about man in a society in ferment? How does it view the problems that confront man in his struggle against nature and men who seek to exploit him? This is not to insist that every film make a philosophical statement or engage in social analysis. This is simply to remind the directors that film-making in an underdeveloped country should be primarily a way of saying, not making magic with picture machines."

Those of us who are interested in Filipino films tend to forget the point raised by Lumbera. We have been nurtured in the formalist tradition of the New Criticism in literature, and we carry our biases into our study of the movies. Just as we are inclined to scrutinize a poem or novel textually, without reference to its social and historical context, so too we analyze a movie in terms of how it is constructed ("breathing photography," "expert editing," etc.) instead of what it is saying.

When we do pay attention to content, we labor under the misconception that only the good artistic movie has something to say — or at least something to say that deserves consideration. We think that the commercial movie, and especially the badly-made commercial movie, has nothing to say, or that what it has to say is beneath contempt.

To the mass audience, the opposite is true. Serious films like *Maynila*, *Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* and *Nunal sa Tubig*, though made with intelligence and care, make no sense to the bakya crowd. This is so not only because these movies deal with subject matter and use techniques that are new and unfamiliar in Tagalog movies, but also because the problems they tackle are of no interest to the mass of Filipinos living today. Alienation, dehumanization, existential despair, and



Top & bottom: Serious films like Ishmael Bernal's *Nunal sa Tubig* appeal to the formalist bias of most movie critics and cineastes; while a patently commercial vehicle like Emmanuel Borlaza's *Mrs. Eva Fonda, 16*, addresses itself to bakya aspirations and the popular imagination.

the absurdity of the human condition may loom large in the minds of middle-class intellectuals, but these are unknown to the uprooted *provincianos*⁸ or the coastal villagers who are ostensibly the subjects of these films.

On the other hand, out-and-out commercial movies may have something vital and basic to say to the mass audience — and in terms it can easily grasp. The standard Fernando Poe Jr. movie, for instance, deals with themes which appeal to the popular imagination and express certain popular aspirations. It is often set in some never-never land with no basis in history or present reality, a fact that turns off the critics; yet this setting, no more fantastic than the symbolic Albania of *Florante at Laura*,⁹ does not make the thesis of the movie any less valid.

The Poe character is usually a patient, long-suffering individual who, when his patience has been stretched to the limit by the violence of his oppressors, is not averse to using fists and guns to defend or avenge himself. It is a character the Filipino peasant, likewise blessed with legendary patience, may find easier to identify with than the extremely simple-minded peasant anti-hero of *Ganito Kami Noon . . . Paano Kayo Ngayon?*

The war epics that used to be a Poe staple are likewise closer in spirit to the folk conception of wartime history than the critically acclaimed *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos*. The guerrillas in the Poe epics were often too super-heroic to be credible, but they did not depart from the popular image of the guerrilla as a freedom fighter resisting foreign invasion. In *Tatlong Taon*, the guerrillas are either horrifying grotesques of naive USAFFE types fighting America's war in the Pacific, and the only Japanese we see is an officer who, though he rapes a village girl, still comes out looking as cute and lovable as Christopher de Leon. No doubt there were bad Filipino guerrillas and good Japanese officers during the war, but to tip the balance in favor of the latter, as *Tatlong Taon* unwittingly does, goes against the popular grain.

The Human Condition

One strong quality of the Poe character is that he is incapable of wallowing in despair. He may be assailed by doubts, but in the end he always gets over his doubts and goes into action. Unlike the Rafael Roco Jr. character in *Lunes, Martes . . .*, who ends up accepting things as they are, the

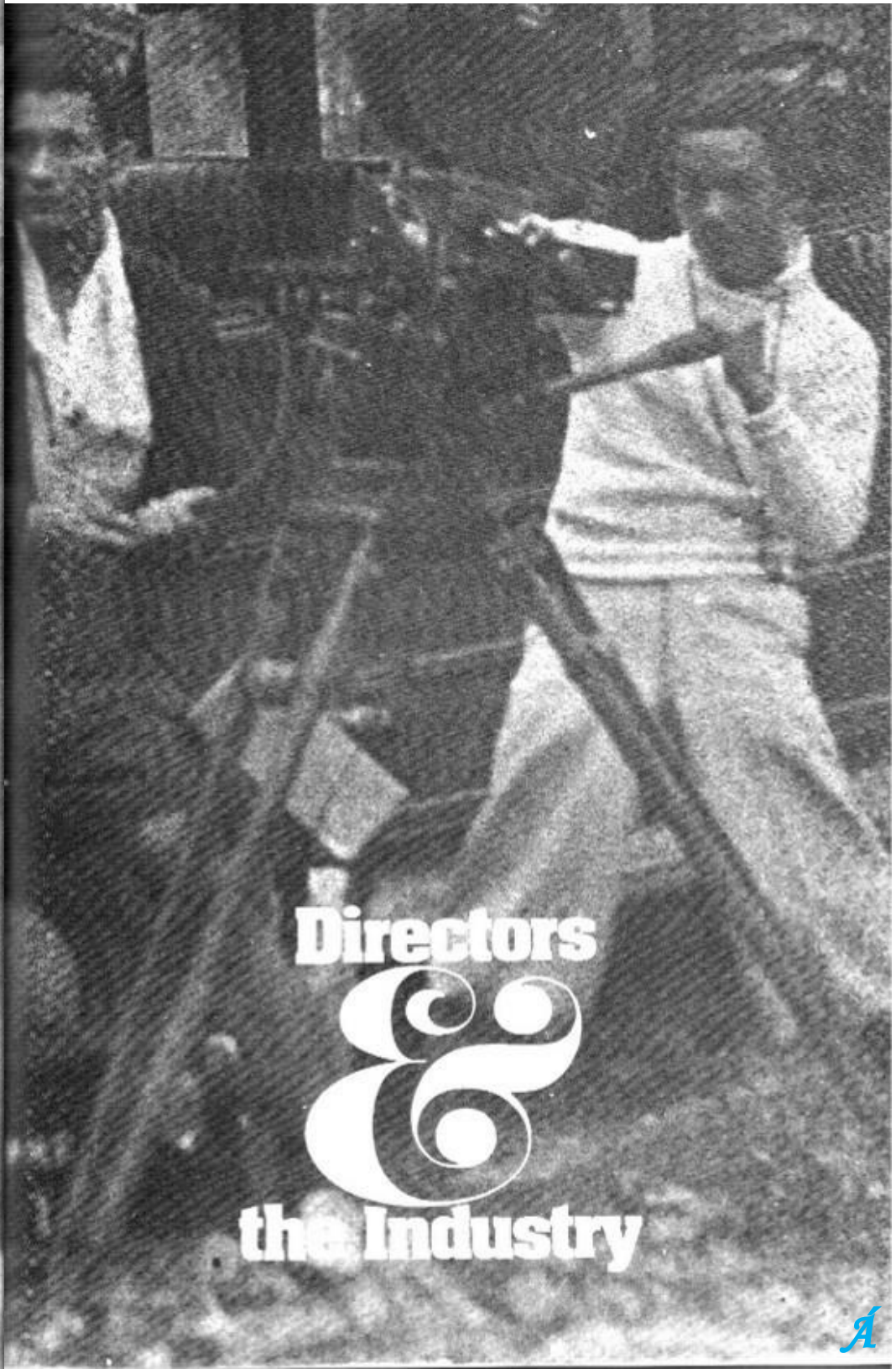
Poe character believes in the necessity of struggle, operating on the assumption that the human condition presents much to protest against but nothing to despair about. Thus, the Poe movie always ends on a note of hope. Perhaps the hope is illusory, perhaps it could be a stimulant for the down-trodden.

This extended disquisition on the Poe movie is not meant to be a denigration of films like *Ganito, Tatlong Taon*, or *Lunes*. Nor is this an argument for swallowing — hook, line, and sinker — the phenomenon of mass culture as it exists today. We need not justify what is blatantly opportunistic and exploitative in commercial movies.

What we are driving at here is simply that commercial movies made for the bakya crowd, for the mass audience, are as deserving of serious study as the works of non-commercial film artists. They are as worthy of critical exploration as the films we hail as masterpieces.

As movie critic Pauline Kael notes in her essay *Trash, Art, and the Movies*, whether a movie is good or bad is sometimes of less interest than why so many people respond to it the way they do.

"Sometimes," Kael writes, "bad movies are more important than good ones just because of those unresolved elements that make them such a mess. They may get something going on around us that the moviemakers felt or shared and expressed in a confused way. *Rebel Without a Cause* was a pretty terrible movie but it reflected (and possibly caused) more cultural changes than many a good one. And conceivably it's part of the function of a movie critic to know and indicate the difference between a bad movie that doesn't much matter because it's so much like other bad movies and a bad movie that matters (like *The Chase* or *The Wild Angels*) because it affects people strongly in new, different ways. And if it is said that this is sociology, not aesthetics, the answer is that an aesthetician who gave his time to criticism of current movies would have to be an awful fool. Movie criticism to be of any use whatever must go beyond formal analysis."



Directors
&
the Industry

GERARDO DE LEON:
A Master Film-Maker Speaks Out

by Amadis Ma. Guerrero

Gerardo Ylagan de Leon was brought up in an atmosphere rich in theater. The whole clan — brothers, sisters, cousins and uncles — seemed to be imbued with this passion for drama (and, later, the cinema), to the extent that one writer (now an ambassador) in a pre-war article described the Ylagans of Manila as “the Barrymores of the Philippines.”

The Ylagans collaborated on many plays and movies, and early in his career as a movie director, Gerry decided to drop his surname in favor of his mother’s family name — because it was embarrassing to see so many Ylagans in the film credits. Thus, through the years and decades, he became known as Gerry de Leon.

Gerry’s chief influence during his formative years was his father, Hermogenes, a playwright, producer, and occasionally, musical conductor. The elder Ylagan headed a *zarzuela*¹ company known as the Compañia Ylagan, a group which performed in provincial town fiestas. Later Ylagan donated all of his plays (including the famous *Dalagang Bukid*, which was made by director Jose Nepomuceno into the first full-length Tagalog feature film) to the University of the Philippines, but time took its toll on the manuscripts and most of them were destroyed by termites.

The movies wove their spell on Gerry at a very early age. On Tuazon street in the Sampaloc neighborhood where he grew up, there were two small moviehouses called the Obrero and the Filipinas. Gerry haunted these theaters and sometimes, when he would be missed at home, he would be found in one of the moviehouses long after the screening had ended and the gates had closed — asleep on his seat near the peanut shells and the spittle on the floor.

Significantly, Gerry’s first job — while still a high school student at the old Jose Rizal College in Quiapo — was as a piano player at the nearby Cine Moderno. This was still

the era of the silent films, and Gerry would get a stiff neck from playing the piano and watching the movie at the same time. Sometimes he would get so engrossed he would stop playing altogether, and a voice behind him would shout, “Hey, keep on playing!”

Most of the movies shown were American, but a few were European, like *The Bridge of Sighs* and *The Volga Boatman*. De Leon recalls, “I was in awe watching this kind of movies, they were so dynamic in composition. *The Volga Boatman* was unforgettable.”

In effect, the silent movies served as de Leon’s training ground. He says, “It was very good training because the pictures told the story. That’s pure cinematic art. Of course, the movements were larger than life, almost over-acting. But at the time it was very impressive. Someone once said that if you want to test a movie, turn off the audio, and if it’s still interesting that means it’s good. So, if you can bring out your point silently, do it.”

After finishing high school, however, de Leon decided to become a doctor and he enrolled at the UST² College of Medicine. For a few years he concentrated on this goal, but the spell of the movies lured him anew, and sometime before graduation he became a professional actor and script-writer. He did not forsake his medical studies, however, and upon completing them took the board exams and copped seventh place — a feat considering he was busy with his work in the movies.

De Leon practised medicine for a while, but he found that he was too compassionate by nature. “I would pity my patients too much,” he recalls, “and sometimes would even ask money from my mother just to give them medicine. With that kind of compassion, you won’t go far in medicine, where you must keep a necessary distance.”

By that time too, de Leon was beginning to enjoy life in the movie world, so he decided to concentrate full-time on this medium. His first break as a director came in 1939 when the producer Pilar Hidalgo Lim tapped him for *Ama’t Anak*, in which he directed both himself and his brother Tito Arevalo. The movie got good reviews.

Other directorial assignments soon followed, and de Leon worked for a time for LVN, Sampaguita, and then RDR Productions (named after Rogelio de la Rosa³ but managed by the businessman Amado Araneta).

De Leon’s biggest pre-war hit was *Ang Maestra*, starring Rogelio de la Rosa and Rosa del Rosario. De Leon assigned

Overleaf:
A film crew of the
Parlatone-Hispano
Filipino Corpora-
tion on location
circa 1935.

the story to an unknown but promising writer still in his teens, Eddie Romero; he (de Leon) also asked de la Rosa to write a personal letter to schoolteachers all over the country. The gimmick paid off, for the movie became a box-office hit. De Leon was made as a director, and Romero was made as a writer. Later Romero, too, would make it as a director.

Ang Maestra was the story of a girl from Manila who comes to a small provincial town to teach; her restless brother, a black sheep of sorts, follows her, and then embroils the town in scandal. The movie had other social themes, for it showed how tenants are tyrannized by their landlords, and how tradition-bound people adapt to the graduates turned out by the new educational system.

Ang Maestra is the kind of movie that film societies would be glad to showcase today, but regrettably it has not been preserved for posterity. The film reels of the pre-war era were of the nitrate type, and these are prone to spontaneous combustion. The other early de Leon movies, like the historical *Diego Silang*, suffered the same fate.

De Leon went on to make other movies in the late thirties and early forties, but the outbreak of war in 1941 brought an abrupt halt to the activities of the Philippine movie industry.

During the Japanese Occupation, de Leon went back to an old love — the theater — and directed plays at the Life theater. He also resumed the practice of medicine, but the long arm of the Japanese eventually caught up with him. It turned out that the Japanese had created an agency, and were collecting Filipino movies and booking these. The directors who came across the de Leon movies liked his work.

One evening, several Japanese officials visited de Leon at his residence, and asked his help in directing Japanese propaganda films. De Leon told them he was no longer connected with the movies, and that he was now a doctor, but one Japanese officer barked, "Many doctors in Manila but only one director!"

It was an order he couldn't refuse, and de Leon had to serve as an assistant director for a movie called *Tear Down the American Flag*. The director, Abe Yutaka, was well-known in his country, and he was fluent in English for he had stayed in the United States for 15 years and had been heavily influenced by Cecil B. de Mille. Because de Leon himself was familiar with de Mille's movies, he and Yutaka

worked well together.

De Leon assisted in the making of other propaganda films by other Japanese directors, and in the location shooting of one of these movies — in the hills of Cababalan, Bataan — he and a group of fellow Filipinos and Americans were given the scare of their lives.

This particular movie utilized American prisoners of war as extras and at one point, when they were riding in a vehicle, they passed on to the Filipinos little notes meant for their friends and sweethearts in Manila. Unknown to the group, a spy was among them, and the following day the Filipinos and Americans were ordered by a machinegun-wielding Japanese soldier to line up. The Japanese commander gave them two minutes to come up with the messages. Some of the POWs and Filipino actors, including a brother of de Leon, were slapped, and de Leon thought it was the end for them. However, the Japanese director appeared, winked at him, and then explained the situation to the commander. The notes turned out to be harmless, and the Japanese withdrew from the scene.

De Leon, looking back at that era, draws a distinction between the Japanese military and the people he had to work with. "They were not soldiers," he says, "they were just sent here to make movies." And years later, when he got to travel to Japan, he had a happy reunion with those craftsmen and technicians.

After the war, de Leon resumed his movie career with a vengeance. One of his first post-war movies was about a GI (played by one of the POWs slapped by the Japanese interpreter) who is assigned to the Philippines, tries to befriend the Filipinos and then returns to his country after his stint ends. De Leon called the movie *So Long, America* and it about summed up his feelings towards Uncle Sam.

With the passing of the years, his talent as a director flowered, and the decades of the fifties and sixties produced many films which are now regarded as Filipino classics — including *Daigdig ng mga Api*, *Noli Me Tangere*, *El Filibusterismo* and *Sisa*.

A de Leon movie is known for its visual composition, and de Leon traces this talent to a childhood penchant for sketching, which instilled in him a deep appreciation of art. Later, in his travels abroad, he would make it a point to go to museums and study the compositions of famous artists. "Rembrandt has a very special way of lighting the faces of his models," he observes. "His favorite technique is the



crosslight effect, in which light comes from the background and illuminates certain portions of the subject's face and you get a three-dimensional effect."

At the beginning, de Leon had no rules to follow and he directed by instinct, "and maybe from imitation although not intentionally," he points out. Later he came into contact with books on the art and craft of film-making, and these opened up a whole new world for him. Ernest Lindgren's *The Art of the Film* particularly impressed him, and he found that he had all along been doing by instinct what foreign film-makers had been practising on a more academic or intellectual level.

Lindgren's book led him to the works of other author-directors like Sergei Eisenstein and Konstantin Stanislavski, founder of the Method school of acting. These books helped in developing his technique, but he soon found that he was becoming too bookish and losing his spontaneity. So he completely disregarded the books and returned to his old way of directing by feeling and instinct.

"Do it your way even if it's against the rules," he now advises younger film practitioners. But he does not regret reading those books. "Through reading, you avoid being boring and repetitive. And that was the common fault of most writers in my time. They had a vocabulary of a million words, and they tried to put all these into a single movie."

And this brings him to the younger crop of film directors, like Ishmael Bernal and Lino Brocka. "I like Bernal's choice of words very much," he says. "His Tagalog is almost poetic, beyond the literal and commonplace, although he can be commonplace, if the situation demands it. But when seriousness demands it, his words are nice. That goes for Brocka too, who searches for truth in his movies. But the search for truth is endless..."

De Leon classifies movie directors into three kinds: the Svengali type (i.e., those who "magnetize" actors through the sheer power of their personality); the dictator type, who treat actors like "cattle" (a remark attributed, rightly or wrongly, to Hitchcock, and which is "an insult to the actor"); and the more liberal type. De Leon places himself in the latter category.

"I give an actor opportunity to develop his role," he says. "I let him discover things for himself, with a few nudges here and there to bring him to the right path. And when he discovers that, he will never forget it, because it is

Opposite page:
Pancho Magalona as the enigmatic Simoun in Arriva Production's *El Filibusterismo*. Directed by Gerardo de Leon, this film version of the *Fili* swept most of the major prizes at the 1962 FAMAS awards, including Best Picture and Best Direction.

his own discovery. But if you tell him constantly 'do this, do that' he'll become a robot."

However, de Leon does admit that there are some actors who lack imagination, and who have to be directed painstakingly. But even with these he is careful for "actors are the most sensitive people on earth. They won't tell you they're hurt, but they'll never forget it. So directors should be actors at the beginning so they can put themselves in the position of actors."

Now 65, Gerry de Leon has about 70 films to his credit, not to mention numerous awards and citations, in a career spanning four decades. Although his health has not been too good of late, he remains highly articulate and mentally alert. He speaks in a voice barely above a whisper (the result of a nearly fatal accident some years back, in which a drunken American sailor driving a six-by-six truck rammed into the taxi he was riding; in the operation which followed, one of the nerves of his vocal cords was severed). One does not agree with all of his views, but one listens with respect.

The veteran director's chief frustration is the fact that he and his colleagues have yet to come up with a film like *Rashomon*, which spearheaded Japan's entry into the international movie market.

"We have not done this yet, and we may not be able to do so unless the government steps in," he declares. "In Japan, you know, all business is controlled by the government, although this is not apparent. It's the same thing in America, where everything falls under the big Jewish organizations. So I wish the (Philippine) government would step in right now."

De Leon would like the Philippine movie industry to be totally subsidized by the government. "You cannot do anything by halves, you have to go to extremes," he asserts. "Give Lino Brocka ten million pesos to make a movie for outside consumption, instead of the measly one million he and other Filipino directors have to contend with. How can Bert Avellana and Eddie Romero compete with (Francis Ford) Coppola with his \$25 Million-dollar movie (*Apocalypse Now*)? No Filipino producer can come up with that amount of money, but that is not the point.

"People in the government are now aware that the movies can shape an entire way of life, and can even make presidents. They can sell the Philippines outside. That's what the Americans did to us, and are continuing to do so. They bring in their movies and show us their refrigerators, their

mode of life, and pretty soon we're buying everything American. And that's what the Japanese are doing to us, and now we are buying everything Japanese."

De Leon cites the case of the Manuel Conde movie, *Genghis Khan*, which earned good notices in the United States. "Somebody (from outside) bought it," he says, "and it was advertised as 'made in Afghanistan' or something. Too bad, but the point is that the government did not capitalize on the movie, which could have been the *Rashomon* that we want to do now." The same case can be stated for the Avellana and de Leon films which have won awards in Southeast Asia.

De Leon believes it should be a government policy to select good, well-made Filipino films and show this for free abroad, so that other peoples can be made aware of our accomplishments. "This is what the Germans are doing here now," he notes. "They are not doing this for nothing, you know, they have something on their minds. They're selling us German movies, because they realize that with movies, you can sell your country to the world."

This is what people in the government should do, he reiterates, instead "of looking for scenes that they can censor, a little violence, a little sex scene now and then. They don't realize that great scenes are like that. When you are a director or a writer you are like a preacher, and to drive



Cesar Ramirez and Cynthia Zamora in Gerardo de Leon's *Huwag Mo Akong Limutin*. Made for Premiere Productions in 1960, *Limutin* was another FAMAS awardee for Best Picture and Best Director.





A scene from an early de Leon, *Isumpa Mo, Giliw*, made in 1947 for Sampaguita. The screenplay for this film was by Eddie Romero.

home your sermons you use words or scenes that will jolt the moviegoer. If you cut these scenes and not show them outside, we'll be so anemic we will never sell."

In de Leon's view, the Philippine movie industry has retrogressed instead of progressed. "It doesn't seem to belong to us anymore," he observes. "There is a lack of enthusiasm among local producers. I feel that the foreigners are taking over. I don't want to name names, but they have a chain of theaters and they can always say 'we cannot show your picture in our theaters because we have other engagements . . .' Pretty soon you'll have to go down on your knees so that they'll show your picture in their theaters."

And, according to de Leon, these foreigners have slowly begun producing movies too. "You don't expect these people to do this for love of our country. You cannot expect anything substantial from their movies, but action, brutality and pornography . . . they'll do anything for the sake of money. Pretty soon they might become even more dictatorial and say an actor should get this much only and no more."

How to go about curbing this alleged threat is difficult to say, but de Leon suggests that people concerned about the movie industry, and who are well-read on the subject, should get together and come up with remedial measures.

"If Filipino producers don't unite, there's a danger of their being pushed out of the business," he warns.

Overleaf:
Jose Padilla Jr. in
*Ang Sawa sa Lu-
mang Simboryo*,
one of Gerardo de
Leon's best re-
membered films.

GERARDO DE LEON An Amazing Discovery

by Charles Tesson

Gerardo de Leon died in July 1981 at the age of 68, leaving behind him a lifetime's work of about 70 films. Four of them have been shown at Nantes — *Sisa* (1951), *Pedro Penduko* (1956), *El Filibusterismo* (1968), and *48 Oras* (1950). A meager sampling, considering how many he made, but a generous one, in view of their quality. Amidst the diversity of themes and genres (historical, political, and adventure films) in de Leon's body of work, these four stand out by virtue of a certain style not readily identifiable with *a priori* models. Gerardo de Leon's style is elusive. He does not resort to established American film formulas for his aesthetic touches, although his films markedly show the American influence. But in his moviemaking, he undoubtedly found a direction all his own, neither keeping close to nor deviating greatly from his chosen models.

Each of his films is different: whatever the subject is, from the moment the action starts, the screen teems with ideas and much evidence of directorial inventiveness. This is all the more to his credit, considering that he had to work within a very narrow framework. He was under contract to Premiere Studios, where he filmed most of his work; in the credits for his films, one finds the same group of technicians, the same producer, etc. His *oeuvre*, containing examples of all kinds of films, represents a veritable spectrum of Philippine cinema; it includes commissioned scripts as well as musicals, though he apparently specialized in action films and adventure stories.

While working under deplorable conditions, he complied conscientiously with his studio contract, concerning himself primarily with the practical aspects of his craft and with pure direction (somewhat like Fritz Lang in Hollywood, whom his films often call to mind). His films did not have a prevalent theme, neither were they dogmatic; throughout his long career, he did not particularly advocate any aesthetic tendencies. But he had great mastery over the visual characteristics

Translated from "Deux Cineastes Philippins," *Cahiers du Cinema*, No. 333 (March 1982). English translation by Federico Miguel Olbes.

of his craft and was remarkably inventive. The devices and details of his staging are apparent at the inception of each shot. His credo was "Each shot should be new."

Gerardo de Leon is not only one of Philippine cinema's great names (if not the greatest); he is also a name to reckon with in world cinema. (There have been and there will be others, perhaps, seeing as how the interest in Philippine cinema and its history has only just begun.) The man was an artist; certainly, one cannot watch any of his films without revelling in the sheer joy of movies, or in the pure wonder of his directorial style.

Sisa and *Pedro Penduko*. Both films, although different in execution, have something in common: they paint character portraits — a priest in *Sisa* and the hero of a popular comic strip (*Pedro Penduko*). Using the character of the priest, who seemingly steps straight out of a Bunuel film (a combination of *Nazarin* and *El*), Gerardo de Leon succeeds in transforming a story of banal sentimentality.

Edna Luna and Efrén Reyes in Gerardo de Leon's *Pedro Penduko*, based on Francisco V. Coching's popular *komiks* series.



Pedro Penduko can be summarized in two words: action and adventure. *Pedro Penduko* goes all out to seduce a landlord's daughter, provoking the secret jealousy of his best friend's sister. Subsequently, the landlord's brother unexpectedly returns to avenge himself on the landlord for having had him arrested for robbery. He kills his brother and kidnaps his niece, as well as Pedro's jealous admirer. Pedro Penduko and his friend then go off to the rescue.

At the start of every new scene, de Leon uses some device — like intercutting a character or a pistol in extreme close-up — to jolt the viewer. The extreme depth of field of his shots allows the viewer to take in everything, all the possible lines of action, and creates an internal rhythm sustained through all the mishaps and vicissitudes of the narrative. A change of axis, a shift of frame, suffices to upset the rhythm. The composition of each shot, each angle, corresponds to the moment's dramatic tension. Gerardo de Leon always arranges his characters in a careful perspective, establishing an axis of conflict around which the physical rivalry between Pedro Penduko and the landlord's brother, and the emotional rivalry between the landlord's daughter and the jealous maiden are played out. Visually, this axis creates lines of flight — horizontal planes extending outside the frame to dissipate tension; as well as lines of force — diagonal planes within the frame. In short, he creates dynamic tension at the very source of each action, each adventure. Nothing happens that is not triggered off by the shot and its staging. This is truly great artistry.

El Filibusterismo. Set in the 19th century during the Spanish occupation, the film recounts the adventures of the rebels who are secretly weaving their first plots. The film makes clear from the outset that it is fictional history that is being portrayed onscreen, and thus leaves its characters with maximum flexibility in acting out their roles. This freedom of portrayal is characteristic of action films. The main character, who is both revolutionary and rogue, is also an actor and a stage manager. Obligated to disguise himself and prepared for any eventuality, he manages to keep an eye over everything. Gerardo de Leon's *mise-en-scène* revolves around this disturbing character and his succession of disguises. Masked by dark glasses, the hero's very presence on the scene threatens all the time to trigger off explosive consequences. As in de Leon's other films, the manner whereby the dramatic construction of a shot or scene is modified, from the moment



a character comes in for a close-up (i.e., becomes a hero), is the only "action" which concerns him. That is the real "adventure" in the film, and it is thrilling to watch.

48 Oras. A man is unjustly accused of having murdered his wife. No sooner is he in prison than he escapes. Severely wounded (a bullet in his body cannot be removed, giving him only 48 hours to live) and hunted by the police, he hides with friends and sets out to find his wife's murderer. His suspicions lead him to a cabaret owner who is a notorious gangster.

Throughout the film, Gerardo de Leon's sole concern is to preserve the integrity of every shot. He blocks his characters in a way that precludes the use of an answer shot — the instigator of the action is prominent in the foreground, while the rest face the camera and recede into the background. Advancing or retreating along the same tack, the film deploys its scenes in the same manner one would turn the pages of a book, only to discover suddenly that something else has been contained within all along. Each shot



Premiere Productions' top female lead Anita Linda starred in Gerardo de Leon's *Sisa*, 1951, for which she won the first Maria Clara award for Best Actress.

is a puzzling trap, like a drawer with two or three false bottoms. *48 Oras* marvellously orchestrates the long hide-and-seek sequence between the wounded husband, the police, and the gangsters. Within each individual shot that makes up the sequence, each frame is a door opening outwardly to reveal a policeman lying in ambush, and, at the same time, a curtain behind which another character creeps surreptitiously. One could cite all of the film's magnificent scenes: that in which a child pursued by the murderer (who knows the truth) hides in a watchmaker's drawing-room; or that of the flashback which re-enacts the crime, etc.

Two months after having seen the film, I remember accurately each frame — the unexpected violence of one scene; the smallest move or gesture by each character; the whereabouts of the murder weapon. Clearly, this is an indication of the undeniable stamp of genius. The festival in Nantes has made the first move in discovering Gerardo de Leon's work. It is to be hoped that other festivals (or television which, ostensibly, is in quest of unexplored worlds of cinematography) will soon follow suit.

LAMBERTO V. AVELLANA:
A National Artist and His Times

by T.D. Agcaoili

The best — in ideas and execution — will always come to the artist, if the circumstances attendant to the creative process are present.

The circumstances, the encouragements and the inspiration attendant to the creation of *Anak-Dalita* by Lamberto V. Avellana, the film's director, were like votive candles, remembrances of the fiery flames rising high over Intramuros at the height of the battle for the liberation of Manila in 1945, tainting the skies over the bay red, orange, and yellowish in the midst of bursting shells and exploding bombs. And of the peace that came after, an unquiet peace that exploded once more into a war, this time a distant one that was nonetheless a war which touched most Filipinos deeply because of their sentimental attachment to the Americans who had assumed the new war as their own, drawing many of the veterans, along with new army recruits, to a distant land called Korea...

In reality it was the same war again, people killing people; only the reasons were different. But somehow it had served to provide an objective correlative for a filmmaker like Avellana to create a synthesis of the chaos, destruction and confusion that had engulfed his country and people for over three years, and whose effects still remained, as natural monuments to lost lives and ruined places.

The ruins of the old city, Intramuros, remained five years after the war, unlevelled and unswept; migrants from the provinces made their makeshift homes among the ruins, living a hand-to-mouth existence as if the war were still raging in their midst and they were still uncertain of a future, restive and unrelieved of their nightmares.

A sensitive artist like Avellana looking at the scene knew deep in his heart that the nightmare was reality. Fili-



Opposite page:
Lamberto V. Avellana in his younger days, on location for LVN.

Abridged from the author's article published in *Philippines Daily Express*, June 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 & 17, 1981.

pino combat battalions became veterans after less than a year of fighting in Korea and had to come home, their R&R leaves in Tokyo not quite sufficient to soothe the lacerated nerves with their memories of the enemy charges. They came home, combat-weary veterans, as if the new war were just an extension of the old one. They came home to band music and glowing speeches of welcome, and were replaced with fresh troops who took the ships on the return trip to Pusan.

One of the veterans returning home from the Korean war is the hero of *Anak-Dalita*, a sergeant (played by Tony Santos) who barely reaches his mother alive as she lies dying in one of the caves of Intramuros, a victim of penury and the lack of medical care, lying in bed without help except for the solicitous visits of a bar-girl (Rosa Rosal) living in a nearby cave¹ . . .

The characteristic aftermath of the war, livid and frightening and at the same time sad, so very sad like the whole of humanity dying and still crying for succor, for survival, for ultimate perseverance, is the thematic content of the film that Avellana made ten years after the Liberation² out of the painful memory and synthesized objectivity brought by time and distance and because of an obsessive conscience crying to the artist for expression and exorcism in *Anak-Dalita*.

It is a story of cave-dwellers in a modern city levelled to the ground by total war, leaving only the skeletons of buildings that had once stood so stately and so firmly for centuries that nobody had ever thought such total destruction could happen to them and to the people whose shells lived therein, wide-eyed, hollow-checked, fear and uncertainty about the reality of their existence reflected in their slow, groping movements, more so in their grasping, nervous and animal-like instincts, as they emerge from their caves in search of food, company, faith — and even for sex — in a world that they could not believe existed, much less, understand . . .

This is the essence that the genius of Avellana captures on film in *Anak-Dalita*, a modern allegory of the sub-human existence that is possible for contemporary man when he lets loose the instincts that seem to lie waiting insidiously in his enormous but little-used brain for the propitious time when the cave-man in him can assert itself again over his ruminative, constructive and peaceful self . . .

To realize this modern allegory, and at the same time present a realistic narrative with individual characters, and

not mere stereotypes — to make *Anak-Dalita* a film that can be viewed from different levels of understanding, Avellana utilized the tradition of neo-realism established a few years earlier by Rossellini and De Sica in films like *Open City* and *The Bicycle Thief*. Like Rossellini, Avellana is steeped in the documentary tradition; and like De Sica, he was also an actor before becoming a film director. At any rate, the extensive use of documentary technique in *Anak-Dalita* succeeded in imbuing the film with a sense of authenticity. Like the two Italian directors, Avellana is also prone to pick up on the set from among the bystanders watching, character-types that he believes would be appropriate for some of his scenes — a common practice among neo-realist film-makers. Thus, for *Anak-Dalita* Avellana used as dwellers of Intramuros, people actually living in the ruins of the city, in the clothes that he saw them in. For *Anak-Dalita*, he never used a studio set, preferring the difficulties of crowd-control to the comparative ease and comfort of filming in a studio-built set because he knew that it was not only impossible to match, say, the ruins of an Intramuros church interior with one built by a production designer no matter how talented he is because there are nuances, and an aura, in things that are true which imitation and the counterfeit cannot capture.

The film aesthetics of Avellana was not lost to the jurors of the Asian Film Festival in 1956, who unanimously chose it as the best picture that year from a field that included the works of Japan and South Korea's best film-makers . . .

Anak-Dalita won the Grand Prix, the Golden Harvest trophy, and in so doing it was automatically rendered ineligible by dint of the festival rules for that year's *ad hoc* prizes. Avellana was somehow disappointed, because he wanted so much to win, personally, the award for best direction, along with some other awards for his production staff.

This was remedied the following year, through his lyrically expressed story of a Philippine minority group's lifestyle in *Badjao*.

The film depicts some of the legendary attributes and traditional customs of the sea-nomads of southern Mindanao, who live on boats or in homes built on stilts above the coastal waters. One such custom is for the father of a newborn baby boy to throw the latter into the sea to see if it will struggle to float and survive, apparently to test its human worth. If it sinks and drowns, then it obviously does not deserve

life — and presumably will not be equal to the rigid regimen of the tribe.

Using the same artists and technicians with whom he worked in *Anak-Dalita* Avellana won through *Badjao* the best director award aside from the awards for best story by Rolf Bayer, best cinematography by Mike Accion, and best editing by Gregorio Carballo: the four major functions in the making of a film.

The glowing honors for *Badjao* following the startling success of *Anak-Dalita*, one coming after the other in unbroken sequence, a feat that has never been repeated in the Asian film festival ever since, attests to the methodical application of Avellana's prodigious knowledge of — or is it instinct for — good cinema . . .

When he made *Anak-Dalita* in 1955, there was a challenge confronting the film industry, an objective that gave direction to the efforts of, and drew out the best from, Filipino film-makers: the Asian Film Festival which, although regional, aimed at the same objectives as those fostered in the Cannes and Venice filmfests.

LVN Pictures, Avellana's home studio, wanted to garner top honors, if only because the company's owners, the late Doña Narcisa B. vda. de Leon and her son, Manuel de Leon — especially the latter — were founding organizers of the Federation of Motion Picture Producers in Asia (the sponsoring body of the festival) along with other film producers in the region. Somehow Manny de Leon felt obliged morally to produce a meritorious film, one that would depict Philippine life and culture honestly in a manner that utilized good film form, even if it would not elicit popular patronage.

Avellana was the logical director to handle such a task. He was at the time the most scholarly and innovative of the movie directors, unfettered by orthodox and quite stale concepts of film-making that characterized the industry at the time. He was also articulate, not just as an individual, but also as an artist committed to truth and beauty. He had a style distinctly his own, which permitted him to compromise some of his values whenever his producers requested him to make a mass-appealing movie, without coming out commonplace or cheap. Above all, he possessed a universal grasp of life, born out of his experience and personal lifestyle . . .

At a time when specialization is *de rigueur* in the conduct of men's affairs and in their pursuit of knowledge and expression, the idea of Goethe's Universal Man is difficult to find personified; but Lamberto V. Avellana, Philippine Na-



Avellana's Award Winners: *Anak-Dalita* (top) with Rosa Rosal and Tony Santos copped the Golden Harvest Award for Best Picture at the 1954 Asian Film Festival. The following year, *Badjao* (bottom) with the same stars won the Asian Film Festival awards for direction, story, cinematography and editing.

tional Artist for the theater and films, may be said to be quite close to it, except for a disarming detachment from politics and political thoughts, although he occasionally serves political ends when he makes commissioned documentaries and semi-narrative films about politicians or their projects.

He writes with lucidity and a facile style, and was, in his college days, editor of the Ateneo de Manila's *The Guidon* (the college paper) and *Aegis* (the college annual), aside from being employed by the *Graphic* magazine as Features Editor after winning the national Roces award for best student editorial in 1935. He continues to write film scripts, oftentimes under the pseudonym of Valentin Donato. He is involved in the theater, having founded the Barangay Theater Guild with his lovely wife, the sweetheart or, as he puts it, "the flower", of his college days, Daisy Hontiveros, then the U.P. Dramatic Club's leading actress and society columnist ("This, That, and the Other") of the *Philippine Collegian*³ during the late Fred Ruiz Castro's⁴ editorship.

Avellana composes the basic melody that he uses as theme or background music for his films, although he employs the services of a professional musician composer to write down, transcribe, and arrange the music for formal use.

He is a fine actor, winning recognition and awards for acting during his college and post-graduate days at the Ateneo de Manila, where he taught drama, debate, and public speech before the movies got hold of him. He has appeared with Narciso Pimentel, Arsenio Lacson⁵ and other former Ateneans in many stage presentations that included Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*, wherein Avellana played the title role with a wig that he seldom removed, even when he went to the UP campus a-visiting Ms. Hontiveros.

When the Japanese occupied the Philippines, Avellana presented the best stage shows at the Avenue theater, managing to satirize the enemy subtly enough to escape the *Hoodubu* censors and the *kempetai* police, sending his audiences to suppressed glee and hidden snickers.

He has a deft hand in painting, using an impressionist style with oil and tempera.

Thus, it can be easily seen that Avellana is adequately equipped to handle the complex art form of the film, which has also been called a collaborative art because of its utilization of various art forms and disciplines that include literature, the drama, music and the dance or choreography,

painting and sculpture.

Although a story or script might be written by somebody else, Avellana adds his own ideas onto it, sometimes with enough materials to merit a credit for co-authorship. Usually he likes to co-author a script with his wife, who has a penchant for effective dialogue. He goes to the set with his mind previously fixed the night before on the choreography for his camera and players. But once on the set the fertile mind begins to stir, the discontent of creativity reaching out for something better, for a more spontaneous idea, including new lines of dialogue, resulting in the freshness and verve, the heart-felt outpouring that one encounters in films like *Anak-Dalita*, *Badjao*, *Bus to Bataan*, *Kundiman ng Lahi* and *Kapitan Kulas* (1975), which won second place as best picture in the first Metropolitan Film Festival.

Lamberto Avellana's knowledge of dramaturgy, combined with his amateur interest in the graphic arts, accounts for the psycho-portrait quality of his close shots of faces and the emotional reactions that they evoke in empathy from audiences; also for his lengthy shots of two characters talking (e.g., Santos and Rosal in the post-funeral scene of *Anak-Dalita*), as in a stage play without breaking the scene into different shots to include inserts of close-ups and reaction shots, and being able to sustain, even to heighten, interest because in this style of film-making, the director must be able to make his actors behave realistically, maintaining and sustaining their behavior and emotional reactions continuously and progressively without the benefit of editing to create rhythm and to cover up a defect or lapse in acting. Avellana's style requires the discipline of stage acting.

Avellana joined the movies when the sugar tycoons from Negros headed by J. Amado Araneta (of today's Araneta Center in Cubao)⁶ bought lock, stock and barrel the American-controlled Philippine Films corporation on Inverness (now M.L. Carreon) street, and, installing Carlos P. Romulo⁷ as president, adopted a policy of investing the industry with fresh talent, particularly in terms of writers, directors, and players . . .

Recalling that time in 1936 when he was asked to do a local movie despite the fact that he had shared a common arrogance (if one can call the attitude that) among college students, graduates and professionals to disdain Filipino movies and had not seen even one, Avellana says: "As offered through CPR,⁸ I simply went into it with Hollywood pictures as my norm and the training in dramatics at the Ateneo

as background. Dramatic training, as proven anywhere in the world, is the best preparation for films, particularly for direction, production design, acting, of course, and cinematography, in a way, since in films the camera takes the place of the audience, and can be moved from a long shot, analogous to a seat in the last row of a drama theater, to an extreme closeup, wherein the eyeball of an actor can be seen in all its stark details."

"In theater," he continues, "one learns discipline within a given craft — acting or direction. One gets to know and practice and whet whatever talents and aptitudes one might possess. The artist hones his skills or enriches what he absorbs from teachers and coaches."

He was still studying for his Bachelor of Arts degree at the Ateneo de Manila, on the old Padre Faura campus, when he made his first movie, *Sakay*, in 1936. The following year, he acquired his bachelor's degree, graduating magna cum laude. And the year after that, he lost his bachelor's status when he married the sweetheart of his college years, Daisy Hontiveros.

Enlisted by Romulo, who was also publisher and chief executive of the D-M-H-M Newspapers (*El Debate*, *Philippines Herald*, *Mabuhay* and *Monday Mail*, aside from *Foto News* and *Philippine Cinema and Radio* magazines), to bring about a revolution in the film industry were a diverse crew who, like Avellana, had no previous links whatsoever with films.

There was Severino Montano, playwright, actor and director from the University of the Philippines who had just written a play about Leonor Rivera,⁹ and whom Romulo had ensconced in a makeshift study-office in the loft of the tower built on the church-like facade of the Santa Ana studio building and which often served conveniently as a set for a church-bell tower. Montano was commissioned to write the script for a story based either on Rizal's life or on any of the national hero's works.

For more than a year the eminent dramatist labored on his assignment, but apparently film was not his cup of tea. Legitimate theater was. And he quit, I am sure happily, when he received a fellowship grant from an American university to study modern drama. The war caught him in the U.S. where he became useful to the Philippine government-in-exile in Washington. When he returned to the Philippines after the war, he brought with him the concept of arena theater, introducing it initially to the Philippine Normal School drama students and propagating it further



to serve the developmental programs of the government in the rural areas.

But his experience at the bogus Sta. Ana studio church-bell tower must have been so claustrophobic he never wanted to try the movies again. After all, like most pure theater-oriented talents, Dr. Montano must have looked down on films, especially so when he saw their dark and violent aspects. At any rate, by then the Aranetas had long given up film production, preferring instead the less hectic business of theater ownership and operation.

But back in 1936, Don Amado and CPR brought to the industry, aside from Avellana and Montano, a well-known international playboy, Nick Osmeña, who was an art connoisseur and gourmet (he had a special cook in his elegant digs at the Pasay Court who could cook delectable *binagoongang adobo*¹⁰ which he served his special guests, one at a time at a candle-lit table for two, with a service, from candlesticks to napkins, whose color motif always matched the shade of the guest's dress), and had his own ideas about what Filipino movies should be like. And, to illustrate his concept, he directed *Magdalena*, starring Yolanda Marquez, an elegant, svelte and beautiful mestiza who lived with her aristocratic and charming mother in a Spanish-styled house in the San Miguel district. Today, she is better known as Mrs. Mary Prieto, the socialite.

Magdalena was as close to an art film as one could get at in those days. Osmeña's directorial style leaned heavily on subtle suggestions to develop a story and delineate a cha-

Avellana's contemporaries. Left: Ramon Estella's *Alias Sakim* starred Leopoldo Salcedo and Anita Linda, then at the height of their popularity. Right: Salcedo also starred with newcomer Yolanda Marquez in Nick Osmeña's *Magdalena*.

racter, and employed a delicate editing rhythm that resulted in a deft portrayal of Magdalena that was bolstered immensely by Ms. Marquez's sensitive and finely restrained acting. She won the best actress award from a jury of journalists that year, 1936.

Another personality, well-known in city politics and a student leader in his U.P. days, whom CPR enlisted to direct films was Hermenegildo Atienza, who directed *Hatinggabi*. Another was Ramon A. Estella, son of the famous Filipino composer of *Ang Maya*, Jose Estella. Ramon made two of the best films for Philippine Films: a nationally relevant movie about landlords and tenants, *Buenavista*, with President Quezon's social justice program (he expropriated the Buenavista Estate and distributed the land, after parcelling it, to the tenants of the hacienda) as theme; and *Huling Habilin*, the dramatic story of a tortured love affair rich in visual imagery and affecting in its dark and unearthly mood.

Both films starred Rosa del Rosario, the country's most accomplished actress, with Angel Esmeralda (brother of Gerry de Leon, Conrado Conde, and Tito Arevalo, and father of Jay Ilagan)¹¹ as her leading man in *Buenavista* and Leopoldo Salcedo in *Huling Habilin*. Mike Velarde Jr., who years later wrote the popular love song, *Dahil sa Iyo*, was commissioned to compose the theme music for *Buenavista*, and the result was a tender and haunting melody that is considered by many today as the best of Velarde's music.

Another director, this time recruited from the vaudeville stage where he was a prominent impresario, was Enrique H. Davila, Sr. He directed the film version of the famous zarzuela by Severino (Lola Basiang) Reyes,¹² *Walang Sugat*, with Rosa del Rosario as Julia and Leopoldo Salcedo as Kapitan Tenong. The pre-recorded voices of professional singers were utilized for the synchronized playback of the musical numbers, a common practice in the local film industry, even for a film that was principally a musical production in which a more viable rule would be to cast actors and actresses with vocal talents. If one were to venture a thought, this practice may be considered symptomatic of the inability of some film-makers to understand the significance of reality in films and of their propensity to carry the meaning of make-believe to a ludicrous and absurd extent.

A young studio secretary, Guillermo (Billy) Icasiano, was discovered by Davila, who was appointed production manager aside from being director, as a good although timid script-writer as well as a potential film director whose

obsession was to make a movie of a popular *Litwayway*¹³ serialized novel, *Kalapating Puti*. He was given the break that he could not get during the time of the pioneering American film producers. *Kalapating Puti*, despite the fact that it ran for over four hours in screening time, because of Icasiano's fear that the public would be resentful if they should find something in the novel missing in the movie, became one of the biggest movie hits before the war. This clearly illustrates the condition of Filipino movies at the time, when film-makers never knew about "telescoping" devices like a series of dissolves or a split frame, and movie audiences were compelled to keep pace with the slow, dull tempo of unschooled film-makers.

Araneta and Romulo also sought to improve the social standing of movie stars by searching for new faces among college graduates, beauty queens, and socialites. Araneta wanted the stars to have a measure of class and acquire glamour, possibly even social prestige to offset the prevailing public prejudice against movie stars whose image as a whole was not helped one whit by the fact that most of them came from the vaudeville stage and the bit players were moonshiners from the dance-halls of the Sta. Ana Cabaret, advertised as the biggest in the world. (Not that the vaudeville shows were something to be despised. They were entertaining variety shows, a potpourri of song numbers, dance ensembles, comedy skits, and sometimes illusionist acts.)

There were also excerpts from operatic arias and, occasionally, dramatic presentations. There was no indecent costuming, much less nudity although, when Gypsy Rose Lee appeared in a movie and her act became well-known, a bit of strip-teasing was sometimes performed, but then this form of entertainment was notorious more for its suggestion than for what it revealed and its main appeal really stemmed from the kind of imagination that audiences brought to the theater with them.

The new recruits to the cinema included Amparo Karagdag, an erstwhile carnival beauty queen, Norma Blancaflor, a sweet-faced campus beauty, Ely Ramos, an impeccably dressed and quite intelligent member of the Zulueta family of Iloilo, Sigrid von Giese, who studied at the Assumption College¹⁴ with an ancestry from the German nobility on her father's side and who was later, after the war, renamed Paraluman: a beautiful teenager with soulful eyes and halting Tagalog.

Araneta also started a battle royal with the Vera family

of Sampaguita Pictures by ensnaring with higher salaries the two biggest box-office stars of the day, Rogelio de la Rosa and Carmen Rosales, along with the self-styled "Cecil B. de Mille of the Philippines", director Carlos Vander Tolosa. The feud between the Araneta group and the Vera contingent benefited the movie people, particularly the actors and actresses as well as the directors and technicians for now, the other studios were compelled to match the sugar money proffered by the Philippine Films group that included, aside from Araneta, the industrialist and finance specialist, Placido L. Mapa, and other Visayan *hacenderos*.¹⁵

Whereas movie stars rode the *auto-calesas*¹⁶ and the *tranzias*¹⁷ before Araneta came into the picture, now they could afford to own a car with their average salary of ₱3,000.00 per picture, compared to the ₱750.00 to ₱1,000.00 that they used to earn. Aside from the per-picture fee, they were allowed expense accounts released on weekly basis, to permit them to dress better and be seen in select places, such as Araneta's newly built theater-restaurant, the Casa Mañana, on the site where the Legazpi Towers stands today on Roxas Boulevard. Don Amado imported American and European stage headliners, including the first roller skates derby in the Philippines, to perform at his swanky Casa Mañana.

To be sure, he appreciated the value of what is called by financial and management technocrats today as the leisure-and-entertainment commodities and he was quite liberal in putting up capital for his projects.

This was the atmosphere within which Avellana found himself as a director, a neophyte who was aware that to succeed he had to learn the language of the film past.

Before *Sakay* Filipino movies were shot with an eye-level camera. It was in Avellana's first film that the movie camera truly moved in what may be called an organic direction, not just to pan or to track, but to tilt up or tilt down in accordance with a point-of-view, a kind of visual rhythm that was best illustrated in his scene in front of the giant Crucifixion.

Asked what was the aesthetic principle that governed the shot, he says: "Briefly, I was tutored by cameraman William 'Pop' Jansen on the possibilities of a Mitchell 35. I would describe the effect that I wanted to show on the screen, and he would give me the technical term for it, things like pan, tilt, track, dolly-in for a close-up, pull out for a medium shot or a two-shot, or estab-

lishing shots. These pictures were in my head as I worked on the script. Pop made me look good in front of the old hands in the studio as I called out each set-up in proper nomenclature. But I had to have the image first — and frankly I was not aware that the Filipino pictures up to that time were not using the camera at all, except as a straight picture frame."

Indeed, there were two kinds of camera tripods, a high one and a low one. There was also the high-hat, which was not a tripod in the strict sense, but which could be used for mounting the movie camera at close-to-ground level. These tripods and mounts were used simply to achieve a straight picture frame, and not establish a point-of-view, create a psychological attitude, or induce an emotional value.

Avellana explains: "The application of stage effects, in matters of massing, balance, focal points, dramatic stress in movies was my guiding principle. I wanted a scene done a certain way, paced at a certain rhythm, and that's what I asked for from my players. Dramaturgy is a background that cannot be overlooked by the film-maker.

"Regarding that shot of the icon of the Crucifixion in *Sakay*, aesthetics and the desire to catch a startling effect, I suppose, made me tear up part of the second floor of the Baras convent so I could shoot downwards with the head and chest of the Crucified Christ in the foreground and the upraised faces of Leopoldo Salcedo (as a PC¹⁸ officer) and Pedro Faustino (as a parish priest) looking up."

The shot, dynamic in composition, evocative ideologically and empathic emotionally, was typical of *Sakay*, revolutionizing the techniques of film narration, liberating the film-maker from a staid eye-level camera angle, rendering a point-of-view that was subjective or omniscient as the director wished, and producing a film of such great power and ineffable beauty that some people today, including myself, consider *Sakay* the best film Avellana has ever made. But then I'm looking back at *Sakay* with nostalgia. And since it was in nitrate film stock, a combustible compound, no copy or print of it has survived. And it is a pity, because definitely *Sakay* is a milestone in the development of the Filipino film as an art form.

The film is about Macario Sakay, a Filipino soldier who went underground to make guerrilla sorties against the Americans and their Filipino collaborators even after General Miguel Malvar¹⁹ surrendered to the American authorities in April 1902. Because of his continued resistance and guerilla



attacks against the American supply lines, Sakay inspired a brave defiance among the people, keeping them from cooperating with the American occupation forces. He was declared a bandit with a price on his head for his capture dead or alive. To seek and destroy Sakay and his so-called bandit band, the Americans organized the nucleus of the Philippine Constabulary, thus making Filipinos fight their fellow countrymen.

The pursuit of Sakay (Salvador Zaragoza) by a young PC officer (Salcedo), and the conflicting loyalties and interests, both national and personal, behind the pursuit, along with the criss-crossing emotional stresses in a life-and-death struggle, provided Avellana, who collaborated on the script with his wife, with a dramatically rich and thematically explosive material to develop on film.

He had an entire village built in a vacant lot adjacent



Leopoldo Salcedo in a rare still from Avellana's first film *Sakay*. Made in 1936 for Philippine Films, it launched one of the most remarkable directorial careers in Philippine cinema.

to the studio for *Sakay*, only to burn it afterwards.

Remembering the set, Avellana recounts: "I asked that it be built so I could burn it down, because the devastation wrought by the outlaws of Sakay was a high point of the story, and I had to have special close-ups for the intimate shots of terror and panic. While I needed the full shot of an entire village for the grand conflagration, I needed a town that I could control. I think it cost about ₱15,000 which was practically the cost of one entire movie production at the time — since parlor plots were going for a total of about ₱18,000. Eighteen thousand — total cost. And here I was, burning a town for 15-thousand. I think *Sakay* cost ₱63,000. That put it in the category of a super-production. Admittedly, a hell of a way to launch a career. But it did mine very well, I must admit."

With *Sakay* Avellana symbolized the death of Filipino

resistance to the new foreign overlord, the American. If it rose again out of the ashes like the proverbial phoenix, it did so at another time several decades later, against another foreign conqueror, with the Filipino, as suggested by Salcedo's PC officer, fighting not just side by side with the American but also for him. But that is another story . . .

"Miniatures?" Avellana says, referring to the Philippine village set that he razed to the ground for his film. "I had two of them, for that town. It was not a matter of being satisfied with the miniatures. But to make the scene particularly exciting and realistic, one has to intercut between actual live scenes and miniatures."

Sakay, indeed, set the tone for Avellana's career in films. It was chosen as the best picture by a jury of journalists that year, 1936. But perhaps more rewarding than any trophies and critical reviews that it received was the ungrudging praise the people in the industry heaped on the picture. Avellana's rivals, the directors who had been working long in the industry, openly recognized the fresh talent, the depth of filmic knowledge, the innovative cinema that the young director displayed in his first work. They knew, deep in their hearts, that a new standard of quality had been set. The other directors at Philippine Films watched his "shootings"²⁰ and joined the previews of his rushes. Their attitude towards Avellana was a mixture of awe and rue. Avellana, on the other hand, enjoyed all the attention paid him. Perhaps the actor in him made him play up to his audience at the sidelines, drawing inspiration from their curiosity and interest.

Avellana's creativity kept up as the years rolled by and he made other pictures — and won more awards, not only from local jurors but at international film festivals as well. He won a citation from the Bilbao Film Festival with his documentary film, *El Legado*, in 1960. The following year, he entered the Bilbao competition again, this time with *La Campana de Baler*, which is about how a Spanish garrison, besieged by a company of Filipino soldiers that included Manuel L. Quezon²¹ as a young officer, held a young woman captive inside the Baler church in their desperate negotiations for their freedom. The young woman was Maria Aurora Aragon who later became Mrs. Quezon. Based on a true historical event before the turn of the century when the Filipinos were battling against the American interventionists, *La Campana de Baler* was entered as a documentary, a re-enacted documentary with the incidents depicted in it filmed on the actual sites where they happened, and

won the much-coveted Conde de Foxa Award.

Avellana has won other awards and citations, including the best documentary film award in the Cambodian Film Festival in 1969 for *The Survivor*. His movie about the Huk movement,²² *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay*, won the FAMAS²³ awards for Best Picture and Best Direction in 1953. The Filipino Film Academy has also given him International Prestige Awards for the honors garnered abroad by *Anak-Dalita*, *Badjao*, *El Legado* and *La Campana de Baler*.

Badjao enjoyed invitational exhibitions at the Vancouver Film Festival in 1961, at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1962, and at the Coronado Film Festival in 1963; a distinctive achievement when one considers the fact that only films which have met a universal standard of merit can ever be invited to such festivals for art films.

Another Avellana film, *No Way Out*, was exhibited at the San Francisco Film Festival in 1963. It should be put on record that Avellana was the first Filipino film-maker to have his picture shown at the Cannes Film Festival. This occurred several years ago with his film *Kandelerong Pilak*.

His film adaptation of Nick Joaquin's *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*²⁴ and his Asian Film Festival Grand Prix awardee, *Anak-Dalita* have been exhibited on two different occasions at the Frankfurt Film Festival — also long before any other Filipino film.

Avellana has the distinction of having directed feature movies for prestigious foreign companies: *Sergeant Hasan*, filmed in Singapore for the Shaw Brothers, considered the biggest film production company in the world today; *Destination Vietnam*, filmed in Saigon in 1969 for Universal International, and *The Evil Within*, filmed in Bombay in 1970 for 20th-Century Fox.

All the Philippine presidents, starting with President Elpidio Quirino, have presented him with citations for his work in films and theater . . . In 1976, Avellana was named a National Artist for Theater and Film, the highest honor a Filipino artist can aspire for, with a lifetime emolument and an assured niche in the official art history of the country.

MY WORK AND MYSELF

by Eddie Romero

. . . When I began working in Filipino films as a fledgling writer still in my mid-teens over 40 years ago, the American model was at the zenith of its influence, and the height of the Filipino film-maker's ambition was not to be able to articulate a personal view of individual and social life but to become the best imitator of John Ford or Frank Capra. No later than three or four months after a especially popular American film was shown in Manila, a thinly-disguised domestic version of it was bound to appear. The imitations tended to capture the worst elements of the copied film readily enough, while remaining virtually oblivious to its subtler qualities. Yet again, even then, a number of Filipino directors, notably Carlos Vander Tolosa, Joaquin Pardo de Tavera, Ramon Estella, the Silos brothers, Octavio and Manuel, and the young Lamberto Avellana were fashioning highly personal directorial styles, the forerunners of a general approach to film and film-making that would characterize much of the output of our industry, not necessarily to its misfortune. For art refuses to be judged by its origins. It can as readily be realized out of imitation as out of creative inspiration.

The strongest influence in my development as a film-maker was a man whose professional convictions, oddly enough, turned out to be almost all diametrically opposed to the ones I was destined to develop. This did not prevent me from admiring him as a film-maker, or caring for him very much as a human being. His name was Gerardo de Leon, and to me, he was the epitome of the imitator who is also a brilliant innovator, the dazzlingly inventive sentimentalist, the journeyman genius, and paradoxically, the first truly original Filipino film-maker. . . In 1941 on the strength of a magazine story of mine that he had chanced to read, he hired me sight unseen, over the telephone, to write a screenplay for him. To my eternal gratitude, he showed not the slightest dismay on discovering that I had been wearing long pants for only a

Excerpted from a paper delivered by the author at the festival-symposium on Southeast Asian films held in Tokyo Oct. 15-28, 1982 under the auspices of the Japan Foundation.



Eddie Romero on location during the shooting of *Agila*, 1981.

couple of years. I myself had had a somewhat unusual gestation as a writer. I had become one by simply falling into writing. At sixteen I had had a brace of short stories published in national magazines and written countless features and articles for them. Yet I had in fact pitifully small knowledge of literature — I thought P.G. Wodehouse was the greatest writer who ever lived (subsequent events over four decades have not lowered him too far in my estimation). On my first assignment, Gerry — that was what we called him — told me that all he expected of me was a good storyline with a couple of surprises in it, a hero or heroine that people could admire and cheer, a villain that they could hate, a strong climax (three or four if possible) and a bang-up finale; the plot had to unfold continuously, not stop for anything, there should be scenes that made people laugh, or cry, hold them spellbound, not at the same time, of course. It was a simpler world, and we were to be happy jugglers of fate. These were specifications that I was delighted to meet, for they demanded no more than I was capable, at age seventeen, of meeting. Wodehouse could not have demanded more. I was asked to write a scenario about a rural school teacher, to be played by

one of the country's most popular actresses at the time. I drafted the outline of a drama infused I thought, with passion in the style of James Hilton. Gerry loved it; our producer did not. I was instructed to write, instead, a comedy with some tragic sidelights. With the dauntless enthusiasm of my seventeen years, I did. The film that Gerry made out of my script did not savage it too severely, and it was an enormous popular success. This confirmed the validity of the formula that Gerry had enunciated, and I was promptly commissioned to write another screenplay for him, this time a farce. While the project was in production, the Pacific War or the Second World War as we call it, broke out.

I wish it would be truthful to say that I grew up into manhood in the next three years, but the fact is, I am not sure that this is so . . . I had lost no one truly dear to me, and I came out of it without any festering psychic or physical wounds that I was aware of; my political convictions were about as puerile as they had been before, my view of human nature only a few shades less romantic. In the war years I had discovered great literature, I had done more reading in the three years that had passed than I had ever done before or was to do in any comparable period later on. I had had the usual daydreams about fame through artistic achievement, but I was not at this time nurturing earnest illusions about my own worth or capabilities as a serious artist. I saw myself as a better-than-competent hack, but I did hope to turn out to be something better. I returned to my journalistic calling for several months, until the paper I was working on failed, and Gerry de Leon actively re-entered my life. He had continued to work in films during the war, and had made, among other things, two films in association with the eminent Japanese director Abe Yutaka, whom he greatly admired as an artist and as a man. I wrote three more screenplays for him, one of which obtained a great deal of favorable critical attention. Again it was Gerry who stimulated my ambitions in this alien field of endeavor, and it was he who implied that my work was increasingly tending to suggest certain attitudes and insights that only I could best realize as director. To my protests that I knew nought of film direction, he replied that under prevailing circumstances, that was not as important as it might seem. He insisted that I be present at filming sessions and after some months of this, took to disappearing from sets and locations, leaving me behind to finish the scenes in progress. I ended up shooting about half of the third post-war script I wrote for him. Shortly

after that I was awarded my first directorial assignment. There was another difficulty that made my professional limitations seem minor by comparison, and that was the fact that hailing as I did from one of the Visayan islands in the center of our archipelago I did not speak more than a few words of Tagalog, now called Pilipino, the language spoken in the films I was making. I wrote my scripts in English, trusted my assistants for the accuracy and dramatic effectiveness of their translations, and directed by ear. Fortunately there had been some precedent for this particular anomaly, as a number of foreigners, notably Americans, had directed Filipino films before me, and most of the people in the industry did speak English. But I was probably the first native to fall into such an embarrassing predicament. It was a great lark. I don't imagine that too many people have had the good fortune to be paid well for learning a trade while practising it. My first film proved to be a substantial commercial success. I was twenty-two, and I had not learned very much, but I was happy in my work. Perhaps there is no better way to start.

I made seven films in two years. I got married while making the third of these. While I was making the seventh, my father was appointed Minister to the Court of St. James in London, and he suggested I take a little time off to take stock of myself, find out if I really wanted to stay in the line of work I had chosen, and, at worst, get to learn how to do it better. I seized at the opportunity, and I took my wife and three-month-old-son with me to Europe for a year. 't was perhaps the most stimulating year of my life. It opened my eyes to the myriad complexities and possibilities of the medium of film, to past and prevailing theories of film and film-making, to masterpieces and masters that I had never heard of before — Eisenstein, Rene Clair, Jean Renoir, de Sica, Pabst, Max Ophuls, Carl Dreyer, to name only a few. I borrowed prints of famous films and went over every shot, sometimes frame by frame. I read dozens of books on film-making, had long and memorable conversations with many notable film critics. I was able to meet and converse with some of the outstanding film-makers of the day, among them, David Lean, Therold Dickerson, Roberto Rossellini, Vincente Minnelli, and watch them at work.

I returned to the Philippines brimming over with new ideas; I was on the verge of becoming a qualified film director, and I could hardly wait to apply what I had learned, at least in matters of film techniques, in the use of the camera,

Ganito Kami Noon... Paano Kayo Ngayon?, a picaresque tale set during the Philippine Revolution, marked Romero's return to Tagalog movies after years spent directing Hollywood B-movies. *Ganito* was adjudged Best Picture at the 1976 Metropolitan Manila Film Festival.



editing, and so forth. My friend and mentor Gerry de Leon avidly milked me for whatever ideas and information he considered useful, and as time passed, I learned something about him that I had not had the necessary background to notice before, and that was, that for all my growing intellectual pretensions, he was a much more fully realized artist than I was or would ever be. He knew things by heart that I had to learn by painful trial and error. Read and think as hard as I might, unsophisticated and ingenuous as I might consider his ideas and attitudes about life and society to be, he knew everything about film-making that he needed to know, and he used everything he knew to convey a style and attitude, to create a world that was entirely his own. To me, at least, almost every film he made was a marvel of total mobilization of his personal resources. He was quite content — more content than I, anyway — to work with blatantly derivative dramatic material because his primary concern was with style, and he made it all work brilliantly. Having devoted so much effort and study to acquire knowledge relative to technique and style, I was slowly coming to the conclusion that my essential concern was with content; essentially, I was still a writer, and to make things worse, beyond a certain facility for writing dialogue, even witty dialogue, in fact I did not know what I wanted to say. I felt that I wanted to

make films that related to contemporary situations, attitudes and values, yet I did not really know how I felt about them. I was an observer, and perhaps I could have developed some valid artistry out of that, but I was too much of a romantic to settle for that.

I became increasingly impatient with the films I was making. It seemed to me that I was doing two or three stories over and over again, adding nothing new to the effort as I went on repeating myself. There wasn't enough money, and therefore not enough time, to do better. I became one of the first independent director-producers, taking on more horrendous business and professional burdens than I had ever imagined, receiving perhaps substantially more recompense in terms of personal satisfaction, but a great deal less in terms of money. The economy of the business, I felt, was working against me, pushing me even closer to disaster. When I first started to direct films, soon after the World War II, Filipino films were generally recognized to be the best in Southeast Asia. Only less than a decade later, this reputation was becoming a thing of the past. It seemed to me that Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Hongkong, Taipei, Thailand were making better and better films even as our own industry continued to slide downhill. I began to dream about making modest films, using some American acting talent, for Ameri-



Vic Vargas and Roland Dantes slug it out in Eddie Romero's *Banta ng Kahapon*, a Tagalog movie done in the best film noir tradition.

can distribution. My hope was that even if I would be obliged to continue trafficking in stereotyped product, at least there would be more time and money to work with, a greater opportunity offered thereby to polish what skills I had. Perhaps I was still a willing victim of old colonialist myths, and secretly longed to be part of the mainstream of American culture, to be in fact an American. I would have denied it then, and am not sure this is untrue even now. That was at once the boon and the bane of the predominant influence of America in the evolution of our young and impressionable national culture.

As often befalls relentless dreamers, opportunities came my way and I made eager use of them. In the course of two decades, starting in 1956, I made over 20 American films, most of them of the low-budget exploitation variety. I continued to make occasional Filipino films, and on these occasions, I made stronger efforts to compose a definition of myself on film. Japanese films began, better late than never, to influence my work, I was impressed by Mizoguchi's mastery and discipline, I was awed speechless by the scope and grandeur of Kurozawa, and I fell in love with the world of Ozu, for here was an artist who, with the barest modicum of perceptible technique, so movingly celebrated mankind's most cherished illusions about itself with such gentle simplicity, that one longed with all one's heart that it was all true. Some time in the latter seventies, after spending over a year working in an administrative capacity on Francis Coppola's production *Apocalypse Now*, I came to another turning point in my life. I decided that I was as tired of making slick exploitation films for the American market as I had been of making Victorian melodramas and slapstick farces for the domestic Filipino market twenty years before. I persuaded myself that I was now capable of making personal films that would be acceptable to a mass audience, and that realization of at least certain aspects of artistic achievement was possible, even within the limitations within which Filipino films continued to be made.

The film that the Japan Foundation has so kindly chosen for exhibition in this festival, (*Ganito Kami Noon . . .*) was the first of those efforts, I have since made a half-dozen more films treating of different subjects but inspired by similar aspirations, with varying degrees of success. My latest picture involves Filipino and American characters, and it has a dialogue track that is about half in English and half in Pilipino.¹ It is partly an effort to depict the personal con-

sequences of a confrontation of two essentially conflicting cultures, a situation that is not uncommon in my country.

At this point, it might be appropriate for me at this time to say something about my sentiments on the medium of film. Film, at least in the geographic areas in which I have worked, is a commercial medium . . . It would be presumptuous to claim that film is always art. It would not be incorrect to say, however, that the medium of film offers the gifted artist of our times a matchless vocabulary of expression; for no other form of art, in my estimation, can rival its richness, its subtlety, its complexity. I cannot conceive of a feeling, an insight, or even an entire philosophy that cannot be expressed in film. This is why the medium has attracted and fascinated so many of the most creative minds of our day. I believe that to such people the challenge of film, considering the circumstances in which it exists, lies in discovering ways of edifying and even inspiring while entertaining, ways of expressing complex feelings and insights comprehensibly across a wide cultural spectrum. Just as the great masters of music, drama and the other arts have succeeded in realizing this through the generations of human history, it can be done, and it is being done in film, and with much wider and more immediate impact, for film teaches far more people and addresses them far more intimately than any medium of art ever did. Herein lies what I believe to be the well-spring of the dedicated film-maker's aspirations

For my part, I am today primarily interested in the exploration of individual characters and in the social, cultural and even historical consequences of the playing out of their hopes and fears in personal and social relationships. I do not believe in heroes and villains, or in people as personifications of unadulterated virtues or vices. I believe that conflict is the essence of life, that no defeat or victory is ever complete, and that fulfillment comes out of reconciliation rather than out of mastery. It is in such a world that the characters who people my films live. It may not be the truth, but it is, so far, the best that I can do.

LINO BROCKA:
Dramatic Sense, Documentary Aspirations

by Rafael Ma. Guerrero

More than any of his peers, Lino Brocka exemplifies the notion of the director as a superstar. Other film-makers may have their own distinction and following — either as critical or commercial successes — but Brocka alone is as much a household word as the reigning idols of the local screen. The esteem in which he is held is perhaps best ascribed not to an acknowledged superiority as a film artist, but rather to the sum of his efforts, artistic and otherwise, toward that oft-implored and much-abused objective — the upliftment of Philippine cinema. To begin with, he spearheaded the entry early in the decade of new talents into the industry; and among that batch of recruits, he was the quickest to establish himself comfortably within the prevailing system and standards of local movie-making. Even as others were still grappling with their first feature, Brocka was well into his fourth. This ready success was, no doubt, hastily interpreted by some as a sign of compromised ideals; but if Brocka's initial body of work — nine films in three years — rarely transcended the built-in, formulaic mediocrity of the commercial cinema, apparently it was also comparatively worthier to be cited for awards at the annual Manila Film Festival, by the Catholic Council for Mass Media (CCMM), and by the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences (FAMAS). Thus, early on, Brocka consolidated in effect a position of tactical significance: he had become one with the industry, but he had also risen above its limitations.

Wanted: Perfect Mother largely accommodated LEA's concept of a family picture. But by *Santiago*, the war epic that was his second film, Brocka already reveals a conscious if subdued attempt to ameliorate areas of film-making within his disposition. Hence, even as he indulges the stale heroics of Fernando Poe Jr.'s screen persona in *Santiago*, he surrounds his star with the laudable realism of his bit players, heretofore unknowns Mario O'Hara, Lorli Villanueva, Joonee Gamboa and Angie Ferro, all summoned from the waiting

roster of the PETA-Kalinangan Ensemble.¹ This ready recourse to the trained ranks of a repertory group was to serve Brocka in good stead, leaving its mark in the fact that the smallest roles in his films, unlike in most Tagalog movies, are always fully realized.

Santiago also marked Brocka's emergence as a conscientious star-maker, a reputation he alone enjoys among today's name directors. Hilda Koronel was a 14-year-old LEA discovery with no acting experience behind her when tapped for a role in *Santiago*. Against the objections of their home studio, Brocka shrewdly casted her as a deaf-mute, a decision which paid off handsomely with a FAMAS Best Supporting Actress Award for Koronel. Subsequently, she was to appear in six more of Brocka's first nine films, a succession of roles largely undistinguished except as a kind of training ground for the eager, young star. Declaring a moratorium on films in late 1972, Brocka returned to television, developing the dramatic anthology *Hilda* around the emergent sensibilities of his actress-protégée. Their collaboration was to reach its highest point four years later with the release of *Insiang*, the film that took both Brocka and Koronel to the prestigious Cannes Film Festival and to the brink of international recognition.

Also introduced in *Santiago* was a personable teenager named Jay Ilagan, who was to be the first in a line of male discoveries by Brocka. Even then, the novice director was already aware that the industry needed new faces, not just handsome ones, but an altogether different breed of male actors who could play varied roles and moreover lose their identities in each characterization. Talented actresses the industry had a surfeit of; only the dearth of sensible female roles had prematurely driven the likes of Lolita Rodriguez and Charito Solis to semi-retirement. With actors, however, the opposite was true. What challenging roles were available invariably ended up being modified to fit the calcified *machismo* of an established actor's screen personality. Ronnie Poe's inability in *Santiago* to shed off the contained masculinity of his familiar image as a fearless paladin of justice was to underscore this fact. Consequently, Brocka was to devote his energies disproportionately to the development of young male leads.

Apart from Koronel, the only other actress Brocka has counted on regularly is Lolita Rodriguez, but she had been a Sampaguita star for some 15 years before appearing in Brocka's *Tubog sa Ginto*. On the other hand, a number of



Hilda Koronel with Ruel Vernal and Mona Lisa in Lino Brocka's *Insiang*, 1976, which was subsequently shown at the Director's Fortnight at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival.

today's most popular male stars are actors who have passed through Brocka's tutelage. Ironically, Ilagan, for whom Brocka had originally intended the lead roles in *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* and *Maynila, sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, did not fulfill the director's expectations. A chronic weight problem was to plague the young actor and in his stead, Brocka was to successively field two unknowns — Christopher de Leon (*Tinimbang*) and Bembol Roco (*Maynila*). Despite their inexperience, both were to give award-winning performances the first time around — ample proof of Brocka's uncanny instinct for star-material and sure handling of acting talent. Lately, Brocka has been building up Phillip Salvador, another relative unknown whom he has styled as a male sex symbol. Whether the regimen Brocka has set for him — a crash course in theater, a stage appearance, and a series of ably assisted secondary roles — will work the same alchemy it did for de Leon and Roco remains to be seen.

Less publicized but equally important as well are Brocka's efforts toward the development of a more cognizant and critical audience for Tagalog movies. The public — most especially perhaps that abstract though no less real entity known as the *-bakya crowd* — seems to have always figured in Brocka's attitudes as a director. Indeed the banal

tone of his early *oeuvre* may be attributed to an over-riding concern for the limited sensibilities of the general movie-going public. "The appreciation of the Filipino moviegoer," Brocka has said, "has been formed by the conventions of the *komiks*", a belief reflected in the fact that the majority of his early films (*Wanted*, *Tubog*, *Cadena de Amor*, *Stardoom*, *Villa Miranda*) were based on stories serialized in them.

Originally, the limitations deriving from this popular source-book seem to have challenged Brocka. Omitting the overt religiosity typical of this material was one standard ploy of his; shortening its habitual verbosity was another. More important, deepening the shallow characterizations emerged as a forte, masking the sometimes irreversible incongruities of these serialized plots. The covert homosexual of Eddie Garcia and the materialistic stud of Mario O'Hara in *Tubog* bear this out, as also the jaded playgirl of Lotis Key in *Stardoom*. In this, Brocka's theater background was to be of invaluable assistance, facilitating the invention of telling gestures and character traits by which attitudes and, by extension, psychology, could be defined. This presumes, of course, a careful eye for detail, an early affinity from which Brocka's later interest in documentation seems to have developed. If anything may be said to have brought his first phase as a film-maker to an end, this acquired tendency for the documentary aspects of film is perhaps the likeliest cause. Certainly, *Tinimbang* — a well-observed portrait of small-town life — which opened the second phase of Brocka's career, is markedly different from the ante-bellum feudalism of *Villa Miranda* and the syrupy romanticism of *Cherry Blossoms*, the films preceding his temporary retirement in 1972.

Along with his new cinematic outlook, Brocka appears to have realized as well the need for a more informed and discriminating audience. For years, as an incentive toward improving the quality of the Filipino cinema, exponents of Tagalog movies have encouraged greater patronage of local films by the educated minority who compose the so-called A and B audience. The annual city-based festivals at Manila, Olongapo and elsewhere — accompanied by the slogan "*Tangkilikin ang Pelikulang Pilipino*"² — was one response in this direction. Brocka was to take a campaign trail other than the network of theater chains; he was to carry his crusade to the lecture circuit of the city's colleges and schools, a route he would retrace before the release of

Maynila. Now this is not as quixotic a strategy as it may first appear. Manila, among Asian capitals, has one of the highest literacy rates, along with a student population of about a million and a half. Obviously, even a small fraction of this potential moviegoing public could spell the difference between success or disaster at the box-office. This was then not an altogether selfless endeavor, but rather a way, albeit untried and unorthodox, of publicizing *Tinimbang*, a film of which Brocka was not only the director, but also partly its producer. Together with some actor-friends and business associates, he had formed Cine Manila, an independent production outfit. Not unexpectedly, everything hinged on their first venture.

Tinimbang's popularity was unprecedented, not because it was overwhelming, but rather because for the first time in Philippine movie history a film achieved that happy coincidence of being both a critical and commercial success. To be sure, there had been other well-made commercial hits in the past, but what distinguished *Tinimbang* as a turning point was that it was a thoroughly non-commercial risk on several counts. Lolita Rodriguez and Eddie Garcia, who headed its cast, were name stars, but by no means were they box-office draws; Christopher de Leon, whom the film introduced in its lead role, was a complete unknown; its subject, the coming into manhood of its adolescent hero against the backdrop of small-town intolerance, was hardly a popular theme. Still, despite these drawbacks, *Tinimbang* overcame a slow start at the box-office to become the sleeper of 1974 and the most widely praised film in the first half of the decade. Endorsements were quick to come from writers, educators, religious, articulate students, concerned citizens — from precisely a representative cross-section of the very public Brocka had courted.

As may be expected, *Tinimbang's* accomplishment as a breakthrough has obscured the realistic appraisal of its worth as a cinematic work. While it is certainly a deeply felt film, perhaps even autobiographical in certain respects, it also partakes of the sensational and the sentimental to an uncommon degree. Urination, vomit, an aborted fetus are details which excite Brocka's morbid fascination, almost as if they are indicative of a sensual sophistication. Even more pronounced is the film's unabashed sentimentality — perhaps a concession to the larger soap-opera-oriented public who thrive on fictive adversities. As such, *Tinimbang* has, not one, but two representative social outcasts — the

mentally deranged Kuala (Lolita Rodriguez) and the leprous Bertong Ketong (Mario O'Hara) — although, obviously, one such character suffices to point out the ostracism and hypocrisy of society. Its protracted climax is similarly flawed, verbalizing the film's moral homily in no uncertain terms and underscoring this, moreover, with the death of both its marginal protagonists.

Tatlo, Dalawa, Isa, the omnibus which followed, is a much more satisfying if eclectic piece of filmmaking, greatly enhanced by the evocative camerawork of Romy Vitug. Only the first episode, a thin narrative about dope addicts undergoing cure at a rehabilitation center, reveals a residual theatricality in its ritualized absorption over a neophyte's grueling initiation. The third episode, based on Orlando Nadres' original teleplay, *Bukas, Madilim, Bukas* — about a spinster's last, vain stab at emotional fulfillment — is particularly memorable, its sepia-toned cinematography capturing the story's mood of genteel decadence. Unfortunately, despite favorable notices, *Tatlo* did not repeat *Tinimbang's* success at the box-office, an indication perhaps of the fact that, after years of priming his public, Brocka's deepening concerns and stylistic growth had begun to outpace the common crowd of moviegoers.

Maynila, arguably Brocka's finest achievement to date, confirmed this quantum leap in sensibility. Uncompromisingly bleak in its outlook, it related Brocka's dramatic sense to his documentary aspirations, engendering a poetic realism that recalled Avellana's classic *Anak-Dalita*.³ In Mike de Leon, Brocka was fortunate to find another sensitive cinematographer (as well also a progressively-minded producer); *Maynila* owes much of its anarchic beauty to his naturalistic lighting and richly saturated images. Equally important is the contribution of scriptwriter Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., who adapted Edgardo Reyes' Tagalog novel. Though he has "emasculated" the novel's proletarian anger — as some purists have decried — del Mundo's treatment nonetheless conveys its desperation and poignancy, enlarging its indictment of urban life in fact with a tacit recognition of the value of communal action. On the whole, *Maynila* represents — as its numerous awards attest — an index of the industry's finest efforts; for while, admittedly, it is not as thematically or stylistically ambitious as other films, it sets creative and technical standards in its correlation of conceptual meaning, pictorial beauty and documentary truth.

The opening frame of *Maynila* is typical of its pithy

imagery. Julio Madiaga (Bembol Roco), the transplanted *provinciano*⁴ in search of his hometown sweetheart in Manila waits outside the *accosoria*⁵ of the Chinese Ah Tek, who has forcibly enslaved her as his common-law wife. As the color gradually bleeds into the scene (the film's credit sequence having been in a stark black-and-white), we see Julio slumped against the squalid wall overlooking the Chinaman's quarters. Overhead, in the frame's right-hand corner, barely within the camera's range of focus, is a palmist's sign with its intriguing come-on looming large. "May problema ka ba?"⁶ it asks; and almost as if in answer, we notice next a hastily scrawled graffiti to Julio's left — the one word: "Makibaka."⁷ Thus, barely a minute into the film, its theme is concretely stated. Indeed, as we learn eventually, the above is really the film's penultimate sequence. Ligaya, Julio's betrothed, has already been killed by Ah Tek and Julio is himself about to avenge her death. The rest of the film is actually a flashback, illustrating through the *via crucis* that characterizes Julio's search its theme — the need for concerted effort in seeking social redress.

Another sequence concerning the death of a construction worker offers a more extended example of the film's expressive range. Early on in his search, Julio finds employ-

Lino Brocka with stars Amy Austria and Phillip Salvador at the Palais du Festival at Cannes during the gala premiere of his film *Jaguar* in 1980.



ment in a construction site where he is exposed to, among other things, the corruption of building foremen. Among his co-workers is Benny, another provincial whose heavy accent and naive ambitions about a singing career occasion much ribbing from Julio and the rest. During a slack in their work, they egg Benny into singing a song. Eagerly, he launches into a local ballad, a *kundiman*, only to be cajoled into singing an English-language song. Good-naturedly, he obliges, shifting to the more familiar strains of "The Impossible Dream" (from *Man of La Mancha*) which, in a sense, is a literal rendition of the contained longing of our *kundimans*, so named after the phrase in the vernacular "*kung hindi man*" (i.e., if it never comes to pass). Carried away by his amateurish performance, Benny steps back with an expansive gesture, slipping on some coiled ropes and plunging to his death several stories down. He dies still clutching the songbook which has been all along the repository of all his dreams and ambitions.

In the novel, Benny's blood, spilled on the gravel, is shoveled and mixed in with fresh concrete, becoming as such a permanent part of the building. The film resists this melodramatic symbolism, choosing instead to enlarge on Benny's death by lingering on the soiled cover of the discarded songbook as it quickly gets buried into the dust and debris of the building floor. Significantly, on the cover is a picture of Nora Aunor⁸, our very own native-born Horatio Alger, who as such represents for Benny and his kind the wish-fulfillment of all their dreams and aspirations. Thus, wordlessly, the film deepens an already tragic event, mourning in so doing a much greater and universal loss: the death of our dreams, the demise of the spirit.

Conceivably, Julio Madiaga and Ligaya Paraiso's plight comes naturally as a subject for Brocka. If anything, his work has shown a pronounced affinity with various forms of oppression; and indeed, ever since resuming his career with *Tinimbang*, Brocka has elaborated on a native victimology suffused with bitterness and moral doubt. More than anything else, Brocka's protagonists are proto-typical victims not so much acting out their particular destinies as being acted upon by fate and circumstance. Early examples are the war evacuees of *Santiago*; *Tubog sa Ginto*'s blackmailed homosexual, victimized by his own covert needs as well as by the overt demands of family and society; the young man on the make in *Stardoom*, alienated and finally killed by his own success. From the start, orphans or at least children deprived of a

normal daily life have figured prominently in Brocka's repertoire. *Wanted: Perfect Mother's* title is self-explanatory. *Lumuha Pati ang mga Anghel*, about a ragtag band of street urchins fending for themselves, was a homage to Olive la Torre's *Roberta*, the fifties' classic about a much-abused child heroine. In much the same vein, the youthful drug addict and the G.I. baby of *Tatlo, Dalawa, Isa's* first two episodes, the boy in search of his mother in *Lunes, Martes . . .*, Niño Muhlach in *Tahan Na, Empoy, Tahan* and *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay* are all variations on this theme. Perhaps, its most grotesque version is to be found in "Bukas, Madilim, Bukas," *Tatlo's* third episode, in which a spinster is closeted into a life of filial servitude by a domineering parent.

Grown-ups are no less vulnerable in Brocka's films. The outcasts Kuala and Bertong Ketong represent extreme instances, as do also the showgirls of *Lunes, Martes . . .*, one and all, blatant losers mired in a disreputable profession. Among Brocka's *dramatis personae*, mothers — it appears — are the most prone to suffer, as evidenced by the sex-starved wife in *Tubog*; the rejected stage mother in *Star-doom*; the illiterate, slum woman in *Tatlo* who stands to lose her grown-up daughter to the child's American father; the has-been actress of *Lunes, Martes . . .*, burying in anonymity the failings of career and motherhood; the timid widow in *Empoy*, bullied along with her kids by a termagant sister. Even more explicit is Alicia Vergel's predicament in the title role of *Inay* as a retired schoolteacher shuttled from one household to another by her unfeeling brood. In an oblique sense, *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay* also belongs to this same category, although its sympathies extend beyond the bounds of domesticity to encompass the sorry lot of well-meaning homosexuals. The earlier *Insiang*, however, is perhaps the most powerful re-working of Brocka's fixations, bringing together as it does the figures of parent and child as mutual victims of each other's inhumanity.

Brocka's affinity with characters who undergo privations and hardships has often been misconstrued — along with the significance of his lowly settings — as being indicative of proletarian sentiments. His films, however, do not sustain this interpretation. For though his characters are culled chiefly from the masses, their struggles are confined to their own psychological inadequacies rather than to the larger, socio-economic issues of our times. *Maynila* is perhaps the sole exception, but that is owing to its provenance



as a novel of social realism. Indeed, Julio Madiaga, as developed in the film, remains oblivious of or incurably naive about the forms of exploitation which surround him. His sole objective is to recover Ligaya; but being, conversely, ignorant as well of the legal and extra-legal means of redress open to him, he precipitates his own tragic end. The same socially conscious claims have accrued to *Insiang*, especially because of its Tondo⁹ setting. Again it needs pointing out that the film's milieu — while the source of much of its realistic flavor — is not intrinsic to the material. Mario O'Hara's original screenplay resembles, more than anything else, a Jacobean revenge drama, and as such, could be transplanted to any desirable setting without altering the essential conflict of his story.

Brocka's importance lies not in his thematic content whose significance, till now, springs mainly from his own personal psychology. Being the local director most in the limelight, his own orphaned childhood will no doubt bear closer scrutiny toward a more studious interpretation of his work. In itself, the confessional attitude of his films augurs a very interesting development; but of more immediate relevance, perhaps, is their achieved realism, their creation of a *mise en scène* unmistakably Third World and Filipino.

Top left: Alicia Alonzo with child star Niño Muhlach in *Tahan Na, Empoy, Tahan* belongs to a long line of victimized mothers in Brocka's oeuvre.

Top right: Alicia Vergel, shown here with Dindo Fernando and Laurice Guillen, returned to the screen in Lino Brocka's *Inay*, an entry to the 1977 Metropolitan Manila Film Festival.

THE CULT OF THE IMAGE IN LINO BROCKA

by Charles Tesson

Though Lino Brocka made his first film only in 1970, he has already 38 titles to his credit, in addition to a television series and several stage plays. In the Philippines, he has become a veritable one-man film factory, a situation actually of considerable advantage to him. He is able to do films which he considers "quite personal" (these are the films we are seeing, which are somewhat akin to the tip of an iceberg in relation to his body of work) as well as commercial films. The films by Brocka being shown in Nantes are: *Tatlo, Dalawa, Isa* (1974), *Tinimbang Ka, Ngunit Kulang* (1974), *Dungaw* (1975), and *Maynila, sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975).

Tinimbang Ka, Ngunit Kulang. That which is weighed and found wanting in the title of this film refers both to the aborted fetus in the story and to a man's conduct through life as it is evaluated at the last judgment. Along these two extremes, the film unfolds an edifying morality tale. A boy on the edge of manhood rejects his family. In turn, he is drawn to two persons on the fringe of his small-town society — a leper and Kuala, a woman traumatized by an unwanted abortion. He endeavors to bring the two together, gradually replacing his family with a new one, so to speak. He succeeds in this resolve, becoming — as it were — both a "parent" (for having fostered Kuala and the leper's relationship) and a "child" to the pair. In the end, Kuala is pregnant by the leper; and the film, which opens during the Maytime festivities for the Virgin Mary, ends on Christmas Day with a (re)birth.

Between the image of Kuala and the viewer, the boy acts as a necessary go-between. A scene from the film symbolizes this device utilized by Lino Brocka: a boy surfaces out of the water and sees a woman about to dive as though from a height, desirable, but inaccessible; between her and himself, he also sees a person taking her photograph. Always, there is this double transmitter of the image to the viewer: the one

who conjures up the images of the film and the one who looks upon them with desire in the film. The latter, a silent observer, weaves the elements of the story together. The first time the boy finds himself strongly drawn to Kuala (he stares at her silently for a long time), it is in public; she is already on stage, as it were, dancing and creating a spectacle of herself.



Lolita Rodriguez as Kuala and Mario O'Hara as the leper Bertong Ketong, the two social outcasts in Lino Brocka's *Tinimbang Ka, Ngunit Kulang*, 1974.

The Image Cult. Lino Brocka's cinema extends the imagist tendencies of a country whose culture dotes on images. In this regard, he is a great film-maker, one driven by his own passion for images (to make them, to show them, to preserve them), by the provenance of these images (the stars of Philippine cinema), and by a traditional pre-occupation with images (in religious art). Lino Brocka films nothing but images: images that are offered, images that are venerated, corporeal images worthy of adoration, rituals and processions. He films them not just to bring them to light, but to arrange them, to set them in motion within a story held together by an enigma – can one love and desire a female body secretly and be so blinded by it so as not to desire anything but simply its image? *Dung-aw* resolves this question: the presence that is filmed is documented out of desire (it becomes a venerated image); while the woman who has no desire except a narcissistic need to be loved and adored, remains simply an image, a graven idol, a statue. The narrative straddles this tension between a sensual attraction for the physical and its own imagist tendencies (in Brocka, the one is analogous to the other).

Dung-aw, which refers to a trivial operetta sung outdoors,¹ is an epic fresco celebrating the saga of Gabriela Silang, a heroine who led a peasant revolt. The film recounts her exploits, employing an imagery derived from the Western (Joan Crawford in *Johnny Guitar*, Barbara Stanwyck in *Forty Guns*). Almost overlooked among the characters is Don Pablo, a young man who admires her silently. Never taking his eyes off her, he is visibly fascinated by her behavior. This character is more than just the viewer's alter-ego in the story. He is there, not only to provide us with a vantage point, but more importantly to project the enigma of his desire which is the meaning of the stare whereby he "fixes" her, photographs her in his mind's eye, conjuring in so doing the illusion that exists between a body and its image. This is a great theme for cinema: the distancing and the dissolution of a corporeal presence into the content of memory, the remembered image of an absent present.

The ShriII Image. One finds this same dynamism in *Maynila*. A young man from a fishing village comes to the city to look for the woman he loves. She has disappeared and he has completely lost track of her; in the film, she does not exist except as an image recurring out of desire; she is a memory, a mental recollection seen in flashback, the imprint on a



photograph. *Maynila* initially appears to revolve around three principal character types in Philippine society: 1) the romantic lover who is a silent observer in search of his loved one; 2) his friend, a laborer, who rebels against the hardship of his condition; 3) the opportunist, or the practical Filipino – a student who resolutely succeeds in improving his lot. Of the three, it is clear that Brocka, as a director, is interested only in the first. One finds this character in *Dung-aw*, in *Tinimbang*, as well as in *Bona* (in the quiet, sensitive presence of Nora Aunor).

In the course of the young man's odyssey in *Maynila*, the film plunges us into the city with its construction sites, its male and female prostitutes, all of which is magnificently filmed. The camera following the long search by Julio (excellently played by Bembol Roco who is at once wilfully obstinate and also constantly vulnerable), uncovers the tragic, nocturnal underside of city life, a legacy of the *film noir*. His sweetheart's name is Ligaya Paraiso (Happy Paradise) and she is held captive on Misericordia (Mercy) Street. Arranging to meet her in church, he elects instead to take her to a moviehouse where they can speak more freely: the film being screened is Nicholas Ray's *King of Kings* and the scene shown is that of Christ carrying the cross on his ascent to Golgotha. Similarly, the young man's descent to the hell of the city is his own "way of the cross", which comes to a remarkable conclusion with him cornered in a dead-end alley, a cry frozen on his open mouth out of which emerges the image of the vanished woman. Of the four Brocka films seen in Nantes, *Maynila* is undoubtedly the best.

Hilda Koronel as Ligaya Paraiso and Bembol Roco as Julio Madiaga, the ill-starred lovers in Lino Brocka's *Maynila, sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, 1975, the film widely regarded to be Brocka's finest achievement to date.

ISHMAEL BERNAL:
Merging Art and Commercialism

by Mario A. Hermando

Filipino film director Ishmael Bernal made an unlikely first film in 1971, the sort of movie that a director ordinarily would have made late in his career. The film, *Pagdating sa Dulo*, is a comic drama on life in show business, specifically the movies. It is the kind of film that can be made by one who knows the art and business of movie-making, and the kind of life people in it lead.

Surprisingly, the neophyte director of *Pagdating sa Dulo*, like a veteran in the movies, knew his subject inside-out. The film, a biting satire on the local movie scene, is still timely 10 years after it was made. The setting is Manila at the height of the *bomba*¹ craze in the early 70's, when hugely popular, cheap black-and-white softcore and hardcore films were made in a matter of days on a shoestring budget.

The story is about the parallel rise to fame of a porno queen and her man, a movie stud, and their individual destruction. The film-within-a-film may also be taken on various levels — as a love story, a sex melodrama, a *roman à clef*, an exposé of the making of a porno movie, a look at the attitudes, values and ambitions of the people in the movies, and an attack on their materialism, greed and lack of professionalism.

The title may be interpreted as having philosophical implications about the meaning of love and success experienced by the two characters, or simply, suggestive sexual undertones parodying the naughty and crude titles of the *bomba* films of that era.

Essentially, Bernal's 10-year career in the movies is characterized chiefly by attempts to rise above the industry's dismal conditions, as depicted in the film, raise the level of his audience and meet halfway the commercialistic demands of the industry.

Apparently, before joining the movies, Bernal had familiarized himself with the problems of film-making in the Philippines. For some technical and theoretical knowledge

of film, he went to the reputable Film Institute of Poona, India, as a Colombo Plan scholar. His academic background includes an A.B. degree in English from the University of the Philippines and post-graduate studies in French literature at a university in France.

As expected, he came back to the Philippines only to realize that its film industry was as under-developed (or developing) as the country. For here, the conditions were, and still are, so difficult that they mitigate against the creation of high-quality Filipino films. That a few good films, some of them even excellent, have been made despite the almost impossible conditions, speaks well of the talent and native ingenuity of the movie people.

But they are few. Only about four or six of 140 films made here every year may be considered truly good. Some five or six other films made the same year may be considered decent or respectable, but otherwise artistic failures. Invariably, the two or five films Bernal has made for every year are among these 10 films or so. The rest are done by Lino Brocka, Mike de Leon, Eddie Romero, Celso Ad. Castillo and any of the new filmmakers, men and women, mostly young, who show some promise during their first year in the movies but who often have also stopped growing.

Where newcomers were eventually eaten up by the system, making one bad commercial film after another, Bernal has remained critical of his works. But he who always insists on doing a good, meaningful and well-crafted film without considering its box-office potential is endangering his movie career. And so, directors like Bernal, Romero and Brocka have learned to compromise.

Industry Ills

Perhaps the moviegoer or industry outsider will appreciate even more the accomplishments of a Bernal film — or of any other good local film — if he is aware of the obstacles facing the film-makers.

For one, taxation is onerous. This may seem to be the problem of producers, but when the producers have to pay taxes at every stage of film-making, from shooting, for the use of raw negative stocks (per foot of film), to post-production work, they cannot possibly give the film-makers a free hand in consuming stocks. The artist-director therefore is already restrained from playing with his ideas as creatively as he can because of the limited film supply at hand.

Taxation, of course, continues even after the film is completed. When it is finally exhibited commercially, the producers still have to share with the government (in taxes again) and the theater-owners the gross income of the film, getting only a third of the revenues. Thus, a picture that costs P1 million — the average budget spent on a film today — has to earn three times its original cost for the movie to just break even. Unfortunately, more often than not, a film earns less than a million pesos in Manila, with about the same amount expected from the provincial bookings which share the earnings with Manila on a 50-50 basis.

At such an economic disadvantage, the producers have to think in terms of drastic cost-cutting, pouring their investments in a film that follows a certain formula that is most likely to succeed at the box-office. The artist-director, for his part, has to work within the limitations imposed by the commercial demands of the project — big stars who do not necessarily know how to act, a suggestively sexy theme, the element of youth in the story, action or fight sequences every now and then.

He has to make do with the little (time, film stocks, other production expenses) that the producers give him. In other countries, a director is given enough leeway. He is allowed to shoot a certain scene for a reasonable number of times so that in the editing room, the director and his film editor can pick the best shot (or 'take').

The director and his cinematographer abroad are also given all the sophisticated equipment they need, like cameras, lenses and lighting devices, to capture the right image exactly the way they want it. But Filipino film-makers usually make do with old, insufficient equipment. In Europe and in some instances in Hollywood, major film artists have complete control of their projects, from the production concept to the choice of actors and other talents. Bernal has remarked in an interview that this was also true with him, but only on two occasions — *Pagdating sa Dulo* and *Salawahan*.

Censorship

Artistic control, however, ends once a film is submitted to the board of censors. Curiously enough, the well-made, more intelligent local films are subjected to more rigid, usually indiscriminate and sometimes unfair, censorship. In this

light, it is not surprising that many films by Bernal were greatly affected. Shots and entire scenes were cut, titles were changed (*Manila by Night* became *City after Dark*), shortened (*Aliw, Sir?* became simply *Aliw*) or lengthened (*Pito ang Asawa Ko* became *Huwag Tularan: Pito ang Asawa Ko*).

The entire ending — and consequently, the moral of the story — of *Menor de Edad* was changed when the censors required the producer and the film-maker to reshoot it. The substantial cutting done on *Nunal sa Tubig* and *City after Dark* (the latter reduced from two and a half hours to just two hours), two of Bernal's masterpieces, damaged their rhythm, texture and visual power. The scenes or shots considered by the censors as objectionable include a circumcision ritual in *Nunal sa Tubig*, actually a detail of Bernal's large canvas depicting village life, or the perverse love scenes in *City* which are central to its theme.

Also unprecedented in the history of Philippine cinema, *City after Dark* has been banned from any exhibition abroad, particularly from competing at the Berlin Film Festival last February, the first time a local film was invited to this prestigious festival. Censorship, of course, is just one of the constraints local artists have to work against.

A director like Bernal usually enjoys a certain amount of freedom with his film but only after agreeing to the story material and principal cast decided by the producer (sometimes in consultation with him). The germ of the film is eventually developed from these 'givens' and it now depends on the intelligence and skill of the director to make something sensible and worthy of the moviegoers' time and money out of them. Once the film is finished, though, it is then left at the mercy of the censors.

Show-biz Politics

If Bernal has had his successes as a film director, and if he is able to survive in the cut-throat world of show-biz, it is largely due to his ability to merge art and commercialism in his films. This is why producers who want to earn not only box-office success but also some prestige and glamor with their films always include Bernal among the three or four directors they are willing to work with. And in terms of working relationship with them, Bernal has a good track record. He is a favorite of Regal Films, Seven Stars, LEA Productions and Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions, some of the

major film outfits in the country.

To be sure, he has had clashes with some of his other producers, but they are nothing compared to the bitter and monumental bickerings between other directors and their producers. With Bernal, the bone of contention has almost always been artistic and not economic.

The first film he would have made, *A Ewan, Basta sa Maynila pa rin Ako*, was halfway through the shooting in 1970 when Bernal stormed out of the set after a brush with its producer, Eddie Rodriguez. In 1973, Bernal also had that much talked-about dispute with the producer of *Pito ang Asawa Ko* who decided to add some scenes to the finished picture without even informing him. There was also his quarrel with producer-star Amalia Fuentes in 1975 which erupted when he was about to wind up the shooting of a local adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

In later years, Bernal's energy to fight for his films flagged. He didn't raise a fuss when producer-star Alona Alegre added uncalled-for scenes to the near-classic *Isang Gabi sa Iyo, Isang Gabi sa Akin* in 1978 at a time when Bernal was confined in a hospital. He was compliant when in 1979, the ending of *Menor de Edad* was ordered changed, and tight-lipped when *City after Dark* was banned from going to Berlin.

This kind of attitude of course should reassure producers who would otherwise be apprehensive about their directors whose temperament and working habits they cannot predict. With Bernal, the producers have no such fear, not even of overshooting the budget, the one area they are most concerned with. Sometimes, he can even be very accommodating — at the expense of his films, as it is apparent in *Dalawang Pugad, Isang Ibon* (1976) which features full and unnecessary dance numbers that do not suit the tenor of the film. With a director like Bernal, who can be self-critical with his works, such forays into commercialism are easily identifiable. Less so, though, are the sexy scenes in *City after Dark*, some of which are longer than necessary.

Reviewing the body of work Bernal has done in his ten-year career making movies, we find real cinematic gems alongside purely commercial enterprises. Some of these so-called commercial pictures themselves are intelligent and well-crafted enough to qualify as minor local masterpieces. The production of these films became possible because Bernal accepted the challenge of following the established formulas for box-office while infusing them with

solid film aesthetics and adding a few innovations in form and content.

He has obviously been a conscious and willing participant in the game movie people are playing, primarily for their survival in the business, but in his case, also for some personal satisfaction. He hits and misses, but despite the misses, the overall result of his efforts is still, point for point, film for film, greater than what the other directors have scored in fewer films.

The Films

Of the 33 films he has made, at least 20 are worthy of his name, out of which seven are actually good, four others are very good (*Ligaw na Bulaklak* in 1975, *Dalawang Pugad, Isang Ibon*, 1976, *Ikaw Ay Akin*, 1978, and *Aliw*, 1979) and three are outstanding (*Pagdating sa Dulo, Nunal sa Tubig*, 1975, and *City after Dark*). The last three were made four or five years apart from each other, with two of them, *Pagdating* and *City*, written by Bernal himself (*Nunal* was written by Bernal's close friend, Jorge Arago).

With all these films to his credit, Bernal has already assured himself of a prominent position in the history of Philippine cinema even if he decides to stop working now. For as many of these films prove, he has done what was earlier thought to be impossible — reconcile the box-office with aesthetic daring and intellectual dynamism, artistic

Ishmael Bernal on location for *City after Dark*.





Alma Moreno was launched into stardom in Ishmael Bernal's *Ligaw na Bulaklak*, 1975.

virtues hardly found collectively before in Philippine movies.

Like the best directors everywhere, he expresses his ideas in the distinctive language of film by the creative and technical integration of sounds and images (for as much as film-making conditions here would allow him). What sets him apart from the other local directors is the innovativeness and audacity of his experimentations and explorations.

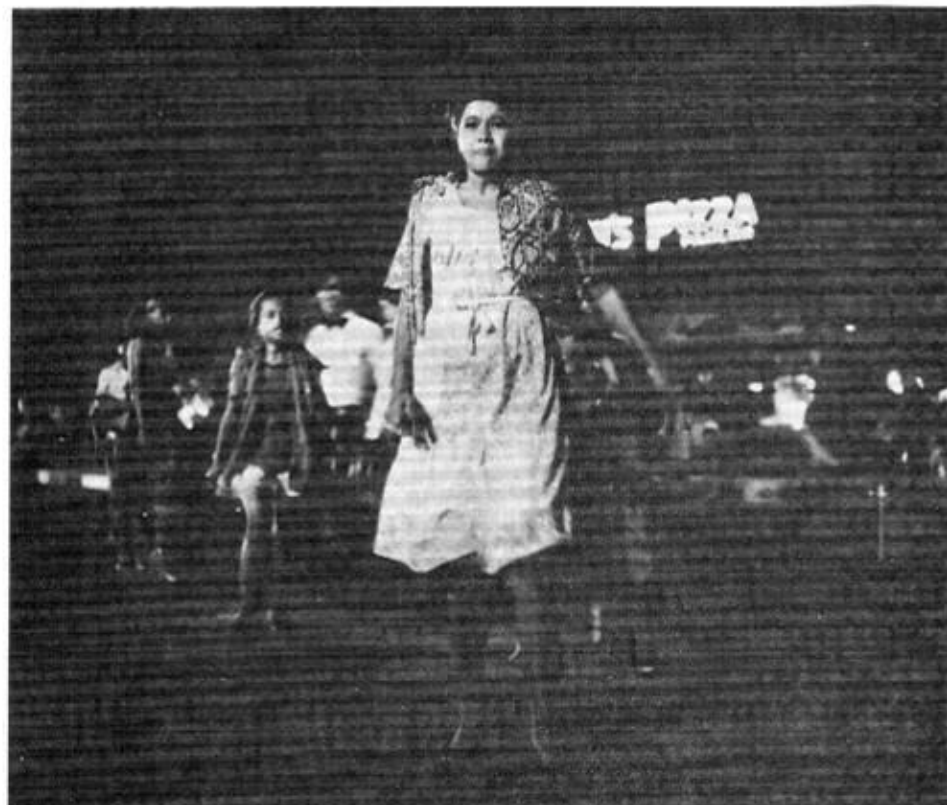
He is in fact the only Filipino director whose best films may be taken on different levels simultaneously. The story or dramatic action may be taken literally, but something else is also going on at the same time. This has only made his films more stimulating intellectually and more entertaining. A test of the richness of his films is how they grow on the moviegoer the second or third time he watches them. Whether or not the viewer agrees with what the film is saying, or whether or not he really likes the particular Bernal film he is watching, he will most likely be seldom bored by it, provided he switches his critical faculties on.

As with any piece of entertainment or any work of art that is experimental, however, it takes a certain measure of openness on the part of the viewer, not to mention a high level of intellectual capacity and cultural background, to grasp its essence and fully appreciate its finer points. This is especially true with *Nunal* and *City*, which, because they are unconventional and distinctively cinematic in structure, would be very hard or impossible to adapt to other forms of art, like literature (as a novel) or a stage play, without taking away, or diminishing, their power and impact.

How does one, for instance, describe or verbalize the daring last scene of *Ikaw Ay Akin*, which relies mainly on the silent face-to-face confrontation between two women (Nora Aunor and Vilma Santos) who speak only with their eyes, speechless, for a few tense, emotion-filled minutes? Or the last scene of *Aliw* (1979) which shows a youthful kept mistress (Lorna Tolentino) walking away from her bed where her lover has just given her instructions on practically how to behave as a man's slave, and opening and passing by a seemingly interminable series of locked doors and gate which eventually lead to her liberation.

Another proof of Bernal's successful attempts to depart from the conventions of film is his experiments with the confrontation scene, which are like clever variations on a theme. In *Daluyong* (1971), warring lovers and family members confront one another with much bite and venom. A newly-married woman is suddenly face to face with her lost former

Lorna Tolentino in the controversial *City after Dark*, 1980. Manila's night life was as much a character in this film as its gallery of lost souls.



husband she thought to be dead in *Lumapit, Lumayo ang Umaga* (1974). Wife and mistress take their turn in *Dalawang Pugad* but with grace and civility. In *Walang Katapusang Tag-araw* (1976), two female arch-rivals are pitted against each other in soap operatic tradition, and in *Isang Gabi sa Iyo, Isang Gabi sa Akin* (1978), beleaguered lovers and brothers win, lose and win again one another in various confrontation scenes. As ever, such scenes provide the pictures with dramatic tension and excitement and make revelations about the characters.

Bernal is equally daring and imaginative with the love scenes. The long smooching scene between Elizabeth Oropesa and Eddie Garcia in *Mister Mo, Lover Boy Ko* (1974) is both funny and erotic for the almost acrobatic twists and turns of the pair's interlocked, scantily-clad bodies. Less erotic but more tender and expressive is the bedroom scene between Nora Aunor and Christopher de Leon in *Ikaw Ay Akin*, where as a romantic couple in deep slumber, they toss and turn without disengaging their bodies from each other (while the soundtrack plays the slow movement of Bach's *5th Brandenburg Concerto*). A variation on this bedroom scene, this time totally silent, has Vilma Santos and Romeo Vasquez, still in their pajamas, trying to rise half-asleep in *Dalawang Pugad* but cannot disentangle themselves from the clutches of each other's arms.

Unlike other directors, Bernal continues to add something novel and striking to obligatory sex scenes, which could be either a love act or a loveless sexual encounter. Some vivid examples — the sizzling love-hate battle between a man and a woman in the two-character film *Bakit May Pag-ibig Pa?* (1979), the quickie sex between Liza Lorena and Mat Ranillo III in a dingy, dilapidated bathroom in *Walang Katapusang Tag-araw* and the gentle love play between a lesbian drug-pusher (Cherie Gil) and her blind lover (Rio Locsin) in a dirty pushcart by an estuary in *City after Dark*.

What makes these love scenes different from those found in other pictures is that they are not there simply for the titillation of the public. They are integral to the story, the natural and logical continuation or resolution of the preceding scene or sequence. This being the case, the sexual excursions of a Bernal film, required by the commercially-oriented movie industry, are perfectly justified.

In his best elements, Bernal gives insights even on over-used dramatic conflicts, the staples of Philippine movies, most commonly the love triangle and the I-can't-get-out-of-

this-rut plight of prostitutes. In *Aliw*, Bernal has introduced the idea of local whores catering to Japanese tourists, a fact of Philippine life that was earlier overlooked by other film-makers. Another revelation found in the same film is the girls' group visit to the Redemptorist Church in Baclaran to perform an act we do not normally associate with prostitutes — praying together in church. In *City*, the girls at a bordello await customers while the TV set is tuned in to an evangelist program asking viewers to make a choice in life.

Bernal is also fond of symbolic objects and gestures as much as of ironic statements and visual contrasts. The cardboard throne on a movie set in *Pagdating sa Dulo* suggests the false, perishable success of the *bomba* queen (Rita Gomez) who sits on it. The disparate interests of every character in *Ikaw Ay Akin* neatly give away their attitudes and responses to their individual dilemmas; the hero (Christopher de Leon), a sky-diver and business executive, approaches his love affair with two women with both sobriety and derring-do and without quite making up his mind on whether to stick to one. The lover (Vilma Santos), being an artist, is exuberant, mercurial in temper and neurotic, while the rival (Aunor), a horticulturist who cross-breeds orchids, cultivates her relationship with the man and patiently waits for it to flower.

The ritual of washing is also a favorite symbolic device of Bernal. A guilt-ridden character (Daria Ramirez) in *Nunal sa Tubig* tries to soothe her itchy skin by washing herself at the *nipa*² bathroom, and this not being enough, she runs to the moonlit sea and bathes in the glorious water. In *Bilibid Boys* (1981), the inmates of a prison give a boy (William Martinez) a ritualistic bath before raping him, with the kind of solemnity reserved for religious events. In *City* the first thing a whore masquerading as a nurse (Alma Moreno) does upon coming home from the bordello is wash herself, and having done this, she raises her head in the mirror only to find her true face staring at her, as though accusingly, censuring her for living a double life.

Typical of an artist, Bernal explores the complex psyche of an individual human being and probes the dynamics of this individual's inter-relationships with other persons and his part in the social and environmental setup. In his most serious films, mainly *Pagdating*, *Nunal* and *City*, his characters are forever grappling with the dehumanizing, degrading forces around them and looking for meaningful

relationships with others.

He has respect for these characters whom he delineates fully as sympathetic human beings with minds and feelings of their own. Even the common folk — the lower classes — and mothers and elderly women have their own individual needs and dignity. For example, the caricature-like, parasitic personality of an aging supporting character (Rustica Carpio) in *Aliw* reveals herself in a poignant scene where she takes home to daughter and son an unwelcome new member of the household — her lover.

Oddly, this poor woman articulates better the same sentiment and need of the high school principal (Anita Linda) in *Ligaw na Bulaklak* and the bourgeois wife and mother (also Ms. Linda) in *Dalawang Pugad*. Bernal's other women, like the middle-aged swinger (Rita Gomez) in *Salawahan* (1979) and the younger girls, are surer of themselves because they are strong, intelligent and independent. They do not fit local movies' stereotypes of suffering wives and martyr mothers.

Unlike many popular directors here, Bernal has discreetly refrained from creating characters with homosexual sensibility, except for the couturier in the farcical *Pito ang Asawa Ko* (1973) and Rita Gomez's role in *Salawahan*. The gay character of Bernardo Bernardo in *City* is something else again. He is a multi-dimensional human being with a misleading feminine exterior but tough, masculine sensibility.

An actor's director, Bernal has succeeded in drawing the best from his actors. He has turned many box-office stars not taken seriously before into fine performers before the movie camera (Elizabeth Oropesa, Vic Vargas, Rosanna Ortiz, Alona Alegre, Daria Ramirez, George Estregan, Yvonne, Walter Navarro, Suzette Ranillo, Cherie Gil, the teenage heart-throbs in *Bilibid Boys*). He is also the only local director to tap actors from all the major theater groups in the country and use their talents to great advantage in a wide variety of roles.

He has masterfully handled superb large crowd scenes using stars, unknown or little-known professional actors and non-actors. The most memorable of these are the big high school scene in *Ligaw na Bulaklak*, the party scene in *Ikaw Ay Akin* which ends in a group picture-taking, the procession sequence in *Boy Kodyak* (1979) and the riot scene in *Bilibid Boys*.

He puts his actors in appropriate setting and dresses

them up accordingly. The locale, sets and architectural design seen in his films all help to define the characters and mood, and enhance the atmosphere. Every detail and every prop must be exact and must meet the visual demands of the film.

His images, like his style as a film artist, generally have that simple, subdued, cool and detached quality. He expresses his ideas and composes his shots carefully, directly, economically and meaningfully. One can see the influence of the French Bresson and the Japanese Ozu in the composition of his shots.

He is selective and sparing with his use of sounds — musical score is rarely intrusive and dialogues are terse and conversational (exceptions: *Daluyong*, *Salawahan*, *Ikaw Ay Akin*, *Bakit May Pag-ibig Pa?*). Silence is also as important in conveying his message as sound effects. The monotonous whirring of a distant motorboat breaking the dead-silence of a dying coastal town in *Nunal* helps drive home, in aural terms, the vision of technology threatening the calm and the very existence of the place and its people.

Depending on the kind of film he is making, the rhythm is either snappy and rapid, as in the comedies *Tisoy* (1976), *Salawahan* and *Menor de Edad*, and the action drama *Bilibid Boys*, or brooding and contemplative, as in *Boy Kodyak*, *Girlfriend* (1980) and *Sugat sa Ugat* (1980).

Every aspect of a Bernal film may not always be ideal, but this weakness is outshone by his strengths. In every film, he seems to be ready to try something new, whether it be a theme, a conflict, a character or a scene. He is also the major local director to have covered the broadest range of film genres and themes, with varying levels of success and failure, from the historical drama (the Bonifacio episode in the unreleased multi-million peso epic *Lahing Pilipino*³ made in 1977) and the adaptation of a foreign literary classic (*Anna Karenina* starring Amalia Fuentes) to the disco musical (*Good Morning, Sunshine*, 1980) and the personal, experimental film (*Nunal*).

There are other film genres and an unlimited number of themes awaiting Bernal's creative touch. There is a long road ahead of him. The dead end which has trapped his characters in *Pagdating sa Dulo* — that depressing time when an artist begins to question the meaning, or lack of meaning, of what he is doing — is nowhere in sight. He is fond of saying in his films "Life is short," and because there is truth to it, he is, happily, making the most of it.

A FILM DIRECTOR SPEAKS OUT

by Eddie Romero

A few observations about content in Filipino as well as foreign films may be useful at this point. I never know what to think when I read of a particular film that is well-made but lacking or inconsequential in content. It seems ungrateful to take issue with people who defend film as a "serious" art form, yet I think it is necessary to remind ourselves from time to time that in our insistence on having "good" films convey ideas that are relevant to contemporary life, it is easy to forget that film is essentially a distinct art form and that the primary virtue of a film should be that it *is* a film rather than, say, a kind of cinematographic editorial.

No one questions the need for relevance in art, but like so many other catch-phrases, this one tends to be so broad as to be in danger of becoming meaningless. This sort of relevance, when all is said and done, has to do with what an individual derives out of an aesthetic experience.

Most critics demand that such an experience should serve to widen or intensify one's awareness of himself in relation to the world he lives in. But even if we were to accept this as a definitive criterion, it is necessary to note that awareness takes many forms.

To some, awareness takes the form of articulate knowledge; to others, of disposition or moods that are largely emotional. To most of us, it is shaped and reflected by a complex interaction of intellect and emotion, which is precisely what art is all about. For art takes over where information and opinion leave off; and that is why in film, as in any other art, form is inseparable from content.

A film that does nothing more than convey information or express an opinion may be a lot of things, but one thing it cannot be is a representative example of film as art, for — to belabor a point — a painting, symphony, a piece of sculpture, a poem or a film qualifies as a work of art only when the intellectual or emotional impact it creates is generated

out of the form of the work itself.

This dictum causes a certain amount of confusion in the literary arts for obvious reasons. Music, painting, sculpture and the dance do not use words, and therefore do not have written texts that can be analyzed for rational meaning. Theater, the novel, poetry and film do deal in words, thus tempting many to simplify aesthetic appreciation by using written or oral text as a guide to evaluation.

Theater and the film make the temptation even stronger by reinforcing spoken words with live and moving images. Even practitioners of these forms are also thus tempted to "make a point," to state a case; these inclinations are essentially alien to the idea of art.

What is a film? What makes it a distinct and separate medium of art? To answer that, let us look at its components. A film is based on a kind of play, using actors as does a theatrical play, but with the whole world available as a setting instead of a stage backdrop; through cinematography, the action of the film can be seen through an almost limitless variety of perspectives, from the microscopic close-up to the panoramic shot; action may be depicted in normal sequence or out of it, at normal speed or faster or slower than normal speed; color may be used naturalistically or impressionistically or not at all, when the film is photographed in black-and-white or in some monochromatic tone; cutting or editing controls the pace of staging, so that a particular incident can be depicted in its entirety, (with characters entering a scene, enacting the pertinent incident, then leaving it) or only in part, as segments of a more extensive chain of development; music and sound effects and even silence are used to intensify or, conversely, to dilute certain impressions created by the visible action; props, decor and special photographic effects are used to reinforce the visual impact of the presentation.

All this is true enough, but it is a mistake to assume that film is theater expanded by a variety of technological tools, or even that a film is the bare sum of its parts. For when good acting, cinematography, sound recording and editing are imaginatively combined to present a film scene, they fuse into a single distinct effect far removed from the individual components that went into it, in much the same way that water bears little resemblance to pure oxygen or pure hydrogen.

Therefore, although film borrows lavishly from theater, painting, ballet and fiction and makes use of certain arts that

are indigenous to it, such as cinematography, special photographic effects and editing; although all these arts contribute to the form of a film, the finished form is distinct and apart from any of its components or all of them combined, because in bringing these elements together, the chemistry of art has created an altogether new element capable of evoking mental impressions, moods and emotional states in a fashion that is entirely its own.

For the first two or three decades in the history of film criticism (1915 to the early 40s), some of the most prestigious writers on film in the western hemisphere staunchly insisted that film was essentially a visual medium, and that speech, sound effects, music, and even acting were merely contributory elements, serving only to magnify the visual experience of a film. That view fell by the wayside as the medium grew in technological complexity, but as far as some critics are concerned, all this might as well have never happened; like the early Soviet cultural commissars, they still cling to the notion that film should have important statements to make.

Not too long ago, a Manila newspaper published a series of articles featuring a number of interviews with well-known film people, writers and other artists in which they were asked to name what they thought were the ten best Filipino films ever made. I have no quarrel with their choices, but the overwhelming majority of the interviewees admittedly made their selections on the basis of *purported content*; this film was based on a novel by Rizal, here was one about an oppressed cultural minority, here one about cherished Filipino traditions, and there one about social injustice. Nobody sounded as if he were disposed to endorse, say a musical comedy for no other reason that it was good, if not great, film.

This is an all-too-familiar phenomenon. In the many years that I have worked in the film industry, announcement of some grandiose theme was all it ever took to get a film hailed as a masterpiece even before it hit the screen, and strangely enough in virtually every case the encomium has never been withdrawn regardless of how the project turned out. As a consequence, the tendency here is to reward intention rather than achievement, bombast rather than artistry.

It is clear, I hope, that I am not trying to say that films should not deal with important ideas or issues; but ideas can be presented in any number of ways, and the ideas in themselves have nothing to do with art. The fact that

Picasso's *Guernica* happens to be a slashing commentary on the insanity of war is not what makes it a great painting; that *War and Peace* is a gripping account of Napoleon's invasion of Russia is not what makes it a great novel.

Surely it is self-evident that an artist's first loyalty is to his art, and that an artist who uses his medium primarily as a platform for his ideas, however provocative or original, is not an artist at all but a pamphleteer.

Just as a good idea is not diminished even when it is expressed poorly, a good work of art is not diminished by paucity of intellectual content, and those who insist on the primacy of content over form in films have no real interest in the art of the film; they are just looking for another propaganda medium.

Has art, then, no obligation to truth? Of course it does, but let us first ask Pilate's question, "What is truth?" and refer to Confucius for the answer: "The truth can never be said; it can only be hinted at."

Good art was never meant to answer questions with the brisk pragmatism of an Ann Landers or a Tia Dely.¹ Good art flashes quick little beams of light on the dark corners of the human soul. For a fleeting instant we see with awesome clarity what we fear even to imagine, and are plunged once again into the comforting half-light of banality. But hopefully, we remember.

FILM CENSORSHIP AND SOCIAL CHANGE

by Eddie Romero

To argue about the value or irrelevance of censorship is futile because, like so many other issues, it is resolved not on the basis of reason but of social necessity, real or imagined. Let us examine the nature of that necessity.

Censorship bodies are almost invariably set up at the behest of those sectors of a community that are most avidly concerned with the preservation of the status quo. Most censorship codes are rooted in prevailing norms of social morality, and censors defend those norms not so much to uphold what is ethically good, for few of them are professional philosophers or licensed ministers, as out of the firm belief that they are indispensable to the maintenance of peace and order, without which no government can function effectively, and without which the most influential elements of a given society could not continue to prevail.

All this is quite defensible, on both ethical and practical grounds. Yet even a good defense in this case answers no questions, because ultimately the continuing validity of an institution depends on its relevance and adaptability to the inexorable twists and turns of history. What censors, ours and everyone else's, do not seem to be sufficiently aware of is that you cannot ensure order and stability by simply defending the values that *used to* support them without staying alert to what changing conditions are doing to those values, and what these shifts portend for future order and stability. Unless this capability exists, censorship becomes not only a hindrance to creative expression and a wet blanket to the general public, but, unknowingly, a menace to the credibility of government itself, particularly where it tends to insist on the perpetuation of social attitudes that can only place the premises of modern social management in an undeservedly bad light. This needs some elaboration.

Our government is committed to an over-all developmental program that must include sweeping changes in

even our most venerable institutions. President Marcos continually refers to the process as nothing less than a revolution. One does not change institutions without changing values and traditions. A receptive culture is the indispensable foundation of change; we cannot create a new society, a New Republic, on the foundations of the old.

Individual self-reliance cannot be developed without weakening the vise-like hold of our ancient extended-family system, which demands blind loyalty to self-annointed or hereditary patrons, and rewards subservience rather than personal initiative.

Corruption cannot be eradicated where the interests of elite groups prevail over the interests of a community. Individual productivity cannot be stimulated by such values as *palakasan*, *hiya*, *utang na loob* and *pakikisama*¹ unless they are redefined to make them more relevant to contemporary exigencies.

The fact is that our age-old values and traditions are already in the midst of epochal change, and any effort to retard that change must need discredit the factors that brought that change about. In our time, one of the most visible of those factors is public policy. Therefore those who formulate public policy with one hand and support censorship with the other are stuck, like it or not, with the gigantic task of moving popular culture into closer relevance with our developmental goals, for trying to make culture stand still in the midst of monumental economic change is impossible.

Now our feature, or theatrical, films, like those of every other country where the movie business remains in the hands of private enterprise, exists only on the strength of a widespread desire for film entertainment. And while box-office returns may not be a gauge of artistic achievement in films, they certainly are an accurate index of popular values. It is not true that prurience and sadistic violence are the most saleable elements in contemporary films, but they do draw a sizeable audience, and the reason why so many of them are made is that there are a lot of film producers who are as lazy as they are greedy.

No responsible film-maker in this country advocates the total elimination of film censorship to begin with. It is, however, only too discernible that the great majority of our commercially successful movies, by paying lip service to "approved" values and moral attitudes, serve only to support obsolescent and reactionary notions that are overdue

at the garbage dump of history. For example, there is nothing more obscene, to my mind, than the constant effort to identify entire social sectors or interest-groups in our society as wholly good or wholly evil, and as long as this tendency exists in our popular culture, social stability remains threatened, and neither truth nor good nor beauty is served thereby.

We are living in an unprecedentedly complex age, and there is less likelihood than ever that we can return to an idyllic simplicity that never existed anyway. If it is of social value for films to edify while entertaining, it is imperative that censorship be exercised in the full awareness that valuable Filipino films can only be made in an atmosphere that permits a reasonable amount of daring and imagination acting upon what exists in our contemporary life. Movies exercise a pervasive influence in the evolution of modern culture whether we want them to or not. Therefore, censorship should be more concerned with encouraging them to grow in relevance to legitimate national priorities than with the pathetic hope of not rocking the boat in the midst of a typhoon.

PHILIPPINE MOVIES: SOME PROBLEMS & PROSPECTS

by Lino Brocka

There are two sides to the coin that is Philippine movie-making today: one side, the technical aspects, mainly financial problems that producers encounter in the form of government taxes or foreign competition; the other side, real or imagined problems which beset film-makers in relation to the Filipino mass audience, the so-called *bakya* crowd.

The first complaint, with which we are all familiar, requires further study. Vicente Salumbides, in his *Motion Pictures in the Philippines* (1952), mentions the taxes imposed on the Philippine motion-picture industry by Congress and city councils, and traces the history of Filipino films:

"From 1904, when visual entertainment was introduced in the Philippines, to World War I (1914), European pictures dominated the movie screens of the country. From that war to the advent of Tagalog talkies in 1934, the American pictures were absolute rulers. But from 1935 to the present time the Tagalog pictures have slowly and steadily crowded out the American pictures from week-end to mid-week programs, except in the first-run and second-run moviehouses in Manila, Cebu and other large cities where many foreign elements reside. However, so long as English is an official language of the Filipinos and is taught in their schools, American movies will never leave the Philippines . . ."

An article, "What Ails the Local Movie Industry?", in the April 1, 1958 issue of the now defunct *Literary Song Movie Magazine*, recounts then Senator Rogelio de la Rosa's FAMAS¹ Awards Night speech at the Manila Hotel on March 15 that year:

"He was applauded when he declared that, despite stiff and oftentimes ruinous competition from foreign sources, the indifference and prejudice of some segments of our population and the lukewarm attitude and non-support of our government, Philippine films have

managed to survive and advance so that now movie-making is considered one of the nation's biggest and most progressive enterprises."

At the very least, the movies turned out by our producers should have realistic plots and not insult the moviegoer's intelligence. Which brings us to the other side of the coin that is our entertainment industry: the question of audience, mass audience.

Too often has the *bakya* crowd been blamed for the sad state of Filipino movies. But what can one expect of an audience that has been fed nothing but secret-agent, karate, fantasy, and slapstick movies since time immemorial? A child raised on rock 'n' roll would find classical music strange, discordant, unpleasant; an audience raised in an atmosphere of motion picture commercialism and escapism would regard a good film totally alien. The film audience deprived of good, intelligent fare by irresponsible and unscrupulous film-makers cannot be expected to accept things overnight, no matter what artistic merits a production may have.

There are two tendencies, both wrong, that an aspiring director should beware: one is undue haste to "revolutionize" the industry; the other is following the line of least resistance, or of no resistance at all — of allowing oneself to be sucked in by the system as if by quicksand. Sometimes one extreme leads to the other.

Not a few talented and enterprising directors start out in too advanced a fashion and usually wind up at the opposite extreme and at the mercy of what one critic has called "*bakya*² producers." These over-ambitious artists, who to be fair to them usually have the best of intentions, may well illustrate the Filipino proverb: *Buhay-alamang, paglukso'y patay*.³ They remind one of Icarus who was so excited with the wax wings his father Daedalus made for the two of them in their escape from the labyrinth that he flew too high and the sun melted his wings, and he fell into the sea and drowned.

The only way one can elevate local cinema from its present *bakya* status to an artistically acceptable level is to introduce gradual changes until one succeeds in creating one's desired audience. The "upliftment of the motion picture industry" should not, can never be, a package deal; it is, instead, a protracted struggle. One should work perseveringly with the material at hand, should be aware of but not stunted by our cinematic tradition, and should place one's trust in the Filipino mass audience.

And it is a perceptive audience, not at all stupid, as a few elitists like to think. The mass of Filipino moviegoers take note of everything; they have standards, too: they know instinctively if a movie is well-made, or abominable trash.

The film-maker's task is to develop their tastes further, in a conscious and patient fashion, in order slowly to wean them away from the false artistic and social values fostered by kiss-kiss, bang-bang, zoom-zoom, boo-hoo, song-and-dance flickers. One could work at first with the same commercial medium, but do it a little better, with more restraint, intelligence, characterization, and motivation, so as not to insult the educated or alienate the *bakya* crowd.

For instance, Filipinos, especially in the barrios, read the *komiks*.⁴ One gives them Mars Ravelo⁵ but pares the *komiks* story down to filmic essentials: a minimum of dialogue, a toning down of sentimentality. After that, one's audience is prepared to accept something different: an original story where one can more or less do what he wants, or where the *bida*⁶ is no longer all holy and hollow. Who knows, perhaps in three or four years, one's audience will be ready for, say, the complex characters of Nick Joaquin.⁷

One must therefore first build his own audience: by gathering experience that is not alien to the majority of Filipinos at a particular time; by compressing and systematizing this experience for them; and by giving back this now crystallized experience to them in films they would enjoy and be moved by and take as their own. It is a slow but continuous process, and one's work gets better and becomes more challenging each time. Somerset Maugham has said that one should have minor works on which to build one's major works. And the sincere Filipino film-maker should get over his hang-up about making the Great Filipino Film; he should, instead, think seriously about developing the Great Filipino Audience.

But tragically, too many of our producers and directors and writers and cinematographers and editors and actors have become jaded, have resigned themselves to the dismal state of Philippine films, the movie industry at its worst. They should at least have a sense of responsibility, especially the producers. Yes, money is important — one has to consider the demands of the box-office in order to survive — but commerce should never set the standards for film-making. One should uplift his audience, too; one should entertain but not distract that audience from reality: after all, we are supposed to be creators. Every movie one makes sets the pace,

the quality for the kind of films that will continue to be made; film-makers have the power to influence their audience for better or for worse and should not, therefore, think only of profit.

To conclude: aside from solving the attendant technical problems, the Filipino film-maker must avoid two tendencies – impetuosity in bringing about cinematic art and the opposite extreme, complete capitulation to the industry at its worst. He should slowly build his audience by making gradual changes in the style and content of Filipino movies, and at the same time retain his sense of responsibility to his audience.

Notes

THE EARLY MOVIES

Page 11

1 *zarzuela* – musical comedy patterned after that of the Spanish theater. Also spelled *sarsuwela*, in the vernacular orthography.

Page 16

2 *Noli Me Tangere* – a novel about Filipino life under the Spanish regime written in 1887 by Dr. Jose Rizal, the Filipinos' Renaissance man and leader of the reform movement in the late 19th-century, later to become the national hero.

THE "SILENT PICTURES" ERA IN THE PHILIPPINES

Page 19

1 *sarsuwelas* – See footnote to p. 11.

2 *bodabil* – local vaudeville, sometimes spelled *vodavil*.

Page 20

3 *Escolta* – Manila's main shopping street from the late 19th-century to the 1950s.

THE GOLDEN DECADE OF PHILIPPINE MOVIES

Page 39

1 *puto* and *dinuguan* – a favorite Filipino snack: sweetened rice flour buns (*puto*) eaten with a dish (*dinuguan*) made of pork or chicken bits cooked in highly spiced pig's blood.

Page 40

2 *artista* – Filipino generic term for entertainment star.

3 *turo-turo(s)* – cheap stalls serving ready-cooked meals.

4 *provinciana(s)* – country girls.

5 *Nanay* – mother.

6 *bidang babae* – female lead.

7 *hija* – child (daughter).

Page 41

8 the little Bicolana marvel – Nora Aunor, the superstar of the 70s. See "Cinderella Superstar," pp. 135-143.

9 *bidang lalake* – male lead.

10 *pogi* – Filipino slang for good-looking.

11 *tisoy* – short for mestizo, referring to male Filipinos with foreign blood.

12 *barako* – literally, stud. Used as an adjective to mean rugged and manly.

Page 44

13 *tulising pugot* – the headless bandit of local folklore.

14 *Kenkoy* – the local Dagwood.

15 *Dalagang Ilokana* – maiden of the North, caricatured as a cigar-puffing beauty in a popular movie of the 50s by the same title.

Page 54

16 *sacada* – migrant laborer employed only during the cane harvest.

THE CELLULOID ROUTE OF 'GENGHIS KHAN'

Page 55

1 *ilustrados* – the intelligentsia.

Page 56

2 *camisadentro* – man's undershirt.

3 *adobo* – the Filipino national dish of pork and/or chicken stewed in vinegar, soy sauce, pepper and other spices.

Page 57

4 "Hindi ba pinaghirapan natin 'yon sa high school?" – Didn't we labor over that in high school?"

Page 59

5 *barong Tagalog* – the Filipino shirt made of flimsy embroidered material, worn untucked; considered formal wear when worn with dark trousers.

Page 60

6 Botong Francisco – Carlos V. Francisco, noted Filipino painter and muralist, a close friend of Conde; he was posthumously declared a National Artist in 1974.

7 "Pinagtawanan kami sa Times Theater." – "They laughed us down at the Times Theater."

Page 62

8 *Kislap* – meaning “spark.” The leading Filipino entertainment magazine in the 50s.

9 FAMAS – Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences, founded in 1952 and patterned after AMPAS in the United States.

10 UP – University of the Philippines, the premier state university.

11 *komiks* – vernacular for comic-books.

Page 63

12 Ibanag . . . Ilongo – dialects of the Cagayan Province and Panay Island, respectively.

Page 66

13 Pierre Rissient – French film-maker and international film scout.

14 Nida-Nestor – Nida Blanca and Nestor de Villa, a popular love team of the 50s.

PROBLEMS IN PHILIPPINE FILM HISTORY

Page 69

1 *bakya* crowd – See “Notes on Bakya”, pp. 117-123.

2 *sinakulo*, *komedya* and *sarsuwela* – See “From Stage to Screen,” pp. 83-94.

Page 70

3 Hukbalahap – the local communist armed movement of the 50s.

Page 75

4 *bomba* – literally, “bomb”; the colloquial term for soft-core films.

Page 77

5 Metro Manila Filipino Film Festival – In 1975, at the instance of local movie producers, a presidential proclamation required all first-run theaters in Metropolitan Manila (140 theaters in 4 cities and 13 municipalities) to show only Filipino films during the 10-day period from Christmas Day onward, every year. Since 1978, the Philippine Motion Picture Producers Association and the Movie Workers' Welfare Fund, in association with the Cultural Center of the Philippines, have undertaken to select 10 new films from the industry's year-end production to showcase during each Festival, granting awards of artistic recognition as well as cash incentives to the deserving films and artists.

6 BCMP – Board of Censors for Motion Pictures, later re-constituted as the Board of Review for Motion Pictures and Television.

FROM STAGE TO SCREEN

Page 93

1 *de numero* – literally, “by the number,” meaning routinely choreographed.

Page 94

2 *iyakan*, *bakbakan*, *sayawan*, *kantahan* – Filipino for scenes of crying, fighting, dancing and singing, respectively.

3 *sayawan-kantahan-ligawan* – dancing-singing-and-wooing.

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE AND THE FILIPINO CINEMA

Page 95

1 *bomba* – See footnote to p. 75.

2 *zarzuela... comedia* – See “From Stage to Screen”, pp. 83-94

Page 96

3 *Noli* and *Fili* – popular abbreviations for the novels of Jose Rizal: *Noli Me Tangere* (see footnote to p. 16), and *El Filibusterismo*, a sequel to the *Noli*, written in 1891.

Page 98

4 *bodega* – a warehouse.

Page 101

5 Avellana . . . T.D. Agcaoili – for Lamberto V. Avellana, see “Lamberto V. Avellana: A National Artist & His Times”, pp. 202-217. T.D. Agcaoili is one of the pioneer Filipino film critics.

Page 108

6 Lapiang Malaya movement – a quasi-politico-religious sect in the late 60s.

7 *Sakada* and *Batilyos* – two “socially-conscious” plays: *Sakada* is about migrant cane-field workers; *Batilyos*, about stevedores at an urban fishport.

8 Dagohoy – leader of a native rebellion against the Spaniards in the 18th-century.

9 (Andres) Bonifacio and Gregoria de Jesus – Bonifacio led the peasant uprising that opened the Philippine Revolution of 1896; de Jesus was his wife, a heroine in her own right.

NOTES ON BAKYA

Page 119

- 1 *bomba* – See footnote to p. 75.
- 2 *Amboy* – from “American boy.” Teen-age slang in the 60s meaning “falsely modish.”
- 3 *Iper* – a Japanese tonsorial innovation for male “permanents.”

Page 120

- 4 “*Bakyang-bakya naman 'yang kinakanta mo.*” – “That song is so kitsch!”
- 5 “*Class nga, low-class naman*” – “It’s class, all right, low-class.”
- 6 *Ramon Magsaysay* – President of the Philippines, 1953-1957.
- 7 *Joseph Estrada* – one of the Philippines’ top male stars since the 60s; in 1967, he was elected mayor of San Juan, one of the towns of Metro Manila, a position he has retained to the present.

Page 121

- 8 *Helen Gamboa & Jeanne Young* – Emerging to fame in the late 60s, these two were among the first stars of Philippine cinema to come from the urban middle-class milieu, complete with convent-school polish.
- 9 *Che-charon* – (accent on the first syllable); typically atrocious Filipino pun on the name “Che.” *Chicharron* is the vernacular term, from the Spanish, for pork cracklings.
- 10 *Clover* – a pre-war theater that became the home of the local vaudeville, surviving as one of only two hold-overs of that era, well into the 60s. (The other hold-over was the Manila Grand Opera House.)
- 11 *Indio* – the Spaniard’s misnomer and epithet for their colonized subjects in Latin America as well as in the Philippines. Originated from Columbus’ mistaken belief that he had reached India – the Indies – when he got to Central America.

REMEMBRANCE OF MOVIES PAST

Page 126

- 1 *bakya* crowd – See “Notes on Bakya”, pp. 117-123.
- 2 *calesa* – a horse-drawn cab used as a mode of public transport
- 3 *cochero* – carriage driver
- 4 *palco . . . butaca* – vernacular terms, from the Spanish, for orchestra and balcony seats, respectively.

Page 127

- 5 *carretela* – the local horse-drawn passenger cab.
- 6 *programa* – the programmed fare of a theater
- 7 *cine* – from the Spanish, for moviehous.

- 8 *pandesal* – the common bread bun.
- 9 *estero* – tidal estuary.
- 10 *Palaris* – a pre-war Filipino movie about a local hero who led an uprising against the Spaniards.
- 11 *Mona and Sano and Tembong* – popular comic stars of the 30s.
- 12 *kontrabidas* – the villains, in a movie, play or story.
- 13 *Sakay* – a pre-war Filipino film by Lamberto V. Avellana. See “Lamberto V. Avellana: A National Artist and His Times,” pp. 200-217.

Page 128

- 14 *kastanyog* – local portmanteau word derived from *kastanyas* (chestnut) and *niyog* (coconut), referring to roasted coconut meat, a popular wartime snack.
- 15 *sisid* – rice salvaged from the sea-bottom off the piers; it was dried and recycled for cooking, during the war.
- 16 *azucena* – literally, it is the name of a fragrant white lily; in this case, it is used as a local portmanteau word derived from *aso* (dog) and *cena* (dinner), and refers to dog-meat, once considered a local delicacy now banned.
- 17 *butchi* – a native roll made of rice flour with sweetened bean filling.
- 18 *Borneo Bussan Kaisha* – a Japanese enterprise in Manila.

Page 130

- 19 *pare-pareho* – in this sense, “They’re all the same.”

Page 133

- 20 *Lam-ang* and *Indarapatra* – Filipino folk epics.

CINDERELLA SUPERSTAR

Page 138

- 1 *German Moreno* – popular entertainment figure who started out as a minor comedian in films but has since found his mark as a TV and radio host whose programs cater to the movie fans by playing up the current favorites.
- 2 *Director Marquez* – Artemio Marquez, who also owned Tower Productions, a new outfit at the time, which then made money on a spate of so-called “teenage musicals.”
- 3 “*bomba*” wave – See footnote to page 75.
- 4 *Plaza Miranda* – public square in downtown Manila, often the chosen venue for major rallies, demonstrations and campaign speeches.

Page 139

5 Ian – Nora's child with husband Christopher de Leon

Page 140

6 Noranians & Vilmanians – popularly used to identify fans of Nora Aunor and Vilma Santos. The latter graduated from child roles in movies to teenage star in the wake of Nora Aunor's success, but as an adult, she has developed into a fine actress who, since the early 70s, became the major box-office rival to Nora Aunor.

7 Teodoro Valencia's column – Valencia, the acknowledged dean of Filipino journalists, is also the most influential. His daily column has made and unmade public personalities.

8 Christopher de Leon – currently the top young male star of Philippine movies and one of its most-awarded actors. He won the FAMAS award for best actor for his introductory role in Lino Brocka's 1974 *Tinimbang Ka, Ngunit Kulang*.

9 Lotlot – a child Nora adopted legally before her marriage.

10 Boyet – Christopher's nickname.

11 NV Productions – Nora's own production outfit, inactive since 1980. NV stands for the initials of her real name, Nora Villamayor.

Page 142

12 a Carmen Rosales or an Amalia Fuentes – prototypes of Caucasian Filipino beauty which used to be the sole standard for judging star potential.

13 *Alkitrang Dugo* – an adaptation of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

Page 143

14 Bembol Roco – star of Lino Brocka's *Maynila*.

15 Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino – the local film critics' circle.

16 FAMAS – See footnote to page 9.

17 *Tisoy* – an NV movie starring Christopher de Leon in the title role, based on a Filipino comic strip character created by Nonoy Marcelo in the 60s.

MR. BOX-OFFICE

Page 144

1 Originally published as "*Batang Taquilla*," meaning "box-office kid." "Mr. Box-Office" is the author's own translation of the title.

2 *leche* – literally, milk, from the Spanish. Used as a cuss-word in colloquial Filipino.

Page 146

3 "*Pumasok ako sa party. Aba, hindi tumayo. Lagot siya.*" – "If I arrived at a party and she didn't rise to greet me – she'll get hell for that."

4 *champorado* . . . *tuyo* – sweetened rice gruel cooked with cocoa usually eaten with salted dried fish (*tuyo*).

5 *kanto* boys – colloquialism for idlers. *Kanto* means "street corner," the usual haunt of local idlers.

Page 147

6 *barkada* – gang, but not in the gangland sense.

7 "*Huwag kang lalapit.*" – "Stay away."

8 "*Pasensya na lang, pare, hindi sinasadya.*" – "Sorry, partner, that wasn't intentional."

Page 148

9 *contraida* – Spanish spelling of *kontrabida* (villain).

10 *sotana* – priest's cassock.

Page 149

11 *kuya* – older brother

Page 150

12 "*Gipit kami, talagang gipit.*" – "We were really hard up."

Page 151

13 *moro-moro* – See "From Stage to Screen", pp. 83-94.

Page 152

14 *fiamblera* – metal lunchbox consisting of three or four nested compartments held together by a stemmed handle.

15 *lumpiang toque* – spring roll made with bean sprouts.

16 *sinigang* – local broth made with fish or meat and vegetables, with tomatoes or other souring agents.

17 "indies" – the independent movie producers.

Page 153

18 *Sakay* – See footnote to p. 127.

Page 154

19 *Brod* – colloquial abbreviation for "brother." Used as a form of address.

Page 155

20 *bitin* – a term referring to trousers that do not quite cover the ankles.

21 *Inday* – a post-war theater that showed local vaudeville and burlesque.

22 *Señor Zarah* – Don Jose Zarah, prominent impresario whose stage produc-

tions were a training-ground for many Filipino entertainers who went on to the big time.

23 *moro-moro*... *zarzuela* – See “From Stage to Screen”, pp. 83-94.

24 “*Tahimik na! . . . Walang tawanan.*” – “Quiet! . . . Don’t laugh.”

Page 156

25 *puto* – sweetened rice flour bun.

DOLPHY: THE WAY OF A CLOWN

Page 159

1 “Filipinos are really like that,” Dolphy explains. “They root for the underdog to win. Just look at Nora Aunor. They want their everyday humor somewhat on the side of the underdog or the simpleton, like in *John en Marsha* (a popular TV situation comedy that stars Dolphy). Even for the poor, the best things in life – love and a sense of humor – are free. That’s what we like to portray on our show. Difficulties must be faced with a light heart, even in real life.”

2 “I also do it because it is what the audience expects of me. And so my films end up being quite commercial, nothing more, which can be frustrating. Even if I wanted to do a dramatic feature or something Jack Lemmon-style, I cannot get away with it. My pathetic scenes, if any, must be kept to a minimum, just enough so that the final victory is made sweeter. It’s difficult to change public tastes. They usually go for the same type of movie as your latest smash hit, and they’ll stick to that type for a while. Try making a musical, and they won’t buy it. Nor a horror film. But if it’s the less popular actors who try other genres, the public might go for it. Sometimes, it’s just luck. It’s a matter of timing, being able to anticipate what the public wants.”

Pages 159-160

3 “Even Lino Brocka,” he adds, a bit defensively, “is doing commercial films now. He has to make some sacrifices because our people have not learned how to appreciate good movies.” But no real resentment lurks in his statement: “On the other hand, how can you get angry at the public, or take issue with them? The customer is always right, I believe that, since they’re the ones who pay to see a movie. They are your first critics.”

Page 160

4 Of his own disappointments, he continues: “I’m sorry to say that most of those who watch my films don’t go for the more intellectual Tagalog movies. They rarely do, except when they’re occasionally pressured by their children, or when they have a free movie pass. Most of our moviegoers belong to the *bakya* crowd, which does not necessarily mean that their IQs are low. It’s just that few of the elite watch Tagalog movies.”

5 *Pero suwerte ako sa comedy.* – But I’m lucky with comedy.

Page 162

6 “It was also my fault,” he says generously. “I was negligent. I spoiled people and trusted them too much.” But I don’t want to talk about the people

who wronged me. It’s useless. I leave it all in God’s hands.”

Page 163

7 *Ganyan talaga ang mukha ko.* – I really look like that.

8 At first Dolphy hesitates. “I’m the same old me. I may sometimes be bitter – but only in words. I can forgive even those who have offended me extremely. I’m a sucker for sob stories . . . I rarely get angry, but the few times I do, I get terribly angry. It doesn’t last, though. On the other hand, if one is too kind, it can be foolish, sometimes.” He admits to the follies of goodness. “It’s like allowing a child to misbehave with impunity; he’ll have grown horns by the time he grows up.”

9 “*Pukunan ko rin dito kasi ay dugo at pawis. Masakit pag nawala.*” – I’ve also invested blood and sweat in this enterprise. It will really hurt to lose it.”

Pages 164-165

10 “Show-biz is dirty,” he affirms. “As the saying goes, it’s a dog-eat-dog world, full of heartaches. Even success has its penalties. You may be clean and honest, but there are those who will look down on you, and even stab you in the back.”

Page 165

11 “Politics is even dirtier than show-biz,” he reasons. “Some people will even commit massacre in the name of politics.”

12 He muses: “It’s funny. The moment one becomes successful, one makes enemies. As a nobody, I had no enemies.”

13 *Hindi pang-matagalan ’yon.* – They won’t last.

14 What he has against the trends jabs at the flesh of issues skin-deep. “We’re too Westernized,” he thinks. “Just look at our disco music and Pinoy rock; it’s still the Western beat. Most of our films, for instance, try to follow the American trend; it’s more realistic, they say. But we are still on a double standard. We cannot do what the American people are doing; it comes naturally to them, but for us, it’s simply for show. In Filipino films, we can use ‘sonofabitch’ but not the vernacular equivalent, just because it sounds more obscene in Tagalog. But it’s all the same. As for our lifestyle, it’s true we don’t have divorce but the incidence of separation is higher here than in the States; more husbands have mistresses; even the taxi driver has two or three wives. Being a Catholic country, we have no divorce, but the situation is worse . . . I hate to say it, but the Filipino is quite a hypocrite, even the way he lives . . .”

Page 166

15 Of women, he claims liberal, supposedly as opposed to strict, views. “Everyone has his own ideas. I’m basically simple. It’s enough that I get along with a woman. I don’t like an overbearing or scandalous woman. Nor a grandstand player. I’m a simple man who prefers to stay in the sidelines. When you’re made, you don’t have to rub it in.”

16 “. . . Some men perhaps don’t show this. These are the silent types who can be more dangerous. And there are many of them around.”

17 “It’s a gamble. A man who will declare that there is only one woman in his life is rare. I wouldn’t believe him. A man who professes there is just

one woman for him must be lying."

18 "*pagka medyo naliligaw sila*" – whenever they go astray.

Page 167

19 "I respect their individuality, but not when they're wrong. Of course, everyone has his vices. The thing is to carry on and behave properly."

20 His most painful fear in show business is to become a has-been. "Of course, I'm resigned to that, although I fight it," Dolphy says. "It's like death, you know. Who can prevent it? But if it comes, I'll have no regrets. I've had all the benefits that come from being an actor. I consider myself lucky," he smiles mildly, also claiming it is his prime asset. "In spite of my youth – er, my age – I'm still around, you see, while most of my contemporaries are gone."

Page 168

21 ". . . I rarely read books, but that one (*Millionaire Clown*) I read. What was special about him (Chaplin) was that his movies had a message, as well as a human touch. He, too, started from scratch. He had a sad life . . . and all because of keeping to his principles"

Page 169

22 "Of course, no one can be successful in everything. Each of us has our share of problems. That is the beauty of living: to have problems and solve them and have other problems . . . Life is no fun without challenges."

THE EDDIE RODRIGUEZ SYNDROME

Page 172

1 *pilyo* – naughty; in this case, it means a male flirt.

Page 174

2 *iniwan ng asawa* – abandoned by the spouse.

MOVIES, CRITICS AND THE BAKYA CROWD

Page 175

1 *bakya crowd* – See "Notes on Bakya," pp. 117-123.

2 *indio* – See footnote to p. 10.

3 *masa* – the hoi-polloi.

4 *komiks* – vernacular for comic-books

5 *hindi commercial . . . pang FAMAS* – not commercially oriented, awards oriented; for FAMAS, see footnote to p. 62.

Page 177

6 *cenaculo* – Spanish spelling of *sinakulo* (see "From Stage to Screen," pp. 83-89).

7 *anting-anting* – an amulet.

Page 180

8 *provincianos* – country folk.

9 *Florante at Laura* – An epic poem by the 18th-century Tagalog master Francisco Baltazar, who used the pen name Balagtas. Describing events set in a mythical Albania and Greece, Balagtas meant the epic as an allegory to describe the oppression of the Filipinos under Spanish rule.

GERARDO DE LEON: A MASTER FILM-MAKER SPEAKS OUT

Page 184

1 *zarzuela* – See footnote to p. 11.

Page 185

2 UST – University of Santo Tomas, in Manila. Founded in 1611, it is the oldest university in Asia, older even than Harvard.

3 Rogelio de la Rosa was one of the first superstars of Philippine cinema; his popularity spanned the 30s to the 50s. He was elected to the Philippine Senate in 1956; after two terms, he was appointed to the foreign service, and has served as Philippine ambassador to Cambodia, the Netherlands, Poland, Bulgaria, and currently, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

LAMBERTO V. AVELLANA: A NATIONAL ARTIST AND HIS TIMES

Page 202

1 The term "cave" refers to one of the cave-like cells in the old fortress walls of Intramuros which the squatters appropriated for shelter.

2 Liberation – Filipinos refer to 1944-45 as the "Liberation" period, i.e., when American troops came back to the Philippines and finally managed to drive off the Japanese.

Page 206

3 *Philippine Collegian* – official student publication of the University of the Philippines.

4 Fred Ruiz Castro later became the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

5 Narciso Pimentel became a famous stage, radio and TV personality; Arsenio Lacson became mayor of Manila in 1951 until his death in 1962.

Page 207

6 Araneta Center in Cubao – one of the biggest and most prosperous of the privately-developed commercial centers in Metro Manila.

7 Carlos P. Romulo went on to a brilliant career as Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, wartime aide to Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Philippine ambassador to the United Nations and signatory to the UN Charter, Philippine ambassador to the United States, Foreign Secretary under President Elpidio Quirino, president of the University of the Philippines in the 60s, and since 1969, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

8 CPR – the initials by which Romulo is popularly known.

Page 208

9 Leonor Rivera was the Filipina sweetheart of Jose Rizal, who became the national hero. Her parents objected to Rizal and made her marry an Englishman.

Page 209

10 *binagoongang adobo* – Filipino dish of pork simmered with tiny salted shrimp and garlic.

Page 210

11 These are some members of the Ylagan show-business clan. (See "Gerardo de Leon: A Master Film-Maker Speaks Out," pp. 184-194). Conrado Conde made a name as a film director; Tito Arevalo, as a music composer, arranger and director; and Jay Ilagan, a third-generation representative of the clan, is a fine actor just in his 20s.

12 Severino Reyes created the character of *Lola Basiang* (Grandma Basiang), which, for Filipinos has come to mean "story-teller." Reyes signed *Lola Basiang* to a number of tales and fantasies that he published for Filipino children. These tales were the basis for a popular radio story-telling series beloved of Filipinos who grew up in the 40s and 50s.

Page 211

13 *Liwayway* is the most widely-circulated Tagalog magazine; it publishes short stories and serialized novels, in prose as well as comics-form.

14 Assumption College – a leading convent school for girls in Manila which caters to the elite.

Page 212

15 *hacenderos* – plantation owners.

16 *auto-calesas* – horse-drawn cabs.

17 *travias* – the local trams.

Page 213

18 PC – Philippine Constabulary

19 General Miguel Malvar was the last Filipino general of the Revolution to surrender to the Americans.

Page 216

20 "shootings" – Filipino-English term for "filming."

21 Manuel L. Quezon – Philippine patriot, statesman, and President of the Commonwealth government from 1935 to 1944.

Page 217

22 Huk movement – the local armed Communist rebel movement of the late 40s and 50s.

23 FAMAS – see footnote to p. 62.

24 Nick Joaquin is a National Artist for Literature; *Portrait* is one of his best plays.

EDDIE ROMERO: My Work and Myself

Page 224

1 Romero refers to *Desire* which he made in 1982.

LINO BROCKA: Dramatic Sense, Documentary Aspirations

Page 227

1 PETA-Kalinangan Ensemble is the performing arm of the Philippine Educational Theater Association, of which Brocka has been executive director since 1974.

Page 229

2 "*Tangkilikin ang Pelikulang Pilipino.*" – "Support Filipino films."

Page 231

3 *Anak-Dalita* – Tagalog movie classic by Lamberto V. Avellana; also see "Lamberto V. Avellana: A National Artist & His Times," pp. 200-217.

Page 232

4 *provinciano* – country bumpkin

5 *acesoria* – a lower-middle-class tenement.

6 "*May problema ka ba?*" – "Do you have a problem?"

7 "*Makibaka.*" – "Join the struggle." *Makibaka* was a rallying cry among the young leftist activists of the early 70s.

Page 233

8 Nora Aunor – See "Cinderella Superstar," pp. 135-143.

Page 235

9 Tondo – Manila's largest district, site of the city's worst slums now the subject of urban renewal programs.

THE CULT OF THE IMAGE IN LINO BROCKA

Page 238

1 *Dung-aw* actually refers to a funeral eulogy and dirge sung during wakes in northern Philippines.

ISHMAEL BERNAL: MERGING ART AND COMMERCIALISM

Page 240

1 *bomba* – See footnote to p. 75.

Page 249

2 *nipa* – the native thatch, made from the leaves of a swamp palm; these are dried, pressed and sewn together to make shingles for roofing and walls.

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3 *Lahing Pilipino* (The Filipino Race) – an ambitious epic film commissioned by a Philippine government agency in 1977 with seven participating Filipino directors, to show Philippine history from pre-Hispanic times to the present. Ill-conceived and ill-advisedly rushed for completion within three months from its inception, the film was discarded, after the first cut proved too unwieldy and disharmonious.

A FILM DIRECTOR SPEAKS OUT

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1 *Tia Dely* (Aunt Dely) is a popular radio female personality who is the Filipina "Ann Landers of the airwaves."

FILM CENSORSHIP AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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1 *palakasan*, *hiya*, *utang na loob* and *pakikisama* – typically Filipino cultural values. *Palakasan* refers to the system of competing for favors with a superior. *Hiya*, meaning "a sense of shame," refers to keeping face or saving face. *Utang na loob*, literally "a debt of feeling," refers to the sense of gratitude and loyalty that one necessarily owes a benefactor. *Pakikisama* is the ability to get along with others, implying tolerance as well as generosity.

PHILIPPINE MOVIES: SOME PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Page 259

1 FAMAS – See footnote to p. 62.

Page 260

2 *bakya* – See "Notes on Bakya," pp. 117-125.

3 "*Buhay-alamang, pagbukso'y patay.*" – A Filipino saying to underscore the perennial risk one faces by the very fact of living. It refers to the life of the tiny shrimp which faces death each time it leaps; also implies that life is ephemeral.

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4 *komiks* – vernacular for comic-books.

5 Mars Ravelo is the most popular Filipino comics novelist. Since the 1940s when he began his career, Ravelo's fertile imagination has given Filipino popular culture countless unforgettable stories and characters, including a gallery of fantasy creatures, who have been further immortalized in successful movies made out of these stories.

6 *bida* – Filipino for hero.

7 Nick Joaquin – See footnote to p. 217.

About the Writers

T.D. Agcaoili, a pioneering film critic, has been a newspaper editor, a film documentarist, and an advertising executive at various times in his career. A poet and a fictionist, as well, his writings have been translated into German and Russian and included in Philippine literary anthologies. He was the director-general of the Maria Clara awards and headed the awards committee of the Metropolitan Film Festival in 1975 and 1976. A lecturer in film aesthetics, management and communications at the U.P. Institute of Mass Communications, he has also written, directed and produced a number of feature films, including several for world release. Currently, he is at work on a critical history of Filipino films.

Denise Chou Allas is a free-lance features writer formerly connected with the staff of *Celebrity* magazine where her piece on Dolphy was originally published.

Virgilio S. Almario, a prize-winning Tagalog poet and essayist, has authored three collections of poetry under his pseudonym, Rio Alma. Among these are *Ang Makata sa Panahon ng Makina* and *Doktrinang Anakpawis*. He has also published a volume of literary essays, a manual of writing style, and an anthology of modern Filipino poems. He writes a column for the *Philippines Daily Express* and was a juror in the 1982 Metro Manila Film Festival. Currently, he is the executive director of the Children's Communication Center.

Lino Brocka, an award-winning Filipino film director, has represented the Philippines at such prestigious international film festivals as Cannes and San Sebastian. Earlier this year, he was a juror at the New Delhi International Film Festival which featured a retrospective of his films. He also directs stage plays for the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), a nationalist-oriented drama group, of which he is the executive director.

Celso Al. Carunungan is a noted Filipino writer whose novel *Like a Big Brave Man* was published both here and abroad. He is also the author of a Tagalog novel, *Kampon ni Satanas*, published in 1969. He wrote the original screenplay for *Biyaya ng Lupa*, a Tagalog movie classic filmed by the late Manuel Silos. At present, he is chairman of the Manila Arts and Culture Commission, Manila City Hall.

Andres Cristobal Cruz is a poet, fictionist, critic and painter. He has been a recipient of Palanca awards for literature, as well as the Republic Cultural Heritage Award. In 1962, he was named in the annual selection of Ten Outstanding Young Men (TOYM) by the Philippine Jaycees for his achievements in literature. Among his published works are a book of poems, a collection of short stories, and two novels in Filipino. He was the director of the defunct Bureau of Standards for Mass Media and is currently a regional director for the Office of Media Affairs.

Petronilo Bn. Daroy is a professor in Philippine Literature at the University of the Philippines, where he is also Public Relations Officer in the office of the President. He is the author of *The Politics of Imagination, Against the National Grain*, and *The Novels of Rizal and the Ideas of European Liberalism*. He is a member of the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino*, a local association of film critics.

Julie Y. Daza is a well-known newspaper columnist for the *Times Journal* and the defunct *Daily Mirror*. At present she is the editor of *People* magazine and a co-host of the television talk-show, *Tell the City*. A choice collection of her columns entitled *The Best of Medium Rare* was published in 1981 and more recently, a collection of her love stories.

Jessie B. Garcia is a journalist hailing from Bacolod City. He has been a frequent contributor of articles on celebrities and the popular arts to local periodicals and magazines. A collection of his personality sketches of local filmdom's love goddesses entitled *Stars in the Raw* was published in 1982.

Amadis Ma. Guerrero belongs to an old and well-known family of writers. A former staffer of the Associated Press and the *Weekly Graphic*, he has lately turned his hand to fiction and art criticism. He has published two collections of short stories and has co-authored *The Struggle for Philippine Art* and a volume on painter and National Artist Victorio Edades with Pura Kalaw Ledesma. He contributes art reviews regularly to the *Times Journal*.

Mario A. Hernando is one of the country's most prolific free-lance journalists. Columnist and film critic, he is an active member of the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino* and is an executive board member of the *Office Catholique International du Cinema* (OCIC-Philippines). Since 1976, he has served on the jury of the annual Catholic Mass Media Awards.

Jose F. Lacaba is the president of the Screenwriters Guild of the Philippines. He has written several original screenplays, among them that of *Jaguar* (with Ricardo Lee) which was filmed by Lino Brocka and subsequently shown at Cannes. Formerly connected with the defunct *Philippines Free Press* and *Asia-Leader Magazine*, he is equally facile in English and Filipino. A collection of his Tagalog poetry was published in 1981 and more recently, a collection of his journalistic essays in English on the activist movement in the early seventies entitled *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage*.

Bienvenido Lumera is a professor at the University of the Philippines, Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature. Holder of a Ph. D. in Comparative Literature from Indiana University, Lumera is a noted authority on Tagalog poetry and Philippine literature, as well as a film critic, poet, and dramatist. His rock opera-ballet *Tales of the Manuvu* and his zarzuela *Ang Palabas Bukas* have both been made into acclaimed productions. A member of the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino*, he has twice served as chairman of this local association of film critics.

P.T. Martin is an editor, researcher and poet. He heads the management executive staff of the Children's Communication Center, a foundation engaged in publishing children's books and producing broadcast material for children. His article on the silent era in Philippine movies was written while he was still a senior student of Philippine Studies at the University of the Philippines.

Santiago A. Pilar is an A.B. Humanities graduate of the University of the Philippines where he is currently a lecturer in Philippine art history. He is well known for his art historical studies which have appeared in *Archipelago*, *Orientalism*, *Filipino Heritage* and *Pamana*. He is the author of *Juan Luna, The Filipino As Painter* published by the Eugenio Lopez Foundation. In 1981, he was named TOYM awardee for art history by the Philippine Jaycees.

Quijano de Manila is the journalistic *nom de plume* of Nick Joaquin, the most widely respected living fictionist and essayist in the Philippines. *Prose and Poems*, the first collection of his verse and fiction, appeared in 1952. Subsequently, his novel, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, written on a Rockefeller Foundation grant, won the Stonehill Award in 1961. He has also written four plays, among which is *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, filmed by Lamberto V. Avellana in 1966. Eight volumes of his journalistic essays written under his pen name have also been collected. A recipient of several journalistic and literary awards, he was named a National Artist in 1976.

Eddie Romero, both as a film director and as a screenwriter, has some 70 feature films to his credit, including Hollywood productions. One of the most highly regarded film-makers in the country, he has won numerous awards for his work. These include the first Maria Clara award, the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences (FAMAS) award, the Metropolitan Manila Film Festival award, the Gawad Urian, and the Catholic Mass Media Award. *Ganito Kami Noon . . . Paano Kayo Ngayon?*, the film which marked his return to Tagalog movies in 1976, has been shown in various retrospectives on Philippine cinema held abroad.

Agustin V. Sotto has contributed film criticism to *Positif*, the 1982 *International Film Guide*, *Asiaweek*, *Arts Monthly*, *Philippines Daily Express*, and *Who* magazine. Formerly a film instructor at De La Salle University, he is at present a special assistant to the Director-General of the Manila International Film Festival. A member of the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino*, he has also served on the jury of the Carthage Film Festival.

Charles Tesson, a young man in his twenties, has been a regular contributor to the *Cahiers du Cinema* for the past four years. His critical dissertation on F.W. Murnau's *Faust* has been published in *La Quinzaine du Cinema*.

Nicanor G. Tiongson, an associate professor at the University of the Philippines' Department of Pilipino and Philippine Literature, is the author of a book on Philippine traditional drama entitled *Sinakulo*, as well as a more recent volume on the *komedya*, another local theater form. A Ph. D. holder in Philippine Studies, he has written and lectured extensively on Filipino literature, drama, and costumes. Currently, he is the chairman of the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino*.

Rafael Ma. Guerrero has published criticism on film, theater, and the visual arts in a variety of local periodicals and magazines since 1970. An A.B. Literature graduate of De La Salle University, he studied criticism under Henry Popkins and stagecraft under Ladislav Smocek while a member of the PETA-Kalinangan Ensemble. He has also taken up workshop courses in photography and television production at the School of Visual Arts in New York City, as well as a seminar on Third-World cinema at the Museum of Modern Art. His film and television credits include co-authorship of two full-length screenplays, co-direction of a feature film, and several television documentaries. At present, he is completing a book-length study on Tagalog movies, 1972-1982, for publication early in 1983.

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Necessarily, a book of this sort is made possible through the work of many hands. I am indebted, to begin with, to the writers who gave their kind permission for the use of their articles in this anthology. Likewise, I am obligated to all the producers and production outfits, directors, publicists and friends who furnished me the stills found herein. Considerable as these were, the lack of other period stills and the time constraints attendant to the preparation of this book for printing led me to resort to reproducing illustrations found in extant publications, most notably stills of LVN Pictures' best-known productions found in *Doña Sisang and Filipino Movies*, © Vera-Reyes Inc., 1977. I trust that in view of the archival limitations presently obtaining with respect to Philippine movies, they will not begrudge me these precipitate borrowings.

The two articles by Charles Tesson from the *Cahiers du Cinema* were brought to my attention by Agustin Sotto and were translated from the French by Federico Miguel Olbes and Marita Manuel. I hope that these two pieces will prove to be as much "eye-openers" to the readers as they were for me.

The section of "Notes", literally an indispensable key to this volume for the foreign reader, is largely the work of Marita Manuel and Jose Carreon of the Information Group, Metropolitan Manila Commission. I am deeply indebted to them for this invaluable contribution.

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R.M.G.