

## CLASSICS OF THE FILIPINO FILM

The search for the great Filipino film is a daunting and often frustrating adventure, because the film industry and its audience appear to prefer, not excellence, but a comfortable mediocrity. Some filmmakers work in the medium to come up with substantial movies, but their efforts are inhibited by producers who think that quality is “poison” at the box office.

And yet, it was not always so. Despite the gloom-and-doom observations of cynics, there have been enough excellent exceptions to the desultory rule to prove that Filipino filmmakers can come up with exceptional motion pictures—if the spirit moves them, and when filmmaking conditions encourage their production.

What then are the factors that encourage excellence in the Filipino film, and those that mitigate against it?

The maker of exceptional movies has something to say in terms of the film medium, and the mastery of that medium to say it in a significant and empathetic way. The filmmaker must be enough of a stalwart to resist the many importunings toward mediocrity that compromise achievement in the local filmmaking situation. These include the preference for convoluted plots, many detours, and the *halu-halo* (eclectic) style of filmmaking in which diverse elements like drama, comedy, action, and fantasy scenes are shoehorned into one production.

Other negative elements that could discourage or destroy quality are: limited production budgets due to a small, largely domestic film market; the star system and the stereotypes it engenders; the overly explicit rendition of screen characters’ thoughts and feelings; slack pacing; a lack of appreciation for the importance of unity; extremely heavy taxation; censorship, which inhibits the creative flow of original film concepts; lack of formal training in film; and the audience’s low expectations, which quickie filmmakers are only too happy to “measure down” to.

In the light of these pervasive limitations, it really is a marvel that our filmmakers have given us so many fine films in the past. Truly, they are the heroes of the film industry, wrenching excellence from the very jaws of near-endemic mediocrity.

### **The Beginnings: The First Golden Age**

At the very birth of Filipino films at the turn of the century, significance was very much in evidence. The first features produced in this country were two films on the life of the national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal. Soon, however, superficially entertaining movies from abroad quickly became popular with moviegoers. This persuaded Filipino movie producers that success lay, not in challenging the audience, but in tickling its fancy.

During the prewar years, the movie audience fancied bucolic romances, tearjerkers, and swashbuckling costume spectacles, and that's what it got—in heaps. But the Filipino filmmaker gained a strong sense of technique, and that lent the predictable material a measure of pertinence and excitement. By the 1930s and the 1940s, enough gifted filmmakers with their own sense of style had presented themselves and their works to the viewing public to usher in the so-called first “golden age” of Philippine films. They included Jose Nepomuceno, Carlos Vander Tolosa, Joaquin Pardo de Tavera, Octavio Silos, Tor Villano, Lorenzo P. Tuells, Ramon Estella, and others who made their most significant films during this period.

Among the notable films of the prewar era are Jose Nepomuceno's ***Dalagang Bukid*** (Country Maiden), 1919; ***La Venganza de Don Silvestre*** (The Vengeance of Don Silvestre), 1919; and ***Noli Me Tangere*** (Touch Me Not), 1930; Carlos Vander Tolosa's ***Diwata ng Karagatan*** (Goddess of the Sea), 1936; Tor Villano's ***Ligaw na Bituin*** (Wandering Star), 1938; and Ramon Estella's ***Huling Habilidad*** (Last Will), 1939. Initially, the Filipino directors imitated foreign filmmaking styles. In time, however, they presented homegrown variations that were particularly appealing to local audiences. Materials for movies were often adapted from folk literature, theater, and radio drama serials.

Also transposed to the film medium were conventions of the stage and radio, like obvious stereotypes in characterization, melodramatic dialogue and vocal delivery, stylized staging, and convoluted plots with multiple detours and climaxes.

After a while, these obvious elements were refined by the more artistic directors, and the positive Filipino filmmaking style began to emerge. Thus the creation of the estimable body of work that prompted people to hail this period as Philippine movie's first “Golden Age.”

However, World War II nipped this progress in the bud, as most filmmakers stopped shooting movies, and instead became active on the popular stage.

### **The Second Golden Age**

After World War II, Filipino filmmakers returned to work with a vengeance, with four major studios—Sampaguita, LVN, Premiere, and Lebran—dominating the movie scene. This “studio system” had its favorable and unfavorable aspects as far as the production of worthy movies was concerned. The studios' control over their stars and film crews meant that they could establish reliable standards for work, thus encouraging professionalism and love for the medium. On the other hand, control also meant the tendency to follow safe, tried and tested formulas.

Still, the major studios did go out of their way to hire artists, not merely artisans, so the innate artistry of their resident directors sometimes shone through and lifted the occasional production above the predictable throng.

This was encouraged by the studios' producers, who were not just entrepreneurs out to make a buck, but also lovers of film who were proud of their studios' output—and particularly proud of the one or two special “*pang-award*” productions that they commissioned for local and regional film competitions each year. It is these productions that form the bulk of the postwar “film classics” that have raised the world's estimation of the quality of Philippine film culture. Gerardo de Leon, Lamberto V. Avellana, Manuel Conde, Gregorio Fernandez, and Chat Gallardo, the outstanding directors of the 1950s and 1960s, are the premier artists responsible for the second “golden age” of the Filipino Film.

Other factors that contributed to the emergence of local movies' second golden age include the encouragement for quality work offered by annual film competitions like the Maria Clara and FAMAS awards, and some scriptwriters and directors' determination to dramatize ethnic or period material on screen, thus prompting the audience to gain a better appreciation of the richness of the Filipino culture, traditions, and values.

Conversely, some filmmakers made it a point to deal with contemporary subject matter and topical situations and issues, thus making people realize that movies could in fact be substantial if they confronted reality instead of running away from it, which was the more traditional stance. This shift made movies powerful because they could affect, not just people's fantasies, but their own lives.

Generally regarded as the most visually gifted of the postwar directors, Gerardo de Leon attained greatness by instinctively opting for relevant topics for his movies, even those that he considered as his potboilers. He resisted the lush romances and swash buckling sagas of the period, and chose to make films about real people in the throes of resolving significant problems that is related not just to the protagonists in the film, but to society as a whole. His films were also characterized by a very personal interpretation of material, by striking images and pulsating cadences that gave his works their distinctive heartbeat, so to speak.

In 1951, De Leon made *Sisa*, based on the tragic character in Rizal's *Noli me tangere*. He fleshed out the madwoman's story into a dramatic correlative for an entire nation's tragedy. Arresting images suffuse the movie with visual pertinence: Maria Clara singing as Sisa runs; Ibarra hypnotizing Sisa to help her unravel the trauma at the root of her madness; her sons, Crispin and Basilio, ringing the church bells in the rain; Sisa seeing the missing Crispin in the flames as she cooks; and the whipping and rape montages. Outstanding are the scenes between Sisa and Ibarra towards the end of the film, the fight in the belfry, and the film's finale.

De Leon is also acclaimed for his work on a number of other exceptional films. His screen versions of the two Rizal novels, *Noli Me Tangere*, 1961, and *El Filibusterismo* (Subversion), 1962, use dynamic film language and images to present Rizal's dramatic and political points with energy and affective understanding. *Ifugao*, 1954, delves into

the proud tradition and age-old enmities of the highland tribes. The *Moises Padilla Story*, 1961, exposes the cancer of corruption eating away at the heart of Philippine politics. *Hanggang Sa Dulo ng Daigdig* (To the Ends of the Earth), 1958, transformed a formula tale of vengeance into a compelling suspense-drama. *Huwag Mo Akong Limutin* (Forget Me Not), 1960, was one of the first “adult” dramas to be made in the country, reflecting contemporary morals and sensibilities.

In 1956, Lamberto V. Avellana made audiences sit up with his then controversial production, *Anak Dalita* (The Ruins). The film shocked some quarters with its espousal of cinematic realism and naturalism, as opposed to the then fashionable stylistic escapism. Avellana derived his style from Italian postwar neorealist productions, but went on to render it truly his own, and quite “Filipino,” by setting his story of love, intrigue, survival, and tragedy in the period immediately following the end of World War II in Manila.

In terms of design, the production was exceptional because it was fortunate to be able to use the actual bombed-out ruins of a church for its principal location. The ruins added immeasurably to the sense of realism called for by the film’s script.

The movie is also enhanced by fine performances—Rosa Rosal as the hostess, and Tony Santos as the sculptor who loses the use of one arm in the war. Things come to a head when the sculptor beats a smuggler at his own game; however, the boy whom he has learned to love is shot in the final struggle for the money that is supposed to have been smuggled to Hongkong. The squatters finally leave the church ruins in a long exodus to start life elsewhere, on land that they can finally call their own.

Avellana’s other significant films include: *Badjao*, 1957, about the proud seafaring people of Sulu; *Kundiman ng Lahi* (Kundiman of the Race), 1959, in which he details the changes in rural people’s lives after a factory is established in their farming community; and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Filipino*, 1965, the film version of Nick Joaquin’s dramatic elegy on the decline of Intramuros and all the old values that it stood for. Manuel Conde is known for his movies which draw inspiration from the folk hero, Juan Tamad, such as *Juan Tamad Goes to Congress*, 1959. This political and social satire is a classic for its wickedly on-target jibes against traditional Filipino politicians and their laughable excesses. The satirical mode is rarely attempted in local movies because it requires acute powers of observation and the equally well-honed comedic means to spoof people’s attitudes and behavior. Few filmmakers possess these rare traits in even rarer combination, so Conde’s achievement remains unsurpassed to this date.

Conde also distinguished himself with his work on such films as: *Genghis Khan*, 1950, the first Filipino film to be honored at the 1951 Venice International Film Festival, which amazed film buffs abroad with Conde’s ability to make a sweeping epic on a shoestring budget; *Juan Tamad Goes To Society*, 1960, which sustained Conde’s penchant for satire, this time on the urban Filipino’s social foibles; *Ibong Adarna* (Adarna Bird), 1941, which featured the first color sequence in Filipino filmmaking

(the sequence showing the magical bird singing was hand painted, frame by frame); ***Ikaw Kasi*** (You Are to Blame), 1955, which dealt with the coconut industry; and ***Molave***, 1961, which foretold the problems that Filipinos are experiencing at present due to the over-exploitation of the country's forests.

Gregorio Fernandez is remembered for ***Malvarosa***, 1958, which dramatized the tribulations of a family hounded by tragedy. In this film, Fernandez's skill as a visual storyteller is immediately apparent in the way he spans decades through judicious montage. He underscores the visual motif of the railroad tracks that run, not just through the town, but through the lives of his characters. He elicits memorable performances from Charito Solis as Rosa, the only girl in a family of spoiled and weak men, and Rebecca del Rio as the mother who takes to the bottle. Finally, ***Malvarosa*** showcases tight editing, astute musical scoring, and directorial sweep.

Fernandez's other classics include ***Higit sa Lahat*** (Above All), 1955, which gave him the 1956 Asian Film Festival Award for best director (in this film, Rogelio de la Rosa plays a fugitive who sacrifices his identity for his family); ***Luksang Tagumpay*** (Dark Victory), which was honored by the FAMAS for its striking dramatic images as the best film made in 1956; and the filmmaker's tributes to Filipino heroes ***Heneral Gregorio del Pilar*** (General Gregorio del Pilar), 1949, and ***Dagohoy***, 1953.

Manuel Silos' masterpiece is ***Biyaya ng Lupa*** (Blessings of the Land), 1959, which focuses on a family of survivors. His use of montage in this production has been justly celebrated, e.g., the passing of the years in the family's life is measured by the growth, from seedling to flowering and then fruiting, of an orchard of lanzones trees. Striking images include the rain on the flowering trees, a lynch mob hunting for a rapist, the widow having to work as a beast of burden, a bamboo bank being opened for the money to finance an ambitious son's trip to the big city, the son coming home to show off his newly acquired city ways.

***Biyaya*** is notable for the excellent performances of Rosa Rosal and Tony Santos as the rural couple, and of Leroy Salvador, who crafts the role of the deafmute son with sensitivity and imagination. He carries his father's broken body, and tries to "talk" to the love of his life, exhibiting anger, and then remorse. He won't let his civilized brother in—until all is forgiven.

Silos is credited with innovative work in his other movies. In ***Tuloy ang Ligaya*** (Let the Good Times Roll), 1958, he went in for visual improvisation by way of split-screen effects and other camera "tricks." And his penchant for musicals resulted in the exceptional song-and-dance numbers in ***Hagdanan ng Kalayaan*** (Freedom's Ladder).

Chat Gallardo chose to specialize in action-dramas and comedies, and is best remembered for ***Geron Busabos*** (Geron, the Bum), 1964. Here, Joseph Estrada plays a shiftless bum who emerges as a protector of the weak against the petty hoods who terrorize people working in the public market in Quiapo. Gallardo's

direction and Augusto Buenaventura's screenplay take the material beyond its formula limits and achieve great emotional impact with the development of felt relationships between the protagonist and the other colorful characters who eke out a living in the bowels of the big city.

Good scripting and earthy dialogue are enhanced by natural-looking street scenes and the whole production's strong sense of realism. Gallardo successfully snatches moments of visual poetry from his film's grimy settings, as in the scenes between Geron and his girl, who sells sampaguita flowers in Quiapo Church, and between Geron and a boy whose grandfather has just died. In other powerful moments in the film, Geron moves from exploding in anger in a hospital, to breaking down in relief after he learns that the boy's fever has subsided. In terms of performance, Geron and Digno (played by Oscar Roncal) are fully realized characters.

*Geron Busabos* has been hailed as an example of a movie that has quality but is also very popular—precisely the combination of attributes that local movies must have in order for the film industry to really progress. A popular but inept movie is a step backwards, while a fine film that is rejected by the movie audience only perpetuates the superstition that good movies do not make money. Good and popular films like *Geron* are needed to effect a consistent improvement in our film industry's output, and to convince hesitant producers that making good movies can be good business.

After *Geron*, Gallardo went on to work closely with Estrada in the latter's action-drama and comedy productions, and came up with outstanding films like *Ransom*, 1974, and *Tatay na si Erap* (Erap Becomes a Father), 1972.

### **The Third Golden Age**

*Geron* was produced in 1964, towards the end of the second, decade-long golden age. It was made, not by one of the major studios, but by Emar Pictures, an independent company. This fact serves to highlight an important development in the 1960s: the decline of the traditional studios and the rise of the independent film companies.

By the 1960s, the Big Four's top contract stars were beginning to realize that their movies made a lot of money principally because of their star value. Desirous of getting a bigger share of the profits, they refused to renew old contracts and entered into new ones with producers who dangled bigger talent fees before them. Or they decided to turn producers themselves.

The rise of the independents was a positive development because it brought in new concepts that shook up the predictable formula orientation of the established studios.

On the other hand, it added to the power and influence of the star system, and lowered the standards of filmmaking in the country, since, in effect, anybody with money and the right connections could now make a movie, without the well-oiled filmmaking machinery of a major studio to back him up.

Some independents like Emar did come up with creditable movies, but others were

responsible for tawdry and technically inferior quickies, many of them copies of movies coming from overseas. Thus, the independents produced “Pinoy cowboy” films, “secret agent” movies patterned after the James Bond “love them or shoot them” spy series, and the major development of the 1960s and 1970s, the *bomba* films. These sex dramas brought down the level of filmmaking in the country. It did not take much money to make them—the only requirements were a camera, a room, a bed, and bodies willing to strip and clinch on it. As prurience held sway, excellence or even mere competence became irrelevant.

All these conditions, however, did not daunt the major film artists, who came up with quality films amidst the commercial demands of the industry. The best films of Eddie Romero, Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, Celso Ad Castillo, Marilou Diaz-Abaya, Laurice Guillen, Mike de Leon, and Peque Gallaga constitute the third golden age of the Filipino film.

Some of these and other filmmakers differed from a number of older directors by taking formal studies in film instead of learning “on the job,” and by steeping themselves in “New Wave” cinema from abroad, which emphasized film as an art form. Eventually local film artists tried to adapt their new-found philosophy and aesthetic of cinema to the requirements and exigencies of the local film situation.

Aside from this “film as art” movement, the Filipino film scene was energized and given greater focus and pertinence by the rise of social consciousness and the awareness of and involvement in the nationalist struggle. These twin impulses prompted some scriptwriters and directors to look for and showcase the Filipino in their films.

There was a time when the film industry was relatively closed to new directors. But Lino Brocka’s commercial success with his first film, *Wanted: Perfect Mother*, 1970, and the artistic and commercial success of his *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* (You Were Weighed and Found Wanting), 1974, prompted producers to give other new directors a break. The industry welcomed not just new directors, but writers, cinematographers, musical directors and other film craftsmen with a fresh sensibility and novel approaches to their work.

In particular, more professional writers were commissioned to do not scenario outlines as was the common practice before but full-blown scripts. In this regard, the martial law government’s demand that all film scripts be submitted to it for approval helped indirectly to establish the importance of the scriptwriters. Moreover, production designers attained the legitimacy and importance that they had not enjoyed before, and their new-found significance, coupled with the artistry of cinematographers and editors, transformed the “look” of the Filipino feature film.

It was at about this time, too, that new film awards, like the Urian awards, supported the move towards the new cinema by calling attention to the achievements of these filmmakers. These awards also provided a welcome alternative to the traditional awards bodies’ choices, which more and more people were beginning to question.

The new cinema was characterized by a strong sense of irony, as filmmakers took a critical look at society, and occasionally even at themselves. This very “modern” temperament and point of view was influenced no doubt by the artistic films coming from Europe and America, and by the rebellion against hoary conventions and “truths” that characterized the 1970s.

Noticeable, too, in the films of the new cinema was the improvement in the technical aspects of filmmaking, particularly in the movies of Mike de Leon, who started as a cinematographer of *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (Manila, In the Claws of Light), 1975, before he turned director. This technical polish, harnessed towards the artistic unity of the film, helped the better movies made during this period to find a growing audience abroad, particularly on the festival, art film, and TV-movie circuits.

Also helpful in making people take Filipino movies more seriously was the publication of a number of historical or analytical books on local films. These books reflected the public’s growing consciousness of film as a legitimate medium, not just a frivolous diversion, as it was previously perceived.

All of these positive impulses came to bear on the work of the most significant filmmakers of the period.

Eddie Romero started out writing scripts for Gerardo de Leon, but moved on to directing films both in the Philippines and in the United States. One of his most outstanding films is *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* (This Is How We Were, What Happens to You Now?), 1976.

This ambitious period film seeks to discover the true essence of the Filipino by surveying historical events through the naive point-of-view of a country bumpkin, Kulas. Throughout the film, the identity of the Filipino is discussed with different people. Fine performances are turned in by Christopher de Leon as Kulas and Eddie Rocha as the friar who befriends him. The film is also commendable for its period production design, for which it won several awards. Eddie Romero’s other exceptional films include the adult drama, *Passionate Strangers*, 1966; the wartime epic, *Manila: Open City*, 1967; *Sino’ng Kapiling, Sino’ng Kasiping?* (Housemates, Bedmates?), 1977, his study of contemporary sexual mores; *Banta ng Kahapon* (Threat from the Past), 1977, a hard-hitting political drama; and *Aguila* (Eagle), 1980, a film about three generations of a Filipino family, spanning almost a hundred years of Philippine history.

Lino Brocka’s *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* was an Edgardo M. Reyes novel, written for film by Clodualdo del Mundo Jr. and photographed by Mike de Leon. The production benefits greatly from the close collaboration between these three film artists.

The film follows Julio Madiaga (Bembol Roco) as he scours the back alleys of Manila for his long-lost love, Ligaya (Hilda Koronel), whom he finally finds as a kept woman. Julio’s search is an objective correlative for other survivors’ search for their own selves



in the mean streets of the urban jungle. De Leon's camera observes life at its most natural and desperate. Fine editing energizes the film's important scenes. The script by del Mundo is exceptional and Brocka masterfully combines the elements in his movie to come up with a memorable, shattering indictment of the city.

Brocka's other important films combine personal conflict with social and political significance. ***Orapronobis*** (Fight for Us), 1989, blew the lid off political violence, as did ***Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim*** (My Country: Gripping the Knife's Edge), 1985. ***Gumapang Ka Sa Lusak*** (Dirty Affair), 1990, did the same with the country's endemic syndrome of corruption. ***Jaguar*** (Guard), 1979, centered around a security guard who became the fall guy of criminal syndicates. ***Insiang***, 1976, showed how the slums nip innocence in the bud. And ***Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang*** showed up the hypocrisies of a small town.

Ishmael Bernal presents a rogues' gallery of survivors in ***City After Dark***, 1980, denizens of the big city who ply their trades as other people sleep. They include a blind masseuse, a hooker who pretends to be a nurse, a lesbian dope pusher, a gay couturier, and a drug addict. These people come together in various configurations as the city tests their loyalties and resolve. The scenes are characterized by fine scripting and cinematography. Memorable is the last scene which shows the transition from night to dawn, which intimates hope being found in a city drowning in despair.

Bernal's other significant movies include ***Nunal sa Tubig*** (Mole in the Water), 1976, on how modernity disrupts the equipoise of nature and tradition in an island village; ***Himala*** (Miracle), 1982, on a miraculous apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary that isn't—or is; ***Relasyon*** (The Affair), 1982, on the trials and tribulations in the relationship between a married man and his mistress; ***Hinugot sa Langit*** (Wrenched From Heaven), 1985, on the issue of abortion; and ***Ligaw na Bulaklak*** (Wild Flower), 1976, on innocence corrupted by age and impotence.

Celso Ad Castillo's ***Pagputi ng Uwak, Pag-itim ng Tagak*** (When the Crow Turns White, When the Heron Turns Black), 1978, is full of memorable images that celebrate nature, art, passion, religion, and revolution. The film shows the contrasts between old and new musical styles and cultures. Fine scripting and good coordination of music and cinematography, and cinematography and editing, make ***Pagputi*** an exceptional film. Excellent performances are turned in by Vilma Santos, Bembol Roco, and Joonee Gamboa.

Castillo has directed a number of other outstanding productions. They include ***Burlesk Queen***, 1977, his study of a stripper's life and milieu; ***Ang Alamat ni Julian Makabayan*** (The Legend of Julian Makabayan), 1979, a film about an advocate of agrarian reform who became a rebel; ***Nympha*** (Nymph), 1971, in which Castillo fuses his twin concerns of sex and religion; and the folk fantasy, ***Ang Mahiwagang Daigdig ni Pedro Penduko*** (The Wonderful World of Pedro Penduko), 1973.

Marilou Diaz-Abaya's ***Moral***, 1982, tells the story of the friendship between four young women, and how it is tested and enriched as they work out their individual

problems and conflicts. In this film, the performances are rich because they spring from believable situations. The movie is exceptional because it goes beyond a shallow interest in romance and melodrama, to underscore the strength and generosity at the core of female bonding.

Diaz-Abaya's other films have presented different views of women's place in society. In *Brutal*, 1980, she showed how Filipino men literally brutalized their women. *Karnal* (Carnal), 1983, and *Boys' Town*, 1982, evinced the director's concern for the oppressed youth.

Laurice Guillen's *Salome*, 1981, dramatizes the subjectivity of guilt in relation to an alleged rape case in which the rapist is killed. To flesh out her theme, she uses the camera to get inside the victim's psyche, where truth and fantasy find themselves in dangerous coexistence. In the end, Salome must face up to her guilt, and her husband must confront her. Guillen has been praised for her handling of other films like *Kasal* (Wedding), 1980, her unsentimental view of modern marriage, Filipino style; *Ipagpatawad Mo* (Forgive Me), 1991, a film on autism and how the condition affects the autistic child's parents; and *Magkano ang Iyong Dangal?* (What Price Honor?), 1988, a relatively mature treatment of a seriously troubled marriage.

Mike de Leon, perhaps the most consistent of contemporary filmmakers, has directed only a few films, but each of them has been choice. *Batch '81*, 1982, dares to expose the secretive world of fraternity initiations, and uncovers a strong streak of violence in the Filipino psyche. This movie shows fine ensemble work by the actors, who play the frat neophytes whose quest for brotherhood is perverted into a deadly game of dominance and submission.

*Itim* (Rites of May), 1976, is a psychological drama, a study of guilt and violence. *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising* (When You Dream and Wake Up), 1977, is a delicately hued romance set in the highlands. *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* (Thrilled?), 1980, spoofs a number of self-important totems of Philippine society. *Kisapmata* (Split-Second), 1981, is about the excesses of authority in a Filipino family. *Sister Stella L.*, 1984, depicts a nun's commitment to the workers' cause.

Peque Gallaga's first film, *Oro Plata Mata* (Gold Silver Death), 1982, is grand and ambitious. It shows how patrician landlords in the south cope when World War II shatters their cozy world. In one scene, Joel Torre turns in a stirring performance as he forces his traumatized relatives to get over their depression. Violence is used purposively to show the horrors of war, and spectacle enhances the film's value, particularly in the scene of the big fire that drives the gentry away from the plantation. The film abounds in striking images and fine examples of production design. Effective combination of good camerawork and actor's movement is evident throughout the film.

After *Oro*, Gallaga went on to make other remarkable films, including *Scorpio Nights*, 1985, his graphic depiction of Filipino sexuality; *Isang Araw, Walang Diyos* (One Godless Day), 1989, an epic view of a day in World War II in the Philippines; and

*Unfaithful Wife*, 1986, Gallaga's powerful study of friendship and marriage.

## **Epilogue**

Gerardo de Leon, Manuel Conde, Gregorio Fernandez, Lamberto Avellana, and Lino Brocka have passed away. Celso Ad Castillo, Ishmael Bernal, Marilou Diaz-Abaya, and Mike de Leon are "occasionally in semiretirement," and the industry has reverted to overwhelmingly "commercial" work, with producers playing it safe with formula film fare, due to rising production costs and what they perceive as the moviegoers' increasingly escapist preferences.

In these unproductive and unrewarding film times, it is instructive to hark back to exceptional achievements in film, to remind audiences that Filipino filmmakers are not inherently inferior to their colleagues in other countries, and have what it takes to continue to come up with memorable films, the filmmaking situation and producers' attitude permitting. This survey shows that, despite its commercial orientation and other faults, the Filipino film industry has not done all that badly. When it is bad, it is awful, but when it aspires to do good work, it is truly capable of achieving and sharing with its audience the abiding gift of excellence in film. • N.U. Torre