

films every time one of us would go to the editing room. Butch has more of the European sensibility—very cerebral; mine was more American—cheap tricks department type of things. So I'd come in one day and see what Rene had put together and tell him to change it, not knowing that Butch had been there the day before and had put that together himself.

Much later on, when Virgie Moreno was looking for a copy of the print to show at the U.P. Film Center, I volunteered to hunt for the producer (who will remain nameless, in order to protect the innocent) and track down the film, and Butch stopped me. "Are you out of your mind? Everybody who remembers, remembers some kind of a cult classic, and you want to show the film for what it *really* is?" That was my first real lesson in Showbiz Strategy 101: a kind of John Ford axiom, "If the Truth and the Legend contradict each other, print the Legend" type of thing. That was from Butch Perez. The other really important lesson he taught me was that you must place maximum importance on the clothes that you wear on the first day of shooting. That's going to determine the tenor of the entire shoot from then on.

Actually, even about a month or two before we went into the shooting of *Binhi*, we were having no fun operating within the first exploratory stages of martial law. We were used to doing what is now known as Guerilla, Experimental and Alternative Filmmaking; and later on, I realized that both Butch and I had come to that proverbial fork in the road and it was time to follow our own styles. We never talked of really splitting as partners; it was more of him going to Baguio and me going back to Bacolod and trying out new stuff, but I guess it was obvious that we were tired of each other's ideas.

Flop or not, *Binhi* gave us a lot of mileage with the people that mattered. I remember really violent discussions with Butch, Jorge Arago, Nonoy Marcelo and Pepito Bosch about filming *Ang Babaeng Hulk* with Mitch Valdes, which was about Philippine pop art and the splintering caused by western influences. The ideas were tremendous and over the top but I was sure that no production outfit would pick it up. Everybody felt betrayed by me, because I didn't want to waste time developing an idea that just wouldn't reach first base from the very start. Not at the time. From what I know now, thirty years later, about Philippine show business, I was right. You wouldn't be able to do what we wanted to do in *Ang Babaeng Hulk* even now as an industry picture.

How close is *Oro* to your family history?

Well, I didn't have any aunts or female relatives visiting funky wounded

guerillas in rice granaries in the jungle and fondling their private parts. Things like that were natural extensions of the premises that existed within this imaginary family that I put together in this story. But the parameters that they operated in were from real-life family experiences.

My wife actually was born in the jungles of Negros Occidental. They lived in a series of tree houses where they would pull the ladders in after them. They had a carabao out there so they could have fresh milk. My mother-in-law met her future husband when he used to visit them as a guerilla. Hacienda living is like that. A lot of nothing-to-do with a battery of servants to make sure that you can do nothing effortlessly. The peeling of the *butong pakwan* by servants, people playing mahjong all day—I do have an aunt who is almost in her 90s who plays mahjong daily seven times a week, sunrise to sunset (can you imagine what her buttocks must be like?)

Families would visit other families for weeks. Aside from having huge families, it was another reason why hacienda houses were huge. If you bothered to ride the kind of roads they had before the war, you wanted to stay where you stopped for a long, long time. The socialist "critics" made much of my characters calling the rebels in the mountains at the time *tulisanes*. That was what they were considered.

Actually, the workers in the haciendas who were brutalized, and a lot of them were, found the Japanese invasion a good excuse to change the order and settle a lot of old scores. Some hacenderos and their families were buried alive upside down with their legs sticking out. Most of our history is that of oppressed people not getting any justice in the towns and hightailing it to the mountains. They were in different times branded as bandits, *tulisanes* and criminals. If they had an ideology they were known as Huks and NPAs but the rich always considered them, and still do, as bandits. My characters were expressing how their milieu thought. Stupid people made the intellectual leap to think that that was the way I myself thought. It's so tiring.

Did you ever have the fear that after *Oro* it would be downhill all the way?

Not then. When I was doing *Oro*, it never occurred to me that I was right in the middle of my career. I wrote the story of *Oro* around 1976, 1977... it had the really artistic working title of *The Jungle Story* because the original reason for doing it was to set up this horribly civilized set of people with very strict social patterns and putting them in some situation where they are hermetically sealed and see how they would operate in