

FILM REVIEW

IISA PA LAMANG

Directed by: Jose Javier Reyes

The Matinee Idol Caught in a Feminist Movie

I

The genre of romantic triangle movies in the post-war era has portrayed the realities of Filipino domestic life in various shades - suffering wife, philandering husband, materialist mistress; negligent wife, philandering husband, loving mistress; suffering wife, philandering husband, suffering mistress. The movies inevitably end with penitent husband returning to forgiving wife. The mistress somehow dies or disappears in limbo.

Iisa Pa Lamang (Only One So Far) starring matinee idol Richard Gomez, Dawn Zulueta and Maricel Laxa, explores the same triangle theme. No doubt used to exploit the box office appeal of love scenes by the two real-life sweethearts, it succeeds, surprisingly, in portraying a feminist approach to the old problem of philandering Filipino husbands. In the film, philandering husband loses mistress and wife, one after the other.

II

Dawn Zulueta plays a weak woman (Clara) who, faced by grave material problems, goes into prostitution. Rescued from the trade by a middle-aged man who puts her up in a condominium, she becomes a prisoner unable to stay with the child she supports. In most difficult moments she seeks release through off and on flings with Richard Gomez (Armand).

Armand finds the mystery of Clara intriguing and, because of that, is unable to decide between her and his fiancée Betinna (Maricel Laxa). Postponing their wedding, he later begs her on his knees to marry him after discovering Clara's lifestyle.

Betinna is the strongest of the three. She disciplines her philandering stepfather and in the process his mistress (who turns out to be Clara). Her whole attitude to Armand's wavering attitude about their wedding is further proof of her strength:

"Isipin mo. Pero huwag kang umasa na narito pa rin ako pagbalik mo.

Hindi kita hihintayin.”

(Think about it. But do not expect me to be here when you return. I will not wait for you.)

Betinna and Armand get married. But Armand bumps into Clara again and pursues her. Betinna gets wind of it, confronts them, and forces out a decision. Clara goes to the United States (the perennial Filipino escape). Armand returns to Betinna, saying Clara had left. Betinna rejects him, in a dramatic dialogue.

“Hindi kita hinabol. Ikaw ang lumuhod sa akin para pakasalan ka.”

(I did not run after you. You were the one who knelt down to beg me to marry you.)

Spurning him, she says:

“Mabubuhay ako nang wala ka. Lalaki ka lang.”

(I can live without you. You are only a man.)

lisa Pa Lamang deals with the theme of male-female relationships in Philippine society very effectively and comes out with a feminist solution. It shows the selfish character of many men who keep two (or more) women for their own convenience. It shows the weakness of some of them who can not make the necessary decisions.

Were it not for the surprise twist in the story, *lisa Pa Lamang* would have ended like any romantic triangle movie. In its feminism, the movie explores related issues:

1. Is it really the wife's fault when her husband philanders? Barbara Perez, playing the mother of Betinna says:

“Wala kang kasalanan. Siya ang may kasalanan.”

(You are not at fault. It is all his fault.)

She further advises:

“Pabaya mo lang siya. Pag bumalik siya, pag-isipin mo.”

(Let him be. If he comes back to you, make him think.)

2. Women are usually pitted against each other. The husband philanderers and the wife and mistress quarrel. Betinna, the wife in the movie, does not go into a hair pulling match with Clara. Having confronted her before as her stepfather's mistress, she says:

“Tuwing magkikita tayo ay lalaki na lang ang pinag-aawayan natin.”

(Everytime we see each other we quarrel over men.)

But she does not quarrel with her. She asks: "Do you love him? If you do, and he does, that will be in your conscience." (3) Do men love as women do? When Clara counters Betinna's question: "Does he love you?" Betinna answers:

"Marunong bang magmahal ang mga lalaki? Kung magmahal man sila, gaano katagal?"

(Are men capable of loving? If they are, how long does it last?)

Isa Pa Lamang exposes the character flaws of philandering men in no small measure. Furthermore, it tells women to stop coddling them and to think of themselves instead, not to be selfless in their love but to keep their own self-respect.

If *Isa Pa Lamang* is able to reach some women viewers confronted by the same problems, then it is able to succeed not just artistically and monetarily. It will succeed in helping women confront the feminist issue in this macho society.

Proserpina Domingo-Tapales