There’s no doubt about it: Mario O’Hara is a major director. In *Bakit Bughaw ang Langit?*, he tackles the same basic situation Lino Brocka deals with in *Bona*. In the comparison Brocka suffers. Where *Bona* fails, *Bakit Bughaw ang Langit?* succeeds.

The situation is ordinary enough: a woman (Nora Aunor) falls in love with a man (Dennis Roldan). To say that she “loves” him, however, is an oversimplification, because he is a retardate. What she feels is a mixture of pity, sympathy, maternal love, and -of course- sexual love for him. On the other hand, though a mere child as far as his brain is concerned, he is physically grown-up, as portrayed in a clever drunken scene where he mimics raping the mistress of a neighbor.

The film opens with her family (selfish mother, lazy father, and haughty sister) moving into a small apartment compound in Metro Manila. The film ends with her family leaving the compound and she herself leaving not just the compound, but her family as well. Between opening and ending, the film explores the way family and community inevitably stifle genuine love.

Her family treats her in the tried-and-tested Nora Aunor fashion: they make her an atsay. Aunor, having played this role for the nth time, makes full use of her experience. She is convincing as the oppressed younger sister. In fact, she is not only convincing, but brilliant. The lessons of *Atsay* and *Bona* have not been lost on her.

Like the rest of the apartment community, Aunor’s father treats Roldan as a freak. Roldan is still a man after all, says the father, who refuses to believe that Aunor is safe in the company of the retardate. O’Hara suggests in two scenes that, indeed, Roldan is a full grown man, sexually speaking. In the drunken scene, Roldan attacks a woman already established to be a sex object (the woman is there only because of her sexual attractiveness to a philandering husband). In a separate scene, the community homosexual takes Roldan inside his parlor, ostensibly to attack him sexually (the use of double entendre words is significant).

In a crucial early scene, Aunor mistakes Roldan’s sleep-walking for a sexual attack. Her shift in attitude towards him, in fact, is possible only because of this early scene. In a later scene, she sees him naked. O’Hara dwells on Aunor’s face, to suggest that she is not just amused, but actually intrigued. O’Hara, however, does not take the easy way out: he does not allow the relationship of Aunor and Roldan to become actually physical. If there is a sexual love between the two, it is too deep inside them to be articulated.

True enough, there are some glaring mistakes. The most obvious occurs when Roldan utters that key line “Bakit bughaw ang langit?” The camera pans out to the sky as expected, but instead of the sky being clear and blue (which is what “bughaw” means), the sky is cloudy and white. The symbol is totally destroyed by such a simple cinematographic mistake. In fact, almost all of the mistakes in the film can be attributed to the cinematographer, who seems not to know how to light a set. Night scenes appear brighter than day scenes, light filtering into houses has no clear sources, camera movements are jerky, shadows are not expressive. O’Hara should learn from this film: he should not use the same cinematographer again.

Aunor’s performance here proves that her winning of the Urian Award for *Bona* is justified. She remains one of the best of our young actresses, especially in the hands of a director who understands film acting. In a film whose screenplay has undistinguished (in fact, even
inane) dialogue, Aunor is able to express her emotions primarily through her silent moments. The mark of a true film actress is her behavior when she does not speak. Aunor is destined to become an all-time Best Actress. It is appropriate that Anita Linda - herself an all-time Best Actress- plays her mother in this film.

The acting cannot be faulted, not even the acting of newcomer Roldan. The community actors (or bit players) are particularly excellent. Apparently mostly PETA actors, the bit players manage to convey what O'Hara seems to be bent on conveying, namely, that if people would just leave other people alone, life would be a million times happier. The retardate suffers enormous psychological, even physical (he is chained, he is beaten up) oppression, all at the hands of the community. (Is O'Hara now directing films which develop the character he acted in Brocka's *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang*) Only the fringe persons in a community really are important, says O'Hara. Aunor, the discarded sister, is one. Roldan, the retarded ex-basketball player, is another. In a community as narrow-minded as that of the apartment compound (and O'Hara really symbolizes here the entire Philippine - even world - community), persons who really care, really love, really live are doomed.