

# Trails of andres bonifacio review



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

When a film is described as poetic, it is often taken as a compliment. However, when a film is described as theatrical, it is seen as a critique, scathing at that. What makes poetry the better spouse to cinema? Isn't cinema but a visual and aural interplay of poetry and theater to begin with? Theater provides the cornerstones: the narrative, the milieu, the setting and the characters.

Poetry, on the other hand, more than the fapde and the flourishes, provides the requisite subtlety in the execution the minute gestures that accentuate a character, that last five seconds of absolute ilence before a cut, the symbols, the verses, the rhymes, and rhythms. This is purely hypothetical. But if films are Judged based on a balance where theatricality is measured with poetry, and the former outweighs the latter by a large margin, does it mean that the film is better off staged than filmed?

Of course, cinema, contrary to common misconception, is vaster than the trite and absolutely baseless hypothesis that was Just forwarded. For that reason, cinema should and cannot be caged to what is merely "cinematic" because the term cinematic" itself is already enigmatic, subjective in its very definition and has something more to do with how the recorded moving pictures are treated and utilized to express rather than how these pictures are moved and later on recorded.

That being said, for all the accusations of supposed theatricality, Mario O'Hara's flawed yet masterful Ang Paglilitis ni Andres Bonifacio (The Trial of Andres Bonifacio) is truly cinematic, probably the most important and

cinematic creation that the Cinemalaya Film Festival ever produced in its six years of existence.

Ang Paglilitis ni Andres Bonifacio starts off after the Tejeros Convention where Andres Bonifacio (Alfred Vargas), a commoner from Tondo who is the founder and regarded father of the Philippine Revolution, has lost the presidency of the Revolutionary Government to Emilio Aguinaldo (Lance Raymundo), one of the more popular generals in the province of Cavite.

In the midst of the revolutionary war against the Spanish colonizers, the revolutionary government initiates a trial against Andres and his brother Procopio Oanvier Daily), for treason, when the two, along with several of their men, were captured in a town where a supposed confrontation ensued between Bonifacio and Aguinaldo's camps.

Artistic liberties aside like the ghostly narrator (Mailes Kanapi) who conveniently appears to provide present-day commentaries and reactions on the events of the past, O'Hara does not deviate from recorded history, neither adding nor deleting anything from the written accounts of the trial to depict one of the most contentious and mysterious events in Philippine history, one that has been a pointed precursor to several of the present ills that plague Filipino politics. Terariness is the point. What essentially is the value of history translated into film, as is? It only glorifies and celebrates the erroneous artifice of a concrete and permanent history, as written by the few, and more damningly, by the few who are in the position to write and create history.

We have seen this happen with Marilou Diaz- Abaya's Jose Rizal (1998), a film that attempted to film Jose Rizal's life as fact that it only succeeded in being both glossy yet tepid, as compared to Mike De Leon's Bayaning Third World (Third World Hero, 2000), a film that has experiential knowledge of the impossibility of committing history to celluloid that it resigned itself to deconstructing the hero and what it has become in the present age. The film, self-consciously theatrical from its very first frame up to the last, eschews reverence for its depiction of history.

By scripting the trial as it was recorded up to the final recount of Lazaro Macapagal who read to Andres and his brother Aguinaldo's verdict, utilizing theater actors to play historical figures as if they were acting on stage for immediate audiences and hence enunciating words, expanding odily gestures, and utilizing exaggerated acting styles, and employing several theatrical and literary devices, O'Hara treats history as literature and more specifically, treats the trial of Bonifacio as fiction, dramatized and romanticized.

This film's form, as described above, aptly sets the tone for the grandiose stage play that is Bonifacio's trial, a proceeding set-up to emulate a sense of fairness and justice in the dilemma of legitimately dispatching the utmost symbol of the revolution. It is undoubtedly inevitable that many viewers would imagine Ang Paglilitis ni Andres Bonifacio as history recreated in film for the singular purpose of historical education, and I seriously fear educational institutions treating the film as such, feeding eager minds O'Hara's clever mockery of recorded history as truth and fact.

Before ending up with conclusions about historical figures whose lives and deaths are buried deep in speculations, hypotheses, and conflicting accounts, one should recognize the genius of O'Hara's exploitation of the media he utilizes, that the Andres Bonifacio of his film is the Andres Bonifacio of the records of the biased revolutionary government, the main character of a staged play, the leading man of a film, and not the revered national hero of the Philippines.

O'Hara curiously incorporates the tale of the 'bong Adarna, also staged, in his film. Vargas, apart from playing Andres, also plays the youngest prince who in the Adarna tale the Adarna bird sings its lulling song. The film's use of the Adarna tale ends mid-tale, when Andres and his brother are killed by Aguinaldo's men. Death, more than the grand equalizer of men, is also the most effective means to silence men.

Unlike the youngest prince of the Adarna tale who will be able to return to his father's castle after being beaten up by his jealous brothers, and be acknowledged for his feat of capturing the Adarna bird and curing his father, Andres and Procopio's deaths in the hands of his fellow Filipinos has left an incurable, lingering void in a country's problematic history. All we can really do is investigate, speculate, and hopefully, create, and that as we do all those things, we can nurse this ailing nation to full health, with or without the help of the mysterious songs of the mythical bird.