

## Critiquing Goyo: The Portrait of A Young Soldier

by Dominique Zurbano

Last, September 5, 2018, the awaited sequel to *Heneral Luna*, *Goyo: Ang Batang Heneral* premiered in cinemas nationwide. The sequel is only the second part of Jerrold Tarog's trilogy of films centered around three polarizing historical figures from the Philippines. The first tackled Antonio Luna through *Heneral Luna*; *Goyo: Ang Batang Heneral* is about General Gregorio Del Pilar, while the last film be centered around Manuel Quezon.

*Goyo: Ang Batang Heneral* boasts of a stellar, ensemble cast. Paulo Avelino stars as the brooding and charismatic boy-general, with Carlo Aquino as his close friend and aide, Vicente Enriquez. Rafa Siguion-Reyna plays Julian Del Pilar, Goyo's brother, with Art Acuna reprising his role as Manuel Bernal from *Heneral Luna* and newcomer Tomas Santos as the third Bernal brother. Mon Confiado, Epy Quizon, Ronnie Lazaro and Alvin Anson (with the addition of Archie Alemania) reprise as well their respective roles (President Emilio Aguinaldo, Apolinario Mabini, Lieutenant Garcia and General Jose Alejandrino). Newcomers to the cast include Empress Schuck as Felicidad Aguinaldo, Gwen Zamora as Remedios Nable-Jose, Gabby Padilla as Dolores Nable-Joe and Robert Sena as their father, Don Mariano Nable-Jose. Last but not the least, Arron Villaflor returns as Joven Hernando, now as a photographer, the audience's surrogate character.

The film opens, with Luna's ghost, featuring texts from Teodoro Kalaw's *An Acceptable Holocaust: The Life and Death of a Boy-general* and Nick Joaquin's *A Question of Heroes*. Goyo has been tasked to assassinate Luna, but since the general has been killed by Kawit soldiers, he goes to find what's left of the Bernal brothers, some of Luna's aides before following President Aguinaldo to Dagupan and later, into the decisive road to Tirad Pass. The film delves beyond Del Pilar's image as the romantic boy-general and seeps through his psyche, as a man, as a lover, and as a soldier. It also gives a glimpse on Del Pilar's last love affair, with the wealthy heiress, Remedios Nable-Jose as played by Gwen Zamora.

The treatment Tarog gives this much-awaited biographical epic is a mixture of psychological and coming-of-age and a little bit of romance. The experience can be funny, sad, relateable and at terms, even creepy.

The visuals are breath-taking, a step-up from *General Luna*. The production design is superb, and the visual effects have improved. The colorgrading is excellent, with how it took in consideration Del Pilar's arc was set during monsoon season.

The directing is confident – and it shows with how it treats Del Pilar as a subject, and his arc as a journey. The evident improvements are proof of this.

There is an easy chemistry between Avelino, Siguion-Reyna, Aquino and Villaflor, especially during the bathing scene. Siguion Reyna's enabling older brother, Julian is easy to like and easy to hate, with his turns between his rashness in dealing with Manuel Bernal and his attempts to flirt with the ladies in Dagupan. Carlo Aquino is illuminating and perfect as the moral compass of the foursome, as Vicente Enriquez, from asking Angel to cooperate to his quiet distress and grief when questioned by the American soldier. His best scene comes during the 30-minute Tirad Pass sequence. His performance radiates with a quiet resilience. Villaflor is pensive and critical as the maturing Joven, who navigates his affiliation with Del Pilar's party through Dagupan and Ilocos.

Tomas Santos portrays Angel Bernal with naivety and rawness, in his moments with his brother and Vicente Enriquez. As Manuel Bernal, Art Acuna delivers one of the most haunting and powerful performances of his career. His turn is tragic and unforgettable. While Gwen Zamora plays Remedios Nable Jose with grace and precision, I felt that she was underutilized with how little material she was given and how Remedios was written.

Paulo Avelino, as the titular character, is magnetic and thoughtful. His Goyo is not the same Goyo Romnick Sarmienta portrayed; he makes his turn at the general thoughtful, evoking sympathy for all his character's follies and embraces his own interpretation of the character. He proves to be a strong leading man and delivers some of his best acting in this film.

The lesser characters in this film also bring their A-game. Mon Confiado is as sharp as ever as President Aguinaldo, while Epy Quizon's Mabini gives the most brutal insights in his narration. Alvin Anson is memorable, in his urgency as Alejandrino, and shares a dynamic and wonderful to watch presence with his aide de camp, Evaristo Ortiz as played by Roeder Camanag, who also gives his best. Che Cosio-Santos, with her little scenes, is wonderful and on point as Hilaria Aguinaldo, strength and character in every line. Another notable performance is

Empress Schuck's Felicidad Aguinaldo, with her expressive eyes. She makes the most out of every scene. She holds her own against Gwen Zamora's Remedios.

While it is an amazing experience, *Goyo* is not without its flaws. Writing, in particular with Remedios Nable-Jose's character, can be improved. I felt that she could not be given the sole credit as the only woman who tried to push Goyo off, as that medal belongs to Poleng, a girl Goyo once courted and wrote to when he was a student, who rejected him because her mother did not like him. The editing in the ball scene could have been edited to feel less clunky and draggy.

*Goyo* is the experience of a young general trying to become a man, motivated by the wrong things and people; it is a peek through the psyche of a young boy forced to become a man, and a wake-up call to critical thinking, in the age of idols and social media trolls. It also gives a glimpse into the psyche of someone with trauma, the psyche of someone young who needed to position himself into someone capable of fighting for an ideal.

Bittersweet, funny, and even psychedelic, *Goyo* is one of the most socially relevant, entertaining and thoughtful coming-of-age films. It deserves all your money, time and understanding. A second viewing, is very much recommended.