

LECTURES

ABSTRACT OF MAGISTER D'ANGLAIS THESIS ON CINEMA AND LITERATURE : AND CINEMA : CONRAD, THE SCRIPTURES AND T.S. ELIOT IN APOCALYPSE NOW

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Since the beginning of the motion picture era, the adaptation of written fiction has been one of the richest sources of the visual literary medium. From time to time, scholars have tried to analyze the process. The purpose of our present study is to examine the process itself. We approach the question both from the technical point of view, and the impact of the literary devices used in the process. They underline the importance of written fiction as a source translated into the moving images of the film medium.

It must be said, of course, that adaptation has been more successful with some directors than with others, or with some literary works than with others. The lack of success in Visconti's version of *l'Etranger* or Kazan's film version of *East of Eden* offer us examples which serve to accentuate Coppola's masterful efficiency in adaptation.

In this study, we seek first to lift up Coppola's aims, and throughout the study to demonstrate how Coppola makes use of four primary literary sources (portions of the Bible, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* [1979], T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* [1922] and *The Hollow Men* [1929] in *Apocalypse Now* [1979]. We feel that Coppola sought in that way to revitalize interest in written fiction. It is interesting to note the ricochet effect, as we become aware of Eliot's borrowing in *The Waste Land* of structural images from Weston's *From Ritual To Romance* [1920] and from Sir George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* [1890-1915].

Cinematic adaptation imposes some special constraints which have little or no importance in written fiction, such as time limits. One can put a book down and come back to it later, but a film must, as a general rule, be circumscribed in a time from not exceeding three hours. Economic and psychological considerations also provide constraints. At the same time, it must be recognized that the director takes a certain amount liberty of interpretation in the adaptation process. These liberties can be seen in the additional impact of photography, sound and musical scores, offering an atmosphere to underscore the written dialogue, tools which are not available to the author of written fiction, except as imaginary devices. These processes are of necessity subjective, uniting personal experience and objective medium.

These influences, sources of what we call double alienation, are particularly evident in Coppola's work. Parallel examples are to be seen in Visconti, Kazan, and Orson Welles.

In the introductory chapter, we deal with theoretical issues. We have sought to underscore our *structuralist* approach by including readings of events by contemporary philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault, and, to a lesser degree, by literary theoreticians, like Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes. Each of the latter has treated the role of print-culture. This would also justify our inclusion of Marshall McLuhan. We set forth the questions dealt with throughout the study, positing a comparison of Visconti, Kazan and Coppola as instructive examples. The next chapter deals with Coppola's subjectivity in adaptation of Conrad, his choice of actors, and his visualization of horror. The following chapter presents Coppola's reliance on subjective apocalyptic images from the Scriptures to heighten dramatic impact in symbolic passages. The last chapter of volume one illustrates Coppola's reliance on passages inspired by Eliot's *The Hollow Men* to convey through dialogue the concept of the depravity of modern man and his spiritual emptiness. Both positive and negative analogues are underlined. Throughout this study, we mention the *intentionality* of these processes, relying on *Notes on the Making of Apocalypse now*, in which Coppola himself indicates that *Heart of Darkness* provides the skeleton of *Apocalypse Now*. Contemporary social forces, particularly the

Vietnam phenomenon in the United States, in Coppola's mind, make an updating of the novel an imperative, and his metaphysical conclusions form the core of the film. They also give the framework within which one may analyze the process of adaptation. We have judged useful to include a technical section in a second volume, in which we furnish a complete shooting script of *Apocalypse Now* as well as a lexicon of technical terms and illustrations with photographs from the film.

Although one could possibly consider inclusion of the shooting script to be somewhat fastidious, it is essential to provide a statistical basis on which to analyze Coppola's subjective orientations and statement about the characters involved. See the Graphs.

Our appraisal of the power of adaptation by a director like Francis Coppola has compelled us to refer, whenever appropriate, to his wife's comments on the making of *Apocalypse Now*. She followed the making of the film, noting every detail relative to the shooting. She wanted to make her own contribution to the production, and her notes formed the basis of a film about making the film. Her notes and the subsequent film offer a telling and reliable testimony on Coppola's motivations and intentions.

Mrs. Coppola raised some basic and pertinent questions about her husband's work which strengthened many of our conclusions. If one looks at the list of works Coppola entrusted to the celluloid medium, one might well wonder why he specialized in adapting written fiction, and why he chose certain work over others. Why, for instance, did Coppola transpose the framework of *Heart of Darkness* (colonial occupation of the Congo by the Belgians), to the Vietnam War? Why does he have his journalist quote from *The Hollow Men*?

Cinema is often thought to appeal more to passive imagination (because the director presents prefabricated images), while written literature calls forth active imagination (because the reader is required to make his own visualization). We have sought to contribute to the understanding both of the relationships and of the dichotomy between the two forms of expression.

Apocalypse Now was filmed with two possible endings. One version ends with the explosive destruction of the island. The

other, shown in Algeria, ends with the assassination of Kurtz. one wonders why the two endings were shot and projected separately.

Coppola was quite successful in other adaptations of novels, specifically *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *The Godfather* (1969). What made it difficult for him to adapt *Heart of Darkness*, so that it remained only the skeleton of *Apocalypse Now*? What about the inclusion of the poetry from *Heart of Darkness* and what dimensions are added by it?

One wonders also about the reasons behind the movement of the films, *Apocalypse Now*, from what begins as a straightforward violent war films through the metaphysical to arrive at what he calls the Vietnam of the Spirit. The answers to many of these questions are to be found in his very literary choices. They also lie in the fact that Coppola has deliberately chosen not to take a documentary approach to the Vietnam war, but chose instead to treat it as a metaphysical problem, the Vietnam Complex, which even today continues to overwhelm the collective conscience of the American people. As we understand this, we understand also Coppola's physical and spiritual stance.

In one scene, Willard, played by Martin Sheen, meets Kurtz in a fashion feminiscent of Moses' going to the mountain to meet God, turning aside to contemplate the phenomenon of the burning bush which is not consumed by the fire. This worshipful scene is reconstructed and clothed in modern dress, using visual techniques borrowed from Cecil B. De Mille's *The Ten Commandments*. Other passages as well evoke the biblical Revelation. They are tellingly recreated through Coppola's masterful use of operatic techniques.

Special effects and artifices are not used haphazardly in *Apocalypse Now*. The very choice of the word "in significant, and such scenes give content to the word. Apocalypse is a literary genre from which Coppola has borrowed the symbolic structure in order to reinforce his message. Apocalypse is Revelation, and Willard experiences the revelation of the personification of evil. Kurtz is mystical figure in apocalyptic dimensions accentuated through the use of narration, photographs, tape and files. The genius of Coppola in this respect lies in the fact that the Biblical

atmosphere is actualized, updated through modern dialogues, costumes and accessories. A tape recorder and tapes become modern counterparts for the table of the laws of Moses. As Willard leaves the "sanctuary", he carries with him the tapes of Kurtz' Revelation.

The biblical episode of the Golden Calf is translated according to the details of *From Ritual to Romance* (Weston) and *The Golden Bough* (Frazer). The scene is shot in such a way as to evoke a tribal ceremony, making a clear allusion to the biblical episode of the Golden Calf, constructed while Moses is receiving the tables of the Law.

Another frame of reference is the Apocalypse of Saint John, closing the new Testament. Willard's voyage is reminiscent of John's vision.

The musical score of the film is of no minor importance. Francis Ford Coppola and his father, Carmine, collaborated in the composition, together giving emphasis to the written work on which the films was based. The music, far from being a simple accompaniment, helps to set the thematic issues. The soundtrack is every bit as important as the visual track. Both tracks form the atmospherical medium by which the message is transmitted. Music consolidates the organic ideas of the films, and cements them into an attractive, philosophical and well-balanced whole.

Coppola sought to examine war as multifaceted in order to pose the question of the moral issues behind all wars. The credits are projected on the pictures of the Apocalypse in order to project Apocalypse as callapse. This, too, tells us much about Coppola in metaphysical quest in the process of adaptation. The movement is centripetal. This is what Coppola means when he says that the films starts like a war movie and becomes metaphysical. A simple war movie depicts events and the people involved in them. The metaphysical experience of war seeks to define it as a universal manifestation of evil. Chef, played by Frederic Forrest, tells Willard that Kurtz is evil, and the photojournalist (played by Dennis Hopper) says that judgment of Kurtz surpasses the ordinary. The madman has expanded the mind of the photojournalist. What remains is emptiness, and darkness.

Coppola sought, in each of his adaptations from the literary medium to the cinematic medium, to make an impact on his viewing audience, and through it on the general public. He was this impact as being the same in the two media, but considered the latter to be more efficient and touching a wider audience.

Orson Welles attempted to make an adaptation of *Heart of Darkness* in 1936, but never produced it, primarily due to lack of financial resources. It appears to us that Coppola has relied as well on Welles' films. Indeed, some visuals appear to be based upon Welles' shooting script.

An examination of other Coppola adaptations will help us to understand better his evolution. In 1971, Coppola, at the age of 31, had already demonstrated considerable skill as a screenwriter. The film *Patton* comes to mind. Paramount Studios contacted him for a screen version of *The Godfather* by Mario Puzo (1969). It was a saga about the Mafia, a secret society which expanded from a tight hold on Sicily to a firmly rooted operation in the New World by World War II. Coppola's version faithfully sets forth Puzo's themes of Family, A Father and A son, Vito and Michael, Manliness, Macho Posturing, Respect, Loyalty, Intimacy, Protective Authority, Devotion, Assassination, in the Italian-Sicilian style and tradition. Immediately after the release of *The Godfather* in early 1972, Coppola was thinking in terms of a sequel. Two years later he began shooting *The Godfather, Part II*.

The themes of Family, Father and Son, Manliness, Macho Posturing, Respect Loyalty, Intmacy, Protective Authority, Devotion and Assassination to be found in *The Godfather, Part II* are at least partially replicated in *Apocalypse Now*. We find the notion of family developed in the relationships among Willard and his crew. The Chief assumes the father role, and Willard mentions a son in the closing dialogue with Kurtz.

Coppola was often inspired by theoreticians and technicians of earlier times. He gave recognition to such people as Orson Welles and Roger Corman. He adopted the style and the methodology , the basic rules of editing from people like Eisenstein and Pudovkin. He was inspired by more contemporary, avant garde filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, all of

whom served as models for Coppola, especially insofar as his integration of various technical devices is concerned. It is important to note that he relies on personal talent and cultural background, but also on previous successes of other people.

Coppola's keen admiration of Eisenstein is evident in the sequel movie, *The Godfather, Part II*. He achieves highly elaborate counterpoints based on Eisenstein's pattern, moving judiciously from one character and convey the same (or at least a comparable) message with the help of sometimes quite individualized means.

Within the Judeo-Christian culture which is our frame of reference, at least three subcultures exist: oral, written and cinematic. We believe the three are inter-related. More often than not they lead such artists as Francis Ford Coppola, T.S. Eliot and many others, film-makers and poets, to conceive of their re-creation into a single, synthesized form. We have attempted to discuss this phenomenon using structuralism to help us de-construct such works of art as *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*.

We have been concerned with the adaptation of many unified works into a different medium of expression of a non-written nature, in order to suggest our own de-construction and re-construction of the whole work. Our reference to some theoreticians reinforces our choices of a set of observations capitalized in arguments for consolidation. This is adequately summed up by David Lodge, when he offers the opinion that style is the very medium in which the subject is turned into art.

In addition to this, Michel Foucault's post-structuralist theory has enlightened our intention to see the outcome of our analysis not as the truth, but as a plausible reality. Marshall McLuhan, for his part, has demonstrated, in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, that the process of viewing and understanding films is one that needs as much scanning as literary scanning. Once more this borrowing has been necessary in order to scan *Apocalypse Now* segment by segment.

The methodology we have adopted to study the presence of Conrad, The Holy Scriptures and T.S. Eliot in *Apocalypse Now*

was aimed at not only showing these works in the films, but also at expecting perspectives in order to benefit the field of adaptation. To accomplish this task, we have also relied upon the balanced dosage of the assembling of Coppola's sophisticated means. Here also, we should be careful about exaggerating the role of special effects and processes.

Among the many examples which illustrate Coppola's adaptation, let us have a look at the following remark made by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. "River like a snake uncoiled with its tail..." and its re-creation by Willard's voice-over in *Apocalypse Now*. "snaking like a main circuit cable plugging me straight into Kurtz...". In both cases, we observe an itinerary from outside. Coppola knew how to give depth to his account, to such an extent that, very exceptionally, he could also adapt his themes to commercial exigencies which usually require a story to have a beginning, a middle and an end. These are met by Coppola's borrowing of the theme of the voyage upriver from Conrad.

T.S. Eliot, widely reputed for his dealing with modern man's sterility, gave the right content to Coppola's treatment of the American soldier during the Vietnam war. This part of our analysis shows the metaphysical aspect which emphasizes man's involvement in madness, horror and darkness, which condemns humankind to penitence.

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