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APOCALYPSE NOW: TWO VIEWS

Master showman Francis Ford Coppola's dazzling movie purports to be about the Vietnam war, but its affinities are more with World War II. Even though Robert Duvall's raid on a village is made by helicopters, in order to scare the Vietnamese he has every chopper loudly playing Wagner's *Valkyrie* on its amplifier system. This picture has nothing of the feel for Vietnam and the gradual American involvement of *Go Tell the Spartans*; the sense of national disgrace of *Coming Home*, or the drug-dealing demoralization of *Who'll Stop the Rain* — and certainly none of the soul-searching of what we know as the television war. It doesn't even have the moral ambiguities of the current, fine, World War II film, *Soldier of Orange*.

In order to convey a basic plot, Coppola has resorted to a voiceover narration — the voice of Martin Sheen as a CIA Captain. He tells of his encounters while going up river in a small gunboat, and what transpires when he reaches his destination. His mission: to terminate Marlon Brando — playing a Special Forces Colonel leading a group of Montagnards on a killing spree in Cambodia. The assassination is ordered not because Cambodia is off-limits, nor for Brando's being trigger-happy (as Sheen says, "charging a man with murder in this place is like handing out speeding tickets at the Indie 500"), but for his taking himself out of the System; ignoring the Brass chain of Command. Brando has set himself up as a god, whom the mountain people worship.

All of the characters are one-dimensional with the exception of Chef, a crew member of the gunboat. We learn more about him than anyone else in the

film and he is expertly played by Frederic Forrest. As for Brando's Kurtz, the role is without substance and is played entirely in dark shadows. The implication is that characters are superfluous: that what Coppola wanted was to make war — any macho war — as loud and gruesome as possible. But it signifies absolutely nothing. The resultant, apparently arbitrary, conglomeration of footage depicts neither a moral nor a good yarn. To what end was Phillipine land destroyed and so many years of sweaty effort expended? Joseph Conrad, on whose *Heart of Darkness* *Apocalypse Now* was based, at least knew how to tell a story.

Credit for writing the film is given to John Milius and Coppola, though most of the dialogue sounds improvised and much of it is incoherent. Vittorio Storaro's photography is superb, but it does not compensate for the movie's glaring pretentiousness.

PAT ANDERSON

"Mistah Kurtz, he fat."

(A line reportedly added to the script of *Apocalypse Now* after the arrival of Marlon Brando.)

The general consensus on *Apocalypse Now*, excepting Jack Kroll's review in "Newsweek" and a couple others who gave it unqualified praise, is that it's three-quarters fantastic and one quarter terrible. (That leaden, pretentious ending with Marlon Brando reading T.S. Eliot and Martin Sheen staring into space.) And, I suppose, any person who defines his/her reaction to it based on the standard dogmas of film criticism is obliged to agree. Still, for a film as rich and provoking as this, the uniformity of opinion is distur-

bing. Perhaps people are judging it too abruptly? I am reminded of the critical reaction to *2001* when it first opened. It was panned by nearly every major critic, though many later recanted.

The use of "pure cinema" in *Apocalypse Now*, i.e., those portions without a direct narrative subtext, should not be undervalued. Those who dismiss these portions as sheer visual gimmickry or "boom-boom" spectacle are not giving Francis Ford Coppola his due as an innovator or a craftsman. However you want to look at it, *Apocalypse Now* is a daringly different looking film, a uniquely composed artwork. The purely visual/aural aspects, I hasten to add, are not the chief characteristics of the film, for it is plainly conventional in its drawing of characters, its classical source material and the use of a voice-over narration. What is noteworthy is Coppola's use of pure cinema to create a fuller, more textured experience.

There are moments within the film that take this mode to amazing and, I think, profound extremes. The opening shot of a palm tree forest and the exploding napalm, mixed with the sinister slow-motion helicopters emitting strange, synthesized whirrings from their propeller blades is one example. I can't recall being so acutely affected by an image in my movie-going history. There are other instances in which Coppola will blend a certain image with a certain passage of music, as when the patrol boat passes under the huge, black jet fighter plane cradled in a tree with that eerie trumpet whine on the soundtrack, to create a momentary, dazzling reality that other films expend their entire lengths to attain. It is this startling use of film that is entirely to Coppola's credit. *Apocalypse Now* is the new "trip" movie, expanding the notion of Vietnam as 'stoned theatre' to surreal dimensions.

But I still don't like the ending, and would like to offer my preferred version,

one which Coppola reportedly filmed but obviously decided against. Like Marlow in the Conrad novella, Cpt. Willard returns home, back to America in this instance. He visits Kurtz's family intending to somehow convey to them the truth about Kurtz's Montagnard kingdom and what he tried to be. But the family has been notified by the Pentagon that Kurtz has died honorably in the field, killed by the Viet-Cong. Kurtz's son, in tears, begs Willard to confirm the story of his father's heroic death. Willard suddenly realizes the son can never fully comprehend the horror of what happened, and perhaps *shouldn't* comprehend it. Willard lies to the boy, confirming the official version. He then leaves, shaken but strangely at peace with what he has done.

JEFFREY WELLS

THE SEDUCTION OF JOE TYNAN

The Seduction of Joe Tynan is a film that is perhaps too ambitious for its own good. It traces the rise to power (and probable corruption) of a U.S. Senator, portrays the problems that this devoted family man faces when his career takes him away from home, and depicts his affair with a bright young political aide. Jerry Schatzberg, who directed the film, cannot seem to make up his mind which of these plots is most important, with the result that *Joe Tynan* loses its center and its subplots become digressive. Starring and written by Alan Alda, the film, while dramaturgically lopsided, is nevertheless sincere in its presentation and is particularly candid regarding the women in Tynan's life — wife, daughter, lover.

The performances are all fine, with Alda taking command of the screen like never before in his film work. Barbara Harris as the wife gives a full-bodied, technically inspired performance, but it is Meryl Streep as the "other woman" who makes every