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Films in Paris**'Apocalypse Now' Short of Its Target**

By Thomas Quinn Curtiss

PARIS, Sept. 25 (IHT) — Several films previewed at recent festivals are now receiving their European premieres, the most controversial and expensive of these being Francis Ford Coppola's "Apocalypse Now," which is opening simultaneously in Paris and London. In Paris it may be seen in English at the Hautefeuille and the Ambassade.

Opinion is divided on "Apocalypse Now." Some commentators declare it magnificent, others a sorry disappointment. One cautious critic, jittering on the neutrality seesaw, has described it as "a crippled masterpiece."

This term is usually applied to a film that has been ruthlessly taken away from its director and butchered by studio cutters at the behest of worried producers desperate to shape to the box-office mold. Von Stroheim's famous "Greed" and Eisenstein's "Que Viva Mexico" suffered that fate, but Coppola has been permitted a free hand at editing and, with evident uncertainty, has supplied varying endings to his own work. As it is the most publicized movie since the multimillion-dollar "Cleopatra," curiosity should draw the crowds — at least at the outset of its engagements.

Prepared as a screen fresco of the U.S. participation in the Vietnam war, its scenario traces the journey of a young captain, returned to Saigon from battle duty, who is chosen for a secret mission. He must track down and assassinate a mad U.S. colonel who has disappeared into Cambodia where he has founded a state, appointed himself its ruler and is leading his men on unauthorized raids. This reigning lunatic has executed South Vietnamese officials who have visited him, suspecting they were double agents.

Feat of Cinematography

The perilous travels of the captain and his quartet of aides up a jungle river — by plane and patrol boat — comprise the bulk of the footage that has been expertly shot to induce the strange, ominous, war-torn tropical scene. As a feat of cinematography this is in itself a high achievement, and one seems to be in the midst of the hostile, steaming forest where danger lurks behind every palm branch.

There are weird encounters. At one post the commanding officer orders surfboard riding as flack spatters about. At another port the USO stripteasers excite the soldiery beyond control and must make a hurried escape in a waiting craft.

The sequence in which a native village is annihilated by air attack as the triumphant Valkyrie chorus blasts forth was obviously inspired



Martin Sheen in a steamy sequence from "Apocalypse Now."

Music Education

by the night riders of the Klu Klux Klan, accompanied by the same music, in "The Birth of a Nation." Deeper study of D.W. Griffith would have benefited Coppola in his striving for the epic style. Melodramatic intensity cannot be sustained unbroken for the length of an entire film. The objective of "Apocalypse Now" is beyond its grasp. Excellent in many details and in its atmosphere, it fails in its intended impact.

It would rise to grandeur in its long-postponed meeting of the appointed assassin and the paranoid colonel, but this big scene is a mar-ring anti-climax, with Marlon Brando groveling about in a bald wig spouting Mephistophelian theory like a B-picture menace, while his "people" are sacrificing cattle.

Acting honors go to Martin Sheen as the questing captain, sometimes the voice-over narrator, and to Sam Bottoms. Credit also goes to Frederic Forrest, Albert Hall and Larry Fishburne as Sheen's boat crew and to Robert Duvall as the officer with a mania for surfing.