Apocalypse Now and Heart of Darkness Comparative Analysis

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Introduction

Critically acclaimed Apocalypse Now (1979) was directed by Francis Ford Coppola, who began his career as a dialogue director sound-man and then eventually went on to become the director. The film was written by Coppola himself, along with John Milius and Michael Herr. The film is a combination of vivid cinematography, visionary directing and smart storytelling. Francis Ford Coppola played a significant role in this movie by adding a flair of art to the movie. It has become an enormous screen accomplishment, appreciated for its beauty, vision and scope all across the world (Venetia, Rainey, pp. 1-3). This film is definitely full of talent. The cast of the film assembled by Coppola is perfect, adding to the delight of the film. The film's continuous source of surprise is the method characters develop to hide and disclose their secretive benefits and the way others misjudge them. The film does not give away its mysteries too soon, and the blunt talk in the movie is scintillating for the viewers. Dependably challenging and entertaining throughout the initial period, it ticks into extraordinary gear midway. The film examines the main character's actions as it moves the story along at a brisk pace, a considerable achievement in itself. Production design was entirely up to the mark, and costumes used in the film boosted the film's look of intended reality, adding much-needed flair to the movie.

Discussion

If we analyze Apocalypse Now on a deeper level, we realize that it is about man's inevitability to choose between good and evil. We came to the conclusion that it is generally about a situation where a person has to choose between the right and wrong paths. Sometimes, choosing the right path could turn into evil for him in future, but sometimes, one has to face the reality and challenges of life in order to make the right decision. The film is all about making the right decision at the right moment and choosing between good and evil. Every once in a while, *Apocalypse Now* is not about any other war but about the catastrophic United States involvement in Vietnam. The United States was not able to choose correctly between good and evil, and eventually, they paid a huge price for it.

The origin of Apocalypse Now undeniably goes back ten years to a script made by John Milius, which was grounded on the basis of stories from people who participated in the Vietnam War. The title of the movie was borrowed from the Revelations of John the Divine. But John wanted a proper story to

base it all on, and Francis recommended Heart of Darkness by Conrad. *Apocalypse Now* is a spectacular work of art and as technically complex and masterful as any war movie that has ever been made (Ebert, Roger, pp. 1-3). The movie induces the appearance and spirits of the much dreaded Vietnam War, dealing in impressions for which no clarifications are satisfactory or essential. Apocalypse Now was shot in the Philippines and made to look like Vietnam with all that bloodshed and artistic effects of a war movie. Apocalypse Now wants to be something more than just a war film. It wants to entice its viewers about the horrors of war and how it changes a person and affects countries on a much larger scale (Ebert, Roger, pp. 1-3). Apocalypse Now is not just an ordinary movie that tells about the horrors of war; instead, the film deals not only with the appearances and effects of war but also with other aspects of life like fate, difference between good and evil, human feelings and emotions, and various other subjects that could affect human lifestyle.

This mysterious man, named Kurtz, whom we meet in the film's closing section, is a renegade Green Berets officer who has taken protection in the jungles of Cambodia. From there, he initiates his own wars, much to the anger of his superiors (Richard, Roud, pp. 1-3). Conrad is somewhat vague about the atrocious things that Kurtz is up to. We know only that he rules his native people with a bloody hand and attracts them with the help of his sorcery. He scares his people into doing things they normally wouldn't do. His people are scared of him due to his powers. The Marlow character is now a battle-scarred Special Services officer known as Captain Willard, who is allocated by the commanding general to go into Cambodia in order to find Kurtz and dismiss him as quickly as possible. This sometimes vague plot has been enforced on the film from the very beginning, which keeps interjecting the usual flow of Francis's incredible reflection upon war.

The major chunk of the film is engaged with Willard's adventures as he travels upriver. Those scenes of the film are often mesmerizing, none more so than one in which Willard and his acquaintances are forced to witness an attack on a Vietcong village by fighter planes of the American Air Force. That scene gives an idea about the horrors of the war and what it feels like to see someone get hurt in a war. With the exclusion of Brando, who has almost no role in acting, the actors are exceptionally right. This may sound like overkill, but the most mesmerizing fragment of the film is when Willard is directed towards the river in the boat given to him by the Army to assassinate Colonel Kurtz. Colonel Kurtz's techniques are considered by the upper command to be illogical and flawed (Cahir, Linda Costanzo, pp. 1-3). This is intended to be ironic since American methods in Vietnam might be considered illogical and flawed as well. In any case, this first half is very flashy cinema: it is also very pretty, with red smoke bombs, atmospheric fog haze and other artistic effects. Even the napalm sequences are visually ravishing. The last half of the movie was more of an experience than a movie.

1. ## Despite the temporal and spatial differences, Coppola's "Apocalypse Now" retains the essence of

Joseph Conrad’s Novel, “Heart of Darkness”. What is that essence, and how is it manifested in Conrad’s novel and in Coppola’s film?

2. What are the themes of Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Coppola’s Apocalypse? Are they similar or different in any way?

Conclusions

Generally, *Apocalypse* Now lives up to its striking title, revealing not only the numerous faces of combat but also the illogicalities between tediousness and enthusiasm, fear and disappointment, cruelty and attractiveness. General debate on realism and formalism leans toward framing, lighting, position and camera movement. However, one has to realize that other things can also be considered realist or formalist. *Apocalypse Now* is supposed to be a part of the realist film genre. Overall, Apocalypse Now has its flaws and limitations, but it is a beautiful epiphany of natural beauty and horrors of war and overall, it was a brilliant direction from Francis Ford Coppola.

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