

flung verbal echo in *Beowulf* does seem in some sense a “real” phenomenon.

As a rule I am not exasperated or astounded when numerical analyses lead to significant results; indeed, I consider it a foregone conclusion that they will do so, whatever ingenuity may be required on the part of the number juggler.

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### Fiction and Film

To the Editor:

Terry J. Peavler's article on Cortázar's “Las babas del diablo” and Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (“*Blow-Up: A Reconsideration of Antonioni's Infidelity to Cortázar*,” *PMLA*, 94 [1979], 887–93) is a convincing study of the relationship between the short story and the film. The study is so convincing that the methodology should be made extrinsic.

Peavler begins by remarking that most critics have been unable to see past the simplest connections, while “the few critics who have been seriously concerned with the film's relationship to its source often seem befuddled by the apparent fuzziness of that relationship” (p. 887). This statement is generally true about the critical posture taken when the question of source relationships between literature and film is broached. A good case in point right now is the critical willingness to be “befuddled” by the relationship between Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* and Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*. Most of the critical remarks have been, to use Peavler's term, “purely contrastive.” A critic mentions that there is some relationship, although a “fuzzy” one, and then criticizes Coppola's film because the final segment of the voyage upriver and the confrontation with Kurtz are anticlimactic. Neither Antonioni's critics nor Coppola's have a methodology that enables them to perceive that there is a vital and incontrovertible relationship between the fiction and the film.

I think there is a methodological failure here: in considering the relationship between film and literature, critics are relying, perhaps unconsciously, on assumptions that lead them into the failures Peavler describes. One problem is that the critics appear to have an excessively Platonic concept of sources. Like Pope, they seem to believe that whoever wrote it first wrote best; second, second best; and so on. This attitude explains why trivial differences between the story and its film transformation are often seized on as extremely important. When Kauffmann argues that “Antonioni retains little other than the

device of subsequently discovering in a photograph what was really happening at that moment” (quoted on p. 887), he is making an objection that is in fact the departure point of Peavler's methodology, because the observation is true. The fact that a critic uses this observation as an argument against the relationship simply proves that the whole methodology is at fault. Peavler is apparently able to see a rich relationship between film and short story because he starts by asking himself the question, “What is Cortázar's story really about, anyway? Isn't it about the same sort of problem that *Blow-Up* is about?” With Conrad, one might begin similarly. *Heart of Darkness* is, on one level, a parable about colonialism and neocolonialism. It is a parable structured in a particularized way, a retrospective narration of a baffling and anticlimactic journey upriver that results in an encounter with a man who has little to say, told by a narrator who has even less to report. *Apocalypse Now* has this exact structure.

I am not suggesting—nor is Peavler—that a film's concerns are completely those of the novelist, or vice versa. I am saying that one begins by distilling the source in an attempt to establish some common ground of interest for both artists. Peavler goes a step further and discerns that the two artists are looking at a similar reality. The difference is that, while Cortázar is concerned only with the nature of the reality, Antonioni is concerned equally with the reality that Cortázar sees and the reality of “Las babas del diablo.” Antonioni finds in the story an excellent insight that stimulates his own thinking, or, as Cortázar appears to say, the two artists' mutual ghosts.

This methodology offers some immediately rewarding critical insights into the meaning of the film. I would argue in similar fashion that the order and structure of *Heart of Darkness* give *Apocalypse Now* an organization that makes Coppola's insights more meaningful than they otherwise could have been. But Peavler, it should be noted, goes still further: he argues that Antonioni may be a better reader of Cortázar than Cortázar's more literary readers. Antonioni's films may lead us back to a renewed understanding of Cortázar. I would hope that on the basis of my own sketchy example one would be persuaded not only that Conrad's novella illuminates Coppola's film but that the film makes us reconsider Conrad.

In *Apocalypse Now* the events surrounding the journey appear to dwarf the end of the journey. If we turn to *Heart of Darkness*, we realize with renewed force that the journey is paramount in the novella as well and that Marlow's purposes in telling the story are substantially different from the audi-

ence's expectations. After we watch *Apocalypse Now*, it seems clear that Marlow sees the end of the journey as not nearly so important as the journey itself. If we turn back to the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* we note a curious phrase, which seems to explain very precisely what is to come: "The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel, but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze."

Peavler's methodology is exemplary because it results in more than the illumination of film: it results in a renewed emphasis on literature. The critics Peavler quotes seem to come to the unspoken conclusion that one need not read Cortázar at all. Peavler's methodology demands both that we read fiction to understand film and that when we understand the film we understand the fiction better. Criticism that argues to the contrary, and that thus tends to discourage literary study, is not merely faulty in its ends but pernicious in its assumptions.

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Mr. Peavler replies:

It is difficult to formulate a full response to Mosier's letter because of the number of issues that it raises. I am naturally flattered that he is so favorably taken by my essay; but some of his remarks indicate that I may have implied stances or opinions that I did not intend, and others suggest that he may be somewhat overly exuberant in his response.

I hope that if there is any virtue in my essay, it is to be found in its *intrinsic* approach to the works studied. At every stage I let *Blow-Up* and "Las babas del diablo" guide my investigation. In fact, I did none of the traditionally regarded "research" until after my arguments were fully shaped and my conclusions established. The "research" was undertaken to make certain that my insights were original and to find support for my own views or to develop rebuttals for contrary opinions. I can envision no possibility of making this methodology "extrinsic." Any attempt to do so would, I should think, lead to some rather strange and silly arguments. Each pairing of film and literature presents its own methodology.

I also feel somewhat uneasy with Mosier's interpretation of my interpretation of previous criticism. Most of the articles I read—and all but one

of the essays, Melvin Goldstein's, that I finally used—are, in my opinion, excellent. No one to my knowledge has written an article for the purpose of arguing against a relationship between the two works. The few critics who raise the issue, with the exception of Fernández, simply push it aside and go on in search of other, but equally important, matters. My argument is not better, nor is my interest; they are simply different.

I have not had the opportunity to study or reflect at length on *Apocalypse Now*, but I share Mosier's respect for it, and my reactions to the attacks on Coppola range from amusement to amazement. If I am dissatisfied with the film, my concern is not its betrayal of Conrad. Here I concur with Mosier: most of the attacks come from persons who did not find what they expected or wanted to find. The shock begins immediately when we are confronted with a voice-over narration, hardly a technique we expect in a contemporary film by a major filmmaker, and continues through the pop music, the water skiing, and the dozens of unexpected characters and incidents that we do not wish to find in what we expect to be a "statement" about the war. What we get is the war seen close up by one of its correspondents, Michael Herr, integrated into a vision, seen by Joseph Conrad.

Mosier's summary of *Heart of Darkness*, "a retrospective narration of a baffling and anticlimactic journey upriver that results in an encounter with a man who has little to say, told by a narrator who has even less to report," seems reasonably accurate for both works, as do his arguments on the relationship between the journey and its end. The quote concerning "the yarns of seamen" has even greater significance in the context of the previous sentence by Conrad: ". . . a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold for him [the seaman] the secret of a whole continent, and generally he finds the secret not worth knowing."

It nonetheless baffles me that everyone, including Mosier, who is interested in the relationship between film and literature views *Apocalypse Now* as exclusively devoted to *Heart of Darkness*. While Conrad may have provided Coppola with important structural elements for the entire film and with particular characters, incidents, and even conversations for the last third or so, it seems to me that Michael Herr, in addition to writing the narration, provided the tone and many incidents in the first two thirds. Although Herr's book on Vietnam, *Dispatches*, is not a novel, it is an excellent piece of literature that shows its own debt to Conrad, for it mentions a "heart-of-darkness trip" and "Lord Jim" individuals, men free from authority, or "lost to headquarters" in official jargon, who carved out