

A New Modus Critique

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Jun 1998

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Robert Borski — 08 Jun 1998, 14:57

Fellow Lupines:

I've been thinking some about various critical analyses as they've been applied to the list. Too often I feel theories or suppositions are advanced, but are not evaluated as source documents that draw upon a larger referential frame. All criticism that seeks to address certain perceived truths is valid, of course, but at the same time these various critical screeds must also define for themselves a nexus of core beliefs that seeks to address the examined main using self-defined standards that are either stated or implicit, but which yet remain true to themselves within these same boundries. (Horrors: I've just regurgitated whole globlets of Philosophy 101--please forgive the vomitus.)

Let me start over, using a suggestive parallel.

For my paradigm, I'd like to deviate from literature and cite the various schools of analysis used to evaluate film. Even the most monomaniacal foaming-at-the-mouth practitioners of a certain cant would never insist their critical dissections are the only valid approach. (Hey, Gene, how's the head wound? Roger misses you.) Hence the various schools of thought that are taught in most collegiate film courses. Each has its own tenets, and while various conceits often overlap, each school has its own evaluatory dicta. Is it possible, however, to use the standards of one to critique the analysis of the other? I maintain no. Hence the auteur cahiers du cinema approach to analyzing CITIZEN KANE will always be every bit as valid as the Marxist approach, as long as each adheres to its referential frame. Each has its own grammar and rules; each generates its own true sentences. But mix them together, you have more gibberish than sense.

I would like to suggest we attempt the same respect for boundaries here.

Now I'll be first to admit that my way of looking at Gene Wolfe may be somewhat different than others. I subscribe to the Secret Shadow theory, especially re FIFTH HEAD. My belief--again, at least in regards to this particular work--is that while its grand theme is the search for identity, its central conceit is that no one is simply who he or she seems. This notion underwrites the corpus of my earlier dispatched NOTES FROM CLIFF, which as far as I'm concerned comes as close to being my critical manifesto as anything else. Please note, however: it is far, far from being the only approach to Wolfe. Others have their own approach, whether it's the mantic, the algal or the Ellisian, and each, when it remains true to its own referential frame, is 100% valid. But should we try to impose our own critical standards upon theirs, because we feel they're superior or prima intellectuae? Please, let us do not. It only leads to contentiousness or hurt feelings or the worst wound of all--at least for those who would like to share our analyses--silence.

I would like to apologize for not having been a practioneer of my own advice in the past. I will try to do differently from now on.

Because this is a group about Gene Wolfe, remember?

Given the scramble for turf, there can be no Alpha Males--only yelping curs.

Robert Borski (exits, pursued by wolves)