

The Orphans

War-child returns to his Past

by J. Alan Gaudet

The Orphans is neither political propaganda nor is it Soviet Hollywood. It is in all respects of theme and technique a modern film, centered upon "the most horrifying combination, children and war". The intense and honest rendition of a painful childhood is what makes the film modern and remarkable. The sympathy for orphans is perhaps the mark of the Russian people's strong sense of family that allows the portrayal of such circumstances to be a profound social comment and yet escape the vicissitudes of political censorship.

The real beginning of the film is the stark image of an unidentified child who stares unmovingly across the wasteland of a dump. The child, whose beauty is intensified by her blind glare of shock,

forms the foreground to the sudden flight of the scavenger flock that fills the air. The disturbance, never seen, but alluded to by the sudden introduction of the music, is war, and the flock is the children of the countryside, who from this point on are moved by winds they neither control nor understand.

These same winds move the major character, Aloyshia, who in adult life, searches out the fragments of his past. In the office of records he hears the broken bits of description of his family as recorded by the state. The truth of his two brothers' lives is not better. Aloyshia's reunion with them, one in prison, and one in his wealthy home, is difficult and throughout the film they are contrasted to his memories of childhood. The successful brother, who seeks to make

Aloyshia "happy" in a materialistic wonderland of wine and good food, realizes at the end of their revelry that Aloyshia is not happy. Happiness of this type is incomprehensible to the orphan who yet, does not judge.

The meeting with Aloyshia's other brother is more tortured. They resemble each other physically and spiritually. The convict's bitterness, partially a product of his life, partially of his mother's suicide, is contrasted to his assertion of will to be human. Still neither of these men have what Aloyshia seeks; the meetings are merely contrasts to the main subject of the film.

The portrait of Aloyshia's childhood, first in the streets and then in the orphanage he grows up in, is one of the most sympathetic presenta-

tions of childhood in modern cinema. The children are real and alive as opposed to their keeper's all too human ideals and masks. These masks are however sympathetically undercut by the wild and angry imitations of military training performed by the otherwise quiet peasant while he tends the grounds. The climax of the film, in the death of one boy who attempts to kill the nearby Nazi prisoners of war, results in a fight between Aloyshia and a teacher, where the child is struck and calls the teacher a fascist. The child's trial, although idyllic, lays bare the faults of the keepers. The antagonist retreats in shame, leaving Aloyshia to stare at him outside the room of the judgement.

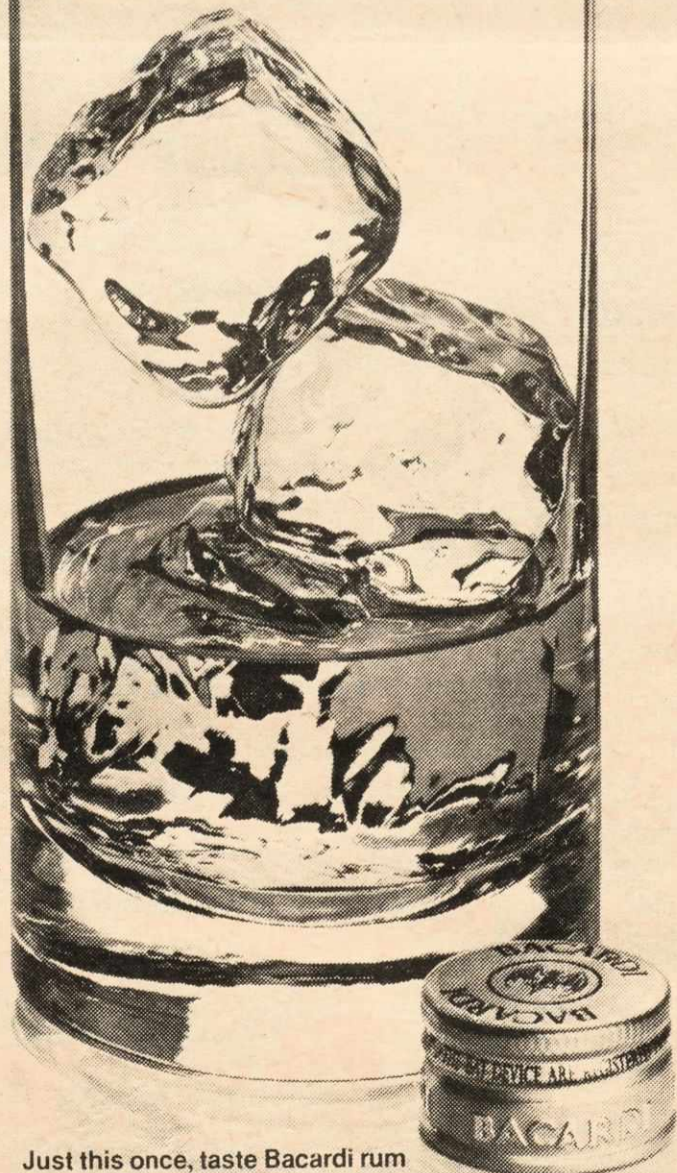
The film ends with Aloyshia's condemnation of sentimental journeys. However, the journey has neither been completely sentimental nor as one critic says "an empty refuge." The journey was that of an orphan and artist, honestly portrayed and not tempered by companionship's urge to 'look on the good side.' The film and its images

are too captivating to be so easily dismissed and Aloyshia's comment serves as irony. The audience has already identified with his suffering. The "stirring of souls" through the story of an orphan, is for them the realization that in our society we are all alienated and homeless. Aloyshia's plea cannot drown out the powerful presentation of the all too real. It is the voice of a battered bird screaming at the wind.

The negation of the film demonstrates its power. Aloyshia still unsatisfied, was searching for the sum of his suffering and happiness. He didn't have to look for what he could not escape. The audience's reaction must be contrasted to his.

Technically, the workmanship of the film is not perfect. It suffers through typically poor subtitles, clumsy camera work (shadows and mismatched footage) and overdone musical scores. The mark of its success is that it overcomes these and its own negation, leaving the viewer with memories of haunting images and poetry.

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MicMac Artifacts on Exhibit

by Eric Lawson

The Nova Scotia Museum is currently displaying an exhibition of Micmac "material culture". In other words, the things they made. The exhibition traces the development of the material culture from the 16th century to the present, and displays not merely photographs but the artifacts themselves.

The items displayed are largely post-European-contact trade items, which include such varied artifacts as chairs, canoes, purses and head-dresses.

The emphasis throughout the exhibition is on the craftsmanship involved in the production of these items. This emphasis encompasses several themes. One example is the use of European materials. Interestingly, the Micmacs reversed the trend of most post-contact native peoples and incorporated European materials into their own unique style. This retention of Micmac style produced such unique items as a hat made from both moosehair and silk.

The museum calls this use of European materials in the making of traditional items

"mixed media." Another striking example of "mixed media" is a box, made by a Chief Jerry Lone Cloud in the 1890's, which contains part of a tea-chest shipped from Ceylon.

However, many of the artifacts, for example household furniture, are distinctly European in nature. Even here Micmac culture is incorporated, as the seats and backs of the chairs, for example, are inlaid with colourful, detailed quillwork. This quillwork is so carefully crafted that, by itself, it is worth a trip to the museum.

The exhibition also includes several reproductions of Micmac "petroglyphs", or carvings on stone, and a facsimile of a Micmac wigwam.

The exhibition will be running until March 16, and is concurrent with a series of demonstrations and lectures conducted by two Nova Scotian Micmacs. The museum is open seven days a week, including Wednesday evenings, and is located on Summer Street. More information can be obtained by phoning the museum at 429-4610.

**Staff Meeting
Thursday at 7:00**