

SHORT FILM REVIEWS

see things in the pictures that I would have missed on my own.

Some people feel uneasy at the coupling of two art forms in this way, with one explaining and illuminating the other. Shouldn't the pictures be able to stand on their own? Isn't the camera intruding by leading our eye over the pictures rather than letting us explore them in our own way? Certainly not. What better use for any art form than to help us understand something better, even another art form.

It would be difficult to come away from the film without feeling that living the way Mercer lives would be good for all of us, and that her work, if unknown to us, should not be. She diffidently points out that Harold Town wanted to trade one of his paintings for one of hers. The film leads us to believe that he got a good deal.

Alan Stewart

Where The Bittersweet Grows

p./d. Kim Ondaatje cam. James B. Kelley, Steve Behal, Derek Redmond graphic design Michael Talley ed. Margaret Van Eerdewyk, Kim Ondaatje neg. cutter May Bischoff p.a. Ben Moran, James Moyer research Killaloe area, Gordon Flagler sd. ed. Margaret Van Eerdewyk re-rec. Len Abbot original mus. Bill Whiteacre dist. Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre running time 26 min. col. 16mm.

Kim Ondaatje's **Where the Bittersweet Grows**, Part I, is a documentary film which deals in a factual way with three families who have chosen to live in the country, in homes they have built themselves. Part I is the first of three intended films that will be made at five-year intervals to report and reflect on the families as they develop, age, and settle further into their chosen environments. All three families are attractive, well-educated, and have children. Their choice to live where and how they do seems to be the result of a calm decision, rather than an hysterical flight from the city. All of them appear to be enviably fulfilled and content.

The appeal of these modern settlers is undeniable, but it is the houses and the rural environment that give the film its magic. This does not detract from the homebuilders themselves; after all, it is their dreams, imagination, and hard work which the houses represent. However, we have all seen films that use the building theme — everything from the rain-forest villages in those **Burma, Land of Contrast** things that people show in high school gyms, to **The Shining** — but in few cases are we drawn in to the extent that we are in **Where The Bittersweet Grows**.

If Ondaatje intended in Part I to introduce the families, give us a capsule history of each one, and show us their respective houses in the woods, she has certainly succeeded. The quiet interviews and voice-overs give us most of the factual information necessary to understand the

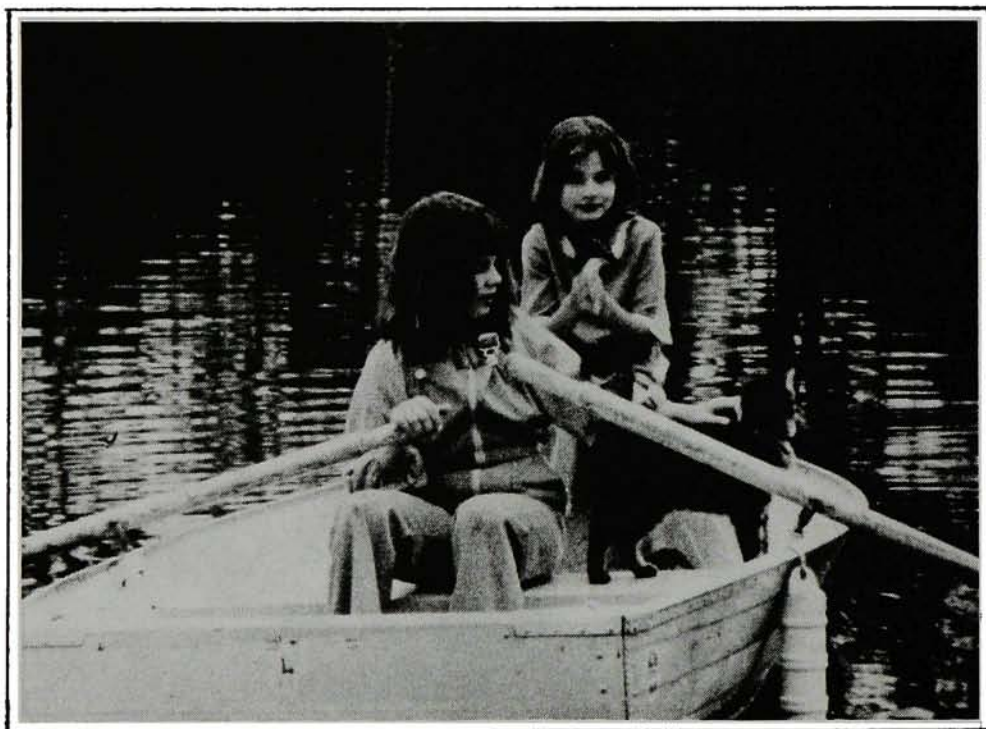
different backgrounds and motivations. If the film had been in Swahili or Hindi, it would still have had the same charming effect, for it is the photography that lures us into the film's soft, bucolic world.

Ondaatje has achieved more than just a tasteful representation of the man-made, and the natural habitat. Without sacrificing the repertorial aspects of the film, she has artistically interpreted and presented the land, houses and furniture as a kind of visual tone poem.

This simple, spare poetry is capable of creating a multilayered image around one small object, like a blue bottle on a wooden window-ledge or a horse walking through long grass.

The tranquil feelings of the three families are aptly communicated and reinforced by the visuals. Indeed, the combined efforts of Ondaatje, cameraman Jim Kelly, and Margaret Van Eerdewyk, who did the editing with Ondaatje, have resulted in a film that I could willingly see again and again. It satisfies on all levels.

Alan Stewart



A world to explore **Where The Bittersweet Grows**

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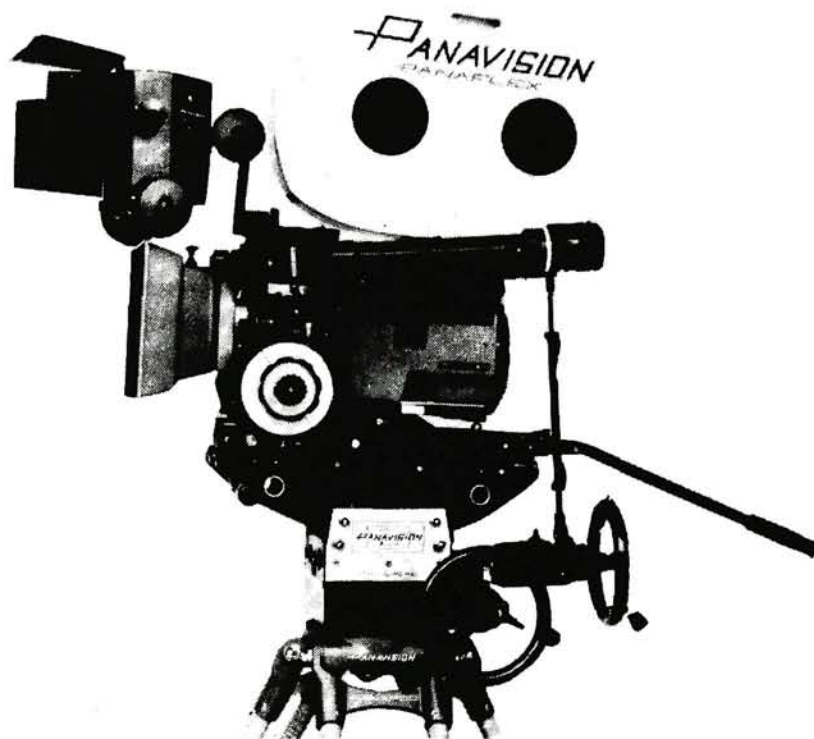
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