



Bambi Meets the Deer Hunter

by Michael McCusker

Bambi and the Deer Hunter have something in common. Neither movie is about the Vietnam war.

The Deer Hunter is about three guys who grew up together in a Pennsylvania steel town. Bambi is about three guys who grew up together in the woods. All three guys are white, but the animals are a mixed cast; a deer, a rabbit and a skunk. The three guys go to war after a drunken wedding and a deer hunt. The war comes to the woods in the form of a hunter and the forest fire he caused.

The forest fire and the escape of Bambi, Thumper and Flower thrilled me with more horror than the escape of Mike, Steve and Nick from the Viet Cong.

As a war movie Bambi was more plausible. The catastrophe of man the hunter was certainly more realistically portrayed.

The Deer Hunter is not so finely drawn. It pretends to be an analogy of the catastrophic effects of war upon three men, and its apologists explain that it was not intended to portray Vietnam except as an example of war itself.

If that is indeed the case, then I find it not only a badly conceived effort, but a complete disservice to the American public that is demanding, finally, after

a 10 year sleep, to know what happened in Vietnam. I found the movie to be a pack of lies.

I do not know the finer points of cinema criticism. I know something about war, however. And the Deer Hunter disturbed me because after they all sang God Bless America and the lights were turned on in the Seaside theater, some youngsters of teen age asked me if that was the way it was in Vietnam. Trying to explain that it was not, I found myself almost shouting in rage, perhaps because those same youngsters were fodder for the next one, and the lies of this movie might ultimately kill them.

Let's start with the big deal made about the single shot theory. Mike, the movie's main man, will expend only one round to get a deer. If he was that chary in returning fire in Vietnam, his first fire fight would have been his last. I remember that even a fire cracker would be answered with a torrent of fire. One of the major criticisms by warfare experts was that we threw rounds around like water out of a hose.

Then we move on to the game of Russian roulette, which was the device the entire plot revolved upon. If it ever happened, no veteran of Vietnam I ever talked with knew about it. We used to hear a lot of wild stories about what Mr. Cong would do to us if we were captured --same stuff the Japanese were told if captured by Americans a generation and two previous wars ago --but none of them included roulette. I found it an irony, perhaps a contempt for the average moviegoer by the producer or director, that Russian Americans were the supposed victims of Russian roulette played upon them by Vietnamese.

That moves us to a racism so explicit in the Deer Hunter that it is a stench. Nowhere within the movie are Vietnamese portrayed as human beings, and certainly not as a worthy foe. "Their Vietnamese" and "Our Vietnamese" have no redeeming qualities whatever; and the symbol of their decadence is based on a fiction--the aforementioned roulette. Even the atrocities the movie shows committed upon Vietnamese are by Vietnamese, and though I understand they often were, my memory is that those portrayed in the movie such as throwing a grenade in a bomb shelter overflowing with mothers and children, or the machinegun-

ning of a mother and her child--were actually committed by us children of redblooded American mothers. Or have we forgotten My Lai?

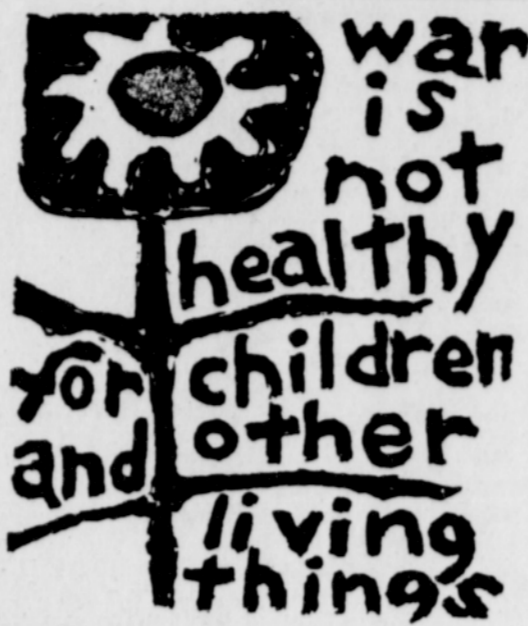
No matter how badly any movie portrays the Vietnamese--and I am sure the ground has been broken for many more--no amount of sour grapes will diminish the fact that those people whipped the hell out of us, not because they were better soldiers, but because they fought us in the same manner our ancestors, for the same reasons, fought the British 200 years ago; and like the British, the Americans were too inflexible to adapt. America, with its bombers and battalions, tried to play chess in the Land of Go, and lost.

But there was another form of racism in the Deer Hunter, perhaps less noticed. Contrary to the script, the American soldier was not entirely white. In fact the greater percentage of actual combat troops were off-white. The rear areas were filled with caucasians, but the closer to the bunkers the more America's racial stew was in evidence. Some of the more cynical have noted that nations always ensure that a goodly number of their lower orders are killed off in combat against another nation's lower orders, so no matter who wins or loses, there are less potentially troublesome 'niggers' left in either.

I could go on, but I am getting mad again. I am getting the feeling that once more we are being used. For almost 10 years the Vietnam veteran has borne the national guilt for the war because the rest of the nation refused to face its responsibility for the war. Even President Carter, in a New York Times interview has admitted that the country's spiritual malaise is a result of its cowardly failure to realize that we lost the war and that it was immoral. The veteran, after suffering the intense losses and anguish of combat, and the terrible guilt of this war in particular, was given no help when he returned home. Instead he became the leper, the repository of all our sins. He was treated like dirt because he did the country's dirty work.

Now he is being manipulated into another form of conspiracy. He is expected to remain silent about the absolute distortion of his experience.

The war movies of a generation ago were meant to fire up men and women



The Broken Whisper

Anton Webern was an Austrian composer, conductor and a leader in the country's socialist movement in the early years of this century. He was born Anton von Webern in 1883, but dropped the aristocratic title during the 1918 revolution which followed the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during World War I.

Webern began his professional career in 1908 as conductor of various orchestras throughout Austria. He joined the Social Democrats Party in 1920 and became conductor of a workers' orchestra. He continued to compose music and conduct orchestras during the Nazi occupation of Austria and during World War II. His son was killed in battle and his home was destroyed by bombs.

Webern's fortunes took a brighter turn in the final days of the war. He received an official letter from Vienna requesting that he take a major role in the postwar reconstruction of Austrian culture.

At the end of the war the allies occupied Vienna. A curfew was imposed. One night Webern returned home in observance of the curfew. He stopped outside his Vienna apartment to light a cigarette. An American sentry shouted an order at him, but by this time the 62-year-old composer was partially deaf. He did not respond to the order. The soldier shot him.

Though his work was largely unknown to the general public, Webern was widely esteemed by classical musicians and by socialists throughout Europe. Roberta Schanek, who lives in Cannon Beach, wrote the following poem mourning his tragic death

the slender fingers crumble
textured as flesh, preserved in tannic acid
each ganglion
each tortured final harmony
the hand turns on its side, raw side out
exposing varicolored fluid tendrils
the trumpet screams in horror
mutilated fractions of gestures
graspings at the cold
wings sear and sever the air
and the music
falls in jagged bloody pieces
thin sour fragments lodged
between the sharp enamelled points
sir, does each star
assign itself to name and number?
but hear the lone, the broken whisper
foreign anger diminished
to a contraction of crystalline iris
at last, motionless
the composer's neck hairs bristle
at untuned scrapings on a sunless window
gunmetal, dense behind a heavy door

Roberta Schanek



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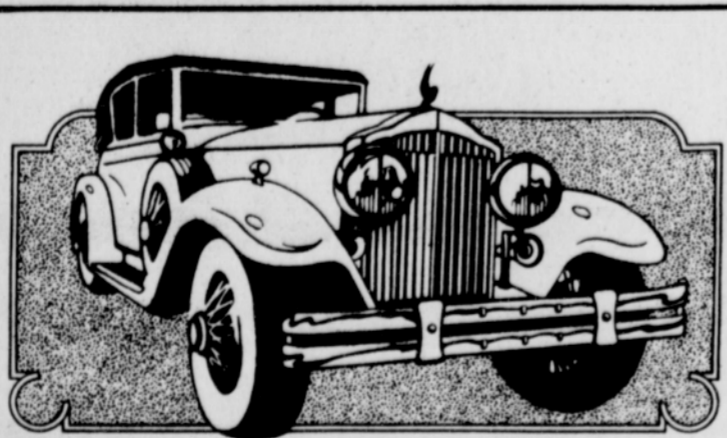
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