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**OMBRE BIANCHE (The Savage Innocents), Italy/
France/Great Britain, 1959/60**

Cert: A. **dist:** Rank. **p.c.:** Magic Film/Playart/Gray Films/S.N. Pathé Cinema/Joseph Janni. **p:** Maleno Malenotti. **d:** Nicholas Ray, Baccio Bandini. **sc:** Nicholas Ray. **adapt.:** Hans Ruesch. F. Solinas, from the former's novel *Top of the World*. **ph:** Aldo Tonti, Peter Hennessy. **SuperTechnirama** 70. **col.:** Technicolor. **ed:** Ralph Kemplen. **a.d.:** Don Ashton. **m:** Angelo F. Lavagnino. **m.d.:** Muir Mathieson. **sd:** Wyn Ryder. **sd.rec.:** Geoffrey Daniels. **l.p.:** Anthony Quinn (*Inuk*), Yoko Tani (*Asiak*), Marie Yang (*Powtee*), Peter O'Toole (*1st Trooper*), Carlo Giustini (*2nd Trooper*), Kaida Horiuchi (*Imina*), Andy Ho (*Anarvik*), Marco Guglielmi (*Missionary*), Yvonne Shima (*Lulik*), Lee Montague (*Ittimangnerk*), Francis De Wolff (*Trading Post Proprietor*), Anthony Chin (*Kidok*), Anna May Wong (*Hiko*), Michael Chow (*Undik*), Ed Devereau (*Pilot*). 9,630 ft. 107 mins.

French title: LES DENTS DU DIABLE.

Inuk, an Eskimo living in the extreme north of Canada, wins his young and beautiful wife, Asiak, by offering her mother Powtee a whale bone, a walrus head and amulets. The white people who live in a trading post hundred of miles to the south give a rifle in return for valuable fox skins, and Inuk struggles to get together his precious cargo, stays the night at the trading post, but leaves when Asiak decides that she does not like the ways of civilised people. Accordingly he builds an igloo near the post, where he is visited by a missionary. Inuk offers to share Asiak with the missionary—the greatest Eskimo compliment—but the indignant missionary refuses. Inuk is mortally offended and unknowingly kills his visitor before taking flight to the north. Powtee leaves the young couple and goes off alone to die, first instructing Asiak in the facts of child-birth. Shortly after the birth of a baby boy, Papik, two Canadian troopers catch up with Inuk and arrest him, intending to take him to trial for murder. During their journey, one of the officers freezes to death, and the other is saved by Inuk from a similar fate. When the grateful trooper recovers in Inuk's igloo, he tries to prevent Inuk from standing trial, realising his innocence but knowing that he will be convicted by white man's law. Inuk cannot understand the situation, so the trooper tricks him into escaping back into the frozen wilderness.

It is difficult to see how the conception of this formidable subject could have been expected to work. In the age-old spirit of semi-documentary, the superstitions and customs of the Eskimos have been studied in detail: caribou eyes and crawling maggots are consumed, a dog's belly is ripped so that frozen hands can be thawed in the entrails, the Eskimo hero hunts polar bear, seal and walrus with harpoon, spear and bow-and-arrow. Yet, as so often, conscientiousness turns out to be almost the film's sole virtue. Admittedly Aldo Tonti's Arctic photography is often magnificent, but the atmosphere is continually being broken by shifts from Pinewood to location and back, with all manner of fancy cutting and back projection to distract the attention. These technical irritations are remedied by nothing in the script, performance or direction. Nicholas Ray's dialogue, a stilted and coy sort of pidgin-American, condescendingly turns a primitive people into quaint Characters. Their eccentricity is avidly seized upon to provide a prolonged sex-joke built around the Eskimo's amiable habit of offering his wife to male visitors; and once that is out of the way, some tritely unfavourable comparisons remain to be made between the ways of civilisation and those of the noble savage. The latter, impersonated by an unsuitably tall Anthony Quinn and a prettily tinkling Yoko Tani, has been thoroughly cleaned up for non-documentary audience inspection, while other characters either verge on caricature, like the missionary, or serve to illustrate some facet of Ray's familiar preoccupation with neurotic love-hate relationships, such as the Trooper played by Peter O'Toole (dubbed and uncredited). Vitalised by this kind of ambiguous sympathy and studio-bound imagination, the film's concern with the plight of a dying race can seem little more than token, and its epic pretensions merely impertinent.

Suitability: A, B.

P.J.D.