



In Memoriam Michael Reeves

Ideally, perhaps, one should see everything: certainly the early work of all new directors, to search it for signs of promise. In practice, of course, it is virtually impossible. I made no pilgrimage to see *Revenge of the Blood Beast*: it never occurred to me to do so, nor to distinguish it from other Blood Beasts. Nor did I go to see *The Sorcerers* when it appeared. I wouldn't have gone to see *Witchfinder General* either, if it hadn't turned up at the local and if it hadn't been for Tom Milne's short notice in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. It seems nicely ironic, when one looks back over the history of British film criticism in the last decade, that the director who perhaps came nearest to fulfilling the wishes of *Movie* for a revival in the British cinema – a director working at the heart of the commercial industry, making *genre* movies without apparent friction or frustration – should have been discovered by *Films and Filming* and the associate editor of *Sight and Sound*. I came out of *Witchfinder* telling myself that the next time a Michael Reeves film appeared I would review it for *Movie* and try to secure an interview with its director. Now there will be no interview, and *Witchfinder General* will have no successor: Michael Reeves is dead, at the age of twenty-five, leaving behind him only three-and-a-half films. So what should have been an enthusiastic recognition of his great promise becomes a sad and (I hope) balanced assessment of his limited but striking achievement.

First, the problematic half. *Castle of the Living Dead* is credited to Warren Kiefer, coauthor of the scenario. Reeves was associated with it throughout as assistant director; his work on it earned him the opportunity of directing *Revenge of the Blood Beast*. He is said to have taken over altogether the last fortnight's shooting, which in terms of low-budget Italian-British co-production must account for about half the film (he was scarcely in his twenties at the time). I have been unable to obtain any official confirmation of precisely which scenes he directed, or what he contributed to other scenes or to the script; I can only offer my own deductions, on stylistic and thematic grounds. (The film's cameraman, Aldo Tonti, who has worked for Visconti, Rossellini, Fellini and Fleischer, may also have made a significant contribu-

tion; certainly in the best parts of the film the camera-work is highly distinguished, equalled in Reeves's output only by that of Johnny Coquillon on *Witchfinder General*.) The film is startlingly uneven. Most of the first half is at best routine stuff, completely undistinguished in *mise-en-scène*, the camera-work merely restless. It is difficult to judge dubbed dialogue scenes fairly, but the acting seems mostly nondescript. There is no sense of any strong controlling presence: stock horror-film characters are unimaginatively presented. Then, at the point where the action moves to the castle exteriors, the whole film lifts. One feels, I think, the point where I suppose Reeves to have taken over as certainly as one feels the moment where Shakespeare took over 'Pericles' (I hope no one will think a qualitative comparison is intended!). And one feels it primarily not from any stylistic mannerisms but from the film's sudden quickening into life. Not everything that follows need necessarily be Reeves' (just as not everything that precedes it need necessarily *not* be); but from the appearance of the coachman with the scythe the film ceases to be a standard horror movie and takes on the closely-knit organisation of poetry. For a start, we are suddenly in the presence of a *director*; someone who knows where to put the camera and where and when to move it. The acting noticeably livens; the remarkable décor of the castle grounds is really *used*, becoming an important presence, and when the film returns to the interiors the level of invention is sustained. Suddenly we find, after the awkwardness of the first part, a flowing of ideas. Reeves can't convert the central characters from stock figures, but they become dislodged from the centre in favour of the hitherto subsidiary dwarf. The film, from which one might have walked out from sheer boredom during the middle stretches in the castle interior, becomes extremely exciting: it might have been a minor masterpiece. As it is, it offers a salutary reminder of the supremacy of pure *mise-en-scène* in the art of cinema.

The distinction between great *metteur-en-scène* and *auteur* inaugurated by certain French critics seems to me fallacious, however. A genuine engagement with one's material inevitably involves expressing one's attitudes and hence

defining one's themes, whether consciously or not. The quality and something of the content of Reeves' personal vision is already impressively clear in *Castle of the Living Dead* (if my attribution is accurate). The first part of the film is peopled by the stock characters of the horror genre, notably gaunt, sinister Count and gaunt, sinister coachman (both have their honourable ancestry in *Nosferatu*, but the coinage has been much devalued since then). There is one scene only in which one would like to think Reeves had a determining influence: that in the market-square, with its macabre public-hanging joke and its establishment of hostilities between dwarf and coachman. Then, about halfway through, comes the moment when the intruding vindictive actor, still dressed in his Harlequin suit, lost in the castle's underground passages, emerges into the grounds. Low-angled shots show the coachman, with his gaunt death's head, holding an immense scythe that crosses the whole foreground of the screen. Abruptly, here and in the ensuing murder, the stock character takes on new resonances: he becomes a figure of monstrous cruelty and power; the image relates him to the traditional personification of Death. In subsequent scenes the dwarf, with his sturdy energy and pluck, his valiant efforts to protect the heroine, comes to represent for us the positive promptings of life. The two figures, both physically grotesque yet incongruous opponents, alternately pursue and ambush each other among the weird, huge statuary of the castle grounds. The scenes, almost painfully exciting at 'thriller' level, take on an allegorical or morality-play resonance.

If I am right in assuming that Reeves was the controlling influence in the latter half of the film, then what he seems to have done is to grasp the implicit subject – for even the most routine material can reveal a subject to the diligent enquirer – and around it organise characters, incidents, images into a coherent poetic unity. The plot concerns a deranged Count Draco (Christopher Lee) who lures people to his castle (by means of his coachman-servant-assassin) and murders them in order to embalm them by a special instantaneous process that immortalises them in death by preserving the flesh eternally. His dead wife, subject to an experiment before the fluid was perfected, is slowly decaying on a bed; in another room he is assembling a kind of waxwork museum of corpses held in permanent suspension (among whom one may spot Reeves himself as a dashing moustachioed officer). Clearly, there is a far from negligible subject lurking here – the theme of transience and mortality, one of the great subjects of English poetry. To grasp something of the 'poetic' organisation of the latter half of the film, consider the underlying interconnections between the following:

- a) The coachman as Death kills Harlequin with the scythe – cut to a shot of him tranquilly scything grass.
- b) At the (supposed) burial of another victim, the Count recites over the grave the text about the grass that 'in the morning is green and groweth up, in the evening it is cut down and withered'.
- c) The Count is obsessed with a desire to perpetuate beauty in death; his wife's unsuccessfully embalmed corpse on the bed is set holding a hand-mirror, to stare with glassy eyes at her own beauty forever; around and over her we see cobwebs, a spider, rats. The heroine Laura exclaims, 'That's what he wanted to do to me!'.
- d) The dwarf is Laura's protector; gradually he emerges as the true hero of the film ('Smallest of the small, bravest of the brave', as his friend the witch says), defender of Life against Death (the coachman). He is the answer to the Count's obsession with a useless, aesthetic beauty: aestheti-

cally ugly and stunted, as a character he becomes increasingly beautiful throughout the latter part of the film.

e) The witch, the dwarf's patroness, once beautiful, victim of an early experiment, is now devoted to destroying the Count. Her ugliness and degradation (the fact that the role is visibly played by a man is itself macabrely expressive) add another component to the complex of ideas and images unified by the theme of transience.

f) The struggle between dwarf and coachman is played out against timeworn monuments that decorate the castle grounds; one of these, beneath which the dwarf meets the witch, looks like an allegorical figure of Age.

I must confess to a special affection, within Reeves's work, for these later scenes of *Castle of the Living Dead*: the obsession with evil and violence that characterises the subsequent films is here more muted and balanced, reminding us that there can be advantages, for an immature genius, in working from other people's material. If they were in fact directed by Warren Kiefer, would Mr Kiefer please step forward?

If the initial stimulus and justification for wanting to talk about Reeves lie in certain stunning set-pieces of *mise-en-scène* (of which the pre-credit sequence of *Witchfinder General* can stand as an example), one's sense of his great promise is determined by the way in which, in only three-and-a-half films, he had already established himself as an *auteur*, with a coherent (if still somewhat raw) view of life. *Revenge of the Blood Beast*, *The Sorcerers* and *Witchfinder General* were written as well as directed by him, from subjects of his own choosing (within the bounds of that elastic term, the Horror Film), and he had virtually complete control of the shooting and editing. One notices various incidental similarities over the four films that suggest the more superficial aspects of a 'signature'. In both *Blood Beast* and *Witchfinder* a body falls away from a wall to reveal a bloodsmear left behind it. The witches in *Castle* and *Blood Beast* are both played by men; though the former is a force of good and the latter a force of evil, the overwhelming way they assault people (the former, Christopher Lee; the latter, everyone in sight) is strikingly similar. Played off against them in both films are ineffectual comic policemen. The following progression, and the degree of development it shows, suggest something central to Reeves' work. In *Castle*, the Harlequin-clad actor climbs the castle wall, inadvertently looks in through the window where the heroine is preparing for bed, and stays to watch; later, he is murdered with a scythe. In *Blood Beast* an innkeeper deliberately peers in at the room where the young honeymooning couple are making love in bed, and subsequently tries to rape another young girl; later, he is hacked to bits with a sickle. In *Witchfinder*, the central character, sexually depraved, seduces the heroine by agreeing to spare her uncle; at the end of the film, he is savagely and hideously mangled with an axe. His henchman spies on the witchfinder's love-making through a window; at the end, he gets one of his eyes kicked out. The odd film out – *The Sorcerers* – is so only in so far as there is no sharp instrument involved in the leading characters' destruction and in so far as the issue is much more complicated. Of the three leading characters one (under hypnosis) performs the actions of a homicidal sex maniac and the other two experience them through a kind of glorified empathic voyeurism; all three are burnt to death. What is striking in this progression is the way in which the sexually depraved character moves increasingly towards the centre of the film, and the corresponding increase in the violence and intensity of the punishment he receives. Beneath these surface resemblances, the films Reeves scripted

reveal a deeper unity.

Revenge of the Blood Beast (the Italian title *La Sorella di Satana* – ‘Satan’s Sister’ – is rather more meaningful) is an untidy and often clumsy film, made very cheaply (about £13,000) and swiftly, and sometimes looking it. The scenario was more or less made up as they went along, and adjusted to such factors as the vagaries of weather and the fact that Barbara Steele (nominally the star) was only available for four days’ shooting. It contains unfortunate incongruities of tone, notably in a comic car chase with a would-be surrealist joke about a recurring motorcyclist that was shot (to save time) by an *ad hoc* second unit (the only time Reeves used such a thing); the result displeased Reeves, but neither time nor money permitted retakes. Nevertheless, when one looks back on it from the two later films, one is struck by the completeness with which *Blood Beast* sets forth Reeves’ outlook and the essential themes of his work; it also contains one of his finest passages – the flashback that shows the witch Vardella.

The sequence starts with the intercutting of a funeral service in a chapel (the bell being rung by a dwarf) and shots of a boy running across a darkening hillside, across a landscape at once ominous and beautiful. The boy bursts in on the service with the news that his brother has been killed by the witch; enraged priest and congregation immediately set out to destroy her. The ragged procession sweeps out of the dark chapel under trees silhouetted against the night sky, carrying feebly flaring torches: the visual-dramatic sense of *Witchfinder General* is already striking and sure. Then the witch’s cave, a yawning black hole from which an apparently decomposing hand gropes. Vardella is summoned out, and the nightmarish quality of the scene becomes manifest. She is an obscenely disgusting figure, her face hideously wrinkled and decomposed, yet her onrush suggests great power. The horror is intensified by the sense that she is nearly but not quite human, an obscene freak of nature, a suppressed and perverted force from the darkness. In the semidarkness she and her assailants become a struggling mass as she claws at men’s faces before being overpowered. The rapid cutting and closeup details increase the sense of messy confusion. Vardella is dragged to the lake and placed in an elaborate ducking-chair (it was in fact a siege-catapult left over from an epic: a nice example of Reeves’s flair for rapid improvisation!). A red-hot metal spike is driven through her and she is repeatedly ducked, while the priest intones prayers of exorcism. Reeves cuts to a medium long shot from the lake, the hideous figure impaled in the chair struggling and screaming, thick bare legs convulsively outstretching, as the chair rises and falls, the holy, white-clad ministers and the congregation forming a semicircle behind, the faces of the women impassive. The vileness of the witch is matched by the horror of what is being done to her: victim and destroyers are reduced to a common bestiality. Or, if you like, Vardella’s viciousness is felt as being reflected in the righteous who surround her, an ineffaceable universal principle. The scene evokes comparison with the nightmare visions of Hieronymus Bosch; it belongs in a better film than *Revenge of the Blood Beast*. Its sense of horror and cruelty is so intense as to suggest a painful hypersensitivity in its creator: not a balanced view, certainly.

Nothing else in the film quite equals this, but several other sequences have something of the same force: the intercutting between the resurrected (and indestructible) Vardella and the brutish innkeeper, just before his attempted rape of the young girl who comes to him for protection, again suggesting that the witch is being used as an image for a universal evil inherent in human nature; the sequence

of the cockfight, where a young boy is attacked by Vardella as through a high window he watches with pleasure the brutal sports of his fellow-humans. The whole concept of the film is centrally Reevesian. ‘Transylvania Today’, the opening title tells us, and we see a vintage car joggling through some very traditional woods. ‘Transylvania Today’ proves to be a Communist state peopled mainly by idiotic policemen and a voyeuristic rapist innkeeper. This could appear a cheap and childish sneer at Communism, or even at foreigners; in retrospect from the other two films the idea reveals itself as more serious. On the one hand there is the State, which thinks it has solved all human problems by politico-social means; on the other is Vardella the witch, symbol of eternal and indestructible evil. (From this viewpoint the film becomes a sort of ‘pop’ *Switchboard Operator*.) The visual joke which is the thing most people seem to remember from the film is in fact organic and fundamentally serious: after hacking the innkeeper with a sickle, Vardella contemptuously casts it aside so that it falls neatly over a hammer. In Reeves’ films policemen are *necessarily*, ridiculous and ineffectual, because evil is ineradicable and ultimately all-powerful, all-overwhelming. *Castle of the Living Dead* is his only optimistic film (in so far as it is his); one wonders if Reeves was responsible for adding the opening commentary – ‘The war is over but the killing goes on . . .’. The excessive violence with which Ian Ogilvy beats up *Blood Beast*’s innkeeper looks gratuitous at first sight, but can be seen as making, rather clumsily, the basic point of *Witchfinder General* whose ending it strikingly anticipates: that evil infects everyone, ‘villain’ and ‘hero’ alike, that we all carry within us a terrific latent violence that awaits a chance or pretext for erupting. The apparently ‘happy’ ending of *Revenge of the Blood Beast* is completely undermined by Barbara Steele’s last words (‘I will return’), with their implication that Vardella, officially laid forever, lives on in her and is only awaiting an opportunity to surge to the surface again. (Reeves wanted to end the film with the young couple safely back in their London flat. They make love. Later, the man wakes up in the moonlight and turns to gaze tenderly into the face of . . . Vardella. Time, budget and Barbara Steele’s unavailability for further shooting forced him to substitute the present more innocuous but quite unambiguous ending.)

The Sorcerers occupies a curious position in Reeves’ little *oeuvre*, because it is at once the finest of his films in conception and the worst in execution. It is as if the creative impulse had expended its energies at the script stage: the realisation of ideas that could have been the basis of a masterpiece is generally unenterprising and ordinary. One feels, especially in scenes centred on subsidiary characters, that Reeves has been too easily content with B-feature solutions.

The film concerns an old practitioner of medical hypnosis (Boris Karloff), disgraced and reduced to poverty by journalistic exposure, who has perfected a method of hypnosis that not only gives him and his wife complete telepathic control (at whatever distance) over their victim, but also enables them to experience, with complete physical empathy, whatever sensations he is experiencing. Gradually, two decisive facts emerge: that his wife (Catherine Lacey), apparently a sweet old lady whose chief interest in life is to support and encourage her husband, carries within her a great reservoir of perverted and sadistic desires which, once the floodgates are opened, proves absolutely uncontrollable; and that her will is very much stronger than that of her humane and appalled husband, so that it is *she* who effectively determines what the young man does. The film is centred on the three-minds-in-one-body conflict: the young man, will-

less whenever the couple choose to exert their control over him, becomes a battleground for their opposed wills.

The Sorcerers really has two subjects, both very rich and suggestive. From the point of view of the young man, it can be seen as an allegory about psychosis, with Catherine Lacey as unmanageable Id and Karloff as ineffectual Super-ego: the young man is completely at the mercy of what seem (since he remembers nothing of his meeting with the old couple) uncontrollable inner compulsions, and he is not aware afterwards of what he has done. What he has done includes the gratuitous murder of two girls, one with scissors, one by strangulation. He is as helpless as Norman Bates, and his mental relationship with Catherine Lacey strongly recalls the mother-son interaction in *Psycho*. From the point of view of the old couple, on the other hand, the film becomes, fascinatingly, an allegory about the cinema and the vicarious experience of the spectator. Catherine Lacey discovers the delights of experiencing anything she wishes to experience, with no consequences: especially, the delights of danger and violence, which even her nice old husband can't deny that he rather enjoyed. From the point in the film where we are alerted to such implications, our own response becomes uncomfortable and self-questioning: to what extent do we, like Catherine Lacey, want the young man to commit horrible murders while we sit back in our seats sharing the sensations in secondhand security? And are we so sure that that 'security' isn't a delusion? Are we, like the old woman, contaminated? Does the release of our baser instincts threaten to overwhelm and obliterate all our finer feelings? What do we go to horror films for, anyway?

At the core of *The Sorcerers* – and by no means unrelated to such questions as the popularity of the horror film – is Reeves' recurrent preoccupation with the universality and the irresistible power of evil. The most frightening (and best realised) thing in the film is the tracing of Catherine Lacey's rapid and unprotesting surrender to her worst destructive impulses, from that first ominous moment when she delightedly orders her victim to crush an egg in his bare hand. The theme is given a further extension through the interaction of the minds and desires of the old woman and the young man, and the ambiguities arising from it. When responding to telepathic orders he appears merely zombie-like, the medium through which her perverse desires can be realised; yet it is established at the outset of the film that the experiment will only work if the guinea-pig is 'willing'. The young man's character is not explained or developed in detail, but we are given a few tantalising hints suggestive of inner disturbances and conflicts. He is associated with two strongly contrasted décors – his modern flat, decorated with contemporary abstract paintings, and his dowdy and cluttered antique shop where he spends most of his days. At the start of the film he expresses his boredom and dissatisfaction with life, his desire to have things happen: his behaviour, abruptly and arbitrarily leaving his sweetheart with a (male) friend and going off for a solitary hamburger in a Wimpy bar, suggests a neurotic restlessness. Both the murders he is driven to commit carry (like the shower scene in *Psycho*) violent sexual overtones: the repeated upward lunge with the scissors with which he stabs the first girl, the position of the bodies as he strangles the second. We are left to ask exactly whose perverted desires are being fulfilled, his or the old woman's?

As the film progresses the young man becomes increasingly its focal point. This is doubtless partly explainable in that what happens to him is more 'cinematic' than the experiences of the old couple, who are for most of the film confined to a single room. But in relation to the Reeves' *oeuvre*

the character assumes a particular significance. He is completely at the mercy of the evil forces that have been released, be they within him or without, forces he can neither control nor understand, forces which make him both destroyer and destroyed. The role is played by Ian Ogilvy, a personal friend of Reeves, who appears in all three films and with whom one can assume a certain degree of identification on Reeves' part. Can it be coincidence that this character, who seems to embody so much that is central to the personal vision of Michael Reeves, is called Michael Roscoe?

If *The Sorcerers* is perhaps the most theoretically interesting of Reeves' films, *Witchfinder General* is certainly his most successfully achieved work. It is easy to make *The Sorcerers* sound a much better film than in fact it is: its virtues are primarily on the level of ideas. In *Witchfinder* what one is immediately struck by is the assurance and intensity of what is on the screen. The pre-credits sequence – again concerned with the execution of a 'witch', though she is not here a force of evil, merely a wretched victim – instantly reveals a regaining of the creative intensity of the best scenes of *Revenge of the Blood Beast*, and although this level of inspiration is not consistently maintained there are no serious lapses. The film has, unfortunately, a central flaw. Vincent Price does not really belong in it. It is not just that his accent repeatedly jars in an otherwise all British cast: one can persuade oneself to overlook such incidental defects. He gives a very accomplished performance, but he remains always Vincent Price in costume. *Witchfinder General*, while certainly horrific, is not really a *genre* horror film, and it is the *genre* that Price's presence continually evokes. One guesses that Reeves found difficulty in 'directing' an actor whose screen persona is so fully formed and familiar. The scenes introducing Price promise, in fact, a richer and more complex character than ever actually materialises. Michael Walker pointed out to me that Matthew Hopkins and his sadistic, brutish henchman Stearne are like a parody of the Knight and Squire in *The Seventh Seal*, and once one has seen it the likeness is striking. But the hint of genuine religious zeal felt as intermixed with Hopkins' corruption on his first appearance is never developed: he becomes an altogether more melodramatic villain, a mere hypocrite, differing from Stearne in his greater refinement rather than in any greater complexity of motivation. Reeves wrote the part with Donald Pleasance in mind, and, though one is not altogether happy about this idea either, it certainly throws light on the director's original conception of the role.

It is easy to demonstrate *Witchfinder's* consistence with Reeves' other work. The theme of the morally outraged seeking a revenge that ultimately degrades them to the level of their quarry – a theme so fundamental to human experience that it has inspired outstanding work in most ages, in Greek tragedy, Elizabethan drama, the Western – is one to which Reeves would be expected to respond strongly. Primary interest in the film is divided between two figures: the debased witchfinder Hopkins, and the young Cromwellian officer Richard Marshall (Ian Ogilvy again). Marshall's fiancée allows herself to be seduced by Hopkins in the belief that he will then spare her uncle-guardian; later she is raped in the fields by Hopkins' assistant Stearne (Robert Russell); the guardian is publicly executed for witchcraft. The first half of the film shows an England where the disorders of civil war allow evil, cruelty and violence (thinly disguised as religious righteousness) to run riot. There is the sense that Hopkins is everywhere; not only that, his excesses are condoned and applauded by educated and igno-

rant alike. The second half centres upon Marshall's quest for vengeance, and culminates in the overwhelmingly horrible scene where it is executed, and we see that he, too, has become more beast than human.

But *Witchfinder* offers more than thematic repetition: there is marked development. *Revenge of the Blood Beast* and *The Sorcerers* are dominated almost entirely by destructive evil; the weakest aspects of both films are those involving positive or constructive feelings – the Ian Ogilvy / Barbara Steele relationship in the former, the Victor Henry / Elizabeth Ercy characters in the latter, all conceived perfunctorily in very conventional terms, with little sense of interest or involvement on Reeves' part. In *Witchfinder* – although there is again the disturbing sense throughout that sanity and goodness are powerless against the all-pervading corruption and violence – there is also a strong feeling for positive potentialities, with emotions like love and tenderness becoming real presences in the tone of the film, so that through their destruction it moves closer to true tragic feeling than either of its predecessors. The love relationship is handled with poignance; so is the girl Sara's feeling for her uncle, and the sacrifice it prompts her to make, in a scene which Hilary Dwyer plays very touchingly. The film pivots on the church scene: Marshall returns to find the guardian dead and Sara cowering in the chapel, terrified and feeling herself defiled. Kneeling with her by the altar he declares them married and swears vengeance, a scene that could easily have lapsed into melodramatic absurdity but which Reeves and his actors bring off magnificently. After it, Marshall rides off again, and as he kisses Sara goodbye we understand that for him, too, the girl is degraded – that he has difficulty in bringing himself to caress her, and that the tenderness he felt for her has now become converted into the singleminded lust for revenge. His reaction interestingly echoes that of Hopkins, when he learns that Sara has been raped by Stearne: he wants no more to do with her, and promptly breaks his pact sentencing the guardian to death.

The use of landscape in the film is felt as an extension of this awareness of human positives. Reeves's grasp of the importance of décor is one of his best qualities: one thinks of the garden in *Castle of the Living Dead*, the innkeeper's littered primitive room, with its incongruous fridge, in *Revenge of the Blood Beast*, the Karloff-Lacey flat in *The Sorcerers*. In *Witchfinder General*, from the first shot of a 'natural' cross formed by sunlight streaming through trees, the English countryside is felt as a real presence: it is difficult to think of other films in which it has been used so sensitively and meaningfully. With it is associated Paul Ferris' theme-music, which suggests a traditional air without being actual quotation. Against the peace and fertility of nature is set the depravity of men. The last seconds of the film are very striking. After Marshall has hacked Hopkins to death, the camera returns us to Sara's face (she is bound on a torture-table, face down). In the sudden stillness she begins to scream, and we realise that her mind has given way, perhaps permanently, under the strain of so much horror. Reeves cuts in shots of the castle's deserted staircases and corridors, along which the screams echo, then returns us to the face and freezes the image. As the final credits come up over it, they are accompanied by the 'nature' music, over which the screams continue: the juxtaposition chillingly expresses our sense of all that has been lost.

Reeves' death is a tragic loss for the British cinema, the more so in that none of his films is completely satisfactory, that one is aware of far more promise than achievement. In discussing his work I have not attempted to minimise its unpleasant aspects, its neurotic quality. It is certainly true

that his direction springs to life most startlingly in scenes involving excessive cruelty and horror, and, although his treatment of violence is never in the least titillating, neither does it strike one as balanced or mature. But, in the very lack of balance the films reveal, he shows the kind of intensity of vision out of which great art often develops, and his work, in its consistency and in the development shown over so short a period, is more impressive in its sum than in its components. There is little to be gained, now, in talking of his promise: if it were solely a matter of promise, this article would scarcely be worth writing. And of course there can be no promise without some degree of achievement. The achievement represented by these three-and-a-half films is sufficient, I think, to repay the attention of anyone interested in movies, and in what could be done within that most discouraging of areas – the British commercial cinema.

Robin Wood

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R.W.

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