

DECEMBER 1982 90p

S & filming

incorporating FOCUS ON FILM

FILM

MAKING
GANDHI



BRITISH CINEMA OF THE FIFTIES:
THE FORGOTTEN DECADE



The would-be bride (Beatrice Romand) and the reluctant bachelor in *A Good Marriage*.

audience, are expected to react to this display of aggressive determinism on the girl's part or the somewhat bland, initially surprised, reaction of the man. But such is the quality of Rohmer's writing that he makes one not only listen to what each character is saying but imagine what they are thinking as well. The two main confrontation scenes illustrate this perfectly: at a party, to which the lawyer arrives late, Sabine eventually gets him upstairs to her room and attempts a little scene of flirtation and affection, to his obvious embarrassment; then later, on receiving no response to her phone calls, she bursts into his office. In a seamlessly constructed scene, with the camera slowly moving closer to their faces, she forces him to reveal that he has no desire to get married at present and wishes to remain uninvolved. Not only is this a virtuoso set-piece of acting, writing and direction, but it forces both characters to emerge from behind their protective screens and make direct contact for a moment before Sabine storms out and starts weighing up another young man whom she spies on a train.

Despite its concise conception and execution it remains, nevertheless, a rather small anecdote, leaving a less rich impression than the best of the Six Moral Tales. Perhaps one has to go to the casting to discover why. Ms Romand, with her tight little face and precise enunciation, certainly has the measure of the part yet somehow fails to make Sabine a fully defined personage – should she really be so gauche and charmless at key moments, so over-bearing in her exercise of will over others? The fact that the film never tells us may provide the clue to its final sense of incompleteness. Rohmer's way with his other actors is as acute as before, however, with particularly finely-tuned playing from André Dussollier, all easy smiles and apologies at the beginning, turning into a quiet, rather funny desperation as he tries to extricate himself from the trap forming

around him. Rohmer's tightly composed conversation pieces do not allow for any great compositional flourishes, yet some of the close-ups have a sunny plastic beauty and he turns the old cliché of shooting through the windscreen of cars into a positive asset.

JOHN GILLET

THE EVIL DEAD

Director/screenplay: **Samuel M. Raimi**. Photographer: **Tim Philo**. Editor: **Edna Ruth Paul**. Music: **Joe LoDuca**. Special effects: **Tom Sullivan, Bart Pierce**.

Cast: **Bruce Campbell** (Ash), **Ellen Sandweiss** (Cheryl), **Betsy Baker** (Linda), **Hal Delrich** (Scott), **Sarah York** (Shelly).

Producer: **Robert G. Tapert**. Executive producers: **Bruce Campbell, Samuel M. Raimi**. Associate producer: **George Holt**. Production company: **Renaissance**. Distributor: **Palace**. 90 minutes. Colour. Certificate: X.

Already hailed as the *Night of the Living Dead* of the Eighties, feted at horror festivals and celebrated by no less a luminary than Stephen King as "the most ferociously original horror film of 1982", *The Evil Dead* has quite a reputation to live up to. It doesn't disappoint. In fact, it's terrific. And, considering the circumstances of its production, really rather amazing.

Like Romero's film, it's an independent, low-budget production: *Evil Dead* cost well under a million dollars, raised entirely from private investors. But whereas *Night of the Living Dead* actively utilised its budgetary limitations to achieve a stripped-down, documentary, almost home-movie quality, *Evil Dead* frequently manages effects which you'd think would

have swallowed the entire budget in one go – for example, the make up and special photography (especially in the final 'meltdown' sequence) and the often highly elaborate camerawork (including what could easily pass for Steadicam).

All this is particularly remarkable considering the age and relative inexperience of the production team: Sam Raimi was only twenty-two when he wrote and directed the film (he also took over as principal cameraman after Tim Philo dropped out) whilst Rob Tapert was a mere twenty-six when he produced it. Before this, their only movie-making experience had been in 8mm (albeit in reputedly epic productions). The extraordinary special effects were achieved by twenty-four-year-old Tom Sullivan and, at thirty the old man of the team, Bart Pierce. For the meltdown two of the characters were reproduced down to the minutest detail and the photographic and make-up special effects men worked for eight weeks solid to create a convincing illusion of total decomposition. The five 'stars' were all college students and the lead, Bruce Campbell, dropped out of Michigan State University in order to help raise the film's finance, as did its producer Rob Tapert. It was shot in 16mm and then blown up to 35mm for theatrical release but, apart from one or two grainy shots, the quality of the images is remarkably good.

Of course, none of this would be particularly significant if the film didn't actually work. But it does – and how. The story itself is a familiar one, owing more to Lovecraft than to Romero. Five college friends venture into the deeply wooded mountains of Tennessee to spend a weekend in an isolated cabin previously occupied by an occultist. Among the possessions they discover, bound in human flesh and printed in human blood, is *The Book of the Dead*, a manual of Sumerian burial practices and funeral incantations. Playing a tape recording of these chants the students inadvertently arouse terrifying forces far beyond their comprehension or control: the very woods become alive with immanent hostility, the dead begin to rise, one by one the friends are taken over by demonic forces who can only be destroyed by the utter dismemberment of the bodies they have come to inhabit, whilst all around there lurks some utterly awful and massively powerful Unseen Presence, indicated by a really effective subjective camera (or what Raimi over-modestly refers to as Shakicam), the perfect expression of Lovecraft's frequent references to the literally indescribably horrifying. As in *The Dunwich Horror* what we see is the Thing's effects – giant trees crashing in its path, Nature in uproar, and the abject terror on the faces of its victims.

As Stephen King puts it: "In *Evil Dead* the camera has the kind of nightmarish fluidity that we associate with the early John Carpenter; it dips and slides, then zooms in so fast you want to plaster your hands over your eyes. The film begins and ends with crazily exhilarating shots that make you want to leap up cheering." (The final one apparently put both star and director/cameraman in hospital with broken ribs.) O.K., so Raimi tilts his camera once too often, but so does Carol



Extraordinary special effects in *The Evil Dead*.

Reed in his *Third Man* period. And for all his occasional misjudgments and awkwardnesses with dialogue, Raimi knows how to handle narrative tightly, economically and suspensefully (not as easy as it sounds, witness the flaccid *Blade Runner* and, sad to say, parts of *Poltergeist*).

With its obvious influences and references (from *Orphée* to *The Hills Have Eyes*) *Evil Dead* clearly bears witness to a lifetime's cinephilia (and a particular taste for low-budget Hollywood exploitation) but Raimi and his collaborators have clearly *learned* from their voracious moviegoing – their film really hangs together and *works* in its own right. It may throw everything including the kitchen sink (or rather the characters' guts) in the audience's face but in no way is it just a slavish rehash of great moments from old favourites. It's also more than just a rollercoaster ride of gut wrenching horror climaxing in the best decomposition sequence since *The Devil's Rain*, for not only does Raimi know how to use just the right amount of tongue-in-cheek humour (the film announces itself as "the ultimate experience in gruelling terror") but, in the moment between Ash and Linda in which their love *almost* rescues them from their living hell, building to an extraordinary scene with a chainsaw, he turns in a sequence worthy of Franju, one which would melt any Surrealist's heart. There's real imagination at work here, not just manipulative skill and facility with gadgets à la *Friday the 13th*, and it's *this* that marks out Raimi and co. from the majority now mining the horror genre and which inspires such hope for their next feature, *Relentless*.

Incidentally, the film has been cut by about 33 seconds; no scenes are actually missing, though various bits of battering and gouging have been slightly shortened. Annoying and trivial, I agree, but in the current climate of moral panic over video "nasties", I suppose it could have been far worse. Significantly the only scene I found offensive, a bizarre "rape by Nature", seems to have been left intact.

JULIAN PETLEY

THE WEAVERS: WASN'T THAT A TIME!

Director: **Jim Brown**. Screenplay: **Lee Hays**. Photographers: **Jim Brown, Daniel Ducovny, Tom Hurwitz**. Editor: **Paul Barnes**. Sound: **Chat Guenter, Larry Loewinger, Ginger Turek, Sandy Smolan, Richard Patterson**. With: **The Weavers – Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert, Fred Hellerman**. Producers: **Jim Brown, George C. Stoney, Harold Leventhal**. Distributor: **Cinegate**. 76 minutes. Certificate: **U**.

Do you remember The Weavers? With chart-topping Fifties hits like 'Goodnight Irene', 'On Top of Old Smokey' and 'If I Had a Hammer', the group popularised folk singing in a new way, bringing to a mass audience the politically committed

tradition of singers like Woody Guthrie. Following the preparation for a reunion concert in 1980, *The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time!* is not so much a history of the group but more a celebration of their strength and determination.

Through reminiscences, tributes, archive material and concert rehearsals, the film pieces together their story – their dedication to the labour movement, their sudden (almost unsought) rise to stardom, their isolation from the media (but never from the public) in the McCarthy years and their overwhelming joy in singing.

The group that influenced a generation of singers like Arlo Guthrie, Don McLean and Peter, Paul and Mary began their career singing at union gatherings. Poverty led them to a nightclub where Decca 'discovered' them, prettied them up and gave them the star treatment. Just two years after their first hit, the best-selling version of 'Goodnight Irene', the full force of McCarthyism hit them and they became a prime target for red-baiting. "It's fashionable nowadays to honour those on the blacklist," muses Lee Hays. "If it wasn't for the honour, I'd just as soon not have been blacklisted." With radio stations, record companies and most venues closed to them, The Weavers nevertheless managed to sell-out Carnegie Hall in 1955, a fitting place to return for their final show.

But it is not the past that makes the film so alive – it is the present. Lee Hays, confined to a wheelchair, dying of diabetes, still able to joke and organise; Pete Seeger taking time off from cleaning up the Hudson River to rejoin his old group and Ronnie Gilbert relishing in her new-found feminism.

The concert, a 'one last time' for The Weavers, like the film, has no truck with nostalgia. As at their previous Carnegie Hall concert, the audience delights at their timely political fervour as anti-Reagan jokes jostle with old favourites with updated lines. Through the words of a song like "my get up and go has got up and gone", the group celebrate their continued lust for life and optimism for the

Director/cameraman Jim Brown adjusts focus as the Weavers (left to right: Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert, Fred Hellerman) adopt the pose of an old photograph from their days of greatest success in *The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time!*

