

“You Should Always Kill The Villain Twice”: Australian Horror Movies and the Guilty Pleasures That Won’t Go Away.

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Introduction

This study intends to shed light on cyclical iterations of genre cinema production in Australia which, for all its professed defiant national character, somehow closely reflects phases and trends mostly originating from the American film industry.

The present work focuses on the horror-thriller genre which was at the core of the exploitation craze of the mid-1970s to late 1980s *Down Under* and which has been enjoying notable commercial and critical success for the last ten years in these niche markets all around the world.

While quickly discussing current globalized evolutions of the horror movie genre and their manifestations in recent Australian feature films, this study returns to the slightly problematic label of “Ozploitation”. Among the movies produced during this period, *Patrick* (Richard Franklin, 1978) and *Long Weekend* (Colin Eggleston, also 1978) have gained cult status among fans of the genre (and belated critical recognition) at home and overseas. Both movies are studied in relation to their recent remakes, with *Patrick* brought back to cinema screens by Mark Hartley in 2013 and *Long Weekend* remade by Jamie Blanks in 2008.

All along this work and specifically in the paragraphs dealing with both remake enterprises, gender-coded tropes and figures are highlighted through various shifts and reconfigurations. This angle is particularly emphasized in the last section of this study, with a development on *Storm Warning*, shot in 2007 by Jamie Blanks before his remake of *Long Weekend*.

Theoretically outside the conceptual framework of this study on movie remakes, *Storm Warning* can nonetheless be analyzed in terms of syncretic reformulation (if not rehashing) of previous iconic narratives (from shock exploitation flicks to revered Hollywood canon). Besides what can be described as a fairly common grey area between acknowledged re-adaptation and thinly-veiled rip-off, *Storm Warning* echoes the bold elements of characterization and visual treatment central to productions dating back to the original heyday of “Terror Australis”¹, such as *Fortress* (Arch Nicholson, 1985), a made-for-TV movie with a striking, disquieting third act, and *Fair Game* (Mario Andreacchio, 1986).

* * *

Australian horror movies, from the Ozploitation era to the new millennium

Apart from *Fair Game*, all of the movies quoted above² have been penned by the same writer. American-born Everett De Roche (1946-2014) emigrated to Australia in the mid-1960s and started to write for a local TV crime series in 1970. From the original *Long Weekend* and *Patrick* to *Snapshot* (1979), *Harlequin* (1980), *Roadgames* (1981), *Razorback* (1984) and *Link* (1986), De Roche was the foremost storyteller of the classic Ozploitation era, skilled at twisting genre conventions and at imbuing them with striking local colour once alien to this American born in Maine and mostly raised in California.

Directed by various filmmakers often under the supervision of ubiquitous producer Antony I. Ginnane, these movies written by De Roche are extensively commented upon in Mark Hartley’s *Not Quite Hollywood: The Wild, Untold History of Ozploitation!*, an Australian documentary released in 2008. In this feature film, Hartley takes the viewer on a colorful tour of a section of the Australian movie industry which, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, was seen as antithetic to the

¹ Originally claimed, among others, by the first mass-market horror magazine in Australia from 1987 to 1992, this designation has been made popular again by Australian academic Mark David Ryan to refer more specifically to the Australian horror movie genre.

² De Roche is officially credited as the sole writer of the 2008 remake of *Long Weekend*; the script of the 2013 remake of *Patrick* is rightfully attributed to Justin King, but in this “based on the electrifying cult classic” “contemporary re-imagining of the 1978 Australian chiller” (marketing posters) or “grandiose remake des Kultklassikers” (insert on the German DVD edition cover), the plot and dialogue still closely follow the original treatment by De Roche, while the 2013 rewrite mostly affects the original stylistic treatment of director Richard Franklin and cinematographer Don McAlpine.

cultural promotion of “Australianness” by public funding bodies, mainstream or scholarly movie reviewers and highbrow festivals at home and overseas.

Patrick (1978) may be the sole exception to this clear-cut distinction thanks to its winning the *Grand Prix* at the 1979 edition of the *Festival international du film fantastique d'Avoriaz* while competing against John Carpenter's *Halloween* and Philip Kaufman's remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

Still, during the period mentioned earlier, Australia was exclusively represented in Cannes Film Festival's official selections and parallel events by films³ adhering to a specific government-sponsored mission statement:

[Peter Weir's] *Picnic at Hanging Rock* thus inaugurated what many commentators have since called (wisely or not) the 'AFC genre': in other words, the kind of film favoured by the federal government-funding body the Australian Film Commission (now Screen Australia) and the various state bodies – lushly photographed (often in nostalgic rural settings), derived from local literary or theatre classics, frequently about coming of age or family themes, costume dramas usually devoted to defining (in low-key heroic or mythic terms) the national character and its destiny. (Martin 2010)

Intrigued by subsequent decades of embarrassed disinterest or outright rejection suffered by exploitation movies from Down Under, Mark Hartley decided to venture into cult-movie archaeology with *Not Quite Hollywood*. In his documentary, he writes the broad history of a boom-bust cycle of Australian genre cinema taking place 30-odd years ago, and he concludes his demonstration with the current revival of horror, supernatural, science-fiction and crime thrillers.

Films in these categories constituted a fair share of the original Ozploitation output and, since the turn of the millennium, they have reached niche audiences around the world thanks to the globalized economics of straight-to-DVD release for rental and sale (Ryan 2009), of video-on-demand distribution and of cable network broadcast market. From small-scale fan blogs to well-established websites like fangoria.com, the internet community of genre-movie lovers has offered unprecedented exposure to

³ Screened in competition: *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), *My Brilliant Career* (1979), *Breaker Morant* (1980), *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1983); screened in Directors' Fortnight: *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975), *The Devil's Playground* (1976), *The Getting of Wisdom* (1978), *Heatwave* (1982).

more or less obscure Australian films from a previous generation⁴ and it has enthusiastically supported productions from the past decade.⁵

Symbiotically linked with the cultural and financial interconnections of contemporary movie production, distribution and consumption circuits, the Australian horror cinema of the 2000s and 2010s has managed to amalgamate local elements and imported visual and thematic figures to produce a complex ensemble of subcategories, borrowings and innovations. “Torture porn”, one of the most controversial trends of the recent period, can even be traced back to Australian genre cinema: James Wan and Leigh Whannell, two graduates of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology’s film school, failed to convince local producers to fund *Saw*, a project which they finally took to Los Angeles. Produced by Twisted Pictures and released in 2004 by Lionsgate Films, the movie started a highly profitable franchise.

One year after the international success of *Saw*, *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005) mixed torture porn and survival horror elements with true crime Australiana and “post-colonial discomfort with the land” (McFadden, 2013). Ten years and one sequel later, *Wolf Creek* is still the flag bearer for Australian horror cinema around the world – one of many local features which paradoxically (and cheekily) flaunt their Australianness by subverting *Crocodile Dundee* / *Skippy* clichés and showing foreign tourists or clueless urbanites rarely surviving their encounter with human, animal or geographic materializations of the “Horror in the Outback” (McFadden, 2013).

The label of “Terror Australis” itself hints at implicit connotations of mystery, fantastical speculation, colonial malaise and violent cultural mutilation. From the *terra australis incognita* imagined in Antiquity and during the Renaissance to the legal fiction of *terra nullius* that condoned the dispossession of Aboriginal lands, the island-continent has inspired a sense of baffled wonder often close to some insecurity borne out of doubt and guilt. In past and present Australian horror cinema, locals of European ancestry and wide-eyed visitors are frequently defeated by the environmental and mystical otherness that can take the shape of giant saltwater crocodiles, of Dreamtime spirits, or of endless tracks meandering through merciless

⁴ *Patrick* (1978), *Long Weekend* (1978), *Snapshot* (1979), *Thirst* (1979), *Harlequin* (1980), *Road Games* (1981), *Turkey Shoot* (1982), *Razorback* (1984), *Link* (1986), *Fair Game* (1986), *Howling III: the Marsupials* (1987), *The Dark Age* (1987).

⁵ *Undead* (2003), *Visitors* (2003), *Wolf Creek* (2005), *Rogue* (2007), *Black Water* (2007), *Storm Warning* (2007), *Long Weekend* (2008), *Dying Breed* (2008), *Prey* (2009), *The Loved Ones* (2009), *Daybreakers* (2010), *Road Train* (2010), *Uninhabited* (2010), *The Needle* (2010), *Snowtown* (2011), *The Tunnel* (2011), *Patrick* (2013), *Wolf Creek 2* (2013), *The Babadook* (2014).

outback dust flats. These outer and inner landscapes, still not fully domesticated, may thus serve as near-blank canvases for visual narratives inspired by exotic horror idioms.

Patrick (1978) was extremely popular in Italy because of its stylistic connections with the *giallo* movies, and the director of the 2013 remake acknowledges Dario Argento's work as one of his inspirations for his project. For the last twenty-odd years, Australian moviegoers and moviemakers have indeed embraced world horror cinema productions coming from all horizons. Spanish spooky gothic tales and Japanese or Korean haunting chillers have had some influence on themes and atmospheres conjured in recent Australian horror movies, with or without the mediation of Hollywood remakes⁶ like *Quarantine* (2008), *The Ring* (2002) or *The Uninvited* (2009).

Of course, Hollywood has been recently busy remaking / re-adapting / rebooting its own horror back-catalogue from the 1970s and 1980s, with filmic reiterations ranging from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) to *Carrie* (2013). Given that they were working with less commonly-viewed original material, Australian directors who recently ventured down the perilous road of repetition may have been spurred as much by a desire for artistic experimentation (bordering on self-indulgence) as by elusive hopes of financial profitability.

Patrick (1978; 2013)

As of early 2015, the latest released remake is *Patrick* (also titled *Patrick: Evil Awakens* outside Australia, 2013) directed by Mark Hartley. Authorship is slightly problematic on this enterprise. Only near the bottom of the end credits can one find a reference to the original movie, with the following breakdown:

Screen story by
JUSTIN KING, MARK HARTLEY, RAY BOSELEY and ANTONY I.
GINNANE⁷
Inspired by the 1978 Motion Picture "PATRICK"
Written by EVERETT DE ROCHE and Directed by RICHARD FRANKLIN
Script Editors RAY BOSELEY
REGINA LEE

⁶ After *[REC]* (2007), *Ringu* (1998) and *A Tale of Two Sisters* (2003).

⁷ Still active after 45 years in the movie industry, Antony I. Ginnane may be described as the closest Australian equivalent of Roger Corman; after coming full circle on his genre-cinema financing career with the remake of the 1978 *Patrick* he also produced, he has supervised a second remake, this time of one of his most infamous productions: *Turkey Shoot* (1982 and 2014).

Before script doctors got involved, the creative authority already appeared quite diluted (from “writing a motion picture” to partaking in the elaboration of a “screen story”). One sadly pragmatic element may explain this curt nod given to the original 1978 script: at the time of Everett De Roche’s passing in April 2014, news agencies mentioned his “three-year battle with cancer” and his last credited works on imdb.com are a final feature film (*Nine Miles Down*, 2009) and a 2010 episode of *K9*, a *Doctor Who* spin-off shot in Queensland, Australia. His absence from the 2013 project contrasts with his involvement in the 2008 remake of *Long Weekend* (his first-ever movie script, filmed by Colin Eggleston in 1978) and his 25-year-long fight to get *Storm Warning* shot and finally released in 2007.

The implicit distance put by the authors of the 2013 *Patrick* remake between their work and the original movie is probably better explained by their drastic thematic and stylistic choices. Director Mark Hartley thus explained why, out of all the Ozploitation movies he had features in his documentary *Not Quite Hollywood*, he decided to pick *Patrick*:

The original film is very rooted to its year of production – 1978 – and when you re-visit it in the year 2013 its shock value and suspense elements have greatly decreased. However, it has a timeless plot. It’s a classic love-story-with-a-body-count. It’s about a troubled young psychopath who has limitless powers, but all he wants to focus them on is making the girl he’s obsessed with fall in love with him. I thought that was such a great idea and also felt that the advances in technology – and the ever-increasing invasion of privacy that has developed along with them – made the story intriguingly relevant.⁸

Hartley’s issues with “decreased shock value and suspense elements” may echo the dissatisfaction expressed by Everett De Roche in a 2012 interview in which he recalls the ups and downs of his collaboration with director Richard Franklin in 1978, and makes his own appraisal of the movie’s aging:

The truth is, nobody wants to believe there are script issues once the juggernaut is rolling, and some simply wish the writer would go away and work on the next project. Richard was more inclusive, and I did hang around the set [...] but the director is the captain of the ship and, I guess, his vision has to dominate.

I still cringe at some of the “campy-ness” of *Patrick*, and the film seems much more dated than, say, *Long Weekend* or *Roadgames*. Richard and I

⁸ “Q&A with Director Mark Hartley (Patrick)” — Melbourne International Film Festival PREMIERE FUND documentation available at <http://miffindustry.com/assets/Industry/Q/Patrick%20Q&A.pdf> (last accessed on January 24, 2015).

constantly argued about changes, but alas, the writer has zero clout and the show must go on. I was furious about certain changes at the time [...] but I've mellowed over the years.⁹

Having interviewed pretty much everyone involved with the original movie, Mark Hartley is able to echo some of De Roche's comments about discordance between plot and tone in Richard Franklin's film, mentioning some visual shortcomings which are the reason why Hartley and his team made new creative choices:

Richard, the director, had lots of battles on set, and when you look at 'Patrick' now, it's dated so badly [...] Richard really wanted it to be atmospheric, but he was fighting all the time with the cinematographer, who was a documentary cinematographer, who kept on saying 'Well, I'm not quite sure where the light source is supposed to be to create those shadows,' and Richard would say 'It's a film about telekinesis, for Christ's sake!'¹⁰

Richard wanted it to be a lot moodier than it was but he was constantly at odds with Don, who wanted things to look ultra-realistic. From the very start I always said our film had to be incredibly spooky.¹¹

The "spooky" aspect of the remake came through a fairly ambitious sampling of influences. Compared to the interchangeable visual treatment of Hollywood horror remakes in the new millennium (if one excludes the fetishistic grindhouse recreations of Rob Zombie), Hartley and his collaborators have boldly experimented with various styles:

The original *Patrick* was very much a homage by Richard Franklin to his mentor, Alfred Hitchcock.¹² In turn, our film takes a large part of its inspiration from Richard's work and the suspense films I loved from other Hitchcock admirers (most notably Brian De Palma and Dario Argento). The film's cinematographer, Garry Richards, and myself were also inspired by two modern Spanish horror films: *The Orphanage* and *Julia's Eyes*.¹³ [They're] movies more about mood and timbre than jump scares and bloodletting. "Nothing particularly horrific happens in them and they're both beautifully photographed, much more about the atmospherics," Richards says, something the new production hoped to emulate.¹⁴

⁹ "Crafting 'Little Aussie Masterpieces': an interview with Everett De Roche" – Article available at <http://www.spectacularoptical.ca/2012/06/an-interview-with-everett-de-roche/> (last accessed on January 24, 2015).

¹⁰ "Mark Hartley Talks Patrick: Evil Awakens' Chilling Tone, Thrilling Finale, Crack Cast and Much More" – Article available at <http://www.dreadcentral.com/news/67009/exclusive-mark-hartley-talks-patrick-evil-awakens-chilling-tone-thrilling-finale-crack-cast-and-much-more/> (last accessed on January 24, 2015).

¹¹ "Patrick Redux" – *videoandfilmmaker.com*, December 19, 2013 – Article available at <http://videoandfilmmaker.com/wp/index.php/features/patrick-redux/> (last accessed on January 24, 2015).

¹² Richard Franklin actually became famous on the international horror scene when he went to Hollywood to direct *Psycho II*, released in 1983.

¹³ "Q&A with Director Mark Hartley (Patrick)".

¹⁴ "Patrick Redux".

The distancing from the original movie was compounded by a clear intention to disorient the viewer, with jarring period elements or referential frameworks giving a somehow counter-intuitive aesthetic feel to their 2013 movie:

There were visual references in more contemporary gothic horror and thriller films we wanted to head towards. Without meaning to sound insulting, we didn't want it to look like an Australian film. We wanted it set in no particular place and be fairly ambiguous about the period."¹⁵

I think making old-fashioned Gothic chillers is a bit of a hard sell. It's funny, too, because we thought that the film announced its style from the first frame [...] and yet, we still get a lot of criticism for the CGI effects, which I wanted to look slightly... "hokey" isn't the word... but I said to the CGI people, I want this film to have a film reality, as opposed to a real life reality. I didn't want them to look real at all. I wanted them to look like they'd been manufactured in a lab, like old-fashioned visual effects, particularly with Wright's car death. I wanted that to be almost like a back projection Hitchcock thing.¹⁶

In the 1978 original, only the early exposition scenes featured visible attempts to establish a stylistic specificity, with reflections and panoramic shots to establish the disquieting proximity between Patrick and his mother, followed by a multiplicity of camera angles around the apartment of the heroine to underline her situation as the uncomfortable object of male desire. However, the rest of the movie's visual composition appeared purely utilitarian in design, with unimaginative framing and editing and the drab setting of a clinic that looks as welcoming as a Victorian boarding house for forlorn spinsters. The only disquieting visual continuity to be found was the unblinking stare of Patrick, an unhinged matricide gone mysteriously comatose. His face adorned most of the movie's various posters and DVD covers, and one specific aspect of the visual and narrative shift between the two versions can be observed in the promotional tools created for the 2013 remake.

On most of the posters for Mark Hartley's version, Patrick is either nowhere to be found or the close-up on his eyes only conveys a vague sneering challenge, sometimes underlined by half-pouting full lips. Jackson Gallagher, the actor cast to lie in bed with an air of mild focus on his face, has been compared to Ashton Kutcher, and the use of his "pretty-boy" physique may have been as much an indirect manifestation of a gender reversal in tone and content as a nod to teenage female viewers. These 2013 posters mostly feature the two female leads: Sharni Vinson as

¹⁵ "Patrick Redux".

¹⁶ "Mark Hartley Talks Patrick".

nurse Kathy Jacquard, the object of Patrick's obsession, and Rachel Griffiths as Matron Cassidy, while Charles Dance's character Dr. Sebastian Roget looks slightly worried by a scalpel brandished close to his face.

In the job interview scene featuring these three characters, the power structure that existed in the original movie is clearly upended. If Matron Cassidy's positioning is still intriguing at the beginning of the movie, Dr. Roget feels immediately threatened by the new nurse ("So, you're an expert. Are you going to tell me how to do my job?"). After this initial challenge, he seemingly treats her as an intellectual equal when he dares her to "do remarkable things" and be a "trailblazer". The young new recruit later puts much more of a fight when she protests at Roget's liberal use of electro-shock therapy. Finally, she is able to outsmart and terminate Patrick on her own while, in the 1978 movie, the young nurse's survival depends on her boyfriend's intervention to snap her out of her suicidal puppet daze.

The female character then played by Susan Penhaligon seems fairly unexcited to resume her nursing career after her "trial separation". She hardly bats an eyelid when her estranged husband sets up to sexually assault her ("Are you finished, Ed?... I'd like to discuss our divorce"); she is ready to overlook his impulses and keep him around while she flirts with a playboy surgeon and she develops a crush on Patrick. However, while she wonders about her husband's reproaches of "frigidity" and while her female nurse colleagues are equally sexually liberated in both movies, it is probably the heroine of the remake that may still more clearly qualify as a version of the "Final Girl"¹⁷ horror type.

In 2013, Jacquard is her maiden name: Ed is now Mr Penhaligon, subtly feminized through the reference to the 1978 actress, and Sharni Vinson's character's only explicit sex scene in the movie is part of a dream-within-a-dream – a very remote potentiality. Lastly, when members of the clinic staff drop like flies around her, she keeps her head cool enough to turn the tables on the telekinetic killer and finish him off with a forceful oversized-syringe stabbing, a minute variation on the phallic motive of empowering knives and shifting gendered power plays in slasher movies.

A few moments later, Patrick gets Part Two of his "double tap", or the confirmed-kill finishing move now mandatory in action and horror thrillers to be rid of the villain

¹⁷ A type introduced by Carol J. Clover in her book *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992). With her recurring nightmares manipulated by Patrick, 2013 nurse Kathy Jacquard is probably closer to Nancy Thompson of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* than to Laurie Strode of *Halloween*.

(here, a second run-in with a pointy object). This killing mannerism validates his definite status as horror movie monster (down to the post-credits split-second hint at some possible resurrection of Patrick in the digital realm), but only after the writers of the remake played with viewers' assumption earlier in the movie: instead of opening the movie with his Oedipal murders as in the 1978 original, they have chosen to introduce Patrick as a cute, harmless, sad medical case.

In his guiltless passivity, he appears demasculinized and has to silently suffer Kathy's colleague's *double entendre* comments and the assaults of science and male *hubris* when Dr. Roget repeatedly shocks and burns him. Only after Patrick's own violent moves against people surrounding Kate is the gory truth about his past and his condition gradually revealed, with an over-the-top electrocution-and-drowning double homicide (and botched suicide to boot) that is also about narrative tempo, as Mark Hartley explains:

That was our kind of wild card that we could keep cutting back to in the end. That was hopefully the thing that would get us into that final gear because that was one of the important things when Justin and I were writing the film – we always thought that a lot of Australian thrillers were great, but they couldn't find that final gear that they needed to. We wanted to hopefully, you know, step on the accelerator towards the end.¹⁸

Ultimately, thanks to their gritty heroine's determination, the filmmakers take the movie to its conclusion through a few more jump-scares that may belie the gothic syncretism professed in interviews and press releases. Aware of these shortcomings, Hartley admits that "*Patrick* [...] proudly counts among its ingredients old-school prosthetics, a smattering of nudity and a fast-paced – and bloody – climax".¹⁹

One strong element of Everett De Roche's script for the 1978 version, which has been pretty much extirpated from the 2013 remake, is Patrick's Oedipal murderous perversion and later transfer from his dead mother to nurse Kathy who is either cajoling or scolding the ever-naughtier man-child in her care. In Hartley's movie, the titular character has killed his mother, has died and has been reborn as a telekinetic virtual avatar who can't take no for an answer. Besides an extreme Oedipus complex now diluted into a more central unrequited infatuation, the remake has also done

¹⁸ "Mark Hartley Talks Patrick".

¹⁹ "Q&A with Director Mark Hartley (Patrick)".

away with the original movie's variations on maternity²⁰ elaborated by De Roche. The figures of motherhood which the writer toyed with more strikingly in his script for *Long Weekend* (1978) have remained as forceful as ever in Jamie Blanks' 2008 remake of this pioneering eco-horror thriller.

Long Weekend (1978; 2008)

One of the rare additions to the original script is an extra element of wildlife drama, with a baby dugong found dead on the beach in the 2008 remake, before Peter shoots dead its mother swimming near the shore. The little mammal beached on the sand, its head stuck in a plastic bag, is first mistaken for a baby seal by Jim Caviezel's character in the remake; this initial indeterminacy (not as endearing as a seal or as unsettling as a shark) first fits Everett De Roche's general plan for his 1978 script:

I had only a vague plan to write a kind of environmental horror story. My premise was that Mother Earth has her own auto-immune system, so when humans start behaving like cancer cells, She attacks. I also wanted to avoid a *Jaws*-like critter film. I wanted the *Long Weekend* beasts to all be benign-looking and not overtly aggressive. Australia has a misunderstood reputation for lethal fauna, from snakes to sharks to crocodiles, yet you can wander the Oz bush for weeks and be confronted with nothing more dangerous than a wallaby.²¹

However, the grey fetus-like animal hints at what has been the point of no return for the couple in both versions: the abortion that Marcia/Carla²² first kept secret from Peter. In both movies, the husband refers to it as "murdering the unborn", and when the wife defends her actions by arguing that "nothing was destroyed", she gets reminded of some half-acknowledged guilt: "You said it cried, those were your words" (1978); "It's been eating away at you ever since it happened" (2008).

Peter describes both of them as "cannibals [...] relish[ing] the taste of human flesh" in both movies, but the anthropophagic metaphor is more developed in the remake's version of that central dialogue scene between the characters. While John Hargreaves delivered his lines with a mix of smirk and spite in the original, Jim

²⁰ Susan Penhaligon's Kathy (1978) seemed indeed more maternal than Sharni Vinson's version; and Julia Blake's matron (1978) was a more protective stern, tough but fair type than Rachel Griffiths' reinterpretation, Roget's gloomy daughter with unresolved daddy issues of her own.

²¹ "Crafting 'Little Aussie Masterpieces': an interview with Everett De Roche".

²² No specific explanation has been given by the remake's authors for changing the woman's first name from Marcia (1978) to Carla (2008); *The Brady Bunch*'s "Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!" is probably too imprinted by now in English-speaking viewers' minds for the name to elicit anything more than a smile.

Caviezel portrays a confused husband on the verge of breakdown and sinking in despair in the remake. In a few sentences, “his” Peter further amalgamates notions of feral consumption and problematic motherhood which somehow hint at his later demise:

“I feel as if you’re feeding off me. You know, I feel like, everything that comes near you now just gets a little closer to death. I’m not sure how I’m scoring on Nature’s little snap exam; I don’t reckon old Mother Earth’s too pleased with you. Must be a female thing, right? Different chemicals...”
(*Long Weekend*, 2008)

For the next few scenes of the remake, Peter reinvests gender-coded figures of destruction, as when he explores the site of a family murder-suicide perpetrated by the father now hanging dead from a tree. After he finally shoots Carla dead – an accidental occurrence which was however announced by his pointing the same spear gun at Carla from afar early in the movie or his gunning down the dugong mother – his slain wife seems to have banded with the female Cosmos to prevent him from escaping alive, a deadly alliance (mostly conveyed through a split-second, black-and-white insert of a dead Carla opening her eyes) which was not detectable in the original movie.

The path that Peter follows in his mad dash is even narrower, with trees joining in what looks like an unending birth canal²³ that will not let him go as he is haunted by the earlier conversation about the “unborn destroyed” and by the quick shot of undead Carla’s accusing stare. Mother Nature hands out a final gruesome punishment for his crimes against the environment when he is literally pulped by the bull-bar and the wheels of a semi-trailer, right on the edge of the bush. Director Jamie Blanks turns up the gore factor on this only convenient occasion, with the bits of head, torso and limbs flying in the middle of the blood spray unconsciously evoking the most lurid visuals sometimes used in anti-abortion propaganda.

In both movies, this use of a shameful abortion as some karmic trigger for the nature-revenge scenario only appears late in the movie. More than a manifestation of some common patriarchal agenda in classic horror movies, it is mainly a plot catalyst

²³ When the aggressor shifts from masculine to feminine at this point of the movie, albeit on a supernatural mode, the natural setting seems to take on the characteristics of the threatening *locus* thus analysed by Carol Clover:

Decidedly “intrauterine” in quality is the Terrible Place, dark and often damp, in which the killer lives or lurks and whence he stages his most terrifying attacks. [...] It is the exceptional film that does not mark as significant the moment that the killer leaps out of the dark recesses of a corridor or cavern at the trespassing victim. (Clover, 1992, 48)

to explain that the relationship between the man and the woman has become so poisoned that it is indeed mutating into a destructive streak impacting the world around them. When the natural world fights back in the remake, Carla's death feels more like collateral damage to Peter's struggle than actual retribution. This variation from the original's constant marital dogfight is built in Claudia Karvan's toned-down performance compared to the original shrill *persona* conveyed by Briony Behets, and it is mostly visible in the little coda that is the only new distinct scene and character point in this nearly shot-for-shot re-creation (presented by its producers as the first-ever remake of an Australian feature film):

Jamie wanted to do it verbatim, per the original, and I had to twist his arm to allow even the few small changes that got through. [...] It was Claudia's idea to shoot the little epilogue flashing back to their wedding in happier days, and I think that worked a treat.²⁴

* * *

A much stronger female lead and graphic comeuppances were the main draw cards of *Storm Warning* (2007), the first collaboration of Everett De Roche and Jamie Blanks before they worked together on *Long Weekend*. If *Storm Warning* had not been an original script written in the early 1980s, its smart mix of elements from Boorman's *Deliverance*, Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* and from the whole crazy-hillbillies-in-the-woods slasher subgenre would have put it among the better horror remakes of the last decade. In the middle of American franchise reiterations and the horror genre renewal in Australia, it occupies a singular place as some kind of redemption movie in Jamie Blanks prodigal-son's artistic trajectory.

After a few short movies in Australia in the mid-1990s, Blanks managed to impress Hollywood executives who hired him to direct *Urban Legend* in 1998, one of many movies shot after the success of *Scream*, Wes Craven's 1996 sleeper hit. Three years later, while the teen slasher genre was reaching saturation point, he shot *Valentine* (2001) which was universally panned and hardly recouped its budget. In contrast to these assembly-line American movies promoted around young TV and music celebrities' first forays in Hollywood productions and corseted by the Motion Picture Association of America's ratings system, *Storm Warning* has earned him accolades in international horror movie festivals and the renewed support of genre aficionados.

²⁴ "Crafting 'Little Aussie Masterpieces': an interview with Everett De Roche".

Storm Warning's bold shocks start with its promotional posters. Apart from the US "unrated" DVD cover which shows a generic cloaked figure holding a machete, they mostly feature Pia, the French heroine about to engage in the "preventive slaughter" that makes for a manic splatterfest of a third act. Her left fist clenched tight around a hammer handle, she is seen from behind, in a domineering stance that reaches to the top of the poster. More commonly associated to iconic franchise killers like Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees or Freddy Krueger, this image shows how De Roche and Blanks, while sticking to survival horror conventions, subvert a few torture porn and rape-revenge tropes.

As a French sheetmetal artist who gets into apocalyptic DIY to survive, Nadia Fares' performance carries the movie. Known at the time outside France for gutsy genre compositions – a good twin/evil twin murderous act in *The Crimson Rivers* (2000) and a special forces officer in *The Nest* (2002), Fares plays a Pia who is too mature to be just a plucky "final girl". The way she goes into warrior-mode brings to mind Ellen Ripley or Sarah Connor. When Pia brings the pain with her nasty surprise on her would-be rapist, her face shows the same barely-contained murderous rage that Linda Hamilton's character was betraying while putting up with the abuse of a sleazy male nurse in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

A MacGyver-ish version of the *vagina dentata*, the improvised emasculating²⁵ device that Pia uses against Poppy is a striking opposite to the phallic bladed weapons of horror movie killers (while reinforcing Carol Clover's analysis of "[k]nives and needles, like teeth, beaks, fangs, and claws, [as] personal extensions of the body that bring attacker and attacked into primitive, animalistic embrace" – Clover, 1992, 32). When Jamie Blanks explains what inspired De Roche on that occasion, his comments further enhance the power shift in *Storm Warning's* gender politics:

You know where [Everett] got the idea for that Penis Flytrap? You know those little baby wipes, where you stick your finger in it? That's where the idea came from! He's a sick puppy, but I love him! I must confess I almost turned the movie down, based on that scene, because I just didn't know

²⁵ Seemingly ready to let Pop rape her in exchange for her husband's life, Pia is first hastily groomed, with some makeup clumsily applied by one of Pop's sons, before she is led to the bedroom. The forced ritual and the surprise castration that awaits her abuser seem to echo Barbara Creed's comments on 1978's *I Spit on Your Grave*, the most (in)famous of rape-revenge movies:

Woman is monstrous because she castrates, or kills, the male during coition. The first killing, which sets the scene for the later murders, is clearly in the mode of a sacrificial rite. [...] Woman signifies sex and death. Her second killing is imbued with an even more ritualistic quality. [...] Woman, pleasure and death are intimately related in these scenes. (Creed, 1993, 129)

how to film it. My wife talked me into doing that – you can thank her for that sequence.

[...] **It seems surprising because Everett de Roche's previous thrillers (like *Roadgames*) are not explicit.**

Yeah, they just haven't let him film those ones yet!²⁶

Jamie Blanks might be wrong on that last answer, because in 1985 Everett De Roche wrote a fairly disturbing ending for *Fortress*, an Australian TV movie²⁷ that superficially plays like an adventure story for the whole family. On the run from their kidnapers, half a dozen children and pre-teens and their teacher hack the last baddie to pieces with makeshift spears and an axe. In the next scene, the creepy mood goes from *Lord of the Flies* to *Children of the Corn/Village of the Damned*: cops visiting the school to “tie up loose ends” are surrounded by the kids silently staring at them. The police officers are firmly sent away by the schoolmistress whose new resolve is expressed through her change of wardrobe, from long flowing skirts to more practical denim overalls.

The fierce territorial and tribal instincts that have her keep the heart of her “wantonly dismembered” tormenter in a glass jar could summarize a new localized horror trope that Jamie Blanks jokingly²⁸ singled out during the promotion of *Storm Warning*:

I think Greg McLean, who made *Wolf Creek*, started this whole new genre – the anti-tourism genre. I'm just following in his footsteps. It's like, “Just don't come to Australia!”²⁹

* * *

Hopefully, city slickers and foreigners will keep away from desert stretches of coast and remote corners of the outback, but they will come back for more local horror remakes and gender-benders. During the promotion of *Patrick* (2013), Mark Hartley announced his next project:

²⁶ “*Storm Warning*: Q&A with director Jamie Blanks” – Interview available at <http://cinefantastiqueonline.com/2007/11/storm-warning-qa-with-director-jamie-blanks/> (last accessed on January 24, 2015).

²⁷ Directed by Arch Nicholson. Broadcast by HBO in the United States, its VHS and DVD copies are now out of print. However, the full movie can be watched on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibPC4t54xsU> (last accessed on January 24, 2015).

²⁸ In her 2010 article “Horror in the Outback”, Naja McFadden makes a much more politicized reading of this emerging trope in the context of a post-9/11 Australia and of its multicultural makeup seemingly fraying at the seams.

²⁹ “*Storm Warning*: Q&A with director Jamie Blanks”.

Justin [King], Tony Ginnane and myself are also working on another remake that he's got, a film called *Fair Game*, which is another film that featured in *Not Quite Hollywood*. Justin's going to start writing that script, so that's a couple of years away. That's going to be a sort of female *Straw Dogs* meets *Duel* in the Outback.³⁰

Thankfully, Australian female directors are also contributing to the current horror genre revival. In 2014, Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* was premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and spent the rest of the year collecting major awards at festivals around North America, Europe and Asia. Jennifer Kent may soon share the spotlight with a whole generation of female visual artists. In (unplanned) sync with *XX*, a 2015 American all-female horror anthology including Mary Harron (*American Psycho*, 2000), Karyn Kusama (*Jennifer's Body*, 2009) and Jennifer Chambers Lynch (*Boxing Helena*, 1993; *Chained*, 2012), five Australian female writer/directors are joining forces to shoot interconnected stories taking place in the same small Tasmanian town. Judging by the comments of Lizette Atkins, the producer of this yet-untitled anthology, it seems that, before overcoming expected misogynistic adversity, these female directors may first have to break through their own self-imposed limitations concerning gender and genre:

If you package works together thematically – in this case horror from a female perspective with a female audience – it can work. From a marketing perspective, it's a great addition to our slate of 'Horror from Down Under Films', which we've been developing for the last nine months or so. They're what we call 'elevated genre' films [...]. The female filmmaker anthology fits in perfectly with this slate. It's a very good fit for us.³¹

Once they venture outside the safe confines of a gendered niche/ghetto ("a female perspective with a female audience"), away from comforting labels ("elevated genre") and self-limiting ambitions ("fits in perfectly", "a very good fit for us"), they may establish their own criteria of validation and marketability, either by navigating the current confines of the genre or by reconfiguring them in a fundamental way.

³⁰ "Mark Hartley Talks Patrick".

³¹ "Girl horror: five female directors grab horror by the balls and head for cannibal country". Article available at <http://www.brionykidd.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Girl-Horror-five-female-directors-grab-horror-by-the-balls-and-head-for-cannibal-country-ArtsHub-Australia.pdf> (last accessed on January 24, 2015).

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