

## Returning to Australian horror film and Ozploitation cinema debate

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The three articles in this subsection return to scholarly debates at the core of research into Australian horror movies and Ozploitation cinema. In terms of the former, the horror film remains under-researched in Australian film studies. This is not surprising. On the one hand, since the mid-2000s the Australian film industry has produced a handful of popular, and internationally influential horror movies such as *The Babadook* (2014), *Daybreakers* (2009), and *Wolf Creek* (2005). On the other hand, the majority of Australian horror films rarely receive critical acclaim, nor are they widely discussed in mainstream film criticism; and for every *Wolf Creek*, there is a long list of movies such as *Red Billabong* (2016), *The Pack* (2015), *Me and My Mates vs. The Zombie Apocalypse* (2015), and *There's Something in the Pilliga* (2014) that disappear into the long-tail of the market. Few local horror movies released each year secure cinema release and the average title circulates in home video markets, and/or subscription and pay-per-download services. As a conceptual category, Australian horror movies emerge at the intersection of cult cinema; Australia-international cinema that can be difficult to evaluate on the basis of cultural value (the setting of *Triangle* [2009, Christopher Smith] for instance is never specified although Australian actors play characters who speak with American accents); and genre film-making long associated with Hollywood-inspired film-making. As a consequence, until quite recently the subject has rarely been central to dominant discourses in Australian film studies concerned with distinguishing Australian cinema as a national cinema.

The term 'Ozploitation' film has been widely embraced in film criticism since the release of Mark Hartley's documentary *Not Quite Hollywood: The Wild, Untold Story of Ozploitation!* in 2008. The term is variously used to refer to Australia's genre film-making heritage in the 1970s and 1980s, contemporary genre film-making, as well as a national style of exploitation film-making. As this suggests, the term has considerable elasticity. However, as various scholars observe, the concept is problematic (Thomas 2009; Martin 2010; Ryan 2010). Three key criticisms are relevant here. First, Hartley's film emphasises textuality that can be understood in terms of exploitation cinema (excess; exploitative marketing; titillation; and gratuitous violence, gore and nudity, and so on), although many of the films discussed are simply Australian movies drawing on conventions of major film genres. Second, the films examined are an idiosyncratic selection of 1970s and 1980s film texts, rather than a definitive or representative account of genre film-making during this period. Thirdly, the period of film history examined in *Not Quite Hollywood* is arbitrary. Although the film focusses on the 1970s and 1980s, the documentary points towards a renaissance in contemporary Ozploitation film-making exemplified by movies such as *Wolf Creek* (2005) and *Rogue* (2007). The documentary therefore ignores key 1990s examples as well as substantive trends in the 2000s. Nor does the documentary consider the antecedents of Ozploitation cinema before the late-1960s Australian film revival. Consequently, although the term is widely used, the object of study and its terms of critical reference are vague and only partly understood.

The following articles thicken debate about Australian horror cinema and Ozploitation. Lesley's Speed's article examines an atypical Australian-American inter-war movie filmed off the Great Barrier Reef, titled *Zane Grey's White Death* (1936). The fictional documentary features Zane Grey as himself – a prominent author, adventurer, and celebrity fisherman – searching for a notorious great white shark known as 'White Death' terrorizing the east coast of Australia. Within the context of 'interwar development of tourism at the Great Barrier Reef', Speed examines the film's production characteristics; the film's generic hybridity in terms of how it combines travelogue documentary, fictional adventure film, and exotic exploitation film; and the role Zane Grey plays as a celebrity in the text. Speed argues that the film 'reflects an American perspective of Australia as an exotic location', and can be understood as an early Australian exploitation film containing a trope that has since become a staple of contemporary Australian horror cinema: the threat of killer animals in a dangerous natural environment.

The two subsequent articles explore contemporary Australian horror movies. Jessica Balanzategui's article examines how horror movies are conceptually framed in Australian film theory and criticism by comparing the critical reception of two contemporary horror films: Greg McLean's *Wolf Creek 2*

(2013) and Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* (2014). Balanzategui argues that the Australian horror film tends to be discussed in terms of 'Australian Gothic' or the catch-all category of 'Ozploitation', broad conceptual categories that allow for discussion of national identity, taste-culture, the relations between Australian cinema and Hollywood, rather than within the context of the broader horror genre. She suggests that this restricts how local horror films are critically received and discussed in the context of Australian cinema. Shelley Buerger's article draws on psychoanalytic film criticism and provides a detailed textual reading of the representation of motherhood and post-traumatic grief in *The Babadook* (2014). Using Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection, and Creed's (1993) monstrous-feminine – developed by applying the abject in her analysis of international horror films – Buerger interrogates *The Babadook*'s 'depiction of maternal indifference' and the 'portrayal of repressed grief and the resulting traumatic disruption to the mother/child bond'. In so doing Buerger argues that Kent reimages maternal abjection in *The Babadook*.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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