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Anglo Argento: A critical reassessment of the films of Norman J. Warren

When it comes to revisiting low budget luminaries of British horror from the 1970s, Norman J. Warren is often overshadowed by his contemporary, Pete Walker. Linking in with a series of lengthy interviews with the director earlier this year, this paper will focus on his '70s gothic horror triptych: *Satan's Slave* (1976), *Prey* (1978) and *Terror* (1979). I examine Warren's cinematic response and emulation of the European horror director Dario Argento, and how he transposed these influences into an inverted image of bucolic England. Indeed, I argue that there are two sides of these films – the modern and the rural – and these provide the underlying narrative drivers for events. Each film takes place in rural communities where the camera lingers over country houses, villages and village greens, pubs, and meandering country lanes. There is always an underlying disquiet about these locations and English familiarity and safety is undermined. I suggest that there is also something deeply resistant in the films to the changes being brought about by modernism and technology. The rural settings create an introverted view of England that is seemingly utopian, romantic and, most significantly, static in the sense of negating industrial changes brought about by modernity. Hence one gets a deeply romantic view of England which is similarly held by many for an America of the 1950s with its drive-ins, diners and jukeboxes which no longer exist, yet this same effect is created and defiled, by Warren, through the prism of horror. Finally, I suggest that the narrative of these three films can be related to a wider English tradition of surrealism as seen in, for example, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) which show the English landscape as Alice-like in its wavering of reality.