

Psychoanalysis of a Sequel: The Disinterment of *Pet Sematary Two*

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In *The Language of Cinema*, Kevin Jackson defines a *sequel* as ‘a film which picks up characters, stories or gimmickry that have already proved a success at the box-office and re-packages them in more or less derivative ways’, and he adds that it is ‘often said that sequels are always and inevitably inferior to their originals’.⁽¹⁾ Built into most people’s very definition of the word *sequel* is the automatic assumption that it will be deficient in relation to its predecessor. Where the original was artistic, the sequel is held to be a strictly commercial venture. An original creation becomes a mass-produced copy, its strength diluted through an extenuation of material stretched too thin. A famous director, writer and stars are replaced by journeymen, hacks and a no-name cast, perpetrating an unauthorized or even plagiarized fraud on the original’s true genius. Abjectly belated in relation to its real source, the sequel is often self-conscious about its own inferiority, a discomfort manifested in awestruck or joking allusions to its parent-text. These irreverent citations – this ‘nostalgic repetition and compulsive winking’⁽²⁾ – only serve to give the sequel an even worse reputation, for parody is often seen as the death of a genre. So pervasive is this scorn for the sequel that I could only find the contrary view – ‘the sequel and its intellectual cousins the prequel, the spin-off, the tie-in, the themed attraction, and the licensed product are not, as has been alleged, mere “cultural stepchildren”, but legitimate art forms in their own right, each as deserving of critical respect as any of the more traditional accepted modes of creative expression’ – as a position stated facetiously in a spoof called *The Book of Sequels: The Greatest Stories Ever Retold!* ⁽³⁾

Consider the reception of *Pet Sematary Two* (1992) as evidence of this widespread bias against sequels. The original *Pet Sematary* (1989) was authorized by Stephen King in more ways than one: not only did he pen the novel on which the film was based, he also ‘wrote the script and he made the deal that saw it was done right. In addition to agreeing to shoot the production in Maine, producer Laurel Entertainment agreed to film King’s script as written’.⁽⁴⁾ It’s no wonder that one admiring reviewer called *Pet Sematary* ‘the most faithful film adaptation of a Stephen King novel yet’.⁽⁵⁾ But *Pet Sematary Two* was filmed in Georgia; none of the original cast or characters appears in the sequel; and, most damaging of all, Stephen King had nothing to do with it. Given its commission of all these sins *typical of a sequel*, *Pet Sematary Two* was practically destined to meet with adverse critical comment. When it was reviewed at all (that is, when it was not considered beneath contempt), *Pet Sematary Two* was derided as derivative and inauthentically horrific: ‘Lacking the morbid tone of the original, [director Mary] Lambert’s sequel is unnecessarily repetitive’.⁽⁶⁾ Predictably, the film’s lack of originality is traced to the absence of its prime mover: ‘Unfortunately, [the studio] left out the most important ingredient in the original’s formula: [Stephen] King’.⁽⁷⁾ The negative feedback on this film – some of it quite vitriolic – can be tellingly traced to the movie’s (lack of) status as a sequel: “‘Pet Sematary’ was a work of art by the master, Stephen King. “Pet Sematary II” was a work of trash by some wannabe’; ‘If they knew they were going to make a sequel they could have used some of the original characters’; ‘Sequels keep ruining the horror-genre and this is also one of the worst movies ever made’; ‘This is over 90 minutes of my life gone forever. I’ll never get those minutes back again, and I could have used them for something of purpose. For instance, to petition against unnecessary sequels. ...like this one’; ‘I really liked the first [*Pet Sematary*], but if there’s ever another sequel and it’s as bad as this, so help me god, I will kill myself’.⁽⁸⁾

Within a context so hostile to sequels, it becomes nearly impossible to view *Pet Sematary Two* as anything other than a mere shadow of the original, an unwelcome revenant. Even the advertising for the film is subject to this ‘ghost of the original’ effect: ‘Remember the tagline for the original (“Sometimes dead is better”)? That should have [gone] for “II”, too. Not as a tagline but as a production note’.(9) Given this attitude toward shady sequels, how can the tagline for *Pet Sematary Two* – ‘Sometimes you should just let dead dogs lie’ – invite anything but derision? But what if we were to read this tagline for what it actually says, and to view *Pet Sematary Two* on its own terms, not as a mere ghost of its predecessor? Preposterous as it may seem, I propose to put the cart before the horse, to read a sequel *not* as a sequel, but as an original work in its own right, to approach *Pet Sematary Two* as worthy of in-depth analysis all by itself, without relation to its Ur-text.

Certainly, an interesting study of this sequel *qua* sequel could be done, for the film makes numerous and complex references to its predecessor and to other films in the horror genre. In the discussion that follows, I note some of these references, but I do not intend to pursue them.(10) Instead, I cite these allusions as cobwebs to clear away, as the trappings of a ‘sequel’ which must be removed if we are ever to see the work itself, the artefact buried under layer after filmy layer of predecessors and of prejudice against sequels. It is only when *Pet Sematary Two* is dug out from under its filmic overlay, disinterred from its graveyard as a ‘sequel’, that it can be approached as a ‘legitimate art form’ in its own right, ‘as deserving of critical respect as any of the more traditional accepted modes of creative expression’(11) – to take *The Book of Sequels*’ joke seriously, at least once, for the sake of experiment. Thus the discussion that follows – yes, for a movie called *Pet Sematary Two* – and is as lengthy and detailed as one you might expect for *Touch of Evil* or *North by Northwest*, and the critical approach taken – psychoanalytic – is as serious as those applied by Stephen Heath and Raymond Bellour in their profoundly respectful studies of these now-classic films. Whether this experiment of approaching a sequel as a serious work of art is successful can only be decided on the basis of the particular insights revealed from doing so. After reading this analysis of *Pet Sematary Two*, you be the judge.

Pet Sematary Two begins like an old-fashioned Gothic horror film with a beautiful blonde carrying a lantern down the winding staircase of a castle. As she leans down near an iron gate, skeletal hands reach up from underground to grab her. The hands’ fumbling and the blonde’s feeble screams provoke a director’s cry of ‘Cut!’ and we realize that we have in fact been watching a movie (cf. the real/reel confusion and the need for a better scream in De Palma’s *Blow Out*). The blonde, actress Renee Hallow (Darlanne Fluegel), confronts her director Frank – ‘You get off on seeing me suffer, don’t you?’ – in a feminist moment which reminds us that the director of the film we are watching is female.(12) During the retake, Renee screams for real when she is electrocuted as the result of an accident with the film equipment, while inept Frank, and Renee’s young teenage age son, Jeff (Edward Furlong), look on helplessly.

After Renee’s funeral, Jeff and his father, Chase Matthews (Anthony Edwards), move from Los Angeles to the town where the Creeds once lived. At the animal hospital where Chase works as a vet, Jeff adopts a kitten, Tiger, which he must protect first from Zowie, a dog, then from Clyde Parker (Jared Rushton), a school bully. Jeff resents the fact that his housekeeper, Marjorie Hargrove, seems to be trying to take the place of his dead mother.

Similarly, Jeff’s friend, Drew (Jason McGuire), dislikes his stepfather, Gus Gilbert (Clancy Brown), for having taken his mother, Amanda (Lisa Waltz), away from his father. When Gus shoots Zowie in order to

keep the dog away from Gus's rabbits, Drew buries Zowie in the Micmac burial ground beyond the pet sematary.⁽¹³⁾ Later, Jeff (wearing a hockey mask like Jason in *Friday the 13th*) and Drew go to the pet sematary on Halloween night where they sit around a fire and listen to ghost stories told by Clyde. (This is where viewers learn what 'happened' to Ellie after *Pet Sematary* ends. For the record: she hacked up her grandparents with an axe, licking the brains off the blade. She was then committed to a psycho ward but, as in numerous teen-slasher-film campfire stories, she has just escaped and. . .).⁽¹⁴⁾ Drew's stepfather Gus breaks up the Halloween story and is about to strike Drew with a pet-sematary cross as punishment for disobedience (Drew had been grounded that night) when the resurrected Zowie jumps Gus and tears out his throat. Jeff and Drew inspect the dead body (shades of *Stand by Me*) and then, feeling guilty, they bury Gus in the Micmac ground. Gus returns from the dead, smiling more than he ever did when alive, but also hanging up skinned and gutted rabbit carcasses (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), gulping and dribbling his meals as if human food were alien to him (*Invaders from Mars*) and killing Clyde by forcing his head between the spikes of a motorbike. Finally, Gus uses a hammer to break through a door to get to Drew (as Gus sticks his head through the boards, he looks like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*), forces Amanda and Drew into a head-on collision with a truck, and attacks Jeff's father Chase with a power drill (*Body Double*). Chase survives only by shooting the zombie-like Gus through the head (*Night of the Living Dead*).

Neither Chase nor Jeff has been able to get over Renee's death. Both become obsessive watchers of a video in which the character played by Renee is shot. (This movie is actually *Once Upon a Time in America*, which features a scene with Darlante Fluegel, the actress who appears as Renee in *Pet Sematary Two*). Jeff dreams of his mother alive again and seated in her favourite rocking chair, but as she turns toward him he sees that she has a ferocious dog's head; he wakes to find the demonic Zowie actually sitting in his mother's chair. Chase dreams of making love to Renee, but above the breasts he is fondling is the head of a wolf-dog which attacks him; waking, Chase finds the resurrected Zowie biting him and then fleeing by jumping out a window (*The Company of Wolves*). After receiving a disturbing report on the composition of Zowie's blood (the dog is dead!), Chase visits the town's former doctor, Yolander (Jim Peck), who had once found the same thing when he tested the blood of Church, the cat from the first *Pet Sematary*. Like *Psycho*'s Norman Bates, Yolander has been driven mad by this blurring of the line between life and death; his latest obsession: taxidermy. Back home, Jeff awaits the return of his mother Renee, whom he has buried in the Micmac ground. While Jeff sits smiling in his mother's chair, Renee arrives to kill the 'usurper', housekeeper Marjorie (Sarah Trigger), who has had the effrontery to put on Renee's dress. Then, following a battle to the death between Jeff and the resurrected school bully, Clyde (Jeff electrocutes him), Chase is able to convince Jeff that the revenant Renee's true goal is not to get the family back together, but to kill them both. Renee stands atop a bed while watching the destruction caused by a fire she has set (*Carrie*) and, as the wounds in her face re-open, she remarks on the fact that she is melting (like the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*). Chase and Jeff leave as the house, with Renee in it, burns ('Dead is better!' she screams, in a grimly humorous echo of the original film). Then, while Chase and Jeff drive away, the camera helicopter-pans and zooms over the woods to the pet sematary and the Micmac burial ground beyond, zeroing in on the grave site but cutting to black before we can see who or what (sequel) will be the next to arise from the dead.

In the first *Pet Sematary*, those buried are all loved ones (Timmy Baterman, Spot, Church, Gage, Rachel) from whom the living have been unable to part. The dead returning from the grave are initially the wish-fulfilment fantasies of grieving families who want their loved ones back. But the revenants represent the fears as well as the hopes of these families: the scalpel-wielding Gage is Doc Creed's guilt

over his inability to save his son from dying, and Gage attacks Rachel in the form of Zelda, the sister for whose death she felt responsible. The protagonists of the first *Pet Sematary* must learn that ‘sometimes dead is better’, as the ad for the movie put it; they must forego hope of seeing their loved ones again in this life, and they must overcome irrational feelings of guilt for their deaths.

Pet Sematary Two continues the original’s idea of the living dead as the projection of hope and fear, of wish-fulfilment fantasy turned nightmare, but complicates the premise, for this time it is not only loved ones who are buried (Zowie, Renee) but also hated enemies (Gus, Clyde). Zowie returns as a result of Drew’s wish to have his beloved dog back and to have a defence against his abusive stepfather Gus (Gus beat Drew and shot Zowie; the resurrected Zowie kills Gus). Feeling guilty over Gus’s death (since Zowie enacted Drew’s wish-fulfilment fantasy), Drew buries his stepfather, hoping that he will come alive again and (secretly) hoping that he will return as a better father. Both wishes come true – for a while. Soon, however, Gus’s smiling is revealed to be a cover for even worse evil than he committed when first ‘alive’, and Drew’s beloved dog Zowie turns out to be in cahoots with the murderous Gus against Drew. ‘Raise some hell’, the tagline for the sequel, is thus accurate in both senses: first the revenant Zowie helps Drew defy his sadistic stepfather (helps him rebel or ‘raise some hell’), but then the living dead Zowie and Gus turn against Drew (who has unwittingly brought damnation upon himself, ‘*raised* some hell’). Similarly, Jeff rebels by summoning his mother Renee to kill the housekeeper Marjorie who threatens to take his mother’s place at his father’s side, only to find Renee’s hellish power turned against himself and his father. Unlike Drew, however, Jeff realizes the terrible consequences of hell-raising in time to save his family.

Drew’s stepfather, Gus, is the kind of insecure authority figure whose sadism is designed to provoke violence in others so that Gus can prove his manhood by taking them on. (At one point in the film, Gus asks the rebellious Drew a question more appropriate to his own provocative behaviour: ‘What are you trying to prove?’) Gus, a sheriff, calls attention to the law as a way of daring others to break it, and the law includes such minor rules as not watching TV during dinner. ‘You’re breaking the law’, Gus warns Drew, ordering him to ‘shut [the TV] off’; Drew, of course, aims the remote control at his stepfather and tries to shut *him* off. Gus’s orders are deliberately hard to follow, ensuring the disobedience that will bring down the wrath he associates with virility. After telling Drew to ‘show [his mother] some appreciation’ by eating the meal she has cooked, Gus takes some of the food off Drew’s plate, saying ‘Not that much appreciation’ and calling the boy fat. Gus *wants* Drew’s dog Zowie to attack the rabbits so that the electrified cage he has set up will be given a chance to prove itself. In fact, Gus seizes the opportunity to shoot the dog himself, his rifle becoming – like the keys, hammer and power drill he holds later – an extension of his manhood. When Drew lies about who shot Zowie in order to protect his stepfather (‘Some psycho got trigger-happy’), the lie reveals a truth: sheriff Gus is a psycho; his authoritarian laws are the danger from which society needs protection.

Drew may dream of an ideal father (at first seemingly embodied in the resurrected Gus: ‘He even kind of smiles, like he forgot he hates me. He serves me an extra helping of pancakes. It’s like we’re family, a real family’), but soon Drew’s fantasy of a benign paternal authority figure (Gus does save Jeff from the bully Clyde) turns into a nightmare – a revenant Gus even more insecurely sadistic than his stepfather used to be: ‘Drew, buddy, you have the right to remain silent – I’m gonna bash your head in! You have the right to an attorney, but you won’t need one because you’ll be dead!’ Drew and Amanda are pursued by Gus in his sheriff’s car, wearing his sheriff’s hat and giving them a friendly patrolman’s wave before

forcing them to drive head-on into an oncoming truck: Gus is a vision of the dark side of patriarchal authority which incites and exacerbates the violence from which it claims to be protecting us.(15)

Prominent on the soundtrack just as Gus causes the deaths of Drew and Amanda are the rock lyrics: ‘I wanna die just like JFK; / I wanna die in the USA.’ Earlier in the film, a strict schoolteacher orders Drew, Jeff and the other kids to sit down, and she would most certainly confiscate the kitten (Tiger, the mother-substitute)(16) that Jeff has smuggled in under his jacket were she to discover it; behind this teacher is a large poster of George Bush Senior. There isn’t much political allegory in *Pet Sematary Two*, but what there is suggests that, just as wicked stepfather Gus has displaced Drew’s real father, so Bush, Reagan, and other dangerously authoritarian presidents have displaced John F. Kennedy, America’s true father. (Drew is like Clinton, whose father died before he was born and who suffered under an abusive stepfather.)(17)

At one point in the film, Gus insists on making sexual advances to Amanda right in front of Drew, a form of bragging that Gus (not Drew’s father or Drew) has possession of the wife/mother. For Gus, sex is male pursuit and conquest of the female; as he admits in the scene where the dog Zowie chases the kitten Tiger, ‘When I was young I thought cats were the girls and dogs were the boys.’ Gus’s sexual aggression is given full rein when he returns from the grave to rape Amanda. (Alternatively, we might read all these scenes with Gus as a projection of Drew’s Oedipus complex – perhaps it is the son who desires his mother and so perceives Gus as a rival – and of Drew’s reaction to the primal scene – perhaps it is Drew who confuses sex with aggression, fearing that Gus is hurting his mother.) The sexually voracious Gus (he taunts Chase by claiming that he ‘had Renee first’; he rapes Amanda; he says that Zowie must have ‘thought [the kitten] was lunch’) would seem to have a lot in common with Zowie, but this fact of course actually makes the man and the dog rivals in Gus’s mind: Gus wants all the rabbits for himself to ‘eat’. Zowie’s attack on the rabbit cage not only threatens Gus’s food supply, it also interrupts the sex he was having with Amanda. Earlier, Gus had watched approvingly while the rabbits themselves had sex.

From Drew’s perspective, Zowie is a kind of father-substitute (18), befriending the boy, preventing the wicked stepfather from having sex with his mother, and finally saving Drew by killing his stepfather just as Gus is about to strike Drew with a pet-sematary cross. Zowie enacts Drew’s fantasy of defence, of revenge and – at least for a short time – of the return of his real father in the resurrected body of a reformed Gus. Drew tells Jeff, ‘sometimes I wish Gus would die’, and, dressed up as Dracula for Halloween, Drew threatens to ‘drink his [stepfather’s] blood’. We should not be surprised, then, that Zowie (Drew’s familiar) kills Gus by biting him in the neck, or that Drew later hastily covers up the neck wound as if he himself were responsible for it. Like many children, Drew may have internalized the guilt that properly belongs to the abusive adult, feeling that he himself provoked Gus’s attack. (This is what Gus tries to get him to believe.) Drew’s ill will toward Gus is a *defensive* hate, but it may still have led Drew to consider himself a kind of vampire who deserves to be punished by the cross-wielding Gus. Drew’s sense of guilt is revealed in his punning explanation to his mother of what he and Jeff did to his stepfather: ‘we just ditched Gus’ means to her that they outran him, to Drew that they killed and buried him, and to us that Drew feels both triumphantly alive and morbidly guilty about the act.(19) The lyrics ‘I wanna die, I wanna die’ are heard over and over again just as Drew and his mother are forced by Gus into a fatal collision. Is Gus the tragic enactment of Drew’s death wish, the suicidal longing that comes from unresolved guilt? (Alternatively, the lyrics ‘I wanna die just like Jesus Christ’ suggest that Drew, like the movie’s other insecure males, may be tempted by the thought of the immortal power to come from death and resurrection – a power that turns out to be both dehumanizing and defeatable.)(20)

One difference between Drew's and Jeff's families that may explain why the latter has a happier ending is that, unlike Drew's insecure and sadistic stepfather Gus, Jeff's father, Chase, is strong and loving. Though initially it seems as if Chase will make the opposite mistake from Gus, allowing his love for Jeff to turn him into a weakly permissive father, Chase eventually shows he has the strength to curb his son's harmful fantasies – and his own. Both Gus and Chase disbelieve their boys' stories about burial and resurrection ('You think a lie like that's never going to catch up to you?'; 'Don't you lie to me!'), but Gus succumbs to Drew's fantasy of life everlasting, whereas Chase resists his son's desire as unhealthy ('I've been letting you get away with a lot these past few weeks, but I will not stand for crap like this!'). Chase realizes that he and his son have given themselves over to a morbid longing for Renee's return, a desire that can only lead to further death.

Chase's wish-fulfilment dream of making love to a beautifully revenant Renee is interrupted by his intuition that she is a she-wolf biting his groin – that his inability to part from her is leading him to a longing for suicide. (Perhaps this is also what Drew half-realizes when his fantasy of the good father returning to his mother becomes a reality-principle nightmare of her being raped by a corpse ['You're cold as ice! Oh, you smell bad! Let go of me, Gus!']). Dead, Renee can be only a castrating succubus – that is, giving way to his desire for her can only disable Chase as husband and father. When Gus disinters Renee (prior to her reburial and resurrection) in order to 'fuck her', he is enacting Chase's own deepest desire, and when Chase fights to keep Gus from drilling a hole in his head ('No brain, no pain – think about it'), he is struggling against his own longing for death as an end to the pain of mourning and as a necrophiliac reunion with his wife. 'Remember, Chase, I had Renee first', Gus insists; the resurrected Gus is death, who has become Chase's rival for Renee, but Chase must fight death, not to get Renee back, but in order to let her go – it is his *sense of rivalry with death* that he must overcome. Gus is a living (dead) example of the monster Chase would become if he gave way to his desire to possess everything – even life beyond the grave.(21) In killing Gus, the embodiment of his own possessive desire for the dead Renee, Chase frees himself to become a good father to Jeff, warning the boy that the resurrected Renee is 'not your mom' and convincing him to leave her – the figure of Jeff's own possessiveness and death wish – behind.

We can approach an understanding of Jeff's fears and desires by way of his encounters with Clyde. After being protected from Clyde's torment by Chase's arrival ('saved by the bell'), Jeff eventually finds himself alone with the bully ('I guess your dad's not here to save you now, is he?'), who threatens to send Jeff to where he can 'join [his] mom' – a deadly reunion that is both dream and nightmare for Jeff. 'You're gonna die', the revenant Clyde promises Jeff in the climactic battle at the end, but Jeff rejects this return of his repressed desire by electrocuting Clyde. Recall that Jeff had earlier watched helplessly while his mother Renee was accidentally electrocuted. Her death by electrocution becomes the barrier separating Jeff from repossession of his mother, much as the electrified cage keeps Zowie from the rabbits. If Jeff had given way to his desire to join his mother in death, he would have electrocuted himself; instead, he kills that desire – that voracious hunger for *all* life – by destroying Clyde ('Eat this, asshole!').

Consider, too, Jeff's relation to Marjorie, the housekeeper. Unlike Gus, who really seems to be an evil stepfather, Marjorie is appealing, helpful to Chase and concerned about Jeff – a potentially loving stepmother. Her only 'crime' is that she wants to fill Renee's shoes as wife and mother, and Jeff's inability to accept the fact of his mother's death – a refusal embodied in the revenant Renee – leads to the

death of the innocent Marjorie.(22) It is Jeff who preserves Renee's clothes for her return, Jeff who actually buries his mother in the Micmac ground ('You bury your own'), and Jeff whom Marjorie 'mistakes' for Renee when the born-again Renee attacks her. As Renee breaks the mirror with its reflection of Marjorie dressed in Renee's gown and stabs Marjorie in the cheek with a mirror shard ('Did you really think you could be like me?'), we wonder if it isn't Jeff whose fantasy of Marjorie as his new mother is shattered by a fear that this would mean disloyalty to Renee.(23) Curiously, although Drew felt suicidally guilty about his self-defensive killing of Gus via Zowie, Jeff does not seem as conscience-stricken about his Renee-engineered murder of Marjorie. Perhaps this is a sign that the movie has not quite moved beyond Jeff's initial childish perception of Marjorie as the wicked stepmother usurping his mother's place, or maybe Jeff's successful distancing of himself from 'Renee' also helps him feel less responsible for 'her' evil deeds.

Renee is a Hollywood movie star, made up as the image of men's desire and victim of their possessiveness. Everyone wants Renee dead or alive: the skeletal hands that reach for the buxom blonde Renee in the horror movie-within-a-movie; Frank the director who 'get[s] off on seeing' the star he cannot control 'suffer'; Gus who claims to have 'had' her before she became a star and who digs her up to 'fuck' her again; the man in the Renee movie which Chase and Jeff watch obsessively who shoots her for having slept with another man. Hollywood constructs Renee as the object of male desire and institutes a jealous rivalry among men for her possession. Chase makes the right move when he decides to 'get my son Jeff out of L.A.', but he must then rid the boy's mind of Hollywood's idealization of Renee and its incitement of possessive desire for her. The school Jeff attends erects a shrine in her honour ('We Remember Renee Hallow') as one might for a sex symbol like Jean Harlow or Marilyn Monroe; male schoolmates ask Jeff, 'Hey, what's Hollywood like?' and enviously call him 'celebrity boy'; reporters crash the funeral to get photos of the grieving Jeff at his mother's graveside, and the sheriff who stops them, Gus, turns out to be even more competitively intrusive: 'Hey, Jeff, you know your mother and I used to be sweethearts...prom, homecoming, the whole nine yards.' Jeff watches Renee act in a movie at the beginning of the film; he watches her over and over again on video after her death; he prepares her movie star's dress for when she will return from the grave to play her part again. Jeff may resent Hollywood for taking his mother away from him and his father (Renee the movie star is divorced from the veterinarian Chase), but Jeff's image of her and his possessive desire for her are structured by Hollywood. As the facial scar that Renee received during the movie-set electrocution re-opens at the end of the film to reveal her disfigurement, Jeff is forced to recognize the real woman behind the idealized image, the reality of imperfection, ageing and death that no movie make-up can disguise.

While serving as a specific critique of media images of women, *Pet Semetary Two* also provides more general instruction in the realities of divorce and death. In fact, divorce can be experienced by children as the accidental death of a parent: a forced and irrevocable parting without rhyme or reason. The resurrected Renee is Jeff's childish fantasy of absolute control: his mother will never grow old or die and therefore neither will he; his real mother will remain as beautiful as her Hollywood image – those cheeks will never be scarred(24); time will be slowed to the point of stopping so that the ideal can be realized, as if life were a video that you could slo-mo or freeze-frame.(25) Also, of course, the return of Renee means no divorce: before her death (the death of Jeff's hopes), his mother had indicated that she was willing to consider a reconciliation with his father, and now the (wish-fulfilment fantasy of a) reborn Renee pleads, 'We can try again, Chase. We can make it work this time.'(26) In order to face the fact of his mother's death (the irrevocability of divorce), Jeff must conquer several fears: that divorce means his mother doesn't love him anymore; that he is responsible for his parents' divorce due to his lack of faith in their

relationship; that in choosing life with his father he is abandoning her: ‘You’re not going to leave me, Jeff’, says the revenant Renee, ‘your father and I are trying to work things out. Jeff, I don’t want to be alone. Jeff, come back. Jeff, I love you.’ And, regarding Renee’s death, Jeff must overcome his desire to join his mother in the grave rather than go on living without her: ‘Stay with me!’ Renee pleads, ‘Dead is better! Dead is better! Stay with me!’

The kitten which Jeff saves from the fire destroying (his childish hopes of saving) Renee is perhaps a sign that Jeff has preserved the only part of his mother that he could: the maternal instinct that lives on in him. He has saved his feeling self, rather than succumbing to the ‘no brain, no pain’ death that his real mother would never have wished for him. However, the brief shots of Renee, Gus, Marjorie, Clyde, Amanda and Drew which we now see, and the conversation between Jeff and Drew which we hear repeated from earlier in the movie, would indicate Jeff’s – and our? – continuing inability to accept death;

[Drew:] I’ve never had anyone die before. But I guess you get over it, eventually.

[Jeff:] No, you never get over it.

The unstoppable urge to have our loved ones back motivates the camera’s final pan and zoom back to the pet sematary and the Micmac burial ground. Someone who knows better will nevertheless bury one of their own there sometime soon – and suffer the consequences of a dream come horribly true.(27)

1. Kevin Jackson, *The Language of Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998), 227.
2. Mark Crispin Miller, 'Advertising: End of Story', in *Seeing through Movies*, ed. Mark Crispin Miller (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 228.
3. Henry Beard et al., *The Book of Sequels: The Greatest Stories Ever Retold!* (New York: Random House, 1990), 5.
4. Gary Wood, 'Stephen King & Hollywood', *Cinefantastique*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1991), 51.
5. Mick Martin and Marsha Porter, *Video Movie Guide 1997* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), 824.
6. Mark Kermode, 'Pet Sematary Two', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (1993), 60.
7. John Hartl, "'Pet Sematary' Sequel Is a Corpse', *Seattle Times*, <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19920828&slug=1509720>, accessed 5 October 2009.
8. 'IMDb User Comments for *Pet Sematary II*', Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0105128/usercomments>, accessed 19 October 2009.
9. Ibid.
10. Even judged by the standards of other postmodern horror films of the 1980s and '90s, *Pet Sematary Two* has an extremely high degree of intertextuality. Although we cannot know for sure how many of these numerous references to other films were consciously intended, the fact that Mary Lambert was directing a sequel to the original *Pet Sematary* movie, which she had also directed, probably made her hyper-aware of her film's relation to other films as well.
11. Beard, 5.
12. Prior to *Pet Sematary* and *Pet Sematary Two*, Mary Lambert was best known for having directed Madonna's controversial music video 'Like a Prayer' and the female-centred film noir *Siesta* (1987).
13. Although the sequel maintains the distinction introduced in the original film and book between the pet sematary and the Micmac burial ground, these two are often conflated in the popular mind, as evidenced by the Ramones' song to the closing credits of *Pet Sematary*: 'I don't wanna be buried in a pet sematary; / I don't want to live my life again.' Perhaps the confusion owes something to the fact that the idea of the pet sematary has gripped the public imagination (a childish misspelling for a common childhood wish to commemorate a pet – in the hope that there will be some kind of afterlife for it – as for the adults we bury), whereas the concept of the Micmac burial ground doesn't seem as haunting – or as fully developed.
14. Elsewhere in the film, Dr. Yolander tells Chase that Rachel was 'killed for the second time' – presumably after she killed Louis with a knife at the end of the first *Pet Sematary*.
15. Sheriff Gus and school bully Clyde would seem to be opposites: law and outlaw. As Drew watches the resurrected Gus save Jeff from Clyde's potentially murderous bullying, it would seem that Drew's fantasy of an ideal father has come true. However, Gus does not chasten Clyde in a loving way as would befit a benign patriarch; instead, Gus forces Clyde's head between the spokes of a motorbike – a form of poetic justice (Clyde had threatened to do the same to Jeff), but an act more vicious than any Clyde himself had actually committed and a punishment worse than the crime. Thus the overly zealous lawman is an outlaw. Gus goes in deadly pursuit of Drew in order to stop the boy from revealing the sheriff's crime (Gus's murder of Clyde), and Gus and the revenant Clyde become evil co-conspirators – doubles, not opposites. Gus (who calls Drew 'buddy') and Clyde (who calls Drew 'junior') are older than Drew and Jeff; they are the wicked stepfather and rivalrous older brother of childhood nightmare. (Note that Clyde threatens Jeff early in the film by claiming that the kitten Tiger – Jeff's mother-substitute – died from getting its head caught between the spokes, and note that Jeff's mother Renee dies with her head against the rails of an iron gate. The 'bad father' 'responsible' for Renee's death is Frank the film director – and, Jeff may fear, himself.)

16. Adopted by Jeff after his mother's death, the kitten Tiger may be considered a mother-substitute or, more accurately, a child-figure allowing Jeff to play mother, to bring his mother back by enacting her role. The kitten's name, Tiger, suggests a fiercely protective mother, but its tininess implies vulnerability. As further evidence of this kitten's double meaning, note the curious fact that the bully Clyde considers Tiger 'a pussy name'.
17. Like Bush's family, Gus's has a dog, whereas Jeff and Chase, like Clinton, have a cat.
18. Thus, we have symmetry between the film's families: kitten Tiger is a mother-substitute for Jeff, while dog Zowie is a father-substitute for Drew. Director Mary Lambert often emphasizes the family parallel through cross-cutting. For example, right after Marjorie says something maternal to Jeff who nevertheless insists that she is not his mother (in his eyes she is the 'wicked stepmother'), there is a cut to Gus (the wicked stepfather) ordering Drew to put Zowie (the father-surrogate) outside.
19. 'You are grounded!' Gus had earlier told Drew, 'that's the new law, buddy'. Drew disobeys, literally *grounding* his stepfather.
20. The deaths of Drew and Amanda may be seen as the inevitable result of Gus's voracious appetite. Earlier he had stuffed Amanda's mashed potatoes in his mouth, and at the end he causes her and her son to be crushed on impact with a potato truck. As he leaves, Gus smashes one of the potatoes that have spilled out of the overturned truck. Gus has broken the law he swore to uphold (the sheriff's and the father's job is to protect and serve), and he is about to learn the truth of the moral adage he hypocritically uses to admonish his son: 'Life is full of lessons, buddy. No one's above 'em. Not you, not me.'
21. The film's feminist message equates male possessiveness with death. Skeletal hands reach up to grab Renee's breasts in the film-within-a-film at the movie's beginning, and Renee accuses the male director of 'get[ting] off on seeing [her] suffer'. Gus fondles Amanda's breasts when she is in the kitchen, asserting his possession of her in front of Drew; later, Gus rapes Amanda. Chase fondles Renee's breasts in his dream of making love to her: he must come to realize that this male possessiveness is deadly – for the women who suffer it, and for the men themselves who become voracious monsters (their humanity dies).
22. The only sign that Marjorie might make a bad mother is that she falls asleep when she is supposed to be preventing Jeff from leaving the house; he sneaks out and buries Renee, who returns to kill Marjorie – for her failure as a mother-substitute?
23. Interestingly, Marjorie's cheek scar echoes Renee's earlier in the film. Does the vengeful Renee destroy Marjorie's beauty out of envy, or is reality beginning to interrupt Jeff's fantasy as it will when Renee's facial scar spontaneously re-opens later in the film? The fire Renee sets and that threatens to destroy everyone might be seen as the extension of Renee's disfigurement, the crack in the world engulfing all.
24. Compare Dr. Yolander's fantasy of taxidermy as control: 'You would be so much more interesting with blue eyes', he tells a dead, stuffed animal, sticking his hand through its hollow body as if it were a puppet and popping out and replacing the creature's eyes.
25. We note again that Jeff watches his mother over and over again on video. Furthermore, director Mary Lambert sometimes shoots the resurrected Zowie and Renee in slow motion: as the living dead, they occupy a time outside of time; such zombie motion is also chillingly unlikelike.
26. 'Renee' is (ironically) reborn, returned from the dead; as a revenant, Renee 'Hallow' is unhallowed, not sanctified. 'Chase' chases after Renee in his imagination until he realizes that her deadness endangers his life (that his longing for her is suicidal). 'Zowie' is an exclamation expressing excitement, usually positive, but not in the case of this formerly-friendly-but-now-vicious dog from the dead.
27. The terrible fact that life in this world entails the death of those we love may account for the almost suicidally world-weary tone of the Ramones' song played to the end credits of the first *Pet Sematary*: 'I don't want to be buried in a pet sematary; / *I don't want to live my life again*' (emphasis added).

Additionally, the pain of divorce and of an abusive stepfather may contribute to the sourness of *Pet Sematary Two*'s closing tune, also by the Ramones: 'I just wanna walk right out of this world / 'Cause everybody has a poison heart.' Stephen King quotes the Ramones' '*Hey-ho, let's go*' as a weary, deadly siren song in his novel, *Pet Sematary* (New York: New American Library, 1984), 227.