

A Dark Knight on Elm Street: Discursive Regimes of (Sub)Cultural Value, Paratextual Bonding, and the Perils of Remaking and Rebooting Canonical Horror Cinema

William Proctor

In many accounts, American horror cinema has been in a state of perpetual crisis since the 1970s, a decade that has often been viewed as the cradle of ‘New Horror’, of a body of ‘progressive, exploratory, often radical’ (Wood 2018: 400) films ‘characterized by countercultural themes and typified by the early work of such filmmakers as George A. Romero, Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven, John Carpenter and David Cronenberg’ (Mann 2019: 20). Although there may be at least some degree of legitimacy regarding the ideological health of horror cinema during the period, the way in which this grandest of narratives has been continuously re-ascribed and re-enforced over forty years or so is less about incontestable ‘truths’ than it is about ‘discursive regimes of [sub] cultural value’ (Tompkins 2014), discourses that characterise select cult objects as oppositional ‘art’.

It is these discursive regimes that feed into the ‘rhetoric of crisis’ attached to American horror cinema between the 1980s and 2000s, a narrative undergirded by moral dualisms between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ objects (Hills 2002), between ‘horror-as-art’ (Hills 2005) and commercial horror. As Steffan Hantke emphasises, ‘it is when measured against this criteria of canonization – transgressiveness coupled with the mystique of rebellion and subversiveness – that contemporary horror films, with their mainstream credentials, fall short’ (2010: xviii). Regardless of the fact that ‘any characterisation of modern horror or 1970s horror as a totality is bound to be schematic’, risking ‘a limited one-dimensional account of horror’ (Hutchings 2004: 188, 191), it is the discursive force and frequency of these arguments that subscribe to New Horror as existing outside of market forces and commercial, corporate logics. Yet this idea of a mainstream commercial cinema neatly bracketed off from a low-budget, progressive, underground cult cinema remains ‘one of the most problematic concepts in film studies’

(Jancovich 2002: 231), one which fails to deal with ‘the fact that most of these “other” films were likewise made to maximize profits’ (Church 2010: 236). To this, Pierre Bourdieu’s assessment of the art/commerce binary seems fitting:

The opposition between the ‘commercial’ and the ‘noncommercial’ reappears everywhere. It is the generative principle of most of the judgements which, in the theater, cinema, painting or literature, claim to establish the frontier between what is and what is not art. (1993: 82)

Applied to American horror cinema, ‘the generative principle’ that establishes ‘the frontier between what is and what is not art’ arguably lies in moral dualisms between (good) ‘originality’ and (bad) ‘repetition’. If we accept for a moment that the 1970s produced some of the most sacred and divine texts of the horror film canon, then it is understandable that the ‘mindless series of remakes’ (Hantke 2007: 91–2) produced between the late 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium would potentially be seen by cultish fan audiences as blasphemy, as a sacrilegious assault on the church of New Horror. In many cases, ‘even the potential to ruin an existing film, or the memories associated with it, leads audiences to reject the new versions a priori’ (Mee 2017: 202).

During this period, there was arguably no production company that bore the brunt of fan antagonism more than Platinum Dunes. Launched in 2001 by director Michael Bay, Brad Fuller and Andrew Form, the fledgling studio risked baiting a generation of horror fans for whom ‘the raw, meat poetry’ of films like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) stand as a fortress against ‘the sleek high-gloss rhetoric of commercial entertainment’ (Lee 2008): fans who cast bids for subcultural capital as a way of shoring up their status as ‘real’ fans, as connoisseurs and cognoscenti who ‘seek to construct identities through the construction of an inauthentic Other’ (Jancovich 2002: 306). As online fans are frequently interpellated as buzz-builders and spreaders by production cultures seeking free labour and viral publicity (see Caldwell 2008), the general response to horror remakes and reboots indicates that the producer/fan relationship can just as easily turn sour, which is to say that fans can quickly become a discursive threat as buzz-killers and anti-fans. In 2009, for example, Platinum Dunes cancelled plans to remake Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds* (1960) and Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968) reportedly due to fan backlash (Child 2009). In the grand pursuit of subcultural capital (Thornton 1995), fans often view remakes and reboots as symbolic attacks on totemic objects (Proctor 2017); ‘inauthentic horror’ dressed in the rotten skin of corporate zombies; and silver bullets shot through the heart of canonical horror cinema.

It is within this fraught, agitated context that Platinum Dunes produced a remake of Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), a film that sought to

reboot the franchise for a new audience and a new millennium, yet ultimately failed to do so despite becoming Platinum Dunes' highest-grossing film at that point. It is important to distinguish between remakes and reboots here given that the terms have been used interchangeably in both press and academic discourse 'despite describing very different products' (Kendrick 2017: 250). In basic terms, a remake is a re-interpretation of a self-contained film, whereas 'what can be said to immediately identify a reboot is the fact that it initiates *a series of texts*' (Gil 2014: 25–6, emphasis added). Put differently, 'a reboot "re-starts" a series of films' by 'beginning again' with a new narrative sequence (Proctor 2012: 4). To complicate matters, a film can be both a remake and a reboot simultaneously: Platinum Dunes' *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Bayer, 2010) is a remake of Wes Craven's 1984 film, yet it also attempts to reboot the franchise by reactivating the series from year zero. As it did not in the end spark future instalments in the rebooted sequence, however, it is best to view the 2010 Elm Street as both a remake and a 'failed reboot' (Proctor 2012; 2018; forthcoming; see also Verevis 2017: 162).

What is immediately striking is that the healthy economic performance of the Elm Street remake, which accumulated a worldwide gross of \$115,664,037 against a production budget of \$35 million, seriously undermines the idea that box office performance is the predominant factor undergirding sequel production, as well as complicating the 'pre-sold' and 'instant recognition' philosophy as a transcendental formula for success. However, in this chapter I am less interested in charting the reasons why the film failed to spark a sequel than I am in examining a sample of promotional, 'entry-way paratexts' (Gray 2010) that preceded the release of the film. These paratexts **that** were strategically mobilised to navigate 'the canonical legacy' (Tompkins 2014) of Wes Craven's authorship – for the purposes of this chapter, his 'author-function' (Foucault 1969) – by activating Christopher Nolan's directorial imprimatur, attached to the Batman reboot, *Batman Begins* (2005), and its sequel, *The Dark Knight* (2008). Appealing to what I term a **brand-function** in pre-release interviews, I want to consider the role that directors and their films can have in establishing discursive regimes of (sub)cultural value that are appended to film projects that they were not connected with. We can also witness how Bayer's lack of authorial prestige, in the face of Craven's subcultural weight as horror auteur, is strategically negotiated not through direct confrontation – a discursive struggle that Bayer would undoubtedly lose – but through circumnavigation or valorisation. In this chapter, I will argue that Bayer attempted to bid for distinction, value and belief in the remake by suggesting a paratextual bond between distinct film properties of Batman and Freddy Krueger. In doing so, the *Elm Street* remake/failed reboot serves as a critical lens with which to examine the way in which auteurism may be mobilised in service of promotional rhetorics, and may shift from text to paratext, and from 'author-function' to 'brand-function'.

The chapter is split into two sections. The first discusses film authorship as a ‘function of discourse’, as Michel Foucault would put it (1969), considering the way in which Christopher Nolan and Wes Craven’s directorial prestige operates as an ‘author-function’; the second moves on to examine a sample of entry-way paratexts used to promote the *Elm Street* remake/failed reboot.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING AN AUTHOR (FUNCTION)

As a discourse, authorship is the product of several arenas colliding and coalescing into a meta-narrative of sorts, a collaboration of fan voices, ‘critical industrial practices’ (Caldwell 2008), entertainment journalism, academic work and, of course, authors themselves. I am particularly interested in the way in which entry-way paratexts position film directors as auteurs and as brands. As Jonathan Gray explains:

[a] prime function that authors serve is classificatory. To say that something is the work of a particular author is (a) to offer a certain guarantee of quality predicated on the name value of that author and (b) to frame one’s understanding of the current work within the context of meanings and themes from other works to which the author’s name is attached. In this regard, authors become genres and brands. (2014)

One of the ways in which the use-value of authors is employed in service of exchange-value is via entry-way paratexts that seek to assign value to a film to mark it as the work of a bona fide auteur in order to bid for consecration as ‘art’. However, the auteur/commercial director binary fails to address the way in which auteurs are often activated for commercial purposes and branding opportunities as well. As Timothy Corrigan has argued, ‘despite its often overstated countercultural pretensions, auteurism became a deft move in establishing a model that would dominate and stabilize critical reception . . . as a kind of brand-name vision that precedes and succeeds the film’, generating ‘an artistic (and specifically Romantic) aura’ (1991: 102). For Corrigan, the figure of the auteur becomes ‘a *commercial* strategy for organizing audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims that identify and address the potential cult status of an auteur’ (1991: 103, emphasis in original). Foucault’s concept of the ‘author-function’ situates authors as ‘projections . . . of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we exact as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice’ (1969: 127). An author-function is instead ‘a means of classification’ that is ‘strongly reminiscent of Christian exegesis when it wished to prove the value of a text by ascertaining the holiness of its author’ (1969: 127).

In *Hunting the Dark Knight*, Will Brooker draws upon Foucault's author-function concept, charting the construction of Nolan's directorial cachet as it evolved across several stages of meaning-making: 'from posters, previews and press kits through the professional reviews of journalists to the amateur, but no less informed and arguably more invested, public responses of audience members' (2012: 25). Around the time of *Batman Begins*, Nolan was recognised and appreciated as 'an individual artist and stylist', yet 'his name had not yet become commercially useful to the studio, or recognizable to reviewers, as a brand' (2012: 16). At this stage, Nolan 'is almost drowned out by competing discourses' (2012: 25), not least of all by 'the thunder of the "Batman" brand' (2012: 31). Hence, 'the romantic sense of the director as an "homme du cinema" is, therefore, entirely absent' at this juncture and, instead, 'this is Batman's party' (2012: 12).

By the time of the director's next film, *The Prestige* (2006), 'Nolan's brand, bolstered by the success of *Batman Begins*, rose to prominence without the interference of existing, competing discourses' and, consequently, 'began to come into its own as a signifier of quality and a guarantor of certain values' (2012: 25). Although Nolan's newly developed authorial prestige is quietened by the *Batman* brand once more with the release of *The Dark Knight* in 2008, Nolan 'is now a stronger voice, and his 2005 reboot has been judged successful in wiping the slate clean of previous traces' (2012: 29). As *The Dark Knight* became the first billion-dollar film in history at the North American box office and attracted considerable critical praise, Nolan's directorial status continued to evolve, and by the time of the theatrical release of his *Inception* in 2010, 'Nolan's author-function had arrived: it had evolved into a powerful, unambiguous stamp of quality and a guarantor of values' (2012: 34).

In the context of horror cinema, Wes Craven may be recognised nowadays as an auteur, most notably since the director's passing in 2015, but he has been more often pronounced **as: a** 'renowned horror auteur' in academic work (Wee 2006; see also Muir 1998); a 'Master of Horror' in DVD/Blu-Ray paratexts (especially those distributed in boutique editions by cult gentrification specialists Arrow); and a parent of New Horror 'who has thrice pulled cinematic horror up from the flames of self-annihilation' (Muir 1998: 1). Craven's reputation as cultish horror auteur nevertheless encourages bids for distinction through the cult 'art' and mainstream commerce binary. Robin Wood (2018) may have argued that Craven's first film, *The Last House on the Left* (1972), is cinematic art, but the critical establishment was not so kind. Indeed, the negative reception of the film, which led to protests calling for the film's removal from cinemas, demonstrated that Craven was not considered an auteur, but 'the party who wrote this sickening tripe and also directed the inept actors', as Howard Thompson wrote for *The New York Times* (1972). Evidently, there is a difference between a ('good') bona fide auteur and a ('bad') cult and/or horror auteur,

at least within certain interpretative communities. However, what is important is that a ‘bad’ horror auteur may be deified (and reified) within fan cultures as an ‘Author-god’, as ‘good’ cultish object, and testament to further cultural distinctions and hierarchies. As creator, writer and director of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, however, Craven’s author-function began to steadily transition from obscure cult director to popular, well-known brand name. It was ‘the film that finally propelled Wes Craven into the big league’ (Robb 1998: 61).

The diachronic passage of Craven’s author-function has been given extra oxygen through critical and academic considerations of the *Elm Street* sequels as ‘bad’ objects. Craven himself had publicly denounced the franchise on many occasions, decrying the trajectory of the series as ‘a little more commercial’, and ‘like making cheeseburgers’: ‘You get a formula for something that satisfies the appetite, and then you make it over and over again and make a business out of it’ (Wells 2000: 93). Here, Craven essentially ‘self-fashions’ himself as a non-commercial, cult auteur standing in protest against an egregious fast food cinema, which is flipped and sold without intellectual nourishment. (Incidentally, Craven’s ideological and artistic posturing did not prevent him from producing four films in the highly commercial *Scream* franchise.) Yet whereas Craven may be forever attached as the towering auteur of the first *Elm Street* film – as in Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, an appellation branded on film posters in 1984 (see Robb 1998: 61, 77) – it is less likely that Jack Sholder, Chuck Russell, Renny Harlin, Stephen Hopkins or Rachel Talalay are recognised as auteurs of their *Elm Street* sequels. As Karra Shimabukuro states, the *Elm Street* series ‘moved from [Craven’s] auteur film to just another cog in the studio system, with specific goals of making the series a more commercial piece’ (2015: 58, emphasis added). As such, these discursive regimes of (sub) cultural value and oppositional taste, ultimately construct an auratic barrier that sequels, remakes and reboots struggle to breach. Given the sonic boom of Craven’s horror auteur-function, his prestige as creator of dream demon Freddy Krueger, and the canonical legacy of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, perhaps Bayer’s remake was always fated to fail.

FROM AUTHOR-FUNCTION TO BRAND-FUNCTION

Platinum Dunes’ original remit – to remake canonical horror films from the 1970s and 1980s – was likely to be contentious from the start. Although many of Platinum Dunes’ remakes and reboots were box office triumphs, arguably serving to encourage the company to continue raiding the cult archives, the online fan backlash gained significant traction as the 2000s progressed. It seems that Platinum Dunes was not aware of the minority horror fan audiences’ cult proclivities, but rather that

the idea of remaking the seminal slasher movie [*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*] was in part motivated by research showing that 90 per cent of the film's anticipated core audience (eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-old males) knew the title of Tobe Hooper's original but had never seen it. (Verevis 2006: 146).

Laura Mee's suggestion that fannish 'rhetoric [which] implies that the remaking process changes, challenges, or damages the earlier text, aesthetically, emotionally, or even economically' is 'inaccurate' (2017: 202), but such a viewpoint takes fans' complaints far too literally, as opposed to symbolically and affectively. For horror fans who cast bids for subcultural capital by demonising remakes as blasphemous 'Others', which, in turn, (re-)commemorates and (re-)establishes the originals as sacred and holy, the 'earlier text' is 'damaged' at the symbolic level (see Proctor 2017). While not entirely 'wrong' per se, Mee's cold rationality fails to understand the discursive regimes of (sub)cultural value that underscore fan discourses of this type: not as literal, but as metaphorical enactments.

By the same token, it is not only the holy 'aura' of the canonical horror film that is threatened by remakes and reboots, but the figure of the anointed horror auteur as well. It is plausible that hiring a director with subcultural capital of his or her own might lessen the potential for backlash, at least to some extent. For instance, the remake of Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) seems to have repelled at least some backlash by involving Craven as producer, and by hiring Alexandre Aja to direct; prior to the remake of *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), Aja had accumulated a degree of subcultural capital in horror circles with his 'New Wave of French Horror' film *Haute Tension/Switchblade Romance* (2003). Conversely, Platinum Dunes' remakes 'were helmed by directors with a track record in video and television commercials' (Heffernan 2014: 61), a strategy that would keep costs as low as possible. However, hiring Marcus Nispel to direct the remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) would force negative comparisons not only between the original and the new version, but between the two directors as well. Essentially, Nispel's career as a director of music videos and commercials, with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* being his debut feature film, was a match neither for the canonical legacy of the film itself nor for Tobe Hopper's reputation as horror-auteur *par excellence*. In other words, Nispel did not possess enough of an authorial reputation with which to brand the remake, and perhaps symbolically defend it against criticism from the horror fan culture.

Like Nispel, Samuel Bayer began his career as a music video director, and the *Elm Street* remake was his first and, at the time of writing, his last feature film. Although Bayer may have accumulated at least some (sub)cultural capital as the director of Nirvana's 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' music video (1991) and, to a lesser extent, Green Day's 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams' (2004) – both of

which are invoked in the *Elm Street* remake's electronic press kit (EPK) – he did not, like Nispel, possess a level of directorial prestige that could negotiate the power of Craven's authorship. As such, Bayer pointed away from Craven as much as possible, although not invariably, by mobilising the 'Nolan Function' (Brooker 2012) as a way to discursively promote the film. It did this not by confronting the canonical legacy of the 'Craven Function', but by suggesting a paratextual bond with Nolan's first two *Batman* films, the superhero origin story and the reboot concept as narrative template:

I like what Christopher Nolan did with Batman. I think Tim Burton is an amazing director, but I think that Christopher Nolan reinvented, to a certain degree, the superhero genre. Heath Ledger's portrayal made people forget about Jack Nicholson. The new Batmobile made me forget about the old Batmobile . . . That's the way we're approaching Nightmare. (McCabe 2010: 36)

At the core of Bayer's narrative lie the concepts of memory and 'forgetting' (Harvey 2015), both of which are central to the reboot concept: memories of Tim Burton, the old Batmobile and Jack Nicholson as the Joker. Just as Nolan's *Batman Begins* 'forgets' Burton's *Batman* films – and more pointedly, Joel Schumacher's *Batman and Robin* (1997), the film that sent the *Batman* film series to cultural purgatory for almost a decade – Bayer is seemingly advocating that his *Elm Street* remake will 'make people forget' Craven's *Elm Street*. Suggesting that 'the way we're approaching Nightmare' by encouraging a paratextual bond with *Batman Begins*, and *The Dark Knight*, is also to suggest that the source material for the remake is not Craven's original, but rather the narrative blueprint of the reboot concept; or, more accurately, **it is** the blueprint specifically advocated by Nolan and his co-writer, David S. Goyer, who, in turn, drew upon the concept from its origins in superhero comics (Proctor 2018; forthcoming). Arguably, Bayer attempts to stave off comparisons with Craven's *Elm Street* by articulating that the remake is better viewed as a conceptual adaptation of the reboot principle, with the 'Nolan Function' and Nolan's *Batman* pulled into service as a brand-function. Simply put, Bayer wants nothing more than to hope that some of that Nolan magic will rub off and guide the reception of the *Elm Street* remake, perhaps to challenge, or at least address, the *a priori* 'bad' object status of canonical horror remakes and reboots.

Moreover, Bayer implies an analogy between Jack Nicholson and Robert Englund, and Heath Ledger with Jackie Earle Haley, the new Freddy. As the only actor to portray Freddy Krueger at this point, Englund's shadow haunts the text despite his absence (which is always already present at the symptomatic level). Having played Freddy for over two decades across multiple media – eight franchise films, the *Freddy's Nightmares* TV series (1988–90) and a raft of other

appearances, the most recent of which was in an episode of US sitcom *The Goldbergs* in 2018 – Englund’s cultish synonymy with the role suggests that Craven is not the only ‘auratic’ figure that requires negotiation (which also implies that actors can possess author-functions and canonical legacies as well). Yet, whereas Ledger’s appointment as the Joker was received poorly upon announcement – until of course the release of *The Dark Knight* in theatres put paid to fan criticisms – the hiring of Haley as Krueger was applauded by fans, not least because of his turn as Rorschach in Zack Snyder’s (2009) adaptation of Alan Moore and David Gibbons’ seminal *Watchmen* comic series. In interviews, Haley recognised that Englund’s star persona as Freddy remained such a commanding presence that he required negotiation, but rather than mobilise Englund as ‘bad’ object, Haley instead wholeheartedly embraced the actor’s canonical legacy. Haley declared he was:

perfectly fine with being Freddy number two. Because you know what? Robert Englund has done an amazing job with this character. He’s done it for two decades in numerous films and he’s made the character iconic. He’s in all our minds even if we haven’t seen the movies. And rightfully so. (Ryan 2010)

Yet in order to append value, belief and authenticity onto the *Elm Street* remake, and hence construct the film as ‘good’ object, discursive regimes of (sub)cultural value require a ‘bad’ object with which to compare and contrast. Clearly, then, Craven, Englund and the original *Elm Street* film are untouchable entities, so Haley and Bayer shift focus to construct the Elm Street sequels as ‘bad’ objects that the remake seeks to redress by going ‘back to the origins of *Nightmare on Elm Street* . . . when it was scary [. . .] Back when it was less comedic [and] more serious’ (Ryan 2010). Said Bayer: ‘Freddy became a vaudevillian, comedic character that you’re not really scared by, and I don’t think that’s what [original director and franchise creator] Wes Craven intended’ (Yarm 2010, square brackets in original). On the few occasions when Craven is mentioned directly, Bayer does not seek to struggle with his author-function nor the canonical legacy of his *Elm Street*, but instead, substantiates his aura, and his directorial intent, with Bayer suggesting that he is operating as a directorial surrogate for Craven’s original authorial intentions. Thus, the remake will return Freddy ‘back to his origins’ as ‘scary’ dream demon rather than comedian with one foot in the camp tradition:

They needed to make *Batman Begins* before they made *The Dark Knight* . . . [They] had to go back to the mythology of the character; they had to reintroduce the character to audiences as if he had never existed before. That’s the way we’ve approached Freddy Krueger (Yarm 2010).

Bayer continues:

In fact, I told all my cast and crew that we must do with Freddy what Christopher Nolan did with Batman. I'm trying to make a dark and serious film, and I hope I'm achieving that. One of the most extraordinary aspects of *Dark Knight* is the way it integrates Batman into a believable world, and I want to do the same with Freddy. That doesn't mean the classic elements of the mythology will be absent from our *Nightmare on Elm Street*. (Rosales and Sucasas 2010)

It is striking that the promotional discourses that surrounded *Batman Begins* enacted similar rhetorical flourishes: a 'back-to-basics' approach, 'back to the origins', 'back to the mythology', a 'dark and serious' reinvention. As Brooker writes, 'the idea of realism was central to the promotion and distribution of Nolan's Batman – particularly *Batman Begins*' (2012: 89). This discursive thrust sought to strategically erect aesthetic and generic boundaries between Batman as 'Dark Detective' and as 'Camp Crusader', thus furnishing moral dualisms between 'good' and 'bad' iterations of the character; between Nolan's 'stripped-down tough' Batman and Schumacher's 'swishy, showy form of camp' (2012: 93). In this light, both the Batman and Freddy Krueger brands are seen to have been damaged in some way by camp and comedy, with the respective reboots being anchored to this idea of 'realism' as a mode of repair, as a corrective mechanism with which to transform franchise brands from 'bad' to 'good' objects once more to extend their shelf-life (or 'brand-life').

At the same time, however, there can be such a thing as too much 'reinvention'. Rather than wiping the slate clean and beginning again from scratch, then, both Nolan and Bayer sought to link their respective (re)iterations with 'good' canonical objects from the archives, which along with claims about 'roots', and 'origins', suggests that Nolan's *Batman Begins* and Bayer's *Elm Street* are not 'reinventions' exactly, but **un**inventions: films that promote the notion of rewinding the clock to a time when the characters were generically 'pure'. Yet, neither Nolan nor Bayer sought to sketch out their reinventions on a blank slate, but frequently summoned support from historical 'good' objects, as well as retaining 'some contrasting traces of the bad old one in the production discourses; and rather than erasing it, they in fact made the bad object visible again, as a point of comparison' (Brooker 2012: 106). The difference between *Batman* and *Elm Street*, however, is that the former has an eighty-year mythos to draw from, comprising thousands of comics and an armada of transmedia ventures in radio, television, animation, computer games and so on, while the latter is a comparatively short-lived film franchise consisting of eight films, a spin-off TV series and non-canonical comics. Both properties might very well include transmedia expressions, but for *Elm Street* there is arguably

only one ‘good’ object: that is, Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, which for Bayer remains ‘the best one, and the one I really looked at’ (Yarm 2010).

Bayer clearly recognises the difficulties related to reinventing Freddy Krueger in a way that overly interferes with the canonical legacy of the franchise. In a sense, Bayer seems to be working from an academic understanding of genre theory, most notably the delicate balance between formula and invention. The *Elm Street* remake will be ‘a dark and serious’ film, cut from the same cloth as Nolan’s *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, but one which also aims to return to the scary world envisioned by Craven. For Bayer, this was a world where Freddy was terrifying, before he became a ‘vaudevillian, comedic character’, and yet it ‘[d]idn’t mean the classic elements of the mythology [would] be absent from our Nightmare on Elm Street’ (Yarm 2010):

You certainly couldn’t make Freddy Krueger without the striped sweater, the hat, the glove – those are like Batman’s cape and his utility belt. If you look at images of burn victims, it is really is frightening what happens to the skin, the features that get burned off: your eyelids, your nose, your lips, your ears. I don’t think the original character looked like a burn victim. I always thought he looked like a witch. (Yarm 2010)

Like Batman, Freddy has ‘classic’ elements that should not be erased. Yet Bayer also argues that the original Freddy make-up fails to live up to the ‘realism’ mantra, which in a way partially constructs Englund’s ‘look’ as failing to meet the generic aspirations of the remake. On the one hand, Craven’s *Elm Street* is the ultimate ‘good’ *Elm Street* object – ‘the best one’ – whereas on the other, the original Freddy make-up doesn’t capture the reality of burn victims effectively. In essence, ‘the striped sweater, the hat, the glove’ are the immovable accoutrements of Freddy’s design, but the burned visage is not; that is up for reinvention in order to fit the character in with Bayer’s realistic aesthetics (‘the way we’re approaching Elm Street’). Here, Bayer runs the risk of tampering with the canonical legacy of Freddy Krueger by suggesting that Craven’s *Elm Street* contains a ‘bad’ element that requires reinvention.¹

CONCLUSION

Paratexts of this type, then, put in play multiple contradictions. They are employed ‘either to deflect readers from certain texts or to inflect their reading when it occurs’ (Gray 2010: 36), whereas they also wrestle with the dialectics of reinvention and ‘the classic elements of the mythology’. Too much reinvention runs the risk of Freddy becoming unrecognisable; not enough, and the remake becomes a ‘pointless’ victim of remake and reboot culture (Mee 2017).

By seeking to navigate and negotiate the canonical legacy of the 1984 film, the prestigious aura of the ‘Craven Function’ and Englund’s star persona as Freddy Krueger, Bayer summoned Nolan and Nolan’s *Batman* as a brand-function, to such an extent that audiences were primed to think of the *Elm Street* remake as aesthetically and generically in communion with Nolan’s *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. In drawing upon similar ideologies related to ‘realism’, ‘re-invention’, ‘origins’ and ‘roots’, perhaps ‘Freddy Begins’ would have been a more appropriate title for Bayer’s purposes. In doing so, Bayer actively constructed Nolan’s *Batman* films not as cinematic texts specifically, but, rather, as brands and entry-way paratexts. In so doing, Nolan’s *Batman* becomes the lens with which audiences should view Bayer’s remake of Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, a strategy that indicates the perils of remaking and rebooting canonical horror cinema.

NOTE

1. It is worth considering that way that Nolan’s brand-function has also been mobilised in the service of other films, such as the James Bond reboot, *Casino Royale* (Campbell, 2006), Rob Zombie’s *Halloween* (2007), *Terminator: Salvation* (McG, 2008), *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (Wyatt, 2011) and more besides (see Proctor 2012; and forthcoming).

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