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# “Nightmare is over”: Trauma and Agency in the Remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*

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**Abstract:** The 2010 remake of the horror film *A Nightmare on Elm Street* focuses on the earthly abuses committed by the now confirmed pedophile Freddy Krueger. The fact that the victims of Krueger’s sexual assaults start getting murdered in their sleep is relevant to the trauma studies, as nightmares are one of the most common symptoms observed in people diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Therefore, one of the goals of this paper is to analyze the ways in which trauma is portrayed in the movie. Considering that the teenagers can only overcome Krueger — and therefore, their trauma — once they are able to witness the terrible events of their past, this work also aims at observing and discussing the trajectory that allows the protagonists to survive. In order to meet these goals, some central concepts to trauma theory are presented and discussed in relation to their portrayal in the film. The analysis shows that the main character Nancy can only defeat Krueger once she knows everything that has happened in the past and is able to have agency in the story.

**Keywords:** audiovisual; *A Nightmare on Elm Street*; horror; trauma.

**Resumo: “O pesadelo acabou”: Trauma e Agência no Remake de *A Hora do Pesadelo*** - O remake de *A Hora do Pesadelo* (2010) explora os abusos mundanos cometidos pelo pedófilo Freddy Krueger. O fato de que as vítimas de seus crimes são assassinadas durante o sono é relevante para os estudos de trauma, visto que os pesadelos são um dos sintomas mais comuns exibidos por

pessoas diagnosticadas com transtorno do estresse pós-traumático. Portanto, um dos objetivos deste artigo é analisar as maneiras através das quais o trauma é retratado no filme. Os adolescentes somente conseguem vencer Krueger e, portanto, seus traumas, quando se tornam capazes de testemunhar os terríveis eventos de seu passado. Assim sendo, este trabalho também busca observar e discutir a trajetória que torna possível a sobrevivência dos jovens. Alguns conceitos chave para a teoria do trauma são apresentados e discutidos com relação à sua representação no filme. A análise mostra que a protagonista Nancy somente consegue derrotar Krueger ao tomar conhecimento de tudo que aconteceu em seu passado e adquirir agência na história.

**Palavras-chave:** audiovisual; *A Hora do Pesadelo*; terror; trauma.

## Introduction

Joanne Leal (2020) highlights the role of cinema as a powerful means of communication, as films are able to speak to their audiences in multiple ways, including language, music, images, and narrative. Graeme Turner's (1999) book *Film as Social Practice* also focuses on the interface between cinema and communication, discussing film through a cultural studies perspective. The scholar notes that up to the end of the twentieth century, film studies tended to be largely dominated by the perspective of the aesthetic analysis, in which movies' ability to become art through the arrangement of images and sound was the main focus. He then introduces his book as breaking with such perspective, studying film as narrative, entertainment, and cultural event: "The book is intended to introduce film as social practice, and the understanding of its production and consumption, its pleasures and its meanings, is enclosed within the study of the working of culture itself" (TURNER, 1999, p. 2).

Turner (1999) argues that the function of films in our culture goes beyond that of being an exhibited aesthetic object. In his understanding, the audience's pleasure is a dominant consideration for both the audience and the producers when it comes to popular films. Movies provide us with pleasure in our enjoyment of the event itself, in our recognition of styles, stars, and genres, and in the spectacle of representations on the screen. Popular films tend to have a life beyond their theater reruns, becoming part of our personal culture and our identity (TURNER, 1999). Thus, Turner (1999, p. 3) reflects on them as "a social practice for its makers and its audience; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself".

The scholar also observes that the insertion into film studies of methods taken from disciplines such as psychoanalysis, linguistics, semiotics, and anthropology has culminated in the film becoming “part of a wider argument about *representation* — the social process of making images, sounds, signs, stand for something — in film or television” (TURNER, 1999, p. 48, emphasis in the original). Thus, it becomes part of a wider field of approaches and disciplines called cultural studies.

Having these observations in mind, the present paper discusses the representation of trauma in the 2010 remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. The images, language and narrative are associated with psychoanalyst formulations of trauma. It is also speculated that there is a connection between the mundane abuses showed in the remake with the anxieties of a 21st century audience (ZANINI, 2019). Furthermore, the agency regained at the end of the movie by main character Nancy can be understood as a pleasant victory for the audience, in possible connection to their own fears.

Claudio Zanini (2019, p. 200) notes that, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, film audiences witnessed the increase of on-screen violence due to the emergence of the slasher, a subset of the horror cinema characterized by “the presence of a psychotic killer responsible for multiple murders whose face is invariably covered, leaving victims and audience members alike in suspense regarding the murderer’s identity and motivation”. Scholars typically identify John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978) as the first slasher, since its plot presents a mysterious serial killer who murders a group of teenagers, with the exception of a character with whom he has a climax confrontation (ZANINI, 2019). Such type of character has become known as the *final girl*, a term coined by Carol J. Clover.

One of the most famous slasher franchises ever produced is Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. The first film was released in 1984. Since then, six other movies, an anthology television series called *Freddy’s Nightmares* (1988-1990), a crossover with the *Friday the 13th* universe entitled *Freddy vs Jason*, and a 2010 remake of the first film have been produced (Zanini, 2019). Given the franchise’s popularity, it is not a surprise that many critical works have analyzed the movies. Among them, we can cite two feminist readings: Kyle Christensen’s “The Final Girl versus Wes Craven’s ‘A Nightmare on Elm Street’: Proposing a Stronger Model of Feminism in Slasher Horror Cinema” (2011) and “Look What You Did to me!”: (Anti) Feminism and Extratextuality in

the Remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*” (2016). Additionally, some works have explored the Gothic feature in Craven’s franchise, such as Kendall R. Phillips’ “Craven’s Gothic Form: Nightmares, Screams, and Monsters” (2012) and David Kingsley’s “Elm Street’s Gothic Roots: Unearthing Incest in Wes Craven’s 1984 *Nightmare*” (2016).

The franchise of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* presents as its villain the serial killer Freddy Krueger, a child murderer who is burned alive by parents seeking justice for their assassinated offspring in the fictional town of Springwood. In the form of some vengeful supernatural being, Freddy returns to assault and murder teenagers — often the children of the vigilante parents who partook in his killing — in their sleep. Once someone is murdered by Krueger in the dream world, they will also die in reality.

Freddy Krueger has achieved the status of a pop icon over the years. It is possible to buy T-shirts, posters and action figures of the assassin. Such fame, as noted by Zanini (2019) in his paper “‘It hurts ‘cause you’re in my world now, bitch’: gothic features in the 1984 and 2010 versions of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*”, has produced quite a few differences in Freddy’s presentation and characterization in the two films. In the opening sequence for the 1984 original, Krueger’s presence is merely suggested through shadows on the wall and the introduction of his razor glove and fedora hat. In the 2010 remake, as Freddy has already been established as a pop icon for decades, he cannot be suggested as a novelty. The latest version also confirms that Freddy was a pedophile — something that was merely hinted at in the 1984 movie. As Zanini (2019, p. 209) observes, this human evil makes the character more disturbing and horrendous for twenty-first century audiences, since “the certainty of Freddy’s earthly abuses enhances the powerful role of trauma in his supernatural existence, updating both his villainy and his Gothic potential in contemporary times”.

Trauma is indeed one of the central themes in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. In both the original version and in its remake, Freddy’s victims are murdered during their sleep — more precisely, in nightmares, which is one of the most common symptoms observed in people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In addition to that, the 2010 remake shows us the teenagers — especially Nancy — discovering, remembering, and reconstructing, little by little, the traumatic events to which they had been exposed during childhood. Uncovering the truth about everything that happened in the

school with Freddy Krueger makes it possible for the teens to start trying to witness their whole traumatic experience, which proves to be very important for their survival. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze the 2010 remake, observing the ways in which trauma is portrayed in the movie. This work also seeks to show that Nancy can only overcome Freddy — and therefore, her trauma — once she knows everything that has happened to her and is ready and able to have agency in the story. Methodological procedures include two steps: firstly, a brief review of trauma theory, in order to revisit some concepts and observe how trauma itself and symptoms of PTSD are presented in the film. Then, scenes from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010) are analyzed in relation to how they can be connected to trauma.

### Trauma theory: a brief review of some key concepts

From the early 1990s, the field of trauma studies has expanded and become quite diversified. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth (1995) has edited and organized works written by researchers and professionals from different fields, such as psychiatrists, literary critics, educators, writers and sociologists, among others. According to the scholar, the complexity and difficulty of listening and responding to traumatic stories in ways that do not simplify them, lose their impact, or reduce them to several versions of the same tale is a problem that concerns experts from different areas. In her understanding, the different works that she has edited and organized for the book seem to suggest that:

There is no single approach to listening to the many different traumatic experiences and histories we encounter, and that the irreducible specificity of traumatic stories requires in its turn the varied responses — responses of knowing and of acting — of literature, film, psychiatry, neurobiology, sociology, and political and social activism [...] It may be only through this variety that we can learn, in effect, not only to ease suffering but to open, in the individual and the community, new possibilities for change, a change that would acknowledge the unthinkable realities to which traumatic experience bears witness. (CARUTH, 1995, p. IX)

Those unthinkable realities are indeed connected to the core of traumatic events. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Caruth (1996, p. 11) presents as the most general definition of trauma “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the

event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucination and other intrusive phenomena”. Therefore, as Irene Visser (2015) observes in her paper “Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects”, we may understand that the subject of study in trauma theory is more connected to the aftermath than to the event itself. According to her, trauma involves the recurrence or repetition of the traumatic event through nightmares, memory, and other symptoms that fall under the definition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Regarding PTSD, psychiatrist van der Kolk (2000) states in “Posttraumatic stress disorder and the nature of trauma” that the horror and threat caused by traumatic events is so intense that they may affect people’s ideas of themselves, their capacity to cope with events, and their biological threat perception.

Caruth (1996) also notes that during the first half of the twentieth century, trauma was most commonly associated to soldiers who had witnessed sudden and massive death. However, psychiatrists and physicians had to start reshaping their ideas and understanding of physical and mental experiences due to the rising numbers of perplexing war experiences and other catastrophic responses throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. As a result, the responses to a variety of experiences such as rape, child abuse and work accidents began to be understood in terms of the effects of PTSD. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth (1995) states that the pathology of PTSD cannot be defined by either the event itself, nor (by) in terms of a distortion of such event. According to the scholar, the pathology consists “solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it” (CARUTH, 1995, p. 4).

Caruth’s understanding of the pathology of trauma as an event that was not assimilated as it occurred is also present in her analysis of Sigmund Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In this work, Freud (2016) wonders about compulsive repetitions which cannot be linked to the pleasure principle, as they originate from experiences that include no possibility of pleasure and that can never have brought any sense of satisfaction to the people going through them. Those experiences are related to catastrophic or extremely painful events. They have not produced pleasure in the past and continue not to do so in the present. Instead of taking the shape of memories or dreams, they keep haunting the survivors in the form of fresh experiences, repeated under pressure of a compulsion. To Freud (2016,

p. 3726, emphasis in the original), one very astonishing characteristic of cases such as this is related to how the survivor has had a “passive experience, over which he has no influence, but in which he meets with a repetition of the same fatality”. This means that the traumatized individual becomes subjected to a series of repetitions of harmful events, having no control over their reoccurrence and not wishing for it. In order to exemplify these repetitions, Freud (2016) discusses Tancred and Clorinda’s story in Tasso’s romantic epic *Gerusalemme Libearata* (1581). In the tale, the hero Tancred unknowingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armor of an enemy knight. Once she has been buried, Tancred goes into a strange mythical forest. There, in his grief and pain, the knight strikes at a tall tree with his sword. Nevertheless, it is blood that comes out of the trunk as the voice of Clorinda — whose soul is trapped inside the tree — complains that her lover has wounded her again. In the psychiatrist’s understanding, this story illustrates the hypothesis that the mind may have a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle.

As Caruth (1996) analyzes the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and the story of Tancred and Clorinda, she comes to the conclusion that it works as representative of how a traumatic experience repeats itself, exact and literal, against any will of the survivor. Additionally, in one very interesting insight, Caruth (1996) notices and draws attention to the voice that comes out of the tree as it is struck. According to the scholar, it is only as Tancred repeats the harming of Clorinda and hears her cry coming from the tree that he is urged to acknowledge, for the very first time, what he has done. This means that Clorinda’s voice bears witness to the past that Tancred has unknowingly repeated, working as a witness to a truth that the man himself cannot fully know. It leads Caruth (1996) to think of trauma as a wound that

is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. Just as Tancred does not hear the voice of Clorinda until the second wounding, so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature — the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance — returns to haunt the survivor later on. (CARUTH, 1996, p. 4)

Therefore, we can understand trauma as an overwhelming experience that cannot be fully assimilated at the moment it happens, and that may later



return in its literal form to haunt and possess the survivor. In “The Intrusive Past: the Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma”, van der Kolk and van der Hart (1995) discuss some concepts related to narrative and traumatic memories. The first are linked to mental constructs that allow people to make sense out of experiences. It is the case of familiar and expected situations which can be assimilated without much conscious awareness of the particulars of the event. However, when an experience is frightening or unforeseen, it might not fit into existing cognitive schemes. As a result, such events may be remembered with a lot more vividness, or even resist integration completely. If the existing meaning schemes are unable to accommodate an overwhelming experience, the memory of such event will be stored differently and become unavailable under normal circumstances, dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control. In such cases, fragments of unassimilated and unintegrated experiences may manifest later through behavioral reenactments or recollections. These are the traumatic memories<sup>1</sup>, which have as another one of their characteristics the fact that they often occur in situations that are reminiscent of the original traumatic event, being evoked under certain conditions that are considered as triggers. Meanwhile, ordinary memories are an aspect of life that can be integrated with other experiences and accessed and described anywhere, at any moment.

Van der Kolk and van der Hart (1995) also note that flashbacks, nightmares, dissociation and behavioral reenactments are often observed in people who have experienced traumatic events. This is related to the fact that the survivors are unable to organize the experience on a linguistic level, which leaves it to be organized on an iconic or somatosensory level — precisely, the aforementioned nightmares, somatic sensations, flashbacks, and behavioral reenactments. The stage considered as complete recovery<sup>2</sup> is described by van der Kolk and van der Hart (1995) as that in which the survivor no longer suffers the reappearance of traumatic events in flashbacks and other intrusive phenomena. Instead, “the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality” (176). This means

1 Van der Kolk and van der Hart present the term “traumatic memory” as a merely convenient one, since a memory would need the possibility of being narrated to be considered as such.

2 Complete recovery or healing from trauma is not a consensus. Nevertheless, the scholars referenced in this work believe that survivors can become able to eventually face the traumatic events that they have experienced, transform trauma into narrative memories, and move on with their lives, even if they can never heal completely.

that the traumatic event has been transformed into a narrative memory that can finally be placed in the past. In “Posttraumatic stress disorder and the nature of trauma”, van der Kolk (2000) states precisely that one of the critical steps in treating PTSD is the emotional processing, which is related to the survivors reexperiencing the traumatic event without feeling helpless. In many cases, this is done by helping or allowing the victims to talk about their entire experience: what they think happened, what led up to it, their thoughts and fantasies as the event was taking place, what the worst part of the experience was, how they reacted during the situation, how they were affected and changed by it, what changed in relation to their perceptions of others and of themselves, etc. This type of exposure therapy is believed to help reduce symptoms by allowing the survivors to realize that the traumatic event had a beginning, a middle, and an end, that it now belongs to their personal history, and that remembering it is not the same as going through it again. Even though a variety of new techniques for PTSD treatment have been developed in recent years, exposure therapy is still considered to be very helpful, if applied with care<sup>3</sup>. In addition to that, van der Kolk (2000) highlights how important it is for the survivors to have experiences that directly contradict the physical paralysis and emotional helplessness that tend to accompany traumatic experiences. Yochai Ataria (2015, p. 201) explains that “when the traumatic experience becomes unbearable, one feels the body as a tool, and eventually, in the most radical cases, one’s sense of body ownership disappears entirely, as does the sense of agency”. Shaun Gallagher (2000, p. 15) defines the sense of ownership as “the sense that I am the one who is undergoing an experience”. As an example, he cites the sense that one’s body is moving, regardless of the movement being voluntary or involuntary. Meanwhile, the sense of agency is explained as “the sense that I am the one who is causing or generating an action” (GALLAGHER, 2000, p. 15). The scholar exemplifies it with the sense that one is causing something to move, or that one is generating a certain thought in one’s own stream of consciousness.

These observations regarding experiences which contradict emotional helplessness and physical paralysis for survivors who have undergone traumatic

3 Telling one’s trauma narrative is not always enough for healing. The conditions under which the story is told need to be conducive to recovery, and in many cases, drug treatment also becomes necessary in order to help a survivor recover. Even so, the narrating of a traumatic event does play a significant role in the recovery from trauma. In relation to that, Susan Brison remarks the following: “This is not to say that narrating one’s memories of trauma is always therapeutic, nor that it is, by itself, sufficient for recovery from trauma. But that such narratives contribute significantly to such recovery is currently accepted as uncontroversial in the field of the psychology of trauma” (40).

events, and the senses of body ownership and agency, become quite interesting once we consider the final scenes of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, in which Nancy revisits the site of her trauma and defeats her abuser, as will be discussed in the next section.

### **“Nancy’s starting to remember”: overcoming trauma in *A Nightmare on Elm Street***

As the credits for *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010) are shown, we can see very interesting and meaningful images. There are kids playing, words written with chalk on the floor, and the zooming on the words “bad school” — from the complete name Badham Pre-School. Among the drawings on the floor, we can see a man with a hat and a stripped-shirt — two elements that a 2010-audience will probably recognize as a reference to Freddy Krueger. We can also notice words such as “stop” and “no”. Interspersed with these, there are the faces of children and words such as “unicorn”, “lamb” and “sheep” — reminders of innocence. All of these symbols, images and words work as hints to the story that the film will present.

During the first scene of the movie, we meet a young adult named Dean. We witness a nightmare in which he is about to be murdered by Freddy — an event that is stopped by Nancy calling Dean’s name. As another teenager named Kris sits with the boy at his table, we get another hint of the traumatic past that is haunting the characters. When Kris suggests that her friend talk to somebody about the nightmares that he is experiencing, Dean replies that he already has, and that his therapist believes that all his troubles come from his past — something which we will discover to be true. The man also says that as he and his therapist revisited his childhood, they realized that it was at that point that the nightmares involving Freddy started. From this information, we can infer that Dean has been traumatized by the abuse which he suffered as a kid, and that one of his symptoms are the reoccurring nightmares. In addition to that, the young man stresses to Kris that the dreams which he has are real. Vividness is indeed one of the characteristics of traumatic experiences that have not been integrated as narrative memories.

Later, at Dean’s funeral, Kris sees herself as a little kid — which we can interpret as some sort of flashback. Then, she sees a picture of Dean and herself as children and does not know how to explain that to her ex-boyfriend Jesse, as she believes that she only met Dean in high school. At home, as Kris goes

through old photo albums, she becomes suspicious because some of the pages have been ripped off. Questioning her mother does not help, since the older woman dismisses her inquiries. That night, as Kris is sleeping, she dreams that she finds a box with objects from her childhood — including a blue gown which has been sliced across the chest. It is then that she meets Freddy, who knocks her down and asks if she remembers him. Eventually, Kris has a nightmare in which her younger self leads her through the corridors of a school, telling her that they need to hide. There, the girl hears kids chanting the famous Freddy Krueger song and sees the killer playing hide-and-seek. From that, we can speculate that there was indeed a song that the children used to sing as Freddy “played” with them.

After Kris has been murdered, Quentin and Nancy team up in order to understand the nightmares and flashbacks that almost all of their friends seem to be having. Eventually, they find an old picture of a Badham Pre-School class of which they were all part of, but could not recall. It is then that, confronted with the photo, Nancy’s mother reveals that there are episodes from the kid’s childhood that their parents tried to keep hidden. Those involve a man named Freddy Krueger who was a pedophile. As the woman tells the story, we see images that clarify some of the scenes which we have encountered during the nightmares and flashbacks of the characters. For instance, we see Freddy playing hide-and-seek with the children while chanting his song and little Kris with scratches on her back — which explain the slashed gown that she saw in her nightmares. It may also help us understand some behaviors that the characters have shown throughout the movie. Both Dean and Quentin are quite dependent on medication. While the latter has ADHD, the former has had nightmares about Freddy from a young age. When questioned as to why she has repeatedly rejected Quentin’s advances, Nancy says that she finds it difficult to belong with other people her age. According to Kolk (2000), the diagnosis for PTSD is made by three major elements: repeated reliving of traumatic memories — which tends to include sensory and visual memories, often accompanied by feelings of distress —, avoidance of reminders of the event — which usually results in detachment and emotional numbing, rendering the victim unable to experience pleasure and joy and making them withdraw from engaging with life —, and a pattern of increased arousal—which manifests itself as irritability, concentration problems, startled responses, etc. Therefore, we can speculate a link between Dean’s nightmares and the repeated reliving of

traumatic memories, between Quentin’s ADHD and the pattern of increased arousal, and between Nancy’s detachment and emotional withdraw and the avoidance of reminders of the event. That is to say that the traumatic experiences have deeply impacted the lives of the characters.

When Quentin and Nancy leave the house after talking to the woman’s mother, the boy tries to convince his friend that what they are experiencing are just memories; to which Nancy replies that simple memories cannot kill someone. Considering the very possible connection between Freddy’s manifestations in nightmares and trauma, an observation made by Susan Brison becomes quite interesting. In “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self”, Brison (1999) notes that the traumatic memory challenges the traditional distinction between mind and body that had informed the Western cultural narrative of the nature of the self for years. For a person with PTSD, a mental state may feel physiological at the same time that the physical state embodies the emotional and cognitive paralysis characterized by shattered assumptions of safety in the world. Furthermore, the nightmares and sensory flashbacks are reminiscent of the traumatic event itself, and they render useless one’s will and immobilize one’s body. Brison (1999) also notes that trauma survivors may have their basic cognitive and emotional capacities altered or even annulled, and that their connections with memories of life before the traumatic event, their sense of self, and their capacity to envision a future may be lost. Therefore, Quentin’s statement that they are just experiencing old memories is insufficient to properly encompass the power and effect of trauma — issues which *A Nightmare on Elm Street* explores quite interestingly through Freddy Krueger and his abilities to actually kill people while they are experiencing nightmares related to the trauma that they have undergone.

While Quentin refuses to believe that Freddy Krueger is actually killing their group of friends in their nightmares — choosing instead to conclude that they are just starting to access repressed memories, he has another dream. In this new vision, he sees his and his classmates’ parents chasing a still human Freddy Krueger who continuously claim innocence. Once the man is trapped inside of a building, the adults set fire to it, eager for justice and revenge. This leads Quentin to believe that their parents have murdered an innocent man because of false accusations that they made as children. He then decides to take Nancy with him so that they can find their old pre-school and make more sense of the strange events happening to them. Once they

arrive at the building, the two start investigating the school and find Freddy's old room, which has a hidden passage that leads to a bedroom. When they enter it, Nancy says that she has been there before and we see a flashback of the girl as a child with Freddy saying that he will take her to a special place if she can keep a secret. In the bedroom, Nancy and Quentin find drawings made by children and a hidden wooden box with photographs inside. They very likely depict Freddy's abuse of Nancy, as Quentin says that they are all photos of her and is reluctant to show them to his friend. When the girl sees the pictures, she cries in sorrow. It is then that Quentin understands and admits that Freddy is after them and that the assassin is chasing the children because they exposed his abuses. Nancy realizes that during Freddy's latest attack, she was able to bring some part of him to the "real world" — a piece of cloth from his sweater. This leads her to believe that she knows what to do to defeat Krueger. Linking the narrative of the movie to trauma, this moment becomes quite interesting. According to Brison (1999), healing from trauma involves regaining control over traumatic memories and other intrusive PTSD phenomena, reconnecting with humanity, and recovering a sense of agency and control over the surrounding environments. She also stresses that these achievements may depend heavily on other people. The scholar states that:

In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them. This aspect of remaking a self in the aftermath of trauma highlights the dependency of the self on others and helps to explain why it is so difficult for survivors to recover when others are unwilling to listen to what they endured. (BRISON, 1999, p. 46)

This is to say that the reconstruction and telling of the story of the traumatic event is important, but it may not be enough. The presence of an empathic other who will be attentive and take part in the process of bearing witness is also a very relevant element to healing. In Brison's (1999) understanding, the construction and telling of a narrative of the trauma experienced, aligned to the presence of understanding listeners, is helpful to the integration of the traumatic event into a life with a before and after and to the process of regaining control over nightmares, flashbacks and intrusive memories. These observations become quite interesting when we notice that Nancy can only feel ready to face and challenge Krueger once two conditions are

met. The first is that she knows the whole truth about what happened to her and the other kids, and the second is that Quentin — and the spectator — now know the truth and are able to listen and believe her. We can conclude that now able to witness everything that happened, transform the traumatic experience into a narrative, and having others witness and believe her story, Nancy is finally able to begin her healing.

Nancy's plan to defeat Krueger involves physical confrontation, a direct facing of her trauma. Trusting Quentin to keep watch, the girl goes to sleep in Krueger's old bed. In her nightmare, a lot of the traumatic experiences from her past manifest: Freddy's song, his calling her “Little Nancy”, his asking her if she wants to play, sexual innuendos, violence. In Krueger's perspective, they are reproducing memories from the girl's childhood: she is in bed, helpless, in a kid's nightgown. Nevertheless, Nancy is not the same anymore: she is now a young woman who can defend herself, she knows and has been able to witness the traumatic events that she had been exposed to, and she has people who listen and believe in her. This means that where Nancy had been powerless before, she now has agency, and that allows her to pull Freddy Krueger into our world as Quentin wakes her up with an adrenalin shot. According to van der Kolk (2000), experiences that directly contradict the emotional helplessness and physical paralysis that tend to accompany traumatic events can help survivors in their recovery. Brison (1999) also comments on how — in the case of a human inflicted trauma —, telling the story of the traumatic event allows the survivors to go from being the object or medium of another person's (the perpetrator, rapist, torturer, etc.) speech to being the subject of their own. This helps contradict the feeling of helplessness left by the traumatic experience and “reveal the performative role of speech acts in recovering from trauma: under the right conditions, *saying* something about a traumatic memory *does* something to it” (48, emphasis in the original). In Brison's (1999) understanding, a person who has been reduced to an object through torture or other forms of abuse can become a human subject again if they have the opportunity of telling their story to empathetic others who are able to listen and care. As previously mentioned, both Quentin and the spectator serve as listeners who are now witnessing Nancy's trauma and story. This empowers the woman, and she is able to actually say and do something to her trauma and its perpetrator as she pulls Freddy Krueger into our world, cuts off his hand and tells him “it hurts, doesn't it? That's because you're in my world now, bitch”.

Ataria (2015, p. 204) notes that, during traumatic experiences and the loss of a sense of body ownership, “the world becomes an alien place, resulting in the feeling that the world is unreal. In more radical cases [...] a subject may feel that the world ceases to exist.” The scholar also highlights that during a severe trauma, one’s body can be — or feel like it is — controlled by someone else. On the other hand, having a sense of agency is connected to the feeling that one can control their own body movements, which leads Ataria (2015) to argue that the sense of helplessness experienced during a traumatic event is, in fact, a loss of the sense of agency. Thus, it becomes very interesting to observe that Nancy pulls Krueger back into our real world. In her trauma and in its aftermath, Nancy’s body was subjected to her abuser and, without a sense of body ownership, the world had ceased to exist: the power was Krueger’s and he could torture her in the dream realm. However, as Nancy becomes empowered, witnesses her own trauma, and shares her story with an empathetic audience, she can return to our world — bringing Krueger with her. Now, she has agency, and she can control her movements and defeat the killer.

## Final considerations

This paper has sought to demonstrate how the remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* represents trauma and its aftermath, and how it suggests possible healing pathways for the survivors. The use of nightmares as Krueger’s place to torture and kill can be linked to the symptoms of PTSD which the children who have endured his sexual abuse present. Additionally, the teenagers in the movie also exhibit other symptoms which are characteristic of PTSD, such as intrusive flashbacks, patterns of increased arousal, detachment, emotional withdraw and the avoidance of reminders of the event. Furthermore, the explicit confirmation of Freddy Krueger as a pedophile makes him more horrendous to a 21st century audience. It also reflects anxieties of our time, when movements to denounce sexual violence have gained strength.

Indeed, Nancy only becomes able to defeat Krueger once she has learned the truth and has truly witnessed the traumatic events which she has undergone. Additionally, she now has witnesses — Quentin and the audience — who have heard her story and who believe her. This gives Nancy agency and control of her own body, which makes it possible for her to bring Krueger into our world and defeat him. Such victory can be seen by the audience as pleasant and as positive representation for tales of abuse, in the sense that



the main character is able to share her story and be believed, seek justice, and heal. Fully knowing the story of her traumatic experience and being able to tell it to others who believe her is what allows Nancy to have agency where before she was helpless and powerless. Therefore, when she tells Krueger that it hurts because he is in Nancy's world this time, the audience is lead to agree with the sentiment. It truly is her world now.

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