

CONTEXTUALIZING *HOMER AND LANGLEY* IN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

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Abstract: *E.L. Doctorow's Homer and Langley, published in 2009, offers a rich reinterpretation of American history by fictionalizing the lives of the Collyer brothers, the infamous hoarders of 20th century New York. This novel not only revisits important historical events and social changes, such as the World War I, the Vietnam War, the Great Depression, or the cultural revolutions of the 1960's, but also presents them from the subjective point of view of its narrators. Besides, the novel exemplifies key postmodern features such as metafiction, unreliable narration, intertextuality etc. Through Homer's introspective storytelling, Doctorow critiques the way history is perceived and presented, suggesting that it is experienced and remembered selectively, especially by those who live outside the established norms of society. Moreover, in cultural terms, the novel explores the shifting values of the American society. The brothers' gradual withdrawal from society mirrors the loss of faith in modernity and technological progress, especially in the context of war, conflict, economic instability, and consumerism. Thus, the novel depicts the rise of mass media and suburban culture through the brothers' growing isolation, questioning the American dream. Furthermore, Doctorow uses the brothers' decaying mansion as a metaphor for social decline. Once a symbol of the upper-middle-class stability, it becomes a space where the past fills every corner of the house. Homer and Langley's hoarding is not due to their eccentricity; it is the psychological response to trauma and loss. The novel's exploration of hoarding resonates with modern understandings of this condition as a symptom of an unhealed trauma, in this case relates to war, disability, and grief. Langley, a WWI survivor, and Homer, the blind narrator, deal with both physical and emotional isolation and cope with their own deconstructed existence by collecting objects which represent memories. This symbolic accumulation of objects serves as criticism towards the American materialism and the tendency to ignore psychological trauma. Finally, the novel Homer and Langley depicts the socio-historical image of 20th century America. Blending fiction with real historical events, Doctorow challenges readers to reconsider how history is created, remembered and understood in American cultural imagination.*

Keywords: postmodernism; hoarding; infamy; Homer and Langley, conflict

1. Picturing *Homer and Langley* in the context of U.S. history and culture

The novel was published in 2009, and it presents in a fictionalized manner the life of Homer and Langley Collyer as interpreted and imagined by Edgar Lawrence Doctorow. The author follows Umberto Eco's theoretical line regarding postmodernism revisiting the past with a different attitude¹ managing to rewrite the life of the Collyer brothers. The narrator is Homer, the blind younger brother. He tells the story of their lives, describing the decay of their home in New York. The

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*. Trans. Weaver William. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. New York, 1983, p.67

novel starts with an overview of their childhood providing details regarding the background of their family. Coming from the upper class, as their father was a famous doctor and their mother was an opera singer, their childhood was happy, and they never lacked anything. However, the loss of their parents due to medical reasons leaves them alone and orphans in their brownstone on Fifth Avenue. One of the most important events in the novel is Langley's return from war, as it affected him psychologically. His post-war trauma triggered his obsession with creating a universal newspaper. For this reason and also because he wanted his brother to catch up with the most important events in the world once he regained his sight back, he started to collect newspapers and other objects, predicting their decline into hoarding.

Over the years, the two brothers became more and more isolated, seeking solitude, having no trust in the world outside. Even so, during this time various people went in and out of their life, for example housekeepers, a group of jazz musicians, a gangster, a group of hippies, reporters, etc. All of these interactions reflect the changes in the American society and culture; however, they could not change the isolated existence of the brothers. By the 20th century the authorities became concerned with their lifestyle and home conditions. Neighbors started to make complaints about their hoarding, authorities started to visit the place more and more often because of their unpaid bills, and finally the press started to write about their eccentric lifestyle, turning them into micro-celebrities, known for their notoriety. Even though they refused to talk to reporters, and they wanted to be left alone, they became more and more mentioned in the newspapers. Thus, the Collyer brothers became infamous for their unconventionality, questioning the meaning of fame in postmodern society. The novel ends with Homer in complete isolation remembering their childhood and the house which is now a devastating collection of useless objects, or a death trap. Langley is crushed under a pile of his own collections, while Homer, unable to escape or call for help, slowly dies of starvation. The concept of fame in the novel is primarily represented through infamy. Among all the characters examined in this analysis so far, none have achieved the same level of real-world recognition as the Collyer brothers. This can be attributed to the power of mass media, which played a very important role in shaping their public image. Despite their lack of intention to achieve celebrity, they became widely known and even considered urban legends. Their notoriety persists, as proved by naming a park in their memory in New York and the multiple videos and publications circulating on the internet regarding their life. The Collyer brothers are remembered not for traditional achievements but as peculiar and infamous figures. Their case exemplifies the idea that infamy can be more lasting and influential than positive fame. Thus, Doctorow highlights the changeable nature of fame at some point in the novel when Homer and Langley discussed one of their favorite baseball players, Walter Johnson:

“ ‘Who is your favorite baseballer?’ he said.

‘Walter Johnson’, I said.

‘And what is he if not a replacement for Cannonball Titcomb, Langley said. You see? It’s social constructions I’m talking about. One of the constructions is for us to have athletes to admire, to create ourselves as an

audience of admirers for baseballers. This seems to be a means of cultural communizing that creates great social satisfaction and possibly ritualizes, with baseball teams of different towns, our tendency to murder one another. Human beings are not bison, we are a more complex species, living in complicated social constructions, but we replace ourselves just as they do.”²

What Doctorow wants to emphasize through this dialogue, especially through Langley's last line, is the fact that fame is a social construct which is fluid, it is changeable in time. Fame is not established by accomplishment, talent, or other achievements, it can arise from an individual's different traits, from his capabilities to distinguish from others or even from deviation from social norms. In this case, being different from the majority serves as a stimulus for personal recognition. In addition to this, mass-media plays an important role when it comes to shaping the public image and perception of the Collyer brothers. Furthermore, the media is able to spread all kinds of information, and it chooses how people are portrayed, highlighting the idea that the public persona presented is not always a true reflection of the actual person, and fame is not always a true reflection of success, but it can be created by cultural influences and media attention. Thus, Guy Debord's theory in which he states that celebrities are not free people, and their celebrity life does not offer them real choices is fictionally confirmed³

Furthermore, Mrozowski suggests that the high interest in Homer and Langley's lives at the beginning of the 20th century in America underlines the fact that American writers, both literary and academic, found in hoarding narratives metaphors for the experiences of a recessionary culture⁴. In this case, from a sociological point of view, the novel also critiques the social, cultural and psychological impacts of the Great Depression in 1930 or even the economic recession or crisis which started in 2007⁵. Trying to depict how people dealt with a low financial income, themes such as loss and survival, cultural shifts, and the power of media were delved into in the novel. The theme of loss and survival is visible through Homer and Langley's parents' death and Langley's involvement in the war. The references to World War I, II and the Vietnam War also show that they lived in a society dominated by conflict, protests and public spectacle. Thus, the themes of loss and survival are depicted through these events as well.

The cultural shifts are represented by the multitude of historical events presented and also the variety of guests the brothers have at their residence in New

² E. L. Doctorow, *Homer and Langley*, Random House, New York, 2009, p.13

³ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Trans. Knabb Ken, Black and Red, Detroit, 1970, p.24

⁴ Daniel Mrozowski, "From Hoarders to Pickers: Salvage Aesthetics and Reality Television in the Great Recession." In Boyle Kirk & Mrozowski Daniel (Eds.), *The Great Recession in Fiction, Film, and Television: Twenty-First Century Bust Culture*, pp. 189–211. Lexington Books. Lanham, 2013, p.203.

⁵ Daniel Mrozowski, "From Hoarders to Pickers: Salvage Aesthetics and Reality Television in the Great Recession." In Boyle Kirk & Mrozowski Daniel (Eds.), *The Great Recession in Fiction, Film, and Television: Twenty-First Century Bust Culture*, pp. 189–211. Lexington Books. Lanham, 2013, p.203.

York. For example, all the allusions to music, media and newspapers, youth movements in the novel reflect the pop-culture movement which changes and transforms the postmodern identity. In the novel, Homer plays the piano and he plays different genres, such as jazz and swing. These genres show that the world outside is in continuous evolution, even though the brothers are stuck inside and in time. Moreover, Langley's collections of newspapers, with the aim of creating a universal newspaper, represent a multitude of information and events criticizing how this media obsession is part of pop culture. Another feature representing pop culture in the novel is the presence of the Hippie movement as part of Youth culture. At some point in the novel some hippies move into Homer and Langley's home as their guests, this highlights the 1960's pop culture hype, described by Homer as it follows:

"They would go off to some rock-and-roll band concert and be gone for a couple of days. They would take menial jobs, make a few dollars, quit till their money ran out, and then find some other job. But for one stretch some astrological influence held sway, for they all went off to work in the morning—Lissy, a clerk in a bookshop, and Dawn and Sundown waitressing in a diner, the boys as phone solicitors for an insurance agency— and came home in the evening, just as if we were a typically square bourgeois household. That peculiar conjunction of the stars lasted almost a week. Living as they did, these kids were more radical critics of society than the antiwar or civil rights people getting so much attention in the newspapers. They had no intention of trying to make things better. They had simply rejected the entire culture."⁶

The hippie guests represent the cultural shift which appeared along with the Youth culture movement. From a lexicological point of view, words and phrases such as: "radical critics", "antiwar people", "civil rights people", "rejected the culture", are part of the semantic field of rebellion. Young people stopped looking for and believing in the American Dream and started searching for alternatives. They did not try to reform the system; they simply walked away from it. The way Homer described them as "kids" underlines the gap between generations and cultures and the fascination he developed towards their behavior.

2. A postmodern approach to *Homer and Langley*

Doctorow's novel *Homer and Langley* (2009) presents in multiple instances postmodern features. From a historical point of view the novel depicts probably some of the most important socio-historical events in the American society as Doctorow's decision to prolong the Collyer brothers' lives with ten more years in the novel allows him to treat, explore and present in a fictional manner some of the most important events in the American history, such as: World War I and II, the Spanish flu pandemic, the Wall Street Crash and the afterwards Great

⁶ E. L. Doctorow, *Homer and Langley*, Random House, New York, 2009, p.121.

Depression together with the Cold War⁷. Furthermore, the novel also presents two more socio-historical events namely the Vietnam War associated with the cultural breakdown in America during postmodern times⁸. In this case, the destruction and deconstruction of the American society in that period is represented by the decaying lifestyle Homer and Langley lived and by their home in continuous destruction. Thus, Linda Hutcheon's theory regarding the blend of historical events and fiction, in other words "historiographic metafiction"⁹ or the postmodernists' return to history is visible in Doctorow's choice of characters. He uses Homer and Langley, in real life known as the Collyer brothers, infamous for hoarding. However, the author changes their real-life story in multiple instances, for example: he rewrites their timeline by extending their lives with ten years and therefore placing them in socio-historical events they could not have experienced otherwise. Thus, skepticism arises as the novel presents a fictionalized or subjective version of the history/ reality that questions the historical events presented. In addition to this, one can discuss the presence of Lyotard's narrative knowledge as well. The narrative knowledge is only possible if the narrator is a meta subject, and he/she decides to present the universal history of life through a local or a mini narrative¹⁰. Thus, Lyotard states that the meta discourse arouses speculation and skepticism because the one who transmits the history of life is also a subject not being able to present it in an objective manner based only on scientific facts. In this case the presence of the unreliable narrator whose version of reality might be distorted is characterized by Doctorow's choice of having Homer to be the narrator of the novel. Therefore, Homer, Langley's brother, who is blind, introverted and socially isolated, presents all the events in the novel in a very subjective manner. The narration is deeply reflective and very personal, characterized by ambiguities, therefore the reader cannot differentiate between reality and imagination. However, it is the reader's who is in charge of finding meaning, and the text is open to multiple interpretations, not a mean/way for the author to deliver one message, as Roland Barthes suggests in *The Death of the Author*¹¹.

Barthes also analyzed how usual cultural products can become "myths" or are mythologized by media. In other words, he demonstrated how media is able to transform people and objects into symbols¹² giving the example of Greta Garbo and Audrey Hepburn. When it comes to the novel itself, a comparison between

⁷ Ann Howard, "Cocks, Corsets, Clocks: E.L. Doctorow and the Tunnel of Love." In Wutz Michael & Murphet Julian (Eds.), *E.L. Doctorow: A Reconsideration*, pp. 148–174. Edinburgh University Press. Edinburgh, 2020, p.172.

⁸ Ann Howard, "Cocks, Corsets, Clocks: E.L. Doctorow and the Tunnel of Love." In Wutz Michael & Murphet Julian (Eds.), *E.L. Doctorow: A Reconsideration*, pp. 148–174, Edinburgh University Press. Edinburgh, 2020, p.172.

⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Function*, Routledge, New York, 1988, p.88

¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Bennington Geoff and Massumi Brian. Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10. Manchester University Press. Manchester, 1979, p.34.

¹¹ Roland Barthes *The Death of the Author*. Trans. Heath Stephen. In *Image, Music, Text*. Fontana Press. London, 1977, p.148.

¹² *Mythologies*. Trans. Lavers Annette. The Noonday Press. New York, 1972, p.57.

reality and fiction should be drawn. In real life the Collyer brothers became a myth themselves, without even trying. They represented symbols of lunacy, seclusion and oddness. In the novel, Doctorow deconstructs this myth presenting the characters in a complex manner, being primarily depicted as human beings capable of empathy. Depicting Homer and Langley like this, the author also criticizes the power media has over people. It analyzes how media is able to create these myths through newspapers, radio, TV and produce public images which do not necessarily resonate with reality, as it is stated in the novel:

“Langley and I were not the eccentric recluses of a once well-to-do family as described in the press: we had metamorphosed, we were the ghosts who haunted the house we had once lived in. Not able to see myself or hear my own footsteps, I was coming around to the same idea”¹³

Another key feature in the construction of the novel as a postmodern one is the creation of a fictional world promoting disbelief in utopia. Therefore, the novel is a representation of the destruction and deconstruction of the perfect world. This aspect is represented both by the decaying house and the personal development of the characters in the novel. Homer and Langley were once wealthy spoiled children and teenagers with thousands of possibilities ahead as their parents were well-known in New York. However, after their parents' death, they lost their path and became socially isolated. In addition to this, the socio-historical events which affected the American society back then, such as the World War II, inspired Doctorow to rewrite history, building through his fiction a world in complete deconstruction, a world which represents the consumerist society, the post-war society, a world in which psychological issues due to war contribute to the mental and physical downfall and deconstruction of the characters. In this case Langley is the one depicting several aspects presented above as he came back from the war with psychological trauma, and he is the representative of consumerism because of his obsession with collecting and buying things such as pianos, newspapers, etc. When it comes to physical deconstruction, Homer takes the floor, as he loses his eyesight and remains paralyzed because of a disease the brothers chose to treat at home. The house is the material thing which represents the whole world of the characters. Both Homer and Langley have lived there since they were children. The house decomposes, it is in constant decay, as their lives since their parents died. The presence of postmodernism is visible in the description of their house as well.

“The front hall is completely blocked with boxes of books stacked to the ceiling. A narrow passageway between bales of newspaper and overhanging garden tools—shovels, rakes, a power drill, a wheelbarrow, all strung overhead by wire and rope from spikes he's hammered into the walls—leads from his kitchen outpost to my enclave. [...] My bed is a mattress on the floor beside my typing table. I also have a small transistor radio that I hold up to my ear in hopes of hearing something sometime. [...] Upstairs, he has so piled things up in pyramidal fashion that the least nudge of any one thing—rubber tires, an iron pressure cooker, dressmaker's dummies, empty bureau drawers, beer kegs, flowerpots—I

¹³ E. L. Doctorow, *Homer and Langley*, Random House, New York, 2009, p.161.

almost take pleasure from visualizing the possibilities —and the whole assemblage will fall on the interloper, the mythical trespasser, the object of Langley's stratagems. Each room has its own punishing design of our things. Washboards greased with soap are laid on the floor for the unwary to step on. [...] For every dead rat he draws an invisible notch on my arm."¹⁴

Here the author uses specific words to build a clear image of the Collyer brothers' home. From a lexicological point of view, the vocabulary used reflects themes such as disorder, isolation, and fear. The most obvious feature is the use of nouns that belong to the semantic field of clutter and decay: "boxes of books," "bales of newspaper," "garden tools," and "beer kegs." These objects are old, asymmetric, and constructed in a pyramidal shape, creating the image of physical and mental disorganization. This lexical collection mirrors the hoarding behavior in the novel.

Doctorow also uses words with military or violent connotations, such as "spikes," "stratagems," and "interloper." These terms suggest that Langley sees the outside world as a dangerous place and therefore he decided that the house must be turned into a trap against intruders. Therefore, paranoia and tension are the emotional states of the characters regarding the outside environment. Thus, another postmodernist feature is exemplified through this statement. The paranoia of reason is Lyotard's theory discussing the class struggles in postmodern times. He states that the paranoia of reason is a synonym for the assumption that social division started to lose shape and finally became inexistent, or not plausible anymore. In this case, following the Marxist ideology of class division, it gained the status of "utopia"¹⁵. In the novel, for the Collyer brothers, the house represents the utopic space. A safe paradise which protects them from the outside discrepancies and vice. However, the actual description of the house belongs to the semantic field of dystopia.

Furthermore, the author includes spatial terms as well, for example: "narrow passageway," "stacked to the ceiling," and "mattress on the floor," which depict the suffocating living space where Homer lives, being trapped there. The house becomes alive, like a character. This metamorphosis is visible at the end of the book, when Homer, dying, remembers the good old times spent with his brother and the beautiful house they lived in.

"I remember our house as it was in our childhood: a glorious elegance prevailed, calming and festive at the same time. Life flowed through the rooms unencumbered by fear. We boys chased each other up and down the stairs and in and out of the rooms. We teased the servants and were teased by them. We marveled at our father's jarred specimens. As little boys we sat on the thick rugs and pushed our toy cars along the patterns. I took my piano lessons in the music room. We peeked from the hall at our parents'

¹⁴ E. L. Doctorow, *Homer and Langley*, Random House, New York, 2009, pp. 167-168.

¹⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Bennington Geoff and Massumi Brian. Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10. Manchester University Press. Manchester, 1979, p.13.

resplendent, candlelit dinner parties. My brother and I could run out the front door and down the steps and across to the park as if it was ours, as if home and park, both lit by the sun, were one and the same.”¹⁶

The semantic field of beauty and calm depicts the house in this fragment through the following phrases and words: “glorious elegance,” “calming,” “festive,” and “resplendent”. These suggest lightness and calmness. They also emphasize that the house once had a soul of its own, it was welcoming, joyful, and full of life. It is not just a setting anymore. It represents a living presence, a character on its own. However, exactly like the main characters, or the inhabitants, the house decays.

Moreover, concerning the narrator, Homer represents the observing mind Stanzel talks about in his study regarding the postmodern narrative. Homer narrates the events in a subjective and personal manner; he presents his own version of reality. Thus, the question of truth becomes absurd in this case as in postmodernism there is no absolute truth¹⁷. An interesting fact about the narrator is that he is not omniscient and omnipresent in this novel, compared to Connor’s theory in which he suggests that a frequent feature in postmodern novels is that narrators are omnipresent and omniscient in multiple micro universes, which are meant to represent the whole world in multiple pieces¹⁸. Here the narrator is blind, therefore he only remains the observing mind, everything he knows is everything he believes and everything others tell him, especially Langley. His description of everything that surrounds him is based on his own imagination and it relies on what he hears, smells and remembers. Although in the novel there are presented real historical events, and the post-war society, fact and fiction are blurred both by the author, when it comes to the real representation of the Collyer brothers, and by the narrator when it comes to the presentation of the socio-historic events in the novel. This can be linked to Linda Hutcheon’s theory regarding historiographic metafiction in which it is stated that authors use both nostalgia and irony to express their critical opinion upon the historical events which affect and represent their narrative world. Novels present a structural change in society. They present a postwar world in which a lot of significant changes have a considerable impact on everyone’s life. In postmodern fictional literature, history is fragmented, it is observed through local events, in micro-universes, therefore the reader should rethink these events in order to see the bigger picture; in this sense postmodern writers combine history and fiction to question the truth and the narrative authority¹⁹.

Another relevant postmodern feature regarding history’s alteration and the way Doctorow changed real events through fiction is the way in which he used intertextuality. The theory linking intertextuality to postmodernism belongs to Roland Barthes. He suggests that the variety of existing texts intertwine with one

¹⁶ E. L. Doctorow, *Homer and Langley*, Random House, New York, 2009, p.168.

¹⁷ Franz K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*. Trans. Goedsche Charlotte. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 1992, p.4.

¹⁸ Steven Connor, *Postmodernism and Literature*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. Cambridge University Press. New York, 2004, pp. 72-73.

¹⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Function*, Routledge, New York, 1988, p.90.

another in order to create new ones²⁰. In this case, E. L. Doctorow uses intertextuality from the beginning by choosing to write a novel about real historical events and figures/characters who already appeared in multiple texts such as other novels for example *Ghostly men* by Franz Liz (2003) or *My brother's keeper* by Marcia Davenport (1954). Writing about the Collyer brothers and choosing to expand their lives Doctorow encompasses more historical events to write about and analyze. This metamorphosis of reality can be linked to historiographic metafiction, a postmodern concept which highlights the subjective nature of history, suggesting that historical narratives are themselves constructed texts shaped by interpretation and subjectiveness. Therefore, other theoretical aspects presented at the beginning of this research are confirmed²¹. In this sense, the author designs a narrative which not only rewrites history but also analyzes how it is told and remembered. This is due to his choice of having Homer as a narrator. Through historical recontextualization, literary allusions and personal reflections on different events in the novel through the narrator's perspective, Doctorow constructs a novel rich in postmodern features. In addition to this, from an intertextual point of view, *Homer and Langley* highlight themes and motifs which can be found in other literature works as well. For example, the theme of hoarding and isolation can also be seen in classic literature as it shares similarities to Miss Havisham's house in *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Like Miss Havisham, who keeps old objects from her past in her house, the Collyer brothers collect and preserve objects belonging to their deceased parents and other possessions as a means of holding onto the past and the utopic world they once lived in. Moreover, both houses, Miss Havisham's and the Collyer's, reflect the psychological deterioration of the characters. Furthermore, Doctorow's novel also contributes to intertextual mythmaking by showing how figures like Homer and Langley can transform from private individuals to public legends. The Collyers' notoriety alludes to other figures in American literature, such as Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose wealth and reclusive lifestyle created this aura of mystery around this character that trigger public speculation. Like Gatsby, the Collyers became famous not for their accomplishments but for the myths that developed around them. In this sense, Doctorow critiques how the media transforms personal tragedy into spectacle.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Homer and Langley* shows how postmodern literature can reshape historical narratives, public memory and personal identity. Depicting a fictionalized version of Homer and Langley's real-life, Doctorow managed to construct a narrative which analyses the ways of mass media and questions the foundations of truth. The brothers' transformation into media spectacles, confirms

²⁰ Roland Barthes *The Death of the Author*. Trans. Heath Stephen. In *Image, Music, Text*. Fontana Press. London, 1977, p.148.

²¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Bennington Geoff and Massumi Brian. Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10. Manchester University Press. Manchester, 1979, p.15.

Guy Debord's theoretical guideline in the "Society of the Spectacle", where representations replace reality, and individuals are consumed as images rather than seen as human being. Thus, the novel reveals how fame, disguised as infamy here, is constructed not with values and virtues, but with deviation from social norms, eccentricity and cultural misunderstanding. Furthermore, Homer's storytelling, marked by subjectivity, weakens the readers' trust in his presentation of historical facts, consequently aligning it with Jean-François Lyotard's notion of narrative knowledge and the collapse of the grand narratives. The decaying brownstone, filled with newspapers, tools, and personal objects, becomes a powerful metaphor for mental deterioration, cultural clutter, and historical overload, depicting themes such as consumerism, trauma and the destruction of utopian standards. Moreover, the cultural shifts presented in the novel emphasize the novel's link to pop culture, youth rebellion, and the disintegration of personal identity in front of mass media. Even the existent linguistic field, alternating from terms associated with clutter and decay to metaphors of paranoia and violence, highlights the dystopian atmosphere in the novel, reinforcing the themes of decline and loss of self. Finally, Homer and Langley's withdrawal is not liberating, for them it is self-destructive, ending in physical and symbolic death.

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