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The Making of a Monster: Alienation, Dehumanisation, and Consumerism in *American Psycho* and *I Am Legend*

Master's Thesis

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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná diplomová práce se bude zabývat žánrem hororu, konkrétně díly *I Am Legend* Richarda Mathesona a *American Psycho* Breta Eastona Ellise. V úvodní části diplomant stručně nastíní historii žánru a literární kontext, do něhož obě díla zasadí. Svůj výběr primárních textů zdůvodní. Jádrem práce bude tematická analýza děl, v níž se diplomant zaměří na otázky odcizení, osamělosti, konzumerismu, dehumanizace, apod. Součástí bude rovněž literární analýza prostředků, jimiž jsou tato témata v dílech zobrazena. Analýzy bude diplomant dokládat ukázkami z primárních děl a opře je o relevantní sekundární zdroje. V závěru své analýzy shrne, obě díla zhodnotí a vzájemně porovná z hlediska zvolené tematiky a literárních prostředků.

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Prohlašuji:

Práci s názvem The Making of a Monster: Alienation, Dehumanisation, and Consumerism in *American Psycho* and *I Am Legend* jsem vypracoval samostatně. Veškeré literární prameny a informace, které jsem v práci využil, jsou uvedeny v seznamu použité literatury.

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ANNOTATION

This master's thesis explores horror literature as a vehicle for cultural and social critique in the post-World War II era. It focuses on the novels *I Am Legend* (1954) by Richard Matheson and *American Psycho* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis. Through thematic analysis and close reading, the thesis examines how both texts reflect contemporary anxieties related to alienation, consumerism, dehumanisation, and the erosion of moral and mental structures. Furthermore, this thesis employs key theoretical frameworks, including Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny, existentialist theories by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, and Jean Baudrillard's postmodern critique. It also outlines the cultural and historical background of each novel, namely the Cold War era and the neoliberal 1980s. The analytical section focuses on three central themes and presents a comparative perspective on how the figure of the monster, the protagonist, and human identity evolve across different moments in modern history.

KEY WORDS

Horror fiction, Social criticism, Alienation, Dehumanisation, Desensitisation, Erosion of morality and sanity, Consumerism, Existentialism, the uncanny, Abjection, *American Psycho, I Am Legend*

ANOTACE

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá hororovou literaturou jako nástrojem kulturní a společenské kritiky v období po druhé světové válce. Konkrétně analyzuje romány *Já, legenda* (1954) od Richarda Mathesona a *Americké psycho* (1991) od Breta Eastona Ellise. Cílem práce je prostřednictvím tematické analýzy a metody blízkého čtení ukázat, jak oba texty reflektují dobové úzkosti spojené s odcizením, konzumerismem, dehumanizací a rozpadem morálních struktur. Práce se opírá o vybrané teoretické rámce, zejména teorii abjekce Julie Kristevové, pojem „Něco tísnivého" od Sigmunda Freuda, existencialismus (Sartre, Camus) a postmoderní kritiku Jeana Baudrillarda. Součástí práce je také vymezení kulturně-historického kontextu, konkrétně období studené války a neoliberalismu 80. let. Analytická část sleduje tři klíčová témata a komparativně ukazuje, jak se mění podoba monstra, hrdiny i lidské identity v různých fázích moderní historie.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Hororová fikce, kritika společnosti, Odcizení, Dehumanizace, Desenzitizace, Eroze morálky a psychického zdraví, Konzumerismus, Existencialismus, Něco tísnivého, Abjekce, *Americké Psycho, Já, Legenda*

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INTRODUCTION

"Hell is empty and all the devils are here."

— William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

In the decades following World War II, horror fiction has served as a powerful instrument through which one could express the cultural anxieties and social criticism of the time. From Cold War paranoia and fears of complete nuclear annihilation resulting in nuclear winters to the rise of consumer capitalism and the erosion of moral boundaries in postmodern societies, horror has continually adapted to reflect the shifting evolutions of human dread. Furthermore, this thesis explores how two monumentally significant texts, Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* from 1954 and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* from 1991, use horror not merely as a way to induce shock and fear, but to address key grave concerns, which, in their eyes, might lead to apocalyptic disasters. Despite their differences regarding style and theme, both novels reflect the fractured state of postwar society, critiquing the forces that alienate individuals, distort and twist morality, and depreciate human life.

I Am Legend by Richard Matheson was written during the onset of the Cold War era. It depicts the presumably last man alive in a world overrun by mutants afflicted by a vampiric plague. However, beneath its post-apocalyptic veneer lies a deep philosophical struggle of a common man combating mid-twentieth-century anxieties, including nuclear catastrophe, unrestrained scientific advancement, and existential despair. In contrast, *American Psycho*, published in the consumerist excess of the late 1980s, follows a wealthy New York investment banker whose descent into sadistic violence is camouflaged by a poorly maintained act of normalcy, which, despite its flaws, remains hidden. Through its dispassionate and flat narration and grotesquely brutal satire, Ellis criticises the moral bankruptcy of late capitalist society, where identity is reduced to performance and humanity is commodified.

While *I Am Legend* engages with fears of isolation, scientific dehumanisation, and the collapse of rational meaning, American Psycho turns inward into the depths of a deeply flawed and fractured individual, focusing on the moral vacuum of the individual within a hyper-consumerist culture. Despite existing in vastly different realities and historical contexts and possessing dissimilar personalities, both respective protagonists serve as distorted reflections of their corresponding societies, which readers are forced to face. Neville is a tragic figure

driven by survival and guilt, and Bateman is a monstrous embodiment of desire without conscience or consequence.

The main focus of this thesis is to investigate how horror operates in these novels as a medium for highlighting key issues and social crises of the respective societies. The analysis concentrates on three main interconnected themes which affect the protagonists and their society. Firstly, the theme of social alienation. Secondly, the theme of dehumanisation and desensitisation, including the erosion of morality and sanity, and lastly, the theme of consumerism. Moreover, the analytical chapters draw from a range of theoretical frameworks, including Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, Sigmund Freud's uncanny, the Other, and existentialist philosophy. The thesis explores how these texts position horror as a response to historical trauma and social fragmentation.

The methodology of this thesis utilises close reading with thematic analysis, supported by relevant critical secondary sources which deal with the selected texts. Primary textual evidence from the novels is paired with secondary academic sources to highlight how literary form, narrative voice, symbolism, and symbolic imagery reinforce themes of alienation, dehumanisation, and consumerism. Furthermore, special attention is given to how monstrosity is depicted not only in literal terms, such as vampires and cannibalistic serial killers, but also in metaphorical terms in the form of alienation from others, disconnection from self, and its profound consequences regarding the system which allows such people to operate.

The structure of the thesis reflects its aims, helping to illuminate the following theoretical and historical contextualization of horror fiction, as well as three analytical chapters, each exploring one of the three key central themes. The initial analytical chapter reveals how both novels portray social alienation as a result of societal collapse, personal psychological damage, and the fragmentation of social bonds. The subsequent chapter focuses on dehumanisation and emotional detachment, analysing the protagonists' growing disconnection from ethical principles and human relationships. The final analytical chapter investigates the influence of consumerist and capitalist ideologies, with particular emphasis on how commodification undermines individual identity and existential purpose. Each chapter concludes with a comparative discussion that draws out both the shared and divergent aspects of the novels' critiques of their respective cultural moments.

By placing *I Am Legend* and *American Psycho* within their socio-historical and theoretical contexts, this thesis argues that post-WWII horror fiction reflects more than personal

or supernatural fears. Rather, it depicts a confrontation of individuals with their respective social realities and situations, which are horror-inducing. Thusly, these novels challenge readers to confront the alienating, dehumanising, and destructive forces that define modern life.

Theorizing Horror: Key Characteristics and Useful Concepts

Horror fiction, as prolific as it is in the modern era of movies, the internet, and video games, can prove to be a difficult term to define. Although seemingly straightforward, horror fiction possesses many complexities that prevent easy categorisation, all the while having characteristics that help to distinguish it from other genres where fear is used. Outwardly, an oxymoron, horror fiction has managed to captivate its audience for centuries.[1]

Reyes and Carroll both agree that in Western culture, horror is both tremendously pervasive and transmedial.[2] It can therefore be found essentially everywhere, for example, in a book, a movie, in music videos or on posters.[3] The proliferation of horror elements led Carroll to state that "the last decade or so seems like one long Halloween night."[4] However, since the 1970s, horror has been very closely associated with the movie industry, due to the ability to elicit strong visual and auditory stimuli.[5] Moreover, horror's roots run deep in literary history, evolving from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), widely regarded as the first Gothic novel, to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which introduced themes of scientific transgression and existential dread.[6] Over the centuries, the genre has continually adapted, reflecting societal anxieties and psychological depths, and remains relevant in contemporary literature and popular culture.

The term itself is derived from the Latin "*horrere*", meaning to tremble or shudder.[7] From the name, it is therefore apparent that the genre takes on its name after the effect it is supposed to evoke from the consumers of the media. Horror fiction, overall, aims to draw out feelings of "revulsion, disgust and loathing, horror induces states of shuddering or paralysis, the loss of one's faculties, particularly consciousness and speech, or a general physical powerlessness and mental confusion" or a combination of these elements.[8] It often, but not always, employs the usage of inhuman monsters, such as demons, vampires, zombies, ghosts, werewolves, or trolls, among many others. Furthermore, horror also depicts monsters who, although human, are perhaps just as terrifying. This category usually includes human monsters,

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[1] Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Horror: A Literary History (London:* British Library, 2020), 2.
[2] Reyes, *Horror*, 10–11.
[3] Noël Carroll. "The Nature of Horror," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 1 (1987): 51. https://doi.org/10.2307/431308.
[4] Carrol, "The Nature of Horror," 51.
[5] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, (Routledge, 1990), 2.
[6] Reyes, *Horror*, 22–24.
[7] Reyes, *Horror*, 10.
[8] Marie Mulvey Roberts, *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 123.

such as perverted and twisted serial killers. Traditionally, horror fiction also often uses a plethora of cursed or evil-controlled settings, such as a haunted house, a castle or a deep, dark labyrinth. Reyes, however, points out that horror fiction is far more complicated than that. The author uses some of the great works of Terry Pratchett as an example, on which he points out how the two completely different tones that permeate his writing, one being humorous, playful and satirical, and the other being full of grave horror and horrific creatures whose presence is all but frivolous and fun, can coexist in a single body of work, proving that horror itself can be found anywhere and anytime. In doing so, horror crosses the boundaries to other genres, enhancing them with a visceral twist.[9]

Even though the concept of horror fiction is hard to fully encompass with definitions, it has several outlining features, the actual way monsters and supernatural forces are portrayed being one of them. Carroll states that true horror fiction differentiates itself from other works where horror elements are used by the way the characters in the story interact with the monsters or the supernatural forces. Contrary to the fairytale, which also often employs monsters of some kind, horror monsters are those of an otherworldly fear and dread. Protagonists often experience trepidation at the thought of being in close proximity to the monsters or the supernatural elements, let alone endure their touch or sight. On the other hand, fairy tale monsters are a legitimate part of the world, and the protagonists often interact with them. Unlike their horror counterparts, fairytale monsters do not generally invoke feelings of abnormality and blood-freezing horror.[10]

Like the term horror fiction itself, monsters used in horror fiction can also be tough to define and categorise. Beings such as zombies or vampires, who have perhaps reached the cliché status in the genre of horror fiction, can still offer much for academic literary discovery and uncover much about our perception of the world in which we live. One of the aspects of horror fiction that deserves our focus is the effect of purity and impurity. Carroll says that the monsters are deemed impure due to the fact that many, if not most of the monsters, are by their definition hard or impossible to categorise. Oftentimes, they are amalgamations of many threatening creatures and provide unnatural contradictions in the sense that some of them are both alive and dead. This impurity stems from the fact that such creatures suddenly appear foreign, threatening and abnormal because of our inability to process and categorise them. As

[9] Reyes, *Horror*, 2–3.
[10] Carrol, "The Nature of Horror," 52–53.

a result, they then fall into the same loathsome and repugnant category as "spittle, blood, tears, sweat, hair clippings nail clippings, pieces of flesh and so on."[11]

Furthermore, one of the key tropes and a significant mechanism which allows horror to function is the "Otherness." Although difficult to define in an all-encompassing manner, it has been one of the most important aspects of horror literature and film. Most usually, it engages with the human psyche through its effect on fear of the unknown, unfamiliar, or alien. In horror, Otherness is generally represented through monstrous or supernatural entities, boundless or confined spaces, or identities that stand in stark opposition to human norms and dominant cultures. These figures of Otherness challenge the audience's sense of self and the governing societal norms, evoking a complex mix of feelings of both fascination and repulsion. Examining Otherness within horror allows for an understanding of cultural anxieties surrounding race, gender, sexuality, and the alien and foreign, making it a vehicle for exploring societal boundaries and fears. *Cambridge Dictionary* defines it simply as "being or feeling different in appearance or character from what is familiar, expected, or generally accepted."[12] Such a definition, however, does not suffice to truly capture the vast and key, albeit somewhat hidden, role Otherness plays in our lives.

One of the crucial aspects of Otherness is described in Julia Kristeva's essay Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, where she links Otherness with abjection. She explains that people experience a feeling of horror and repulsion at certain substances, actions, and ideas that dare break the status quo, particularly in social and personal settings. She provides proof of the absolutely innate and essential form of abjection residing in humans across many, if not all cultures, the abjection of food. "When the eyes see or the lips touch, that skin on the surface of milk-harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring-I experience a gagging sensation and […] all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire."[13] Through this abjection of something as common and beneficial as dairy produce, she sets herself apart from her father who proffers her the milk. In doing so, she creates her own identity during the "process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death."[14] Her figurative and exaggerated death, symbolised through the bodily convulsions, vomiting, and sobbing she experiences during her abjection of the milk, allows

[11] Carrol, "The Nature of Horror," 55.
[12] "Otherness," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed November 4, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/Otherness.
[13] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Ny Columbia Univ. Press, 1982), 3.
[14] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

her to birth and cement her own self by erecting boundaries which are necessary to be able to distinguish between subject and object, between "human" and "animal", and "the self" and "the other."[15]

In a more macabre example, Kristeva further explains her theory on a human cadaver. She depicts natural human reactions of disgust, sadness, and rejection upon beholding the lifeless body. According to her, seeing the dead body creates a dilemma for the human mind.[16] It is something we know should be and, at some point, was capable of life, yet it is devoid of it. In its current state, it exists on an imaginary border, somewhere in the middle between alive and dead. According to Felluga, abjection is our reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other.[17] Compared to the glass of milk, which has only started the process of decay, in our eyes, the corpse is the far more egregious offender to our perception of life, purity, and our identity because, as Kristeva puts it, "[i]t is death infecting life."[18] Seeing the dead body forces us to tackle the fact that we are finite and will one day also inevitably meet a similar fate, along with all the decay, pus, and foul odours that follow. Kristeva further emphasises that such experience can be made even more intense by the corpse belonging to a family member or to a friend.[19] By abjecting the corpse which blurs the line between life and death on a primal level, we subconsciously choose to remain alongside the living, while simultaneously discarding and rejecting the dead, further establishing our own identity.

Kristeva further stresses the action of committing a crime. She says that, "[a]ny crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility."[20] Although off-putting, some of the items, such as wounds and excrement, and crimes, such as rape or murder, are tangible and, therefore, easier to understand. However, concepts such as morality can prove to be far harder to grasp for the human mind. Kristeva emphasises how the act of betrayal, especially from a friend, and the act of committing a crime have an impact on a person's perception of the self and reality.[21] The act of someone committing

[15] Dino Franco Felluga, *Critical Theory: The Key Concepts* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 3.
[16] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.
[17] Felluga, *Critical Theory*, 3.
[18] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[19] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[20] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[21] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

a crime stirs rage and disapproval in us, more so if the crime has not been met with a just punishment. Premeditated crime is perceived as so offensive because it shatters our illusions about societal norms which we expect others to also follow. Although humans generally abject those who do not follow the frail societal norms people cling to, others breaking them provide us with an inevitable choice. We must decide whether we will permit whichever action the transgressor has carried out or whether we reject the action. Either way, once again, we must choose to be on one side of the border while expelling the other, further distinguishing ourselves and our identity from the ones who disgust us with their actions. The abject is a threat to our understanding of reality because it distorts our own view of the self and our place in the world. Therefore, what truly terrifies us is not simply the unclean, rank, rancid, and decaying, but rather that which "disturbs identity, system, order."[22] Otherness affects the human psyche due to the fact that it blurs the line between known and unknown, the good and the evil, the living and the dead. It is as disrespectful of the rules and laws as it is undefinable and impure.

The idea of impurity seems to be firmly intertwined with horror monsters, our perception of them, and both individual and cultural identities. In *The Nature of Horror*, Noël Carroll discusses the importance of the connection between impurity and disgust. He reasons that in order for us to feel heightened emotional states while experiencing art-horror, the elevated and crystallised form of the genre, it is key for the monster to be both disgusting and impure. Carroll says that, "[i]f the monster were only evaluated as potentially threatening, the emotion would be fear; if only potentially impure, the emotion would be disgust. Art-horror requires evaluation both in terms of threat and disgust."[23] Oftentimes, subjects who are forced to withstand the presence and touch of a monstrous being or an object cover their face. They do it, however, not only due to their fear but also due to the overwhelming revulsion and nausea the object evokes in the subjects.[24]

This disgust, however, usually stems from our perception of the impurity that the monstrous object provides. "We initially speculate that an object or being is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, categorically incomplete, or formless."[25] This argument seems to support Kristeva's reasoning behind the abjection of anything that threatens, disturbs or blurs the borders of our reality and identity. Carrol further argues that monsters are unnatural. "They are unnatural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature.

[22] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[23] Noël Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," 55.
[24] Carrol, "The Nature of Horror," 53.
[25] Carrol, "The Nature of Horror," 55.

They do not fit the scheme; they violate it. The monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge."[26] In their essence, monsters and monstrous objects are entities which cross and break our cultural boundaries and understanding of what we see as natural, blurring lines between purity and impurity. They exist in liminal spaces, dissolving distinctions between self and other, life and death, or human and non-human.

Although not natural, monsters are created for a reason. David L. Clark, in a chapter on *Monster Theory,* states that monsters are not born from nothing; instead, they are created through a process of cultural construction that pieces together parts of marginalised groups or feared differences within society. The "monster" is a symbol that society assembles to embody what it perceives as radically different, threatening, or destabilising. This monstrous figure is formed by taking fragments of the "other," those outside of the cultural norm, and recombining them into a unified, frightening entity.[27]

Clark sheds light onto how throughout history, people of many cultures and religions partook in the creation of monsters. Most often, one group creates the monsters out of a vilified, usually marginalised group they encountered. The dominant group distorts the different physical or cultural aspects and twists them into tormented and unrecognisable forms, allowing the dominant group to carry out atrocities upon the marginalised group. Clark mentions one of the earliest and infamous deeds, which were recorded in the Bible, where the Jews perceived the Indigenous people of Canaan as "menacing giants."[28] In this case, the Jewish perspective allowed them easily to view the Canaan people as someone who is to be "variously resisted or destroyed."[29] The French poets produced works of art in which they disparaged and denigrated Muslims and transformed them into fiendish distortions of their original selves. Consequently, this allowed for greater support for the conquest of the East.[30]

History, however, is beset with such innumerable examples. One from our more recent memory could be how the Nazis revived the dormant hate towards the Jewish people which stems from centuries of distorted facts and vilification by making them appear as bloodthirsty monsters.[31] Similarly, the Native Americans were subjected to a similar fate by being reduced

[26] Carrol, "The Nature of Horror," 56.
[27] David L. Clark, "Monster Theory," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 12.
[28] Clark, "Monster Theory," 7.
[29] Brian R Doak, *Ancient Israel's Neighbors* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 2.
[30] Clark, "Monster Theory," 8.
[31] Clark, "Monster Theory," 8.

to barbaric savages.[32] Such behaviour is not only due to the desire to seize someone else's property or land, however. The blurring of lines of sexuality has also been historically twisted into grotesque forms. "The woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith, ("die erste Eva," "la mere obscure"), Bertha Mason, or Gorgon. 'Deviant' sexual identity is similarly susceptible to monsterization."[33]

Race is also another of the most commonly used means which allow people to distinguish themselves from others. In our history, "the Others" were often the inhabitants of Africa simply due to their darker skin colour. The West twisted this simple biological fact into a question of inferiority and sexual deviance. It was postulated that due to their dark, and therefore, unholy skin colour, the Ethiopian people naturally lived in sin and could not resist vices.[34] Thus, the Western people of the time managed to complete the cycle by taking a truly naturally occurring condition of having a darker shade of skin, perverting it and allowing it to take the place of the previous status quo, pretending it is not a sudden change which allows for the vilification of one group, but rather something that has always been here; something natural. Clark compellingly summarises this effect when he says that "[o]ne kind of difference becomes another as the normative categories of gender, sexuality, national identity, and ethnicity slide together like the imbricated circles of a Venn diagram, abjecting from the center that which becomes the monster. This violent foreclosure erects a self-validating, Hegelian master/slave dialectic that naturalizes the subjugation of one cultural body by another by writing the body excluded from personhood and agency as in every way different, monstrous."[35]

Moreover, in addition to the Other, Freud's concept of the Uncanny is also a pivotal trope which transcends fear into horror. In his seminal 1919 essay *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud explores a psychological aesthetic of anxiety, where he describes the uncanny as something that is frightening not because it is unfamiliar and supernatural, but because it is strangely familiar. Freud describes the uncanny as something once known that is repressed, which eventually leads to its resurfacing in an unsettling context.[36] Freud traces the etymology of the German term *unheimlich* to its root *Heimlich*, meaning homely, familiar, suggesting that the uncanny arises precisely when the familiar is rendered alien due to repression. It is, as he writes, "[…] something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being

[32] Clark, "Monster Theory," 8.
[33] Clark, "Monster Theory," 9.
[34] Clark, "Monster Theory," 10.
[35] Clark, "Monster Theory," 10.
[36] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 39.

repressed […]," and thus "[…] should have remained hidden and has come into the open."[37] The uncanny can be seen particularly in situations involving involuntary repetition, doppelgängers, the animation of inanimate objects, and where the repressed surfaces into view, which are motifs common in horror fiction. The uncanny is especially useful in the examination of horror narratives, namely those that stage a breakdown between the real and the imagined, or the self and the Other.

In conclusion, horror fiction is a genre that is notoriously difficult to define within clear and stable boundaries. It often engages with themes of fear, disgust, pain, impurity, and cultural transgression, to name a few. Horror's main strengths lie not only in its ability to terrify and evoke strong and deep feelings but also to mirror societal fears and tendencies of the time through the usage of monsters, both human and inhuman, the Other, and the uncanny. Using the theories of Carroll, Kristeva, Clark, and Freud, horror operates in liminal spaces, blurring or destroying the lines between life and death, human and non-human, or self and other. Due to these transgressions, identity and order are disturbed, which in turn makes horror a genre uniquely suited for examining personal and collective fears permeating human existence.

With its rise to prominence in the aftermath of World War II, existentialist philosophy deals with the individual's confrontation with absurdity, alienation, and freedom in a world seemingly void of inherent meaning and unchanging truths. Alienation can be explained, according to the American social psychologist Melvin Seeman, as a complex set of subjective experiences including feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement.[38]

Furthermore, Jean-Paul Sartre's reputable principle of "existence precedes essence," encapsulates the view that individuals must define themselves through conscious action rather than rely on predetermined fates, roles, or beliefs. Therefore, according to Sartre, "man is nothing other than what he makes of himself,"[39] forcing every person to tackle the issue of his identity by making daily choices, big or small, which will eventually mould him into a defined and specific person.[40] Furthermore, Albert Camus, in The Myth of Sisyphus, argues that the absurd arises from the tension between the human desire for order and the chaotic indifference

[37] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 182.
[38] Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," American Sociological Review 24, no. 6 (December 1959): 783, https://doi.org/10.2307/2088565.
[39] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 22.
[40] Aho, Kevin, "Existentialism," Stanford.edu, Accessed January 6, 2023, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/.

of the universe.[41] He further claims that in a world without order, one must revolt and live their life in spite of the inability to receive answers from the world and the universe without submitting oneself to dogmas and absolute truths provided, for example, by religion.[42] These core ideas provide a valuable theoretical perspective through which it is possible to examine and analyse the psychological and ethical crises presented in *I Am Legend* and *American Psycho*.

In *I Am Legend*, Richard Matheson presents Robert Neville as a man utterly alone in a world that has moved beyond him.[43] Neville partakes in desperate efforts to maintain a semblance of normalcy, mainly through routines, scientific research, and emotional repression. These aspects of Neville's life mirror Camus's concept of the absurd hero,[44] who persists in the face of hopelessness.[3] When Neville ultimately realises that he is a figure of supernatural terror to a new society of beings which has evolved past his own capabilities and understanding of the world as it was, he confronts the radical redefinition of self that existentialists argue is both necessary and destabilising.[45] His transformation from man to monster reveals how existential alienation in a radically altered world can lead to both moral erosion and psychological collapse.

Contrastively, *American Psycho*[46] explores a different dimension of existential horror through life in a system that simulates meaning but offers none. Patrick Bateman's empty routines, objectification of others, and reliance on brands, social posturing, and surface-level performance reflect Sartre's concept of bad faith, during which a subject is caught in a cycle a self-deception during which individuals avoid the burden of true freedom by conforming to roles given to them by society, instead of accepting roles which one would accept based on genuine interest. This outcome can be clearly spotted in *American Psycho* when Bateman is unable to confront his freedom and act with moral agency, forcing Bateman to recede into meaningless perverted violence and further fragment his identity, further underscoring the existential anxiety of the modern subject in a hyper-capitalist society.[47]

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[41] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 26.
[42] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 52–53.
[43] Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (London: The Folio Society, 2018).
[44] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 108.
[45] Aho, "Existentialism."
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[47] Bo Sun, "Desire, Bad-Faith and Being-For-Other Existential Thought in American Psycho," *Communications in Humanities Research* 62, no. 1 (January 9, 2025): 74–75, https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/2025.20220.

In both novels, horror operates not merely as a genre convention but as a philosophical metaphor. The monstrous, the grotesque, and the violent are externalisations of inner crisis, reflecting existential dread, the erosion of meaning, and the collapse of selfhood. Horror, in this context, becomes a vehicle for dramatising existential concerns in their most extreme, visceral forms.

Moreover, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* presents an illuminating vision of late postmodernist capitalist society in which images and signs no longer reflect reality but instead create a new, detached dimension of hyperreality.[48] During a process where the original reality becomes increasingly and incessantly more copied, perverted, twisted, and distorted to a point where its current state does not resemble the original in the slightest. At this point, the distinction between the real and the imaginary collapses, and individuals engage with simulacra, copies without an original, that shape perception, identity, and meaning and get caught in a mere simulation of reality made up by meaningless signs and images.[49] This concept can be useful for the analysis of Am*erican Psycho*, where surface-level appearances, empty conversations and performative identities mask the absence of moral or emotional substance. Baudrillard argues that "it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself." and "[n]ever again will the real have the chance to produce itself such is the vital function of the model in a system of death."[50]

Bateman himself is surrounded by such signs. His obsession with designer clothing, elaborate restaurant menus, and pop music reviews depicts a compulsive engagement with simulacra, copies of cultural products that define reality through replication and style rather than substance. Patrick Bateman, as a character, embodies the very notion of the postmodern simulacrum due to the fact that he is not a fully formed subject or an individual, but rather a collage of pop-culture consumer brands, memorised highbrow reviews and articles, and media tropes, lacking any fixed authenticity which can be seen in Bateman's infamous line "[t]here is an idea of a Patrick Bateman... but there is no real me."[51]

[48] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Glaser (1981; repr., Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 17.
[49] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1–2.
[50] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 4.
[51] Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (London: Picador, 2012), 352.

Although less central, Baudrillard's theory may also be helpful in the analysis of *I Am Legend*.[52] Neville's attempt to reconstruct pre-apocalyptic normalcy through routines and scientific reasoning can be perceived as a simulation of humanity's past ideals. However, in a world that has evolved beyond him, these attempts are exposed as obsolete performances. As the vampires form a new society, Neville becomes the last trace of a bygone reality in which he becomes the legend, eventually fading into a myth and subsequent oblivion, completing his journey from a simulacrum of the old, non-existent world in a new, incomprehensible one.

[52] Matheson, *I Am Legend.*

Cultural Context: The Cold War and the Yuppies

The Cold War era is a period which marks a time of clashing great contradictory forces and processes in the history of mankind. In Matheson's *I Am Legend*,[53] the prevalent fears created by the Cold War were imprinted in the novel mainly through the book's main protagonist, Robert Neville, who has to balance his will to survive by any means necessary against the guilt that weighs his conscience due to the things he has done to ensure his survival. During this period, which lasted nearly half a century, the might of "imperialism and nationalism" clashed with the ever-evolving processes of "decolonization, multiculturalism, and new ideologies and modes of identity formation", which were affected by "race, gender, class, religion, and rights."[54] *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War* defines the Cold War as:

> […] a distinct historical period shaped, as the name suggests, by a rivalry between two nuclear superpowers or hegemons that threatened global destruction. […] Superpower rivalry is customarily said to have begun in 1947, when the Truman Doctrine sought to contain communism and the expansion of Soviet influence, and ended with the decline and fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc in the late 1980s.[55]

During this volatile time, many people feared the ever-possible chance of military confrontation between the forces of democracy, represented by the USA and its Western-minded allies, and the forces of communism, championed by the USSR and Eastern bloc.[56] The heavily medialized[57] and extremely expensive arms-race[58] only served to escalate the situation. The traditional form of arms race, which consisted of military technology and systems, such as missiles and missile defence systems, precision-guided munitions and weapons, innovative designs relating to tank and mechanised infantry combat vehicles,[59] and naval[60] and aerial[61] advancements consisting of expanding and upgrading navy fleets and aircraft fleets.

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[53] Matheson, *I Am Legend.*
[54] Prasenjit Duara, "The Cold War and the Imperialism of Nation-States," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 86.
[55] Duara, "The Cold War," 86.
[56] Andreas Etges, "Western Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 163.
[57] Christopher Endy, "Power and Culture in the West," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 335.
[58] David R. Stone, "The Military," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 351.
[59] Stone, "The Military," 355.
[60] Stone, "The Military," 353.
[61] Stone, "The Military," 348.

Nevertheless, the most significant and perhaps most sinister part of this arms race was the development of thermonuclear warheads, which, from the end of World War II, became so sophisticated, effective, and reliable that "[…] they were capable of delivering thermonuclear warheads to the major cities of the other side."[62] This grim possibility signifies a terrible but great change in which a major military power can annihilate its opponent in a time span previously unimaginable. *The Oxford Handbook of The Cold War* further supports this argument by stating that "[t]he fact remained that sooner rather than later each side would be able to annihilate the other in the space of a few hours."[63] This possibility marks a stark contrast to World War II, which lasted six years and claimed the lives of up to 85 million people.[64] As dreadful and horrifying as these figures are, they pale in comparison to the figures that *The Oxford Handbook of The Cold War* proposes had an all-out nuclear war erupted between the countries. The author states that "[a] total war fought in the absolute manner of, say, World War II would lead to the deaths of hundreds of millions and the destruction of the governments and societies involved."[65] Jervis supports this statement by quoting Charles de Gaulle, a president of France from 1959 to 1969, who said, "two sides would have neither powers, nor laws, nor cities, nor cultures, nor cradles, nor tombs," as a result of nuclear war.[66] This quote depicts that a notion of sensibility and temperance still existed amongst some of the global leaders even amidst the near ubiquitous sabre rattling.

Another one of the biggest fears of the people living in the times of the Cold War was also directly connected to the fear of an all-out nuclear war. This was the fear of nuclear fallout and nuclear winter. Although the threat of MAD, mutually assured destruction, was very high, the subsequent fallout and disruption of natural habitat could cause irreparable damage to the planet and all creatures who inhabit it. "From 1981–89 both the American peace and environmental movements accelerated, as public fears became focused on the 'nuclear winter' debate—the omnipresent danger that a major nuclear war would destroy not only human civilization but profoundly disrupt the entire biosphere."[67] Furthermore, an incident where

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[62] Campbell Craig, "The Nuclear Revolution," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 365–366.
[63] Craig, "The Nuclear Revolution," 366.
[64] The National WWII Museum, "Research Starters: Worldwide Deaths in World War II," The National WWII Museum | New Orleans, 2024, https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-worldwide-deaths-world-war.
[65] Craig, "The Nuclear Revolution," 366.
[66] Robert Jervis, "The Political Effects of Nuclear Weapons: A Comment," *International Security* 13, no. 2 (1988): 84. https://doi.org/10.2307/2538972.

[67] Richard P. Tucker, "The International Environmental Movement," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 571.

nuclear fallout irradiated the Americans, indigenous islanders and the crew of a Japanese fishing ship near the Bikini islands caused public outcry.[68] However, fallout fears were not limited to the South Pacific. In the U.S., nuclear tests in Nevada led to growing concerns about radiation exposure among civilians. These issues created international headlines, which helped to form a movement against atomic fallout.[69] In the USA, prior to these incidents, many of those who were trying to restrict the usage of nuclear weapons were simply branded as "pro-communist," had their opinions discarded, or worse, were prosecuted by the government.[70]

Moreover, the worries of societal collapse and economic instability during the Cold War spread an aura of fear and trepidation. While the US struggled to manage their exuberant spending on the defensive industry, the Soviets slowly realised they could not keep up with the economic might of the US which was not obstructed by command economy, leading to shift in the Eastern bloc countries by "greater engagement with the West and disengagement from the Soviet orbit."[71] The Soviet economy was fundamentally flawed in its attempts to compete with the capitalist West. By stubbornly persisting with the Soviet ideals of a command economy, "Moscow only succeeded in further isolating the Soviet Union and accelerating the country's economic decline."[72] This led to "decreasing ideological persuasiveness of socialism"[73] in Eastern bloc countries as communist ideals failed to deliver promised benefits and prosperity, leading to a widespread feeling of corruption,[74] fraud,[75] and public apathy.[76] However, the USA was not spared from similar issues as a result of the Cold War economic burden. To prove the superiority of capitalism over communism, the US promoted free market and deregulation.[77] During the 2008 financial crisis, it became apparent that excessive Cold War era deregulation,

[68] Philipp Gassert, "Internal Challenges to the Cold War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 437–438.
[69] Tucker, "Environmental Movement," 566.
[70] Endy, "Power and Culture," 325.
[71] Ian Jackson, "Economics and the Cold War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 61.
[72] Jackson, "Economics," 61.
[73] Dianne Kirby, "The Religious Cold War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 555.
[74] Katalin Takacs Haynes and Matevž Rašković, "Living with Corruption in Central and Eastern Europe: Social Identity and the Role of Moral Disengagement," *Journal of Business Ethics*, (September 4, 2021): 833. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04927-9.
[75] Haynes et al., "Living with Corruption," 836.
[76] Haynes et al., "Living with Corruption," 833.
[77] Nicholas Guyatt, "The End of the Cold War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (OUP Oxford, 2013), 611.

particularly in banking and finance, allowed far too reckless spending and created a volatile financial market which was interconnected, leading to global repercussions.[78]

Furthermore, the threat of impending war created a sense of imminent danger, which was further emphasised by governmental agencies and private companies, which saw an eternal arms race as a means to vast and seemingly infinite wealth.

> The military forces and the vast bureaucracies attending to them in both superpowers had attained massive institutional power by the end of the 1950s […] Politicians, strategists, and military officials on both sides incessantly argued that if the cold war ever went hot, it would be necessary to deploy the most advanced and overpowering military armaments to avoid the catastrophe of losing World War III. […] As a result, huge and influential constituencies stood to gain from an eternal arms race between the two superpowers.[79]

However, the Cold War era influenced not only governmental policies and international relationships, but also individual people living under the ever-existing threat of immediate, indiscriminate and near-total annihilation. Due to this fact, O'Connell describes Doomsday preppers as people who "[…] view society as a fragile edifice, a thin veneer of behavioral norms over the abyss of greed and violence that is the truth of human nature."[80] This, however, is not an outdated view of the community, because O'Connell uses this quote to describe modern-day doomsday preppers.

What preppers seem to have in common is their distrust of the government and established authorities. This distrust mainly stemmed from the incompetence that seemed to permeate the governments of the Cold War era superpowers. Along with the state's respective propaganda, there were movies and literature which portrayed government officials as reckless, authoritarian, and inviting of nuclear war. Another reason for this distrust is the prepper's fear of Big Brother-type surveillance systems being employed by the governments, such as the one in Vonnegut's 1952 novel Player Piano, creating an aura of paranoia and a belief that the government would rather control than protect its people.[81] Furthermore, O'Connell mentions another key aspect of prepping. "Among preppers, a preferred way of reacting to crisis is to batten down the hatches and retreat to one's home, lavishly stocked with food and supplies and,

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[78] Guyatt, "The End," 612.
[79] Craig, "The Nuclear Revolution," 369.
[80] Mark O'Connell, *NOTES from an APOCALYPSE: A Personal Journey to the End of the World and Back.* (S.L.: Anchor, 2021), 3.
[81] M. Keith Booker, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2001), 41.

in many cases, weapons."[82] This statement sheds light on the prepper mindset, which counts on being always several steps ahead of the global events to protect themselves and their loved ones. Booker adds to this by saying that "every aspect of life becomes regimented, scheduled, and controlled for maximum economic efficiency, leaving little room for elements of life that might lie outside the realm of the economic."[83] Booker calls this effect "routinization,"[84] and it is one of the key aspects of the prepping culture.

When O'Connell depicts a story by an American army intelligence officer during the war in Iraq, he talks about how the officer noticed that those who suffered the most were the refugees, in other words, those who were prepared the least. The officer vowed "never to become a refugee."[85] O'Connell eloquently explains this phenomenon of taking care only of oneself and one's immediate family when he says:

> And this void of empathy seemed to me by no means incidental to the prepper movement, but rather a constitutive element of the entire project, the moral void around which it was structured. To be a prepper was to do everything one could do to avoid being one of the sufferers oneself, while contributing nothing to the prevention or alleviation of suffering in others.[86]

Moreover, O'Connell puts into question modern gender roles and gender societal expectations regarding masculinity when he says,

> Preppers are not preparing for their fears: they are preparing for their fantasies. The collapse of civilization means a return to modes of masculinity our culture no longer has much use for, to a world in which a man who can build a toilet from scratch—or protect his wife and children from intruders using a crossbow, or field dress a deer—is quickly promoted to a new elite.[87]

Although Doomsday preppers have much in common, there are some key differences among them. These differences primarily arise from their respective economic situation. The very affluent who could afford the best did so, but not merely to ensure their survival. They also

[82] O'Connell, *NOTES*, 3.
[83] Booker, *Monsters*, 17.
[84] Booker, *Monsters*, 16.
[85] O'Connell, *NOTES*, 34.
[86] O'Connell, *NOTES*, 34.
[87] O'Connell, *NOTES*, 32.

chose to do so to flaunt their status and maintain the prestige and quality of life they were used to.

> On the Trident Lakes website, I read that in the event of a nuclear, chemical, or biological emergency, the properties would be sealed by automatic airlocks and blast doors, and that each would be connected via a network of tunnels to an underground community center featuring dry food storage, DNA vaults, fully equipped exercise rooms, a greenhouse, and meeting areas. The promotional blurb also promised such features as a retail district, an equestrian center and polo field, an eighteen-hole golf course, and a driving range.[88]

Contrastively, those who could not afford the extortionate prices of such amenities simply focused on what they could realistically achieve, which was stockpiling as much food and weapons as they possibly could and building homemade bunkers and remote hideouts. Another difference was how these two kinds of preppers saw the government. While the ultra-rich saw it as a chance of systematic exploitation, the less affluent saw it as a weakness due to man's dependency on it.[89]

Doomsday prepping, which saw a boom during the Cold War anxieties, reflects economic disparities and societal fears which were prevalent during this time. Wealthy preppers invest in luxury bunkers, securing privilege through isolation, while working-class preppers emphasise self-sufficiency, stockpiling essentials as a response to economic instability. Distrust in government and institutions, which stems from the political feuds, media, and literature of the time, allows for survivalist and prepping tendencies to take root, although with differing motivations. While the rich preserve power, middle and lower-class preppers focus on independence and accumulation of key materials. Doomsday prepping is a legacy of the Cold War, which, due to today's political and economic instability, does not seem to be vanishing.

The term "yuppie", a young urban professional, is a key term for the analysis of Ellis's *American Psycho*. The term is used throughout the book itself, for example, during an interaction between the book's main protagonist, Patrick Bateman, and two women he met in a club. He attempts to start a conversation with them, upon which they promptly stop his advances by saying "[g]o back to Wall Street" and calling him a "[f]ucking yuppie."[90] This interaction exhibits the disapproval and disgust towards the yuppie culture, which was already apparent at

[88] O'Connell, *NOTES*, 42.
[89] O'Connell, *NOTES*, 30.
[90] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 183.

the beginning of the 1990s. The culture was seen in this light because it represented one of the darkest and twisted aspects of 1980s America, which Ellis scathingly criticised. Furthermore, the label embodies materialistic excess, which fuels moral emptiness, creating a zeitgeist of consumerist dehumanising effects on culture and society in the 1980s.

"Consumerism" in this context refers to a socio-economic order that encourages the continual acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts, making consumption a primary source of individual identity and societal value. As cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard observed, late 20th-century society became "dominated by commodities", saturated by "a kind of fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance" as objects, services, and material goods multiplied.[91] This represented "a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species", in which virtually "every desire, plan, need, [and] every passion" is turned into an object to be bought and consumed.[92] Moreover, in late capitalism, commodification extends into "hitherto uncommodified areas," in Fredric Jameson's words, signifying the penetration of capital into all aspects of life.[93]

Moreover, the yuppie culture was helped tremendously by the US economic policies of the time. The so-called Reaganomics, which Cambridge dictionary explains as "the set of economic ideas followed by Ronald Reagan when he was US President in the 1980s," which "included lower taxes and spending on public services, and less government control of the economy."[94] Economic policies introduced during Reagan's presidency continue to be as controversial as they were when they first came into effect. Niskanen called Reagan's economic plans "the most serious attempt to change the course of U.S. economic policy of any administration since the New Deal.[95] Some of the outcomes that emerged during Reagan's administration could perhaps be called successful, namely the reduction in inflation and greater market freedom, which allowed investors to operate under less strict governmental restrictions.[96] However, those results stem from policies which were already in place before

[91] Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society* (SAGE, 2016), 43. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526401502.n3.
[92] Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 44.
[93] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 36.
[94] Cambridge Dictionary, "YUPPIE | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary," *Dictionary.cambridge.org*, accessed February 4, 2025, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/yuppie.
[95] Klinger, Geoffrey D, Jennifer Adams, and Kevin Howley. *Money Talks: Alan Greenspan's Free Market Rhetoric and the Tragic Legacy of Reaganomics* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 61.
[96] Klinger et al., *Money Talks,* 77–78.

Reagan took the office, therefore, he merely benefited from the work of others policy makers. The results of his own policies and changes show much less desirable outcomes.

One of the biggest effects could be seen in the widening of the income gap due to the tax cuts introduced by the government.[97] The number of millionaires was growing rapidly, but so was the wealth gap. "By 1989, the richest two-fifths of families had the highest share of the national income (67.8 percent) and the poorest two-fifths the lowest share (15.4 percent) in the forty years the Census Bureau had been compiling such statistics […] The idea, of course, was simple: steal from the poor to give to the rich."[98] Reagan's critics pejoratively dubbed his policies "Trickle-down economics,"[99] due to their effects of not allowing wealth to be shared across the classes, but primarily keeping the vast majority of wealth between the members of the upper class. Apart from the widening income gap, the wages earned by the working class were stagnating. Therefore, the new policies created a culture where "Millionaires were sprouting up as fast as sunflowers in Kansas"[100] while the working class saw little improvement in their real earnings. Such changes prohibited the working and middle classes from upward economic mobility and stopped the trend of middle-class prosperity, which continued after the end of World War II up until Reagan's administration.

Furthermore, this era marks a breaking point in the way it eroded the idea of the American Dream. "After all, media outlets, leaders of industry, and politicians were all telling us that there was a buck to be made, and everyone was being promised a piece of action. […] Everyone felt like they needed to be at the table of this popular new economic game: get rich quick, no long-term commitments, no risk, and little to no work required."[101] While the names of the winners were touted in the popular media, there were, in fact, far more losers than winners. However, their names were insignificant and did not receive much attention.[102] The notion of coming to the USA, working hard, and making a fortune became virtually unattainable. Those who were in the know and already rich only distanced themselves further from the rest of the populace, and others were at a risk of succumbing to the quick-money schemes and the culture of greed.

[97] Klinger et al., *Money Talks,* 58.
[98] Klinger et al., *Money Talks,* 57.
[99] Klinger et al., *Money Talks,* 57.
[100] Klinger et al., *Money Talks,* 57.
[101] Klinger et al., *Money Talks,* 57.
[102] Klinger et al., *Money Talks,* 57.

Many of those who could not withstand the pressures of Reaganomics ended up homeless. The nation which has tripled its national debt under Reagan[103] has also managed to almost double its homeless population in merely three years.[104] Reagan has expressed his opinion on homelessness towards the end of his presidency when he said the homeless people "make it their own choice for staying out there," further adding that there "[…] are shelters in virtually every city, and shelters here, and those people still prefer out there on the grates or the lawn to going into one of those shelters."[105] Mitchell, however, states that Reagan's policies, during which he significantly reduced spending on housing and social services, were at fault for the nearly doubling of the homeless population.[106]

According to McGrath, yuppies originate from baby boomers, who have forfeited hippie ideals of the previous generation and accepted ideals of capitalism and materialism. The Yuppies themselves benefited greatly from many of the introduced policies. After all, the year when Reagan became president was named "The Year of the Yuppie" by *Newsweek*.[107] Yuppies were raised in times of great optimism, where one could become anything they wanted.[108] "When baby-boomers started entering the workforce, 'self-fulfilment' was taking on a different form: It was becoming more and more about performance, achievement, outward success."[109]

The professional fields yuppies tended to search out consisted mostly of law and medicine, but the quintessential field was business. Money and wealth-oriented yuppies started getting business degrees to the point that an M.B.A. degree became a symbol of yuppie success and a very direct path towards prosperity and wealth.[110] This seeming obsession over material gains resulted in the lack of relationships which would produce children, or in significant delays of these relationships in yuppie culture. The members would not have the time or would simply not want to spend the time on others with their careers to progress. "They nearly approached sainthood when they were able to accomplish more things in a single day than was humanly

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[103] U.S. Department of the Treasury. Fiscal Service, "Federal Debt Held by the Public," *FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis*, January 1, 1970, https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?g=k977.
[104] Martha R Burt, *Over the Edge: The Growth of Homelessness in the 1980s* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Washington, D.C, 1992), 140.
[105] Steven V. Roberts and Special to the New York Times, "Reagan on Homelessness: Many Choose to Live in the Streets," *The New York Times*, December 23, 1988, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/1988/12/23/us/reagan-on-homelessness-many-choose-to-live-in-the-streets.html.
[106] Don Mitchell, *Mean Streets: Homelessness, Public Space, and the Limits of Capital* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2020), 62.
[107] John L. Hammond, "Yuppies," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1986): 487. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2748754.
[108] Tom McGrath, *Triumph of the Yuppies* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2024), 11.
[109] McGrath, *Triumph of the Yuppies*, 14.
[110] Hongkun Wei, "A Study of American Yuppie Culture in the 1980s," *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 9, no. 07 (July 22, 2024): 233. doi: https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2024.v09i07.004.

possible. In order to make money, they even did two or more jobs and worked more than 60 hours a week."[111]

Another key aspect of yuppie culture is their "dress for success" mantra, using attire and accessories to signal status and prestige. For this, they would eventually even be ridiculed and satirised in subsequent years.

> The male is dressed in a Pin Stripe Suit with a Cross Pen attached to its jacket pocket; on his left wrist is attached a Rolex Watch and in his right hand is a Squash Racquet which indicates their favourite sport in leisure time; a Burberry Trench Coat is over his left arm; his L. L Bean duck hunting boots appears unmatchable with his attire, however, it is an indication of their brand loyalty when they choose shoes for recreational purposes.[112]

Here, Wei evocatively depicts what one may see on the cover of *The Yuppie Handbook*[113]. It is clear that their affinity to brands is very strong, to the point that they would wear very mismatched clothes for the sake of brandishing the clothing item's brand like a badge. Furthermore, the model wearing a squash racquet further signals a past time of the rich and affluent. Yuppies were often connected to lifestyles of materialism bordering on hedonism due to their habits of expensive dining and the love for expensive electronic gadgets. However, it was not just the clothes that signalled their life choices and class. Their infatuation with personal fitness was also common amongst the members of the yuppie culture.[114]

[111] Wei, "A Study of American Yuppie Culture," 234.
[112] Wei, "A Study of American Yuppie Culture," 234.
[113] Marissa Piesman and Marilee Hartley, *The Yuppie Handbook: The State-of-the Art Manual for Young Urban Professionals.* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985).
[114] Wei, "A Study of American Yuppie Culture," 235.

Social Alienation in *American Psycho* and *I Am Legend*

While *I Am Legend* explores social alienation through physical solitude and post-apocalyptic disconnection, Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* presents a more insidious form of estrangement, and that is one embedded within the very fabric of modern social life. Patrick Bateman is almost never physically alone. He frequently visits the most exclusive establishments, social gatherings, and surrounds himself with co-workers and sexual partners, both consensual and non-consensual. Despite that, he is utterly detached. Bateman himself famously says:

> […] there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: I simply am not there.[115]

His alienation occurs not because of the absence of others, but due to the hollow nature of the relationships he maintains with everyone he comes into contact with. In the world that Ellis hides beneath a veneer of normalcy lies a monstrous reality where connection is replaced by performance, identity by façade, and intimacy by estrangement.

The novel's Manhattan setting, a place of Wall Street yuppies, designer brands, and meaningless social rituals, serves as a hyperreal landscape where genuine emotions are near impossible to find. According to Jean Baudrillard, who theorises in his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, the hyperreal is a condition in which representations no longer refer to reality but instead become self-referential signs that only simulate meaning.[116] Bateman himself is the embodiment of such a simulation. He mimics the behaviour of a high-powered, intelligent, educated, investment banker and socialite, but the man beneath the surface is an unknowable void of no substance.

> I tried to read a trendy new short-story collection called Wok that I bought at Barnes & Noble last night and whose young author was recently profiled in the Fast Track section of New York magazine, but every story started off with the line "When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie" and I had to put this slim volume back into my bookshelf and drink a J&B on the rocks, followed by two Xanax, to recover from the effort. To make up for this, before I fell asleep I wrote Bethany a poem and it took a long time, which

[115] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 350.
[116] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

> surprised me, since I used to write her poems, long dark ones, quite often when we were both at Harvard, before we broke up.[117]

This scene vividly shows the extent of Bateman's alienation not just from others but also from himself. Although Bateman likes to pretend he is well-versed in current topics with well-memorised, comically long reviews from critics, whenever he is actually supposed to prove his intellectual prowess, he is unable to do so. The absurd repetition of the pop song line would be a very unlikely beginning to a critically acclaimed short-story collection, showing Bateman's inability to tackle works of substance and proving his superficiality and emptiness. As a result, Bateman is alienated from the exclusive community he so desperately tries to appear to be a part of.

Furthermore, due to Bateman's inability to accept his failure to be a part of the high-brow community, he compulsively self-medicates with strong narcotics and alcohol in response. This action can be interpreted as Bateman purposefully alienating himself from his emotions by numbing himself with drugs. In accordance with Baudrillard's theory, the popular short story represents a clear simulacrum of literary value. The intertextual repetition of a line from a pop song, "When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie," is reflective of a cultural product that mimics depth but offers none, similarly to Bateman. Literature here serves as a mirror to Bateman's inner core. Bateman's attempt at reading literature functions as a simulation of meaning, manufactured to appear artistic and noble while remaining hollow inside and devoid of connection with himself or others.

Moreover, this scene offers surprisingly more biting criticism to Bateman than is initially apparent. Bateman's desire to write poetry to Bethany is one of the few moments in the novel where Bateman appears to do something because he wants to, not merely because he is expected to, because it is popular. According to Freedman, however, poetry was on the decline in the 1980s. He says, "Americans are ambivalent about poetry. […] few Americans would confess to liking poetry in any form, let alone to actually reading it, even occasionally."[118] In the perfectly curated world of Patrick Bateman, who offers expert opinion on anything culture-related to anyone who will listen, it feels strange to see Bateman admit his fondness for poetry. This small confession shows how Bateman, over the years, slowly eliminated anything that made him who

[117] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 213.
[118] Morris Freedman, "Slowing the Decline of Poetry (Opinion)," Education Week, March 30, 1988, https://www.edweek.org/education/opinion-slowing-the-decline-of-poetry/1988/03.

he is and isolated his previous desires deep inside his core. As Bateman says himself when asked why he does not quit a job he hates, he responds "I… want… to… fit. . . in."[119]

This admission resonates with Sartre's concept of bad faith, where the subject denies their freedom and responsibility by adopting a socially constructed persona.[120] This sentiment is further developed by Sun, who eloquently says, "Bateman's life is a continual attempt to escape the existential anxiety of freedom by conforming to an identity that is imposed on him. He cannot transcend his bad faith because he is caught in an endless cycle of striving to meet external standards, and in doing so, he remains trapped in a state of alienation."[121] Bateman plays the role of a yuppie male, perfectly dressed and economically successful, even as he dismembers bodies and hallucinates conversations. In this regard, he is alienated not only from others but from any stable conception of self. This internalised need to fit society's requirements is illustrated when Bateman says,

> 'You should have the Diet Pepsi instead of the Diet Coke,' I say. 'It's much better. It's fizzier. It has a cleaner taste. It mixes better with rum and has a lower sodium content.' The waiter, Scott, Anne, and even Courtney - they all stare at me as if I've offered some kind of diabolical, apocalyptic observation, as if I were shattering a myth highly held, or destroying an oath that was solemnly regarded […]

This simple recommendation, albeit pretentious, is another rare peek at Bateman's actual preference. He prefers Pepsi to Coke, but Pepsi was not the most popular choice at the time, showing Bateman slipping from his character. Such a simple choice, like choosing a beverage, suddenly needs to become an intricate and premeditated action in a world where society judges your every move as if one is being tried. This example shows that Bateman is not only alienating himself from the world and others due to his desire to do so, but also because he is simply required to by society. This realisation, in turn, evokes an uncommon wave of genuine emotions in Bateman when he says, "I look down at my lap […] and for a moment think I'm going to cry; my chin trembles and I can't swallow."[122]

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[119] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 220
[120] Joseph S Catalano, A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's "Being and Nothingness" (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 85.
[121] Sun, "Bad-Faith," 75.
[122] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 91.

As Sun mentions, another crucial way in which Ellis portrays Bateman's alienation is through the motif of mistaken identity.[123] Throughout the novel, characters frequently confuse one another, swapping names and personalities without consequence. "[…] I've already bumped into Robert Ailes from First Boston in the Horror aisle, or at least I think it was Robert Ailes. He mumbled "Hello, McDonald" as he passed me by[…]"[124] The fact that Bateman does not even feel the need to correct the man whom he thinks he might know, alongside the fact that this confusion is never resolved and seems to affect no one, underscores the interchangeability of individuals in Bateman's world, resulting in one's utter alienation from others and their own identity. Bateman's compliance with the error is a silent admission that his external persona is just a mask hiding the true extent of his alienation. Additionally, as both Bateman and, presumably, Ailes met, they were both in possession of disturbing imagery, functioning as a simulacrum of the same twisted blueprint, which at first portrays a successful yuppie businessman, but upon closer inspection shows somebody completely detached and disconnected. In Bateman's world, everyone looks the same, speaks the same, and desires the same. People are interchangeable characters in a system driven by incessant copying of meaningless signals. The absence of differentiation mirrors the postmodern erosion of personal identity and illuminates the idea that alienation can occur even in the presence of others.

In late capitalist societies, Baudrillard asserts that signs replace meaning, and the subject becomes alienated through overexposure to simulation.[125] As supported by Allué's claims, Bateman was made by society not into a man but into a brand, which is a composite of commodities and rehearsed scripts, delivered in a world where no one is truly listening.[126] This can be exemplified best by analysing the scene where Bateman says to his co-workers and friends, "'Listen, guys, my life is a living hell,' they utterly ignore me, […]" and they continue "[…]to argue about allocating assets, which stocks look best for the upcoming decade, hardbodies, […]"[127] This excerpt shows Bateman trying to reach out to his friends and end the misery of isolation and alienation, however, they thoroughly disregard him. Bateman, being the same as the people he calls friends, is just as alienated from others and themselves, making them unable to perceive their friend calling for help.

[123] Sun, "Bad-Faith," 75.
[124] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 104.
[125] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 11.
[126] Sonia Baelo Allué, "American Psycho or Postmodern Gothic," Philologia Hispalensis 2, no. 13 (1999): 34–35, https://doi.org/10.12795/ph.1999.v13.i02.03.
[127] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 324.

Similar, however, perhaps even more unsettling, are the conversations Bateman has with a woman, Evelyn, with whom he is in a long-term relationship. As she is discussing her vain ideas for their future wedding, he is quite literally and out-loud telling her he wishes to bring weapons to the ceremony and violently murder her family. “I'd want to bring a Harrison AK-47 assault rifle to the ceremony; " I say, bored, in a rush, "with a thirty-round magazine so after thoroughly blowing your fat mother's head off with it I could use it on that fag brother of yours. To this idea, Evelyn responds by wanting “lots of chocolate truffles. Godiva. And oysters.” Bateman, further trying to shock Evelyn and wake her up out of her consumeristic onslaught train of thought of seemingly random exclusive foods and items, doubles down by saying, “[o]r an AR-15. You'd like it, Evelyn: it's the most expensive of guns, but worth every penny." I wink at her. But she's still talking; she doesn't hear a word; nothing registers. She does not fully grasp a word I'm saying. My essence is eluding her.”[128] Bateman is simply trying to get a human reaction out of Evelyn, but she, being a member of the same community, is completely detached and alienated from herself, others and her partner. Just like Bateman, she is often on strong narcotics, isolating and suppressing her actual feelings to the point of non-existence. By Bateman’s own admission, it is apparent how even relationships which would traditionally be perceived as the closest ones are suffering from the forces of alienation. Ellis uses a couple planning a wedding as a biting criticism of the emotional bankruptcy at the heart of consumerist relationships, where even the most intimate rituals are reduced to aesthetic choices, brand names, and surface performances, completely hollowed of genuine connection or understanding.

The dramatic and deranged conclusion of the novel drives this alienation to its logical extreme. Bateman confesses to his lawyer to all the crimes he believes he has committed and, as always, is ignored, allowing for his crimes to go unnoticed or disbelieved. Upon realising, there are truly no consequences to his actions and the fact that no one pays attention to anything he says or does, Bateman says, “[t]here has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession has meant nothing.”[129] Ellis delivers a devastating commentary on moral and communicative breakdown. Not only is Bateman isolated from others, but he is also incapable of meaningful self-expression. In Ellis’s seemingly perfect world, speech is noise, identity is unnecessary, and alienation is not a deviation but the norm.

[128] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 115–116.
[129] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 329–353.

Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* presents a profound portrait of social alienation, positioning Robert Neville not merely as a survivor of an apocalyptic plague but as a man spiritually and psychologically severed from all human connection due to the fact that he, Robert Neville, is quite literally the last surviving human in the world.[130] However, Neville is not only physically separated and alienated from others. Rather, he is estranged from meaning, community, and ultimately, himself.

In Neville's daily and seemingly endless quest for survival amidst the wave-like attacks of vampires, he became a slave to his routines, which keep him occupied and functioning, even though just barely. During the daylight hours, Neville tends to both repair the damaged defences of his home and further improve them, if he still has the time. He would check each window which he had boarded up, put garlic cloves on all windows and doors to ward-off vampires, put protective netting over his generator fuelled hothouse in which he grew his own garlic, conduct extensive scientific research, obsessively sharpen wooden stakes for hours on end to use both for denial of access to his home and murdering vampires.

By doing so, Neville is essentially turning his own home into a survivalist bunker, similar to those which sprouted during the Cold War. Furthermore, Neville's behaviour in this instance is akin to Doomsday prepper behaviour, which Booker calls "routinization."[131] Neville, in the name of efficiency and survival, turns what once was a happy family home into a bastion of defence against an invading force of vampires and their plague. However, by doing so, he alienates himself from the outside world with every plank of wood he uses to board up a window and with every lock and bolt he puts on his doors. This sudden change is very noticeable when Neville himself is described as "[f]inally one day he'd torn off the plywood and nailed up even rows of planks instead. It had made the house a gloomy sepulcher."[132] Here, Matheson is essentially saying that Neville's house bears a striking resemblance to a tomb, making him, in Cohen's terminology, a "living dead."[133] Fundamentally, it makes Neville not so dissimilar to the zombie-like vampires which hunt him, due to the fact that both are hiding from each other during their respective phases of sleep in gloomy, poorly-lit, tomb-reminiscent shelters. Like Neville, they also partake in their routine of hunting their nemesis. This view on Neville's

[130] Matheson, *I Am Legend.*
[131] Booker, *Monsters*, 16.
[132] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 3.*
[133] Simchi Cohen, "The Legend of Disorder: The Living Dead, Disorder and Autoimmunity in Richard Matheson's I Am Legend," Horror Studies 5, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 47, https://doi.org/10.1386/host.5.1.47_1.

similarity to the vampires is also expressed by Mohseni when he says that Neville "is more similar to the creatures whom he has abjected in the first place."[134]

Neville's alienating behaviour does not stop there, however. He continues to go to extremes by installing multiple air conditioning units, which he connects to his generator, in order to extract the repugnant smell of garlic that has embedded itself in Neville's clothes and even his skin.[135] Moreover, Neville would even burn down neighbouring houses to prevent vampires from getting a vantage point to jump onto his own home.[136] Here, it is visible that, in the name of survival, Neville alienates himself not only from his neighbourhood and the half-dead beings which populate it, but also from essentials, such as fresh air. The home, traditionally a space of intimacy and connection, becomes a bunker that seals him off from all other life in his private, self-sufficient fortress.

This behaviour fits Melvin Seeman's idea of alienation, particularly the dimensions of isolation and self-estrangement.[137] Neville experiences isolation in the form of total social disconnection. Not only is he quite literally the last human alive, but he also purposefully avoids even the possibility of interpersonal contact, treating every form of life around him as hostile and even destroying the homes of people he once called friends, further severing his bond with his past self and the world. This sentiment is further supported by Claire Sisco King, who says Neville's "isolation and alienation reaffirms understandings of trauma as producing social detachment that cuts off the survivor from all human community."[138]

However, Neville's desperate attempts at imposing structure in the form of his made-up routines on a world that no longer reflects any human order can be viewed as absurd. As the philosopher Albert Camus argues in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the absurd arises when human beings confront a world stripped of meaning, and yet persist in their routines, nonetheless.[139] Neville's routine mimics that of the absurd hero, clinging to the last relic of reason and duty in an irrational universe. Greenidge supports this idea when she says that "[s]trip away the vampires from I Am Legend and there is the story of a man alone in the world, a man coming to grips

[134] Hossein Mohseni, "Abjection of the Other in Richard Matheson's I Am Legend: The Subject's Deterrence Strategy for Becoming the Abject," Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture, no. 13 (2023): 477, https://doi.org/10.18778/2083-2931.13.24.
[135] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 3.*
[136] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 2.*
[137] Seeman, "Alienation," 783.
[138] Claire Sisco King, Washed in Blood (Rutgers University Press, 2011), 49.
[139] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 10.

with the fact that everything he knows is suddenly wrong […]"[140] Neville's persistence in defending his home, killing vampires, trying to find reason for the apocalypse, and continuing on surviving in general can be interpreted as moral, but it soon becomes apparent that these acts are performed more out of habit than hope.

Neville's constant struggle with useless endeavours in protecting his house can be seen in him saying, "[d]efense? He often thought. For what?"[141] His meaningless efforts in slaying all vampires are visible when he notes their seemingly inexhaustible numbers by saying, "[y]et he never seemed to get ahead. No matter how many stakes he made, they were gone in no time."[142] Additionally, his hopeless grasping at straws of science to get answers on why the world collapsed is apparent when he says, "[a]ll these books, he thought, the residue of a planet's intellect, the scrapings of futile minds, the leftovers, the potpourri of artifacts that had no power to save men from perishing."[143] and lastly, Neville tackling his own pointlessness of living when he realised that "[t]he thought of forty more years of living as he was made him shudder."[144] Neville's daily struggle for survival in a world emptied of meaning cements him as an absurd hero, clinging to routine and reason in the face of futility, where persistence replaces purpose, alienating him from meaning, from others, from his own self, and from the rational order of the world.

Moreover, Freud's theory of the uncanny can be utilised here to explore the intriguing effect of how something familiar can turn into horrific and fear-inducing.[145] This uncanny familiarity may be viewed in Neville's relationship with the vampires. While Reyes says vampires are generally considered to be supernatural or inhuman type of a monster[146] which could also be easily categorised as the Other, in Neville's case, this cannot be done so easily. Case in point, Neville's neighbour and everyday partner in their commute to work, Ben Cortman, who is not only able to talk, maintaining some of his mental faculties, but also his

[140] Ruqqiya Lydia Greenidge, "After The End: Post-Apocalyptic Fiction" (PhD diss., Aberystwyth University in Aberystwyth, 2018) 18.
[141] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 4.*
[142] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 10.*
[143] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 76.*
[144] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 95.*
[145] Jamie Ruers, "The Uncanny - Freud Museum London," Freud Museum London, September 18, 2019, https://www.freud.org.uk/2019/09/18/the-uncanny/.
[146] Reyes, *Horror*, 2–3.

physical appearance. However, in the state that we see him in the novel, Ransom claims that Neville's "former neighbor has become completely alien to him now."[147]

Vampires such as Ben Cortman are a permanent reminder that Neville is not fighting against creatures who necessarily inspire existential dread due to their appearance or behaviour. It is Cortman's retained human traits alongside his mindless, predatory behaviour which creates the exact tension Freud describes as the uncanny. As such, Cortman is no longer simply a vampire or a monster, but a grotesque echo of the life Neville has lost, a nightly visitation from a world that no longer exists. This way, Cortman embodies a deeply personal and psychological horror. However, it is not because Cortman is now wholly the Other, but because he is paradoxically not Other enough. It is precisely the vampires' nearness to what they once were and their function as an incessant reminder of the connection to the past that is now gone, which causes Neville's agony. Their mostly human look combined with animalistic and repetitive logic of moaning, screaming, scratching, and pacing, creates an eerie fusion of known and familiar and the strange and unsettling. Moreover, Neville, being a man of science, is dumbfounded by the behaviour of specific vampires, especially in relation to what repels them. Neville eventually discovers that the origins of the plague are not supernatural but viral in origin,[148] further distancing vampires from the Other because the only difference between him and them is a germ, something very common and certainly not supernatural, further blurring the lines between common and monstrous.

Additionally, Neville discovers the fact that the seemingly illogical behaviour of the vampires when it comes to what repels them originates from their pre-vampiric selves. He explains that if a person afflicted by the vampirism plague feared the cross in his natural life, it would only make sense for them to be repelled by a cross due to their memory of crosses traditionally fending off vampires in the folklore. For the same reason, "neither a Jew nor a Hindu nor a Mohammedan nor an atheist, for that matter, would fear the cross."[149] This confrontation with the once familiar made strange mirrors Freud's hypothesis that what was once known becomes frightening through its distortion or concealment.[150] Neville's misery, then, is not caused only by the absence of others due to his loneliness but by the vampires' unbearable nearness.

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[147] Amy J Ransom, I Am Legend as American Myth Race and Masculinity in the Novel and Its Film Adaptations (Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018), 30.
[148] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 87.*
[149] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 135.*
[150] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 164.

Neville's near-complete alienation can be perhaps seen in the way he treats his past friend, Ben Cortman, whose uncanny existence torments him. Due to the horror Cortman's daily "[c]ome out, Neville!" instils in Neville, he persistently hunts Cortman and obsesses over him.[151] This can be seen when Neville says, "[s]omeday I'll knock a stake right through his goddamn chest. I'll make one a foot long for him, a special one with ribbons on it, the bastard."[152] and "[h]e was out hunting for Cortman. It had become a relaxing hobby, hunting for Cortman; one of the few diversions left to him."[153] Neville makes hunting a past friend into his hobby in an attempt to justify his efforts to survive in the face of a world that is alien to him.

Towards the end of the novel, a scene appears which stresses the depth of Neville's isolation and alienation from all other living beings and from what it means to be human. Neville spots a young female, Ruth, walking in the middle of a field in direct sunlight, as a human would. He was so stunned that he had to blink multiple times, and his pipe fell out of his mouth since it was wide open. The act of seeing her made him question his own sanity. Furthermore, he would compare him to seeing the woman in a field with a desperate man dying of thirst when he said, "[t]he man who died of thirst saw mirages of lakes. Why shouldn't a man who thirsted for companionship see a woman walking in the sun?"[154] Here, Neville likens his situation of complete and utter social isolation to a man's basic human need for water. In doing so, Matheson hints that both of these human needs are natural and vital for one's survival. A person can simply not survive without both, and Neville, only having one of the two needs met, is living a half-life. In other words, Neville is not living as much as he is surviving, similarly to a nearly extinct animal or a plant.

Eventually, however, Neville learns that Ruth has been sent as a spy from a newly emerging society of evolved vampires. Ruth's people represent the next phase of civilisation. Neville's realisation that the infected have evolved into a new society which views him as a monster and looks upon him with fear and contempt marks the final, most radical phase of his alienation. He is no longer a man among monsters but a monster among men. This argument is supported by Maafa, who says that Neville is essentially just as alien to the vampires as they are to him. Neville's crimes against the vampires now make him a viable and deserving target for elimination, which he so often carried out himself.[155] Moreover, Neville fulfils the cycle of

[151] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 22.*
[152] Matheson, *I Am Legend,* 6.
[153] Matheson, *I Am Legend,* 110.
[154] Matheson, *I Am Legend,* 112–113.
[155] Sofiane Maafa, "Monster or Hero: A Post-Apocalyptic View in Richard Matheson's I Am Legend," *ATRAS Journal* 5, no. 02 (July 15, 2024): 45, https://doi.org/10.70091/atras/vol05no2.3.

being completely alien not just to the new society and the new world order surrounding him, but also to his humanness when he becomes the monster he always thought he was eradicating.

Murphy supports this view when she notes how this inversion challenges anthropocentric norms by showing how quickly human moral and social frameworks can become obsolete and undergo "a seismic shift."[156] Neville's scientific understanding, his ethical codes, and his self-image are shattered by the emergence of a new norm from which he is excluded. Neville's realisation of this fact is visible when he is dragged outside of his makeshift bunker and is being taken "[i]nto the world that was theirs and no longer his," and further by him saying, "I'm the abnormal one now. Normalcy was a majority concept, the standard of many and not the standard of just one man."[157] This is alienation not only from society but from history and species identity. Neville accepts that he no longer belongs to any social or moral system that grants coherence to human life. His death is a final withdrawal from a world that no longer contains a place for him, and frankly, has not for years. It is a fitting end for a man who has long since ceased to belong anywhere but in memory and myth, finally becoming the legend. Matheson thereby flips the traditional horror script to deliver a keen social commentary. Normalcy and monstrosity are relative. They are simply a matter of perspective, opinion, and majority.

Both *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson and *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis explore the theme of alienation. However, they do so through distinctly different settings and narrative styles. In *I Am Legend*, alienation is literal and existential. Robert Neville is, to his knowledge, the last human alive in a world overrun by vampires wishing his demise. His solitude is absolute, and the alienation he experiences stems not only from the absence of other people but from the collapse of every structure of meaning and normalcy that once defined his life. Matheson positions Neville as an "absurd hero,"[158] clinging to rituals and reason in a meaningless, chaotic world. His transformation of his home into a fortified bunker and his obsessive routines evoke a desperate attempt to impose order on this chaos. Although Neville desperately abjects the vampires, he comes to realise his routines and himself are not too different to his mortal enemies, blurring the line between human and monster, creating existential dread. Despite his existentialist struggles, there is a possibility that Neville comes to

[156] Bernice M. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 33.
[157] Matheson, *I Am Legend, 157.*
[158] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 108.

terms with his own obsolescence and hypocrisy in the end as he embraces becoming "the legend,"[159] alongside the final realisation that he is not the norm, but the aberration.

Contrastively, Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* is virtually never physically alone. He is surrounded by people, brands, and luxury. However, his alienation is internalised and systemic. Ellis paints a picture of a society so twisted and perverted by consumerism and shallow performative actions that genuine human connection is impossible. Bateman is a hollow shell, performing a role society expects of him. However, as Baelo-Allué claims, "It is the very society that has crowned Bateman and his lifestyle the one that suffers the consequences."[160] Therefore, Bateman performs his role of a serial killer in a society that made him this way, which results in the destruction of the society itself. While both protagonists cling to routines, Neville does it to keep his sanity, while Bateman uses routines to stave off his insanity. Bateman's alienation is performed through simulacra of brands, rehearsed opinions, and social roles. The more he conforms, the less human he becomes.

Neville's alienation is lamentable, stemming from grief, loneliness, abjection of the Other, and an increasingly futile battle for survival. On the other hand, Bateman's alienation is horrifying in its lack of reflection and accountability. Where Neville mourns the world where he had meaning and purpose, Bateman terrorises others in a world that never allowed for meaning to begin with. Neville ultimately dies a legend, acknowledging change. Bateman, conversely, remains trapped in a cycle of meaninglessness. In the end, his "confession has meant nothing"[161] in a world where speech itself fails to produce meaning.

[159] Matheson, *I Am Legend,* 167.
[160] Baelo-Allué, "American Psycho," 34.
[161] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 350.

Dehumanisation, Desensitisation, and Erosion of Sanity and Morality in *American Psycho* and *I Am Legend*

Ellis's *American Psycho* presents a chilling portrait of dehumanisation amid 1980s consumer culture, during which Patrick Bateman, a Wall Street investment banker and a serial killer, reduces human beings to objects as he evaluates everyone by surface attributes, such as designer clothes, business cards, and appearances. This objectification reflects what one critic calls "the dehumanizing effects of consumerist American society where fierce competition, egoism and the desire to get ahead leave no room for any human values."[162] To Bateman, features and traits that make one a human being are only adopted to pass as a human. Bateman's victims, whether homeless men, colleagues, or prostitutes, are treated as mere consumables. Occasionally, they are not only treated as consumables in a figurative sense but in a literal one. In one infamous scene, he meticulously recounts his morning grooming routine and the labels of his suit and tie, showing more intimacy with products than with people. This extreme commodification of life is a satirically literal fulfilment of the idea that rampant consumerism blurs the difference between consuming objects and consuming human beings. As Sonia Baelo-Allué observes, "consumerism includes everything, which dehumanises people and blurs the difference between consuming objects and consuming human beings. The concept of seriality is deeply embedded in our culture, and is shared by serial killer fiction, mass cultural productions, and by consumerism, which may account for the current popularity of the serial killer." Furthermore, she adds *American Psycho* "denounces consumerism by portraying the serial killer as the ultimate consumer."[163] Therefore, Bateman's serial murders mirror his society's serial acquisition of goods. He "collects" victims much as he does designer clothing, gadgets, and foods, collapsing the distinction between human life and disposable commodity. In this way, Ellis uses dehumanising horror to expose the moral hollowness of a culture obsessed with surface and consumption.

Bateman's dehumanisation of others is often explicit in the text. When encountering a beggar on the street early in the novel, Bateman not only murders the man but also cruelly chastises him for his appearance and smell, which can be perceived as a reaction of revulsion

[162] Coşkun Liktör, "'Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here': The Critique of Consumer Society in American Psycho and Fight Club," *Moment Journal* 3, no. 2 (December 15, 2016): 369, https://doi.org/10.17572/mj2016.2.369384.
[163] Baelo-Allué, Sonia, "Serial Murder, Serial Consumerism: Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho (1991)," *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies*, no. 26 (December 31, 2002): 72, https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.200210237.

that aligns with Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. According to Kristeva, the abject is that which is cast off to maintain one's own identity and purity; it is "what disturbs identity, system, order," and must be rejected with horror.[164] As Moore argues, the homeless man, in Bateman's eyes, represents everything he must abject.[165] To Bateman, he is pathetic because of his grovelling for money due to his poverty, the stench of excrement and alcohol, and because of his race and lack of status. All the aforementioned things disturb the pristine order of Bateman's hyper-groomed, status-conscious world, forcing Bateman to abject this "bum"[166] and turn him into the Other, allowing him to justify the homeless person's brutal attempted murder. His act of violence is both an attempt to reinforce his own superior identity and a symptom of his utter lack of empathy. This lack of empathy towards the homeless can be viewed as shared by the ruling elite of the time, as seen in President Reagan's comments on the issue of increased homelessness.

Indeed, Bateman exhibits what psychologists define as "dehumanised perception," seeing others as less than human.[167] Women, in particular, are targets for his sadistic fantasies. He refers to women as "meat" or assigns them value only in terms of their status, body parts and sexual utility.[168] Although he does not only murder women, when he does, it is with extreme brutality and utter dominance over their fates. Usually, he acts towards women this way whenever he cannot control them due to their independence, especially if they threaten his masculinity and supremacy. This argument is supported by Bordo, who says, "female sexual independence is represented as an enticement to brutal murder."[169] A woman is described as also having an "American Express card"[170] and paying for their meal, during which Bateman felt insecure beneath his mask of confident demeanour. She later told Bateman she is in a relationship with a man he despises and who, coincidentally, co-owns the most prestigious restaurant in town, in which Bateman seems never to be able to get a reservation. This is enough of a trigger for Bateman to cause a particularly gruesome display of near-inhuman brutality. Bateman then effortlessly and calmly describes misogynistic and dehumanising, grotesque

[164] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[165] Casey C. Moore, "We're Not through Yet: The Patrick Bateman Debate," The Comparatist 36, no. 1 (2012): 226–47, https://doi.org/10.1353/com.2012.0027.
[166] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 48.
[167] Lasana T. Harris and Susan T. Fiske, "Dehumanized Perception," *Zeitschrift Für Psychologie* 219, no. 3 (January 2011): 175, https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000065.
[168] Reagan Ross, "'Inside Doesn't Matter': Consumerism's Serial Annihilation of Women and the Self in American Psycho," *Fast Capitalism* 13, no. 1 (2016): 108, https://doi.org/10.32855/fcapital.201601.008.
[169] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley, Calif. Univ. of California Press, 2003), 7.
[170] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 225.

scenes of torture and murder, wherein Bateman treats women's bodies as lifeless objects to be carved up and consumed. Bateman's behaviour mimics that of a petulant child, however, with a sadistic twist. Because he cannot possess this woman, he is compelled to destroy her utterly. In her last moments, he makes sure she sees the nail gun with which he nails down her fingers and palms to the floor. He then bites off her lips and those parts of her hand he has not yet nailed down. Shortly after, he cuts out her tongue and beats her jaw with her own cut-off hand after which he violently rapes her multiple times. He keeps her body as a toy to play with for later.[171]

This entire blood-chilling scene shows Bateman's need not only to gain control over others, but to dehumanise them into unrecognisable shapes and objects. Bateman is shown in this scene and in others not only to take his victims' lives but also their senses. By violently ripping and cutting away at their senses and their ability to speak and gesticulate, he is protecting himself from legal repercussions, being an agent of dehumanisation to others, and attempting to regain control in a dehumanising society which made him this way. Furthermore, Bateman's erosion of morality and desensitisation come to light as he is shown to be unfazed and totally calm when he hears on a TV show that the possibility of nuclear war is very likely next month, or when he is more outraged by a homeless person begging for scraps than by acts of horrific murder. Through the murder, Ellis forces the reader into confrontation with abject horror. The violation of the human body becomes a reminder of mortality and moral collapse that we instinctively reject, just as Kristeva describes the corpse as the utmost abjection, the corpse being "death infecting life."[172]

Moreover, as C. Namwali Serpell observes, Ellis's repetitive, deadpan delivery of brand names, atrocities, and calmness in the face of possible annihilation of humankind induces "epistemologically and ethically suspended horror" where readers confront "violence *qua* violence, unmitigated and inexplicable." This tonal flattening "empties [the novel's] violence of meaning and culpability" as it is presented as banal, matter-of-fact, which is deeply unsettling.[173] We as readers become somewhat desensitised too, dragged through an onslaught of sordid and degenerate scenes until they begin to feel surreally normal.

Bateman's dehumanisation can be perhaps best portrayed by the fact that Bateman himself stops resembling a human, neither in his appearance nor his actions. During his breakdowns or

[171] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 226–229.
[172] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.
[173] C. Namwali Serpell, "Repetition and the Ethics of Suspended Reading in American Psycho," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 51, no. 1 (January 2010): 47, https://doi.org/10.1080/00111610903249864.

his murders, he mentions he makes "sucking noises and freakish piglike grunts," having his "eyes rolling back into my head, greenish bile dripping in strings from my bared fangs," narrating how he jumps "out at [the victim], jackal-like, literally foaming at the mouth," and eating dead carcasses, sand, even living humans, their blood, and genitalia, alongside other body parts.[174] However, perhaps the most telling is Bateman's own confession.

> I had all the characteristics of a human being - flesh, blood, skin, hair - but my depersonalization was so intense, had gone so deep, that the normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow, purposeful erasure. I was simply imitating reality, a rough resemblance of a human being, with only a dim corner of my mind functioning.[175]

As Carrol mentions in his telling overview of how societies create monsters, he says monsters inspire unearthly horror and fright to the protagonist.[176] This can be seen in Bateman saying, "I can imagine that my virtual absence of humanity fills her with mind-bending horror," further cementing Bateman's detachment from humanity.[177] However, as Sonia Baelo-Allué argues, in the postmodern age, it is the monster that has become the protagonist. She further postulates the idea that Ellis subverts the concept of normalcy because, in traditional Gothic literature, heroes prevail over monstrous villains and restore morality and balance.[178] Here, however, it is not possible because "[…] normality is what Patrick represents, the normal has become the abnormal."[179] Therefore, Ellis presents the only remaining possibility, and that is to destroy the society which allowed a person like Bateman to thrive. After all, Bateman is not portrayed as an outcast. In this gruesome world, he is a social elite.

Tied to Bateman's loss of humanity is his gradual loss of sanity and sense of reality. This gradual erosion of Patrick Bateman is charted over the course of *American Psycho* as both a personal descent into madness and a societal indictment. At the novel's start, Bateman is already a highly amoral being. He champions malicious anti-social views, including but not limited to, racist, misogynist, anti-homeless, and homophobic ideology and relishes in cruelty. Yet there is a mask of sanity he tries to maintain. As the novel progresses and his homicidal activities intensify due to his inability to maintain a stable identity in a dehumanising world, the mask

[174] Ellis, *American Psycho*.
[175] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 263.
[176] Carrol, "The Nature of Horror," 52–53.
[177] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 306.
[178] Baelo-Allué, "American Psycho," 34.
[179] Baelo-Allué, "American Psycho," 35.

slips. “I felt lethal, on the verge of frenzy. My nightly bloodlust overflowed into my days,” Bateman admits, “[m]y mask of sanity was a victim of impending slippage,”[180] and “I almost become unglued.”[181] These telling and indicting revelations explicitly show his dwindling grasp on sanity. The more he indulges his bloodlust, the harder it becomes to compartmentalise his two selves. As Bateman’s mind is slipping further, he also engages in self-harm more often, usually in the form of overdosing on narcotics and other addictive substances, and self-mutilation.

As Bateman’s mental state worsens, so does his paranoia, which follows him everywhere. Bateman records lewd and brutal acts in his bedroom under halogen lights, gives prostitutes costumes and directs their every movement, as if they were on a movie set. Eventually, Bateman starts imagining he is constantly in the spotlight of a camera when he says he “can almost hallucinate the camera panning low around us, fireworks bursting in slow motion overhead.”[182] Eventually, Bateman starts experiencing severe psychotic breaks and paranoia, hallucinating about a park bench devouring a child, or believing he’s being pursued by SWAT teams. In one scene, he claims “I take the .357 magnum out of its holster and, not wanting to arouse anyone in the vicinity, I screw a silencer onto the gun. This is one of the instances where the reader can verifiably say Bateman is distorting reality, due to Di Maio explicitly saying revolver suppressors, due to their inherent design, are near impossible to suppress.[183] From a Freudian perspective, one could say the repressed content, Bateman’s hidden madness, has erupted so forcefully that it shatters his ego’s stability, producing an uncanny scenario where the real and unreal intermingle.[184] During another scene involving an ATM, Bateman claims the machine is instructing him to feed it a stray cat. Additionally, Bateman’s moral erosion is evident in how his killings escalate in depravity. What begins with relatively quick murders in the form of stabbing a derelict or axing a colleague devolves into prolonged torture sessions, sexual violence, even partaking in cannibalism, necrophilia, and coprophilia. Due to his insanity, he pushes past every boundary of human decency, embracing what Noël Carroll would term the most “impure” monster.[185]

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[180] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 260.
[181] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 325.
[182] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 246.
[183] Vincent Joseph Martin Di Maio, Gunshot Wounds: Practical Aspects of Firearms, Ballistics, and Forensic Techniques, SECOND EDITION. (CRC Press, 1998), 78.
[184] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 182.
[185] Carrol, *The Philosophy of Horror,* 23.

Carroll further argues that horror elicits revulsion by violating fundamental categories such as mixing the living with the dead, human with animal, and sacred with profane.[186] Bateman's acts, such as preserving body parts of victims in his refrigerator alongside food, literally mingle life and death, human flesh and consumer goods, in abject displays that tarnish moral and natural boundaries. The novel's final chapters spiral into frenetic, hallucinatory violence and absurdity, suggesting that Bateman's sanity and, by extension, the coherent reality of this consumerist society, have fully disintegrated. As Liktör suggests, even when he attempts to confess his crimes to others, no one takes him seriously, either because they cannot process such horrors in their shallow worldview or because, symbolically, in this society, moral accountability no longer exists.[187] Bateman's complete moral decay is contrasted with the novel's suggestion that society has lost its moral bearings as well. The authorities never catch Bateman. In fact, the novel leaves ambiguities about whether some murders happened at all, underscoring that truth and ethics have become destabilised in this world. As Liktör illuminates, Bateman's violence can be seen as "a violent reaction against his dehumanisation by society," an extreme symptom of an environment that itself is psychopathic in its values.[188] Ellis ultimately offers no comforting resolution or punishment for Bateman. The horror here is not necessarily the abhorrent gore, but that Bateman's actions blend with the world despite the fact that he does not try to hide them. The last words of the novel, "THIS IS NOT AN EXIT," emphasise Bateman's entrapment in his hellish reality.[189] He remains in the hell of his own and his society's making, with no escape from the cycle of meaningless consumption and violence. *American Psycho* thereby uses the extreme of serial-killer horror to critique the moral vacuum of late-capitalist society, showing how dehumanisation and desensitisation mutually reinforce a climate in which monstrosity and insanity can thrive unnoticed. The glittering surfaces of 80s Manhattan hide a "darkness concealed behind the glittering mask of prosperity, success and glamour."[190] Ellis brings this grotesque darkness to light.

In Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*, the themes of dehumanisation and moral decay unfold in the context of a plague-ravaged world where the protagonist, Robert Neville, believes himself to be the last true human. The novel's horror premise of humanity turned into vampiric creatures immediately sets up a dichotomy between Neville and the infected "Others." From the

[186] Carrol, *The Philosophy of Horror, 185*.
[187] Liktör, "'Abandon All Hope," 378.
[188] Liktör, "'Abandon All Hope," 377.
[189] Baelo-Allué, "American Psycho," 35.
[190] Liktör, "'Abandon All Hope," 382.

beginning, Neville firmly dehumanises the vampire beings through forces of abjection. As Mohseni argues, "[i]n his eyes, they are the entities that cause the highest degree of physical and symbolic phobia in him, and therefore, they need to be abjected."[191] The efforts to dehumanise them can also be seen in the way he refers to them. He calls them "things," "creatures," or expresses disgust at their undead nature. Often, he merely calls them "they" or "bastards."[192] He further dehumanises the vampires by referring to them on the basis of their animalistic traits and comparing them to packs of hungry wolves, trying to tear at him or at each other. To Neville, the infected are mindless predators whom he systematically hunts by day, driving wooden stakes into their bodies with as little compassion as a farmer culling unwanted vermin. This mechanised extermination program illustrates a classic us vs. them mentality, in which Neville sees himself as human and the vampires as an abject Other to be destroyed.

However, Mohseni, interpreting McAfee, argues that Neville's abjection of the vampires is, as horror often is, contradictory.[193] While Neville does everything in his power to dehumanise, abject and turn the vampires into the Other, he desperately needs them to maintain his humanity and purpose. He uses the vampires' existence as justification for their murdering, claiming it is in the name of preserving the human race. As Mohseni tellingly argues, "how can one define oneself other than in opposition to the otherized abject?"[194] By losing the vampires, Neville also loses the ability to see himself as human, becoming what Kristeva calls a "stray."[195] Neville eventually turns into a straying existence at the novel's end when the vampires assert their dominance as the reigning society, killing the unevolved vampires. By doing so, they take Neville's remaining purpose in life, which finishes Neville's evolution into Kristeva's straying and "deject"[196] existence.

While Neville's treatment of women is not a pivotal theme in *I Am Legend*, its depiction of women reflects deeper anxieties about control, morality, and the erosion of human ethics. Female vampires are repeatedly eroticized and dehumanised, functioning as abject figures that destabilise Neville's emotional control and reinforce his need to reassert order through violence and sexual desires. Neville struggles daily to maintain his sanity and morality despite the female vampire's attempt at seducing him. Murphy argues that "the vampires whom Neville most

[191] Mohseni, "Abjection," 465.
[192] Matheson, *I Am Legend*.
[193] Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[194] Mohseni, "Abjection," 469.
[195] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 8.
[196] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 8.

loathes are female."[197] This apparent hatred erodes Neville's self-control when he is portrayed as nearly giving in to his base urges and sexually violating the dazed and sleeping female vampires. Moreover, he consciously questions his decision when it comes to picking female non-consenting vampires on whom he primarily experiments, but is unable to come up with a rational decision. Bordo explains that the female body is often used as "property, to be 'taken' and used at will. Such a body is denied even the dignity accorded a wild animal."[198] Neville may support this outlook to an extent through his experimentation on women, sexually violent tendencies, and his referring to the vampires in animal terms.

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection helps to further explain this portrayal. The decaying, seductive female vampire represents a threat to conceptual boundaries between life and human and non-human.[199] Mohseni supports this fact by saying, "[…] the vampires are simultaneously repellent and seductive for two reasons: they look like cadavers, but even in their zombie-like state, they have a strong resemblance to him as the sole survivor of humanity."[200] McAfee's interpretation of Kristeva can be used to further this argument by suggesting that the paradoxical nature of the vampire "crumbles the borders."[201] Neville seeks to construct around himself, physically and symbolically. As previously discussed, his identity depends on their abject presence as a means of oppositional definition. Thus, the abjection of female vampires does not simply repel Neville. Rather, it defines him, even as it drives him toward dehumanisation and mental and moral disintegration. By constantly trying to separate himself from the inhuman vampires, he becomes less human in the process. However, Neville's erosion of morality should not come as a surprise when Neville himself says, "[m]orality, after all, had fallen with society."[202]

Yet *I Am Legend* complicates this stark dehumanisation by exploring Neville's psychological strain and the gradual erosion of his certainty about the monsters. Eventually, Neville's indomitable determination to exterminate vampires begins to waver as he starts to question his actions and whether the vampires are truly evil. "But are his needs any more shocking than the needs of other animals and men? Are his deeds more outrageous than the deeds of the parent who drained the spirit from his child?"[203] Maafa argues that vampires were

[197] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, 33.
[198] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 11.
[199] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 109.
[200] Mohseni, "Abjection," 469.
[201] McAfee, *Julia Kristeva*, 49.
[202] Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 52.
[203] Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 21.

victims of the plague, rather than its perpetrators. She, too, supports the argument that this might be one of the reasons why Neville decided to accept his fate and commit suicide as a form of repentance.[204]

Moreover, Freud's concept of the uncanny permeates Neville's daily existence. By day, Neville moves through a suburban landscape that was once normal but is now eerily lifeless and populated only by corpses or lurking vampires. By night, his own home becomes a besieged fortress. A moment illuminating Neville's change in emotional depth is when he speaks about how his house changed alongside him. Apart from the whole house being purely utilitarian, with tools lying everywhere, a room, which was once inhabited by his daughter, whom he loved dearly, was now inhabited by a freezer full of frozen, icy, monotonous meals. The room serves as an uncanny reminder of the familiar warm love Neville held for his daughter, turned into a cold, unsentimental room which "[…] had once belonged to Kathy and now belonged to his stomach."[205] One of the most poignant uncanny moments comes in Neville's flashback to the start of the plague. Neville's wife succumbed to the infection and died. Unwilling to hand her body over to the authorities' torch pits, Neville secretly buried her in an act of love and defiance. But Virginia did not remain buried. She rose from the grave as a vampire and returned to Neville's home. The scene of Neville's undead wife approaching their doorstep is an example of terrifying uncanny horror where a beloved, familiar figure becomes a terrifying stranger. Neville ultimately has to confront and destroy her vampiric form, a deeply traumatic act that illustrates Kristeva's notion of abjection, where death infects life.[206] The boundary between life and death, spouse and monster, is obliterated in that moment, evoking both profound horror and sorrow. His choice to honour her humanity by burial ironically leads to an uncanny scenario that forces him to kill the creature that, in Neville's eyes, wears his wife's face. Here, Matheson shows dehumanisation from another angle in which the disease has literally dehumanised Neville's loved one, and Neville's own survival demands an act of dehumanisation and desensitisation that tears at his sanity. Ultimately, Neville's decisions led to his house becoming not only the last bastion of safety but, paradoxically, as Murphy puts it, his "prison."[207] It is this uncanny prison in which he experiences frequent mental breakdowns as a result of his traumatic family experiences. To survive, he must seek refuge in the house in which he is incessantly

[204] Maafa, "Monster or Hero," 38.
[205] Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 5.
[206] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[207] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*. 33.

reminded of faces which once brought him joy, but which he must now repress deep down to continue functioning.

Neville's mental collapse and torture are usually connected to his utter loneliness, the death of his family, and being surrounded by vampires. He frequently blunts his emotions through alcohol abuse and other forms of self-harm. He oscillates between rage and despair, emotional numbness, hyper-vigilance at sundown, and bursts of uncontrolled anger. During these outbursts, he would throw whiskey glasses against the walls and cut himself with their shards. One particularly illuminating passage occurs when Neville has a "drunken tirade" shouting at the vampires outside to leave him in peace, during which he manically rationalises about their condition. In this rant, Neville further entertains the idea that the vampires are an oppressed societal group and describes them as a "disenfranchised"[208] minority and himself as the target of their prejudice. This moment is crucial because it hints that, on some level, Neville is aware of the role reversal that is coming, or at least he imagines the situation from the vampires' perspective. The extreme states that Neville goes through allowed him to view the issue of dehumanisation in a different light, scratching away at the wall of his impenetrable sureness.

Gradually, Neville's desensitisation and dehumanisation are nearly complete upon a pivotal point in the story when his newly found companion, a stray dog he had befriended, dies from the vampiric infection, after Neville finally finds solace in his company after years of solitude. Neville even threatens suicide if the dog's death comes to pass. However, once it does, Neville undergoes a grim transformation during which he becomes emotionless. Instead of engaging in yet another self-harming episode, the narrator says,

> After the first few weeks of building up intense hope about the dog, it had slowly dawned on him that intense hope was not the answer and never had been. In a world of monotonous horror there could be no salvation in wild dreaming. Horror he had adjusted to. But monotony was the greater obstacle, and he realized it now, understood it at long last.[209]

[208] Chris Koenig-Woodyard, "'Lovie – Is the Vampire so Bad?': Posthuman Rhetoric in Richard Matheson's I Am Legend," In *Posthuman Gothic*, edited by Anya Heise-von der Lippe, 1st ed., (University of Wales Press, 2017): 86. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.14491659.9.
[209] Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 105.

As Jürgen Moltmann, a German theologian, famously said, "[t]hat is why it can be said that living without hope is like no longer living. Hell is hopelessness, and it is not for nothing that at the entrance to Dante's hell there stand the words: 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.'"[210] It becomes apparent that Neville's ability for emotional response has collapsed. Horror, once something that would provoke fear, grief, or trauma, has become background noise. The narrator says that "[For Neville], the word 'horror' had become obsolete. A surfeiting of terror soon made terror a cliché."[211] This reflects existential and emotional numbness with which Neville buries the dog alongside his hopes and the rest of his humanity. When Neville further mentions "the dungeon he existed in," from which he was "[n]either seeking to escape with sudden derring-do nor beating his pate bloody on its walls,"[212] he is signalling that by avoiding both extremes, he continues living in an desensitised middle space in which he is neither truly insane or sane, but merely existing out of habit as a mechanized remnant of what he once was. Neville's emotionless state is evident by him saying, "I am predominantly vegetable" and "[t]hat was the way [Neville] wanted it."[213] However, Matheson suggests that Neville's sanity, in a way, returns at the very end upon finally seeing the truth of his situation. He transcends the delusions he held about being a lone crusader for humanity's sake, seeing the world had irreversibly changed and with it the definitions of morality and good and evil. Neville realises that all along, he was "an invisible specter,"[214] murdering people daily, leaving behind nothing but butchered bodies. At that moment, Neville finally does not feel animosity towards the vampires and has forfeited his life.

I Am Legend uses the tropes of horror, such as monsters, loneliness, gore, and other fear-inducing psychological effects, such as the uncanny and the Other, to trace how a man's sanity, morality, humanity, and affectivity can erode when the social structures that uphold them fall apart. As Koenig-Woodyard notes, the novella "highlights ontological fluidity and challenges traditional boundaries between human and vampire,"[215] presenting a posthuman scenario where order is uprooted. By the conclusion, Neville has lost everything, including his family, his hope for normalcy, and even his role as hero. And yet, the narrative forces us to empathise with what was seemingly the monster. As Maafa concurs, Matheson thereby critiques the rigid thinking

[210] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 32.
[211] Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 140.
[212] Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 105.
[213] Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 114.
[214] Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 166.
[215] Koenig-Woodyard, "Lovie," 77.

of his 1950s context of Cold War-era fears of the Other.[216] Be it communists, aliens, diseases, or the ever-present possibility of atomic war, Matheson suggests that today's feared Other might be tomorrow's normalcy, and the true horror is the inability to adapt one's moral understanding to that shift. *I Am Legend* is as much a tragedy of failed communication and understanding as it is a horror story. Had Neville understood earlier that some infected were sentient and peaceful, and had the infected understood Neville's anguish, perhaps the bloody conflict could have been avoided. But in the world Matheson gives us, fear and Otherness prevail, leading to Neville's demise. Matheson's biting critique, hidden beneath the horrors of a man surviving in an apocalyptic world, lies just beneath this. *I Am Legend* asks what happens when a person or a society cannot see the humanity in the Other. The answer is a cycle of violence where roles of victim and monster become perilously interchangeable. Therefore, *I Am Legend* can function as a cautionary tale of what might happen to a society which does not recognise the humanity in others.

Dehumanisation is a crucial aspect of both novels through which horror operates. In *American Psycho*, Bateman dehumanises others based on his arbitrary, unfair, and twisted perception of success and morality, reducing them to their social markers of appearance, wealth, and usefulness. This climaxes in acts of near-unimaginable violence where human bodies are treated as mere material. Sonia Baelo-Allué notes that Bateman is the "ultimate consumer," and his serial killings mirror society's serial acquisition of goods.[217] Moreover, his actions are further demystified by Kristeva's theory of abjection, which illuminates Bateman's eradication of those who disturb his curated identity by possessing physical, social, or moral impurity, imagined or not. Bateman's violence becomes a ritual of reasserting dominance in a society that measures value by aesthetics and power, further proven by Baelo-Allué, stating, "'power' is all, […] you must therefore have that 'power' or end up broken by it."[218]

In *I Am Legend*, dehumanisation is more ambiguous. Neville dehumanises the vampires to preserve his sanity, purpose, and legacy, calling them "things" and "creatures."[219] Yet as the novel progresses, the line between human and monster erodes. His former neighbour Ben Cortman retains enough humanity to unsettle Neville deeply, evoking Freud's concept of the uncanny. Matheson's revelation that Neville himself is the devilish terror to the new post-human society invites a re-evaluation of who is truly dehumanised. Here, horror emerges not from

[216] Maafa, "Monster or Hero," 37–38.
[217] Baelo-Allué, "Serial Murder," 88.
[218] Baelo-Allué, "Serial Murder," 84.
[219] Matheson, *I Am Legend*.

monstrosity but from moral ambiguity and the failure of existential certainty. Matheson's poignant inversion of the vampire myth places Neville in the role of the feared Other, asking whether monstrosity lies in one's biology or in one's perception and mind.

Both protagonists experience a severe deterioration of their psychological faculties, although for different reasons. In *American Psycho*, Bateman's descent is framed as a personal descent into madness caused by a culture into which Bateman belongs. His inability to maintain a stable identity within a dehumanising, hyper-capitalist environment results in paranoia, hallucinations, psychosis and acts of unspeakable gore. His increasing brutality is mirrored by an indifferent society that neither notices nor punishes his crimes. As Baelo-Allué and Liktör argue, Ellis uses Bateman to represent a monstrous inversion of normative morality in a world where monstrosity is masked as success.[220][221] Bateman's descent culminates in episodes of self-mutilation, hallucination, and the disintegration of narrative coherence and reliability. In the final pages, the boundaries of reality dissolve entirely, suggesting that morality, identity, and truth are no longer necessary aspects of the hyper-consumer society which Ellis so scathingly criticises. Contrary to Matheson's apocalyptic portrayal, Ellis depicts a world which may not end because of a nuclear apocalypse but "via a psychological de-humanisation process whereby we literally lose our humanity from the inside out."[222]

While Neville's decline is quieter, it is no less intense by any means. His rigorous daily routines and experiments become Sisyphean in nature. Science offers no comfort or solution for years, and both the absolute extermination of vampires and forging a relationship are impossible. A key aspect of Neville's mental deterioration is caused by his inability to come to terms with how dehumanised and desensitised he has become. His psychological erosion stems from the slow realisation that he may not be the hero of the story, but the villain. Thusly, *I Am Legend* uses horror to destabilise moral binaries and borders and confronts the reader with existential uncertainty. The recognition that his victims are sentient beings with families, communities, and rituals of their own renders his survival a moral failure. Neville's final revelation is not just a narrative twist but a philosophical question in which Matheson hints at the fact that monstrosity is relative, and survival at all costs does not equal righteousness.

[220] Baelo-Allué, "American Psycho," 34–35.
[221] Liktör, "'Abandon All Hope," 382.
[222] Ross, "Inside," 105.

Theme of Consumerism in *American Psycho* and *I Am Legend*

The theme of consumerism is one of the key subjects in both of the novels, which permeates the story. Although both novels are set apart by two decades, due to consumerism being a crucial aspect of the modern capitalist society, it can be seen as impacting the lives of the characters through a dehumanising force. In *American Psycho*, consumerism manifests in the material excess and moral decay of the late 1980s Wall Street culture, while in *I Am Legend*, the consumption of human life by vampiric entities mirrors fears of mass conformity and loss of individuality.

In *American Psycho*, the theme of consumerism and its effects can be spotted on nearly every page from the beginning until the end. The story begins with a visually striking image of the words "Abandon all hope ye who enter here" written in big, crimson letters on the side of a Chemical Bank, which was active in many prominent financial fields, notably retail and investment banking.[223] Ellis references here the actual inscription above the gate of Hell in *Dante's Inferno*.[224] This contemporary entrance to Hell forewarns any traveller of the immediate dangers that may befall them by entering the place, which Ellis likens to the worst location one might find themselves in when it comes to the Christian faith. This is in accordance with Liktör, who argues that the novel "presents us with a vision of contemporary Hell."[225] However, the graffiti on the side of the bank does not necessarily dub only the bank to be the place from which the Devil rules, but rather the whole adjacent area, because the bank's location marks the entrance to Wall Street, a place for the modern-day devils in the eyes of Ellis.

The scene continues with a taxi ride, which is shared by Patrick Bateman, an investment banker and *American Psycho's* main protagonist, and Timothy Price, also a banker and a person Bateman considers his best friend.

> Abandon all hope ye who enter here is scrawled in blood red lettering on the side of the Chemical Bank near the corner of Eleventh and First and is in print large enough to be seen from the backseat of the cab as it lurches forward in the traffic leaving Wall Street and just as Timothy Price notices the words a bus pulls up, the advertisement for Les Misérables on its side blocking his view […][226]

[223] Ellis, *American Psycho,* 1.
[224] Dante Alighieri, *The Vision; Or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise of Dante Alighieri*, Translated by H.F. Cary (Covent Garden: Henry G. Bohn, 1814), 12.
[225] Liktör, "'Abandon All Hope," 373.
[226] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 1.

In this excerpt, Ellis shows the irony of the consumer culture in which the two voluntarily live. As they are leaving Wall Street, they can see the writing on the wall, which was supposed to warn them, or at least, make them consider the possibility that their occupation and lifestyles are flawed. Instead, Price chooses to ignore the words which were meant to offer help. Shortly after, however, a bus stops next to them and obstructs Price's view with an advertisement for *Les Misérables,* which the bus carries on its side.[227] Therefore, the words of warning are now actively being obstructed by a moving advertisement.

The scathing criticism of consumer society in this scene does not end here, however. By juxtaposing *Les Misérables*[228] with the two extremely wealthy bankers, Ellis points out the society's blindness to immorality and injustice. This notion is also shared by Ross, who writes the usage of the play is "a constant reminder of human misery surrounded by so much human excess."[229] While in *Les Misérables,* Jean Valjean is ostracised and even imprisoned by society for his crime of stealing, albeit for righteous reasons, in *American psycho,* the upper classes live a life of moral debauchery with not many other concerns than to consume everything and everyone around them. This argument can be illustrated in the scene where Bateman, in a crazed state, kisses the poster of Eponine, a figure of love, longing, and self-sacrifice. Shortly after, he starts "leaving brown streaks of bile" on her face and possibly writing the slur "Dyke"[230] under the poster. Bateman, in a state of temporal insanity, was finally able to search for a human connection and a figure of moral substance, but due to the destructive nature of his consumeristic behaviour, he resorted to a coping mechanism of violence and desecration. Furthermore, the parallel depicts two characters who are on two complete opposites of the spectrum of morality. On one end, there is Jean Valjean, a reformed criminal who benefits those around him and becomes a positive influence in his community and on the other end, there are Price and Bateman, who are incapable of possessing any of the aforementioned virtues or any moral fibre whatsoever.

The irony of this entire situation is lost on Price to the point that he even offers to pay five dollars to the cab driver to turn up the music to the fullest extent the car radio enables. Therefore, Price will rather pay for and consume nearly deafening levels of noise, drowning out reality in the process, than even begin contemplating the choices he made and the state of the world

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[227] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 1.
[228] Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (1862; repr., London: Bbc Books, 2018).
[229] Ross, "Inside," 119.
[230] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 140.

around him. Shortly after, Price berates the taxi driver. “Will you fucking turn this up?" he snaps but distractedly at the driver, the Crystals still blaring from the radio. It don't go up no higher," maybe the driver says.”[231] Here, Price is getting increasingly irritated as there is a limit to the amount of music he is able to consume at the current moment. Price will rather play the role his role of a narcissistic businessman rather than help to correct the reality in which he lives, with the music serving as a distraction from the world he criticises. This fact is supported by Sharif and Saeed when they explain Sartre’s concept of bad faith, where people have “a tendency to behave like a social automaton conforming to society’s roles and values,”[232] which leads to their submission or destruction. Moreover, none of the two businessmen bothered enough to truly focus on the driver or on what he said to them because the driver was “black, not American”[233] and because of his social standing, which, in the eyes of the two yuppie businessmen, is situated many levels below their own so that the driver might as well not exist. Such behaviour is common to Bateman’s peers, according to Sharif and Saeed.[234]

> Timothy ignores him and irritably continues. "I could stay living in this city if they just installed Blaupunkts in the cabs. Maybe the ODM III or ORC II dynamic tuning systems?" His voice softens here. "Either one. Hip my friend, very hip." He takes off the expensive-looking Walkman from around his neck, still complaining.[235]

Here, Ellis portrays the obsessive preoccupation with electronic devices that saturate the novel. The members of the upper classes are shown to be in an eternal chase to be in possession of the latest electronic devices, which allow them to stand out above the faceless, shapeless rest of their group. Owning the latest gadgets signifies the ability to participate in the culture of consumption, reinforcing their social standing

> He continues talking as he opens his new Tumi calfskin attaché case he bought at D. F. Sanders. He places the Walkman in the case alongside a Panasonic wallet-size cordless portable folding Easa-phone (he used to own the NEC 9000 Porta portable) and pulls out today's newspaper.[236]

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[231] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 1.
[232] Honya R. Sharif and Alan A. Saeed, “The Fear of Freedom in Hyperreality and Its Adverse Effect on Identity in Bret Easton Ellis’ American Psycho,” *Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 95, https://doi.org/10.14500/kujhss.v5n1y2022.pp94-100.
[233] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 1.
[234] Sharif, “The Fear,” 97.
[235] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 1.
[236] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 1.

The infatuation with luxury items, however, does not merely end with electronic devices. In this passage, Bateman carefully curates the costly items which his friend Price is flaunting. Alongside the devices, fashion items, such as clothes and other forms of accessories, are a crucial and indispensable part of the everyday appearance that the yuppies so painstakingly maintain. This statement is further supported by Liktör, who says, capitalist consumer society […] is characterised by an insatiable desire for the acquisition of commodities."[237] Intriguingly, Bateman is not only able to recognise every and each brand and model Price possesses, but also the brands and makes of products he has owned in the past. Furthermore, it highlights the need for constant cycling and replacement of items, which is a quintessential part of consumer culture. Although even luxurious items are quickly discarded and replaced, they are not immediately forgotten by Bateman because, had he forgotten them, he would not be able to further assess his self-worth when he compares himself and his brand-new luxury items with others and the devices he and others still own or used to own.

Moreover, apart from mentioning his age, this is also the first time Bateman describes his best friend, Price. He is even mentioned to be the only interesting person Bateman knows. Perhaps more interestingly, he does not waste time and does not bother himself with the description of his face, physique, or character. The only aspect of his personality he chooses to comment on is his luxury possessions. By doing this, Ellis shows how the consumer culture dehumanises both its victims and agents. A person Bateman considers to be his best and only interesting friend is summarised as a list of items which one might find on a shopping list or on a mannequin in a store display. In this way, the way Bateman describes Pierce is a perfect example of Baudrillard's theory, where society has moved beyond imitating reality. Instead, there is now only a world where signs like brand names, appearances, and curated lifestyles have replaced reality itself.[238]

Through the extreme example of Bateman, Ellis shows that the fetishisation of expensive and hard-to-attain objects permeates not only certain aspects of the upper class's life but rather its entire waking existence.

> In bed I'm wearing Ralph Lauren silk pajamas and when I get up I slip on a paisley ancient madder robe and walk to the bathroom. […] After I change into Ralph Lauren

[237] Liktör, "'Abandon All Hope," 375.
[238] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 2.

> monogrammed boxer shorts and a Fair Isle sweater and slide into silk polka-dot Enrico Hidolin slippers I tie a plastic ice pack around my face and commence with the morning's stretching exercises.[239]

From the second Bateman wakes up, he is surrounded by only the most expensive versions of products and items money can buy. His infatuation with brand names and products he uses to describe his mundane daily actions borders on religious fervour. According to Murphet, Ellis's usage of brand names throughout the entire novel makes the brands and their product perhaps even more recognisable than the actual protagonist, Patrick Bateman himself.[240] Through the acts of repeated daily consumerism, he managed to twist a daily self-care routine into a ritual of self-adoration and self-indulgence. This ritualisation emphasises how deeply and thoroughly consumer culture has penetrated his psyche, turning everyday self-care into a performative act of devotion to materialism and narcissism.

Moreover, Bateman's entire morning ritual consists of approximately fifty-eight steps. This staggering number of steps functions as a critique and damnification of the yuppie culture of which Bateman is a proponent, a victim, and a proud member. Furthermore, Bateman holds himself in such high regard and reverence that he resembles an object which needs to be continuously polished and treated, as if he would fall apart had he missed a single step of his exhaustive morning routine. By doing so, Bateman becomes a commodified version of a human. He forfeits his humanity in order to become the closest thing he holds dear, turning into an inanimate object which does not have to feel, care and can be used to be marketed to others wishing to become just like Bateman himself.

Bateman's morning routine is not only far too exhaustive, but it is also redundant in many of the steps.

> I pour some Plax antiplaque formula into a stainless-steel tumbler and swish it around my mouth for thirty seconds. Then I squeeze Rembrandt onto a faux- tortoiseshell toothbrush and start brushing my teeth (too hung over to floss properly - but maybe I flossed before bed last night?) and rinse with Listerine. Then I use the Probright tooth polisher and next the Interplak tooth polisher (this in addition to the toothbrush) which has a speed of 4200 rpm and reverses direction forty-six times per second; the larger tufts clean between teeth

[239] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 22.
[240] Julian Murphet, *Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho: A Reader's Guide*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 27.

and massage the gums while the short ones scrub the tooth surfaces. I rinse again, with Cepacol.[241]

Only a mere part of his routine, consisting of dental hygiene, mentions six distinctive brand names and uses nine singular dental hygiene items. These items are often overlapping in both form and function, being rendered useless when used in addition to Bateman's other hygiene devices. Once again, Bateman's usage of expensive, overlapping, and redundant cleaning methods and devices highlights the endless consumption, which is a key and indispensable aspect of hyper-consumerism. Through these acts of pointlessness, Bateman masks his inner void, which he tries to fill with disposable gadgets and empty acts of consumerist devouring. Bateman's ceaseless hunt for new products and self-care methods, which he uses to engulf himself in, is perhaps deeper in its nature than it may appear at first glance, showing not only the perpetual and unabashed participation in the consumer culture, but also the examples of Bateman's fear of obsolescence. Obsolescence, especially planned obsolescence, might be one of the most insidious and covert threats consumer culture poses.[242] Bateman, through his extensive and expensive skincare and hygiene routines and through his endless consumption of fashion and electronic devices, tries to stay the hand of time. He, along with his peers, is terrified of the fact that they might be getting older because they associate old age with weakness, loss of control, loss of attractiveness, and the inevitability of death. Paradoxically, Bateman and other members of the consumer culture are, therefore, forced to replace items at rapid speeds, not realising that they themselves are being replaced and consumed by the culture of which they are a component.

Bateman, however, being the grotesque caricature of the yuppie ideals, is not the only one who fears losing his status of a young, attractive, and successful individual. However, it is oftentimes from the members of the yuppie consumer-dependant culture itself from which words evoking fear of losing such traits arise. Frequently, such statements originate from Evelyn, Bateman's girlfriend. With statements towards Bateman and Price, both of whom she is having intimate relations with, she states, "'[y]our hairline looks like it's receding.'"[243] In other instances, "she inspects Price's head one more time. Are you losing your hair?'"[244] and

[241] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 22.
[242] Jeremy Bulow, "An Economic Theory of Planned Obsolescence," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 101, no. 4 (1986): 729–730, https://doi.org/10.2307/1884176.
[243] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 21.
[244] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 18.

"'[a]re you gaining weight?'"[245] By Evelyn saying this, Ellis is shedding light on how the proponents of the consumer culture themselves are caught in the never-ending cycle of perpetual chase after status, and unattainable beauty standards. They live in a merciless world in which even those who one might consider to be their closest ones will ruthlessly berate and demean one another only to make themselves feel better about their existence.

This constant danger, which often comes from those Bateman surrounds himself with, is a supporting factor in Bateman's need for control and physical perfection. Bateman's exercise routine is, similarly to his self-care routine, exhaustive and fixed. It is reflecting his desire for complete mastery over himself. His workouts are timed, calculated, and filled with specific regimens that leave no room for spontaneity. Whether it's lifting weights, using state-of-the-art machines at an exclusive gym, following high-intensity aerobic routines, or practising yoga for flexibility, Bateman approaches exercise with mechanical precision.

> On the leg machines I do five sets of ten repetitions. For the back I also do five sets of ten repetitions. On the stomach crunch machine I've gotten so I can do six sets of fifteen and on the biceps curl machine I do seven sets of ten. Before moving to the free weights I spend twenty minutes on the exercise bike while reading the new issue of Money magazine. Over at the free weights I do three sets of fifteen repetitions of leg extensions, leg curls and leg presses, then three sets and twenty repetitions of barbell curls, then three sets and twenty repetitions of bentover lateral raises for the rear deltoids and three sets and twenty repetitions of latissimus pulldowns, pulley rows, dead lifts and bent-over barbell rows.[246]

This is only a part of Bateman's exercise routine during which he attempts to gain the perfectly sculpted body. However, even exercising is something that Bateman does not fail to use to measure himself against others. Therefore, as in any part of Bateman's life, even the time allocated for physical exercise is overflowing with brands, technical jargon, and narcissistic grooming procedures. "I check myself in the mirror before entering the gym and, dissatisfied, go back to my briefcase for some mousse to slick my hair back and then I use a moisturizer and, for a small blemish I notice under my lower lip, a dab of Clinique Touch-Stick."[247] This passage shows that Bateman's mask of perfection does not come down even in the gym's locker room. Bateman refuses to even enter into an area where he could be seen by others unless he strictly adheres to the yuppie culture's idea of perfection and uniformity. Only after correcting

[245] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 18.
[246] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 64.
[247] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 63.

his visage with remedies which Bateman seems to always carry on himself, he finally emerges from the locker room with his Walkman on, listening to loud music. This excerpt shows that Bateman's exercise routine is not meant predominantly for him. In his consumerist framework of the world, physical fitness and the ability to afford it are simply markers of his position in society. His narration in the gym for exclusive members only shows that his actions there are purely performative. Moreover, Baelo-Allué supports this claim when she says that Bateman mimics the performative nature of the media by living as if he is always being recorded.[248] This helps to illuminate how consumer culture manages to transform even one's own habits into public spectacles.

Bateman mentions reading a new issue of a finance magazine while exercising. He also mentions in detail what he is wearing. […] I remove the clothes, […] then slip into a pair of crow-black cotton and Lycra shorts with a white waistband and side stripes and a cotton and Lycra tank top, both by Wilkes, which can be folded so tightly that I can actually carry them in my briefcase.[249] He also mentions what another yuppie businessman is wearing by saying, "Butner is wearing a pair of knee-length nylon and Lycra shorts with checkerboard inserts and a cotton and Lycra tank top and leather Reeboks."[250] During his exercise routine, he manages to combine both the performative action of exercise for the sake of flaunting the wealth at his disposal, his obsession with comparing himself against others in regard to their wealth and status, and his ceaseless consumption of products which, in this case, is the financial magazine, music, and exercise machines. This finding is aligned with what Baelo-Allué states, when she claims Bateman "consumes in all possible ways: buying, eating and destroying."[251] This hollowness and pointlessness of the consumeristic ideals can be further spotted in the following passage.

> While I kiss and lick her neck she stares passionlessly at the wide-screen Panasonic remote-control television set and lowers the volume. I pull my Armani shirt up and place her hand on my torso, wanting her to feel how rock-hard, how halved my stomach is, and I flex the muscles, grateful it's light in the room so she can see how bronzed and defined my abdomen has become.[252]

[248] Baelo-Allué, "Serial Murder," 85.
[249] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 63.
[250] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 63.
[251] Baelo-Allué, "Serial Murder," 71.
[252] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 20.

Bateman commodifies his body and behaves as if he is giving a marketing presentation. By referring to himself as having parts of his body which are "rock-hard," "halved," and muscular,[253] he gives off an appearance of an inanimate object which one may obtain for a premium price. By doing so, there is virtually no distinction between him, a living, breathing person, and his "Armani shirt,"[254] which is also utilised to market his success and attractiveness. Furthermore, Evelyn mindlessly consuming media during the time of the utmost intimacy couples can have further highlights the infectious way consumer values have embedded themselves into the minds of consumerists. Additionally, Bateman's actions, with which he tried to gain the favour of his girlfriend, prove to be futile due to her lack of interest in his advances. Her apathy towards Bateman can be seen when she "stares passionlessly"[255] at the TV rather than reciprocating her partner's intimate advances. Evelyn further underscores her repulsion and indifference towards Bateman when she says to Bateman, "[y]ou know, you can always be in better shape,"[256] further stressing their disconnection and dissatisfaction.

Bateman, however, unable to read social cues, does not see the complete disregard his partner holds for him, continuing his efforts for another fifteen minutes. Only then does he finally relent and cease his advances. Right after, both of them consume their respective drugs, Bateman leaves Evelyn's apartment only to come home and "dissolve" into his flat.[257] He then continues to masturbate and have "a weak orgasm" to a woman in a designer underwear advertisement. Although Bateman feels the need to continue his chase after society's beauty ideals, his efforts are in vain because they do not bring him joy or satisfaction in his personal life, nor in his woeful attempts at connecting with others. The yuppies are shown to have willingly forsaken their own individuality and humanity in return for what Sharif and Saeed call an identity "constructed from a variety of cultural debris."[258] Be it Bateman's obsession over products or Evelyn naming her dog "NutraSweet"[259] after an artificial sweetener, Ellis tellingly depicts the way hyper-consumerism has penetrated and utterly infected the yuppie culture.

Contrastively, Matheson's novella anticipates the consumerism-brought destruction in a unique way. Neville's daily existence involves scavenging supplies from abandoned stores and using whatever technology and goods he can to survive. He siphons gasoline, boards up his

[253] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 20.
[254] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 20.
[255] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 20.
[256] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 20.
[257] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 21.
[258] Sharif, "The Fear," 96.
[259] Ellis, *American Psycho*, 262.

house with materials taken from anywhere, and rifles through nearby stores and buildings to gather essentials to keep himself and his operation running. Effectively, Neville lives off the leftovers of consumer civilisation. The post-apocalyptic cityscape becomes a "consumer paradise"[260] for the last man on earth. All the commodities of a modern city are there for the taking, without cost, serving as a grimly ironic fulfilment of consumerism's promise of abundance, achieved only by the collapse of the society that created it.

Neville's relationship to this environment is deeply ambivalent. On one hand, the ready availability of material goods provides him comfort and survival. On the other hand, the utter meaninglessness of those goods in the absence of community underscores the hollowness of pure materialism. Matheson illustrates how consumer items, once imbued with social and personal significance, become mere objects when human society disintegrates. Neville can, for example, commandeer a fancy car or a generator, but these things no longer confer status or identity, because his survival and the quest to rid the world of vampires is all that matters, in a way, forcing him to live a utilitarian life devoid of excess of the society that preceded the apocalypse.

Brett Samuel Stifflemire argues that in post-apocalyptic fiction, "familiar objects become unfamiliar and otherworldly" and "[t]he tools of survival often include primitive technology and weapons."[261] This insight supports the notion that, after societal collapse, consumer goods no longer function as symbols of status or comfort because they are stripped to basic utility, revealing the fragility of the systems that once imbued them with meaning. A telling example can be seen in the way Neville uses his personal car. In *I Am Legend*, Richard Matheson reconfigures the car, ordinarily a potent symbol of personal freedom and consumer desire, into a utilitarian instrument of survival. Neville's automobile, traditionally a symbol of one's status, significance, and indulgence, becomes a means to an end governed by spatial and temporal constraints. Stifflemire's analysis of the changes consumer products undergo in the post-apocalyptic times can also be applied to Neville himself, due to the fact that as Neville was left all alone in the wake of the apocalypse, he becomes unrecognisable to his former self in appearance and nearly stripped himself of emotions such as sympathy or love, becoming

[260] Yael Maurer and Meyrav Koren-Kuik, *Cityscapes of the Future: Urban Spaces in Science Fiction* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2018), 172.
[261] Bret Samuel Stifflemire, "Visions of After the End: A History and Theory of the Post-Apocalyptic Genre in Literature and Film" (PhD diss., The University of Alabama, 2017), 267–268.

hardened and unkempt as his depression grew, transforming into a form of his bare and rudimental self.

Moreover, Do Huu argues that in post-apocalyptic worlds, motor vehicles often lose their purpose as means for travelling but become a sort of mobile "shelter".[262] This effect can be seen when Neville uses his vehicle to collect supplies, dispose of corpses, and visit his wife's grave, never straying too far beyond the perimeter he is familiar with and from which he can safely return before nightfall. The daily possibility of death strips the car of any consumerist glamour, reducing it to its bare function. Even access to gasoline, once abundant and accessible, becomes a matter of strategic planning. In this reality, objects once associated with modern plentifulness are stripped of their symbolic status and returned to their bare necessity. The car, once a marker of autonomy and wealth, becomes an extension of Neville's fragile control over his environment.

Neville's psychology is shaped far more by deprivation than by abundance. His most pressing concerns are the depletion of human companionship and the erosion of purpose. In a world with no consumers, apart from those who wish nothing but to literally consume him, the notion of value has lost its meaning. A bottle of fine whisky or a Beethoven record, rare luxuries of the old world that Neville sometimes indulges in, now serve only to highlight his loneliness rather than to signify any prestige they would entail prior to the apocalypse. Therefore, the horror in *I Am Legend* emerges partly from this inversion of consumer norms. The act of consumption is present throughout the novel, but in symbolic forms that critique the old consumer society. Neville no longer consumes to participate in society or affirm his identity. His consumption is tied directly to survival. He must eat to live, drink to numb, and listen to music to temporarily stave off insanity. The goods, once considered luxuries, are no longer but functional props. In this respect, Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum becomes especially relevant in the post-apocalyptic setting because in Neville's world, signs no longer refer to any real, functioning social order.[263] Instead, they float as hollow representations. The whisky bottle, which one could share with friends, and the classical music record to enrich one's soul are now only simulacra of social and cultural systems that no longer exist. Neville, however, unable to accept the fact, continues to engage with these meaningless symbols still. The act of consumption becomes tragic mimicry, and through this inversion, the novel critiques

[262] Cécile Do Huu, "'A Guiding Line? Rethinking the Road in American Post-Apocalyptic Narratives,'" *E-Rea* 22.1 (January 1, 2024), 11. https://doi.org/10.4000/12xg9.
[263] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1–2.

the consumer society by revealing how little of it survives when the society which upheld the consumeristic principle vanishes alongside the shared belief of what is truly important for one's survival

Furthermore, the vampire creatures that surround Neville's fortified house each night literally consume blood for survival, becoming the living embodiments of consumption gone out of control. This statement is supported by Porter, who says in his review of Kennedy's *Vampire Capitalism*, "[t]he spectre of the sinister, blood-sucking vampire has long been drawn upon as a metaphor for the ways in which calculating, profit-hungry capitalist forces exploit, live off and ultimately drain the life force of human society."[264] This idea is then expanded by Cameron et al., who say, "Vampires encourage us to meditate on our own repressed and ravenous appetites [in which] we continue to resurrect and rewrite this monster to suit our […] insatiable appetites."[265] Neville, in turn, becomes a producer of death. Each day, he dutifully hunts down and exterminates the vampires in their sleep. Here, Matheson offers a dark reflection of industrialised society in which Neville's systematic staking of vampires resembles a factory assembly line of killing. The product is death for which Neville can, in turn, buy more life. Additionally, an aspect of consumerism, dubbed "Throwaway Living,"[266] in which consumers dispose of single-use items, rather than repairing or reusing them, can be seen in the way Neville treats the vampires. He does not seek to understand, rehabilitate, or coexist with the vampires. Instead, he eliminates them mechanically and without much reflection, reducing human lives, however altered, to waste to be discarded. This parallels the logic of consumer society, where perceived obsolescence or deviation from the norm justifies disposal. Neville's daily routine of systematic extermination thus mirrors the spirit of convenience and disposability central to modern consumerism. This can be seen as Neville's experiments on female vampires. "The hand lashed out again, this time smashing her across the cheek and snapping her head to the side. Ten minutes later, he threw her body out the front door and slammed it again in their faces."[267] If something no longer serves its intended function, it is quickly cast aside and forgotten.

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[264] Chris Porter, "Paul Kennedy, Vampire Capitalism: Fractured Societies and Alternative Futures," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 20, no. 3 (July 9, 2020): 371, https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540520930126.
[265] Brooke Cameron, Suyin Olguin, and Ian M. Clark, "Vampires: Consuming Monsters and Monstrous Consumption," Edited by Ian M. Clark. *Revenant: Critical and Creative Studies of the Supernatural*, no. 12 (2025): 13, accessed June 9, 2025, https://www.revenantjournal.com/contents/introduction-4/.
[266] "Throwaway Living," *LIFE*, August 1, 1955, https://shorturl.at/pLh3b.
[267] Matheson, *I Am Legend,* 53–54.

As Blake suggests in his accurate depiction of renewed survivor accountability in *World War Z* which also deals with a zombie setting in an apocalyptic world, in *I Am Legend*, one could spot the new society of survivors "purged of their consumer-fetishism," a post-human community that has shed the old culture's obsession with material goods. By the novel's end, Neville realises that the infected beings have formed their own organised society, similarly to how the protagonists of *World War Z* have realised that the causes of the apocalypse were the fault of their very own baby-boomer generation.[268] This conclusion implies a thought-provoking question. If the new society can function without the consumerist behaviours that defined the old world, perhaps those behaviours were part of the disease that doomed humanity in the first place. Matheson himself stated an opinion in an interview which hints at this idea. "What I had in mind was that the only way the society could go on was to completely eliminate what had gone before and start all over."[269] While Matheson does not overtly moralise, the narrative allows us to see Neville's loneliness and eventual martyrdom as the logical outcome of a culture that prioritises individual survival and individualism through the essence of a doomsday prepper instead of focusing on collective well-being. Implicitly, the past that Neville represents is our consumer-driven civilisation, which in Matheson's vision may need to cease to exist for a different mode of existence to emerge. Thus, through post-apocalyptic horror, *I Am Legend* delivers a quiet but potent commentary on late capitalism. It imagines its end and invites us to find horror not only in the monsters that feed on blood, but in the possibility that our normal way of life, structured around consuming things, is in itself monstrous and unsustainable.

Moreover, it is illuminating to view Neville as a prototype of the survivalist consumer, a paradoxical figure who appears in many later apocalyptic fictions. Sociologist Mark O'Connell, in studying modern "doomsday preppers," observes that they tend to "view society as a fragile edifice, a thin veneer of behavioural norms over the abyss of greed and violence." Neville's world confirms this view. However, here, the thin veneer has utterly cracked under the pressures of the post-apocalyptic world. His response aligns with what O'Connell identifies as the prepper mindset when O'Connell says, "batten down the hatches and retreat to one's home, lavishly stocked with food and supplies and, in many cases, weapons."[270] Neville's house is indeed a fortress, filled with canned food, fuel, and an arsenal of wooden stakes and firearms, which he

[268] Linnie Blake, "'Are We Worth Saving? You Tell Me': Neoliberalism, Zombies and the Failure of Free Trade," *Gothic Studies* 17, no. 2 (November 2015): 37, https://doi.org/10.7227/gs.17.2.3.
[269] Matthew R Bradley, *Richard Matheson on Screen* (McFarland, 2010), 118.
[270] O'Connell, *NOTES*, 3.

continuously gathers and expands upon. In this way, *I Am Legend* links back to an American self-reliance myth while also critiquing it due to its alienating and dehumanising effects. On one hand, Neville achieves a kind of radical freedom as the last man. Neville is freed from money, work, and social expectations and obligations. On the other hand, this freedom is revealed to be a nightmare as he becomes the owner of everything and nothing, sentenced to a life of meaninglessness, purposelessness and fear.

While consumerism in *I Am Legend* is a means to an end to keep Neville alive, in *American Psycho*, consumerism is omnipresent, shaping identity, ruling lives, and dictating social worth. Brand names, grooming rituals, restaurant reservations, and gadgets supersede moral substance. To Bateman, people are interchangeable with objects, sometimes even below them. He consumes both and treats them as disposable, fungible, and status-confirming. This saturation of consumerist values leads to a loss of individuality, confirming Baudrillard's critiques of late capitalism as a regime in which consumerism infects all life. Through Bateman's impeccable self-care, luxurious veneer hiding the monster underneath, and expensive gadgets and clothing, Bateman forsakes his humanity to attain the features of a machine in a showroom, having his moral core hollowed out into an utter void.

While the theme of consumerism in *I Am Legend* is not omnipresent as in *American Psycho,* it still plays a key role through its portrayal of consumerism through its absence. Neville's pre-apocalyptic world was one of order, routine, and domestic comfort, during which magazines already started to coin the name "Throwaway Living,"[271] After the apocalypse, the infrastructure of consumer society crumbled, but its remnants remain in the form of commodities, such as Neville's generator, vehicles, and gadgets. The vampires' nightly assaults symbolise a society stripped of its individuality, as they act in a mindless herd mentality. Like Bateman, their consumption of human life is literal, embodying the ultimate fear of mass conformity and dehumanised consumer identity. Neville's attempts to cling to tools of consumption in the forms of books, alcohol, science, and gadgets suggest a desperate attempt to preserve identity through the ruins of a non-existent world.

[271] LIFE, "Throwaway Living,".

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the crucial aspects this thesis has concerned itself with, it has been demonstrated that horror fiction in the post-WWII period is a powerful medium for social criticism through its ability to reflect deep anxieties about alienation, identity, morality, and the corrosive effects of consumerism. Through its illuminating comparison between Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, it becomes clear that although the two works of fiction differ in genre, narrative style, and historical context, they nonetheless intersect in their depiction of crises which pose significant issues to modern society. Whether through the dystopian solitude of a survivor of an apocalypse or through the hyper-consumeristic, despicable void of a man, hiding in plain sight as a businessman, both texts show visible and profound disillusionment with the respective societies and the values they represent.

Matheson's novella, *I Am Legend*, captures the results of a devastating nuclear fallout, social alienation, and existential dread in the wake of a vampire-ridden world. However, Neville's struggle is not merely against vampires but also against the encroaching meaninglessness of existence in a world devoid of human connection and purpose. Through Neville's systematic and robot-like routines and desperate search for meaning stemming from his utter loneliness, Matheson highlights Neville's deep desire for contact and relationship. In contrast, Ellis's *American Psycho* emerges from a late-capitalist society defined by forced social posturing to achieve a desired image, material excess, moral decay, and unbridled violence. Bateman is the crown prince of a society which places at its top a pathological psychopath who measures a human's worth through arbitrary and twisted values, creating an environment where violence becomes both a symptom and a coping mechanism of a broader social alienation, which is so pervasive it defies detection. His descent into hallucination and emotional numbness is framed not as an anomaly but as a grotesque norm and satirical prophecy of the future of Bateman's society and its principles.

Furthermore, the theme of social alienation manifests differently in each novel. Neville's isolation is literal and absolute. He is physically alone, and no matter his effort, he is unable to establish a relationship, let alone maintain one. However, Neville's social solitude transforms into philosophical estrangement as he begins to question the righteousness of his actions. Contrastively, Bateman is surrounded by caricatures of people to the point of erosion of all his faculties, resulting in acts of immense brutality. Here, Ellis depicts a more insidious form of alienation. It is one marked by repetition, mistaken identity, meaningless conversations

and performative interactions in a world where no matter what Bateman does, he gains no agency, rendering genuine human connection just as impossible as if he were physically alone in the same way Neville is. Therefore, both characters, in their unique way, emphasise the consequences of a fractured society where one feels altogether alone.

Moreover, dehumanisation, desensitisation, and the erosion of morality and sanity also play critical roles in both narratives. In *I Am Legend*, Neville believes he must dehumanise the vampires in order to ensure his survival, but this eventually collapses when he realises they have formed their own society, eroding his unwavering belief in his moral superiority. *American Psycho*, on the other hand, presents dehumanisation as a product of society. Bateman's victims are rendered, disposable, powerless, and faceless through violence, forming a stark contrast to the meticulously described and cherished products he consumes with the same voracity. Thus, Ellis depicts this erosion of emotions and the devaluation of human life as systematic, not merely individual.

Consumerism is yet another means to further connect the two novels, though again, in contrasting ways. In *American Psycho*, consumer culture is omnipresent and hideous, shaping identity and reducing people to brands and status objects. Through Bateman, the victims are also dominated and deprived of their senses alongside their humanity through Bateman's consumption. This process is very much in the same spirit which subjugated Bateman by the society in the first place, creating a perpetual cycle of domination and dehumanisation underscored by hyper-consumeristic values. In *I Am Legend*, consumerism is depicted through its absence. The ruins of a former consumerist world, which Neville is forced to scavenge, represent relics of lost meaning and the pointlessness of Neville's own existence, rather than markers of social hierarchy and luxury, forcing Neville to preserve these relics as a way of preserving the reason for his own existence. Through the different ways the authors decided to portray the shared societal concerns regarding consumerist ideologies, they show that such values ultimately hollow out one's inner core and sever the individual from any genuine sense of purpose.

I Am Legend and *American Psycho* serve as mirrors to their respective eras. Labelling both novels as merely escapist would be a mistake because, rather than transporting the reader to a world where one may forget the issues plaguing society, they are instead confronted and made to gaze upon the darker and cruellest realities of their world and human existence. Matheson and Ellis depict monstrosity not as an external threat but as a product of social decay,

alienation, and ideological collapse. In doing so, they affirm that the most terrifying horrors are not supernatural but deeply human.

Furthermore, this analysis has supported the stance that, through themes of social alienation, dehumanisation, and consumerism, post-WWII horror fiction operates as a potent vehicle of cultural critique. By analysing both novels through a methodology of a combination of close reading and thematic analysis, supported by relevant critical secondary sources and theoretical frameworks such as abjection, the uncanny, the Other, and existentialism, this thesis has illuminated how horror fiction articulates deeper cultural anxieties which influence human life. Through the works' philosophical questions, they ask not only what it means to survive, but whether survival in such societies is meaningful at all.

Finally, future research might explore how these themes evolve in 21st-century horror, particularly in relation to digital culture, possibly prompting loss of individuality and social alienation, environmental collapse, which may cause scarcity of traditionally abundant resources, leading to a possibility of global and personal conflicts and an increase in neoliberal subjectivity, resulting in the degradation of communal bonds and social responsibility. Moreover, future research may focus on the depiction of the uncanny in American Psycho due to the number of repressed emotions and identities that eventually surface in distorted forms. The comparative method used here also opens the door to cross-cultural examinations of horror fiction, inviting analysis of how different societies articulate fear, trauma, and alienation. Moreover, this thesis contributes to the field of literary and cultural studies by demonstrating how horror can serve as a tool for sociocultural criticism through which it is possible to examine the prevailing anxieties, moral faults, and crises of identity which the post-WWII Western society was forced to confront.

RESUMÉ

Horor, byť historicky často chybně považován za druhořadý literární a filmový žánr, dokáže poskytnout vhled do duše společnosti skrze strach a děsivá monstra, jenž odráží dobové obavy a úzkosti. Tato diplomová práce se zabývá hororovou literaturou jako nástrojem kulturní a společenské kritiky v období po druhé světové válce. Konkrétně se zaměřuje na analýzu dvou zásadních děl americké literatury *Já, Legenda* z roku 1954 od Richarda Mathesona a na *Americké Psycho* z roku 1991 od Breta Eastona Ellise. Ačkoliv se obě díla v některých oblastech liší, například žánrově a stylisticky, obě díla vycházejí ze společenského klimatu své doby a rozebírají zásadní kulturní i existenciální otázky týkající se identity, lidskosti, odcizení a rozpadu morálních struktur za použití hororu. Práce zkoumá, jakým způsobem zvolená hororová fikce umožňuje nejen vyjádřit úzkosti a nejistoty své doby, ale zároveň je i kriticky reflektovat prostřednictvím groteskních, děsivých obrazů.

Tato práce je rozdělena do teoretické a analytické části. Teoretická část je tvořena dvěma rozsáhlými kapitoly. První z nich se zabývá definicí hororové fikce, jejím historickým vývojem, klíčovými tropy. Jak je v první časti teoretické kapitoly zmiňováno, horor může být nalezen v podstatě kdekoliv a má tedy v literatuře dlouhou historii, po kterou v lidech vzbuzuje silné citové reakce, vypětí a různé tělesné reakce. Kapitola krátce nastiňuje laterální historii hororu a jeho důležité tropy. Jedním z těchto důležitých tropů, kterým se tato kapitola zabývá, je popis monster a jejich podoba v hororové literatuře. Za použití prací Noëla Carrolla a Xaviera A. Reyese, mimo jiné, je ukázáno, že monstra nemusí být jen děsivými a nečistými příšerami skrývající se v zákoutích temných budov, ale mohou to být také běžní lidé, skrývající svou monstrositu v temných zákoutích své duše. Dále se kapitola zabývá místy, kde se hororová literatura běžně odehrává. Důležitým poznatkem je to, že horor je schopen koexistovat s ostatními žánry, čímž prokazuje svou schopnost mísit se s ostatními žánry a vylepšovat je napětím a hrůzou.

Významným termínem, který je využit při analýze je koncept Jinakosti (anglicky *the Otherness*). Tento koncept je významný pro jeho popis pro jeho popis mechanismu, kterým jsou určité postavy, skupiny nebo bytosti konstruovány jako odlišné, cizí či ohrožující již ustanovený řád dané společnosti. V kontextu této práce, jenž pracuje s hororovou fikcí a jejím významem pro vyjádření kritiky společnosti je jinakost často využívána k označení entit, které překračují hranice lidskosti, morálky nebo racionality. ať už jde o upíra, psychopata, nebo poslední bytost obývající hostilní svět, koncept Jinakosti naznačuje, že lidé se budou i nadále vymezovat vůči

ostatním bytostem skrze vyčlenění toho, co je vnímané jako neznámé, nečisté, děsivé, anebo monstrózní.

Dalším důležitým aspektem této kapitoly je vymezení teoretického rámce pro pozdější analýzu obou literárních děl. Jedním z naprosto klíčových pojmů je teorie Abjekce (anglicky *the theory of Abjection*) od profesorky, lingvistky a psychoanalytičky Julie Kristevové. Klíčovým poznatkem, se kterými práce později pracuje, je její pojetí abjekce, při kterém člověk zavrhuje vše, co narušuje jeho stabilní identitu, tělesné hranice nebo kulturní normy. Tyto věci se poté považují za to, co je nečisté, nepřijatelné a narušující individuální nebo kulturní normy. Abjekt je to, co nelze plně začlenit ani zcela odmítnout, neboť existuje na pomezí subjektu a objektu a života a smrti. Právě z tohoto narušení vzniká pocit hrůzy a odporu, který je pro hororový žánr zásadní

Práce se dále opírá o poznatky Sigmunda Freuda, a to zejména o jeho práci na téma „Něco tísnivého“ (anglicky *the uncanny*). Práce dále vysvětluje, jak se Freudova teorie projevuje prostřednictvím jevů, které narušují hranice mezi známým a neznámým, což může způsobovat nepříjemný a tísnivý pocit, který je pro hororovou literaturu klíčový. Tato práce primárně za použití tohoto konceptu ukazuje jak upíři v *Já, Legenda* připomínají svými lidskými rysy jejich bývalou identitu, což zapříčiňuje narušení hranic mezi monstrem a člověkem.

Následující část kapitoly pojednává o filozofických konceptech existencialismu, primárně z prací Jeana-Paula Sartra a Alberta Camuse a postmoderní kritiky Jeana Baudrillarda, které slouží jako opěrné body pro hlubší interpretaci vnitřních konfliktů a kulturního rozpadu v analyzovaných dílech. Sartrova a Camusova pojetí absurdna, svobody a zodpovědnosti jednotlivce vůči vlastní existenci jsou klíčová pro pochopení postavy Roberta Nevilla, který v *Já, Legenda* zápasí s nemožností nalézt smysl ve světě zbaveném řádu, morálky i společnosti. Camusovská teorie *Mýtu o Sisyfovi* se zde dá využít k analýze Nevillova každodenního, beznadějného opakování jeho rutin, které postrádají smysl, sloužící pouze jako záminka pro Nevillovo přežití ve světě, který pro něj již nemá využití. Naopak postava Patricka Batemana v *Americkém Psycho* je nahlíženo skrze teorii Baudrillardovy kritiky konzumní společnosti. Práce dále vysvětluje teorii hyperrealisty, kde je skutečnost nahrazována nekonečným sledem kopií, znaků a symbolů, které postrádají originál a odkazují do prázdnoty. Batemanova identita je potlačena a roztroušena v množství rolí, značek a povrchních gest, což vede k fragmentaci Batemanovi osobnosti a k totální prázdnotě hodnot a morálních zásad. Obě zmíněné filozofické

teorie jsou dále využita k analýze odcizení, morálního úpadku, ztráty autenticity, a ztráty a mentálního kolapsu.

V neposlední řadě teoretická kapitola rozebírá a popisuje kulturně-historického kontextu jednotlivých románů, do kterého jsou díla zasazeny. *Já, Legenda* je zasazen do období studené války, jaderné hrozby a izolace jednotlivce ve světě prepperů (anglicky *Doomsday preppers*), zatímco American Psycho pak do éry neoliberalismu, pohlcenou yuppie kulturou 80. let, Reaganismu a fetišizací konzumu.

V analytické části je práce rozdělena do tří hlavních tematických okruhů. Těmito okruhy jsou sociální odcizení, konzumerismus, dehumanizace a desenzitizace, vedoucí ke ztrátě morálních hodnot a příčetnosti. Každá kapitola se věnuje tomu, jak obě díla dané téma zpracovávají, a poukazuje na jejich rozdílný přístup i společné znaky.

Kapitola o sociálním odcizení ukazuje, že zatímco u Nevilla je odcizení fyzické, zjevné a způsobené vnější katastrofou, u Batemana se jedná o vnitřní prázdnotu ve společnosti zahlcené excesem a privilegii. Byť Neville postrádá lidský kontakt, přesto si zachovává schopnost truchlit, mít výčitky či pociťovat lítost. Na druhou stranu, Bateman je obklopen lidmi, ale neschopný navázat skutečné spojení. Právě v tomto paradoxu se zrcadlí moderní pojetí osamělosti, kde bytí mezi lidmi nevylučuje naprostou izolaci.

V následující kapitole zaměřené na konzumerismu je analyzováno, jak konzumní kultura deformuje lidské hodnoty a vztahy. U Ellise se jedná o přímou kritiku neoliberalismu a hyperindividualismu, kde se identita stává produktem marketingu a materiální hodnoty jsou důležitější než lidské životy nejbližších lidí. Bateman konzumuje nejen značky, ale i lidi. jeho vraždy nejsou vždy impulzivní, ale rutinní, připomínající jeho přehnaná kosmetická rutina. Oproti tomu se konzumerismus u Mathesona objevuje právě skrze jeho absenci. Neville využívá zbylé artefakty, které nachází v ruinách vyhlazené civilizace, například v podobě vozidel, knih, alkoholu a mikroskopů. Využívá je jako nástroje přežití a připomínku světa, který ztratil. Jeho vztah ke spotřebě je spíše nostalgický, nikoli sebestředně posedlý. Krutost konzumerismu zde vidíme spíše ve způsobu, kterým Neville „konzumuje“ upíry při jeho experimentech, jejichž těla poté zahazuje stejně jako se Bateman zbavuje svých obětí.

Poslední analytická kapitola se zaměřuje na analýzu motivů dehumanizace a desenzitizace, spojených s erozí morálky a psychické stability. V *Americkém Psychu* se Bateman stává monstrem přestávající vnímat ostatní jako lidské bytosti a násilí se pro něj stává prázdným rituálem, kterým volá o pomoc ve společnosti, která odmítá slyšet. zatímco v *Já,*

Legenda se naopak ukazuje, jak se z původně lidského hrdiny stává predátor v očích nové společnosti, která ho zavrhla a nahradila. Pomocí teorií Něčeho tísnivého (anglicky *the uncanny*) a abjekce práce ukazuje rozostření hranice mezi člověkem a monstrem. Závěrečná část sleduje psychický rozklad obou postav. Batemanův chaotický a neuspokojivý konec, spojený s halucinacemi a ztrátou pojetí o realitě, a Nevillova pomalá degradace mentální stability a morálních zásad, vycházející ze strachu a nejistoty. Oba protagonisty tak definuje nikoli jejich vítězství, ale proměna ve zdroj hrůzy pro ostatní.

Práce využívá kombinaci metody blízkého čtení (anglicky *close reading*) a tematické analýzy, opírající se o vybrané teoretické rámce. Teorie abjekce, uncanny, the Other a existencialismu umožňují hlubší porozumění psychologickým, morálním i kulturním dimenzím zkoumaných textů. Zároveň se práce opírá o relevantní sekundární literaturu a kritické zdroje, které situují oba texty do širšího literárního a kulturního kontextu. Práce na konci každé analytické kapitoly krátce komparativně porovná obě díla.

Závěrem lze konstatovat, že horor v obou dílech neslouží pouze jako způsob pro vyvolání silných emočních a tělesných reakcích, ale jako způsob kritického zkoumání úpadku moderní společnosti. Matheson i Ellis odhalují, jak snadno se může rozpadnout lidskost, když je ohrožena jak vnějším kolapsem, tak vnitřní prázdnotou. Jejich hrdinové, Neville a Bateman, nejsou tradičními monstry vytvořenými zlými čaroději či bláznivými gotickými vědci. Jsou to produkty své doby, vytvořené společností složenou z běžných lidí, se kterými přichází denně do styku. Neville je ztracený mezi troskami lidstva, zatímco Bateman je pohřbený v luxusu a lhostejnosti. Tato práce tak přispívá k porozumění tomu, jak hororová fikce reflektuje situace, kdy jsou napadeny zaběhlé kulturní hodnoty dané společnosti, ztrátu hodnot a proměnu lidské identity v různých etapách moderní historie následující po druhé světové válce.

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STATEMENT:

During the preparation of this thesis, I used several generative or assistive AI tools throughout all of my chapters. These include ChatGPT4, Grammarly, and QuillBot. I used said tools in accordance with the University AI usage guidelines. The reason for their usage was to improve the stylistic clarity of my writing, to brainstorm ideas, to summarise key points of academic content during research of the secondary sources, to check linguistic accuracy, and to find synonyms for certain words. AI tools have not been used for interpreting primary or secondary sources or drawing conclusions of any kind. The content of this thesis is the product of my own academic judgment, knowledge, and critical thinking. I claim full responsibility for the content of this thesis, as it remains my own intellectual work. After using these tools, I reviewed and edited the content appropriately.