

**PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA  
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF - M'SILA**

FACULTY OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

N°:



DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES

STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

**A Journey into the Realm of Human  
Destructiveness in Bret Easton Ellis's *American  
Psycho***

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfillment  
of the Requirements for Master's Degree**

**The Candidates:**

**Miss. Ahlem CHAIB**

**and**

**Miss. Yamina GHALEB**

**Supervised by: Mr. Mohammed SENOUSI**

**2016 /2017**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the complexity of human's psyche and its destructiveness in Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho*. The selected novel, which belongs to the serial killer genre, offers the reader an opportunity to enter into the world of psychopathic serial killers through the novel's anti-hero Patrick Bateman; the echo of human destructiveness. The novel reveals numerous realistic facts about American society and culture at the end of the twentieth century which were characterized by the collapse of ethics and values. The novelist aims at criticizing the consumerist culture that resulted in people's preoccupation with superficial matters, loss of identity, and the decay of ethics. Eventually, such conditions drove them to deviant behaviors such as violent crimes. Hence, in addition to the twisted nature of human psyche, we can argue that this kind of culture paved the way for the emergence of the remorseless serial killer Patrick Bateman. The novel of *American Psycho* is studied both thematically and stylistically. Indeed, literature is one of the best means to deepen our understanding of human psyche and cultures and that takes us beyond our limited personal experiences. Therefore, due to the fact that literary works cannot be fully appreciated without reference to their historical contexts, the first chapter of this study is devoted to the socio-historical context that frames Ellis's selected novel. This chapter demonstrates that several facts about the author's life experiences and the American yuppies have oriented his literary production. Besides, the thematic study is presented in the second chapter of this dissertation; it is split up into two main sections to emphasize that human beings are complex creatures with good and bad aspects; however, when societies encourage the bad aspects, they can be turned into evil monsters. Last, the third chapter captures the complex architecture of violence and brutality that were presented in a narrative production.

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## INTRODUCTION

Human beings, with their complex structures, have been always a provoking mystery that urges researchers to find out some potential answers. Beside scientists and psychologist, literary figures have been also concerned with the human nature and the individual's psyche. Literary works have long played a crucial role in depicting the life of individuals within different contexts and across ages. This variety of contexts evoked the emergence of a wide range of characters with plenty of motives, desires, tendencies, and freaks.

The modern society is seemingly an interesting area for studying the human nature and psychology. Accordingly, psychopathy is one of the topics that draw the attention of fiction writers. Though occasionally facing harsh criticism, novels with a psychopath character enjoy a significant readership. The authors allow readers to discover the world of those psychopaths providing dramatic scenes of murdering, torturing, and manipulation. This portrayal of psychopaths raises a vital issue whether psychopaths are born or made. Hence, historical, social, economic, and psychological factors seem to be crucial in the interpretation of those fictitious psychopaths.

In the modern era, the serial killer novel has developed its own traditions and techniques; it became a genre: the serial killer genre. Most of the times, the serial killer narratives mix the gothic and the detective traditions. The serial killer novel surrounds around a psychopath who tortures and kills his victims ruthlessly and a smart detective who by the end catches this serial murderer after discovering a definite pattern that relates the crimes. Though it differs in the sense that it lacks the detective elements, Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* is an outstanding example of the serial killer genre.

Best known for his notorious novel *American Psycho*, Bret Easton Ellis, an American novelist, screenwriter, and short story writer, was born to a wealthy family in Los Angeles in

1964. Since his early childhood, Ellis has seemed to be a brilliant writer as he states "I began writing at a very young age and I think the reason was my mother was an avid reader and I was constantly taken to the library."<sup>1</sup> Many of his works, revolving around young rich nihilistic individuals, are viewed as representatives of the mainstream American culture, namely *Less Than Zero* (1985), *Rules of Attraction* (1987), and *American Psycho* (1991).

Set in New York in the 1980s, *American Psycho* is a story of the anti-hero Patrick Bateman, a twenty-seven years old charming, elegant, successful businessman and a serial killer. The novel is one of the most controversial works that have ever been written and it was even banned in some countries. *American Psycho* was first published in 1991 and was harshly criticized for the explicit description of violence and sexual content. Using stream of consciousness, the author tells the story of the wealthy Bateman whose main concern seems to be fulfilling any urgent desire, from enjoying the most expensive clothes and delicious food, consuming drugs, spending nights with girls, to killing and torturing human beings and animals. The novel is an outstanding literary work about serial murders. Through this novel, successfully, Ellis takes the reader in journey into the world of serial killers; how the serial murder perceives the world, how his reality is constructed, and how man is capable of turning into a human monster.

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<sup>1</sup> Jaime Clarke, and Bret Easton Ellis, "Interview with Bret Easton Ellis," *Mississippi Review* vol. 27, no. 3 (1999), pp. 61–102; p.64.



## 1. Statement of the Problem

Bret Easton Ellis, as one of the prominent writers of blank generation,<sup>2</sup> has brilliantly introduced his most controversial novel, *American Psycho* that aimed to be a critique of the yuppie consumerist culture in 1980's America. Throughout the novel, the anti-hero and narrator, Patrick Bateman, represents a psychopath serial killer who obviously differs from any other kinds of psychopaths or serial killers; therefore, Bateman's appearance is mystifying. In this light, Patrick Bateman appears to be an ideal man who works in a very successful company in Wall Street and has a very respectful appearance which is gained by possessing the most fashionable clothes as well as consuming the most expensive products and objects. Indeed, he enjoys a very luxurious lifestyle as any other yuppie in 1980's American popular culture. However, Bateman confessed that he is a psychopath who seeks to consume both human beings and animals by sadistically torturing and killing them; thus, he kills for pleasure with a cold blood because his victims are chosen just to fulfill particular desires.

Patrick Bateman, as an archetypal character of human decay in modern culture and notably American popular culture, exhibits the paradox between internal and external structure in postmodern man. The apparent assessment of postmodern man, physical appearance, money, work, and general lifestyle is highly accepted, whereas a deep analysis of his internal psyche is harshly frustrating. Therefore, one can assume that Patrick Bateman has undertaken a journey, in which the collapse of ethics, the spread of violent crimes, materialism, consumerism, superficiality, and the loss of identity have served as the profound stations in Patrick's journey toward his self-destructiveness. Clearly, the disappearance of traditional values and ethics, in 1980's American culture, demonstrates harsh effects on human psyche.

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<sup>2</sup> The blank generation is a term given to a group of contemporary American writers who discuss modern issues such as consumerism, sex, and violence.

In this concern, throughout *American Psycho*, Bret Easton Ellis investigates the destroying effects of American “wound culture”<sup>3</sup> on humanity and this research, accordingly, will examine the personality of Patrick Bateman and what are the responsible factors for his human decay. Moreover, this research is going to offer an analytical insight on how the novelist responds to the narrative challenge of depicting a psychopathic serial killer whose main concern is to fit in a consumerist society.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to shed light on the decay, decomposition and disintegration of American culture and to examine the distorted image of success that turned to be a destroying illusion. Besides, because analyzing Patrick Bateman’s personality represents a challenging mission for many psychologists, this research is an attempt to give a deep analysis of Bateman’s psyche and to interpret his criminal and sadistic behaviors as a reflection to his structural mind. Moreover, this study aims at arguing that Bateman is a representative model of a corrupted system in addition to finding out the contributing factors in creating such a puzzling personality. Consequently, the analysis of Bateman’s personality is an attempt to confirm the Freudian psychoanalytical concepts that every single behavior is rather the result of repressed desires or a bad entourage.

## **3. Research Questions**

This study intends to put flesh on the bones of several questions. The primary question that will guide this study is whether to consider Patrick Bateman as a criminal or a victim made by a cultural decay. Furthermore, this study attempts to examine how the novel sketches human

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<sup>3</sup> It is an expression used by Mark Seltz to describe modern culture with all its traumatic conditions such as violence and the collapse of ethics. Qtd in; Owen Heathcote, “The Form of Violence: Use and Abuse of Gender in French Literature and Film,” *South Central Review* Vol. 20, no. 1(Winter, 2002 - Spring, 2003), pp. 1-13; p.6

destructiveness in postmodern American culture. Another important question is how the novel depicts violence, identity, desire and pleasure as a part of destroyed psyche originated from 1980's America; and relatively, how Bateman is perceived in psychoanalytical views and how he exhibits a monstrous archetype.

Hence, a new question comes to the surface which is to what extent Bret Easton Ellis's novel reflects the postmodern breakdown of consciousness, and confirms the disastrous effects of one's unconscious motives and desires. The last question examines the potential relationship existing between serial killers and consumerism.

#### **4. Review of Literature**

I have heard that we are spirits having a human experience. Perhaps those of us who have no conscience are dark spirits having a human experience.

Speers, S.A. *Type 1 Sociopath: When Difficult People Are More Than Just Difficult People*. New York: Independent-Publishing Platform, 2015. p. 55.

Psychopaths or sociopaths have long captured the interest of academics, psychologists, lawyers, fiction writers, and many others. One issue that many experts have attempted to address concerning psychopaths is the outstanding traits of this personality disorder, how to be dealt with, and how to protect one's self from the harm of those psychopaths. Robert. D. Hare's *Without Conscience The Disturbing World of The Psychopath Among Us* (1999) is perhaps the most well-known book that offers solid information and a deep insight into psychopathic personality. *The Sociopath Next Door* (2005) by Martha Stout is another fascinating book about the subject matter. Basing on her 25 years experience as a psychologist, Martha Stout gives a defining image of anti-social personalities. Other books worth mentioning are *The Mask of Sanity : An Attempt to Clarify Some Issues about The So-*

*Called Psychopathic Personality* (1988) by Hervey.M.Clekley, *Psychopathy, Perversion, and Lust Homicide : Recognizing The Mental Disorders that Power Serial Killers (Forensic Psychology)* (2009) by Duane.L.Dobbert , *Inside The Criminal Mind : Revised and Updated Edition* (2014) by Stanton Samenow, and *The Inner World of The Psychopath : A Definitive Primer on The Psychopathic Personality* (2015) by Steve Becker LCSW.

Conducting biological, neurological, and social researches, many experts have tried to come to grips with the origins of cruelty, violence, lack of empathy, and the other traits of the psychopathic personality. Some of the best literary corpus may include *The Psychopathic Mind : Origins, Dynamics, and Treatment* (1988) by Reid.J.Meloy, *Psychopath Whisperer : The Science of Those Without Conscience* (2014) by Kent.A.Kieh, *Murderous Minds : Exploring The Criminal Psychopathic Brain : Neurological Imaging And Manifestation of Evil* (2014) by Dean Haycock, *The Anatomy of Violence : The Biological Roots of Crime* (2013) by Adrian Raine, and *Psychopathy: An Introduction to Biological Findings and Their Implications ( Psychology and Crime)* (2014) by Andrea.L.Glenn Adrian Raine.

Novelists, as well, seem to be fascinated by the theme of psychopaths. Creating anti-heroes in their works, fiction authors provide readers with an insight to the world of psychopaths from a safe distance. Among the most famous psychopathic characters in English literature, there are Cathy Ames from *East of Eden* (1952) by John Steinbeck, Alex from *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) by Anthony Burges, Kevin from *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (2003) by Lionel Shriver, Frank from *The Wasp Factory* (1984) by Iain Banks, Hanibal lecter from *Red Dragon and Others* (1981) by Thomas Harris, Tom Ripley from *The Ripliad Series* (1955-1991) by Patricia Highsmith, and Becky Sharp from *Vanity Fair* (1848) by William Thackeray.

The issue of psychopaths offers a fertile scope for literary studies; therefore, this research is conducted to add a new vision concerning this issue.

## **5. Methodology Justification**

In this research, Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho* will be studied both thematically and stylistically. Following the thematic approach, this study will examine the human destructiveness in 1980's American popular culture. We shall first apply **The Freudian Psychoanalytical Theories**; because this study is interested in investigating the reasons for specific human behavior in order to analyze the underlying factors that motivate people to behave in a particular manner. In this sense, the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud has revolutionized the study of inner psyche and challenged the traditional ways of understanding human beings as rational and decision-making.

Due to the fact that the psychoanalytic account of personality remains "the most comprehensive, far-reaching, and influential theory of personality ever created,"<sup>4</sup> this research will rely on the findings of Sigmund Freud in analyzing human complex structure. That is, it will attempt to understand how the interaction between the id, ego, and superego is reflected in specific behavior, and the pleasure principle, in addition to the manipulating urges of love and death, will enrich this study. Therefore, the psychoanalytical investigation of Bateman's personality may give a deep analysis of the responsible motives for his criminal and impulsive behaviors.

Along with psychoanalysis, this research needs to rely on **The Marxism Theory** because many critics have pointed out that Marxist concepts are vitally represented in the novel. Obviously, Bateman and other characters in the novel are extremely addicted to consumption

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<sup>4</sup> Sandis Constantine, "Hitchcock's Conscious Use of Freud's Unconscious," *Europe's Journal of Psychology* No.3 (2009), p. 56-81; p.59

and their capitalistic culture is the main cause of violence flourishment which is the basic structure of their identity.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, *American Psycho* represents the best manifestation of human's obsession with consumption that is rooted in modern and post modern American culture.

Furthermore, **the stylistic approach** will allow us to study the novel through its "linguistic techniques."<sup>6</sup> Thus, stylistic approach will be used in this study to investigate how Bret Easton Ellis has presented and portrayed violence, bloodshed and horror in *American Psycho* through the use of metaphors, symbols, similes and figurative language in general.

## 6. Research Plan

This research shall be structured as the following: **Chapter One:** Socio-Historical Context; **Chapter Two:** The Mindset of the Serial Killer; **Chapter Three:** Fictionalizing Violence in *American Psycho*.

**The First Chapter** attempts to locate the novel within a socio-historical context. Hence, the conditions surrounding the writing of *American Psycho* are to be examined; most importantly, America at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To the close of this century, a new culture came to the surface: The Yuppie Culture. This era, some argued, was also marked by decadence and despair. Furthermore, light will be shed on any potential relations between the novel and its writer's biography. Finally, this chapter will present some of theories that criminologists have provided in attempt to understand the behavior of serial killers.

This research is mainly concerned with analyzing the decay of human beings in American modern culture; correspondingly, it will demonstrate how human's complex structure is

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<sup>5</sup> James Annesley, "Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture, and the Contemporary American Novel," *American Literature* Vol. 71, No. 2 (June, 1999), pp. 376-377; p.377.

<sup>6</sup> David O Fakeye, and Temitayo A. Amao, "Enhancing Poetic Literature Instruction Through Stylistic and Thematic Approaches," *Studies in Literature and Language* Vol. 6, No. 2 (2013), p. 50-55; p.51

deeply affected by its surrounding cultural lifestyle. Thus, the internal psyche and the external lifestyle of Patrick Bateman, as a representative model of human destructiveness in 1980's American culture, will be examined in **The Second Chapter** of this research. In this sense, the examination of Patrick Bateman psyche will rely on the Freudian psychoanalysis as the most effective approach to interpret his astonishing behaviors; that is, the structure of Bateman's id, ego, and superego will be given a paramount importance to understand his unhealthy personality. In addition, this chapter will illustrate how the surrounding circumstances had led to his personality disorder. Consequently, this chapter will focus on USA as a corrupted system that is plagued with crime, consumerism, and appearance.

**The Final Chapter's** main concern is the novel's style. The extent to which the writer was successful in fictionalizing violence is to be studied here. At first, the title *American Psycho* and its symbolism will be analyzed. Then, this chapter will present the serial killer novel as a new genre and how *American Psycho*, with the special techniques that the writer makes use of, is a reflection of a serial killer's biography. The last element this chapter will discuss is the aesthetics of violence; i.e. how Ellis has used the poetics of violence to allow the reader to enter the gloomy world of a psychopathic serial killer.

# CHAPTER ONE: SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This chapter attempts to give an analytical view at the author's life; providing some important facts about his early life, shedding light on the cultural climate that paved the way for his talent to emerge, and most importantly, emphasizing the impact of his life experiences on shaping his mindset as well as his literary production. In addition, this chapter depicts the yuppie lifestyle which the novel's most fictional characters are chiefly identified with. Moreover, it is necessary in this chapter to demonstrate the scientific study of crime as an attempt to prepare for a deep analytical study of the novel's serial killer Patrick Bateman along with studying the novel's violence, horror, and terror.

## 1. Bret Easton Ellis's Formative Years

Life experiences are one of the key factors that shape one's own thoughts, beliefs, and personality. Bret Easton Ellis, as a post-modernist writer, has produced a number of influential works that trace the impact of his personal experiences on constructing a unique perception of life. Theorists argued that Ellis's works have obviously reflected his views towards postmodern life and embodied many aspects of his own biography. For this reason, some of Ellis's literary works, notably *American Psycho* are to some extent autobiographical and self-reflexive.

### 1.1 Bret Easton Ellis's Early Life

Bret Easton Ellis is an American novelist, screenwriter, and short story writer. Ellis was born on March 7, 1964 in Los Angeles California. He lived in a wealthy family in Sherman Oaks in San Fernando Valley. He was raised by his father, Robert Martin Ellis, and his mother, Dale Dennis Ellis, who divorced in 1982. He was educated at The Buckley School and he had some music courses at Bennington College in Vermont.



Bret Easton Ellis had an ambitious personality even when he was a young child. Ellis claimed in his first days at school: “I was too private a person and the only way that I could express myself artistically without totally humiliating myself was through writing”, and he continued, “I still have fantasies of being a musician,”<sup>7</sup> because he has studied in the music school of Bennington.

## 1.2 Ellis’s contribution to literature

Bret Easton Ellis is a talented writer since his childhood days; “I began writing at a very young age and I think the reason was my mother was an avid reader and I was constantly taken to the library”<sup>8</sup> Ellis confessed. Thus, Ellis started his career as a writer at a very early age.

Ellis is considered as one of the major Brat Pack writers; a group of young American authors who emerged during the 1980s and gained fame through making the world of literature more realistic and less alienating.<sup>9</sup> They introduced new literary productions that differ from the previous works in subject matter as well as style; they presented violence, drug as the most outstanding features of New York cultural lifestyle.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Bret Easton Ellis received a respectful reputation as a recognizable writer when he was twenty one years old after the publication of his first novel *Less Than Zero* in 1985 . The novel tells the story of disaffected, disillusioned, and rich teenagers of Los Angeles. In addition, Bret Easton Ellis published a collection of short stories called *The Informers* in 1994. The stories have

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<sup>7</sup> Jaime Clarke, and Bret Easton Ellis, “Interview with Bret Easton Ellis,” *Mississippi Review* vol. 27, no. 3 (1999), pp. 61–102; p.64.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.63.

<sup>9</sup> Emily Temple, “Where Is Today’s Literary Brat Pack?, ” *Flavorwire*. August 12, 2014.  
<http://flavorwire.com/472001/where-is-todays-literary-brat-pack>

<sup>10</sup> Michael Wood, “Goodbye to All What? The return of the Brat Pack,” *Harpers*. August 2016  
<http://harpers.org/archive/2016/08/goodbye-to-all-what/>

interlinked characters. Besides, Ellis wrote *Glamorama* in 1998, a satire novel on celebrity culture and consumerism. It tells the story of a male model who becomes involved in a terrorist organization comprised entirely of other models.

Critics argued that Ellis's major novels are *The Rules of Attraction* 1987 and *American Psycho* 1991. *The Rules of Attraction*, Bret Easton Ellis's second published novel, is a comic depiction of a few promiscuous and spoiled college students in New Hampshire involved in a love triangle. Bret Easton Ellis wrote *American Psycho*, his third novel, as an attempt to give a detailed picture of the decay of human spirits, morals and values in 1980s American culture. In fact, this novel was harshly controversial due to its detailed description of violence and sexual content.

Some of Ellis's works were adopted into films. For instance, Ellis's *Less Than Zero* was adopted into a movie in 1987. In 2008, Ellis's collection of short stories, "The Informers", was adapted for screen, after he partnered Nicholas Jarecki, and wrote the script for a movie version of the stories. In 2000, *American Psycho* was adapted into a movie by Guinevere Turner and Mary Harron. It was released by Lions Gate Films and the protagonist was played by Christian Bale. Then, "The Rules of Attraction" was adapted into a movie in 2002.

### **1.3 Ellis's *Weltanschauung***

Bret Easton Ellis expresses his personal views and attitudes frankly. In an interview with Ellis, Birnbaum admitted that he feels pleasant to talk with Ellis; an honest and witty writer.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it is easy to detect his mindset immediately through his confessions.

Bret Easton Ellis believes that man is an evil creature. He admitted to Jaime Clarke that "man is born and is corrupted and is always capable of badness,"<sup>12</sup> for Ellis, man is born with

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Birnbaum, "Bret Easton Ellis," *The Morning News* Jan 19,2006.  
<https://www.themorningnews.org/article/bret-easton-ellis> .

a great tendency toward doing bad things repeatedly; people are unable to do good things because evil is deeply rooted in their psyches. They like, for instance, killing others with a cold blood because their desires of badness need to be fulfilled. Also, Ellis sees the world of fashion, models, and celebrities as an archetypal scene of terrorism. According to him, people living in the modern era are excessively obsessed with fashion. Consequently, such obsession will “psychically damages the culture”<sup>13</sup> Ellis said.

Concerning the experience of writing, Ellis thinks that writing is the reflection of the writer’s own thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. Ellis pointed out that writing is perfectly a narcissistic matter.<sup>14</sup> That is, literary works aim at pleasing the writer himself when transmitting his beliefs and thoughts into a piece of writing regardless of its subject and what others might think about it.

Bret Easton Ellis is considered as one of the most significant post-modernist writers who could transmit his life experiences, observations and thoughts into a well recognizable works of fiction. Most of his works have perfectly demonstrated the cultural conditions of postmodern life, for this reason, Georgina Colby considered him a successful writer and a cultural commentator and who is a unique writer due to his critique of the hidden aspects of the human culture.<sup>15</sup> Ellis’s ability to make a strong bound between his experiences or observations of others’ living circumstances appears to be much more visible in his novel *American Psycho*.

In addition, Ellis observed the life in 1980’s America culture that was mostly exhibited in a complicated protocols of yuppie lifestyle; a life that marked an awful fascination with

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<sup>12</sup> Jaime Clarke, and Ellis Bret Easton, “Interview with Bret Easton Ellis,” *Mississippi Review* vol. 27, no. 3 (1999), pp. 61–102; p .102.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* , p.85.

<sup>15</sup> Georgina Colby, *Bret Easton Ellis Underwriting the Contemporary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.15

status, money, pleasure, terror, physical appearance and all aspects of surface life without any concern toward the deepest aspect of human structure. Such conditions inspired Ellis to write his most controversial novel, *American Psycho*, where he created a fictional character, Patrick Bateman, who represented the decay of human spirit in modern culture.

#### **1.4 Parallel Between *American Psycho* and Ellis's Life**

Ellis has long wanted to write a book about New York City and life there. In the early 1987, he moved to New York and started meeting some young friends working on Wall Street. Hanging out with those guys, he entered the world of the yuppies and discovered what kind of life they had. The centre of life for those guys seemed to be about wearing the most fashionable clothes, eating in the finest restaurants, and dating the most attractive girls. It is there that the writer decided that he will write a novel about a guy working on Wall Street, having the same lifestyle as those guys, and a serial killer! Ellis admitted that though the connection between having such a lifestyle and being a serial killer might not be that logical; yet, for him, it seemed so.<sup>16</sup>

Bret Easton Ellis's most controversial novel *American Psycho* is his most autobiographical work. When comparing Ellis's life to his fictional work the *American Psycho*, certain connections would come to the surface. When Ellis was asked if his narrator Patrick Bateman is the reflection of any of his acquaintances, "partly guys I met on Wall Street, partly myself, and partly my father,"<sup>17</sup> he answered. He recounted how he was glad for the fortune he had accumulated after the success of his first novel *Less Than Zero*, and how he moved to New York where he experienced the life of the yuppies. Nevertheless, his success as young writer and the glamour of the New York City did not help the feeling of

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<sup>16</sup> Jaime Clarke, and Ellis Bret Easton, "Interview with Bret Easton Ellis," *Mississippi Review* vol. 27, no. 3 (1999), pp. 61–102; p .74.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

dissatisfaction to fade. This success and luxurious life added more to the writer's alienation and ultimately he sunk into drinking and consuming drugs. In that respect, Ellis identifies himself with his narrator Patrick Bateman, "He was young, he was successful, he lived a certain kind of lifestyle."<sup>18</sup> Ellis states that Patrick Bateman is a reflection of his father as well. Ellis's father was obsessed with appearances, prestige, and the glamour of objects.

## **2 The Rise of Yuppies in America**

The term yuppie refers to young, urban, professionals who grown up from the baby boomer generation (1943-1960). Yuppies are usually young, single, childless, well educated, and have a well-paying job. They are characterized by numerous distinctive views and attitudes toward different aspects of life including morals, family, and sexual affairs. To illustrate, yuppies were explicitly greedy and terribly obsessed with money, "when asked what they want? Yuppies reply 'money,' asked what they want to be? They say rich."<sup>19</sup> Consequently, money is the hallmark of the yuppie perception of success. Besides, most members of the yuppies opposed the notion of marriage or having children, and many of them appealed for sexual freedom. Tyler Cowen, in his article *Trade between Cultures*, exhibited a special protocols adopted by the yuppies to fulfill their preoccupation with appearance, status and prestigious lifestyle. Cowen maintained that "a typical American yuppie drinks French wine, listens to Beeethoven on a Japanese audio system, uses the Internet to buy Persian textiles from a dealer in London, watches Hollywood movies funded by foreign capital and filmed by a European director, and vacations in Bali."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the term yuppie serves as an effective symbol that describes the American life during the nineteen eighties.

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<sup>18</sup> Jaime Clarke, and Ellis Bret Easton, "Interview with Bret Easton Ellis," *Mississippi Review* vol. 27, no. 3 (1999), pp. 61–102; p.81.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Dyer, "Yuppie Culture," *Marxism Today* (October 1985), pp. 47-48; p. 48.

<sup>20</sup> Tyler Cowen, "Trade between Cultures," *Creative Destruction: How Globalization Is Changing the World's Cultures* (2002), pp. 1–18; p.4.

Russell W. Belk believed that the unique thoughts and lifestyle are the cornerstone to define the yuppie phenomenon. Therefore, Belk reinforced in the Yuppie Handbook definition that the yuppie is “a person of either sex who meets the following criteria: (1) resides in or near one of the major cities; (2) claims to be between the ages of 25 and 45; (3) lives on aspirations of glory, prestige, recognition, fame, social status, power, money or any and all combinations of the above.”<sup>21</sup>

Studies showed that it is uneasy task to determine who was perceived as a yuppie or how to outnumber them, because criteria of defining yuppies are not accurate. Some estimated that there were 1.2 million, while others argued that about five percent of baby boomers (4.2 million) are defined as yuppies.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, yuppies were just a minority, but they had an everlasting impact on American culture.

Many scholars agreed that the yuppies culture has resulted from the hippies and gay culture. The hippies are a group of a countercultural movement that appeared throughout the 1960s in the United States. The hippies rebelled against the standards and protocols of the American life, and they felt marginalized from materialistic middle class society. Therefore, they created their own lifestyle and culture since they had a special values and aesthetics.<sup>23</sup> Later, the hippies paved the way for the emergence of a new American subculture known as “yuppies.”

The yuppies were perceived as conservative people in politics and liberal in behaviors. They welcomed Reagan’s policies such as taxes and strict economic control. However , their

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<sup>21</sup> Russell W. Belk, “Yuppies as Arbiters of the Emerging Consumption,” *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol.13 (1986), <http://acrwebsite.org/volumes/6543/volumes/v13/NA-13>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "Hippie," Encyclopædia Britannica 2015. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hippie>. Accessed on 15.02.2017.

behaviors and attitudes revealed bold personalities .In this view, Dyer stated that “yuppies are the face but not the heart of Reagan’s America”<sup>24</sup> because they did not respond to Reagan’s appeals for national pride and traditional family .Thus, most of them were unmarried and preferred to stay as such.

Yuppies had a strong desire for financial security, ambition, and individualism. Their parents have raised them with an optimistic spirit. Such conditions made them successful but; most of the time ,yuppies seem unhappy . Yuppies cultural impact on society was disastrous; because socialists argue that their wealth and status were built on others living poor and miserable conditions .Also, marketers proved that their consuming habits and materialistic trends are the responsible factor for the stock market crash in 1987.

### **3. Criminology: The Logic of Serial Killing**

Crime has been always an inevitable part of the human history and researchers have been preoccupied with this issue. The sophisticated nature of crime urged researchers to deal with it scientifically. As a result, a new scientific branch came to exist; criminology. Criminology is defined as the scientific study of the criminal behavior, its motives, its prevention, and its legal aspects or law enforcement. Furthermore, criminology is an interdisciplinary field of study that involves many other fields such as psychology, sociology, economics, psychiatry, and anthropology. By the mid of the 1800s, to fully understand the criminal behavior, a number of theories and approaches were established including the classical and positivist schools, social structures theories, and symbolic interactionism.

Serial murders are one of the most complex areas of study within criminology. Serial killing has developed greatly in the modern time, and media has made it a very fascinating

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Dyer, “Yuppie Culture,” *Marxism today* (October 1985), pp .47-48; p. 47.

subject; not only for academics, but also for the public. Whereas the question if serial killers are born or made is a disputed subject, the definition of a serial killer seems to enjoy a kind of consensus. Douglas, Burgess, Burgess, and Ressler define serial murder, in their book *Crime Classification Manual (2013)*, as “three or more separate events in three or more separate locations with an emotional cooling off period between the homicides.”<sup>25</sup>

### **3.1 Biological Approaches**

The theory of criminal behavior as rooted in the human being is one of the earliest provided explanations. One of the forerunners of this theory is thought to be Cesar Lombroso (1835-1909); whose findings came to dominate in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lombroso argued that criminals are doomed by their physical abnormalities which drive them inevitably to commit crimes. He explained that this condition is nothing but a status of atavism; a regression to a primitive stage in the human development. Lombroso thought that the criminal was “essentially an organic anomaly, partly pathological and partly atavistic.”<sup>26</sup>

When studying the biological factors behind serial murder, scientists focus on brain functioning, genetics, and hormones. They believe one's lifestyle can be affected by the nature of genes. It was found that a gene, metabolizing enzyme A (MAOA) monoamine oxidase, is linked to X chromosome. This gene affects the natural regulation, done by the brain, of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin which are responsible for the pleasure system and for the functions of sleep, appetite, feeding, and body weight. The absence of such neurotransmitters results in the person's tendency to aggressive behavior. Consequently, this person will face difficulties in socialization and feeling rejected will develop a deviant behavior.

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<sup>25</sup> Douglas et al, *Crime Classification Manual* ( New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2013) ,p.115.

<sup>26</sup> Charles A.Ellwood, “Lombroso's Theory of Crime,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* Vol. 2, no.6 (1912), pp.716-723; p. 717.



Neurological disorders are also other elements that scientists rely on to explain violence. Resulting from head injury, birth defects, or seizures, Neurological disorders may relate to aggression. If the parts of the brain that are responsible for aggressive behavior are aroused, the person will be driven to aggression and violence. Hence the less those parts are regulated; the more aggressive behavior will appear.

### **3.2 Psychological Approaches**

Scholars who advocate this psychological approach assume that the driving force behind serial murder is a number of psychological problems. Researchers attempt to understand the distinctive psychological features of sadistic serial murderers; characteristics such as lack of remorse, lack of empathy, the power of manipulation, and antisocial personality.

According to Freud, aggression is something innate in the human being rather than learnt. He believed that aggressive behavior exists within the person himself and that environment has nothing to do with this. The aggressive drive exists as a part of the *id*, which the *ego* and *superego* usually try to repulse. Hence, a number of *defense mechanisms* are used in order to manage this situation, such as *displacing* this aggression onto a substitute object, *sublimation*, or *fantasy*.<sup>27</sup>

It is believed that the environment in which a person lives is has a great influence on one's psychology, that may result in personality disorders such as antisocial personality or narcissist personality. In a society that celebrates individualism, success, hedonism, the person who fails to achieve those norms face serious psychological problems.<sup>28</sup> As a result, the value of reason would be underestimated in such society; "Reason can [then] impose no

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<sup>27</sup> William Glassman, and Marilyn Hadad, *Approaches to Psychology* (London : McGraw-Hill Education, 2009),p. 383.

<sup>28</sup> Richard N. Kocsis, *Serial Murder and The Psychology of Violent Crime* (Totowa, NJ : Human Press, 2008), p. 85.

limits on the pursuit of pleasure, [or] on the immediate gratification of every desire, no matter how perverse, insane, criminal, or merely immoral.”<sup>29</sup>

Serial killers are usually distinct with a psychopathic personality; having certain personality traits and an antisocial behavior. Some scholars define a psychopath as "a selfish, impulsive, aggressive, loveless, remorseless, callous, two dimensional person-a person able to use emotions when it is to his advantage."<sup>30</sup> The goal of malignant type of psychopaths seems to revolve around the gratification of vengeful or sexual sadistic fantasies. Typical of a psychopath is being an egocentric individual who feels restless when being rejected and who tends to break the society's norms and values. Serial killers are unable to form a true and long term attachments with society's members. Psychoanalysts explain this as a result of the psychopath's misperception of his mother's behavior when he was a child. This can provide an explanation for the killer's ambivalence, non-caring attitude, and lack of empathy. Applying the *Theory of Mind* in studying psychopaths helps to find out that the problem does not lie in mentalizing but in their lack of emotional apparatus to feel empathy or guilt. Likewise, he is able to accomplish his sadistic torture and killing. Concerning the sadist behavior of serial killers, analysts believe that its object is to acquire strong emotions rather than to express cruelty.<sup>31</sup>

The narcissist personality of serial killers is another major area of interest. It has been hypothesized that a child who endured a narcissistic trauma in the process of individuation is unable to "tame the archaic, grandiose, and exhibitionistic self" which viewed as an essential part of healthy development. Ultimately, the child, when he grows up, will hold an

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<sup>29</sup> Christopher Lasch , *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York : W.W.Norton, 1991), p. 69.

<sup>30</sup> Richard N. Kocsis, *Serial Murder and The Psychology of Violent Crime* (Totowa, NJ : Human Press, 2008), p. 86.

<sup>31</sup>Richard N. Kocsis, *Serial Murder and The Psychology of Violent Crime* (Totowa, NJ : Human Press, 2008), p. 87.

unsatisfactory parental image, and an archaic and grandiose self image. The child may endure frustration and even phobias if his efforts in the individuation process and in seeking detachment from his mother are hindered. Hence, he develops a sense of ambivalence toward his mother, which will result later in feelings of hostility and explosive behavior.<sup>32</sup>

### **3.3 Sociological Approaches**

A common fact is that humans are social beings by nature. Throughout their lives they become in contact with social groups and associations, and form short or long-term relationships to carry out their natural life. The human behavior is extremely affected by the society in which one lives. Sociology has been an outstanding field on which the explanation of deviant and criminal behavior is based. Many theories have been created to study the effect of social contact on the human behavior.

Two major theories attempted to explain the phenomenon of deviance; the processual and the structural. The latter states that deviance is a mere consequence of social structural conditions. It aims at understanding why the occurrence of deviance in the lower classes is more than in any others. On the other hand, the processual approach aims at analyzing the processes of committing those deviant behaviors. Therefore, it attempts to understand what is behind the fact that certain people are prone to act likewise.<sup>33</sup>

Among the theories that study the phenomenon of serial murder from a sociological perspective, there are the anomie/strain theory and the labeling theory. The anomie/strain theory states that the extreme emphasis on achieving success creates certain pressures on the individual, and ultimately causes the deviance in the individuals' behavior. According to the labeling theory, an individual is driven to deviance as a result of internalizing the idea of

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>33</sup> Ju-Lak Lee, and Kwan Choi , “Serial Murder: An Exploration and Evaluation of Theories and Perspectives,” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol.4, no.3 ( March 2014) pp.99-110;p.101.

being deviant. In other words, if an individual is viewed as deviant by his society members, he will ultimately accept this label and believe himself as deviant and then start committing deviant acts.<sup>34</sup>

This section of study has provided a very significant foundation on which Patrick Bateman's personality shall be examined. The conditions and characteristics that guided the American culture during the late twentieth century were of disastrous effects on the human ethics and morals. Inevitably, human beings affect and are affected by their social surroundings. A culture that stresses certain codes of perfection practices a kind of oppression on its people. For, failing in adhering to those norms or giving them a higher priority creates a kind of anxiety that may eventually turn into abnormal behaviors such as psychopathy. Therefore, the following chapter will offer a psychoanalytical study to Patrick Bateman's personality to better understand the motives that led to the emergence of such destructed character.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE SERIAL KILLER MINDSET

This chapter is a journey in which we will explore the mind of Patrick Bateman who is viewed as an archetypal example of human destructiveness. That is, a psychoanalytical study will be undertaken as an attempt to find a valid interpretation to Bateman's unhealthy personality and understand the reason behind his homicidal behaviors. Along with examining the personality of Patrick Bateman, we will have an analysis of the cultural lifestyle, ethics, and values that are expected to be essential in the creation of a ruthless criminal.

Thus, through this exploratory journey, we will argue whether Bateman is a criminal who blindly responds to his violent urges, or he is just a victim who nurtured in a devastated culture.

### 1. What Makes a Serial Killer Tick?

Patrick Bateman, the antihero of Ellis's *American Psycho*, represents a considerable challenge for personality analysts because the novel provides no information about his psychological background. Bateman himself claims: "searching for a rational analysis of who I am, which is, of course, impossibility: there... is... no...key."<sup>35</sup> However, applying the Freudian model of personality structure appears to be the most effective psychoanalytical theory to understand how his mind works; therefore, to find a valid interpretation to his abnormal behaviors. To examine the personality of Bateman, one should analyze how his id, ego, and superego interact in a relationship that is shaped by unhealthy structure of the mind.

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<sup>35</sup> Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (New York: Vintage, 1991), p.246.

## 1.1 Weak Ego and a Total Control of the Id

In his *American Psycho*, Ellis presented Patrick Bateman who suffers from unhealthy structure of the mind. Patrick's mind is characterized by a total control of the most primitive and instinctual part of human psyche which is known as "the id". The id, according to Freud, is "a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations. We picture it as being open at its end to somatic influences, and as there taking up into itself instinctual needs which find their psychical expression in it."<sup>36</sup> Thus, the id, under the supremacy of the pleasure principle, blindly asks for immediate response to its demands regardless of any kind of restriction such as social boundaries or ethical concepts that may reject the realization of its demands.

Patrick's id, as all humans' id, has many instinctual demands that need immediate satisfaction as a result of the pleasure principle's role which serves as the supreme faculty that guides the id. However, Patrick's ego, that is supposed to function according to the reality principle, is unable to control his id's instinctual demands. Such problem, according to psychologists, will cause a psychological disorder defined as psychopathology. In this concern, Griggs theorized that: "an overly strong id makes one a psychopath, lacking a conscience, or an ogre, selfishly meeting one's needs without concern for others."<sup>37</sup> Therefore, a strong id may negatively manipulate one's behaviors.

Thus, Bateman's overly strong id is the responsible factor for his psychopathological state. In a conversation with his fiancée Evelyn, Bateman admitted that he is not a normal person but an "evil psychopath."<sup>38</sup> In spite the fact that his friends see him as a good person and Evelyn always describes him as "the boy next door."<sup>39</sup> In addition to being a psychopath,

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<sup>36</sup> Sigmund Freud, "New Introductory Lectures On Psycho-Analysis," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XXII (1932), pp. 1-182; p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> Richard A. Griggs, *Psychology : A Concise Introduction* ( New York: Worth Publishers, 2012), p. 285.

<sup>38</sup> *American Psycho*, p.20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Bateman has a strong fascination with murder. In this view, Chauhan and Polley affirmed that:

It is due to this distorted psyche of Bateman, he enjoys a strange aesthetics pleasure in his act of murder. A close study of Bateman's action confirms the fact that apart from any other impulse, it is this aesthetic joy in murder that propels Bateman to commit more murders.<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, Bateman himself, while playing with a little baby, admitted that he lives with a sharply destructed state of mind by saying: "Yes I'm a total psychopathic murderer, oh yes I am, I like to kill people, oh yes I do, honey, little sweetie pie, yes I do."<sup>41</sup> Thus, Bateman's shocking behaviors strongly emphasize his abnormal psyche in addition to his thirst for killing.

For a well functioning personality model, according to Freud, the id is always asking the ego to satisfy its instinctual demands. Then, the ego tries hardly to face reality and tries to control the id's impulsive demands in order to be accepted by the external world which is represented by the cultural and social conditions where the person has lived. Freud clarifies the role of the ego as follows:

It has to serve three harsh masters, and has to do its best to reconcile the claims and demands of all three. These demands are always divergent and often seem quite incompatible; no wonder that the ego so frequently gives way under its task. The three tyrants are the external world, the super-ego and the id.<sup>42</sup>

However, In the case of *American psycho*'s anti-hero, the ego could not serve its masters; hence, it finds itself helpless toward the id's demands. Whenever he feels that he wishes to do

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<sup>40</sup> Anurag Chauhan, Anindya Sundar Polley, "Concentric and the Off-Centered Spheres of the Psyche of the Protagonist and Readers in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*," *the Apollonion* Vol. 2 (April 2015) , pp.1-12; p.5.

<sup>41</sup> *American Psycho*, p.221.

<sup>42</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Anatomy of the Mental Personality," New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis" (1933) <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/at/freud2.htm>

something, Bateman immediately fulfills his wishes regardless of the outcomes; he is ready to torture, rape, kill, and many other acts just to amuse himself. Consequently, these acts made him both a psychopath and a serial killer.

Patrick knows that his wishes are the destructive power of his soul but he cannot find any other way to please his instinctual demands such as the thirst for criminal behaviors: “but I... have no other way to express my blocked... needs,”<sup>43</sup> Bateman admits; so, the only solution for him is “to engage in... homicidal behavior on a massive scale.”<sup>44</sup> As a result, he becomes an archetypal murderer.

Freud believes that people prefer to live in a state of pleasure and try to avoid displeasure, he puts this psychological feature as follows:

the course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle...the course of those events is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension; and that it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension- that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, for the sake of implementing the pleasure principle, Patrick finds himself blindly executing his internal desires and wishes such as raping, seducing, killing, and torturing.

Indeed, most of Bateman’s psyche revolves around producing and maintaining pleasure. Through numerous detailed narration of his lifestyle, fashionable items, and criminal behaviors, Patrick describes how his mission is just to amuse himself. In this concern, Richard Porton emphasized that Patrick’s narration of his life suggests his interest in doing what he wants from returning videotapes to killing humans as well as animals, thus: “when Bateman

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<sup>43</sup> *American Psycho*, p.338.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, translated by: James Strachey (United States; Pacific Publishing Studio, 2010), p.1.



isn't savoring arugula or kiwi and watching porn videos, his real business is killing innocent men and women."<sup>46</sup>

In addition, the production of pleasure in Bateman's psyche can be achieved by enjoying a luxurious life, wearing the most fashionable clothes by the well known designers, listening to his favorable songs, and fulfilling his driving desire of violence and criminality. Bateman shows how he can produce pleasure by obeying his desires as follow:

Did I ever tell you that I want to wear a big yellow smiley-face mask and then put on the CD version of Bobby McFerrin's 'Don't Worry, Be Happy' and then take a girl and a dog – a collie, a chow, a sharpei, it doesn't really matter – and then hook up this transfusion pump, this IV set, and switch their blood, you know, pump the dog's blood into the hardbody and vice versa, did I ever tell you this?<sup>47</sup>

Along with producing pleasure by doing what he wants, Bateman behaviors aim at avoiding any form of displeasure. For instance , the episode involving Bateman's attitude when he saw Al , a black beggar seating in the street asking for food, is a good example of the way he behaves with things he dislikes, and how he impulsively avoid what may cause an obstacle to his pleasure. In this episode, Bateman describes the black bum's appearance in these lines:

A few days' growth of beard, triple chin, a ruddy nose lined with thick browfn veins. He's dressed in some kind of tacky-looking lime green polyester pantsuit with washed-out Sergio Valente jeans worn *over* it (this season's homeless person's fashion statement) along with a ripped orange and brown V-neck sweater stained with what looks like burgundy wine. It seems he's very drunk – either that or he's crazy or stupid.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Porton, "American Psycho by Edward R. Pressman, Chris Hanley, Christian Halsey Solomon, Mary Harron and Guinevere Turner," *Cinéaste* Vol. 25, No. 3 (2000), pp. 43-45; p.44.

<sup>47</sup> *American Psycho*, p.116.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p.129.

Through this description, Bateman shows his interest in other's way of looking and his detest to people like Al whose living conditions are miserable. Bateman does not feel pity for the beggar, as many humans may do, instead, he just feels disgusted because of the way he looks which is completely different from his stylish appearance and respectful social class. Also, he believes that it is unfair to give Al some money because he must work and get money by himself, he asked Al: "Listen. Do you think it's fair to take money from people who *do* have jobs? Who *do* work?"<sup>49</sup> For this reason, he ordered him: "Get a goddamn job, Al," "I say earnestly." You've got a negative attitude. That's what's stopping you. You've got to get your act together. I'll help you."<sup>50</sup> After deciding to help him, he felt disgusted of Al's bad smell, then, he said: "Do you know how bad you smell?" I whisper this soothingly, stroking his face. "The *stench*, my god..."<sup>51</sup> And though the beggar told him that he could not have a shelter, Bateman continued embarrassing him: "You *reek*," I tell him." You *reek* of... *shit*."<sup>52</sup> Hence, Bateman could not bear any more and being with the beggar damages his psychological state and raises his anger; "My rage builds, subsides, and I close my eyes, bringing my hand up to squeeze the bridge of my nose," Patrick said. Subsequently, he decides to kill him in order to overcome his state of displeasure with seeing something different from his own appearance and lifestyle, he expresses his attitude toward the beggar in this way: "Al... I'm sorry. It's just that... I don't know. I don't have anything in common with you."<sup>53</sup>

In similar case, normal human beings would either feel pity or careless toward the beggar who feels hungry; in case they felt pity, they would give him food or money, whereas, those who feel careless toward this social category, they would ignore him and avoid any contact

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<sup>49</sup>*American Psycho*, p.130.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid p.131.

with him. However, Bateman, as a model of human psychological destructiveness, behaves strangely because he suffers from an over supremacy of his id that asks for immediate obedience to its drives. Therefore, he pursues the conditions of his own satisfaction when he wants something. In contrast, when he feels annoyed, he is ready to eliminate any sort of displeasure even if this displeasure compels him to take one's life as what happened with Al, and similar examples are recurrent in the novel reflecting his psychological destructiveness.

Another problem resulted from Bateman's dysfunctional ego is represented in his inability to control his emotions. For instance, in the chapter of *Dry Cleaners*, Bateman narrates how unexpectedly he decided to go to the Chinese cleaners and complain about their works in a manner that emphasizes that his ego could not control the instinctual drives of the id, so that he released these drives in a destructive behavior. Bateman is used to send his clothes to the dry cleaners, then, he receives his clothes cleaned after twenty four hours. But that day, Bateman wanted his clothes to be cleaned just after twenty minutes which seems as an impossible task.<sup>54</sup> Next, Because Bateman cannot understand the language of the Chinese woman who runs the cleaners, he immediately gets angry and finds himself unable to bear the situation, then he inflicts his anger on the woman as follows: "You're a *fool*. I *can't* cope with this."<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, he warned her by saying: "If-you-don't-shut-your-fucking-mouth-I-will-kill-you-areyou-understanding-me?"<sup>56</sup> Hence, before leaving, he mocked at her by saying:" "Stupid bitch-ee? Understand?" I shout, red-faced, on the verge of tears. I'm shaking and I yank the jacket away from her, muttering "Oh Christ."<sup>57</sup>

Another example of Patrick Bateman's abnormal personality, which resulted from his id's supremacy over his behaviors, is his inability to have a good relationship with people and face

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<sup>54</sup>*American Psycho*, p.81.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.83.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid, p.83.

reality because his ego's reality principle is diminished. Thus, he creates his own world and becomes hallucinating and unable to accept neither reality with all its circumstances nor people with their different conditions. Derik confirms that: "Patrick frequently proves that he neither needs nor particularly enjoys anyone he cannot associate with. He uses people for his own personal gain or as an audience to preen and expand his inflated self-image."<sup>58</sup>

Bateman's personality further shows how his state of mind gets destroyed because he cannot face reality which represents his worst fear.<sup>59</sup> He accounts that he becomes "Unable to maintain a credible public persona."<sup>60</sup> In fact, this deviated psyche is resulted from the absence of a well functioning ego which supposedly "has a set of psychic functions able to distinguish between fantasy and reality. It organizes thoughts and makes sense of the world."<sup>61</sup> Freud states.

Consequently, in many episodes, Bateman tells how he gets involved in a severe state of hallucination and imagination; for instance, his world is perceived with a specific view that is totally different from reality, he says:

I hallucinate the buildings into mountains, into volcanoes, the streets become jungles, the sky freezes into a backdrop, and before stepping out of the cab I have to cross my eyes in order to clear my vision."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Derik Cool, "Simply not there: Externality versus Internal Identity in *American Psycho*," *Valley Humanities Review*. (Spring 2012), pp1-12; p.10.

<sup>59</sup> *American Psycho*, p.226.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>61</sup> William Siegfried, "The Formation and Structure of the Human Psyche," *Athene Noctua: Undergraduate Philosophy Journal*. No. 2 (Spring 2014), pp.1-3;p.2.

<sup>62</sup> *American Psycho*, p.86.

This example explains how Batman's life is full of imaginations to the extent that he finds himself unable to distinguish reality from hallucination, as Julian Pearce illustrates: "the line between reality and hallucination for Bateman is extremely blurred or even non-existent."<sup>63</sup>

## 1.2 The Urges of Love and Death in Bateman's Psyche

In *American Psycho*, Ellis represented a protagonist whose most behaviors are manipulated by two main instinctual drives; the first one stands for the life instinct which notably refers to love, while the second one stands for the death instinct which refers to human aggression and violence.

For Bateman, life is perceived by love, he shows, through various acts, that his central wish in life is to be loved by others, in this sense, he declares: "I just want to be loved."<sup>64</sup> The urge of love, according to psychoanalysis, is embodied in all human psyches because people find themselves unable to surpass the stage of separation from their parents which cause a trauma in their future personalities; that is, one's longing for love "is an act of refinding because the beloved unconsciously represents the oedipal parent."<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, Bateman's act of refinding a beloved draws him to insanity, and this is plausible because the importance of love is deeply rooted in human nature as Ferenczi believes: "man has no will to enter the world without the welcoming embrace of his mother."<sup>66</sup>

In one of the novel's episodes, Bateman narrates how he wanted to kill Luis, but when he discovered that he loves him, the pleasure of murder becomes exceptionally denied.<sup>67</sup> Thus, in

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<sup>63</sup> Julian Pearce, "Patrick Bateman of American Psycho: A Sexual Profile," *Lapsus*. November 30, 2014 <https://lapsuspsych.com/2014/11/30/patrick-bateman-of-american-psycho-a-sexual-profile/>

<sup>64</sup> *American Psycho*, p.345.

<sup>65</sup> Fredric T. Perlman, "Love and its Objects: On the Contributions to Psychoanalysis of Martin S. Bergmann," *Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 86, No. 6 (1999), pp.1-35 ;p .5.

<sup>66</sup> Qtd in Fredric T. Perlman, *op.cit.*, p.6.

<sup>67</sup> *American Psycho*, p.159.

Bateman's psyche, love is given a great importance since it is the only factor that makes him deny his pleasure of killing others. Also, he admits that though he is not used to deny his urges or even warn people before killing them, Luis was the only exceptional person to be warned not to upset him. Therefore, Luis is an exceptional character in Bateman's life just because he expressed a sense of passion toward him; something that he mostly needed in his life.

Moreover, Bateman describes his unfamiliar state of happiness when his secretary said that she loves him, he describes his reaction as follows: "a flood of reality. I get an odd feeling that this is a crucial moment in my life and I'm startled by the suddenness of what I guess passes for an epiphany."<sup>68</sup> Unlike the absence of humanity he is used to see in other people, Jean was the only person he could believe her human entity; he could sense her true love toward him, therefore he hopes that she can take him to another world and rearrange his life in an extraordinary manner. More importantly, Jean, Bateman's secretary, could be compared to an angel who is able to reformulate his humanistic entity.<sup>69</sup>

In addition, the absence of love in Bateman's life is considered as one of the main factors that led to his deviated personality. In *Theories of Personality*, Jess Feist and Gregory Feist sets that: "Healthy adult relationships blend all four forms of love. They are based on sexual satisfaction, a desire for an enduring union, genuine friendship, and an unselfish concern for the welfare of the other person."<sup>70</sup> Thus, the absence of love in Patrick's life is highly reflected in Bateman's unhealthy personality.

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<sup>68</sup> *American Psycho*, p.378.

<sup>69</sup> Frank Lentricchia and Jody Mcaililiffe, *The Crimes of Art and Terror* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.66

<sup>70</sup> Jess Feist , Gregory Feist , *Theories of Personality* (the United States of America ;The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2009), p.356.

Along with the urge of love, Bateman is driven by a dangerous drive of death. The drive of death might be implemented either on one's self by self destruction or it is directed from one's self to others by different forms of aggression, cruelty, and murder.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the most frustrating aspect in Bateman's personality is the number of crimes that he committed including raping, killing, and different sadistic acts. Notably, Bateman explicitly reveals his fascination with all kinds of aggression. In this concern, Vartan P puts that in *American Psycho* "the protagonist is increasingly portrayed as a cold-blooded and brutal murderer who kills indiscriminately and on impulse."<sup>72</sup> To illustrate this view, Bateman sets that when he sees a pretty girl walking down the street, two things come to his mind ; the first thing encourages him to treat her kindly and be nice with her , the second thing, however, pushes him to treat her brutally and imagine how her head would look like on a stick.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, Bateman is excessively fascinated with practicing aggression on other people, and because he gets used to horror,<sup>74</sup> he becomes a serial killer who successfully exhibits the monstrous evil in human structure. As Allué ,in her article serial murder, serial consumerism: Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, confirms: "There is no ending to Bateman's killings, which go on and on, in a sequence replicating the way most television series are broadcast nowadays"<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, Bateman thinks that life is better without some people even himself ,as a result he would like to kill many people including his friend Armstrong who annoys him. Because his life is painful and exhausting , as he says "My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope

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<sup>71</sup> William Berry, "How Recognizing your Death Drive may Save you," Psychology Today. Oct 26, 2011. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-second-noble-truth/201110/how-recognizing-your-death-drive-may-save-you>

<sup>72</sup> Vartan P. Messier , "Visual Poetics, Intertextuality, and the Transfiguration of Ideology: An "Eye" for an "I" in Mary Harron's Cinematic Adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis's "American Psycho"," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* Vol. 11, No. 1 (Fall 2009), pp. 93-111;p.99.

<sup>73</sup> *American Psycho*, p.92.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.329.

<sup>75</sup> Sonia Baelo Allué, "Serial Murder, Serial Consumerism: Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*," *A journal of English and American Studies* 26 (2002), pp. 71-90; p.77.

for a better world for anyone,”<sup>76</sup> he sees death as the only release from his internal struggles .

Bateman reveals this idea in the following monologue:

If I were to disappear into that crack, say somehow miniaturize and slip into it, the odds are good that no one would notice I was gone. No... one... would... care. In fact some, if they noticed my absence, might feel an odd, indefinable sense of relief. This is true: the world is better off with some people gone. Our lives are *not* all interconnected. That theory is a crock. Some people truly do not *need* to be here.<sup>77</sup>

Consequently, the drive of death urges Bateman to think that he should put an end to his life, though, he never dares to put his life in a risk. As a result, he released this urge in various forms of aggression directed toward others. To explain this idea, Knight puts:

His murders help him cope with what he sees as a chaotic and horrifying existence. If Bateman were to let himself actually feel, he would fall apart; thus, he holds himself together by bringing order to chaos, by squashing any threat to his carefully molded sense of self. Killing for him stems from the same impulse that leads him to catalog his shower products in the morning and obsess about the details of the menus at trendy restaurants.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, love and death are the main dynamic powers that could harshly manipulate Bateman’s behaviors, and the trauma in Bateman’s life is largely effected by the absence of love and the over presence of aggression which shape the personality of Patrick Bateman; an archetypal character of a psychopathic serial killer.

### **1.3. Bateman’s Twisted Superego**

The superego is the third part in the Freudian format of examining human mind; it represents the ethical, social, religious values, and one’s internal conscience that tends to create a sense of guilt and self punishment when a person behaves inappropriately.

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<sup>76</sup>*American Psycho*, p.377.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid*, p. 226.

<sup>78</sup> Mary L. Knight , *Sympathy for the Devil: Volatile Masculinities in Recent German and American Literatures* (USA; Duke University, 2011), p.133.(Dissertation)



Accordingly, Patrick Bateman's superego, like anyone's, is determined by the social conditions where he has grown up. In this sense, Eli Sagan clarifies:

The dependence of the superego on the particular society in which it exists underlines a fatal flaw in the theory of the superego as representing the moral function within the psyche. Far from carrying out the task of morality in the psyche, the superego is essentially amoral and can be as easily immoral as moral. Within a slave society, the superego legitimates slavery. Within a racist or sexist society, the superego demands racism and sexism. And in a Nazi society, the superego commands one to live up to genocidal ideals.<sup>79</sup>

Bateman shows, through numerous episodes, that he lives in a society that glorifies greediness, misogyny, racism, aggressiveness, and superficiality. Following this notion, it is valid to claim that Patrick Bateman is a sadist, misogynist, and racist person. Since the *superego* incorporates the values and morals of society which are learned from one's parents and others,<sup>80</sup> Bateman's superego is the consequence of a decayed social values originated from 1980's American yuppies' lifestyle. For instance, Carruthers, Bateman's friend, announced his hatred toward other human races such as the Japanese especially that they save more money than the Americans do. Bateman narrates this scene in the following lines:

"Bateman, I *hate* the Japanese," screams at me, one hand placed over an ear. "Little slanty-eyed bastards."

"What," I scream, "in the hell are you talking about?"  
"Oh I know, I know," he screams, eyes bulging. "They save more than we do and they don't innovate much, but they sure in the fuck know how to take, *steal*, our innovations, improve on them, then ram them down our fucking throats!"<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Eli Sagan, *Freud, Women, and Morality: The Psychology of Good and Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p.9.

<sup>80</sup> Saul McLeod, "Id, Ego and Superego," *Simply Psychology* (2016).

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/psyche.html>

<sup>81</sup> *American Psycho*, p.145.

Moreover, throughout the novel, Bateman depicts how his society is blindly concerned with appearances; as a result, he works hard to follow his society's standards which made him look great at the expense of feeling bad.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Bateman's entourage has chiefly contributed in making him do whatever he wants without any fear of punishment. Therefore, he is strongly protected by a society that cannot expect that a successful, handsome, white man with an expensive suit would do any criminal behavior.<sup>83</sup> He himself emphasized the responsibility of his society in making him an evil psychopath and blaming it for his destructiveness; he accounts:

My conscience, my pity, my hopes disappeared a long time ago if they ever did exist. There are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it, I have now surpassed. I still, though, hold on to one single bleak truth: no one is safe, nothing is redeemed. Yet I am blameless.<sup>84</sup>

Though society protected him and encouraged him to silence his superego, Bateman's conscience still surviving. He feels guilty for the crimes he committed, and as an attempt to correct his behaviors, he wants to be punished, therefore, he called his lawyer and confessed all the crimes that he committed. However, his confessions were senseless because his lawyer could not believe him. As a result, Bateman decides to keep behaving in the same shocking manner; because, as he said: "THIS IS NOT AN EXIT."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>*American Psycho*, p.106.

<sup>83</sup>Nathan Rabin, "American Psycho Put Patrick Bateman, and the World he Called Home, under a Microscope," *The Dissolve* April 15, 2014. <https://thedissolve.com/features/movie-of-the-week/511-american-psycho-put-patrick-bateman-under-a-micros/>

<sup>84</sup>*American Psycho*, p.377.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid*, p.399.

## 2. Patrick Bateman as a Product of American Decay

Many critics blame Patrick Bateman and see him as a criminal. However, Bateman appears as a poor victim that resulted from the culture that deeply affected his personality. Thus, any straight person would become destructed as Bateman if he grew up in the city of New York during the 1980's when crime and consumerism were overly spread.

### 2.1. Crime in American culture

*American Psycho*, Bret Easton Ellis's most controversial novel, offers a detailed description of the American lifestyle and statistically reveals the sordid aspect of 1980's American cultural breakdown. *American psycho* successfully emphasized the fact that America in the late twentieth century, as described by Reagan, was a "waste land"<sup>86</sup> with a capitalistic culture that created the conditions in which violence could flourish.<sup>87</sup> Thus, all traditional ethics, values, and principles had been eliminated. Indeed, Americans were heading very fast for Armageddon.<sup>88</sup>

Obviously, the decay of cultural ethics and values has led to an overspread of sadistic crime and violence. In this concern, *American Psycho* determines a strong bound between crime on the streets and crime on the page.<sup>89</sup> Crime, as one of the main issues tackled in the novel, gives a clear demonstration of the destructiveness of America culture. Carla Freccero views America as a land which is highly associated with crime and the phenomenon of the serial killer, in particular, is a key stone to highlight the decay of American cultural lifestyle.

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<sup>86</sup> Frank Lentricchia and Jody Mcaililiffe, *The Crimes of Art and Terror* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003),p. 65.

<sup>87</sup>James Annesley , "Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture, and the Contemporary American," *American Literature* Vol. 71, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 376-377; p.377.

<sup>88</sup> It is an expression borrowed from Ronald Reagan ,when he was in office,he said to his friend Jerry Falwell, "I sometimes believe that we're heading very fast for armageddon right now." Qtd in: Stephen Milligen, "It's the End of the World as We Know It and I Feel Fine: Morality, Theology, and Politics in Seven," *Irish Journal of American Studies* Vol. 13/14 (2004/2005), pp. 149-166 ;p. 151.

<sup>89</sup> Jack Miles, "Imagining Mayhem: Fictional Violence vs. "True Crime"," *The North American Review* Vol. 276, No. 4 (Dec 1991), pp. 57-64; p.57.

In this light, he asserted: “with just 5 per cent of the world's population, the US is believed to have about 75 per cent of the world's serial killers.”<sup>90</sup>

Therefore, one can assume that the destructiveness of Patrick Bateman is merely the nasty product of American cultural decay. The 1980s of New York is deeply embodied in the personality of Bateman who can also be read as the consequence of that time and place, he is the real monster earned through American culture's cruelty and vacuity.<sup>91</sup> Because of the cruelty of Bateman's entourage, he thinks that everything around him is not good, he puts: “maybe a life connected to this city, to Manhattan, to my job, is not a good idea.”<sup>92</sup> His pleasure of sadistic killing and the urge of violence would not surpass its limits if the setting was not Wall Street with its huge population where no one cares for another. Bateman expresses the world of America with absolute absence of kindness and love between people in this passage:

This was what I could understand, was how I lived my life, what I constructed my movement around, how I dealt with the tangible. This was the geography around which my reality revolved: it did not occur to me, ever, that people were good or that a man was capable of change or that the world could be a better place through one's taking pleasure in a feeling or a look or a gesture, of receiving another person's love or kindness.<sup>93</sup>

To further illustrate the fact that crime had overly spread in 1980's America, Bateman narrates, in the chapter of Killing Child at Zoo, how he pulled a knife from his pocket and stabbed a child in his neck.<sup>94</sup> Committing such crime, in another city, is supposed to be perceived as a serious criminal act, and the criminal would fear either to be noticed by others or to be caught by the police. For Patrick Bateman, however, this crime was just a normal

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<sup>90</sup> Carla Freccero, “Historical Violence, Censorship, and the Serial Killer: The Case of “American Psycho”,” *Diacritics* Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer, 1997), pp. 44-58; p.48.

<sup>91</sup> Mary L.Knight, “(L)earned Monsters: Psychopathic Masculinities in Contemporary German Film and Fiction,” *Colloquia Germanica* Vol. 46, No. 1 (2013), pp. 4-20; p.6

<sup>92</sup> *American Psycho*, p.292

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 253

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. 298

incident in the life of a serial killer whose hobby of killing found a setting of Wall Street during the nineteen eighties as a paradise that could harshly fuel his pleasure of killing. In this view, Bateman tells how he fears nothing after killing a child at the zoo and because the police is not viewed as a source of punishment to be frightened from.

He accounts:

I feel empty, hardly here at all, but even the arrival of the police seems an insufficient reason to move and I stand with the crowd outside the penguin habitat, with dozens of others.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, America with the absence of ethics and values permitted various crimes to flourish and criminals like Patrick Bateman are perceived as victims of a devastated culture which is the responsible factor for the over spread of criminals .In this sense, Frank Entricchia and Jody Mcauliffe , in their book *Crimes of Art and Terror*, illustrates:

Bateman is Deregulated Man, and Ellis's novel is the full-blown realization of a vision of America articulated by Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*: a place where one can commit ax murders with impunity. Here, civilization has made mankind harder, consequently more bloodthirsty and better fitted for warfare.<sup>96</sup>

## 2.2. The Disease of Consumerism

Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, a social critique of the 1980s American and a serial killer narrative, is rich with the themes that it intends to address. Apart from the central theme of criminal violence, there are the subjects of superficiality, materialism, and loss of identity.

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<sup>95</sup> *American Psycho*, p. 300.

<sup>96</sup> Frank Lentricchia and Jody Mcauliffe, *The Crimes of Art and Terror* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003),p. 65.

*American Psycho* depicts a society that is plagued with materialism and consumption. Bateman and the rest of the characters are obsessed with material items. This is clearly reflected through Bateman's obsession with possession. He is well informed about the latest and inexpensive brands of clothes and cosmetic products; he is the one that his friends refer to ask about the codes of dressing. Food and women are also a kind of consumption. Bateman and his friends are always discussing foods, the most famous restaurants, and the qualities of "hardbodies" or girls. This consumerist society pushed Bateman to the edge of insanity where he confesses: " There wasn't a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and, possibly, total disgust".<sup>97</sup> As Juchartz and Hunter observe:"Ellis uses violence and greed, in their most extreme forms, as metaphors to reflect the real-life corruption in the world of his readers".<sup>98</sup>

Patrick Bateman, *American Psycho*'s narrator and protagonist, shows how American society is highly obsessed with the act of consumerism. Consequently, the ideology of over consumption is considered as the basic reason for making Bateman a sadist, psychopath, and serial killer. In this sense, James Annesly stresses the fact that *American Psycho* is the bad result of a decadent consumer culture,<sup>99</sup> Bateman himself admits "I am blameless,"<sup>100</sup> to emphasize that he is a victim of a yuppie culture that managed people to believe that the only way to obtain self esteem, ethics , and high status in society is through buying them.<sup>101</sup> As a result, people became strongly preoccupied with designer clothes, haircuts, furniture, and reservations in luxurious restaurants. Notably, all these signs of obsession with unnecessary

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<sup>97</sup> *American Psycho* , p.282.

<sup>98</sup> Qtd in Philip. L. Simpson , *Psycho Paths: Tracking The Serial Killer Through Contemporary American Film and Fiction* ( Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) , p.149

<sup>99</sup> James Annesly, "Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American,"*The Georgia Review* Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 201-203;p .202.

<sup>100</sup> *American Psycho*,p.377.

<sup>101</sup> Katrina Jasmine Russell, "The Impact of Consumerism on the Psyche as Presented in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*," *Zerstreuung*. December 28, 2012. <https://treeandcompany.wordpress.com/2012/12/28/the-impact-of-consumerism-on-the-psyche-as-presented-in-bret-easton-ellis-american-psycho/>

consumption have enormously contributed in creating a world where superficial things and surface were the essence of the world.

Indeed, Bateman is surrounded by a superficial world where “inside [...] doesn’t matter.”<sup>102</sup> Throughout the novel, Bateman tells about various episodes that clearly manifests a culture highly fascinated by consumerism. A whole chapter entitled *Morning* is devoted to describe in details his apartment and his morning routine. Bateman proudly tells about the furniture he possesses and how tastefully everything is arranged in his apartment. He sets:

Over the white marble and granite gas-log fireplace hangs an original David Onica. It's a six-foot-by-four-foot portrait of a naked woman (...) and a thirty-inch digital TV set from Toshiba; it's a high-contrast highly defined model plus it has a four-corner video stand with a high-tech tube combination from NEC with a picture-in-picture digital effects system<sup>103</sup>

Along with describing his apartment, Bateman tells about the protocols of his morning routine. He describes all the sacred steps of his morning taking into consideration all the products he uses and stating all the good qualities of the products he consumes, he narrates:

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 inspect my hands and use a nailbrush. I take the ice-pack mask off and use a deep-pore cleanser lotion, then an herb-mint facial masque which I leave on for ten minutes while I check my toenails. 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.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *American Psycho*, p. 397.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

Moreover, in every incident, Bateman gives a detailed account about what constitute his attractive appearance including his shoes, jackets, glasses, and more importantly who designed them. Indeed, as Elana Gomel argues that bateman's soul is presented just in his clothes and fashionable appearance.<sup>105</sup> For instance, Bateman demonstrates how he gives a great importance to his outfits when he was preparing to meet a model girl called Patricia. He expresses his fixation with clothes and items in the following passage:

I debate between two outfits. One is a wool-crepe suit by Bill Robinson I bought at Saks with this cotton jacquard shirt from Charivari and an Armani tie. Or a wool and cashmere sport coat with blue plaid a cotton shirt and pleated wool trousers by Alexander Julian, with a polka-dot silk tie by Bill Blass. The Julian might be a little too warm for May but if Patricia's wearing this outfit by Karl Lagerfeld that I *think* she's going to, then maybe I *will* go with the Julian, because it would go well with *her* suit. The shoes are crocodile loafers by A. Testoni.<sup>106</sup>

In addition, Bateman explicitly exhibits his interest in consuming when he was planning for the Christmas. He made a shopping where he manifests his obsession with consuming and buying the finest products. In addition, he gives a long list of about the presents he wants to buy to his friends. He states these products in the following monologue:

Pens and photo albums, pairs of bookends and light-weight luggage, electric shoe polishers and heated towel stands and silver-plated insulated carafes and portable palm-sized color TVs with earphones, birdhouses and candleholders, place mats, picnic hampers and ice buckets, lace-trimmed oversize linen napkins and umbrellas and sterling silver monogrammed golf tees and charcoal-filter smoke trappers and desk lamps and perfume bottles, jewelry boxes, office tote bags, desk accessories, scarves, file holders, address books, agendas for handbags.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Qtd in Mandel Noami, "Bret Easton Ellis: American Psycho/Glamorama/Lunar Park," *Studies in the Novel* Vol. 44, No. 2 (summer 2012), pp. 256-259 ; p.258.

<sup>106</sup> *American Psycho* , p.76.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, p.177.



To analyze the consumption of Bateman and his friends from a Marxist stand point, it is valid to argue that the behavior of consuming is not for its use value, but for its sign value which is, according to Karl Marx, “the most distinctive feature of capitalist societies.”<sup>108</sup> To illustrate this idea, many recurrent scenes are notably revealed in the novel. For instance, Bateman owns a Sony digital alarm clock, but he does not use it to know the time.<sup>109</sup> That is, the main reason behind possessing this item is not to benefit from but to reflect his high status and luxurious lifestyle. In addition, Bateman dislikes the haircut of Stash and directly judges that it is a bad haircut just because it is cheap.<sup>110</sup> These examples, in fact, clearly demonstrate how Bateman is fixated with consumption and admiration of expensive things.

Things get further complicated with Bateman’s obsession with consumption when this behavior reached not only material things, but also human beings and particularly women. In this light, Annesly explains that: “In *American Psycho* the word “consume” is used in all of its possible meanings: purchasing, eating and destroying.”<sup>111</sup> However, the most frustrating fact with Patrick Bateman is that his multiple behaviors of consumption are released in a form of purchasing, eating, and destroying humans. For instance, he consumes humans and animals by killing them, and concerning women, he buys them like he does with other objects to fulfill his sexual desires and then sadistically kill them. This behavior, according to Marxists, refers to Bateman’s perception of women as commodities and their bodies are undifferentiated matter<sup>112</sup> created just for sexual exploitation.

As a result, the preoccupation of Americans with consumption became a disease that brutally ruined the life of Patrick Bateman as well as his friends. Consequently, the disease of

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<sup>108</sup> Sonia Baelo Allué, “Serial Murder, Serial Consumerism: Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho*,” *A Journal of English and American Studies* 26 (2002), pp. 71-90; p.83.

<sup>109</sup> *American Psycho*, p.25.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, p.21.

<sup>111</sup> Sonia Baelo Allué, *op.cit.*, p.87.

<sup>112</sup> Jennifer A Krause, “From Classical to Postmodern :Madness in Inter –American Narrative,” (US: Vanderbilt University, 2009), p.258 (PhD Dissertation).

consumerism created a horrible world for Bateman and his friends, as Norman Mailer, points out: “Bateman is living in a hell where no hell is external to ourselves and so all of existence is hell.”<sup>113</sup> That is, Bateman belongs to a consumer culture that made their world awful.

### 2.3. Superficiality and Loss of Identity

Superficiality is another important theme that *American Psycho* deals with. Characters are clearly preoccupied with appearances. Bateman describes in a rich detailed manner how he works out, takes a shower, shave, and dress mentioning every single product he uses, for he is very careful about saving his image as the yuppie handsome man. The scene of the cards is another good example. Pulling out their business cards, Bateman and his co-workers are competing; which card has the finest look. Noting that the cards in fact resemble each other and that all those man work for the same company, one really finds the scene ridiculous. Therefore, all yuppies look in the same way and have the same job as an attempt to fit in a society that glorifies appearance and deny all traditional forms of ethics and values. As a spokesman of his epoch, Bateman assures the cultural breakdown of the 1980’s America in the following passage:

Justice is dead. Fear, recrimination, innocence, sympathy, guilt, waste, failures, grief, were things, emotions, that no one really felt anymore. Reflection is useless, the world is senseless. Evil is its only permanence. God is not alive. Love cannot be trusted. Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in... this was civilization as I saw it.<sup>114</sup>

A significant theme that the novel exposes is that of identity. In the materialist world of *American Psycho* the notion of autonomous identity faded away. Moments of mistaken identity are very recurrent in the novel. People are rather identified with appearances; money, material possessions, and clothes: they became interchangeable figures. Bateman himself is

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<sup>113</sup> Carla Freccero, “Historical Violence, Censorship, and the Serial Killer: The Case of “American Psycho”,” *Diacritics* Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer, 1997), pp. 44-58 ;p .51.

<sup>114</sup> *American Psycho* ,p.375

repeatedly mistaken for others. For instance, when Paul Owen has mistaken Bateman for Marcus, Bateman resolves that it is "understandable" since "since Marcus works at P & P also, in fact does the same exact thing I do, and he also has a penchant for Valentino suits and clear prescription glasses sand we share the same barber at the same place, the Pierre Hotel".<sup>115</sup>

Therefore, one might come to the conclusion that Patrick Bateman, as an archetypal character of American human destructiveness, is the product of his time and place. Indeed, American cultural lifestyle and ethical decay are the outstanding reasons for the creation of Bateman; a misogynist, sadist, psychopathic, serial killer. Thus, Patrick Bateman is a victim of the 1980's American criminal, materialist, and superficial world.

After applying the Freudian theories and concepts on Patrick Bateman, the anti-hero of the novel *American Psycho*, the analysis revealed that Bateman's character suffers a kind of deficiency. The study showed how Bateman's failure in balancing the basic factors of his psyche, the id, the ego, and the superego, is the very reason for his abnormal atrocities. In addition, examining the relationship between Bateman's character and Bateman's nihilistic society proved that Bateman is the victim of a society that embraced consumption to its extreme forms and levels. Actually, what is mentioned above suggests the difficulty of portraying a psychopathic character with unusual characteristics. Hence, the next chapter will shed light on how Bret Easton Ellis could create and represent the world and the mind Patrick Bateman in a written literary work.

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<sup>115</sup>*American Psycho*, p.89.

## CHAPTER THREE: FICTIONALIZING VIOLENCE IN *AMERICAN*

### *PYCHO*

Everybody is a book of blood; wherever we're opened,  
we're red.

Clive Barker, *Books of Blood* (New York: Berkley Books,  
1998), p. xv.

The phenomenon of the serial killer is one of the most serious issues that many fields of studies, such as sociology, psychology, criminology and arts, have attempted to address. Not only academics who have been concerned with the serial killer, but also common people. The topic of the serial murderer has become a part of their culture that they want to be well-informed about. Alongside with movies and media reports, novels serve as a good instrument through which people can learn about the world and the mind of a serial killer from a safe distance. Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* succeeded to a great extent in bringing the life of a serial killer to a written work of fiction.

#### **1. The Conflation of Serial Killing and Writing**

The serial killer genre emerged in the late 1970s or early 1980s when the term "serial murder" was coined and spread in the academic studies.<sup>116</sup> The serial killer narrative explores the life of a remorseless, ruthless killer who kills a number of people with a period of time between each murder. In his most notorious novel *American Psycho*, and with the use of postmodern techniques, Bret Easton Ellis succeeded significantly in echoing the life of the serial killer Patrick Bateman; creating one of the best examples of the serial killer genre.

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<sup>116</sup> Philip. L. Simpson , *Psycho Paths: Tracking The Serial Killer Through Contemporary American Film and Fiction* ( Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) ,p.14

In the fictional works of serial killers, the murderer commits his crime following a structured pattern; a pattern that contains some rational appeal. Motiveless of nature, the crimes of the serial killer reflects a state of atavistic modernism. The brutal acts of the serial killers make their understanding very challengeable; alarming any observer of the dark side of the human nature. Lacking any kind of censor or constraints, the serial killers always seeks to satisfy his repulsive needs. Arguably, this exactly what makes the scenario of these narratives a perfect channel to pass on any sort of ideological agenda.<sup>117</sup>

*America Psycho* perfectly fit in the serial killer genre. It portrays the life of Patrick Bateman, the young yuppie serial killer. His own concern seems to be about satisfying his urgent needs; food, drugs, fashion, sex, or blood. The ruthless Bateman seeks to have pleasure through killing, torturing, and seeing pain and horror in the eyes of his victims. He is troubled neither by justice nor by moral and ethical grounds as far as his "blocked needs" are satisfied. What is noticeable about Bateman's atrocities is that they lack any definite motive that makes any pattern plausible.

A significant element that characterizes postmodernist literature is the experimentation with mimetic description. Postmodern fiction writers are preoccupied with narrating extensive catalogues of superficial details as a camera eye would do. Nevertheless, "despite their obvious failure to contribute to interpretive depth, sustained argument, or narrative closure," Leypoldt explains, "these smoothly mimetic descriptions sustain their serious posture."<sup>118</sup> The aesthetic functioning of this technique is that it challenges the reader's expectations. Unlike previous works of literature where readers can go straightforwardly and easily to the point, the employment of this technique requires the reader to resist the temptation of "skim reading" and

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<sup>117</sup> Philip. L. Simpson , *Psycho Paths: Tracking The Serial Killer Through Contemporary American Film and Fiction* ( Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) ,p.14

<sup>118</sup> Günter Leypoldt, "Recent Realist Fiction and the Idea of Writing "After Postmodernism", " *American Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1, (2004), pp. 19-34; p.29.

rather to read attentively. Likewise, mimetic description "then, jumbles the rules of the traditional aesthetic games, juxtaposing representation with silence and dis-locating experiment from metafiction."<sup>119</sup>

This subversion manifests itself clearly when fiction deals with moral topics, as in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*; the novel that has faced severe objection and criticism since it was first published in 1991 for the detailed description of violence that it contains. Ellis takes the narration to unbearable extremes through the use of representative rhetoric. Ellis's use of graphicness assures that "Patrick Bateman's horrendous acts are shown in high resolution, in the manner of a documentary."<sup>120</sup> Another structural code that Ellis subverts is the emphasis on motivation and psychological depth. Instead, he focuses on the lengthy, detailed passages in order to stimulate the reader's eagerness for the resolution or closure.

Furthermore, while the convention is held that a literary work that deals with serious ethical violation should provide an end that helps for a better understanding of the dark side of humanity, Ellis breaks this convention the same as " other experimental writers whose defamiliarizing devices subvert the psychological coherency of their villain."<sup>121</sup>

### **1.1 Plotting a Serial killer's Biography**

The novel has been always labeled as gothic or detective fiction. However, it may be argued that the selected novel is a totally different genre. It is a serial killer novel par excellence. *American Psycho* can be judged as a real biographical work that deals with a serial killer's life. Analyzing the novel's structure would prove *American Psycho* as a new genre; i.e. the serial killer novel.

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<sup>119</sup> Günter Leypoldt, "Recent Realist Fiction and the Idea of Writing "After Postmodernism" ", *American Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1, (2004), pp. 19-34; p.30.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Leypoldt, "Recent Realist Fiction and the Idea of Writing "After Postmodernism" ", *American Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1, (2004), pp. 19-34; p.31

"Abandon hope all ye who enter here,"<sup>122</sup> Ellis warns his reader through his novel's epigraph that is quoted from Dante's *Inferno*. The novel's epigraph, comparing the novel to hell, clearly gives the assumption that this is a work of art that violates the traditional codes of writing, be it structurally or thematically. Opposite to conventional concept of a novel, with a definable plot that manages to relate the events and actions in a logical and comprehensible order, *American Psycho* has no plot, and even more the reliability of its narrator is doubted.

Ellis seems to prefer introducing his anti-hero without any reference to his childhood or growing-up years. The reader meets Patrick Bateman as a grown up twenty seven years old yuppie. Ellis provides no clues for questions like: how was his childhood? How were his family's financial conditions? How was his father-mother relationship? What kind of relationship he had with his family members and specifically his mother? Throughout the whole novel, Bateman meets his mother and brother only once, and this illustrates how loose his relationship with his family is. The absence of such clues renders the reader incapable of sympathizing with Bateman or understanding the grounds of his criminal acts.

Whereas the typical plot contains rising action, crisis, climax, falling action, and resolution, *American Psycho*'s structure has none. Most importantly is that Ellis denies his readers even the denouncement of events and goes further to challenge their expectations; "for a serial killer narrative to be satisfactory, the "bad" serial killer must be caught at the end."<sup>123</sup> Bateman is presented in world where, seemingly, crimes go unnoticed and unpunished. Among the most puzzling events of the novel are those when the detective comes to interview Bateman (after the disappearance of Paul Owen, whom Bateman has killed with an axe), and when he is chased by the police after shooting a saxophonist one night. While reading those two events,

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<sup>122</sup> *American Psycho*, p.3.

<sup>123</sup> Sonia Baelo Allué, "The Aesthetics of Serial Killing: Working against Ethics in "The Silence of The Lambs" (1988) and "American Psycho" (1991)", *Atlantis*, vol. 24, no. 2 (December 2002), pp. 7-24; p.17

the reader's excitement reaches its highest pitch. Surprisingly, Ellis plays on the nerve of his reader: Bateman is never caught.

Ellis structures his novel in a form of separate chapters or epics. *American Psycho* is divided into sixty chapters. As the titles suggest, the chapters recount Bateman's daily routine and life events; *Morning, Health Club, Date with Evelyn, At Another New Restaurant, In Bed with Courtney*, and his psychopathic acts; *Killing Dog, Killing Child At Zoo, Tries to Cook and Eat Girl*. The novel mixes between two kinds of narrative sequence.

The first narrative sequence, which composes the largest part of the novel, details the everyday string of meetings, parties, lunches, social and professional conversations, which is disrupted by long "anti-narrative" sequences such as going to the gym and to the video rental store, and the blank "mini-essays" where Bateman describes his favorite music bands.<sup>124</sup> Ellis even devotes two chapters where Bateman discusses his favorite music; entitled *Genesis*, and *Huey Lewis and the News*. Bateman begins the chapter *Genesis*:

I've been a big Genesis fan ever since the release of their 1980 album, *Duke*. Before that I didn't really understand any of their work, though on their last album of the 1970s, the concept-laden *And Then There Were Three* (a reference to band member Peter Gabriel, who left the group to start a lame solo career), I did enjoy the lovely "Follow You, Follow Me." Otherwise all the albums before *Duke* seemed too artsy, too intellectual.<sup>125</sup>

In fact, Ellis was criticized for including a detailed and repeated description about such trivial experiences. However, it is that repetition through which "the "surface of things" is meant to be visual, but it is also strangely textual."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.198.

<sup>125</sup> *American Psycho*, p.133.

<sup>126</sup> C.Namwali Serpell, "Repetition and the Ethics of Suspended Reading in *American Psycho*," *Critique*, vol. 51, no.1, (2010), pp.47-73; p.58.



The actual actions in Ellis's *American Psycho* compose the second kind of the narrative sequence. Apart from the scenes of the restaurants, night clubs, and office, this sequence tells about Bateman killing and torturing his victims: women, business acquaintances, children, homeless people, and animals. Bateman's crimes lack any definite motivations, for there is no pattern that relates his victims, he tortures his victim in the most sadistic ways, and even tries to keep them conscious while doing so. In one of the most disturbing scenes, Bateman describes how he tortures a prostitute as follow:

I start by skinning Torri a little, making incisions with a steak knife and ripping bits of flesh from her legs and stomach while she screams in vain, begging for mercy in a high thin voice, and I'm hoping that she realizes her punishment will end up being relatively light compared to what I've planned for the other one. I keep spraying Torri with Mace and then I try to cut off her fingers with nail scissors and finally I pour acid onto her belly and genitals, but none of this comes close to killing her, so I resort to stabbing her in the throat and eventually the blade of the knife breaks off in what's left of her neck, stuck on bone, and I stop.<sup>127</sup>

It is due to that graphic violence that the novel is ranked among "the most notorious *succés de scandales* in recent decades."<sup>128</sup>

## 2. Symbolism of the Title

Set in the late 1980s in New York City, *American Psycho* is Bret Easton Ellis's most controversial novel. The novel tells the story of the white, rich, well educated, handsome Patrick Bateman. Ironically, Bateman is a psychopath, an anti-hero. The story is told by Bateman himself. Ellis makes his anti-hero tells the story directly to the reader in a seemingly objective manner. Bateman recounts his daily life events transparently, ranging from his obsession with body care and fashion, eating in the finest restaurants, spending the night with

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<sup>127</sup> *American Psycho*, p.304.

<sup>128</sup> Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.198.

girls, to killing and torturing human beings and animals. Since its publication, the book has received harsh criticism due to its graphic violence and pornographic images. *American psycho* faced the outrage of critics describing the novel as misogynistic, sadistic, and pornographic.

Apparently, those critics fail to see the real literary and cultural value of the novel as a critique of the 1980s American capitalist society. *American Psycho* is a very symbolic literary work that its writer was very successful in transmitting the core of his book; not only through his choice concerning the starting words "Abandon hope all ye who enter here"<sup>129</sup> and the last ones "THIS IS NOT AN EXIT,"<sup>130</sup> but also even from the book's cover page: the title *American Psycho*. While Psycho apparently stands for "psychopath", Ellis makes his use of "American" very emblematic. The title refers to a psychotic character, with the adjective "American" to generalize its sense to a broader sphere by means of nationality. Ellis wants to assert that not only his anti-hero Patrick Bateman is to be concerned with being labeled as a psychopath, but also the cultural and communal identity. Likewise, the title seems to carry a considerable negative connotation to the context of globalization. Hence, *American Psycho* is the examination of psychopathic character that denotes the illness of the collective American consciousness.

With the lengthy descriptive catalogues of clothes brands, cosmetic products, music albums, and routine activities the novel gives the reader, at first glance, a reason to judge it as a flat, meaningless, and boring book. However, an attentive, deep, and critical reading would reveal the profound meaning of the novel. *American Psycho* can be considered as portrayal of the 1980s New York yuppie lifestyle, representing a world plagued by hedonism, greed, and egocentrism. Patrick Bateman is nothing but a thorough illustration of the ideological excesses

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<sup>129</sup> *American Psycho*, p.3.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p.399.

of the triumph of capitalism during that period. Americans' life seemed to revolve around mass consumption, appearances, and egocentrism, as Ellis explains:

I already had the idea to write about a serial killer before I moved to New York in 1987... That summer, before the Crash, I was hanging out with a lot of Wall Street guys. What fascinated me was that they didn't talk about their jobs at all—only about how much money they made, the clubs and restaurants they went to, how beautiful their girlfriends were. It was all about status, about surface. So I thought about juxtaposing this absurd triviality with extreme violence.<sup>131</sup>

Patrick Bateman is the very voice of the social and cultural atmosphere of his generation. He lives in a world that gives an overwhelming importance to material goods, wealth, and physical appearance to impress, dominate, or control. The world of those people is dominated by superficiality. Introducing the characters of the novel, Bateman refers to what they wear and own rather than to their characters. People of Bateman's world are blinded by materialism so that a sense of identity is lost. Human beings come to be seen as interchangeable entities, where throughout the novel people are mistaken for others. Even worse, this materialism resulted in alienation. Peoples' relationships are built upon a pragmatic sense rather than upon mutual intimacy or friendship. Consequently, they lead a flat, void, and meaningless life. Ellis wants to convey the message that the emergence of his anti-hero is rather natural due to the surrounding world that makes Bateman declares:

There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction. But there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory. Although 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.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Qtd in Philip. L. Simpson , *Psycho Paths: Tracking The Serial Killer Through Contemporary American Film and Fiction* ( Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) , p.148

<sup>132</sup> *American Psycho*, p. 376.

### 3. The Art(ifice) of the Unreliable Psychopathic Narrator

The story in *American Psycho* is told by first person narrator who is the protagonist himself: Patrick Bateman, in the present tense. According to Gérard Genette's, Bateman can be labeled as a *homodiegetic* narrator; "*homodiegetic* narration is the result of delegating the narration to a character who thus becomes a character-narrator."<sup>133</sup> Therefore, readers see the story through Bateman's eyes.

The fact that Ellis chooses a first person narrator provokes a number of results. First, the reader is denied any accounts as for what happen to the characters after their interaction with Bateman; similarly, Bateman plays a dramatic function. Moreover, seeing the story through a serial killer's eye makes the novel void of any moral aesthetics. Another effect, which is the most important, having Bateman whose sanity is suspicious as a narrator raises the issue as to what extent his recount is reliable.<sup>134</sup> *American Psycho* lacks any commentary from the behalf of the author Ellis. We may interpret this point in that Ellis wants to keep the distance between the reader and the author, so that the account seems more personal, more autobiographical in nature. Hence, it can be said that the moral judgment of Bateman's homicides is left for the reader.

Bateman recounts his life in a succession of chapters. The first chapter introduces Bateman's closest circle of people; Evelyn, Price, and Courtney, and tells about Bateman having dinner at his girlfriend's house with other guests. The conversation they had centered on food. The following chapter presents one of the monotonous sections of the novel. Bateman recounts in lengthy detailed pages his daily routine; the chemical products he uses, their

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<sup>133</sup> Qtd in : Goran Nieragden, "Focalization And Narration: Theoretical And Terminological Refinements", *Poetics Today*, vol.23, no.4, (Winter 2002), pp.685-697; p.686

<sup>134</sup> Jaroslav Matula, *Satirical and Transgressive Elements in Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho* (Dissertation) (Brno : Masaryk University Brno, 2011), p.23-24.

function, and their brands. In fact, Bateman details his morning routine like a magazine would do:

Once out of the shower and toweled dry I put the Ralph Lauren boxers back on and before applying the Mousse A Raiser, a shaving cream by Pour Hommes, I press a hot towel against my face for two minutes to soften abrasive beard hair. Then I always slather on a moisturizer (to my taste, Clinique) and let it soak in for a minute.<sup>135</sup>

Next, the two following chapters discuss how Bateman spends time with his male friends in restaurants or bars. Bateman and his friends' conversations are about food, fashion codes, and "hardbodies." It seems that making a reservation and eating in the best restaurants is a crucial issue to those men to the extent that the reader is confronted with whole pages describing this. Bateman's friends consider him so knowledgeable about the latest fashion so they always refer to him as to what pieces of clothes suit each other. Bateman feels pleased with such kind of questions to which he responds confidently. Girls, also, are at the heart of their discussions; they keep commenting on the waitresses of the restaurants and the norms of an attractive girl.

These first four chapters create a kind of a pattern for Bateman's narration. The subjects of reservations at restaurants, girls, catalogues of cosmetic products, fashion, and other commercial goods will be repeated along the whole novel. What breaks these blank sections is Bateman starting his criminal acts. This constitutes the second pattern of narration where the real actions in the novel take place. Beside his violent acts, in those parts, Bateman also describes explicitly his sexual life.

Comparing the two patterns of narration, the reader recognizes that Bateman depicts the graphic violent scenes and his daily routine in the same passionless and flat tone. This reflects to what extent Bateman lacks the ability to empathize or to be affected; as Bateman personally confirms "[T]here wasn't a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and,

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<sup>135</sup> *American Psycho*, p.27.

possibly, total disgust."<sup>136</sup> This stylistic technique signals the significance of using a first person narrator. Having a serial killer tells his own life makes *American Psycho* "a book-length exploration of the mental processes of a serial killer: it thus turns a stock figure in genre fiction...into a full-fledged, psychologically realistic character."<sup>137</sup>

However, being told by first person narrator, who is a psychopath, *American Psycho* presents the reader with a kind of a challenge. Due to some stylistic and thematic elements, the reader suspects Bateman's reliability as a narrator, and questions if his crimes have ever taken place or if they are a mere hallucination that comes out of boredom maybe.

The cinematic techniques that Ellis makes use of are among the reasons that led to questioning Bateman's reliability. Bateman is always thinking of his life or what he has at hand to do (reported in the present tense). Moreover, Bateman is always able to manage for escape; this very fact makes his atrocities implausible. The scene where Bateman is chased by police, for instance, is very cinematic in nature that it looks like a scene from an action movie. To intensify the cinematic effect in this scene, Ellis even switches the narrator point of view from the first to the third.<sup>138</sup>

[R]acing blindly down Greenwich I lose control entirely, the cab swerves into a Korean deli, next to a karaoke restaurant called Lotus Blossom I've been to with Japanese clients, the cab rolling over fruit stands, smashing through a wall of glass, the body of a cashier thudding across the hood, Patrick tries to put the cab in reverse but nothing happens, he staggers out of the cab, leaning against it, a nerve-racking silence follows, "nice going, Bateman," he mutters, limping out of the store, the body on the hood moaning in agony, Patrick with no idea where the cop running toward him across the street has come from.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *American Psycho*, p.282.

<sup>137</sup> Marco Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters* (Lincoln; London: Nebraska University Press, 2016), p.16.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

<sup>139</sup> *American Psycho*, p. 349.

Thematic elements, also, heighten the issue of unreliability. Bateman revisits the apartment of Paul Owen, whom he killed earlier, and finds none of his crimes' traces that took place there.<sup>140</sup> The vanishing of the corpses of people he has killed there surprises him, for:

There has been no word of bodies discovered in any of the city's four newspapers or on the local news; no hints of even a rumor floating around. I've gone so far as to ask people— dates, business acquaintances— over dinners, in the halls of Pierce & Pierce, if anyone has heard about two mutilated prostitutes found in Paul Owen's apartment.<sup>141</sup>

What makes the issue even more suspicious is when Patrick Bateman resolves to confessing his crimes to a friend. Nevertheless, "[T]his confession has meant nothing"<sup>142</sup> as his friend considers it as a joke and tells Bateman that he has "had...dinner...with Paul Owen...twice...in London...just ten days ago."<sup>143</sup> Compared to the effect the novel creates upon the reader, the aspect of unreliability would not seem a crucial issue, for Ellis has made a novel that vividly describes a terrifying story of a serial killer, as Young notes: "what difference does it make whether we believe Patrick committed some, any, or all of the murders, or not? We still have to read all the detailed descriptions of the killings *and the effect on us is exactly the same.*"<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Marco Caracciolo, *op. cit.*, p.105.

<sup>141</sup> *American Psycho*, p.366-67.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p.377.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, p.388.

<sup>144</sup> Qtd in Alain Philippe Durand and Naomi Mandel, *Novels of the Contemporary Extreme* (New York: Continuum, 2006), p.11.

#### 4. The Aesthetics of Violence and Horror

Clearly, then, the repulsiveness of the text decidedly exists on both levels, as evidenced by the forcefulness of the critical responses to it: that of the actual physical violence committed by Bateman and that of the prose itself. Marco Abel, *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique after Representation* (Lincoln; London: Nebraska University Press, 2007), p. 46.

Language, a cognitive process, is the vehicle by which human beings shape and reflect their experiences. Attempting to expose the criminal mind, novelists tend to use deviant linguistic forms through which they allow the reader to discover how the criminal perceives reality. Hence, it is quite logic that serial killers narratives employ unconventional, immoral, and unusual elements; this is what helps the novelist to demystify the criminal's world. It is through the poetics of the criminal mind that that the reader comes to understand, enter, and sometimes even to sympathize with the reality of the serial killer.<sup>145</sup>

*American Psycho* is among the most outstanding fictional works that offer an insight for how a serial killer's life looks like. The novel is controversial mainly due to the detailed depiction of violence. *American Psycho* was fiercely criticized even before it was published. Simon and Schuster agreed to publish the book and gave the writer an advance. However, after some magazines such as *Time and Spy* got some passages of the work and reacted negatively to the novel, Simon and Schuster gave up the novel, and sooner Random House published *American Psycho*.

The resentment of the novel reached the point of leading campaigns of censorship. One would wonder why a book of fiction faced all that outrage while violence has become a recurrent theme that people confront everywhere; news, magazines, movies, and even literary

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<sup>145</sup> Christiana Gregoriou, " 'Behaving Badly': A Cognitive Stylistics of the Criminal Mind", *Nottingham Linguistic Circular*, vol. 17 (2002), pp.61-73; p.63.



works. However, the case of *American Psycho* is distinctive; Ellis takes the issue to unbearable levels where his use of "excessive violence disrupts the whole mechanism of serial killer narrative."<sup>146</sup> A fact that Ellis himself admits, "*American Psycho* is partly about excess-just when readers think they can't take any more violence, or another description of superficial behavior, more is represented."<sup>147</sup>

#### 4.1. Crime and the Written Word

One of the most horrifying scenes that clearly reflect Bateman's monstrous spirit and cruelty is that in a chapter entitled *Killing Child at Zoo*. Patrick Bateman was wandering in Central Park when he moved toward a five-year old child:

"Would you like . . . a cookie?" I ask, reaching into my pocket. He nods his small head, up, then down, slowly, but before he can answer, my sudden lack of care crests in a massive wave of fury and I pull the knife out of my pocket and I stab him, quickly, in the neck.<sup>148</sup>

The reader is already shocked with the fact that Bateman could approach a little child and kill him. However, Ellis manages to go further detailing the murder scene and Bateman's indifference:

Bewildered, he backs into the trash can, gurgling like an infant, unable to scream or cry out because of the blood that starts spurting out of the wound in his throat. Tough I'd like to watch this child die, I push him down behind the garbage can, then casually mingle in with the rest of the crowd and touch the shoulder of a pretty girl, and smiling I point to a penguin preparing to make a dive.<sup>149</sup>

"This cold-blooded aggression is already deeply disturbing, but the narrator's perversity doesn't end here," Marco Caracciolo notices, "[H]e waits until he can see the mother's

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<sup>146</sup> Sonia Baelo Allué, "The Aesthetics of Serial Killing: Working against Ethics in "The Silence of The Lambs" (1988) and "American Psycho" (1991)," *Atlantis*, vol. 24, no. 2 (December 2002), pp. 7-24; p.18.

<sup>147</sup> Qtd in Sonia Baelo Allué, *Bret Easton Ellis's Controversial Fiction: Writing between High and Low Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2011), p.116.

<sup>148</sup> *American Psycho*, p.298.

<sup>149</sup> , p. 298.

expression when she finds her child,"<sup>150</sup> describing how her sound "high- pitched turns into screaming."<sup>151</sup> Neither killing the child, nor seeing his mother crying seems to satisfy Bateman's sadism. Pushing the crowd to reach the body, Bateman pretended to be a doctor and hold the little child's trembling body, aware that "if someone makes a phone call or if a real doctor is at hand, there's a good chance the child can be saved. But this doesn't happen;"<sup>152</sup> "It is difficult to imagine a more inhuman or gratuitous murder,"<sup>153</sup> Caracciolo comments.

This scene does not only illustrate the serial killer's ruthless character, but also it provides an insight for his mind. Ellis seems to be aware of every single detail that constructs the serial killer's world. Specifically, this murder offers the reader an opportunity to come to grips with how a serial killer conceptualizes reality. This is plainly manifested when Bateman states:

I'm suddenly jolted with a mournful despair at how useless, how extraordinarily painless, it is to take a child's life. This thing before me, small and twisted and bloody, has no real history, no worthwhile past, nothing is really lost. It's so much worse (and more pleasurable) taking the life of someone who has hit his or her prime, who has the beginnings of a full history, a spouse, a network of friends a career, whose death will . . . ruin many more lives than just the meaningless, puny death of this boy.<sup>154</sup>

This quote demonstrates Bateman's assumption about the value of children's life. The essence of killing for Bateman is about causing pain, and a child's death is "useless" for him. It is "useless" because it does not cause enough pain; a child has not developed a real and autonomous identity that allows him to create a larger social and emotional network which destroying it can please Bateman satisfactorily. This sequence points out a perverse worldview; more shocking than the murder itself is Bateman's feeling of pleasure with seeing

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<sup>150</sup> Marco Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters* (Lincoln; London: Nebraska University Press, 2016), p.94.

<sup>151</sup> *American Psycho*, p.299

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, p.299

<sup>153</sup> Marco Caracciolo, *op. cit.*, p.95.

<sup>154</sup> *American Psycho*, p.299.

the effect of the child's death on his mother and his judgment of the "value" of a child's death.<sup>155</sup>

Ellis manages to distress the reader not only thematically, but also stylistically. One stylistic choice that intensifies the effect of violent sections on the reader is that Ellis chooses to introduce the textual violence right after lengthy blank pages that describe Bateman's trivial daily events. The reader has to go through the whole first fifteen chapters before he confronts a real action that disrupts the repetitive, tedious segments. The reader is suddenly, in the chapter entitled *Tuesday*, alarmed by Bateman torturing a homeless man and his dog:

He starts nodding helplessly and I pull out a long, thin knife with a serrated edge and, being very careful not to kill him, push maybe half an inch of the blade into his right eye, flicking the handle up, instantly popping the retina... I grab his head with one hand and push it back and then with my thumb and forefinger hold the other eye open and bring the knife up and push the tip of it into the socket, first breaking its protective film so the socket fills with blood, then slitting the eyeball open sideways...Then I turn to the barking dog and when I get up, stomp on its front legs while it's crouched down ready to jump at me, its fangs bared, immediately shattering the bones in both its legs, and it falls on its side squealing in pain, front paws sticking up in the air at an obscene, satisfying angle.

The reader finds himself facing an explicit, detailed violence that he has not been ready for. Abruptly, the dark side of Patrick Bateman is brought to light; the same Bateman who is "the boy next door," who states that "[w]e have to provide food and shelter for the homeless"<sup>156</sup> and "[w]e have to encourage a return to traditional moral values and curb graphic sex and violence on TV, in movies, in popular music, everywhere."<sup>157</sup> Marco Abel notes that:

Through a speeded-up cumulative effect begins to affect the readers in such a manner that they find themselves in a

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<sup>155</sup> Marco Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters* (Lincoln; London: Nebraska University Press, 2016), p.95

<sup>156</sup> *American Psycho*, p.16.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

position they have not occupied before, that they have not desired—a position that calls for a response for which, evidently, the “tools” are not (yet) immediately available.<sup>158</sup>

Undoubtedly, Ellis did his best to make his novel one of the most horrifying literary works that have ever been written. Indeed, he shows no mercy in transmitting the picture of violence to the reader. The novel first words are:

ABABDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTERE 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...<sup>159</sup>

"ABABDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTERE HERE," is borrowed from Dante's *Inferno* where it is on the entrance of Hell. The quote itself is frightening; it brings the image of Hell, suffering, pain, and horror. Nevertheless, Ellis seems to be determined to play on the nerve of readers to the extreme from the very beginning; he attaches "scrawled in blood red". He intends to shock, frighten, and disturb his reader; warning them that it is unusual story which only those with strong hearts can resume reading.

The language used in *American Psycho* is certainly of the most affective quality. The language and images are indeed used intensively so that the description of violence looks more like a cinematic one. In fact, what Ellis has done is that he "has translated what we see visually on the screen of horror films into prose, transcribing the thousands of discrete sights, sounds, and sensation the brain records in each frame of any horror film."<sup>160</sup> In another scene, far more disturbing than that of torturing the homeless man and his dog, Bateman recounts how he torments a girl:

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<sup>158</sup> Marco Abel, *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique after Representation* (Lincoln; London: Nebraska University Press, 2007), p. 46.

<sup>159</sup> *American Psycho*, p.3.

<sup>160</sup> Linda S. Kuaffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (London: University of California Press, 1998), p.249.

I have also shaved all the skin and most of the muscle off her face so that it resembles a skull with a long, flowing mane of blond hair falling from it, which is connected to a full, cold corpse; its eyes are open, the actual eyeballs hanging out of their sockets by their stalks. Most of her chest is indistinguishable from her neck, which looks like ground-up meat, her stomach resembles the eggplant and goat cheese lasagna at Il Marlibro or some other kind of dog food, the dominant colors red and white and brown. A few of her intestines are smeared across one wall and others are mashed up into balls that lie strewn across the glass top coffee table like long blue snakes, mutant worms.<sup>161</sup>

What Bateman depicts here is terrifying and disgusting at once. Ellis puts the reader in uneasy position; the reader apparently sees through an alien mind how a man can be cruel and devilish, he cannot help but imagine himself in the place of the victim. To practice horror on the reader, Ellis makes of the language very vivid; through recounting the commotion of the boundaries of the body, the opening of the eye sockets, the scattering of the intestines, and the use of "unsettling metaphors and similes that blend the human body with animal life (mane, snakes, worms), vegetation (stalks)."<sup>162</sup>

In short, the stylistic elements that Ellis made use, in his novel *American Psycho*, are of a paramount importance in representing a psychopathic serial murder and creating an excellent novel of the serial killer genre. Employing the first point narration helped in building an abstract distance between the reader and the author. Reading the novel through the central character's eyes offers the reader a better insight to the anti-hero's world and psyche. Having Bateman, the serial killer, tells his own story generate a deeper attachment between the novel and the reader; sometimes it pushes the reader to imagine himself/herself in the place of the ruthless Bateman or the helpless victims. Moreover, the cinematic description of violence in the novel helped to a great extent in fictionalizing violence. Through the detailed descriptions

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<sup>161</sup> *American Psycho*, p.344.

<sup>162</sup> Marco Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters* (Lincoln; London: Nebraska University Press, 2016), p.103.

of Bateman's atrocities, Ellis did not only succeed in representing violence, but also in practicing it on the reader who, after finishing the novel, cannot help but feel frightened and even sick.

## CONCLUSION

The serial killer phenomenon has become an integral part of the American culture during the late decades. Serial murder is among the issues that greatly fascinated the Americans. The names of, the serial killers, Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and John Wayne Gacy have become synonyms to terror, horror, and bloodshed. Many fictional stories have been written in attempt to provide the reader with a thorough insight to the mysterious world of the serial killer. For instance, Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* could successfully portray the alien mind and behavior of a serial killer, Patrick Bateman.

This study attempted to analyze the serial killer's behaviors and mindset and to what extent Ellis succeeded in portraying and depicting the life of the serial killer. Hence, the very first chapter was devoted to the social and historical environment that surrounded the novel's writing. In addition, we presented some quantitative qualitative facts in relation to the scientific study of crime; i.e. criminology. At first, light was shed on the author's life and how his life's experiences shaped his writings. In 1964, Bret Easton Ellis, an American novelist, screenwriter, and short story writer, was born to a wealthy family in Los Angeles. This very fact affected to a great extent his literary works. Many of his novels, such as *Less Than Zero* (1985), *Rules of Attraction* (1987), and *American Psycho* (1991) represent the nihilistic USA of the 1980s.

Next, this chapter offered a brief historical overview of the American society in the 1980s. During this time, a new American generation emerged. This new generation was referred to as the yuppies. Yuppies are characterized by numerous distinctive views and attitudes toward different aspects of life including morals, family, and sexual affairs. Distinctively, they promoted individualism, total freedom, and nihilism. The yuppies were extensively obsessed

with money, consumerism, and appearances. This was a time where America was shaped by casual nihilism and passivity, devoid of feeling or hope, and marked by a moral vacuum.

At last, for a better understanding, we attempted a scientific study of serial murdering. In order to come to grips with the true nature of criminals, criminologists have been studying their destructive behavior, their motivation, and the possible methods of prevention. For decades, they have examined the specific phenomenon of the serial murderer. Consequently, a number of theories and approaches sprang out in attempt to understand the roots of this phenomenon. The biological approaches, for instance, stress that the criminal behavior of serial killers is merely the results of a dysfunction at the level of genes. By analyzing the sadistic serial murderers' characteristics such as lack of remorse, lack of empathy, the power of manipulation, and antisocial personality, the psychologist approaches state that the serial killer phenomenon is rather the outcome of a number of psychological problems mainly those suffered at the early childhood. In contrast, the sociological approaches consider the serial killer as a product of his society; it is the social surrounding that paves the way for a serial killer to emerge.

In the second chapter of this study, a deep analysis of the serial killer mindset was undertaken. It demonstrated how Patrick Bateman, as an archetypal model of human destructiveness in 1980's America, took a journey that devastated his state of mind as well as his human entity; he confesses that he is an evil psychopath and murderer. Thus, to figure out how his mind works and to understand the reason behind his unhealthy personality, this study was chiefly concerned with the psychoanalytical interpretation of Bateman's structural mind. Through a psychoanalytical study, we found out that Bateman's mind is not well functioning due to the fact that his id, the instinctual part in human psyche, is overly controlling his behaviors. As a result of the id's supremacy over Bateman, all his behaviors represent an ego,



the reality part in one's personality, that immediately obeys his instinctual wishes and seeks to make pleasure regardless of all the disastrous results.

In addition, the psychoanalytical study of Bateman's mind stated that he is driven by two dynamic drives; the death drive that is responsible for Bateman's violent and sadistic crimes, and the love drive which is the only reason that is able to deny Bateman's death drive. Also, the analysis of Bateman's personality evidenced that he needs a source of punishment, which is supposed to be presented in the superego. However, though he himself feels guilty and confesses that he feels no pleasure by engaging in homicidal behaviors, his entourage compelled him to silence his conscience and keep behaving in the same brutal manner because it convinced him that there is no escape.

After examining the personality of Patrick Bateman, this chapter addressed another important section which shed light on the decay of American culture in postmodern era. This section assured that crime became over spread in American society. *American Psycho* shows that the high rate of crimes led people as well as law consider any act of crime as a normal incident in the life of Americans and notably murderers like Bateman. Moreover, depending on Ellis's brilliant depiction of American popular culture in his most controversial work, *American Psycho*, this chapter provided a wide range of illustrations to confirm that the extreme perception of consumerism and materialism led to the destruction of human beings. Indeed, consumption as an act to fit in a superficial society made people concerned only with what they buy, what they possess, how they look, and more dangerously what they consume serially objects and humans alike. As a result, the decay of American popular culture, which is represented in crime, consumerism, superficiality, and loss of identity, has sharply contributed in the destructiveness of human beings and Bateman represents the best example of this decay.

The last chapter of this study dealt with stylistic elements. It examined how the choices made by the author helped in fictionalizing violence and sometimes even practicing violence on his readers through gruesome portrayal of bloodshed. The first aspect which was discussed is the serial killer as a new genre and how fictional stories like *American Psycho* with their special techniques could portray the serial killer's life. Then, the novel's structure and style, such as making the story a plotless one and using first point of view, were examined to prove *American Psycho* as a real biography of a serial killer.

Afterwards, this chapter explained the symbolism of the title *American Psycho*. *American Psycho* is not only the story of an individual Patrick Bateman the psychopath, it is about the whole American society that witnessed moral destruction and vacuum. Next, the artifice of the unreliable psychopathic narrator was tackled; notably its function and impact on the reader. Finally, this chapter discussed one of the outstanding aspects of the study: the aesthetics of violence and horror.

Clearly, Ellis surpassed the challenge of depicting and portraying the criminal mind. Through the use of the poetics of the criminal mind, Ellis could demystify the criminal's world and help the reader to understand the reality of the serial killer. What is specific about Ellis's *American Psycho* is the detailed and vivid descriptions of violence, especially sexual violence, that Patrick Bateman, the story narrator, provides the reader with. It is due to this fact that the novel has faced the public outrage since its publication and has been deemed as one of the most controversial novels that have ever been written. Ellis could successfully take the reader through a journey to the criminal mind and world where he "has translated what we

see visually on the screen of horror films into prose, transcribing the thousands of discrete sights, sounds, and sensation the brain records in each frame of any horror film."<sup>163</sup>

The Reagan era in American history is widely characterized by an artificial society. The extreme act of consumption became a disease that dangerously sickened people's popular culture. Indeed, American society compelled people to be obsessed only with external illusionary success that must be decorated with the best designer clothes, reservations in the most expensive restaurants, a total freedom in sexual affairs, and accordingly, a strong rejection of all traditional beliefs such as marriage and family. Furthermore, turned to be practiced without any plausible justification and, more dangerously, to fulfill personal sadistic urges. As a result, crime became the most popular phenomenon that is celebrated in streets as a normal incident as well as in media and literature as an artistic trend. Thus, the depiction of American society with the deviated image of ethical principles and values that directly led to the collapse of the traditional view of humanity is explicitly demonstrated in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*.

*American Psycho*, at first glance, may appear to be concerned with a mad serial killer who is presented with unhealthy personality; because he pursues the quest of enjoying pleasure. However, this research could argue that the novel is Ellis's satire and critique of the loss of ethics and values in American materialist and superficial culture. Also, Ellis's frank presentation of American society in literary corpus is the principle reason behind the harsh criticism and controversy it received because people wanted the sordid aspects of their culture to be kept unrevealed. In fact, the setting of New York, with its pretended civilization, over population, and urban lifestyle that embraced the post modern era when consumerist and

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<sup>163</sup> Linda S. Kuuffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (London: University of California Press, 1998), p.249.

violent crimes were highly glorified, would serve as a paradise to adopt evil psychopaths and serial killers. Patrick Bateman, as an archetypal character of human decay in modern culture, is blameless because he understands that he has to fit in his society which fiercely makes him an abstraction without real human entity. This research evidenced that any normal human being would become Patrick Bateman when the culture loses its traditional values and this destiny cannot be escaped because society provides no exit and the result would be definitively humans like Bateman; the American Psycho.

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## ملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة تعقيد نفسية الإنسان وانهيارها في رواية بريت إيستون إليس: "السيكوباتي (المجنون) الأمريكي". تصنف الرواية المختارة ضمن أدب القتل المتسلسلين حيث تسمح للقارئ بسبر أغوار عالم المختلين و القتل المتسلسلين من خلال بطل القصة باتريك بايتمان الذي يمثل بامتياز نموذجا لانهيار النفس البشرية. تعرض الرواية العديد من الحقائق الهامة حول المجتمع و الثقافة الأمريكية خلال نهاية القرن العشرين و التي تميزت بانهيار الأخلاق و القيم. يهدف الروائي إلى نقد الثقافة الاستهلاكية التي أدت إلى هوس الأمريكيين بالمظاهر، فقدان الهوية ، و انهيار الأخلاق. تدريجيا ، هذه الأوضاع كانت سببا رئيسيا في انحراف سلوك الفرد الأمريكي خاصة نحو العنف و الجرائم. بالإضافة إلى حقيقة النفس البشرية الملتوية ، يمكن الاستنتاج أن هذا النوع من المجتمعات ساهم بشكل كبير في تحول باتريك بايتمان إلى قاتل متسلسل عديم الرحمة. درست هذه الأطروحة رواية "السيكوباتي (المجنون) الأمريكي" بشكل موضوعي وأسلوبى. في الواقع ، الأدب هو واحد من أفضل الوسائل لتعميق فهمنا لنفسية الإنسان و لمختلف الثقافات البشرية ويأخذنا وراء تجاربنا الشخصية المحدودة لمعرفة مختلف التجارب الإنسانية و الثقافية للشعوب. لذلك، ونظرا إلى أن الأعمال الأدبية لا يمكن تقديرها بشكل كامل دون الإشارة إلى سياقاتها التاريخية ، فإن الفصل الأول من هذه الدراسة مكرس للسياق الاجتماعي التاريخي الذي يطبع رواية إليس المختارة. يوضّح هذا الفصل أن العديد من الحقائق المرتبطة بتجارب حياة المؤلف و ظاهرة هوس المجتمع الأمريكي بالاستهلاك و المظاهر قد وجهت إنتاجه الأدبي. ثم، الدراسة الموضوعية متناولة في الفصل الثاني من هذه الأطروحة. هذا الفصل ينقسم إلى قسمين رئيسيين للتأكيد على أن البشر مخلوقات معقدة ذات جوانب جيدة وسيئة؛ ومع ذلك، عندما تشجع المجتمعات على تعزيز الجانب السيئ عند الأفراد ، فإنهم يمكن أن يتحولوا إلى وحوش شريرة. أخيرا ، يسلط الفصل الثالث الضوء على البنية المعقدة للعنف والوحشية التي قدمت في إنتاج سردي.