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"Consumerist Psychosis and the Disintegration of Identity: Fragmented Selfhood and Extremist Violence in Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho" - critical studying

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Abstract

Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho (1991) is widely regarded as one of the most contentious pieces of modern literature. The novel underscores how postmodern capitalism creates a hyperrealistic state that replaces actual social and physical facts with captivating and ever-changing images. The novel highlights psychological effects of the extreme consumerism and capitalist hedonism of the United States in the late 1900s. Through Patrick Bateman, a successful investment banker who is preoccupied by materialism and outward appearances, the novel illustrates how consumerist psychosis undermines emotional depth and personal identity. Bateman represents a culture that demands emotional detachment and respects nothing in a world where appearance obliterates authenticity and interpersonal ties are reduced to commercial exchanges. The purpose of this study is to examine how American Psycho portrays the social and psychological effects of a hyperconsumerist culture on a person's sense of self. It also explores how the brutality of Patrick Bateman reflects a psychological response to emotional suppression, identity loss, and the emptiness created by postmodern, hiperconsumerist society.

Key words: consumerism, hperreality, class, personal identity, conformity, emotional isolation, psychological disorder, violence, and sadism

Introduction

During the 1980s presidential post, Ronald Reagan supported an economic philosophy based on the principles of free market, known as Reaganism. By letting corporate interests permeate every aspect of human existence, this philosophy helped to shatter and fragment social life. Often referred to as hypercapitalism, the final form of capitalism signaled a move toward strong laissez-faire policies distinguished by exploitation, environmental destruction, and conflict. Hypercapitalism matches the late capitalism idea, a phrase created by Fredric Jameson, who linked these economic changes to the rise of postmodern culture.

Postmodern capitalism, according Jean Baudrillard, creates a state of hyperreality in which fascinating and always evolving pictures obscure and substitute real physical and social facts. Driven by neoliberal deregulation under the guise of globalization, this change has produced a warped form of capitalism. Growing estrangement and social fragmentation characterize the larger cultural transition from modernism to postmodernism and sophisticated capitalist societies.

Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho (1991), widely seemed as one of the most controversial works in current literature, faced intense criticism upon its release. Many early critics ignored the satirical elements of the novel, instead focused on clear and graphical illustration of violence. In response to extensive criticism, there was a striking title in the New York Times: "Snuff This Book!" (Frecereo, 1997, p. 46), captures the intensity of public reaction. Nevertheless, there is a sharp criticism of psychological consequences brought by the heavy consumerism and capitalist joy of the United States in the late 1900s under the stimulating surface of the novel. Through the affluent investment banker Patrick Bateman, who is fixated on materialism and outward appearances, American Psycho exposes how consumerist insanity compromises emotional link and personal identity. In a world where image or appearance obliterates genuineness and human relationships are reduced to business interactions, Bateman embodies a culture that encourages emotional detachment and exalts emptiness.

With a focus on appearance and status, Patrick Bateman is portrayed as a young, prosperous businessman living in Manhattan's Wall Street culture in American Psycho. He seems on the exterior to have a brilliant and extravagant life, personifying the ideal male figure of the 1980s. Beneath this expertly built veneer, however, is a violent and erratic psychopath on the point of eruption. The book chronicles Bateman's everyday existence, portraying a character whose sense of identity, grasp of reality, and social environment beckon interpretation from a postmodern angle. Bateman, though seen as a creation of postmodern society, also embodies a highly damaged and skewed interpretation of postmodern identity. Fragmentation, a major feature of postmodernism, will be the main topic of attention in this essay. According to Peter Barry, "For the postmodernist … fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon" (Barry, 2009, p. 81).

Patrick Bateman does not view fragmentation favorably, even if postmodern thinkers sometimes celebrate it. He feels trapped within the structure of his postmodern existence and the bounds of his fragmented reality all through the book. Ellis concludes the book with the line "THIS IS NOT AN EXIT" (Ellis, 1991, p. 384), therefore strongly suggesting constraint. Patrick keeps struggling to understand who he really is, how he feels, and how he should communicate with people around him. Throughout the book, his quest for more profound significance and attempts to overcome the superficial quality of regular human interactions are shown. This study aims to explore how American Psycho portrays the psychological and social effects of life in a hyperconsumerist society on personal identity. It also examines how Patrick Bateman's acts of violence are a psychological response to loss of identity, repressed

emotions, and the intense feeling of emptiness generated by a hyperconsumerist, postmodern environment.

Problem statement and research questions

American Psycho by Bret Easton Ellis offers a stinging indictment of the psychological damage brought on by late 20th-century American hyperconsumerism. The book shows how consumerist psychosis corrodes personal identity and emotional depth via Patrick Bateman, a prosperous investment banker consumed by materialism and superficial appearances. Bateman represents a culture that honors nothing and demands emotional isolation in a society where image destroys genuineness and human relationships become commercial exchanges. His increasing violence points to more fundamental psychological breakdown caused by identity loss, emotional repression, and moral detachment rather than just individual pathology. Framed within a postmodern world marked by unrelenting commodification, American Psycho shows how hyperconsumerist ideology breaks the self and fosters a hazardous kind of psychological estrangement. People have difficulty keeping a steady sense of self as commercial values and superficial status markers replace conventional sources of meaning—that is, community, spirituality, and real emotional ties. Bateman embodies this dilemma: a guy driven by social performance and product based identification with an inner world devoid of compassion, morality, and reality itself. The indistinct boundaries in the book between fantasy and reality highlight the breakdown of consistent selfhood in a world dominated by simulation.

Hence, this research aims to investigate how American Psycho depicts the psychological and social consequences of living in a hyperconsumerist culture on the individual's self-identity. It also investigates how Patrick Bateman's brutality mirrors a psychological reaction to identity loss, emotional repression, and the emptiness produced by hiperconsumerist, postmodern civilization.

Methodology

This research paper is a qualitative literary study that centres on the analysis of American Psycho. The primary source for the analysis is the original text of the novel. Textual analysis and thematic analysis approaches will be employed to examine selected data from the novel. The process will involve the following steps: I) Gather detailed data directly from the novel's original narrative. II) Identify and define a set of thematic concepts, which will be discussed and used to construct the conceptual framework. III) Refine the themes to ensure they capture the core meanings present in the data. IV) Develop the analysis by illustrating each theme with direct evidence from the data. V) Document the findings resulting from the textual analysis. VI) Formulate the final conclusions based on the analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation

People in a highly developed postmodern society frequently lose the capacity to distinguish between reality and its simulation, which leads to great ambiguity between what is real and what is created around them. To emphasize the feeling of ambiguity and disconnection that defines postmodern existence, French novelist and postmodern thinker Jean Baudrillard put forth the concept of a "loss of reality". This phenomenon results from

media, movies, and photographs that distort and magnify reality, therefore creating artificial representations of the world—what Baudrillard calls "hyperreality". Coined and conceptualized by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, hyperreality is an artificially constructed version of reality. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 22) It is instead entirely constructed, generated, and artificial; it no longer represents something real, objective, or universal.

Baudrillard's idea of simulacra and simulation, in which the simulacrum serves as the fundamental component of hyperreality, lies at the core of this idea. A simulacrum is essentially a copy with no original—or, in Baudrillard's words, a copy whose "original no longer even exists" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 99). It goes far beyond any true source and separates itself from it to become completely autonomous. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality describes the convergence of the physical and virtual worlds whereby the divide between reality and its depiction vanishes, leaving only the hyperreal. "Hyperreality", according to Baudrillard, "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 1). Simulations substitute actual reality; simulacra are duplicates without an original source. He criticizes modern society—especially consumerism, media, and politics—in Simulacra and Simulation for replacing actual meaning with signs and images, therefore producing a reality where fiction controls human perception and feeling. Hyperreality, according to Baudrillard, develops via four phases, each influencing meaning generation. Reflection, the first stage, is when the picture properly reflects reality and serves as a true representation. The second is masks, in which the picture distorts or misrepresents reality and becomes an unfaithful copy. The third phase is illusion, when the image claims to represent reality but in fact has no genuine link to it. The simulacrum is fully disconnected from reality in the last stage, operating only as a self-contained simulation devoid of any allusion to the real. Baudrillard writes: it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 6).

With the collapse of the boundary between simulacrum and reality, it becomes possible to speak of the disappearance of reality itself—what Baudrillard refers to as the "real," a concept he claims is lost not only in Simulacra and Simulation but also in other works like America. This loss also extends to the concept of the self and personal identity, as the foundational reference point for constructing identity is no longer accessible. In other words, identity—being "a matter of defining the self against a given environment" (Leach, 2020, p. 31)—needs a steady sense of what is real. Without that grounding in the real, the self becomes elusive, fragmented, and lacking in clear structure. As the real is replaced or disrupted by the simulated, the self itself begins to take on features of the hyperreal—a fusion of the real and the artificial. As a result, society is left without a solid reality, inhabited only by simulacra, including the self.

Findings and discussion

Consumerist psychosis, status and identity

As Hayes explains, consumerism involves "the idea that increasing the consumption of goods and services purchased in the market is always a desirable goal and that a person's

well-being and happiness depend fundamentally on obtaining consumer goods and material possessions." (Hayes, 2022). American Psycho is rife with scenes of overspending in which characters employ material items not for their usefulness but rather to denote status and identity. Brand names and items abound in the story, often portrayed with such care that particular sections look like commercial advertisements. The brands the characters feature are live embodiments of themselves.

The following is how Patrick characterizes himself and his coworkers at the Yale Club:

Van Patten is wearing a glen-plaid wool-crepe suit from Krizia Uomo, a Brooks Brothers shirt, a tie from Adirondack and shoes by Cole-Haan. McDermott is wearing a lamb's wool and cashmere blazer, worsted wool flannel trousers by Ralph Lauren, a shirt and tie also by Ralph Lauren and shoes from Brooks Brothers. I'm wearing a tick-weave wool suit with a windowpane overplaid, a cotton shirt by Luciano Barbera, a tie by Luciano Barbera, shoes from Cole-Haan and … (Ellis, 2015, p. 150).

From the perspective of conspicuous consumption: "Conspicuous consumption is a means to show one's social position, particularly when publicly displayed goods and services are too expensive for other members of the same class" (Hayes, 2022). This idea is completely interwoven throughout the book's story. Acquiring products that denote their higher social status, Patrick and his classmates are always seeking to outdo one another. These products' real purpose is little as long as they help to reinforce a feeling of superiority above others. Patrick concentrates on describing his friends' physical appearances and does not express his emotions or the nature of his relationships with them. From this representation, the reader sees Patrick's disconnect from people solely from a consumerist point of view. Apart from Patrick, the characters are not quite known; their physical characteristics are seldom addressed and their personalities seem absent. Consequently, their attire is the only way by which they are recognized.

Patrick's thorough description of his morning ritual, which closely resembles that of a commercial, shows more product information. He discusses every item he uses in depth as he is getting ready:

Then I use the Probright tooth polisher and next the Interplak tooth polisher (this in addition to the toothbrush) which has a speed of 4200 rpm and reverses direction forty-six times per second; the larger tufts clean between teeth and massage the gums while the short ones scrub the tooth surfaces. I rinse again, with Cepacol. I wash the facial massage off with a spearmint face scrub. The shower has a universal all-directional shower head that adjusts within a thirty-inch vertical range. (Ellis, 1991, p. 19)

By means of his thorough descriptions in this paragraph, he shows the superiority of the goods he uses. Patrick's longing for top-tier goods, especially those that set him apart, consumes him. The reader is plunged in Patrick's world of extravagance and is shown how deeply he values unique ownership by the intense focus on these qualities.

When Bateman's ex-girlfriend Bethany returns to his apartment with him, she sees his pricey David Onica painting. Since it is an original work by a well-known painter, it should have high social status and significant prestige value. Nevertheless, Bethany is unimpressed and remarks, "You've hung the Onica upside down," while laughing (Ellis, 1991, p. 235). By hanging the painting incorrectly, Bateman shows Bethany that he is not worthy of possessing a product with such high social status. A few seconds later, he uses a nail gun to attack Bethany out of wrath. Value is important in Bateman's world, and he will not think twice about eliminating someone who threatens his worth or standing in the social hierarchy. Because Bethany denied him the social standing that his pricey painting "should" have given him, Bateman tortures and kills her.

The preservation of social status is extremely crucial to Patrick, and other characters of the same economic background. This becomes apparent when Timothy Price, one of Patrick's colleagues and an investment banker, says, "I'm resourceful [,] . . . 'I'm creative, I'm young, unscrupulous, highly motivate, highly skilled. In essence what I'm saying is that society cannot afford to lose me. I'm an asset" (Ellis, 2011, p.3; emphasis added). Price considers his personal attributions to society extremely valuable. Society cannot "afford" to lose him because he is the type of personality that society prefers: ". . . highly motivate, highly skilled." Price is the poster child for avarice and moral depravity; he makes fun of the destitute and is racist and homophobic. Additionally, he comes out as an elitist who thinks the wealthy deserve a better life than the rest of society. He is embracing the neoliberal economic system; therefore, the system needs him to maintain itself.

One's identity is shaped by their consumption habits in a late capitalist society. Through his consumption, Bateman constructs an abstract and surface-level sense of self, but he lacks any real depth. In his essay "Wall Street Jekyll: Identity and Meaningless Pleasure in American Psycho(s)," Charles Jason Lee explores the following topics:
Bateman 'exists' in a world defined through a hierarchy of labels, which work as definitions of identity and status. They consume the consumer by their desirability, leaving nothing, the attempted satisfaction of pleasure leaving only absence and meaninglessness. (Lee, 2005, p. 26)

In other words, his sense of self is shaped entirely by his consumption. "Bateman attempts to disguise his lack of humanity by purchasing the accessories of an identity he wants to possess: rich, successful and good-looking. He's buying his identity through things!" (Nystrand, 2010, p. 8). Patrick and those around him in American Psycho are so consumed by public opinion that even their dining choices are dictated by trendiness rather than taste. Patrick says, "New York magazine called it a 'playful but mysterious little dish.'" (Ellis, 1991, p. 51).

American Psycho portrays a world devoid of uniqueness. None of the characters have particular features; they are almost identical. The book presents a consumerist society where diversity is erased—everyone has the same looks, views, emotions, and values. Driven

by public opinion, identity turns collective rather than individual. This cultural environment allows for no individual expression or subjective thought; fitting in demands complete conformity. Patrick is sometimes confused with other people when he is with his buddies, and he likewise erroneously labels or gives other people random names. For instance, he calls a prostitute "Christie," admitting, "I don't know her real name, I haven't asked, but I told her to respond only when I call her Christie" (Ellis, 2015, p. 179; emphasis in original). Later, this same woman calls him "Paul," claiming, "You have a really nice place here... Paul" (Ellis, 2015, p. 181). Patrick then clarifies that Paul Owen had also misidentified him for someone else:

[Paul] Owen has mistaken me for Marcus Halberstam (even though Marcus is dating Cecilia Wagner) but for some reason it really doesn't matter and it seems a logical faux pas 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 and we share the same barber at the same place, the Pierre Hotel, so it seems understandable; it doesn't irk me. (Ellis, 2015, p.93; emphasis added).

Patrick loses his own identity and turns identical to his coworkers. He says indifference when mistaken for Halberstam, noting it "doesn't matter" since they "do the same exact thing." This implies that their employment determines who they are more than their personal characteristics. Patrick's identity decomposition starts with these thoughts and his slide into a psychotic condition marked by violence and destruction begins here.

Objectifying humans and commodifying human relationships

Consumerism greatly affects people and their interactions with one another. It diminishes people to nothing other than goods. Characters in American Psycho sometimes disregard others as sentient beings with emotions and personal lives, therefore harming their own sense of identity. Patrick, say, sees himself more as an object than as a living person. He cannot differentiate between humans and things because he strongly identifies with material goods. Everything—and everyone—to him is just a thing to be used then discarded when it stops being helpful. He assesses individuals exactly as he does objects, highlighting a complete lack of emotional connection in his interactions.

This consumerist mindset becomes especially clear in a notable section of the novel, where Patrick's description of his bedroom reveals his inability to distinguish between human beings and material possessions: "Things are lying in the corner of my bedroom: a pair of girl's shoes from Edward Susan Bennis Allen, a hand with the thumb and forefinger missing, the new issue of vanity Fair's splashed with someone's blood, cummerbund drenched with gore..." (Ellis, 1991, p. 209). This inability to distinguish between objects and people allows for greater focus on consumption while pushing genuine human connection aside. To Patrick, there appears to be no real difference between a pair of designer shoes, a copy of Vanity Fair, a cummerbund, or a dismembered human hand.

In one of the novel's most disturbing moments, Patrick reveals that he keeps three severed vaginas in his gym locker: "There's a barrette clipped to one of them, a blue ribbon from Hermès tied around my favourite" (Ellis, 1991, p. 222). This shocking detail shows that he treats his victims as trophies, turning human bodies into literal objects. Patrick has fully absorbed the logic of consumerism, arranging human remains as if they were luxury items in a store display. These violent acts completely strip people of their humanity. However, objectifying others brings him no real fulfilment—like any form of consumption, it only fuels further desire. Patrick also views himself as something created. All his rigorous routines—exercise, skincare, and dressing with exactness—seek to produce a faultless image. He promotes himself as a desirable "brand," always competing with others to be the most attractive product.

Another illustration of how individuals are degraded to things is found in sexual interactions, where sex is shown as a business transaction akin to commodity exchange. Patrick's attitude toward sex workers shows this very clearly. He deprives them of all independence by managing their movements and looks, rather than seeing them as actual human beings. He kills and abuses these to satisfy his needs. Patrick considers them disposable due to their poorer social position and believes their disappearance will pass undetected. These interactions are regarded just as regular maintenance events. Likewise detached and emotionally empty are Patrick's relationships with other women of his own social class and his girlfriend. Since every individual only cares about satisfying their own needs, every opportunity for true intimacy is lost.

Individual identity is almost eliminated in American Psycho and substituted with a shared, collective character among the characters. Their interactions are superficial and emotionally cut off without a strong or genuine sense of self. Every facet of their life, including their relationships, is dominated by consumerism. Berge (2010) highlights this loss of individuality, noting that Patrick Bateman's ability to name and identify commodities with precision is in stark contrast to his inability to distinguish between individual people. Patrick engages only with those who mirror his materialistic values, earn comparable salaries, and belong to the same social tier, reinforcing the idea that identity in this world is defined by consumption, not personality.

Patrick normally shows little care for people nearby. His relationship with Evelyn, for instance, exhibits no actual evidence of emotional attachment or dedication. He says, "I am fairly sure that Timothy and Evelyn are having an affair. Timothy is the only interesting person I know" (Ellis, 1991, p. 17), as he starts to believe Evelyn might be involved with Timothy. He shows no rage or disappointment. Instead, he compliments Timothy, pointing out that Evelyn's adultery does not trouble him—likely because he has little respect for her. Patrick is likewise unfaithful, having relationships with his friends' partners, which further shows his emotional distance and moral callousness.

Patrick's inability to form genuine emotional bonds not only causes severe loneliness from others but also from his own sense of identity. The social roles he assumes to blend in with his peers just worsen this aloneness and provide no real emotional fulfillment. As pathways for his unfulfilled wants, he therefore turns to pornography and violence. His fixation on consumer culture sets him apart, as it confirms a made-up identity and connects him with those nearby. Patrick's efforts to break free from this empty personality seem futile, as do his somewhat shallow relationships. Even after he breaks Evelyn's relationship, her top priority is upholding the fantasy of their mutual image instead of grieving the loss of anything significant. Her words— "But your friends are my friends. My friends are your friends. I don't think it would work" (Ellis, 1991, p. 206)—highlight how maintaining their shared social image matters more than any genuine emotional loss. In this world, appearances take precedence over real human connection.

Another example showing how consumerism influences relationships is when Patrick invites Patricia, one of his lovers, to a restaurant. She first seems indifferent to going out with him, but once he brings up the name "Dorsia"—a really exclusive and affluent restaurant—she promptly agrees. Her change of heart is not driven by love for Patrick but by the urge to be connected with a symbol of great social class. This shows that their relationship is based on trivial motivations rooted in consumerist values. For Patrick, such social contacts are just a means to uphold his position and fit into the affluent throng. In terms of emotional depth or individual development, these ties have no practical use. Media and products have fostered artificial wants in this world while stifling real human requirements like emotional connection and real friendship. People try to define themselves by their possessions, but this does not take the place of the basic need for approval and validation from other people. This too much identification with material items has created a shattered society in American Psycho, where people are hollow and fake mostly because of a consumption-obsessed culture.

Outward conformity, loss of individuality and emotional isolation

Patrick's sense of instability, alienation, and detachment brought on by the pervasive consumerism and advertising leads him to conform to the expected norms. Through numerous, repetitive images of luxury eateries, designer goods, and his strict skincare regimen, this conformity is shown. One would anticipate that Wall Street employees would be consumed by work, but the story shows that Patrick and his crew mostly remain inefficient. They focus on unimportant issues like style, restaurants, and social position rather than working.

Patrick feels driven to adopt these standards in a society where the consumption of 1980s popular culture—Hollywood movies, Broadway plays, and tabloid conversations—is more and more trendy in order to be socially accepted. Though his family's riches imply he has no financial need to work, he still chooses to do so, saying, "I...want... to... fit in" (Ellis, 2011, p. 247). His choice to fit shows the anxiety brought on by a society obsessed with materialism and external achievement. Patrick hopes to get free from his inner sense of

isolation and lack of control by sharing the same ideas, buying the same products, and living the same way.

But in the process he loses his uniqueness and turns into just one more undefined person in a crowd driven by conformity. Losing himself in mainstream culture, Patrick avoids having to face his own moral responsibility and autonomy. By matching people around him in terms of clothing, media intake, and lifestyle choices, he can temporarily feel at ease. But this feeling of comfort is as the facade he calls his "mask of sanity" (Ellis, 2011, p. 289) eventually starts to crack.

Patrick gradually loses any clear self-identification to become indistinguishable from his coworkers. He even acknowledges that being mistaken for Halberstam is unimportant since they "do the same precise thing," implying that their identities are shaped mainly by their professional roles rather than by personal characteristics. Consequently, the personalities become confused and blend with that of their peers, causing identity crises—even for Bateman himself. He admits, "I've forgotten who I had lunch with earlier and, even more important, where. Was it Robert Ailes at Beats? Or was it Todd Hendricks at Ursula's" (Ellis, 1991, p. 80). This moment shows how a consumer-driven society fixated on surface values and aesthetics diminishes the originality of the self. The characters eventually incorporate these ideals as part of their identity, therefore generating a group and vague feeling of self.

Patrick Bateman's identity in American Psycho is shown as a made-up persona—an abstract projection he builds for social approval. This external image has no relationship to an honest self since Bateman himself confesses that the "real me" is not present and characterizes his social façade as an illusion. Such admissions emphasize the degree to which he has suppressed his personality to fit societal expectations. The book uses his expressionless stare and empty physical handshake gesture to show how he imitates human interaction, but without really feeling it. Bateman says, "I was simply imitating reality" (Ellis, 2011, p. 56). These empty interactions draw attention to the performative character of his identity, indicating that Bateman hides his internal emptiness behind an impression of the genuine self. This reading is supported by Bateman's own words:

T]here is an idea of Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory[.] . . . I simply am not there. It is hard for me to make sense on any given level. Myself is fabricated, an aberration. I am a noncontingent human being. My personality is sketchy and unformed, my heartlessness goes deep and is persistent . . . (Ellis, 2011, p. 385)

Bateman exposes the degree of his psychological disintegration and emotional isolation by acknowledging that he is just a constructed "aberration" with a "sketchy and unformed" personality. This confession reveals a profound interior void brought about by the repression of a true, genuine self so as to keep up a false, socially produced persona. Such

self-erasure strengthens the novel's scathing criticism of postmodern identity by painting it as a hollow act fueled by superficial appearances and the strains of a consumerist society. Theoretically, postmodern society depends so much on individuality because it helps to define postmodern cultures. Douglas Giles examines the rise of individualism in modern history in Søren Kierkegaard and the First Explosion of Individualism (2021). This theory derives from Hegelian social and political philosophy, which sees the individual as just one component of a continuing historical process. This means that one builds their personal identity via their engagement with the cultural and social systems in which they grew up. People inherit the value system of their society of birth, which means that their actions are mostly shaped by cultural and social systems. Seen in this light, Bateman's personal identity is greatly shaped by convention and shaped by the wider postmodern framework defining American culture during the 1980s.

Malpas investigates the idea of identity and the alienation experience inside postcolonial theory. He argues that "individuality is built from memories and associations, but when these are generated in a culture that denies one's humanity, the comprehension of the self as whole becomes impossible. Identity becomes a masquerade as one attempts to 'fit in'" (Malpas, 2005, pp. 70–71). This concept also applies to Patrick Bateman, who finds it difficult to identify a unique "self" within himself. He is deprived of true humanity by a mediated environment that shapes his social relationships, personal memories, and sense of self.

This is closely tied to Bateman's own admission of emotional and moral emptiness, brought on by internalizing the violent persona modelled by the Consumer-driven spectacle culture. His confession during a murder—"I can imagine that my virtual absence of humanity fills her with mind-bending horror" (Ellis, 1991, p. 175)—and his later declaration to Evelyn, "I'm [inhuman] … I'm in touch with humanity" (Ellis, 1991, p. 182), reveal his fractured identity. Thus, Bateman's alienation prevents him from attaining individuality and leaves him in pursuit of the social acceptance he so desperately craves: "to ... fit ... in" (Ellis, 1991, p. 127), even though the postmodern world around him denies him a true sense of humanity. He expresses:

There wasn't a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and, possibly, total disgust. I had all the characteristics of a human being—flesh, blood, skin, hair—but my depersonalization was so intense, had gone so deep, that the normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow, purposeful erasure." (Ellis, 1991, p. 151)

Bateman captures a deep level of alienation—the loss of meaning and the weakening sense of connection to the world—as reflected in his pessimistic observation: "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" (Ellis, 1991, p. 200). This statement reveals his existential nothingness, in which conventional sources of pleasure, meaning, or expectation have lost their value. Emphasizing his isolation from anything genuine or

permanent, Bateman's view of the world mirrors a deep disconnection from emotional and spiritual satisfaction. The dominance of surface and consumerism molds his perception of reality, therefore demonstrating how his surroundings encourage a superficial life lacking more fundamental principles or significant human interaction.

Psychological disorder and turning to violence and sadism

Patrick's actions are understated, passive, and not especially dangerous at the opening of the novel. His violent tendencies increase over time even if the novel has a fragmented structure, broken narrative, and widespread ambiguity. In American Psycho, Patrick is shown as a sadist aiming at total control by consuming others into himself. Patrick's obsession with consumption presents itself as violent behaviour. This violence is also an outlet for his resentment of the consumer-driven life he lives. Patrick consumes others and regards them as objects since he sees himself to be superior. Particularly his narcissism, his violent impulses can be seen as symptoms of more profound psychological problems. "Abandon all hope ye who enter here ..." (Ellis, 1991, p. 3) are the opening words that come from Patrick Bateman's mind. These same words also appear above the entrance to hell in Dante Alighieri's Inferno (1995). Such a phrase could just as easily introduce a therapist's report on Bateman. If personality disorders were to be diagnosed in Patrick Bateman, his thoughts and behaviours might suggest a co-occurring diagnosis of borderline and schizotypal personality disorders (Millon & Everly, 1985).

One of the few ways Bateman tries to alleviate his psychological collapse—which is caused by a loss of identity, emotional loneliness, and a deep sense of meaninglessness and emptiness—is to give in to violent impulses. He views people and things similarly because he is so immersed in consumer culture: he uses them to fulfill his needs and throws them away when they are no longer useful. Because he does not acknowledge that other people have complicated emotional lives, this perception enables him to kill without regret. Rather, they are as empty and meaningless as any other object in his consumerist environment. In Patrick's mind, all things—people and objects alike—are equally vacant. His consumeristic behaviour is frequently linked to his murder sprees. For instance, when his favourite show, The Patty Winters Show, does not air new episodes during the summer, he describes feeling homicidal: "Life remained a blank canvas, a cliché, a soap opera. I felt lethal, on the verge of frenzy. My nightly bloodlust overflowed into my days and I had to leave the city. My mask of sanity was a victim of impending slippage" (Ellis, 1991, p. 169).

Patrick typically copes with his psychological disorder by directing all his pain toward ethnic minorities, marginalized groups, and women, as he states, with most of his victims drawn from those he perceives as socially inferior: "My pain is constant and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape" (Ellis, 1991, p. 362). He exhibits intense racist and class-based hostility, notably targeting a Jewish waitress and a Black man, whom he calls a "crazy fucking homeless nigger" (Ellis, 2011, p. 9). Furthermore, he mistreats and objectifies women, randomly telling a woman in a bar, "You are a fucking ugly bitch I want to stab to death and play around with your blood, but I'm smiling" (Ellis, 2011, p. 62). Patrick inflicts torture and

humiliation on others to gain the strength he lacks himself. Yet, he becomes so reliant on his victim that he loses his own identity entirely because "he needs [his subject] very badly" (Fromm, 1969, p. 166). His feeling of power stems from dominating and torturing others. Patrick's inability to conform to a culture built on independence, achievement, and hedonism drives him into a darker state. In this context, Lasch (1991, p.69) observes that reason is devalued in such a society: "Reason can [then] impose no limits on the pursuit of pleasure [or] on the immediate gratification of every desire, no matter how perverse, insane, criminal, or merely immoral." This observation supports Fromm's argument that destructiveness represents "the last, almost desperate attempt to save [the individual] from being crushed by [the world]" (Fromm, 1969, p.202). According to Lasch, at this stage, there exists "no limit" to sexual gratification or acts of destruction. This dynamic is evident in Patrick's unrestricted tendencies to brutalize and objectify people, especially women:

[S]he passes out again and vomits, while unconscious, and I have to hold her head up so she doesn't choke on it and then I Mace her again . . . I start to cut off her dress and when I get up to her chest I occasionally stab at her breasts, accidentally (not really) slicing off one of her nipples through the bra. . ., [I] force her mouth open and with the scissors cut out her tongue. . . Blood gushes out of her mouth and I have to hold her head up so she won't choke. Then I fuck her in the mouth, and after I've ejaculated and pulled out, I Mace her some more. (Ellis, 2011, p.255)

Patrick's descent into madness blurs the boundary between sexual gratification and destruction. Targeting not just women but also underprivileged men, animals, and coworkers, he derives pleasure from acts of intense violence including amputation and necrophiliac behavior, using "drills," "nails," and "knifes" to butcher his victims' bodies. Patrick's destructive impulses therefore arise from a need to establish control rather than only sexual desire. Through this he isolates himself from the outside world, attaining what he sees as "splendid isolation." The violent deeds give him a skewed sense of control over others. He spiritually reinstates lost strength in his own life by killing his victims. Patrick builds a weak sense of identity from this upside-down assertion of power. Regarding his colleague, he explicitly accepts this logic: ". . . would the world be a safer, kinder place if Luis was hacked to bits? My world might, so why not?" (Ellis, 2011, p. 134). Patrick's sadistic behavior so combines violence, sexuality, and self-preservation into one terrible cycle.

The novel's most dramatic moment may be when Patrick kills Paul Owen, his business rival. Paul is a symbol of hegemonic masculinity and power and dominance simulations. Patrick is envious of his possession of the "Fisher account," a prominent Wall Street account. The phrase "Fisher account" appears seventeen times, underscoring Patrick's obsession, and he often "wonder[s] about how Owen got [it]" (Ellis, 2011, p.51). Paul's success increasingly threatens Patrick's fragile self-image. As Fromm states, "[the individual] react[s] to this threat with intense aggression, as if it were a threat to his body or his property. The aggression in such cases has one aim: to destroy the witness who has the evidence" (Fromm, 1973, p.206). Here, the "evidence" is what exposes feelings of

inferiority. Patrick responds with brutal violence: "The ax hits him midsentence, straight in the face, its thick blade chopping sideways into his open mouth, shutting him up" (Ellis, 2011, p.227). Enraged, he yells: "f]ucking stupid bustard. Fucking bastard" (Ellis, 2011, p.227). Paul also functions as Patrick's alter-ego since he "is exactly [Patrick's] age, twenty-seven" (Ellis, 2011, p.225). With voices "probably identical" (Ellis, 2011, p.228), killing Paul symbolizes Patrick murdering the part of himself he despises.

Toward the end of the book, Bateman is beginning to increasingly unwind. His chapters get shorter, his actions and speech become more erratic, and his storytelling becomes nonsensical. Syntactically, Patrick's behavior and the way he communicates his ideas to the reader demonstrate his growing mental instability. He hears voices and even starts talking to himself in the third person: "It's fine,' I emphasize. Something gives way. 'You shouldn't be smitten with him...' I take a breather before correcting myself. 'I mean … me. Okay?" (Ellis, 2011, pp. 372–73). Bateman hallucinates and becomes lost in paranoia; however, it is never clarified how he found himself in these circumstances. He is taking more and more pain medicines as well as a great number of drugs (both legal and illicit). Cocaine is frequently mentioned throughout the book and is known for inducing hallucinations, aggressive impulses, and paranoia (Morton, 1999). In one passage, Bateman admits—and his drug-induced paranoia is made clear:

I'm having a sort of hard time paying attention because my automated teller has started *speaking* to me, sometimes actually leaving weird messages on the screen, in green lettering, like "Cause a Terrible Scene at Sotheby's" or "Kill the President" or "Feed Me a Stray Cat," and I was freaked out by the park bench that followed me for six blocks last Monday evening and it too spoke to me. Disintegration – I'm taking it in stride. (Ellis, 2011, p. 380)

According to American Psycho's conclusion, Patrick created a cruel environment in which he rejected all accepted morality and social mores in an effort to escape reality. There is evidence toward the book's conclusion that Patrick's imagination included gratuitous, horrifying depictions of violence. Patrick goes back to the home of Paul Owen, whom he had previously "killed," to get the proof after leaving a message on a phone. But to his astonishment, it turns out that Paul never lived in that apartment, which is a glaring sign that all (or most of) Patrick's killings were the result of his fantasies. This is ultimately verified when Patrick admits to killing Paul Owen during the pivotal encounter with Harold Cranes: "No!' I shout. 'Now, Carnes. Listen to me. Listen very, very carefully. I-Killed-Paul-Owen-and-I-liked-it. I can't make myself any clearer" (Ellis, 2011, p.397); Cranes responds, "that's simply not possible' […] '[b] ecause … I had … dinner … with Paul Owen … twice … in London … just ten days ago" (Ellis, 2011, p.397).

Conclusion: -

In the end, American Psycho shows us more than the excesses of Wall Street or the grotesque violence of Patrick Bateman's world—it confronts us with a culture where surfaces matter more than depth, and people are reduced to brands, possessions, and images.

My research has tried to show how Ellis uses Bateman's fragmented, obsessive voice to reflect the disintegration of self in a hyperconsumerist society. Beneath the shiny suits and designer labels lies a hollow core, and in that emptiness, violence emerges as the only way Bateman can feel real.

Ellis's book reminds us of the human price of existing in a society motivated by appearances and consumption. Created in isolation, Bateman is not merely a monster; he is a result of a culture that values elegance above substance, simulation above reality, and consumption over connection. His story is disturbing because it reflects a distorted image of our own time. Studying Bateman's fall into madness also forces us to wonder how far the consumerist influences around us form—even erode—our own identities.

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