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Luciano Cabral

The fourfold serial killer in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*

Rio de Janeiro

2015

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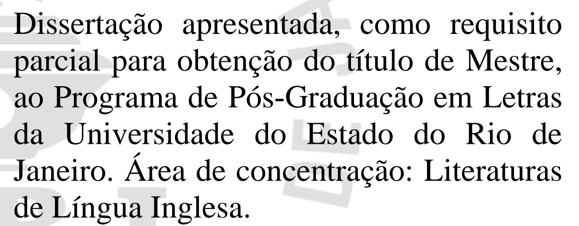

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Assinatura Data

Luciano Cabral

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

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Rio de Janeiro

2015

DEDICATION

To my family.

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This dissertation is made of many components, all of which highly important. All of the stories I have read so far, in tandem with the critical analyses I could be in touch with, have turned out to be, one way or the other, on these pages. These writers and critics have been motivating and useful, but they are nothing but names on covers and witty words in a sentence. In other words, they are not as physically close to me as the professors, friends and family that have helped me to make this happen. This moment, I would like to thank these people, the ones who have assisted me, whether directly or indirectly, making this critical work real.

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"See, Bateman agrees with me," Price says smugly.

"Oh he does not." With a Kleenex Evelyn wipes off whatever she rubbed on. "Patrick is not a cynic, Timothy. He's the boy next door, aren't you honey?"

"No I'm not," I whisper to myself. "I'm a fucking evil psychopath."

Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho.

RESUMO

CABRAL, Luciano.**The fourfold serial killer in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*.** 2015. 101f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2015.

Patrick Bateman, o protagonista narrador do romance *American Psycho* (1991), de Bret Easton Ellis, confunde por ser rico, bonito e educado e, ao mesmo tempo, torturador, assassino e canibal. Mas esta personalidade antagônica não o torna singular. O que o particulariza são as quatro faces que ele apresenta ao longo de sua narrativa: (1) ele consome mercadorias e humanos, (2) compete para ter reconhecimento, (3) provoca horror por suas ações, e (4) não é um narrador confiável. Sendo um yuppie (termo popular usado nos Estados Unidos na década de 1980 para denominar jovens e bem sucedidos profissionais urbanos), Bateman é materialista e hedonista. Ele está imerso em uma sociedade de consumo, fato que o impossibilita de perceber diferenças entre produtos e pessoas. Sendo um narcisista, ele se torna um competidor em busca de admiração. No entanto, Bateman também é um *serial killer* e suas descrições detalhadas de torturas e assassinatos horrorizam. Por fim, nós leitores duvidamos de sua narrativa ao notarmos inconsistências e ambiguidades. Zygmunt Bauman (2009) afirma que uma sociedade extremamente capitalista transforma tudo que nela existe em algo consumível. Christopher Lasch (1991) afirma que o lendário Narciso deu lugar a um novo, controverso, dependente e menos confiante. A maioria das vítimas de Bateman são membros de grupos socialmente marginalizados, como mendigos, homossexuais, imigrantes e prostitutas, o que o torna uma identidade predatória, segundo Arjun Appadurai (2006). A voz autodiegética e a narrativa incongruente do protagonista, contudo, impedem que confiemos em suas palavras. Estas são as quatro faces que pretendo apresentar deste *serial killer*.

Palavras-chave: Literatura americana. Blank fiction. Bret Easton Ellis, O Psicopata Americano, Patrick Bateman.

ABSTRACT

CABRAL, Luciano.**The fourfold serial killer in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho***. 2015. 101 f. Dissertation (Master's Program in English Language Literature) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2015

The autodiegetic protagonist Patrick Bateman, in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), is a troubling character, for he is highly-educated, wealthy and handsome as well as a torturer, a killer and a cannibal. This antagonistic behavior, nonetheless, does not make him a singular character. The four sides he presents throughout the novel are singular, though: (1) he consumes humans and commodities equally; (2) he competes for recognition and admiration; (3) his acts are horrific; and (4) his narration is unreliable. As a yuppie (a popular term from the 1980s used to define young urban U.S. professionals), Bateman is materialistic and hedonistic. As he lives off the excesses of a consumer society, he is incapable of distinguishing people from products. As a self-absorbed, narcissistic protagonist, he becomes a competitor struggling to get approval from his peers. Nevertheless, Bateman is a serial killer, and his detailed descriptions of tortures and murders are horrifying. Finally, we readers cannot rely on his narrative once we notice ambiguities and divergences. Zygmunt Bauman (2009) posits that an extremely capitalist society forces people to be commodified. Christopher Lasch (1991) asseverates that the old legendary Narcissus gave birth to a new one, paradoxical, dependent and less confident. Most of Bateman's victims are socially-marginalized characters, members of minority groups, such as homeless people, homosexuals, immigrants, and prostitutes. As a matter of fact, Bateman may be regarded as having a predatory identity, as defined by Arjun Appadurai (2006). However, this autodiegetic narrator, together with his inconsistent narrative, cannot be entirely trusted. These are the points I want to debate regarding this fourfold serial killer.

Keywords: American literature. Blank Fiction. Bret Easton Ellis. American Psycho. Patrick Bateman.

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been said about Bret Easton Ellis’s most famous and controversial book *American Psycho*. Since its debut, in March of 1991, the novel has been either cheerfully celebrated or heavily condemned. It was supposed to have been published three months earlier as the final literary work of “the end of the eighties”[1]. Ellis´s publishers had probably planned to turn the novel into a satiric episteme of the eighties, a decade full of young urban professionals eager to exercise their right to praise competition, consumerism, and narcissism. The publishers’ plan failed altogether, though: some pages of the novel had started to be spread around the staff at the publishing house, rapidly causing a dramatic commotion. Vivid accounts of torture inflicted upon women, mindlessly violent scenes minutely described, an uncommitted narration, and an overtly nonmoral protagonist triggered a feeling of disgust which soon forced the publishers to breach the agreement for the publication of the book. Organizations for women called their peers for a boycott of the novel and newspaper columnists asked readers to “snuff this book”[2] even before it was officially released. If taken out of its particular context, many sections of *American Psycho* are merely accounts of a disturbed, misogynist, racist, brutal, and cannibal autodiegetic narrator whose intention is nothing but depicting himself as an “evil psychopath”[3]. I surely agree with the usage of all of these derogatory adjectives to label Patrick Bateman. But he is, above all, a personage, a virtual figure created by a novelist. As such, we should apply a different critical standpoint to deal with Easton Ellis’s work.

Reviews of *American Psycho* commonly take it as a satiric portrayal of American society in the 1980s. This decade is generally defined by means of words such as Reaganomics, yuppies, MTV, and selfishness. The protagonist, one way or the other, embodies all of these elements. Bateman is a New Yorker, an affluent young businessman

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[1] MURPHET, Julian, 2002, p. 66.

[2] Read, for instance, the piece to the New York Times offered by Roger Rosenblatt on December 16th, 1990. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/16/books/snuff-this-book-will-bret-easton-ellis-get-away-with-murder.html . Last accessed on March 1st, 2015.

[3] ELLIS, Bret Easton, 2011, p. 19.

who communicates through pop songs and mass media. The joke coined to mock his "me generation" – "Enough about me. Let's talk about you: what do you think of me?"[4] – fully fits his disposition. Extremely narcissistic, he is solely concerned with himself.

Patrick Bateman is not only a product of a narcissistic decade. He is also a personification of the deadly side of it. He enjoys reading biographies of American mass murderers (Ed Gein, Ted Bundy, Son of Sam, Charlie Manson[5]), kills homeless people, homosexuals and immigrants, tortures women, videotapes their death, and masturbates over their corpses. In a sense, he plays the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde doubleness: he is, on the one hand, an ordinary man, handsome, wealthy, intelligent, and well-educated, and, on the other, a serial killer, who beats, cuts, tortures, and kills his victims brutally and callously. Adapted to a world full of visual appeals – be it in TV commercials, outdoors, movies or designer clothes – the protagonist makes use of a narration which echoes this very tendency. It is true that he describes, in graphic details, the assassination of Paul Owen, Al, Torri, Tiffany, Bethany, Christie and Sabrina. It is also true that Easton Ellis's style is depthless and blank, so that the sentences he uses become crude and unrefined. Nonetheless, when it comes to that dramatic commotion which took place on account of the publication of *American Psycho*, some critics feel surprised at that turbulent overreaction.

James Annesley observes, for instance, that all that fuss was motiveless once the representations of violence in the novel do not deviate from any mainstream in American culture. In order to support his observation, Annesley mentions Quentin Tarantino's movies (*Pulp Fiction* [1994] and the *Kill Bill* saga [2003-4] are the ones that come to my mind) and the screen adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1990). He also cites short stories by Raymond Carver and the Vietnam novels by Bobbie Ann Manson, Jayne Anne Phillips and John Nicholls. To make that commotion more inexplicable, he alludes to the brutal images one can find in Jack London's, Ernest Hemingway's, and Edgar Allan Poe's stories[6]. Annesley's point is that the censure which fell upon the novel and the author alike might be explained by the general merging some employ between actual brutality and the aesthetic depictions of brutality.

These controversies, however, generated assets rather than hazards. The novel is Easton Ellis's most famous work to date, it was adapted into a movie in 2000, and it has been

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[4] This joke is mentioned in an article by Elspeth Reeve for the online magazine *The Wire*. Available at: http://www.thewire.com/national/2013/05/me-generation-time/65054/. Last accessed on March 1st, 2015.

[5] ELLIS, Bret Easton, 2011, p. 88.

[6] ANNESLEY, James, 1998, pp. 12-3.

analyzed, or mentioned, in many articles, especially for its narrative blankness and unreliability. It is still, it is worth saying, either acclaimed or rejected by readers, but it has already its place in American literature. My study of *American Psycho* was not particularly motivated by that incident (I got in touch with the novel just some years ago under different circumstances). But it can be regarded as a new attempt to scope out Patrick Bateman beyond that skin-deep moral agenda.

As an undergraduate student of English Language and Literature, I was personally interested in Literary Theory, a field that I had never heard of before starting college. In classes, I was then introduced to terms such as mimesis, catharsis, and suspension of disbelief, which called my attention for the diverse ways from which literature could be approached. Some time later, I was invited by Professor Julio França to take part in his research group on fear literature. I initially worked on Rubem Fonseca's short stories, approaching them from the analyses of aesthetic violence and the theory of reader response. In 2012, when I applied for the master's degree program in Literary Theory at UERJ, my research project was based, to a great extent, on this approach. I did not succeed, though. Ironically, my contact with *American Psycho* took place because of this setback.

The following year, Professor França had come across *American Psycho* during one of his studies and told me the book had much to recommend it to me, not only for its similarities to some Fonseca's stories, but also for its quite singular protagonist. A few days later, I was watching online the lecture "The Danger of a Single Story", by writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and, oddly enough, she also referred to Easton Ellis's novel while making a point. I bought the book and started reading it soon after. I remember that the aspect that called my attention the most was the description of characters, strictly focused on clothes, hairstyle, and brand names. When I finished my reading, I realized I had an object that enabled me to tread two theoretical pavements: Literary Theory (the path on which I started my academic career) and Cultural Studies.

As Cultural Studies engage literary and social analysis in its practice, I could broaden my scope of criticism. Professor Leila Harris, my advisor, is a cultural studies researcher, who works with diasporic literature. Much of her work focuses on theories of postmodernism, criticism on postcolonial literature, and analyses of marginalized groups (or ex-centrics). Cultural Studies have stood for an interdisciplinary methodology to enhance analytical perspectives, thus contributing to a wider notion of the object of study. This is the reason why history, sociology, politics, anthropology, and philosophy go hand in hand with the literary

approach in my dissertation. Interdisciplinarity is the attitude I have tried to exercise all over my critical investigation.

In its entirety, this dissertation deals with Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*. The edition from which the excerpts have been taken is the 2011 by Picador. I have divided my analysis into four chapters, each of them presenting a different point of view on the first-person protagonist Patrick Bateman. The title of this dissertation is a straightforward reference to this division. The titles of the chapters, in turn, try to summarize those points on which I concentrate my criticism. Furthermore, all of these four parts are composed of three subdivisions which constitute the sections of each chapter.

In chapter 1, "Bateman consumes", I focus on the protagonist and his relation to consumerism. Not only do brand names fill up the novel all along, but they are also used to pinpoint time and space. The first subdivision, entitled "Things falling apart", aims at setting the scene of the novel as a "sense of ending", that is to say, as a disenchanted view of the world. The second subdivision, named "A paradoxical yuppie", examines Bateman's controversial narcissism: he fears dependence on people as much as he needs them to be admired. The third subdivision, "A consumerist psycho", demonstrates how Bateman's deep immersion into a consumer society forces him to consume commodities and humans equally.

In chapter 2, "Bateman competes", I contend that Patrick Bateman is, in reality, a contestant in a competition for recognition and admiration. The first subdivision of this chapter, called "A twofold competition", attempts to argue in favor of this viewpoint. I ultimately aim at answering why the protagonist kills Paul Owen, a member of his yuppie class, and also socially-marginalized individuals, such as homeless people, immigrants, homosexuals, and prostitutes. Based on the Dante Alighieri's verse with which Bateman's narrative starts, I metaphorically take the image of the purgatory to initiate my analysis. Bateman is positioned between heaven and hell, eager to climb up, but afraid to fall down. The subdivision "Climbing up" deals with the protagonist's eagerness to move up to be recognized whereas the subdivision "Falling down" considers the brutal relationship between Bateman and the others, the minority groups, namely, those who are found at the margin of consumerism to which Bateman constantly refers. I argue that the others' presence is threatening as it reminds the protagonist that he himself can become marginalized.

In chapter 3, "Bateman is horrific", I intend to uncover the novel's style and some of its themes. So, I try to shed some light upon the narrative in relation to postmodernism, blank fiction, monstrosity, and the grotesque. Although I tend to say that *American Psycho* offers a postmodernist prose, I try to stand away from that all-embracing notion which characterizes

postmodernism sometimes. Thus, the subdivision entitled “A subversive novel” approaches the novel from a postmodernist standpoint, counting on its subversive tendency. In the subdivision “A horrific protagonist”, I also classify (as some critics have already done) *American Psycho* as blank fiction. My intention, nonetheless, is not to straitjacket the novel within a specific genre. As Linda Hutcheon posits: “Labels are always comforting, but often also castrating”[7]. On the contrary, I aim at broadening the hermeneutic possibilities of the novel. In addition, I clarify how the narrative strategies of the novel can make the protagonist a horrific personage. The subdivision “A grotesque psycho” demonstrates that there are some scenes in the novel which might be regarded as examples of the grotesque phenomenon.

In chapter 4, “Bateman is unreliable”, my aim is to attest the psychotic credibility of the protagonist’s narration. As for that, the subdivision “An unreliable psycho” debates the narratological implications of unreliable narrators. The subdivision “Textual signs” concentrates almost exclusively on the textual elements that may signalize Bateman’s derangement. The subdivision “Contextual signs”, in turn, copes with the contextual elements that may signalize Bateman’s unreliability.

Similar to what I do to the signs I have just mentioned, I want to say that¸ to a certain extent, chapters 1 and 2 assign a priority to a contextual analysis while chapters 3 and 4 assign a priority to a textual one. But, all in all, the critical approach employed in this dissertation blurs this boundary in favor of an interdisciplinary practice. The methodology on which I count will be as broad as that combination of literary theories and cultural studies allows me to be. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, Christopher Lasch, Zygmunt Bauman, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Arjun Appadurai, and Linda Hutcheon will dialogue with Sonia Baello-Allué, James Annesley, Tzvetan Todorov, Noel Carroll, Mikhail Bakhtin, Wayne Booth, Julian Murphet and Ansgar Nünning, to name but a few.

Combining literary theories with cultural studies does not mean, nevertheless, that any disciplinary field will be worthwhile in my dissertation. As Umberto Eco asseverates: “[…] the notion of unlimited semiosis does not lead to the conclusion that interpretation has no criteria”[8]. In short, Eco posits that a literary work provides many interpretations, but it does not permit all interpretations. One of these criteria to limit a critical analysis is, undoubtedly, the object of study. So, my criticism does not consider Patrick Bateman’s narcissism by means of psychoanalytic connotations. Even though Sigmund Freud decrees that narcissism is

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[7] HUTCHEON, Linda, 1980, p. 2.

[8] ECO, Umberto, 1994, p. 6.

a universally inherent condition[9], Bateman's self-absorption does not seem an instinctive or natural pathology.

Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* is a controversial book indeed. Its hideous protagonist tells his story with no commitment, totally affectless. Its explicitly pornographic and violent narrative can possibly shock readers. But these are just parts of a bigger picture. By taking a closer look, one may find other perspectives. Some critics have delivered some. The pages of my dissertation will try to deliver some more.

[9] "On Narcissism: an introduction", published by Freud in 1914, is the essay where this proposition can be found.

1 BATEMAN CONSUMES

1.1 Things falling apart

In Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, *Inferno* Canto III, poets Virgil and Dante are standing before the gates of hell as they notice a doomed sign with darkened letters above the entrance that reads: "Abandon all hope ye who enter here" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 3). Overwhelmed and worried about what he just read, Dante asks Virgil for some clarification. Virgil explains that the location they are about to enter is destined to the ones who, when they were still alive, had deserved neither praise nor reprimand, as well as to those who had neither accepted nor denied god. Once they have been cast aside by both heaven and hell, this "eternal purgatory" is to be the agonizing fate for these souls that "Fame of them the world hath none" (ALIGHIERI, 1998, p. 10), that is, for those who have done nothing worth being recollected and praised.

American Psycho begins with this exact same sentence. The protagonist Patrick Bateman is in a cab driven by a non-American black driver, together with his friend Timothy Price, the moment this sentence, "in blood red lettering on the side of the Chemical Bank near the corner of Eleventh and First" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 3), is noticed, "in print large enough to be seen from the backseat of the cab" (p. 3). In the novel, unfortunately, Virgil is not there to clarify the sentence for us readers. Only when we finish reading it, do we realize that the inscription was taken from above the hell´s gates to be used as a dreadful warning: once we readers have stepped into the novel´s setting, we will be in touch with a dantesque inferno full of suffering from Bateman's victims, where many tongues are spoken (at the dry cleaners, Bateman and the Chinese worker are not able to communicate with each other), and crowded with socially ill-matched people (fancily-clothed figures clash with ragged omnipresent beggars).

Twelve years before the publication of Bret Easton Ellis's novel, Chistopher Lasch had already brought this dantesque inscription back. Those Dantean words are not quoted in Lasch's text, but they can be recognized whenever the historian delivers the reasons why the modern world has been conceived as hopeless. The 1960s are usually recalled as a decade of political turmoil and cultural experimentation. The Civil Rights Movement and the so-called sexual revolution are two instances of a time in which Americans, especially young adults,

believed they had serious affairs to fight for. But, in the long run, these affairs could not overcome the dramatic issues that had taken place, those still ongoing or even the ones yet to come. Two world wars, the Nazi holocaust, the Cold War with its threat of a nuclear destruction, the Vietnam war, the drain on natural resources, the crisis of capitalism, the bankruptcy of liberalism, the questioning of scientific outcomes, the futility of philosophy, the irrelevance of history, and the incapacity of a literary representation of the real world are thus some of the setbacks which contributed, by the last decades of the twentieth century, to a disenchantment in American society: "If on the other hand we ask what the common man thinks about his prospects, we find plenty of evidence to confirm the impression that the modern world faces the future without hope […]" (LASCH, 1991, p. xiv). This hopelessness, or "sense of ending" (p. 3), should be taken more as an awareness of things falling apart than as a mere comprehension of a millennium which is about to be left behind.

In *American Psycho*, things fall apart from the very beginning. One of its epigraphs comes from a song by *Talking Heads*, an American pop band whose compositions became hits in the eighties: "And as things fell apart / Nobody paid much attention". Taken from the song entitled *Nothing but Flowers*, this epigraph can be read as a hint to shape both the novel's setting and Bateman's mental disorder[10].

We also find this disenchanted viewpoint in the newspaper Timothy Price has in his hands. Patrick and Timothy are still in the cab when the latter opens the newspaper and reads out the headlines:

> "In one issue – in *one* issue – let's see here… strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway, a Communist rally, Mafia boss wiped out, Nazis" – he flips through the pages excitedly – "baseball players with AIDS, more Mafia shit, gridlock, the homeless, various maniacs, faggots dropping like flies in the streets, surrogate mothers, the cancellation of a soap opera, kids who broke into a zoo and tortured and burned various animals alive, more Nazis… and the joke is, the punch line is, it's all in this city – nowhere else, just here, it sucks, whoa wait, more Nazis, gridlock, gridlock, baby-sellers, black-market babies, AIDS babies, baby junkies, building collapses on baby, maniac baby, gridlock, bridge collapses –" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 4)

On its very first pages, *American Psycho* already paints a horrifying picture of its setting. The New York in which the characters live echoes the problems enumerated by Christopher Lasch. Poverty, diseases, and murders make up a city which is as hopeless as Lasch's diagnosis, yet more violent than the historian could foresee. When Timothy highlights that the awfulness listed are today's news, found in only one issue, his observation will likely astonish us readers because of the atrocities mentioned. But his listing brings about

[10] I debate Bateman's mental disorder in chapter 4.

an impression of a repetition as well. It seems that terrible stories similar to those are frequently reported, as if there has not been a single day in which the novel's New York could be peaceful and pleasant. So, Timothy denounces not only various atrocities, but also the frequency in which they have occurred. He complains indeed about the fact that he comes across those punch lines whenever he opens a newspaper. The news he reads out that day then turns into everyday news.

Though Lasch concentrates his analyses on the twentieth century, especially its second half, he underscores that such a sense of ending cannot be limited to that period alone. The religious vision of the sixteenth century, for instance, preached that believers ought to be anxiously waiting for the apocalypse, as it was told that this event, though destructive, would afterwards restore "a golden age" (LASCH, 1991, p. 6) on Earth. The ending thus was expected to be followed by a hopeful future. Believers were certain that there was a messiah out there on which they could rely, a savior powerful enough to efface injustice and bring back that long-lost sinless lifestyle. A post-apocalyptic period was understood to be bright if social egalitarianism was to be achieved and a connection to past generations kept. These values, Lasch says, were celebrated even by the most faithful transcendentalists: "Their egalitarian and pseudohistorical content suggest that even the most radically otherworldly religions of the past expressed a hope of social justice and a sense of continuity with earlier generations" (p. 6).

Hope, social concern and interest in the past is what the last decades of the twentieth century lack. The absence of these values, Lasch claims, is what sets those decades apart from the sixteenth century. Positivistic and humanistic ideologies had promised to build up a healthy society and scientists had committed to their rational methodologies to light up "the darkness of the ages" (p. xiii). Centuries have gone by then and neither those ideologies nor the sciences are able to offer consistent answers for the flaws we have accumulated. Hopelessness has engendered a vision of a society which has no future to hold onto, or, if there is any, it is marked by impending doom. Absence of social concern has enhanced competition, fear of dependence, and self-absorption. This last-named feature, in particular, has become a protection to shut people away from those social issues which are apparently unsolvable. Lasch says that, according to social theorist Peter Marin, self-absorption protects rich Americans from the horrors which surround them, namely poverty, racism, injustice, and it consequently "eases their troubled conscience" (p. 25). Finally, indifference to the past causes "the erosion of any strong concern for posterity […]" (p. 5). As they turned out to be seen as empty promises, positivistic expectations of the past have failed to provide solutions

for those horrors. So, a past which is regarded as disappointing, or "superficially progressive" (LASCH, 1991, p. xviii), as Lasch puts it, is powerless to foster a bright future. Facing an ugly prospect and rejecting a failing background, Americans, by the end of the last century, were only supposed to live the instant. When one denies the past and the future at once, the only moment which is left is the present.

Patrick Bateman is a character who epitomizes his present in all its excess, that is, the American 1980s. His narrative is filled up by the popular culture from that decade, ranging from David Onica to Huey Lewis and The News, from thriller movies to MTV videoclips. When he reviews the British band *Genesis*, he says he does not understand any of their albums from past decades. He declares he has been "a big Genesis fan ever since the release of their 1980 album, *Duke*" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 128). This album serves as a borderline for time, making clear that anything which is placed out of the boundaries of the eighties is actually misplaced, and thus incomprehensible. The novel ends right before the beginning of the nineties, insisting upon its confinement to a specific period. Whereas the first line of the narrative tells us to enter, the very last warns us there is no way out: "[…] and above one of the doors covered by red velvet drapes in Harry's is a sign and on the sign in letters that match the drapes' color are the words THIS IS NOT AN EXIT" (p. 384, author's capitalization). This sentence locks Bateman, his friends, victims and actions inside a setting in which commodification has indeed reached its apex, a moment many would dub consumer society.

Bateman is not interested in the past. He could possibly be taken as a serial killer whose acts of violence are to be meaningless, as some hasty reviewers have denounced. Readers may get alarmed at Bateman's autodiegetic account because it does not deliver any explanation for the bloodshed so graphically narrated throughout. The blank narrative[11] he makes use of is, in reality, useless to move us into deeper layers. In this respect, we might conclude that all of the protagonist's tortures, killings, paraphilia and cannibalism are *acte gratuit* and nothing else. The novel does not include details about Bateman's background or family bonds which could equip us to understand his behavior as a product of traumatic experiences. Questions such as who he was, where he came from, and what he has done are left insufficiently answered. In the chapter "Birthday, Brothers", Patrick invites his brother

[11] This narrative style is discussed more detailedly in chapter 3.

Sean[12] to a fancy restaurant, for he allegedly wants to talk about their mother. Nevertheless, Bateman says previously that the mother issue is a lame excuse:

> Since it's [Sean's] birthday and he happens to be in the city, my father's accountant, Charles Conroy, and the trustee of his estate, Nicholas Leigh, both called last week and mutually suggested that it would be in everyone's best interest to use this date as an excuse to find out what Sean's doing with his life and perhaps to ask a pertinent question or two. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 215)

Their mother is barely brought up as subject while they are having dinner. Their encounter is so pointless and their conversation so shallow that nothing relevant is ever said about family or personal matters. Bateman even reveals that he despises his brother "and that feeling is unambiguously reciprocated" (p. 215), but his account does not go any further.

Likewise, in the chapter "Sandstone", we readers find out that Bateman's nameless mother is a permanent resident at a mental hospital. A picture of his father next to another one of Bateman and Sean together, on his mother's bedside table, is perhaps the only moment we can perceive some familial bond. While sitting in the private room where she is hospitalized, Bateman says he is "not surprised at how much effort it takes to raise [his] head and look at her" (p. 351). Based on this sentence, we reader might infer that there is a certain family trauma the protagonist may not cope well with. However, he does not unfold such a story. No traumatic occurrence is ever told to support our inference. The dialogue that follows between Bateman and his mother is as superficial as the one he has with his brother. Bateman points out that he has been looking at his reflection in the mirror and has been examining the blood he found beneath his thumbnail. But, apart from that, nothing else is offered by the narrative.

The silence on his background, on the other hand, uncovers a character whose interest is located exclusively in the present. This observation is also assured by the tense he choses to tell the story[13]. The protagonist's violence does not stem from trauma. Such approach would certainly mislead the comprehension of the reasons why he inflicts so much pain on others, or why he narrates his murders so vividly. Rather, this silence allows us to read Bateman as a character who "respond[s] to the forces of the mass media and the free market" (ANNESLEY, 1998, p. 20). Strongly self-absorbed and intimately attached to his decade, Patrick Bateman turns into a barbaric metaphor for the consumeristic *ethos*.

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[12] Sean Bateman is one of the protagonists of an earlier novel by Easton Ellis, *The Rules of Attraction*. Patrick, as well as Sean, also appears in other Ellis's stories. Readers can find some relevant information on the Bateman family in other novels, but none is found in *American Psycho*.

[13] In chapter 3, I argue that the present tense also contributes to make Bateman horrific.

1.2 A Paradoxical Yuppie

On the cover of the ironic book of manners *The Yuppie Handbook*[14] (or as its title points out: *the state-of-art manual*), published in 1984, we can see a picture of two white young people, dressed in high-priced apparel, and carrying luxury goods: a Rolex watch around the man's wrist, a tennis racket in his hand, a Burberry coat over his right arm, and a Gucci suitcase next to him; around the woman's wrist, a Cartier Tank watch, and a Sony headphone on her ears – besides, she is wearing a Ralph Lauren suit. This picture suggests that these youngsters are the prototype of what, in the 1980s, was well-known as the yuppie style – the word "yuppie" being the short for "young urban professionals". Not as widely used nowadays as it was back then, the term labels twenty to forty-year-old adults, graduated from renowned universities, who live in big cities. They admire competition and consumerism, praise narcissism and hedonism, and are proud of their materialistic trend.

When, in 1984, *Time* magazine asked "Who are all those upwardly mobile folk with designer water, running shoes, pickled parquet floors and $ 450,000 condos in semislum buildings?"[15], the answer was obvious. The yuppie class came to life some time after the implementation of the so-called "Reaganomics", a set of economic policies carried out by the U.S. president Ronald Reagan. These policies managed to abandon price controls on oil, reduce government expenses and income tax, and cut down social spending. The plan was based on the "trickled-down theory", that is, to propel the growth of the American economy, a tax cutting was required, especially for big businesses. As a result, the money saved would pass little by little, or would "trickle down", onto small businesses and the general public. The idea sounded relatively simple, but what history books say is that the Reaganomics helped enlarge the gap between the rich and the poor. In the end of the decade, it was renamed Voodoo economics[16] by George Herbert Bush. In short, the idea was that the whole society would profit by letting the money be "in the hands of the affluent [...], since the wealthy would engage in productive investment" (TINDALL; SHI, 2007, p. 1319). One of the

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[14] For a better understanding, see the cover in section Annex.

[15] This question appears in the *Time* magazine issued on January 9th, 1984. An online version of the edition can be found at http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,952325,00.html . Last accessed on March 1st, 2015.

consequences of Reagan's plan was therefore a rush of narcissistic materialism taking over those upwardly mobile youngsters.

Cultural critic Richard Dyer underscores that, in the yuppie culture, money is the greatest desire, and the most sought-after goal for yuppies is to be rich. Accordingly, the devotion to individual pleasure becomes their philosophical stone. Money and pleasure turn into a chance of being freed, albeit not entirely, from the shackles of capitalism and patriarchalism – two systems which, for those youngsters, provide a posh, classy and luxurious lifestyle as much as force them to follow capitalist and patriarchal rules. Lacking any social concern or utopian feeling, those urban professionals work for money, only for gaining it and spending it right away. Money, thus, is just a means. It is not really longed-for; making and spending is. Hedonism is not transcendent or visionary for yuppies. On the contrary, it is the element which makes their culture an empty body, a non-commitment society, a pointless lifestyle (DYER, 1985, p. 48).

Bateman is evidently a yuppie. The first scene in the novel sets him in a cab heading for a party at his girlfriend's home, Evelyn – fancy parties, together with fancy restaurants, populate most of his daily routine. Brands and costly products are frequently listed by him, and he enumerates them proudly and minutely. The chapter "Morning", for instance, is used in its entirety to describe his apartment and his morning activities. As he describes the surroundings and actions, he brags about all of the brand new devices he has, the cosmetic lotions with which he takes care of the skin, and the suits he wears:

> In the early light of a May dawn this is what the living room of my apartment looks like: 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, mostly done in muted grays and olives, sitting on a chaise longue watching MTV […]. The painting overlooks a long white down-filled sofa and a thirty-inch digital TV set from Toshiba […]. A Toshiba VCR sits in a glass case beneath the TV set; it's a super-high-band Beta unit and has built-in editing function including a character generator with eight-page memory, a high-band record and playback, and three-week eight-event timer […]. A glass-top coffee table with oak legs by Turchin sits in front of the sofa, with Steuben glass animals placed strategically around expensive crystal ashtrays from Fortunoff, though I don´t smoke. Next to the Wurlitzer jukebox is a black ebony Baldwin concert grand piano […]. After I change into Ralph Lauren monogrammed boxer shorts and a Fair Isle sweater and slide into silk polka-dot Enrico Hidolin slippers, I tie a plastic ice pack around my face and commence with the morning's stretching exercises […]. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 24-5)

Similar to the cover picture of *The Yuppie Handbook*, the protagonist wears Ralph Lauren clothing, has a Burberry scarf, "grabbing my raincoat out of the closet in the entranceway I find a Burberry scarf and matching coat with a whale embroidered on it […]"

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[16] This information is available at: http://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/reaganomics.asp . Last accessed on March 1st, 2015.

(ELLIS, 2011, p. 29), and also has a Rolex watch, "I take the elevator downstairs to the lobby, rewinding my Rolex by gently shacking my wrist […]" (p. 29). Moreover, he plays squash (p. 121) and has expensive lunches and dinners almost every day.

Bateman has an original canvas by David Onica, a painter and photographer quite acclaimed in the 1980s. Keeping such a painting hung on his wall, however, does not mean that Bateman is interested in *avant-garde* painters, or even that he has noticed in Onica's work an artistic importance which has made him buy the picture. In fact, it is the picture's high price and consequent chance to hold his social status which leads him to the artwork. Just like those ancient patrons, Bateman places the painting on his living room wall to turn it into a tool to show off his high income; he does so to make his financial power visible. In a non-commitment society, Bateman is willing to make use of the painting otherwise: to give evidence of the upper class he belongs to. He buys the picture to manifest he can afford to buy it. He does not need to spare any time to contemplate the art – possessing it is enough. This is the reason why Bateman is not able to notice he has hung the canvas upside down:

> "Patrick?" Bethany asks, still giggling.
> "Yes?" I say, then, "Darling?"
> "Who hung the Onica?" she asks.
> "You like it?" I ask.
> "It´s fine, but…" She stops, then says, "I'm pretty sure it's hung upside down."
> "What?"
> "Who hung the Onica?"
> "I did," I say, my back still to her.
> "You´ve hung the Onica *upside down*." She laughs.
> "Hmmm?" I'm standing at the armoire, squeezing the nail gun, getting used to its weight in my gloved fist.
> "I can't believe it's upside down," she says. "How long has it been this way?"
> "A millennium," I whisper, turning around, nearing her. (p. 235, author's emphasis)

The protagonist's narcissism envelops the usual definition that comes to mind when we hear the word. The meaning of narcissism is commonly associated with self-preoccupation, self-absorption, individualism, lack of empathy, and excessive admiration of oneself. Bateman incarnates all of these features. He cuts off a conversation to ask about the way he looks: "Let me rephrase the ques – Wait, how does my hair look?" (p. 363). Besides he breaks his own stream of thought as he is before a mirror to admire his reflection:

> […] Or would the world be a safer, kinder place if Luis was hacked to bits? *My* world might, so why not? There really is no… *other hand*. It's really even too late to be asking these questions since now I'm in the men's room, staring at myself in the mirror – tan and haircut perfect – checking out my teeth which are completely straight and white and gleaming. (p. 151-2, author's emphasis)

His narrative choice is another plain evidence of his narcissistic tendency. No one else would be allowed to narrate Bateman's accounts but himself. He is absorbed into his looks,

his belongings and his own actions; hence his story needs to be told through his very point of view[17]. In other words, the first-person narration may be seen as the most appropriate writing technique for a narcissist. By using it, Bateman makes his self-absorption pervasive both in content and in form. This does not mean that his narcissistic narrative resembles that discussed by Linda Hutcheon. She is interested in metafictional accounts, that is to say, her focus is on self-reflective, self-reflexive, self-informing, auto-referential and auto-representational narratives (HUTCHEON, 1980, p. 1-2). What I am claiming is that, for a protagonist who is self-centered, self-absorbed, no narrative form would be suitable for his story other than autodiegesis. For this reason, the first-person pronoun should not stand for a deictic word alone. It should be also taken as an urge to get attached as tight as possible to a class whose concerns lie only in its members. Bateman holds a David Onica because he must set visibly his position within the social group he partakes. He accordingly delivers long descriptions of designer clothes and cutting-edge technology every now and again because he has to struggle for recognition. This statement resonates with a paradoxical characteristic of narcissism highlighted by Christopher Lasch. According to the historian's view, narcissistic behavior seeks support "on the vicarious warmth provided by others combined with the fear of dependence […]" (LASCH, 1991, p. 33). In a broader sense, narcissism is self-preservation, a protection to shield individuals from those aforementioned social horrors. So, narcissists tend to cram into themselves and deliberately choose not to depend upon others, not to keep personal ties. More than an act of complacency, Lasch claims this is an act of desperation (p. 26). As it was said earlier, Bateman's narrative reveals no useful family background to be traced. He is a lonely character. Although he has friends and a girlfriend, there are no close bonds between characters. Quite often, a character will identify another by a wrong name or mistake one person for another. In the novel, dialogues are as depthless as relationships, and characters hardly ever speak of feelings. Ironically, when Bateman makes an effort to bring up an emotional issue into the dialogue with his girlfriend Evelyn, she pays no attention to him:

> […] I tell her, measuring each word carefully. "But I… have no other way to express my blocked… needs." I'm surprised at how emotional this admission makes me, and it wears me down; I feel light-headed. As usual, Evelyn misses the essence of what I'm saying, and I wonder how long it will take to finally rid myself of her. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 325)

Despite his fear of dependence, the protagonist still needs others. His beauty, intelligence, fashion conscience, and wealth must be recognized. He therefore chases the

[17] In chapter 4, I debate this narrative choice as it makes readers doubtful about Bateman's reliability.

support of others "for constant infusions of approval and admiration" (LASCH, 1991, p. 40). In a class ruled by materialistic traits, such dependence emerges whenever he labels costly brands. Many chapters in *American Psycho* are named after fancy restaurants and clubs, such as Harry's, Pastels, Smith & Wollensky, Tunnel and Yale Club. Moreover, his status-seeking disposition drags him to detailed descriptions of designer outfits:

> I'm sitting in DuPlex, the new Tony McManus restaurant in Tribeca, with Christopher Armstrong, who also works at P&P. we went to Exeter together, then he went to the University of Pennsylvania and Wharton, before moving to Manhattan. We, inexplicably, could not get reservations at Subjects, so Armstrong suggested this place. Armstrong is wearing a four-button double-breasted chalk-striped spread-collar cotton shirt by Christian Dior and a large paisley-patterned silk tie by Givenchy Gentleman. His leather agenda and leather envelope, both by Bottega Veneta, lie on the third chair at our table, a good one, up front by the window. I'm wearing a nailhead-patterned worsted wool suit with overplad from DeRigueur by Schoeneman, a cotton broadcloth shirt by Bill Blass, a Macclesfield silk tie by Savoy and a cotton handkerchief by Ashear Bros. […]. Armstrong just got back from the islands and has a very deep, very even tan, but so do I. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 132)

Each expensive brand which comes out of the lines to describe the protagonist and his friends gives him the chance of another victory in his battle to be approved. Bateman may have understood that being part of a high class is a matter of quantity: the more he displays brands, the more admired he becomes. For this, designer names build the steps which permit him to climb up. And yet I have the impression that, the moment the protagonist brings brands to the fore, he expects not only other characters' approval, but the readers' concomitantly. Many of the labels mentioned in the novel may be unknown to us, may have lost their economic prestige, may not be as famous as they used to in the 1980s, or may even not be on the market anymore. Nevertheless they will likely sound effectively sophisticated to our ears in the twenty-first century. Bateman is stuck to his decade, but the labels might be not. Scattered all over the pages of the novel, the labels seem to transcend them. We thus take for granted that those designer names are classy, pricey and sophisticated. A narcissistic behavior demands approval and admiration, be it a character's or a reader's. The more approvals Bateman receives, the tighter he will be held to his class. A narcissistic narrator will make use of brands to reach for such recognition.

1.3 **A Consumerist Psycho**

The catastrophic news read out loud by Timothy Price in the first page of the novel also finds resonance with Friedric Jameson's concept of postmodernism. For him, the second half of the twentieth century was essentially a period of crisis – of Leninism, social democracy, welfare state. All of the positive, or negative, expectations of future were swapped by a sense of ending – of ideology, art, social class. A pervasive disposition to crisis has deadened romantic and utopian thoughts to the point of apparent no return (JAMESON, 1991, p. 53). This point is, in fact, a break with the modern movement. Yet I agree with Jameson we should not confine postmodernism within a cultural frame. The phenomenon has obvious implications also on social grounds as theorists track its blooming down to a society whose technology, media and consumerism have become omnipresent. On account of this connection, Jameson asserts that postmodernism takes place the moment contemporary aesthetics and commodity productions are mixed together (p. 56). This combination can be found all along *American Psycho*. Time and place are not set by mentioning dates, months, or cities alone. They reverberate excessively through references to celebrities, devices, movies, songs, clothing and brands. Totally responsive to a twentieth-century consumer society, Bateman can only grasp the surroundings by the logic of commodification.

James Annesley (1998, p. 93) reminds us that American fiction has many times depended upon capitalism and commodities to make up its stories, but it has not been common to refer openly to them. He takes Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as an example of a novel whose commodities play an important role. Gatsby's parties and assets are to be as visible as Bateman's, for both struggle for recognition, but commodities in Fitzgerald's novel are described without being labeled. Unlike Jay Gatsby, Bateman is a psycho, and he is all ears to a commercial culture. When murders and commodification unite, the verb "consume" must be reckoned "in all its possible meanings: purchasing, eating and destroying" (p. 16). Brand names, according to Sonia Baelo-Allué (2011, p. 103), have composed fictional narratives since the 1920s and 1930s. She includes James Joyce, John Dos Passos, Philip Roth and John Updike among writers whose stories also label trademarks. Nevertheless, what places Ellis's novel[18] apart from those fictions is that brand names in *American Psycho* are omnipresent and play a leading role.

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[18] Such emphasis on labels is found, to a greater or lesser extent, in all of Easton Ellis's works.

In order to elucidate the consequences of the omnipresence of commodities in the novel, I will count on a relevant argument offered by Zygmunt Bauman in *Consuming Life* (2007). The sociologist states that, in a consumer society, not only things, but also people tend to be commodified, reified and turned into goods. This is so because human interactions are to be conformed to standards quite similar to those interactions set by consumers and the consumed. In other words, coexisting tends to be chiefly an opportunity to promote oneself, in which constant reshaping and recasting is strongly needed as the aim is to reach the ability to be appealing and, consequently, desirable, or rather, consumable. To be appealing, then, is to hold a market value that may attract customers.

As an example for his statement, Bauman brings up three cases, apparently apart from each other, in which the transformation of people into commodities can be spotted: (1) the strikingly growing number of members at social networks (although Bebo and MySpace are mentioned, the websites FaceBook, Twitter, or even YouTube, can be added to this list without compromising the analysis whatsoever); (2) the use of computer systems to rank customers as more or less important based on their purchasing power; and (3) new rules for the immigration system offered by the United Kingdom (other countries have offered similar rules) whose aim is "to attract the brightest and the best" (BAUMAN, 2007, p. 5) to take part in its active labor force.

Some point out that the best explanation for the exponential increase of social network users lies in the "network effect", that is, roughly speaking, the capacity of a certain activity that involves a high number of people to draw, for this reason, more people: the more people engage in an activity, the more people will be drawn to it. Bauman, however, underlines that social networks are successful because they bring out the users' confessional behavior:

> […] a society notorious for effacing the boundaries which once separated the private from the public, for making it a public virtue and obligation to publicly expose the private, and for wiping away from public communication anything that resists being reduced to private confidences, together with those who refuse to confide them. (p. 3).

The interest in building up a virtual profile and then posting personal information, exposing private moments and confessing them right down to the last details is the backbone of these websites: "At the heart of social networking is an exchange of personal information. Users are happy to reveal intimate details of their personal lives, to post accurate information and to share photographs" (p. 2). What Bauman notices is that this behavior effaces all of the boundaries between public and private fields, turning confession into a virtuous action, and accordingly snubbing any attitude which is not oriented to sheer visibility.

Those who criticize technology have been shocked at this news: companies have been using computer systems to rank their customers' purchasing power more quickly. In so doing, the spending profile becomes the heart of the process. Being an enthusiastic shopper makes you valuable and then you will be treated well. For those who are immune to the appeals of marketing, the end of the line is where they are placed. The statement of the columnist for *The Guardian*, Nick Booth, is significant: "The process of discrimination has been subtly refined and fine-tuned over centuries. The only real difference that IT has made to the class system is to automate the instant judgments"[19]. The selection, all in all, sets the eager consumerists, those potential spenders, apart from those consumers who are less enthusiastic, the ones who are not easily coaxed by advertisements – or even those who, though willing to spend, cannot afford to buy the products or services being advertised.

Finally, the last case mentioned by Bauman was taken from the British prime minister's statement on the new rules for immigration. Many workers immigrated into England to fill low-skilled, or non-skilled, positions. But now only "the brightest and the best" (BAUMAN, 2007, p. 5) are to be chosen. According to the prime minister, the British government aims at attracting "only those people with the skills that the UK needs […]" (p. 5). Bauman keeps going by answering that the ones who are supposed to be attracted are "those with the most money to invest and the most skills to earn it" (p. 5). Consequently, all the others will be kept away. Taking this example, the sociologist emphasizes that these rules are backed by the same principles of the market: "selecting the best commodity on the shelf" (p. 5).

The three cases prove that the social network users (as they expose their profiles and confess their intimate experiences, willing to be seen and somewhat known), the low-ranked customers (as they struggle for a higher purchasing power in order to be better treated) as well as the immigrants (as they need to be the brightest to obtain a visa) must recast, promote and commodify themselves. All of them somehow need to be skillful enough to increase their value and then become appealing to be chosen. To sum up, they must promote a product, that is to say, themselves:

> […] they all inhabit the same social space known under the name of the *market*. […] the activity in which all of them are engaged (whether by choice, necessity, or most commonly both) is *marketing*. The test they need to pass in order to be admitted to the social prizes they covet demands them to *recast themselves as commodities*: that

[19] For a better understanding of this financially-based class system, read Nick Booth´s "Press 1 if you're poor, 2 if you're loaded…", in the English newspaper *The Guardian*, issued on March 2nd, 2006. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2006/mar/02/newmedia.consumernews . Last accessed on February 28th, 2015.

> is, as products capable of catching the attention and attracting *demand* and *customers*. (BAUMAN, 2007, p. 6, author's emphasis)

In *American Psycho*, the protagonist occupies this space, which is one based on marketing rules, where human interactions mimic those very relationships which take place between a buyer and a product: a consumer society. For Patrick Bateman, there is no difference between goods and people as he consumes, eats and destroys both the same way. Goods and people can be used up at will. Furthermore, they can be conveniently thrown away with no regrets.

Bateman's description of his apartment, listing all of his belongings, is likened to descriptions he offers of characters. His consumerist *ethos* and materially-oriented disposition do not allow him to break through the boundaries of the marketing appeal. Thus, he can only deliver endless lists of devices, meals, apparel, shoes, cosmetic lotions, hairstyles, haircuts, and brands:

> The three of us, David Van Pattten, Craig McDermott and myself, are sitting in the dining room of the Yale Club at lunch. 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 Brook 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 nonprescription glasses by Bausch & Lomb. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 150, author's emphasis)

All of these listings throughout the novel may affect us readers just the same as magazine ads, TV commercials and outdoors do. Wherever we are or whichever activity we do, we have been frequently besieged by products and services being offered all day and night long. In *American Psycho*, characters become flesh and bone ads, as if they were permanently placed at store windows or supermarket shelves, ready to be purchased and consumed when one wishes. The long and descriptive lists provided by Bateman tragically highlight the new order in a consumer society: from now on, humans are commodities.

Strategies to offer commodities are plentiful and diverse. According to Bauman, within such strategies, what is implicitly offered is a fulfillment of happiness. In a society populated by eager consumers, being unhappy is not an option. Consumption then is believed to be the path towards a happy lifestyle. Nevertheless, this happiness which is expected to be fulfilled by the time a product is purchased is always short-lived.

A consumer society can be perpetuated if, and only if, it lets its inhabitants' desires only partially fulfilled. Hence, a product must have its value depreciated as soon as it is marketed, in order to be replaced by another. As an everlasting cycle, the product which

promises to offer happiness will always be the newest one. Such strategy strives to convince that any desire will only be granted as long as an up-to-date product is bought; the previous product must be forever rejected: "What starts as an effort to satisfy a need must end up as a compulsion or an addiction" (BAUMAN, 2007, p. 47). In a rush of consumption, the protagonist compulsively use up beggars, prostitutes, immigrants, a homosexual, a child, a dog and also a member of his own social class, Paul Owen. Bateman's serial killing has a close connection with mass culture.

Patrick Bateman could certainly be a Leonian, an inhabitant of that invisible city described by Marco Polo, in Italo Calvino's novel. The city Leonia is not known by what it produces. What makes the city notorious is what it casts away: "It is not so much by the things that each day are manufactured, sold, bought that you can measure Leonia's opulence, but rather by the things that each day are thrown out to make room for the new" (CALVINO, 1972, p. 114). In this city, residents' happiness is found in brand new clothes and devices which are to be placed in a trashcan the next day. Marco Polo's Leonia resembles numerous big cities full of litter being piled up time after time. It looks like *American Psycho*'s New York, full of inhabitants willing to get the newest brands ever marketed:

> "It's Aiwa," Scott's saying. "You've *got* to hear it. The sound" – he pauses, closes his eyes in ecstasy, chewing on corn bread – "is fant*astic*."
>
> "Well, you know, Scottie, the Aiwa *is* okay." Oh holy shit, *dream on*, *Scottie*, I'm thinking. "But Sansui is really *top* of the line." I pause, then add, "I should know. I own one."
>
> "But I thought Aiwa was top of the line." Scott looks worried but not yet upset enough to please me. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 96, author's emphasis)

Although Leonians seem more pleased as they expel, discard, and cleanse themselves of a recurrent impurity than as they enjoy new and different things (CALVINO, 1972, p. 114), their interaction as consumers is not as deep as to require them to turn themselves into goods to be soon rejected. The crucial line that splits Bateman and Leonians apart is that the former consumes humans just like he consumes products.

This consumption of products and people is supported by a brutal scene in a chapter named "Girls". While he has sex with Torri and Tiffany, Bateman bites Tiffany's vagina and tears some of its flesh off: "She starts squealing, trying to pull away, and finally she screams as my teeth rip into her flesh (ELLIS, 2011, p. 292). As the torture unfolds, he decides to videotape his vicious act. While he describes detailedly all the pain that he inflicts upon the two girls, he also describes the camera and its features. These simultaneous descriptions objectify the women, turning them into commodities, just like the one described in this segment:

> As usual, in an attempt to understand these girls I'm filming their deaths. With Torri and Tiffany I use a Minox LX ultra-miniature camera that takes 9.5mm film, has a 15mm f/3.5 lens, an exposure meter and a built-in neutral density filter and sits on a tripod. I've put a CD of the Traveling Wilburys into a portable CD player that sits on the headboard above the bed, to mute any screams. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 292)

The niceties of the torture which Bateman delivers is far similar to the listings of goods he brings out all over the novel. These scenes are sheer examples of a protagonist who is incapable of interacting with characters without commodifying them. As for that, he lists goods, stresses their brands and features, narrates murders, describes inflictions, and consumes his victims. In another scene, he drinks a victim's blood as he drinks some champagne at a restaurant:

> I want to drink this girl's blood as if it were champagne and I plunge my face deep into what's left of her stomach, scratching my chomping jaw on a broken rib. The huge new television set is on in one of the rooms, first blaring out *The Patty Winters Show*, whose topic today is Human Dairies, then a game show, *Wheel of Fortune*, and the applause coming from the studio audience sounds like static each time a new letter is turned. I'm loosening the tie I'm still wearing with a blood-soaked hand, breathing in deeply. This is my reality. Everything outside of this is like some movie I once saw. (p. 331-2, author's emphasis)

By stating that the only reality possible is the one of which he is part, namely, a consumer reality, Bateman once again emphasizes that everything and everybody can be consumable. For the protagonist, there is no other way to act, no other path to find happiness, except through in a nonstop consumption: "My… my *need* to engage in… homicidal behavior on a massive scale cannot be, um, corrected," I tell her, measuring each word carefully. "But I… have no other way to express my blocked… needs." (p. 325, author's emphasis). The outcome is that, through Bateman's eyes, people acquire an expendable status. Therefore, he buys, uses, tortures, eats, kills, and discards them. He does so serially, in a cyclical violent movement. Bateman realizes that there is no way to escape from a hopeless New York, from his yuppie decade – that red-letter sign tells him that an exit is not available. Nonetheless, he does not want to opt out. In reality, what he wants is to "fit in" (p. 228), to be part of an upper class, to have recognition. Bateman ultimately desires to escape from that Dantesque purgatory, where souls are worthless, are not admired, and for this reason they are rejected by heaven and hell.

2 BATEMAN COMPETES

2.1 A twofold competition

The purgatory from which Patrick Bateman has striven to escape is known, according to the catholic doctrine, as a somewhat intermediate locality where all sins are quantified, qualified and judged so as to destine the souls to heaven or to hell[20]. The theological geography sets heaven above, hell below, and the purgatory in between. After judgment, good souls go up and reach paradise whereas bad souls go down and fall into damnation. Bateman is wealthy, well-educated, and handsome. He belongs to the upper class, yet I should say his social status does not appear to have set him higher, that is, in paradise. In fact, he is halfway through the climbing. To achieve recognition and admiration, he has stepped into a competition, fighting to be allowed to enter heaven, and consequently escape hell. This analogy between purgatory and competition makes more sense once we replace the theological ground with the socioeconomic. Bateman inhabits a consumer society where objects are sometimes more valuable than human beings.

The rewards of the heaven the protagonist wishes to enter are all material in tandem with the social standards he aspires to. For Jean Baudrillard, a fundamental change has occurred in our time: material goods have proliferated so quickly that we are presently less surrounded by people than by objects. The theorist draws an appropriate analogy by asserting that, as a child becomes a wolf by growing up among wolves (or, similarly, I would say, as a wild animal becomes docile as it is taken from the woods), by living among objects, human beings perform just as they do:

> We are living the period of the objects: that is, we live by their rhythm, according to their incessant cycles. Today, it is we who are observing their birth, fulfillment, and death; whereas in all previous civilizations, it was the object, instrument, and perennial monument that survived the generations of men. (BAUDRILLARD, 1988, p. 29)

An environment which is swarmed by objects tends to turn people into objects too. The profusion of commodities, advertising and brands has contributed to a perception of products as pervasive and ubiquitous. In this sense, Baudrillard dialogues with Zygmunt

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[20] These precepts can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* at the Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P2L.HTM . Last accessed on February 28th, 2015.

Bauman, for both underscore that an alteration of behavior is directly proportional to an environmental occurrence. Once again, the character Timothy Price is to be taken as an example, not only because his surname carries one of the words which rule commodities, but also because his performance exposes a commodified attitude. While talking to Bateman, Price complains he is not making much money. He lists his qualities and describes himself as something essential to society:

> I'm resourceful," Price is saying, "I'm creative, I'm young, unscrupulous, highly motivated, highly skilled. In essence what I'm saying is that society can*not* afford to lose me. I'm an *asset*." […] "I mean the fact remains that no one gives a shit about their work, everybody hates their job, *I* hate my job, *you've* told me you hate yours. What do I do? Go back to Los Angeles? *Not* an alternative. I didn't transfer from UCLA to Stanford to put up with this. I mean am I *alone* in thinking we're not making enough money? (ELLIS, 2011, p. 3, author's emphasis)

Baudrillard's words help us understand what impels Price to protest for more money. The theorist reminds us that objects are products of human activity submitted to the law of exchange value (BAUDRILLARD, 1988, p. 30). Timothy Price acknowledges this relationship and concludes that a creative young man, highly motivated and highly skilled as he is must not be expendable.

Commenting on the novel's characters, Daniel Cojocaru remarks: "So yuppies like Price are under the constant threat of losing their privileged position in society" (COJOCARU, 2008-9, p. 187). Timothy believes he is indispensable. He is a pricey product, so he should be valued as such. The amount of money he must make needs to be as high as his qualities. The words he uses during the complaint justify this point of view: "afford" suggests the financial means to earn something; and "asset" implies a valuable property. Timothy's discourse reverberates the money, the value, the price needed to assess his performance. The language uttered consequently has to emulate commercial terms.

Timothy Price and Patrick Bateman belong to the same social stratum. Needless to say, their attitudes are alike. As discussed in the previous chapter, Patrick is a serial killer who is completely attuned to consumerism. He is surrounded by commodities, brands and mass production. The famous slogan Baudrillard dubs outmoded still lives on in the novel. The idea that "ugliness doesn't sell" (BAUDRILLARD, 1998, p. 34) still applies to a narrator who often points out that appearance, though superficial and insubstantial, exceeds any other quality:

> Why, for the matter, do I want to please Courtney? If she likes me only for my muscles, the heft of my cock, then she's a shallow bitch. *But* a physically superior, near-perfect-looking shallow bitch, and *that* can override anything, except maybe bad breath or yellow teeth, either of which is a real deal-breaker. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 151, author's emphasis).

In *American Psycho*, many are the moments in which the narrator highlights physical features. Bateman is home with a model named Daisy he and his friends met at a restaurant. While she lies in bed, Bateman scans her: "I pause, staring at her flat, well-defined stomach. Her torso is completely tan and muscular. So is mine" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 204). The protagonist is aware that being concerned exclusively about the body is shallow, but this does not bother him. In another scene, as he is about to leave the office for a meeting, he reveals he had spent the night out moving from restaurant to restaurant, had a hangover because of a cocaine binge, has been chewing Nuprin pills, and has already taken two Valium tablets since he woke up. He observes then that his skin, still tan and smooth, could not be ruined by his addiction. In spite of having inner troubles, in the end of the paragraph he sums up what matters most to him: "All it comes down to is: I feel like shit but look great" (p. 103). When well-defined stomachs, stiff muscles, tan torsos, white skin, and slicked-back hairstyle come to the fore, a message is being sent, the same which is passed on while brands are listed. The protagonist belongs to the upper class and must look like its members to continue being part of it – it is paramount to be alike. Timothy Price, Patrick Bateman and the other yuppies, by exposing their assets, namely, their bodies and brands, keep on feeding a society of objects, of consumption, of humans as commodities.

Baudrillard (1988, p. 36) states that sociologists believe that consumers do not choose freely what to buy. Consuming implies ultimately to acquire a product because its value corresponds to a certain social hierarchy. A David Onica painting, as discussed, fulfills an economic purpose, not an aesthetic one. Consumer needs are not so aimed at an object then, but at the value an object can embody. What is being brought up here is an ideal of conformity, a principle of equivalence. As Baudrillard highlights: "a particular individual belongs to a particular group which consumes a particular product, and the individual consumes such a product because he or she belongs to such a group" (p. 37). In the novel, the protagonist and his friends have to possess expensive goods, otherwise they won't be part of the upper group. In a Baudrillardian sense, they will become ugly, and ultimately they won't be "sold". Evian water, Oliver Peoples glasses, straight teeth and a well-shaped body can put them back on the right path, for those members are valued in accordance with commodities and physical features.

It is in this arena that Bateman competes. It is a terrain where brands and good looks are weapons, where contestants lose for being ugly and poor. Anyone who goes off this path is labeled unnecessary – it is sent straight to hell. But Bateman still needs to fight for

recognition because he is not on top of the social hierarchy yet – he is not in heaven, but, as said, he is in purgatory, an in-between locale, struggling to move up, to reach for a position higher than he is now. It is important to underline, however, that Bateman is also struggling not to fall down, that is, not to descend to a lower position than he is now. Once he declines, he will be marginalized and put aside. I therefore claim that the protagonist's competition is twofold: he battles to climb up as much as he battles to avoid falling down.

Sonia Baelo-Allué asserts that Patrick Bateman is a "narcissistic yuppie; he masters the rules of fashion and his friends repeatedly ask him what to wear or how to match their clothes. He makes reservation for the best restaurants and is admitted into the best nightclubs" (BAELLO-ALLUÉ, 2011, p. 109). Although I would not say she is wrong in asserting so, I contend she is not entirely right. One of the restaurants the protagonist insists on booking, albeit never succeeding in getting a table, is the Dorsia, possibly the trendiest place in the novel's New York (ELLIS, 2011, p. 73). In a scene, Patricia Worrell, a blond model, invites Patrick for a concert, but he turns down the invitation because he does not like live music. Determined to persuade Patricia to give up the concert as well, Bateman lies to her by saying he has a reservation for the Dorsia. After Patricia is convinced, Bateman panics as he knows how hard it is to reserve a table at this place:

> The instant after I hang up on Patricia I dash across the room and grab the Zagat guide and flip through it until I find Dorsia. With trembling fingers I dial the number. Busy. Panicked. I put the phone on Constant Redial and for the next five minutes nothing but a busy signal, faithful and ominous, repeats itself across the line. Finally a ring and in the seconds before there's an answer I experience that rarest of occurrences – an adrenaline rush.
>
> "Dorsia," someone answers, sex not easily identifiable, made androgynous by the wall-of-sound noise in the background. "Please, hold."
>
> I clear my throat. "Um, yes, I know it's a little late but is it possible to reserve a table for two at eight-thirty or nine perhaps?" I'm asking this with both eyes shut tight.
>
> There is a pause – the crowd in the background a surging, deafening mass – and with real hope coursing through me I open my eyes, realizing that the maître d', god love him, is probably looking through the reservation book for a cancellation – but then he starts giggling, low at first but it builds to a high-pitched crescendo of laughter which is abruptly cut off when he slams down the receiver. (p. 72-3)

Bateman is wealthy, definitely part of the upper class. Nonetheless, his position is not high enough to allow him to book a table at a restaurant as trendy as Dorsia. In reality, he panics as he recognizes that there are some commodities he cannot reach yet. Dorsia reminds him that he must keep battling for admiration, must keep fighting for approval. Unlike what Baelo-Allué says, the protagonist does not make reservations for the best restaurants. There is at least one that is beyond his reach.

The fact the protagonist's position is not as high as he would like to can be noticed in those scenes in which he fails to win the competition. One of these failures takes place when Patrick looks for a restaurant to have dinner with his brother Sean. He asks his secretary Jean "to find the most expensive restaurant in Manhattan" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 216). Obviously, since the *maître d'* has laughed and hung up the phone on him, Bateman realizes that Dorsia can no longer be an option. Moreover, he states that this restaurant is "far too chic for [Sean]" (idem). Believing that Dorsia is not a place for his brother may be Patrick's big mistake, so much so that, some lines later, we readers learn that Sean calls Patrick back to tell they are having dinner there: "Sean calls at five from the Racquet Club and tells me to meet him at Dorsia tonight. He just talked to Brin, the owner, and reserved a table at nine. My mind is a mess. I don't know what to think or how to feel" (p. 216). The bewilderment in Bateman's mind is caused by the fact that Sean is able to book a table at the restaurant where the personnel have scorned Bateman. His brother can make a reservation at that place, but Patrick can't. He was mistaken for taking for granted that the Dorsia was as unreachable for Sean as it is for him. To make things worse, Sean could reserve one of the best spots in there, "My worst fear – a reality. A prime booth across from the bar sits there, empty, waiting for Sean to grace it with his presence" (p. 216), and he is even the manager's friend: "He's shaking hands with the maître d' as I walk over but doesn't even bother to introduce us" (p. 217). The restaurant Dorsia epitomizes the commodities the protagonist does not yet have the permission to consume. Even though he wishes for it eagerly, he cannot get a table. Bateman knows that he has to climb higher to stop being ridiculed by a restaurant worker. This is why he competes: the higher he goes, the more recognition he gets. Bateman, on the other hand, may not know that this is quite possibly a strategy of a system that feeds off consumerism to be alive and well. Some commodities must remain unreachable even to the wealthy ones, thus keeping competition ever running.

This competition, it is worth saying, has nothing to do with purchasing power. Bateman is rich, and so are his yuppie friends. He withdraws money from the automated teller "just for the hell of it" (p. 123), and gets surprised whenever the restaurant tab is not high: "The bill comes to $320 – less than I expected, actually – and I put it on my platinum AmEx" (p. 146). What else is left to earn from a consumer society by the time one achieves a high purchasing power? The matter the protagonist is unable to come to terms is not financial. In actuality, he craves being recognized as an essential asset, rather than an ordinary man, or "the boy next door" (p. 11) his girlfriend Evelyn repeatedly calls him.

We should not forget that the competitor is a psycho, so he will resort to anything, including tortures and murders to achieve his goals. I have argued that, in *American Psycho*, people acquire an expendable status; killings, therefore, turning into the final result of a boundless act of consumption. In this respect, any character in the novel becomes a potential victim. Elizabeth Young (1992, p. 113-4) underlines that Patrick Bateman is, in fact, a "democratic killer", murdering "the entire cross-section of race, class, age and gender in New York society". I believe Young makes such point mostly because of the assassination of Paul Owen. Likewise, given this cross-section of victims, I also agree it is hard to "find a pattern in the killings" (BAELO-ALLUÉ, 2011, p. 97). Even though we may side with both critics' statements, we should ever keep in mind that a great number of victims are those considered to be others, to be "ex-centric" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 60-1). In addition, claiming that humans equal commodities, as I have, does not seem to be enough to respond to this question: why does Bateman kill a member of his own class and also ex-centric characters? For this matter, I argue that the answer may be found in the twofold competition in which Patrick Bateman is engaged.

2.2 **Climbing up**

I have compared the protagonist to Narcissus, the mythological figure whose punishment was to fall in love with his own image and drown in a pool. As already said, Bateman's narcissism is paradoxical: he refuses to be dependent on other people but simultaneously longs for their admiration. In a sense, he resembles the legendary Narcissus: "'Hi. Pat Bateman,' I say, offering my hand, noticing my reflection in a mirror hung on the wall – and smiling at how good I look" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 10). In another, he incarnates the new narcissist defined by Christopher Lasch. This new Narcissus still scrutinizes his reflection in the mirror, but he does so less for self-admiration than in search of flaws, fatigue and decay: "All of us, actors and spectators alike, live surrounded by mirrors. In them, we seek reassurance of our capacity to captivate or impress others, anxiously searching out blemishes that might detract from the appearance we intend to project" (LASCH, 1991, p. 92). Dorsia is not the only moment the victorious image Patrick tries to convey is blemished. This image is also stained in the scene he shows off his new business card.

Bateman does not accept so easily the fact that his friend Craig McDermott can book a table at Pastels, a restaurant "impossible to get a reservation" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 38). McDermott knows the maître d', and this is what upsets Bateman. In order to make an impression on his friends, Bateman decides to "even up the score a little bit" (p. 42) – an expression that in itself recalls competition – by putting his new business card on the table to be assessed: "I pull it out of my gazelleskin wallet (Barney's, $850) and slap it on the table, waiting for reactions" (p. 42). The card impresses them, phrases such as "not bad" and "very nice" are spoken. But then, one by one, David Van Patten's, Timothy Price's, and Scott Montgomery's cards are also displayed. It is worth noticing how adverbs and adjectives are significantly intensified: Van Patten's card is "really nice" while Price's is "magnificent". When Montgomery's is shown, Bateman is "unexpectedly depressed that [he] started this" (p. 43). The object that he had hoped would serve to captivate others and enhance his confidence conversely becomes the element that tarnishes his image and frustrates his expectation to be admired. A less attractive business card impedes Patrick to move upwards, making him feel that the heaven he aims has been relocated farther away.

Lasch's Narcissus is mainly defined as (a) paradoxical, as he depends on others though he is afraid of such dependence; as (b) less confident as he notes his weaknesses; and also as (c) less agonistic, as he fears competition. Patrick Bateman's attitudes have led me to stand for the first and second definitions. For the same reason, I should side against the third. Lasch argues that competition was put through a lot of criticism in the 1970s, especially because Americans connected rivalry to annihilation. Conventions that both exalted opponents and limited their behavior, such as cooperation, compassion, discipline, team spirit and fair play, became obsolete and collapsed. Due to marketing and media, competing turned into a cut-throat picture, ultimately resulting in images of slaughter:

> The intrusion of the market into every corner of the sporting scene, however, re-creates all the antagonisms characteristic of late capitalist society. With the free-agent draft, the escalation of athletic salaries, and the instantaneous stardom conferred by the media on athletic success, competition among rival organizations has degenerated into a free-for-all. […] People today associate rivalry with boundless aggression and find it difficult to conceive of competition that does not lead directly to thoughts of murder. (LASCH, 1991, p. 117)

The new narcissist fears competition for understanding that excellence is only worthwhile when it includes the destruction of the opponent. As winning entails elimination, these narcissists avoid confrontation unless the tension between rivalry and cooperation is adequately balanced. This evasive action does not apply to Bateman. He is the narcissist who competes. The comparing of business cards was a dispute he began. Moreover, he does not

care to be compassionate when he inflicts pain on victims, and his detailed narration of the bloodshed corroborates so. The protagonist is a competitor who has internalized the notion that superiority can be achieved only through destruction. Even though his confidence has been shaken, he keeps struggling to step up. So, he must destroy those who stand on his way. Paul Owen is the yuppie that Bateman believes has been definitely obstructing his progress.

Owen's handling of the Fisher account is apparently an impressive achievement since it arouses jealous comments whenever it is mentioned. Bateman wonders how Owen managed to be in charge of the account, repeatedly asks whether Paul is still handling it, and tells his own secretary "to find out as much as she could about the Fisher account" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 169). Like the restaurant Dorsia, the Fisher account can be taken as another yet inaccessible element, something that, once reached, would allow Patrick to climb up the steps toward a higher position. I should say, nevertheless, that Bateman kills Paul Owen not only for it, but particularly because Owen carries the mirror that reflects Bateman's blemishes. Patrick is obsessing over the Fisher account, but he is obsessing over Owen's appearance as well. Like every member of the protagonist's social group, Owen wears suspenders, horn-rimmed glasses, and has slicked-back hair. But Bateman eyes some superiority on Owen that consequently disturbs him:

> Paul Owen walks in wearing a cashmere one-button sports jacket, tropical wool flannel slacks, a button-down tab-collared shirt by Ronaldus Shamask, but it's really the tie – blue and black and red and yellow bold stripes from Andrew Fezza by Zanzarra – that impresses me. […].
>
> "Hello, Owen," I say, admiring the way he's styled and slicked back his hair, with a part so even and sharp it… devastates me and I make a mental note to ask him where he purchases his hair-care products, which kind of mousse he uses, my final guess after mulling over the possibilities being Ten-X. (p. 107)

It was stressed earlier that the protagonist masters the rules of fashion, every so often colleagues question him about dressing codes. Besides, he can tell somebody does not belong to his group by examining the looks. Stash and Vander, for instance, guests at Evelyn's party, astonish Bateman because their hair, clothes, and behavior do not conform to his standard. Vander has "a green streak in her hair" (p. 11) and smokes. Stash, in turn, differs deeply from the other guests:

> Stash doesn't speak. Even though he is probably uncomfortable at the table with us since he looks nothing like the other men in the room – his hair isn't slicked back, no suspenders, no horn-rimmed glasses, the clothes black and ill-fitting, no urge to light and suck on a cigar, probably unable to secure a table at Camols, his net worth a pittance – still, his behavior lacks warrant and he sits there as if hypnotized by the glistening piece of sushi […]. (p. 12)

Thanks to his fashion expertise, Patrick realizes that Stash and Vander are not like him. They are most likely those not to worry about; hence it is easy to ignore their presence. He even adds that Vanden "*might* be pretty" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 15, author's emphasis) if she worked out, tanned her skin, got rid of the leather clothing, and took care of her hair properly. It would be all pointless, though. He is sure that whatever the couple did they could never join his class and be like him. This same expertise conversely leads Patrick to notice that Paul Owen is an opponent. For his four-colored tie, his perfectly trimmed hair, and the account he operates, Owen cannot be ignored. His sophistication in matching clothes, ability for choosing hair products, and job career achievement presumably excel Bateman's. The protagonist's habit of searching out flaws in reflections has in Paul Owen the most depressing realization. This is the reason why this yuppie is murdered.

Daniel Cojocaru similarly posits, as I do, that Bateman is engaged in a competition that demands elimination: "His vulnerability is ridiculed by society, so he tries even harder to conform to the yuppie-ideal, by taking it to its logical conclusion – eliminating his rivals" (COJOCARU, 2008-9, p. 190). In order to efface the "boy next door" image, Patrick needs to remove obstacles. The critic argues that the killings derive from a "quest for identity" (p. 191) due to a process of depersonalization. In the novel, yuppies can barely distinguish each other; names are said but never confirmed. Paul Owen, for example, believes that Bateman is someone else. There is a logical explanation for such confusion, not surprisingly supported on visual and material traits:

> Owen has mistaken me for Marcus Halberstam (even though Marcus is dating Cecelia 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, 2011, p. 86)

On the other hand, those who can be clearly distinguished are victimized. Bateman's urge to "fit in" a class, which is, in turn, ruled by the logic of a consumer culture, has forced him to operate over binary opposites: rich/poor, beautiful/ugly, man/woman, high class/low class, heaven/hell. These dichotomous doubles always tend to be unbalanced, one half overriding the other, just depending on who is in control (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 62). Patrick fears that others may suddenly take his position as a yuppie, but Cojocaru disbelieves that the ex-centric can be a direct threat to it. I understand that the beggars, immigrants, homosexuals, and prostitutes who are killed in the novel are socially and economically unable to take Bateman's place. Nonetheless, I disagree they do not represent a real menace. Their

omnipresence reminds Bateman that competing also means losing, falling down the social ladder. What he ultimately fears is to be marginalized, which equals descending into hell.

2.3 **Falling down**

What Linda Hutcheon has called "the other" or "ex-centric" has to do with the way we commonly build up identities. The other, in a broader sense, is never ourselves. According to Bill Ashcroft, the word "alterity" derives from Latin *alteritas*, and it stands for "the state of being other or different" (ASHCROFT et. al, 1998, p. 11). Moreover, he posits, while defining the terms "Other" and "other", that the existence of others is indispensable for the construction of parameters of "what is 'normal' and [for] locating one´s own place in the world" (p. 169). It can be said, then, that deictic elements shape the self: for an *I* to come to life, a *you* needs to be detected (or collectively, for a *we* to exist, a *they* must be noticed), essentially through differences and similarities. The motto that might support the foundations of identity when it comes to judge the other is the one that states that similarities are positive and differences are negative. Although these judgments should have been treated as relative, they have become set, fixed, unalterable, for the sake of a discourse that often enhances what is white, male, heterosexual, wealthy. The outcome is that these very traits have been turned into given, natural, and immovably positive qualities. Consequently, any quality that differs from those traits, namely black, female, homosexual, poor, is regarded as negative.

Bill Ashcroft, Linda Hutcheon, and also Arjun Appadurai, to name but a few, are theorists who have emphasized that the other is repeatedly pictured as primitive, barbaric, exotic, irrational, and cannibal in order to privilege one of the halves of the dichotomy. Such picture painted this way has propagated a point of view that gazes nothing but white, male, and rich as normal and positive. I would like, for now, to briefly pinpoint examples of this view in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831), in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), as well as in poems by Charles Baudelaire.

In *The Tempest*, the troubled relationship between the characters Caliban and Prospero recalls the clash between slave and master. Prospero, duke of Milan, is sent to an island, and once there he meets Caliban, the only inhabitant of that place. Even though Caliban has been

living on the land, Prospero asserts that no human being had populated it before his arrival: "[…] Then was this island – save for the son that she did litter here, a freckled whelp, hag-born – not honour'd with a human shape" (SHAKESPEARE, 1996, p. 1139). Being skilled in supernatural powers, the duke forces Caliban to obey him and to be his servant. The word chosen to describe Caliban[21] is as derogatory as mooncalf[22], which stands for (i) a congenially grossly deformed and mentally defective person; (ii) a foolish person; and (iii) a person who spends time idly daydreaming. Prospero's aristocratic eyes can only offer a biased description of the other.

Similarly, in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, despite his kind disposition, the protagonist Quasimodo is depicted by city dwellers as a monstrous, hideous, and devilish being. Because of his physical features, Quasimodo[23] is seen as incomplete, that is, he is not supposed to be seen as whole human, and then he can never be fully accepted. In a well-known scene in the novel, Quasimodo, in love with Esmeralda, tries to make her understand the difference between him and Captain Phoebus, the one Esmeralda fell in love with. Quasimodo, thus, places in her bedroom an ordinary vase full of fresh and lively flowers and another vase made of crystal with withered flowers in it. The moment Esmeralda sees them both, she takes the lifeless flowers out of the crystal vase and holds them tight against her chest. After all of his gentle behavior and thoughtful attitudes, Quasimodo is still unwanted.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff feels just as disappointed by the time he falls in love with Catherine. Like the hunchback, Heathcliff is also punished for his traits. Despite being brought up by the Earnshaws (for he was left behind by his parents when he was a child), he is constantly ridiculed for his dark skin and gipsy backgrounds. Hindley Earnshaw treats him harshly. Moreover, Catherine refuses to marry him, for such a bond could taint her family name.

Finally, Baudelaire's poems such as "Sed Non Satiata", "Parfum Exotique" e "La Chevelure" bring out allegedly exotic qualities of Jeanne Duval[24], a Haitian actress and

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[21] In 1969, Aimé Césaire revived this Shakespeare's play entitling it *Une Tempête*. In Césaire's adaptation, the story focuses on Caliban and Ariel, who are a black slave and a mulatto slave respectively.

[22] The entry can be checked here: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mooncalf?s=t . Last accessed on February 28th, 2015.

[23] The Latin words *quasi* and *modo* translate *almost* and *manner* respectively. Quasimodo thus would stand not only for Low Sunday, but also for a half-formed or almost-done being.

[24] Although much is known about Charles Baudelaire and his works, there are rare pieces of information on Jeanne Duval (not even her surname is known for sure). As for that, Angela Carter's short story "Black Venus" (1985) is an attempt to make up Jeanne's experiences, based on her standpoint, not Baudelaire's.

dancer with whom the French poet had a love affair for almost twenty years. “Exotic perfume”, “bizarre deity”, “ebony witch”, “pitiless demon”, “world almost defunct” are some of the phrases found in those poems to describe the poet’s lover. An ebony and curly-haired woman from “a world away” (BAUDELAIRE, 1982, p. 30) was regarded as contemptuous as a demon.

These examples illustrate the recurrently detractive characterization of the other in fictional writings. Be it appearance, social status, gender, skin color or nationality, the other is molded to contrast with what is in the center, that is, white, male, wealthy, and rational. Those who deviate from this norm become off-centered, are labeled ex-centric and then are pushed into the margin. The ones that must be pushed are the Calibans and the Quasimodos, the Heathcliffs and the Jeanne Duvals, all of whom are exotic, black, poor, misshapen, and barbaric, to say the least. The discourses uttered about them are frequently insulting, founded on negative adjectives. The characters I have just pointed out do not partake in *American Psycho* evidently. But they share the same traits with many of those Patrick Bateman victimizes.

Cities, especially metropolises, are places where perfect strangers move around in close contact (BAUMAN, 2009, p. 36). *American Psycho* is set in one of the most cosmopolitan cities of the world. The novel’s New York is populated with Armenian taxi drivers, Asian delivery men, Chinese women working in dry cleaners, Mexican workers, black drug dealers, prostitutes, and dozens of beggars. These are the ones cast economically aside and, thus, regarded as ex-centric. They are at the margin, too far from Patrick to be worried about, so much so that some might think this margin cannot threaten him. There is surely an economic gap between yuppies and the ex-centrics, but there isn’t always a spatial one. In the novel, oftentimes they are compelled to coexist.

While in the cab, heading for Bateman’s girlfriend’s party, Price counts numbers out loud. We readers at first cannot understand why he does so, but later we are told that those numbers refer to the quantity of homeless people he has seen on the streets on their way to the party:

> But then, when you’ve just come to the point when your reaction to the times is one of total and sheer acceptance, when your body has become some *tuned* into the insanity and you reach that point where it all makes sense, when it clicks, we get some crazy fucking homeless nigger who actually *wants* – listen to me, Bateman – *wants* to be out on the streets, this, *those* streets, see, *those*” – he points – “and we have a mayor who won’t listen to her, a mayor who won’t let the *bitch* have her way – Holy Christ – *let* the fucking bitch *freeze* to death, *put* her on her own goddamn self-made misery, and look, you’re back where you started, confused, fucked… Number twenty-four, nope, twenty-five… […]. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 5, author’s emphasis)

Like a genuine yuppie, Price has been attached to a class, absorbed by a materialistic condition. He supposes that poverty is self-made; hence, the homeless are not to be assisted, a conclusion that truly recalls an interview delivered by Ronald Reagan at the end of his second term[25]. Unwilling to admit that the Reaganomics were responsible for the issues of homelessness, Reagan declares that some people do choose to live on the streets. He bases his claim on the number of shelters cities offer as well as on the job ads newspapers publish to make his point. He ignores, nevertheless, problems with mobility and the qualifications many lack to hold a job. The main counterargument provided by the columnist is, above all, economic, not volitional: many were forced to live on the streets due to "housing costs that have risen beyond the means of people with menial jobs"[26].

In the novel, Timothy Price is the character who reverberates Reagan's words. What Price says, though, does not appear to reflect the opinion of a single person only, but the opinion of a whole class. When Patrick jealously suggests his girlfriend Evelyn date Price for his wealth, beauty and body, she promptly replies that "*everybody* is rich", "*everybody* is good-looking" and "*everybody* has a great body now" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 22, author's emphasis). Evelyn's immersion in the yuppiedom matches Price's inasmuch as both can only grasp what is restricted within their narcissistic materialism: the former does not see differences and the latter takes for granted that being poor is a choice.

Narcissists who live off a consumer culture tend to "divide society into two groups: the rich, great, and famous on the one hand and the common herd on the other" (LASCH, 1991, p. 84). Yuppies yearn for fitting the first group whereas they are terrified with the idea of possibly belonging to the second, "by which they mean worthless and despicable rather than 'average' in the ordinary sense of the term" (p. 84). The presence of a detective to investigate Paul Owen's whereabouts serves as a signal of segregation. Donald Kimball interrogates the protagonist about Owen, but no agent comes into the narrative to inquire about the ex-centric victims. There is a sentence, by the end of the novel, which I think that validates this tendency to division. While in a cab, Bateman happens to be recognized as a killer by the driver, Abdullah, who points a gun at him and does not let him go. Bateman says he is locked and held captive inside the cab, but, despite being in danger, he can still find

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[25] Reagan's interview to the New York Times, in December 23rd 1988, can be found at http://www.nytimes.com/1988/12/23/us/reagan-on-homelessness-many-choose-to-live-in-the-streets.html . Last accessed on February 28th, 2015.

[26] Idem.

some consolation in knowing he is not part of the valueless half: "I feel naked, suddenly tiny. My mouth tastes metallic, then it gets worse. My vision: a winter road. But I'm left with one comforting thought: I am rich – millions are not" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 377). Abdullah holds a gun aimed at Patrick's head, but there is a virtual dome (or actual taxi glass dividers symbolically replace it at times), built on class differences, which soothes all yuppies as long as it can keep them apart.

The absence of a spatial gap causes yuppies and ex-centrics to coexist – that dome has no physicality to hold the other outside. So, they stumble, bump, clash into one another, this encounter inciting distress, tortures and murders: "The relation of the center to the ex-centric is never an innocent one" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 72). The protagonist can barely narrate the accounts without referring to beggars or immigrants. Equally, Timothy Price complains harshly about the pervasiveness of the homeless. A sentence from *Divine Comedy* opens up the novel, but this is not the only work of fiction[27] mentioned overtly in *American Psycho*. We readers again and again come across *Les Misérables* (in its Broadway musical adaptation of 1987). The lines by Dante set the scene. The title by Hugo reinforces the presence of the other.

For the most part, the reference to the play is preceded or followed somehow by the presence of an ex-centric, be it a homeless "holding a sign" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 109), a couple of homosexuals that "whistles" and "laughs: a high, fey, horrible sound" (p. 123), the prostitutes Christie and Sabrina (p. 164-5), or a street musician "playing a very beautiful but clichéd saxophone solo" (p. 334). In the first chapter of the novel, Bateman refers to *Les Misérables* three times – in the meantime, Price comments on the "goddam *cluster* of bums" (p. 6). This might make readers think of a proportion: the more reference, the more ex-centrics. It should be noted that some characters have contrasting attitudes towards difference. Evelyn, for example, as she believes people do not diverge at all, is incapable of acknowledging the existence of ex-centrics. Through her eyes, the other is nothing but an invisible being, nonexistent, because her gaze does not transcend her yuppie class. The protagonist, on the other hand, can see them all. The ex-centrics are all over his narrative, omnipresent, in close touch with him. The *Les Misérables* (as a poster, a soundtrack, or a background hum) works, therefore, as an everlasting reminder of a latent fall which scares Bateman to the point of driving him to murder.

[27] Pierce & Pierce, the investment firm for which the protagonist works, is another reference to a work of fiction, namely Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987).

While debating culturally motivated violence, Arjun Appadurai phrases an intriguing question about minorities:

> The puzzle is about why the relatively small numbers that give the word minority its most simple meaning and usually imply political and military weakness do not prevent minorities from being objects of fear and of rage. Why kill, torture, or ghettoize the weak? (APPADURAI, 2006, p. 49)

The anthropologist further clarifies that this interrogation should not implicate the whole human history. The antonym majority/minority is a rather recent dichotomy, being few centuries old. These opposite terms have become universally connected to a concept of modern nation-state, which implies ideas about nations, populations, representation, and enumeration. They have also acquired a deictic status since their existence is interdependent: a majority can only be defined in direct relation to a minority. It moves us back to Ashcroft's definition of alterity, in which a *we* is molded in contrast with a *they* in the making of collective identities. Appadurai argues that fearing others, seeing them as threats, triggers the emergence of "predatory identities", that is, "those identities whose social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as a we" (p. 51). By contending that Patrick fears to fall down the social ladder, consequently becoming an ex-centric himself, I dialogue with Appadurai's averment, for he argues that majority discourses often carry the idea that a hegemonic identity can "be itself turned into a minority unless another minority disappears" (p. 52). Besides, the moment an identity believes to be representative of the purity of the national whole, it longs to eliminate the potential smudge. The homeless, immigrants, homosexuals, and prostitutes have threatened Bateman's purpose to be recognized and admired. Their very presence warns him of the possibility of losing the contest. Their ex-centricity has frightened him, so that he has become a predatory serial killer.

The first murder described minutely and graphically takes place when Patrick leaves a black-tie night party. He wanders around two blocks and passes by a "torn playbill from *Les Misérables* [that] tumbles down the cracked, urine-stained sideway" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 123). Right after he sees it, he meets Al, a black homeless man who sleeps at the doorway of a store, next to a shopping cart full of newspapers, bottles and cans. All of the questions Bateman asks Al echo Price's (and Reagan's) remarks:

> He hugs himself, between sobs, chokes, "I was fired. I was laid off."
> […]
> "Why don't you get another one?" I ask. "Why don't you get another job?"
> "I'm not…" He coughs, holding himself, shaking miserably, violently, unable to finish the sentence.
> "You're not what?" I ask softly. "Qualified for anything else?
> "I'm hungry," he repeats.

> "Listen. Do you think it's fair to take money from people who *do* have jobs? Who *do* work? (ELLIS, 2011, p. 125, author's emphasis)

Zygmunt Bauman (2009, p. 23) underscores that being out of work nowadays is not seen as a temporary condition or bad luck. It is actually equivalent to saying that one is irreversibly and permanently excluded, refused, superfluous, useless for any job, and hence sentenced to a never-ending economic inability. Subsequently, this inability leads to a rejection, a marginalization. In a consumer culture, a person is supposed to consume. The one who cannot come up to this expectation is to be relegated to ex-centricity. Bateman knows it better than anyone else for his credit card has split in two due to overuse: "My platinum American Express card had gone through so much use that it snapped in half, self-destructed, at one of those dinners [...]" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 268). He plays, for this reason, the quintessential consumer, the extreme spender, and competes to keep this position. Unable to be a consumer, Al plays the expendable, the disposable, a role which outrages yuppies. The protagonist denies any correspondence with the "common herd" Al is in, and he utters so, shortly before he stabs him: "Al... I´m sorry. It´s just that... I don´t know. I don´t have anything in common with you" (p. 126). In a time of economic uncertainty, of workers being laid off, Al represents the dichotomous half the protagonist abhors. Bateman really wants that dome to grow thicker whenever he copes with the other, and even signalizes a want of being followed. In a later scene, he assumes he can easily coax a support out of his secretary Jean for his discriminatory posture: "I could even explain my pro-apartheid stance and have her find reasons why she too should share it and invest large sums of money in racist corporations that –" (p. 253). In his reader's guide, Julian Murphet underlines that the answer for the killing of ex-centrics lies in "Bateman's gentrifying world view" (MURPHET, 2002, p. 57), that is, in a primary lust for a setting unblemished by the other. I want to add, nonetheless, that this process of gentrification in the novel only becomes lethal because Patrick realizes he may happen to be gentrified as well.

Immigrants are the ones to make it clear that walls can be torn down and borderlines can be dissolved (BAUMAN, 2009, p. 21). In *American Psycho*, the cabdrivers are foreigners: "the driver, black, not American" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 3), "Inept Haitian cabbie" (p. 8), "a young Iranian guy" (p. 335); the maid is "an elderly Chinese woman" (p. 27); and a Chinese delivery boy is taken for a Japanese (p. 173). In this particular scene, Bateman drinks with another yuppie when the diatribe he hears about the Japanese buying the Empire State Building, the American cultural and financial icon, "moves something in [him], it sets something off" (p.

173). He thus roams until he stops at a restaurant doorway, topples the delivery biker who is coming out, and murders him:

> I find myself crouched in the doorway of what used to be Carly Simon's, a very hot J. Akail restaurant that closed last fall, and leaping out at a passing Japanese delivery boy, I knock him off his bicycle and drag him into the doorway, his legs tangled somehow in the Schwinn he was riding which works to my advantage since when I slit his throat – easily, effortlessly – the spasmodic kicking that usually accompanies this routine is blocked by the bike, which he still manages to lift five, six times while he's choking on his own hot blood. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 173)

The idea of an ethnic East taking over West supremacy frightens Bateman so that something moves him, ultimately urging him to go after a Japanese. After cutting the boy's throat open, Bateman scatters what he alleges to be Japanese food over the corpse, but he soon realizes the food in the cartons is Chinese: "[…] to my surprise instead of sushi and teriyaki […], chicken with cashew nuts falls all over his gasping bloodied face […]" (p. 173). In the end, he feels angry and sorry for "accidently killing the wrong type of Asian […]" (p. 173). This accident might thwart the protagonist's early purpose, but at the same time it sheds some light on a brutality whose destination is "everything that is not white, male and upper-middle class" (MURPHET, 2002, p. 43). Bateman aims his blow at an immigrant, but hits another. This mistake, however, is not to be regarded as a setback. Whether Japanese or Chinese (Patrick cannot even tell the difference), both are Asians and must be killed for merely being so. Appadurai observes that, despite favorable discourses on tolerance, multiculturalism and inclusion, no modern nation construes its sovereignty apart from an idea of "ethnic genius" (APPADURAI, 2006, p. 3). In Bateman's narrative, there is no room for benevolence toward ex-centric characters. This is one of the reasons why I take issue with that Elizabeth Young's remark on the protagonist's victims. As mentioned, she believes Bateman is a "democratic killer". His assassinations appear to be democratic if taken as a whole. In a closer reading, though, he has many unequivocal targets.

The third type of ex-centricity Bateman fears is homosexuality. Once a patriarchal culture obtrudes a narrow view on gender, only two options are left to be chosen: either male or female – whatever it is in between has to be marginalized, or rather, eliminated. Preconceived notions fill up the narrative all along. Taylor Preston suggests, while telling a joke, that any black woman is necessarily a thief (ELLIS, 2011, p. 36-7); George Reeves summarizes his idea of a good personality by saying that it "consists of a chick who has a little hardbody and who will satisfy all sexual demands without being too slutty about things and who will essentially keep her dumb fucking mouth *shut*" (p. 87-8, author's emphasis); and Timothy Price pointlessly declares that the British are gay because they are British (p.

34). Preconception is what makes the protagonist fearful of anything that might clash with his sexual norm. As for that, the gay parade he walks across, after trying to get rid of a gridlock, causes him to say that his mind is "reeling with the concept that a human being, a *man*, could feel pride over sodomizing another man" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 134, author's emphasis). So, he goes back to his apartment and tortures a dog to death.

Preconception is also what makes the protagonist go away from the Yale Club after an inglorious attempt to kill Luis Carruthers, his yuppie workmate. As he thinks of his affair with Courtney, Luis's girlfriend, Bateman wonders about the implications of having Carruthers dead. He chases Luis (who is whistling a melody from *Les Misérable*) as far as the toilets and is about to strangle him, but suddenly he becomes powerless before his colleague to the point of paralysis. In humorously surprising lines, we readers find out that Carruthers is homosexual:

> Instead he looks down at my wrists and for a moment wavers, as if he's undecided about something, and then he lowers his head and… *kisses* my left wrist, and when he looks back up at me, shyly, it's with an expression that's… loving and only part awkward. His right hand reaches up and tenderly touches the side of my face. I stand there, frozen, my arms still stretched out in front of me, fingers still circled around Luis's throat. (p. 152, author's emphasis)

The narration of the encounter between the protagonist and Luis Carruthers in the men's room (together with a second encounter in the chapter "Confronted by Faggot") might carry the ambiguity that has led Murphet (2002, p. 82) to raise the possibility of Patrick's homosexual inclination. The critic highlights that Patrick fails to choke Luis, but he is, on the other hand, very skillful at many other crimes, including the murders of an old homosexual and his dog, in another scene graphically described. I contend, nonetheless, that Bateman's paralysis has to do with the realization of an incongruence. Carruthers is a yuppie, so he should be homophobic, not homosexual. In the binary opposite heterosexual/homosexual, which has shaped up yuppies' identities, Patrick has chosen the first half whereas Luis has chosen the second. In Patrick's mind, yuppiedom and homosexuality would never mingle. A predatory serial killer has to annihilate his rivals, but one of them, a yuppie and an ex-centric at once, is still enigmatic, or rather in Bateman's own words: "Luis Carruthers is, I suppose, an incognito" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 280).

Finally, Bateman's misogynism is probably the most noticeable of his characteristics: women are constantly referred to as "hardbody", "bimbo" or "bitch"; *Body Double* is a movie he has seen thirty-seven times because he likes masturbating "over the scene where the woman is getting drilled to death by a power drill" (p. 67); and the character Patricia Worrell,

through Bateman's speech, is reduced to a body he would casually have sex with: "Though physically Patricia is appealing and I wouldn't mind having sex with her body, the idea of treating her gently, of being a kind date, of apologizing for this evening, […] rubs me the wrong way" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 75). Significant evidence of the vilification of the female sex can be spotted the moment Patrick meets the prostitute Christie (whose real name is kept unsaid). The district where she works is offensively qualified as "meat-packing". From the backseat of the limousine, in addition, Bateman glares at the word "meat", right behind Christie, "in four-foot-tall red block letters painted on the side of an abandoned brick warehouse" (p. 161). This metonymic move, from the person to the body, then from the body to the meat, has indeed pushed to the foreground a system that, dominated by economic structures, has become powerful enough to objectify anything and everything (ANNESLEY, 1998, p. 53). In so doing, this move has consequently unveiled a protagonist who is driven all along the novel to consume through annihilation. In prostitution, Bateman appears to have found the key to join commodification and murder together, for he has had the chance to literally purchase an ex-centric for consumption. In other words, he pays to torture, kill and eat prostitutes.

The new narcissist depends on people for admiration, otherwise no recognition of status will take place. Patrick continuously reiterates his physical features and belongings by comparing them to somebody else's, and he only feels at ease after the realization of his prestige. As for that, it is symptomatic of his narcissism the three questions he asks Christie and Sabrina, the other prostitute for which he pays. In sore need of recognition, Bateman asks if the two girls wonder what he does: "Do you want to know what I do?" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 164). When a negative response is offered, he gets irritated. Although the girls are not interested in knowing it, he answers anyway, saying he works for Pierce & Pierce. The funny line in this scene is that Sabrina takes the firm for a shoe store, making Patrick angrier: "She thinks about it for a minute then says, "Yeah. A shoe outlet? Isn't P & P a shoe store?" (p. 165). In order to be victorious, he asks two more questions whose responses he is sure will be negative: "So have either of you been abroad?" (p. 165) and "Did either of you go to college?" (p. 166). Prostitutes are ex-centric, dragged to the outskirts of the system by economic restraints. The girls, ill-fated and poor, are neither able to afford traveling around nor to have good education. Christie and Sabrina can say nothing but a head shaking movement and a glare to respond. Only when the protagonist triumphs over those women, by imposing his patriarchal superiority, are they allowed entering his bedroom to satisfy his sexual and deadly demands.

Although Bateman has killed homeless people, immigrants, homosexuals and prostitutes, he may have to keep eliminating them. Ex-centrics walk all over Manhattan, their pervasive faces are on the streets, and their presence at restaurant doorways cannot be ignored. Bateman is aware that the other is incapable of taking his position, but he certainly knows that, once he gives up competing, he himself will convert into an ex-centric. The other, for this reason, threatens Bateman's position directly. Eager to reach out for heaven, Bateman struggles for victories over whoever blocks his way up. Afraid of being pushed to the margin, he murders whoever tries to pull him down. The narcissism Patrick holds appeals for admiration. The fierce contention he is in implies killing in series. For an American psycho, competing really means annihilating.

3 BATEMAN IS HORRIFIC

3.1 A Subversive Novel

American Psycho portrays a Wall Street businessman, who is also a serial killer, and whose discourse is uncommitted and virtually descriptive. I have used the adjectives shallow, depthless, and blank on the grounds that many reviewers have chosen them to qualify Bateman's prose. These adjectives have forced literary critics to offer different labels for the novel's narrative: postmodern narrative, minimalist fiction, downtown writing, and blank fiction (BAELO-ALLUÉ, 2011, p. 26). Other critics have asserted that Easton Ellis's work evokes a quite wide range of genres, such as autobiography, comedy, pornography, bleak social commentary, spoof horror, and conventional horror (HELYER, 2000, p. 741). I will not go as far as to demonstrate how miscellaneous *American Psycho* might possibly be in terms of genre, but I would like to suggest that it envelopes a certain amount of modes or categories, including that of postmodernism, of blank fiction, of horror fiction and of the grotesque. Apart from all of the other genres pointed out by scholars, these are the ones on which I want to concentrate so as to analyze the novel's style and themes.

The most prominent motif of *American Psycho* is brand name. The postmodern phenomenon (I recall it from chapter 1) features the connection between aesthetics and commodities. In the novel, the very use of trademarks to set time and space, as well as to describe characters, signposts a leading role for commodities. Because Patrick Bateman cannot break through the limits of his class, brands affect both the content and the form of his narrative. But, if I am to approach the novel from a postmodern perspective, I initially must clarify what I mean by postmodernism. Given its broadness and generalizing tendency (which makes it hard to grasp at times), the phenomenon has been regarded as problematic.

In literary theory, postmodernism is sometimes understood as any literary piece produced after Second World War (BAELO-ALLUÉ, 2011, p. 26). Some theorists tend to frown upon this classification because of its rough notion – a temporal orientation alone should not be enough to conceive an entire circumstance. It is also associated with a crisis (or lack of belief) concerning the mimetic condition of literature, and Coleridge's suspension of disbelief, consequently rejecting the modernist self-consciousness in favor of metafictional writings. Although it is assumed that modernist fiction would sometimes focus on the

aesthetic construction of texts, it does not uncover shamelessly its artificial status "in the manner of contemporary metafiction" (WAUGH, 2001, p. 21). Furthermore, postmodernism is insistently explained in accordance with manifold stylistic trends, such as a mixture of levels, forms and styles, a full praise for copies and repetition, a dissolution of commitment into irony, conscious revelation of the making of the work, a play of surfaces, and an open refusal of history (GITLIN, 1989, 347). These understandings have raised contentions, and some scholars have gladly accepted the phenomenon whereas others have denied it altogether.

Postmodern theorists, however, appear to agree with the fact that this literary phenomenon does not engender any radically original condition. Bran Nicol acknowledges that postmodern narrative "does not do anything fiction had not done before; it is not innovative in this respect" (NICOL, 2009, p. 31). Its distinction from other fictional forms lies in the "*degree* to which these elements are presented" (p. 31, author's emphasis). By reason of this degree, I tend to side with the concept of postmodernism provided by Linda Hutcheon. The definition she offers may resonate with some of those aforementioned aspects, but it is valuable once it admits its inherently paradoxical characteristic, for the postmodern text "uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 3).

On the first pages of her *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Hutcheon immediately posits that postmodern fiction is to be regarded as a contradictory attitude. It brings conventions, common sense and totalizing (or master) narratives into play while at the same time it sabotages their effectiveness, breaking down the consensus to exhibit "the illusion of consensus" (p. 7). The phenomenon is frequently described with adjectives that imply "the opposite of", such as deconstructive, decentering, and dislocating. In other words, postmodern fiction deconstructs what has been constructed, decentralizes what has been centralized, and dislocates what has been located. In this case, the prefix "post" establishes, then, not an overcoming of the modern thought, but rather a questioning of all of the positivistic discourses of modernity. Those discourses embody universal notions of the self and teleological explanations, characteristically similar to the ones uttered by the Stuart Hall's "Enlightenment subject" (HALL, 2007, p. 597), that is, omniscient, omnipresent and rational. By contrast, postmodern fiction ostensively disavows omniscience, omnipresence and rationality as aesthetic devices because these qualities require a dominating voice which is ultimately delusive. What happens in postmodern narratives, then, is the replacement of the traditional and pervasive third-person narrator, whose tale is told in the historical and mimetic past tense, by the restricted or heterogeneous voice of a homodiegetic character, or characters.

As Linda Hutcheon herself puts it: "Narrators in fiction become either disconcertingly multiple and hard to locate (as in D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*) or resolutely provisional and limited – often undermining their own seeming omniscience (as in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*)" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 11).

I want to make clear that my adoption of this concept of postmodernism does not mean that I am about to say that *American Psycho* carries style and motifs that will label it "historiographic metafiction", the genre Linda Hutcheon considers to be the most representative of postmodern fiction. Roughly speaking, historiographic metafiction implies "confrontation with the historical" (p. 108) and self-reflexivity combined. This confrontation demands a reexamination of the past and the consequent realization that historical discourses are not given or natural, but rather constructed; self-reflexivity determines a disclosure of the fictional process through narrators who emphasize the falseness of their work. Thus, intertextuality and metafiction definitely become distinctive characteristics of this genre. In the previous chapter, I pointed out that, in the novel, references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Hugo's *Les Misérables* acquire meaningful roles: they set a scene and reinforce a presence respectively. Even though these intertextual dialogues help me justify my point, because constant intertextuality is a postmodern strategy, *American Psycho* does not fall under the category of historiographic metafiction. Besides, Easton Ellis uses an excerpt from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864) as an epigraph to highlight the fictitious status of his protagonist, but no metafictionality is found in Bateman's narration. It is actually Hutcheon's association of postmodernism with subversion of standards that will be useful for my purposes. I have framed Bateman, while discussing ex-centrics, within the logic of "either… or…" (NICOLS, 2009, p. 31). Nevertheless, Hutcheon's emphasis on doubleness and contradictions will support my interpretation of the narrative within the logic of "both… and…" (p. 31).

The postmodern logic of "both… and…" deconstructs those binary opposites of modern thinking. In this respect, antonymic doubles are blended together to be put into question. In *American Psycho*, the clearest deconstruction of dichotomies takes place in the mix of fine art and popular art. Baelo-Allué (2011, p. 92) cleverly observes that a blurring of high and low culture can be noticed from the very beginning, in the epigraphs. Bret Easton Ellis violates the judicative division of arts as he presents three segments from different sources: (1) from a canonical novel; (2) from an etiquette authority; and (3) from a pop song. Dostoevsky's segment is the first of them:

> Both the author of these *Notes* and the *Notes* themselves are, of course, fictional. Nevertheless, such persons as the composer of these Notes not only exist in our society, but indeed must exist, considering the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed. I have wished to bring before the public, somewhat more distinctly than usual, one of the characters of our recent past. He represents a generation that is still living out its days among us. In the fragment entitled "Underground" this personage described himself and his views and attempts, as it were, to clarify the reasons why he appeared and was bound to appear in our midst. The subsequent fragment will consist of the actual "notes", concerning certain events in his life.

As said some lines earlier, the quote from *Notes from Underground* is employed to stress that Ellis's novel is a work of fiction. But, concomitantly, it expresses the belief in the contingent existence of a person just like Bateman, acting just like he does. Similar to Bateman, the nameless narrator in Dostoevsky's novel is a "well-educated" and "spiteful man" (DOSTOEVSKY, 2003, p. 233) who tells his own story to the public. Unlike Bateman, however, that narrator seems to be more conscious of his stupid choices:

> But I repeat for the hundredth time, there is one case, one only, when man may consciously, purposely, desire what is injurious to himself, what is stupid, very stupid – simply in order to have the right to desire for himself even what is very stupid and not to be bound by an obligation to desire only what is sensible. (p. 256).

The second epigraph is taken from an article by Brian Dumaine, published in the magazine *Fortune*[28] in 1989. Spoken by American social life journalist Judith Martin, whose pen name is Miss Manners (or "the high priestess of punctilio", as Dumaine dubs her), the epigraph may sum up much of Bateman's comportment:

> One of the major mistakes people make is that they think manners are only the expression of happy ideas. There's a whole range of behavior that can be expressed in a mannerly way. That's what civilization is all about -- doing it in a mannerly and not an antagonistic way. One of the places we went wrong was the naturalistic, Rousseauean movement of the Sixties in which people said, "Why can't you just say what's on your mind?" In civilization there have to be some restraints. If we followed every impulse, we'd be killing one another.

The moment we readers recollect that Bateman is a fashion expert, eager to "fit in" a class full of internal codes, formalities and manners, we realize that the segment above anticipates the vicious actions of the protagonist. Through his autodiegetic voice, we learn that Bateman, in fact, tries to follow his impulses; or as he puts it, his "blocked needs" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 325).

The last epigraph is the verse found in the song *Nothing but Flowers*, by Talking Heads. As commented in chapter 1, these lines hint that a sense of hopelessness, a

[28] DUMAINE, Brian. "Miss Manners on Office Etiquette". In: *Fortune Magazine*, 1989. Available at: http://archive.fortune.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/1989/11/06/72701/index.htm . Last accessed on February 28th, 2015.

disenchanted worldview will be shaping the story thoroughly. They foreshadow, in reality, that highly narcissistic environment, where things are falling apart, but nobody realizes it. This incapacity to pay attention has a close connection to Bateman's mental derangement and unreliability[29].

These three epigraphs – paratextual elements which precede the narrative proper – corroborate the postmodern logic of "both… and…" . Easton Ellis, as he joins together sections from high and low culture, signalizes his intention to blur dichotomies and question divisions. So, as the narrative unfolds, readers come across Dante's verses, the musical adaptation of *Les Misérables*, reviews on Huey Lewis and the News, Genesis, and Whitney Houston, Madonna's lyrics, a Walkman with Kenny G CD playing, and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, to name but a few. Their very reference, over and over, implies that subversion which distinguishes postmodern fiction.

Another subversive element of the novel is pornography. The so-called vulgar words for genitals which commonly mark pornographic texts appear throughout. Bateman frequently rents and watches movies such as *Inside Lydia's Ass* (ELLIS, 2011, p. 94), *She-Male Reformatory* and *Ginger's Cunt* (p. 107), and buys and reads magazines such as *Lesbian Vibrator Bitches* and *Cunt on Cunt*, although he also subscribes "to them and both have already arrived in the mail" (p. 67). Add to this the fact that the descriptions of his sexual activities are as extremely detailed as the descriptions of his tortures and murders, and one might regard (as some have done) *American Psycho* as a worthless work of low art. According to Ian Frederik Moulton, pornography is usually related to cultural productions whose sexual representations are explicit (which would distinguish it from eroticism, considered to be implicit in its manners). But the theorist goes on saying that pornography is also both a relative and subjective category. It is relative because it holds no consensus on whether or not a production is, in fact, pornographic, and it is subjective because "the ultimate arbiter is the personal response of the individual" (MOULTON, 2000, p. 4). In this case, the sexual explicitness of a photograph, movie, painting or text becomes, to a great extent, culturally determined. The term (which derives from the Greek *pornographoi*, that is, "painting or writing about prostitutes[30]"), embodies deep-rooted value judgments and preconceptions. Academic scholars have at times rejected research on this genre because it is "understood to be transparent in their significance and self-evident in their meaning"

[29] These topics will be discussed in the next chapter.

[30] Check this entry at: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pornography. Last accessed on February 28th, 2015.

(MOULTON, 2000, p. 5). Moulton argues, nonetheless, that studies have proved that pornographic discourses are not immutable; they have actually a history of their own.

Almost forty years before Moulton wrote his book, namely, in 1967, Susan Sontag published an article in which she also stood for pornography as an aesthetic mode, for she noticed that "nowhere in the Anglo-American community of letters have I seen it argued that some pornographic books are interesting and important works of art" (SONTAG, 1967, p. 183). In other words, she complained about the hasty prejudice of taking pornographic narratives merely as a "malady to be diagnosed" (p. 182). In *The Pornographic Imagination*, Sontag breaks pornography into three perspectives: (i) a social phenomenon, (ii) a psychological phenomenon, and (iii) a minor modality within the arts. The essayist chooses the third one, on which she builds up her arguments. For her, English and American critics lack a sophisticated view of literature because they are too attached to the "conventions of realism" (p. 185). For this reason, they can only comprehend pornographic narrative as a text that triggers nonverbal fantasies whose aim is to arouse sexual affects; as for that, language plays only an instrumental role.

Such vehement outcry does not apply to current criticism in general. Pornographic narratives have become objects of academic analyses in the literary field, as Moulton's book itself has proven. Discussing sexuality from historical grounds in Michael Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* is another well-known example. Apart from that, it seems to me that Sontag's words still reverberate around when it comes to explicit accounts on sexual intercourse. As she poses: "It's something one is for or against" (p. 182).

In *American Psycho*, the graphic depiction of pornographic scenes has to do with a consumer society in which individuals are visually-oriented. Bateman's recurrent sentence, "I *have* to return some videos" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 122, author's emphasis), predicates his responsive behavior to the mass media. The protagonist lives within a simulacrum of the real, always mediated by billboards, magazines, talk shows and the gory and pornographic films he constantly watches. The graphicality of these scenes, besides, deliberately questions the limits of literary representations. The nonmoral, depthless, blank narrative of the protagonist, who curiously feels embarrassed when he buys adult magazines – "I wait until the stand is empty to make my purchase" (p. 67) – does not happen to conceal any sexual act from us readers. Bateman does not spare us from his vulgar language at all:

> Tired of balancing myself, I fall off Christie and lie on my back, positioning Sabrina's face over my stiff, huge cock which I guide into her mouth with my hand, jerking it off while she sucks on the head. I pull Christie toward me and while taking her gloves off start kissing her hard on the mouth, licking inside it, pushing my tongue against hers, past hers, as far down her throat as it will go. She fingers her

> cunt, which is so wet that her upper thighs look like someone's slathered something slick and oily all over them. I push Christie down past my waist to help Sabrina suck my cock off and after the two of them take turns licking the head and the shaft, Christie moves to my balls which are aching and swollen, as large as two small plums, and she laps at them before placing her mouth over the entire sac, alternately massaging and lightly sucking the balls, separating them with her tongue. Christie moves her mouth back to the cock Sabrina's still sucking on and they start kissing each other, hard, on the mouth, right above the head of my dick, drooling saliva onto it and jacking it off. Christie keeps masturbating herself this entire time, working three fingers in her vagina, wetting her clit with her juices, moaning. This turns me on enough to grab her by the waist and swivel her around and position her cunt over my face, which she gladly sits on. Clean and pink and wet and spread, her clit swollen, engorged with blood, her cunt hangs over my head and I push my face into it, tonguing it, craving its flavor, while fingering her asshole. Sabrina is still working on my cock, jacking off the base of it, the rest of it filling her mouth, and now she moves on top of me, her knees resting on either side of my chest, and I tear off her teddy so that her ass and cunt are facing Christie, whose head I force down and order to "lick them, suck on that clit" and she does. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 167)

I quote this long segment to illustrate two points. Firstly, the pornographic scenes in the novel carry a great degree of linguistic crudity. It is not that the sentences here play an instrumental role, but they are notably primarily descriptive, absent of any stylistic ornamentation. For this reason, the focus moves from the language to the descriptions thoroughly. Secondly, taken from the chapter “Girls”, the excerpt finishes with an imperative sentence, which highlights Bateman’s hostile attitude toward women. Bateman hires two prostitutes with whom he has sex. All along the chapter, Christie and Sabrina hardly ever act by themselves because they frequently have the protagonist telling them what to do: “In short, she looks like she’ll be worth whatever it is I’m paying her by the hour” (p. 164). When the sexual intercourse finally starts, the crudely descriptive narration, steadily flat, brings to the fore the orders whenever they appear. This strategy textually reinforces the protagonist’s misogyny. The quote is almost entirely descriptive, but its closing indicates (and there are other similar passages in the chapter) that Bateman, the wealthy patriarchal figure of the threesome, is in charge of the two girls. In the novel, pornography is another element to violate the concept of high art. The explicitness of the scenes pushes the frames of literature somewhat further away from standardized notions. And it does so while the narrative reveals how misogynistic a character can be.

I would like to debate yet another element installed in the novel to subvert conventions. It takes place when a detective comes into Bateman’s office to interrogate him. As Donald Kimball appears, he is supposed to be as rational as C. Auguste Dupin or Sherlock Holmes. Disappointingly, his flawed demeanor by the end of the chapter dismantles all of the expectations we readers might have for an ingenious solution of the case and the arrest of the criminal.

While examining the typology of detective novels, Tzvetan Todorov argues that these narratives can be split into two genres: the detective fiction (or whodunit) and the thriller (or *série noir*). The first genre accommodates two stories in it: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation, in which the former contains what actually happens, and the latter focuses on how the reader or narrator "has come to know about it" (TODOROV, 1977, p. 45). The story of the crime, Todorov underlines, is always absent, though it is the real story (it is analogous to what Russian formalists call "plot"). It is absent because, in detective fiction, the story of the investigation, albeit "insignificant" (p. 46), is the one that is to be present, necessarily decoded by the narrator's point of view. The second genre, the thriller, intentionally unites the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. Unlike detective fiction, the thriller is not narrated in the form of memoirs. The murder does not precede the story being told; crime and investigation, in fact, coexist.

Both the detective fiction and the thriller, even though having divergent typologies, still offer characters who emanate reasoning from their investigations. Their narratives, in general, resemble those "tales of ratiocination" of Poe's short stories as detectives put the pieces of information together to find out the murderer's identity. Donald Kimball, conversely, has nothing to do with C. Auguste Dupin. He actually mimics the investigators of anti-detective novels. As theorist John Scaggs explains, this genre "[…] wears it postmodern philosophy on its sleeve, rejecting, as it does, any notion of the certainty of knowledge and the unity of the human subject" (SCAGGS, 2005, p. 139). When Bateman's secretary stresses the word "detective" while she announces Kimball's presence, Bateman pauses for a moment, and then tears a magazine cover off, which confirms he is apprehensive, to say the least. Bateman asks his secretary to say he is away, but the detective already knows Bateman is in the office: "Jean pauses, then whispers. "Patrick… I think he knows you're here" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 256). When Kimball enters the room, Bateman gets terrified: "Because of the detective's arrival, it seems unlikely that this will be a good day and I eye him warily as he takes the seat and crosses his legs in a way that fills me with a nameless dread" (p. 257). We readers learn that this may be the very opportunity for a character, a detective – a literary symbol of rationality and justice – to arrest the serial killer. Nevertheless, anti-detective novels reject any teleology, any ratiocination that may lead to a final answer. Within the scope of postmodernism, teleological discourses are not possible. The answer, if provided, is always deceptive and non-totalizing.

Postmodernism criticizes mimetic representations of reality. Its narratives appropriate reality and then violate it, or rather, in Hutcheon's words, they install concepts to subvert

them. Reality, especially the one based on historical grounds, is thus delivered in multifaceted ways. It is fragmented, flexible, and ultimately plural. Postmodern attitudes (for the phenomenon is essentially political) necessarily urge a comprehension of reality (or History) as multiple, namely, as realities (or histories). The presence of a rational detective in *American Psycho* would not fit a tale of a narrator that asserts that “There is no evidence of animate life in this office, yet still he takes notes” (ELLIS, 2011, p. 264). Bateman lacks an identity of his own, looks like many other yuppies, and yet Donald Kimball keeps writing down on his notebook so as to find out a final answer. Kimball is clueless insomuch as he cannot even notice his own failure as a traditionally rational detective. Ironically, the latter part of the dialogue between Bateman and Kimball discloses the investigator’s ignorance. Patrick can hardly remember where he was “on the night of Paul’s disappearance” (p. 262). The absence of an alibi could evidence the murderer at last. However, the defense is offered by the notes Donald Kimball insistently takes:

> “Now where were you?” He laughs.
> I laugh too, though I’m not sure why. “Where was Marcus?” I’m almost giggling.
> Kimball keeps smiling as he looks me over. “He wasn’t with Paul Owen,” he says enigmatically.
> “So who was he with?” I’m laughing still, but I’m also very dizzy.
> Kimball opens his book and for the first time gives me a slightly hostile look. “He was at Atlantis with Craig McDermott, Frederick Dibbie, Harry Newman, George Butner and” – Kimball pauses, then looks up – “you.” (p. 263-4)

3.2 **A Horrific Protagonist**

The postmodern rejection of teleology can also be found in the prose of *American Psycho*. The idea that a question, when it is asked, inevitably demands an answer just does not apply to the logic of pluralized realities. By not expressing an elaborate, ornamented, and dense language, the novel’s narration follows this very concept. Diving into deeper layers in order to deconstruct a convention does not ensure an answer in postmodern narratives. To put it differently, the reality which has just been deconstructed will not give birth to another, for a reality is not substituted; it is rather multiplied. Bateman’s prose openly avoids deep layers. His utterance is superficial, depthless, blank. For this matter, critics have called the novel a blank fiction.

The term was coined by Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney in 1992, and then James Annesley used it some years later while analyzing writers whose subject matters dealt “with contemporary urban life and [included] violence, indulgence, crime, sexual excess,

media overload, decadence, drugs, consumerism and commerce" (BAELLO-ALLUÉ, 2011, p. 33). In his book, Annesley lists four views critics have devised to deal with the the emergence of blank fictions. The themes in these narratives may result from: (1) an "apocalypse culture", consequence of a society whose worldview is disenchanted; (2) a culture overrun by a "generation X", in which nihilism, individualism, and indifference are depicted in the texts; (3) some kind of deliberate eagerness for radical aesthetics, which explains extreme and marginal subjects; and (4) a connection to postmodern culture. Annesley stands for postmodernism as the most coherent support for the existence of these fictions. In his opinion, the critical power of Linda Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction and Fredric Jameson's articulations of late capitalism concentrate on "the ways in which contemporary narratives articulate anxieties about subjectivity, representation, and the relationship between text and context" (ANNESLEY, 1998, p. 4). Reference to specific time and space, as in *American Psycho*, requires an analytical interplay between form and content.

In blank fiction, themes are controversial, but the narrative is emotionlessly descriptive for the most part. Writers commonly make use of first-person narrators who just tell a story – they hardly ever pronounce any judgment against the actions. This is possibly the genre's most censured characteristic. For the sake of comparison, let me take an example of a description from Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, a novel with affinities to *American Psycho* for its socioeconomic matters. As Nick Carraway is invited to Gatsby's party, he observes the guests around, and then reports looks, behavior and reactions:

> Dressed up in white flannels I went over to his lawn a little after seven and wandered around rather ill-at-ease among swirls and eddies of people I didn't know – though here and there was a face I had noticed on the commuting train. I was immediately struck by the number of young Englishmen dotted about; all well dressed, all looking a little hungry and all talking in low earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans. I was sure that they were selling something: bonds or insurance or automobiles. They were, at least, agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key. (FITZGERALD, 1994, p. 47-8)

The narrator describes what he is wearing, how he feels among people he barely knows, and his surprise at the young men with voices, just like Daisy Buchanan's, "full of money" (p. 126). His observation allows him to go further as to conclude at last that those men are sellers who acknowledge that Jay Gatsby's premises offer an opportunity to do business. Nick's descriptive account is sharp and overall, moving from superficial layers to deeper ones. It includes not only what he can see, but also what he learns from the scene.

The descriptions Patrick delivers are unlike Nick's. His observations are not as broad as the one the *Great Gatsby*'s narrator offers, even though they are extensive. Patrick reports chiefly on clothing and behavior:

> I'm wearing a two-button wool suit with pleated trousers by Luciano Soprani, a cotton shirt by Brooks Brothers and a silk tie by Armani. McDermott's got on this wool suit by Lubiam with a linen pocket square by Ashear Bros., a Ralph Lauren cotton shirt and a silk tie by Christian Dior and he's about to toss a coin to see which one of us is going downstairs to fetch the Bolivian Marching Powder since *neither* one of us wants to sit here in the booth with the girls because though we probably want to fuck them, we don't want to, in fact *can't*, we've found out, talk to them, not even condescendingly – they simply have *nothing* to say and, I mean, I know we shouldn't be surprised by this but still it's somewhat disorienting. Taylor is sitting up but his eyes are closed, his mouth slightly open, and though McDermott and I originally thought he was protesting the girl's lack of verbal skills by pretending to be asleep, it dawns on us that perhaps he's authentically shitfaced (he's been near incoherent since the three sakes he downed at Vivids), but none of the girls pay any attention, except maybe Libby, since she's sitting next to him, but it's doubtful, very doubtful. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 192, author's emphases)

Bateman spends many lines listing articles of clothing and brands, wondering about buying cocaine, and depreciating the girls at the table. He moreover contradicts himself as he says he (and his friends) wants and does not want to have sex with the girls. The narrator is never certain about what he describes. We readers thus must be always wary of his narrative. Bateman is at the table, near Taylor, but is unsure of Taylor's real attitude. He recognizes that Libby looks attentive, but again he has doubts about it. In the end, what we learn from this excerpt is that Bateman, just like the three girls about whom he complains, has nothing to say.

As a blank fiction, *American Psycho* copes with very controversial matters, such as pornography, violence and ex-centrics. It also portrays a serial killer, paraphilic and cannibal, who offers a graphically depthless narrative. I claimed, in chapter 1, that Bateman's autodiegesis and present tense indicate respectively a tendency to self-absorption and an exclusive interest in a decade. Nonetheless, such elements also produce a closer relationship with us readers. Apart from those aspects, the protagonist's behavior underlines his monstrosity. These are the reasons why, I would like to contend that there are some narrative strategies in the novel which may contribute to make Patrick Bateman a horrific character.

In two different moments in the narrative[31], Bateman uses the word "monster". He is at the restaurant Pastels with his friends when he perceives that the waitress stands by his table looking down at him. Bateman then says that she gazes at him with a scary countenance "as if I were some kind of monster – she actually looks *scared* […]" (p. 45, author's emphasis). The second moment he uses the word, Bateman is in Paul Owen's apartment

[31] In fact, Bateman uses this word four times. The other two occasions the word *monster* is mentioned, though, are not relevant to my point.

torturing Torri and Tiffany, the two escort girls he hires, and narrates that “Tiffany is tied up with six pairs of Paul’s suspenders on the other side of the bed, moaning with fear, totally immobilized by the monster of reality” (p. 292). The monstrous figure the girls see is a wealthy, handsome, Wall Street man. What scares them after all?

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that monsters incorporate alterity and personify differences: “Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual” (COHEN, 1996, p. 7). We could observe, in the previous chapter, that ex-centric alterities are inevitably confined within this notion. Philosopher Noel Carroll, in turn, defines horrible monsters according to lethality and repugnance. As exceptional entities, monsters are extraordinary characters in an ordinary world (CARROLL, 1990, p. 16). Thus, as they breach norms and standards, they are un-natural. Moreover, the emotional response of the characters before the presence of a monster, Carroll adds, suggests a similar emotional response of the audience of a horror movie or of a reader of a horror book. That is, the audience, or the reader, is expected to be scared if the character reacts scarily before the monstrous creature on the screen, or on the pages. Finally, novelist Stephen King, in an attempt to provide examples of monsters and monstrosities, makes a long list of extraordinary personages, abnormal creatures, and people who rupture the physical parameters of what is allegedly normal: The Sandman, Dr. Doom, Dr. Octopus, dwarves, midgets, the bearded lady, the fat lady, the human skeleton, obese people, and even “someone with a really bad case of acne” (KING, 1981, p. 39).

Even though I find King’s listing too ample, his instances, aided by Carroll’s and Cohen’s definitions, lead me to conclude that monstrosities are necessarily determined by an exceptional physical feature. A monster, as it “refers to any being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science” (CARROLL, 1990, p. 27), ought to carry a corporal mark, a physical blemish, to be classified as such. This conclusion, therefore, effaces any possibility of Bateman falling under this rubric once he has no exceptional physical feature to label him a monster.

The monstrosity that scares Torri, Tiffany and the waitress stems from the protagonist’s behavior, not from a bodily trait. Some paragraphs earlier, Bateman was compared to the alienated nameless narrator in Dostoevsky’s novel. But, unlike that narrator, Bateman is an active businessman who goes to parties, restaurants, and clubs as much as engages in tortures, killings, paraphilia and cannibalism. A monster must be markedly repellent (such as Dracula or Mr. Hyde) insofar as characters (or readers), just by glancing at

it (or reading its description), realize that there is something wrong, that there is an imminent danger. This perception, obviously, does not apply to Bateman, for his very presence does not arouse repugnance. His monstrosity is not physical, though. Adapting Carroll's definition, Patrick is an ordinary character in an ordinary world. It is his hideous acts that determine his monstrosity. And it comes to the fore through comportment, through the story told and how the story is told. The narrative strategies employed in the novel, I would like to repeat, help us spot Bateman's monstrosity and horror.

Autodiegetic prose is one of the strategies to make the protagonist horrific. This technique joins together the performance and the performer. So, Bateman takes an action and narrates it, with no mediator, to the reader. In third-person narrations, for instance, there is a distance between the narrator and the events: "[…] in literature the world of the third-person narrator is completely separate from that of the characters in the story" (FLUDERNIK, 2009, p. 31). This heterodiegetic voice does not take part in the acts, so it never turns into a solid figure in the narrative. Differently, in first-person narrations, there is not only a voice, but a whole body with gestures, feelings, and thoughts to tell a story. Readers have the chance to learn from a narrator who participates in the tale. I argue that, in *American Psycho*, this narrator is solid because he is autodiegetic. We can picture his voice and body, and become familiar with the feelings and thoughts he shares with us. Bateman is a narrator who can be entirely personified, for this his narrative becomes more penetrating. The autodiegesis pushes him closer to us, especially when he speaks of thoughts no one else is allowed to know:

> Fleetingly I imagine pulling out my knife, slicing a wrist, one of mine, aiming the spurting vein at Armstrong's head or better yet his suit, wondering if he would still continue to talk. I consider getting up without excusing myself, taking a cab to another restaurant, somewhere in SoHo, maybe farther uptown, having a drink, using the rest room, maybe even making a phone call to Evelyn, coming back to DuPlex, and every molecule that makes up my body tells me that Armstrong would still be talking about not only his vacation but what seems like the *world's* vacation in the fucking Bahamas. (ELLIS, 2001, p. 135, author's emphasis)

Bateman gazes at Christopher Armstrong and emphasizes his body gestures to underscore that he keeps up with the conversation: "Armstrong: you are an… *asshole*. "Uh-huh." I nod. "Well…" (p. 135, author's emphasis). But, apart from this, we also know about his inner intention to stab at Armstrong's head with a knife.

The present tense is another strategy of the novel with a similar effect. Its main function is to pinpoint an event in the current time. Its usage enhances the impact of the narration (perhaps more than a past tense), causing it to be more pungent while being read:

> "Scream, honey," I urge, "keep screaming," I lean down, even closer, brushing her hair back. "No one cares. No one will help you…" She tries to cry out against but she's losing consciousness and she's capable of only a weak moan. I take advantage

> of her helpless state and, removing my gloves, force her mouth open and with the scissors cut out her tongue, which I pull easily from her mouth and hold in the palm of my hand, warm and still bleeding, seeming so much smaller than in her mouth, and throw it against the wall, where it sticks for a moment, leaving a stain, before falling to the floor with a tiny wet slap. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 236)

While discussing some rules of the narrative's game, James Phelan highlights that Suzanne Fleischman posits that the present tense prose constitutes a violation of a mimetic standard. For Fleischman, its very problem is that "one cannot live and narrate at the same time" (PHELAN, 1994, p. 224-5). But I contend that this violation goes well along with a postmodern concept. This autodiegetic simultaneous present, that is, a story being narrated as events are happening, unavoidably clashes with that heterogenic historical past – omniscient and authoritative. Easton Ellis does not subvert a convention only, but he also pushes Bateman's hideous performances towards readers, nearer our present time. The consequence is a disturbing intimacy that turns us into virtual accomplices of his assaults.

Lastly, detailing is another technique, possibly the most conspicuous strategy, to make the protagonist a horrifying figure. In the novel, tortures and murders tend to be minutely narrated. As the excerpts quoted so far have shown, Bateman never hides his crimes from us; on the contrary, he openly describes them, uncovering second after second of the act. In some scenes, the detailing is intensified to the point of scatology and disgust:

> Finally, in agony, after I've taken the coat off her face, she starts pleading, or at least tries to, the adrenaline momentarily overpowering the pain. "Patrick oh god stop it please oh god stop hurting me…" But, typically, the pain returns – it's too intense not to – and she 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. The fingers I haven't nailed I try to bite off, almost succeeding on her left thumb which I manage to chew all the flesh off of, leaving the bone exposed, and then I Mace her, needlessly, once more (ELLIS, 2011, p. 236)

In reality, there is no monster in *American Psycho*. Patrick Bateman does not possess any physical feature to accommodate him in those aforementioned definitions. Other characters, if they had the chance to scrutinize the protagonist's traits, would never find extraordinary marks – no abnormality particularizes him. So, who would expect any harm, pain or slaughter from such a personage? But Patrick incorporates a monstrosity the moment he acts. His performance is monstrous. I may conclude that, when a monstrous performance is done by an ordinary character, horror can also be installed. This is not the whole scenario, though. A narration in the autodiegetic mode, the story told in the present tense, and detailed descriptions are all strategies that contribute to make Bateman a horrific protagonist.

3.3 A grotesque psycho

An interesting analysis for the horror Patrick Bateman represents is to approach it from the category of the grotesque. The blankness, violence, pornography and consumerism which fill up the novel's narrative inexorably move other components to the background. But horrific performances occasionally give some room for ludicrous moments. By employing this latter adjective, rather than putting them apart, I intend to mix up somewhat incongruous aspects, from horrible to comic, in an attempt to locate grotesque aspects in *American Psycho*.

Even though Bateman reviews albums by Genesis, Whitney Houston, and Huey Lewis and the News in three entire chapters, he hates live music. By default, however, he accepts Luis Carruthers´s invitation to see a live concert. So, there are six people in the limousine heading for the show: Bateman, Evelyn, Carruthers, Courtney, Paul Owen and Ashley Cromwell. Despite the fact that none of them seems to be really excited to attend the performance, by the Irish band U2, they go anyway. Their expensive tickets allow them to be seated in the front row and, for Bateman, this location makes singer Bono Vox play a grotesque role onstage.

Because of the loud music, they can barely listen to one another. They constantly switch seats, cup their ears, repeat questions, misunderstand words, and shout. Surely they do not even heed the concert as the audience does. Bateman is eager to know more about the Fisher account, or rather how Paul Owen managed to handle the Fisher account, so he decides to talk to Owen about it. Nonetheless, by the time Bateman sits down next to him, something weird calls his attention: Bono has kneeled at the edge of the stage, and is smirking and also looking insistently into Bateman´s eyes:

> […] and while his eyes blaze, the backdrop of the stage turns red and suddenly I get this tremendous surge of feeling, this rush of knowledge, and I can see into Bono´s heart and my own beats faster because of this and I realize that I´m receiving a message of some kind from the singer. It hits me that we have something in common, that we share a bond, and it´s not impossible to believe that an invisible cord attached to Bono has now encircled me and now the audience disappears and the music slows down, gets softer, and it´s just Bono onstage – the stadium´s deserted, the band fades away – and the message, *his* message, once vague, now gets more powerful and he´s nodding at me and I´m nodding back, everything getting clearer, my body alive and burning, on fire, and from nowhere a flash of white and blinding light envelopes me and I hear it, can actually *feel*, can even make out the letters of the message hovering above Bono´s head in orange wavy letters: "I … am … the … devil … and I am … just … like … you …". (ELLIS, 2011, p. 141, author's emphasis)

Right before Bateman, Bono Vox has strangely turned into the devil. And not only has he become the devil himself, but he also has a message to bring out. The stage background is now lit by red lights as though Bono had dragged hell along with him. The whole crowd around Bateman vanishes and so do the musicians around Bono. It seems that the devil wants nobody else but Bateman to receive the message; and yet nobody else should speak to him but the devil. The stage where the concert is performed becomes the spot where evil comes up. But devil Bono Vox appears to be not only frightening, but ludicrous as well, just like Bateman is at times.

On the one hand, Patrick is horrific; on the other, however, he is quite a comic character. Many theorists of the grotesque admit it to be an aesthetic quality hard to be defined. Nevertheless, paradox, ambiguities, distortions, horror, strangeness, and comic tend to be recurrent characteristics to be focused on when one attempts to grasp the term. In *American Psycho*, Patrick seems to go through events which draw him near some of these characteristics as his behavior furnishes him with ludicrous features. So, can the protagonist be labeled grotesque for this reason?

The noun and adjective grotesque are rooted in the late fifteenth-century Italy. The term is named after "grotta", and refers back to the excavations of palaces (such as Nero´s *Domus Aurea*), tombs and villas, whose substructures happened to reveal antique ornamentations hitherto totally unknown. Discovered in underground sites, or grottoes, these ornamental designs displayed fanciful and fantastic figures which amazed art workers. This amazement was such that, throughout the sixteenth century, these figures spread over Western Europe in many different forms: ceilings, pillars, engravings, jewelry, fabric. Because they had come from the classical era, and for this providing a new connection with a worldlier historical moment, grotesque ornamentations became popular among Renaissance artists. Wolfgang Kayser underscores that the reason why such ornamentations were regarded as a new art form does not have to do with the fact that elements of the world themselves were painted, but rather with the fact that the natural order of such elements had been deliberately distorted (KAYSER, 1981, p. 21): plant stems supporting heavy objects, animals springing from branches, and human bodies with bestial heads were then motifs usually found.

Although the connection with the classical era had been the cause for the grotesque´s sprout, classical aesthetics was also the reason for its rejection. Aiming at decrying the art form "*che oggi chiamano grottesche*" (SODRÉ; PAIVA, 2002, p. 29), Giorgio Vasari, Italian painter and architect, traced back to Vitruvius´s *De Architectura* (27 B.C.) in order to find supportive arguments for his goal. Based on this treatise, Vasari could bring out aesthetic

qualities held by the classical era, such as symmetry, proportion and beauty, to reject the grotesque phenomenon. Vitruvius stands openly against those representations of art which, even though taken from reality, misshape and distort it:

> All these motifs taken from reality are now rejected by an unreasonable fashion. For our contemporary artists decorate the walls with monstrous forms rather than reproducing clear images of the familiar world. Instead of columns they paint fluted stems with oddly shaped leaves and volutes, and instead of pediments arabesques, the same with candelabra and painted aedicules, on the pediments of which grow dainty flowers unrolling out of roots and topped without rhyme or reason, by figurines. The little stamps finally, support half figures crowned by human or animal heads. Such things, however, never existed, do not now exist and shall never come into being. (VITRUVIUS *apud* KAYSER, 1981, p. 20)

From that moment on, the fanciful drawings of the grotesque were reduced to pointlessly bizarre creations. Grotesque ornamentations started to be seen as something far away from classical thinking. According to Vitruvius, architecture is all about imitating nature to resemble reality. For that matter, the disorder found in the grotesque was not to be taken as valuable whatsoever.

In the seventeenth century, grotesque was no longer used to describe ludicrous ornamentations only. One of the entries for the word in César-Pierre Richelet´s dictionary, for instance, was “pleasantly ridiculous” (SODRÉ; PAIVA, 2002, p. 30). Concurrently, the dictionary of French Academy defined it as “ridiculous, bizarre, extravagant” (idem). Such meanings broadened the term from decorative motifs to encompass objects and people.

In the nineteenth century, nonetheless, Victor Hugo stands for the grotesque by turning it into an aesthetic category. In the preface to his play *Cromwell* (1827), he states that the grotesque must be seen as the key phenomenon to pull classical and romantic literatures apart (p. 27). Unlike Vitruvius, Hugo argues that ugliness should not be regarded as alien to nature. In fact, ugliness is as part of nature as beauty is, for both qualities are true components of reality. And not only those, but dark and light, good and evil, distortion and proportion are paradoxes which have always coexisted as well. Hugo underlines that the grotesque is the category from which modern art really springs. Ancient art, he says, has never mingled comedy with tragedy and, for this matter, Aristophanes has never been as superior as Sophocles.

Hugo views the grotesque as contrary to classical aesthetic categories, especially the sublime, and believes this contrast is deeply fruitful. Taking the classical concept of beauty as inflexible, repeatable and, consequently, monotonous, Hugo stresses that the insertion of grotesque elements in a work of art could excel our perception of the sublime. In other words, in the presence of the grotesque, beauty is to be more beautiful. Hugoan grotesque, therefore,

is a beginning, a comparative tool, a contrastive trait on which one must focus in order to sharpen a sense of beauty (HUGO, 2002, p. 33).

Hugoan grotesque is largely contrastive. Since beauty is harmonic, symmetric, and organized, it is a finished category. It is pure and then it envelopes soul, transcendence, and the catholic moral. Grotesque, conversely, is unfinished for it is distorted, messy, and unbalanced. As it is closely linked to the body, especially the bottom part of it, it is never pure and homogeneous, but rather earthly and laughable. Such a view on grotesque, according to Victor Hugo, makes it incessantly renewable. Given its imperfection and incompleteness, any attempt to fulfill its voids tends to create brand new grotesque phenomena (p. 36).

Rather than concentrating on contrasts to grasp the grotesque, Wolfgang Kayser detects its presence in the matching of the horrific with the comic. In relation to a certain ornamental design grounded in the Classical era, the adjective "grottesco", for Renaissance artists, embodied not only ludicrous and fantastic attributes, but concomitantly it allowed distressing feelings caused by the suspension of natural patterns and the blurring of distinct classes. So, even though grotesque figures seem to be harmless and laughable, they are also ominous and somewhat apocalyptic for they may mingle human beings with animals and plants in a random fashion. The phrase "*sogni dei pittori*", coined in the sixteenth century, summarized the grotesque taste for merging unreasoningly all sorts of things. In reality, Kayser states that the combination of humans with animals has a chief importance for the grotesque. As a result, it can be argued that only by putting these two domains together, can one obtain both the horrific and the comic at once. Grotesque elements, emerging from the fusion of different domains along with unnatural arrangements, may be pinpointed in the representations of the devil as well as in the carnivalesque manifestations.

As one of the theorists who tried to contribute to a more significant definition of the grotesque, Kayser mentions German poet Christoph Martin Wieland, who in the eighteenth century coped with a problematic aesthetic phenomenon for his time: *caricature* (KAYSER, 2009, p. 30-1). Wieland distinguishes between three kinds of caricature: (i) true caricature, consisting of portraying distorted nature as such; (ii) exaggerated caricatures, in which the artist, for some reason, enhances the distortion of the subject only to a point where similarity to the model can still be recognized; and (iii) purely fantastic caricatures, or the so-called grotesque caricatures, "where the painter, disregarding the verisimilitude, gives rein to unchecked fancy […] with the sole intention of provoking laughter, disgust, and surprise about the daring of his monstrous creations by the unnatural and absurd products of his imagination" (ADAMS; YATES, 1997, p. 15). Wieland conceives of the grotesque as

precisely apart from reality, an incongruous and highly imaginative phenomenon. Oneiric and supernatural, it can be linked together again to the painters´ dreams, or *sogni dei pittori,* whose fanciful minds destroy any chance of rearranging the world neatly. In addition, ambiguous reactions take place, such as laughing in the presence of distortions, feeling repulsion for the horrible, and being baffled before abnormal figures. Kayser, nevertheless, does not totally agree with Wieland´s directions because, whereas the latter take the grotesque as a diverse and unreal site, apart from reality, the former underscores that a quintessential characteristic of this phenomenon is to portray a world which resembles ours, even though it is strikingly unusual.

Apart from being a key to differentiate ancient and modern art, a tool to contrast ugliness with beauty or a combination of the horrific with the comic, the grotesque roots its occurrence in the body. As stated by Mikhail Bakhtin, the instances of the grotesque rise up when they take place in the corporal elements, for the body sides with the material, rather than with the spiritual (BAKHTIN, 2010, p. 16-7). The critic analyses François Rabelais´s satirical narratives of Gargantua and Pantagruel and ends up disagreeing with Victor Hugo, who labeled Rabelais "the poet of the flesh and of gluttony" (DOSSE, 1998, p. 55), and with others who understood the French poet as a writer of bourgeois accounts and, to a great extent, interested in the economic individual. Bakhtin posits that Rabelais´s style can only be correctly understood the moment popular culture, that is, the carnivalesque, joins in. Thus, the combination of bodily elements and the carnivalesque resulted in what Bakhtin called "grotesque realism" (BAKHTIN, 2010, p. 16).

The body and the carnivalesque are fundamental components for grotesque realism because they become means by which the spiritual can be lowered, down to the material, earthly, and festive domains of life. Grotesque realism is topographically oriented. It impels us to move from the top to the bottom; the former means the head, and the latter the genitals. It looks down and, in so doing, it gives room to a touch with mundane matters. The Bakhtinian concept of grotesque is quite positive, because he underlines that the lower parts, genitals and the ground, hold both death and birth – it kills to give birth to something new. To lower is to get in contact with the bottom part of the body, that is to say, with copulation, pregnancy, parturition, orifices, flatulence, eating, drinking, so as to destroy and then to renew. Surely the body model, according to Bakhtin, is not the Da Vinci´s Vitruvian man. It is indeed an asymmetric, distorted and unfinished one. In this respect, Bakhtin´s and the Hugo´s grotesque bodies are analogous. Such a way of depicting the body can be seen in chapter VI

of Rabelais´s narrative, entitled "How Gargantua Was Born in a Strange Manner", where reference to the lower parts abound:

> Whilst they were on this discourse and pleasant tattle of drinking, Gargamelle began to be a little unwell in her lower part; whereupon Grangousier [...] suspecting that she was in travail, and told her that it was best for her to sit down up the grass under the willows, [...] On, with a sheep´s courage! quoth he. Despatch this boy, and we will speedily fall to work for the making of another. [...] Well, then, in the name of God, I´ll do my best, seeing that you will have it so, but would to God that it were cut off from you! [...] Then suddenly came the midwives from all quarters, who groping her below, found some pelodery, which was a certain filthy stuff, and of a taste truly bad enough. By this inconvenient the cotyledons of her matrix were presently loosed, through which the child sprang up and leaped, and so, entering into the hollow vein, did climb by the diaphragm even above her shoulders, [...] and from thence taking his way towards the left side, issued forth at her left ear. As soon as he was born, he cried not as other babes use to do, Miez, miez, miez, miez, but with a high, sturdy, and big voice shouted about, Some drink, some drink, some drink, as inviting all the world to drink with him [...]. (RABELAIS, 2006, pp. 63-4)

Gargantua´s mother, is about to give birth. Nonetheless, the very first reference to the body is not her labor, but the fact that the account opens with the act of drinking. Rabelais, thus, inserts bodily elements into a festive moment, which corroborates the Bakhtinian grotesque realism. Grangousier tells his wife to speed up her childbirth so that they can have sexual intercourse once again. Copulation appears to be a non-stopping cycle, a never-ending corporal need, a very effective and positive way to renew what has been just over. Furthermore, Gargamelle highlights her husband´s genitals, by funnily blaming his penis for her birth pangs. Looking down to the lower parts, as Bakhtin observes, is always followed by laughable behaviors. Finally, by the time he is born, Gargantua does not act as a baby is supposed to. He cries really. But surprisingly he does so while screaming for something to drink. So, a baby who speaks, screams for some drink, and climbs up inside her mother to reach for his ear right after birth is not at all ordinary. It is actually strange, as the chapter title already anticipates. And when it comes to defining the grotesque, this adjective turns out to be crucial.

Strange may be one of the adjectives to describe Patrick Bateman´s behavior as well. At pains to elucidate the grotesque, Victor Hugo, Wolfgang Kayser, and Mikhail Bakhtin explain the phenomenon by using this word along with others, such as ugly, ambiguous, paradoxical, incongruous, horrific, repulsive, carnivalesque, comic, and laughable. Even though the term is currently considered to be an unstable one, many of these adjectives (as well as their corresponding nouns) frequently bubble up in order to make its definition clearer. In *American Psycho*, a character who is apparently ordinary tends to behave grotesquely. So, some of those adjectives also apply for Bateman. When it is intended to be purely scary, the devil is depicted as ominous, threatening and terrifying. Examples of such representation can

be found in the Bible, in the *Divine Comedy* or in Milton´s *Paradise Lost*. In *American Psycho*, Bono Vox, who introduces himself to Bateman as the devil, does not look purely scary – he is also ludicrous. The way the protagonist describes him, focusing on his clothing and body features, induces laughter at first:

> But when I sit down something strange on the stage catches my eye. Bono has now moved across the stage, following me to my seat, and he´s staring into my eyes, kneeling at the edge of the stage, wearing black jeans (maybe Gitano), sandals, a leather vest with no shirt beneath it. His body is white, covered with sweat, and it´s not worked out enough, there´s no muscle tone and what definition there might be is covered beneath a paltry amount of chest hair. He has a cowboy hat on and his hair is pulled back into a ponytail and he´s moaning some dirge – I catch the lyric "A hero is an insect in this world" […]. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 140-1)

Bateman´s description of Bono Vox is similar to many others he provides all along the novel. In the concert, Bateman points out that the singer is staring at him, but, in addition, he describes the singer´s clothing, and even tries to guess his jeans brand. Moreover, the protagonist observes that Bono´s body is not as muscular as his while he comically underlines that the muscles, if there are any, must be under some chest hair. Only after he scrutinizes Bono Vox, the way he always does when meeting somebody, does Bateman turn his attention to Bono´s eyes and realizes he is the devil.

Comic and absurdity play a chief part as signals to direct us to the grotesque. Throughout the novel, comic elements, or rather ludicrous, suddenly emerge from silly comments, as though absurdity had already closed Bateman in:

> […] Then I met the models for drinks at the Trump Plaza. This was followed by a French movie that I completely did not understand, but it was fairly chic anyway, then dinner at a sushi restaurant called Vivids near Lincoln Center and a party at one of the models´ ex-boyfriend´s loft in Chelsea, where bad, fruity sangria was served. Last night I had dreams that were lit like pornography and in them I fucked girls made of cardboards. The Patty Winters Show this morning was about Aerobic Exercise. (p. 192)

Absurd conversations also hold grotesque aspects. Patrick brings Torri and Tiffany home and, while they are having drinks, he brags about graduating from Harvard. Torri thus says she once knew a man who had studied there. For taking for granted that prostitutes were not supposed to be acquainted with yuppies, Bateman is shocked and becomes silent, encouraging Torri to tell her weird story:

> "He had, like, this monkey. And I would have to watch this monkey in… his apartment." […] "It would only watch…" She sighs, then in a sudden rush admits, "The Oprah Winfrey Show and that´s all it would watch. The guy had tapes and tapes of it and he had made all of them for this monkey. […] One time I tried to… turn the channel, turn one of the tapes off… if I wanted to watch a soap instead or something… but" […] "the monkey would s-s-screech at me and it would only calm down when Oprah was on." She swallows, clears her throat, looks like she´s going to cry but doesn´t. "And you know, you try to turn the channel and that d-damn monkey would try to scratch you," […] (p. 290)

From Torri´s attitude, we readers notice she is sad. Some indications to this conclusion are textually provided: sighs, pauses, emotional reactions. For her, living together with a fierce ape addicted to a television program is dreadful. On the other hand, we may say that a monkey spending all day long watching the same tapes over again, albeit verisimilar, it is unlikely. Our attitude towards the story, for this matter, does not match Torri´s. Her account, conversely, turns out to be funny, laughable, and regarding absurdity, ludicrous. By the time the monkey´s behavior resembles a human´s, different domains mingle and the grotesque phenomenon may take place.

Finally, the protagonist appears to react grotesquely even in moments when he is notably vicious. Right after stabbing Al, the homeless man, Bateman tramples heavily on his dog, and by listening to the cracking sound of its bones being broken, he laughs, qualifying the event as amusing:

> […] 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. I can´t help but start laughing and I linger at the scene, amused by this tableau. When I spot an approaching taxi, I slowly walk away". (ELLIS, 2011, p. 127)

This segment corroborates how paradoxical the grotesque can be. The dog is agonizing because of its shattered legs, while Bateman is pleased for the pain he has inflicted to the animal. Two antagonistic elements, therefore, clash and merge. Enveloping horror and laughter at once, this scene highlights ambiguous reactions, both of them capable of being absorbed by the grotesque.

As a phenomenon that allows contradictory elements to meet up, the definition of grotesque tends to be as broad as unstable. Like the term, Patrick also encloses opposite adjectives. Horror, absurdity and laughter, however, seem to be the three major words one can use as tools to cope with the protagonist´s behavior. The novel provides scenes, conversations and comments quite significant to label Patrick a grotesque character. For this reason, I would say that *American Psycho* encompasses grotesque aspects.

4 BATEMAN IS UNRELIABLE

4.1 An unreliable psycho

Since its publication, *American Psycho* has been issued with many different covers. While some of them display just a small amount of blood scantily mixed up with water, others display a handsome white man´s face, with eyes looking at us. Other editions show a roughly-painted drawing of the novel's protagonist, dressed in a suit, with a bloody and frightening face with no eyes. The cover for the Brazilian edition presents a scene from the movie adaptation, with the actor holding a shining knife. One of the most recent covers, on the other hand, displays a figure of a man standing, whose outline is blurred and obscure, thus preventing the onlooker from seeing him clearly[32].

This particular cover portends an interesting aspect of the novel's narrative: a protagonist who offers plenty of unreliable statements. Patrick is surely an obscure character, not only for his lack of personal and family background, but mainly for his discourse. The moment we readers decide to confront his utterances, we are unable to affirm safely whether he is being true or only picturing the scenes he narrates. Some dialogues are themselves evidence of a narration that has been inconsonant all along. The medicine he takes also contributes to the perception of a narrator whose mind is troubled. The symptoms of such condition can be textually noticed too, particularly in those incoherent sentences we can find on some pages. The chapter "A glimpse of a Thursday afternoon", for example, begins and ends in the middle of a sentence, causing the lines to be syntactically broken. The television program *The Patty Winters Show* Bateman regularly watches (and records) becomes another source of narrative unreliability. Although we may take many of those bizarre topics broadcast daily as quite possible, it is hard to believe that "a Cheerio sat in a very small chair and was interviewed for close to an hour" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 371).

These instances can be seen as signs of the protagonist´s inconsistent narrative. At the very beginning of his story, Bateman appears to be true, but, in the long run, we readers notice he is a narrator we might as well not trust. We cannot fully rely on the words he says or believe the scenes he describes. Patrick Bateman is, to a great extent, an unsteady character

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[32] For a better understanding of this cover, see the edition published by Picador in 2011 in section Annex.

telling a one-sided story. As an autodiegetic protagonist, he provides readers with a restricted point of view – there is no other narrator to come up against his statements. This is the reason why I focus on Patrick Bateman's narrative unreliability. Suspicious as they are, his narration has a considerable impact on the way we interpret this protagonist.

The first theorist to label narrators "reliable" and "unreliable" was American literary theorist Wayne C. Booth in 1961. Discussing how authors use their rhetorical skills to effectively force the fictional worlds they create upon readers, Booth is interested in unravelling the writing technique of novelists. He is not oblivious, as he underscores in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, that, by concentrating on technique alone, he is setting aside the social and psychological implications involved in the process of writing and reading. Nevertheless, by putting together a systematic set of ways of "what good novelists have in fact done" (BOOTH, 1983, p. xv), Booth's purpose is to unchain both writers and readers from those vague and abstract rules about what novelists must do.

Even uneasy for lack of a better term, Booth adopts those adjectives to qualify the narrators' speech and behavior according to their degree of consonance with what the author in the novel has set as norms to be followed. A reliable narrator would act under these norms whereas an unreliable would not. Booth claims that unreliability ought not to be measured by mere irony or lie because narrators may become deceptive for this matter. For him, narrators are often labeled unreliable not when they tell lies or are ironic, but when they unconsciously and unintentionally contradict themselves. In Booth´s own words:

> […] a matter of what James calls *inconscience*; the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him. Or, as in *Huckleberry Finn*, the narrator claims to be naturally wicked while the author silently praises his virtues behind his back. (p. 159, author's emphasis)

The technique writers have commonly used in order to achieve reliability is "direct guidance" (p. 6). It consists of an author's voice barging into the narrative in order to let us know something. More clearly spotted when the narration is heterodiegetic, this technique allows readers to obtain pieces of information never possible otherwise. This omniscient narrator furnishes the story with characters' thoughts and feelings by telling us what is in their minds. Booth avers that such guidance was largely used in old narratives, such as the *Book of Job* in the bible, Homer's *The Odyssey*, and Boccaccio's Medieval collection *The Decameron*. We can also, however, notice this voice guiding us in Marquis de Sade's eighteenth-century novel *The Misfortunes of Virtue* (1791), for instance. While describing the sisters Juliette and Justine, Sade goes beneath the surface and discloses their opposite personalities:

> Mme de Losange, then known as Juliette, was already to all intents and purposes as mature in character and mind as she was to be at 30, which was her age at the time we tell this story. She seemed alive only to the sensation of being free and did not pause for a moment to reflect upon the cruel reverses which had snapped the chains which had bound her. But her sister Justine, who had just turned 12, gloomy and melancholic by disposition yet blessed with surprising gentleness and sensitivity, having none of her sister´s artfulness and guile but the ingenuousness, candour, and honesty which were to make stumble into many traps, Justine felt the full horror of her situation. (SADE, 1992, p. 50)

Who could possibly know all this about the sisters? It is reported not only what is physical and external, but also what is internal, that is, their personal features. Juliette is qualified as “mature in character and mind”, and it is said too that she had never thought over the cruelties which were about to come. Justine, in turn, is said to be “gloomy” and “melancholic by disposition”. She is not as artful and “guile” as Juliette, but on the contrary ingenuous, candid, gentle and sensible. Justine´s description is even finished by a doomed prediction of her fate: these dispositions will soon lead her to traps.

Those pieces of information are delivered by someone who knows much more than any reader would ever be able to. The narrator of *The Misfortunes of Virtue* comments on what is in the characters’ minds as well as foresees a ruinous destiny. As this narrator is capable of telling every single move characters make or thoughts they have, the entire story is under his/her control. Wayne Booth believes that an omniscient voice such as this is, somehow or other, the author’s (BOOTH, 1983, p. 74-5). The intrusive speech we read giving us privileged information on Juliette and Justine is, then, a Sade’s voice. It is the authority, or the reliable narrator, behind the tale breaking into the narrative to deliver things we should accept with no questioning. For Booth, this is the very moment when narrator and author match, and this is done so to guide readers to a certain direction through the story.

Direct guidance is useful to make stories more reliable or to make readers sympathetic, or unsympathetic, to certain characters. For Booth, nonetheless, it is a technique hardly ever used by modern novelists. They have belittled it because they consider “showing” to be more artistic than “telling”:

> Since Flaubert, many authors and critics have been convinced that “objective” or “impersonal” or “dramatic” modes of narration are naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearances by the author or his reliable spokesman. […] the complex issues involved in this shift have been reduced to a convenient distinction between “showing” which is artistic, and “telling” which is inartistic […]. (p. 8)

Although modern writers have generally kept direct guidance away from their accounts, there are still some novelists who make use of it in their works. Gabriel Gárcia Márquez’s *One Hundred Year of Solitude* (1967) and José Saramago’s *The Gospel According*

to Jesus Christ (1991) are just two examples of modern novels whose narrators, every so often, break into the tale to offer some privileged information. In reality, Booth states that this technique has never been completely abolished in fictional writings, but many authors have "renounced the privileged of direct intervention, retreated to the wings and left [their] characters to work out their own fates upon the stage" (BOOTH, 1983, p. 7).

This narrator who intrudes into the tale in order to inform something is named "implied author" by Wayne Booth. The critic believes that any kind of novel gives rise to an indirect image of its maker that "stands behind the scenes, whether as stage manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, silently paring his fingernails" (p. 151). This image is a version of the novel writer, or, in Boothian words, the author's second self (p. 71). No storytelling comes to readers without mediation. Despite the impersonality some tales can display (Booth uses the short story "The Killers", by Hemingway, as an example), a narrator always indicates his/her presence somehow:

> […] the inexperienced reader may make the mistake of thinking that the story comes to him unmediated. But no such mistake can be made from the moment that the author explicitly places a narrator into the tale, even if he is given no personal characteristics whatever. (p. 152)

The notion of implied author is a bone of contention in narratology. More recently, David Herman has summarized the notion of the implied author by positing that it is a role assumed by an actual author. This role can be described as a set of norms and values of which actual writers make use to create their narratives (HERMAN, 2009, p. 187). He goes on saying that a narrative interpretation based on a rhetorical approach takes into account this set of norms and values to expose, for instance, unreliable narrations. Theorist Brian Richardson, in turn, understands that an implied author should be conceptualized through a distinctive voice, or a set of distinctive traits. I object it on the grounds that the features Richardson claims to be the very ones to define the implied author similarly define the term "style". In a dictionary of literary terms, style stands for "any specific way of using language" (BALDICK, 2001, p. 247), which encompasses diction, syntax, imagery, rhythm, and figures of speech. Linguistic devices which particularize a novelist or a poet, for example, are to be regarded as a writer's stylistic expression. To make my point clearer, I quote a segment in which Richardson brings up art forms other than literature, such as music, painting and the cinema, to explain the concept:

> […] we may correctly identify a piece of music we have never heard before as a work of Beethoven, and we know what kinds of things to expect when we are about to view a previously unseen Monet. Cinema has the concept of the *auteur* to

> designate the distinctive markers of a director's style and vision. (RICHARDSON, 2006, p. 123)

Although unsuccessfully, Booth tries to make explicit that the implied author and the real flesh-and-blood author are necessarily distinct entities. He compares the implied author to David Hume's description of an ideal reader, a reader who should be taken as a "man in general", momentarily oblivious of his "individual being" and his "peculiar circumstances" (BOOTH, 1989, p. 70). It appears to me that Booth is arguing that there are two different personas when it comes to producing a work of fiction: (a) the person (not the writer, at this moment) who holds a certain set of ideologies and principles; and (b) the person (the writer, at this moment) who has a set of ideologies and principles that might or might not be compatible with that former person's.

The implied authorship seems a dispensable and slippery concept to me. As a particular voice (or voices) through which readers can identify the author's rhetorical choices, the term style has for long been used to determine such thing. As an omniscient voice that invades the narrative to deliver privileged information, it lacks precision. A first-person narration (not to mention some genres, such as autobiographical writings), for example, would inevitably mingle narrator with implied author, consequently ruining the comprehension of the notion.

Narrative unreliability comes to the foreground, according to Booth, through the interaction between implied authors and the narrators. But when it comes to *American Psycho* and the Boothian unreliable narration, I see at least two drawbacks: (1) the narrator in the novel is autodiegetic – and all of the examples given so far have been of heterodiegetic narrators. Can we really say that there is any author's voice setting up norms and values when the narrative is provided by a first-person protagonist? If we can say so, how should we properly approach this?; (2) Patrick Bateman is mentally-troubled, vicious, cannibal, and nonmoral. If I am to blend this narrator and an implied author together, even if to the smallest extent, wouldn´t I likely be stating that the protagonist and Easton Ellis share some features? These questions, by no means, should be neglected. If so, I would firstly be disregarding an obvious change of perspective. As previously debated, the effects provided by autodiegesis differ from those provided by heterodiegesis. Secondly, by merging, as Booth does, narrator and an author, I may be saying that Bateman is Ellis´s second self. Similar to the narrator in *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, Bateman, at times, addresses his talk to the reader. On his way to the dry cleaners, for instance, he steps on a blind homeless's foot and asks us: "Did I do it on purpose? What do you think? Or did I do this accidentally?" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 79). But this

does not mean that there is any author's voice barging into the conversation. There is actually a narrator who somehow wants to get in close touch with the one who is reading his story. This narrator is trying to drag readers nearer to his narrative, and consequently make them uncomfortable, shocked, horrified, as well as suspicious.

Booth is right anyway in focusing on rhetoric because he noticed that language can be as true as deceptive. The word "rhetoric" actually holds a triple meaning[33]: (a) it is simply a verbal communication, synonymous with discourse; (b) it is an utterance used for mere effect, such as rhetorical questions; and (c) it is also a speech that it is supposed to be meaningful, but, once it lacks truth, becomes meaningless[34]. These definitions reveal that rhetoric is able to lead to divergent contexts. Depending on the content of what has been said, who has said so, and who has received the message, discourse can be taken as either accurate or untrue. For a straightforward understanding of the narrative unreliability in literary texts, Booth believes that the relationship between implied author and narrator ought to be taken into consideration. Other narratology theorists, on the other hand, emphasize that the attention should be drawn to the relationship between narrator and the reader.

4.2 **Textual Signs**

Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* had for years been the quintessential work on unreliable narrative, but structuralist approaches were strongly contested by deconstructivist philosophy, especially for their binary oppositions. As for that, narratology had almost been rubbed out of the literary studies. But, according to Ansgar Nünning, narratology "has recently risen like a phoenix from its ashes" (NÜNNING, 2004, p. 354). This literary field has been in part revived for making use of viewpoints deliberately rejected by the Boothian analysis: the social and psychological implications in the process of reading. Contemporary critics have even disregarded the importance of an implied author to determine the unreliability of a narration. In fact, these theorists rely on the cognitive processes or strategies to interpret a certain text, by and large, based on the reader's backgrounds. Jan Stühring (2011, p. 95), for instance, states that we concentrate on our intuition that what is being

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[33] These definitions can be found at: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/rhetoric . Last accessed on February 28th, 2015.

[34] The word *rhetoric* is taken here as in the sentence: "All the politician says is mere rhetoric".

spoken in some narratives is not accurate to label a narrator unreliable. So, there is not only a narrator's comment, not only a voice barging into the narrative to count on, but also what readers infer from such speech. By resting their approaches upon reading processes, narratology theorists clearly break up a binary opposition. They actually bridge the gap between textual and contextual elements.

There are many textual signs to determine the protagonist's mental disorder, but, if taken isolatedly, they are not enough to determine his unreliability. One of them is Patrick's intermittent incapacity to pay attention to his peers. As emphasized, Bateman is a character totally restrained by the 1980s and its consumer yuppiedom. Throughout the novel, icons from this decade bubble up to set the scene, such as electronic devices (*Aiwa*, *Kenwood*), artists (*Whitney Houston*, *Phil Collins*, *Iggy Pop*, *David Onica, Tom Cruise*), bands (*U2*, *Huey Lewis and The News*, *Genesis*), brands (*J & B*, *Evian*, *Gucci*) and songs (*Dead or Alive*, *Like a Prayer*, *New Sensation*). Furthermore, as Bateman competes for recognition, his narration consists of tediously materially-based lists. His sharp ability to foreground mass media icons and commodities, on the other hand, brings to the fore his inability to concentrate on conversations. In the chapter "Lunch", Bateman chats with Christopher Armstrong at a restaurant, but his narcissism shuts out any possibility of focusing on what it is being accounted by his workmate:

> Armstrong: you are an… *asshole*. "Uh-huh." I nod. "Well…" Paisley ties, plaid suits, my aerobics class, returning videotapes, spices to pick up from Zabar´s, beggars, white-chocolate truffles… The sickening scent of Drakkar Noir, which is what Christopher is wearing, floats over near my face, mingling with the scent of the marmalade and cilantro, the onions and the blackened chilies. "Uh-huh," I say, repeat. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 135, author's emphasis)

Bateman is having a conversation with Christopher Armstrong, or rather, Armstrong is talking but is not being listened. They are sitting at the same table, looking at each other, speaking, but there is no effective interaction between them. Bateman does not hear Armstrong because his friend brags about his own activity, that is, his trip to Bahamas. Bateman ignores the talk because what interests him is what is about him. So, he starts listing things closely related to his own routine: ties, suits, aerobics class, videotapes. Like Narcissus gazing at the pool, Bateman can only be attentive to his own body, his activities, and his belongings, boasting about them proudly whenever he has the chance to:

> Fuck… yourself… Armstrong, I´m thinking while staring out the window at the gridlock and pacing bums on Church Street. Appetizers arrive: sun-dried tomato brioche for Armstrong. Poblano chilies with an oniony orange-purple marmalade on the side for me. I hope Armstrong doesn't want to pay because I need to show the dim-witted bastard that I in fact do own a platinum American Express card. (p. 134)

The chapter is sprinkled with ellipses, which signal the narrator's disorder as well as the moment he stops heeding Armstrong, cuts off his narration, and immediately changes the subject: "[…] It is frequently hotter north in…" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 133) – and right after this ellipsis, Bateman goes on telling what was on *The Patty Winters Show* in the morning. Although he asks Armstrong questions (and they are promptly answered), he does not care to pay attention to his colleague's words, so much so that he does not include them in the narrative.

That the talk they are having is dull and tiresome is signaled not only through the ellipses, but also through the words used in the chapter, such as "uninterested", "disinterestedly", "fleetingly", "drone", "mournful". The protagonist openly tells us that he does not care about Christopher Armstrong or his trip at all. But if so, why does he keep up with the conversation by asking his friend about his vacations?

This intermittent inability to pay attention to his peers leads the protagonist to an inability to recognize peers. The novel is full of moments in which characters mix up names and cannot say for sure who the person is. Bateman himself is many times taken erroneously for Simpson (p. 136), McCloy (p. 175), Batman (p. 198), Marcus (p. 137), and so on. In this same chapter "Lunch", Bateman asks a question and Armstrong starts answering it by saying Bateman's name wrong:

> "So how were the Bahamas?" I ask after we order. "You just got back, right?"
> "Well, Taylor," Armstrong begins, staring at a point somewhere behind me and slightly above my head – on the column that has been terra-cotta-ized or perhaps on the exposed pipe that runs the length of the ceiling. (p. 132)

All along the novel, the protagonist spends many lines describing other characters. Every time he meets someone, he offers readers a long report on clothing, devices, body shape, and hairstyle. I have underscored that, for his narcissistic behavior, Bateman is unable to heed others. But this statement is not completely true. It is worth repeating that, as a yuppie, driven by consumerism, hedonism and ephemeral trends, the protagonist is only able to describe what comes externally. Unfortunately, he cannot go any further. Bateman's materialistic attitude blurs his evaluation and tugs him away from anything other than consumable goods. Thus, he is able to describe what he sees, but unable to go beneath the surface. The world Bateman lives in resembles a mass-production zone, where products and their corresponding brands are omnipresent. They never stop being produced, or, as in the novel, they never stop being listed by him. But, as these goods must be preferably fancy and expensive (otherwise, he will not be admired), his evaluation, consequently, turns into valuation. The protagonist is actually setting up a rule for the social class he belongs to: only

high-priced brands are allowed. By the end of the novel, Bateman comes to the conclusion, after asking himself many unconnected questions, that all of the assumptions underlying his learnings are twisted and meaningless:

> […] The smell of meat and blood clouds up the condo until I don´t notice it anymore. And later my macabre joy sours and I´m weeping for myself, unable to find solace in any of this, crying out, sobbing "I just want to be loved," cursing the earth and everything I have been taught: principles, distinctions, choices, morals, compromises, knowledge, unity, prayer – all of it was wrong, without any final purpose. All it comes down to was: die or adapt. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 332)

This conclusion has made Bateman adapt to a class crowded by self-absorbed members, whose worries lie totally in always having better assets – and it is worth saying, better than any others´, members or not. To take part in such an exclusive group, Bateman has been dressing in overcoats by Giorgio Armani, ties by Valentino Couture, trousers by Hugo Boss, and shoes by Brooks Brothers. He has been going to fancy restaurants and tolerating dull conversations with Christopher Armstrong as well. He has been buying costly clothes and devices, in order to look just like, or better than, his peers. As a result, all the yuppie characters end up having the same features, even though different descriptions are offered throughout: white skin, slicked-back hair, hard-shaped body, horn-rimmed glasses, and expensive garments. The members of Bateman's class can hardly be particularized. For this reason, Bateman and other characters frequently mistake one person for another:

> "What?" Owen asks. "Wait. Is that Conrad?"
> He points at some guy wearing a shawl-collar, single-breasted wool tuxedo, a cotton shirt with a bow tie, all by Pierre Cardin, who stands near the bar, directly beneath the chandelier, holding a glass of champagne, inspecting his nails. […] The Chandelier Room is packed and everyone looks familiar, everyone looks the same […]. (p. 61)

A third textual sign to determine the protagonist's disorder is in the chapter entitled "Chase, Manhattan[35]", for the narrative, which has hitherto been first-person, suddenly turns third-person. Once again at a sophisticated restaurant for dinner with friends, Bateman cannot help admitting that his "life is a living hell" (p. 333) – and again he is utterly ignored, as he himself observes. He admits his life has become hell because he can barely control his thoughts. He has just concluded that every single person, whoever that is, is a potential victim, or in his own words, "they are *prey*" (p. 334, author's emphasis). Such resolution forces him to leave the place (right after going to the restroom to use some cocaine) and roam around the streets late at night.

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[35] There is an intentionally ironic pun on this title. Given the novel's motifs, namely, brands and commodities, *Chase Manhattan* refers not only to a pursuit in a city, but also to one of the biggest four banks of the Unites States.

In this chapter, every ending of a paragraph and beginning of another holds ellipses. They are not being used, however, the way they were in chapter “Lunch”. In that one, they had been employed to spot the moment Bateman switched off, a move from Armstrong’s answers to Bateman’s thoughts. But in “Chase, Manhattan”, the usage of ellipses implies a brief period of blackout, signaling the moment the narrator loses his consciousness and then recovers it:

> […] at which point I use the rest room, do a line of cocaine, pick up my Giorgio Armani wool overcoat and the .357 magnum barely concealed within if from the coatcheck, strap on a holster and then I´m outside, but on *The Patty Winters Show* this morning there was an interview with a man who set his daughter on fire while she was giving birth, at dinner we all had shark…
> … in Tribeca it´s misty out, sky on the verge of rain, the restaurants down here empty, after midnight the streets remote, unreal, the only sign of human life someone playing a saxophone on the corner of Duane Street […] (ELLIS, 2011, p. 334, author’s emphasis)

We readers notice that there is still a link between the end of the sentence and the beginning of the other. The ellipsis does not seem to omit much of what was supposed to be told. Bateman had already said he had excused himself from the table and left before dessert, and, in so doing, we expect that his next move is to go outdoors. Following from this, by the time we find him telling us he is on the streets, walking around Tribeca, we are not likely to doubt his narration. This conclusion, logically reached, still preserves his reliability. But if we are not to regard those ellipses with suspicion, we are about to claim they have been employed pointlessly. Is this so?

Because his thoughts are getting harder to control, Bateman’s narration becomes messy. Therefore, many unconnected topics are bunched together in a rather incoherent manner: morning routine, talk shows, pornographic movies, parties, dishes, tortures, brand names, killings, bloody scenes. In the previous excerpt, for instance, he called to mind what he and his friends ordered for dinner soon after he had commented on what was on *The Patty Winters Show* – he joined commonplace activities together with gory pictures. A connection such as this (and there are many others all over the novel) corroborates how far his unbalance has gone. The ellipses are instances of a mind which has turned more and more deranged. The Xanax, Valium, Halcion, and Nuprin Bateman constantly takes can no longer hold his anxiety and panic attacks back. The point worth highlighting here is that ellipses are not in the chapter’s narrative to mark a voluntary disregard. In reality, they signpost an involuntary attitude, that is, the narrator´s loss of consciousness. Moreover, he does not act as if he were aware of those mental gaps, though he can notice them coming. He foresees his blackouts some lines before the first ellipsis, exactly at the moment he speaks: “[…] and during dinner I

almost become unglued, plummeting into a state of near vertigo […]" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 334). The words "unglued" and "vertigo", more specifically, must be taken into consideration because they can help us understand the reason why the narration changes into heterodiegetic.

If I have been arguing that it is possible to determine Bateman´s mental disorder textually, thus, the word "vertigo" works as significant evidence. This symptom is defined as a sensation of dizziness or unnatural motion just as though one were feeling the surroundings spinning around, leading to a loss of balance and to a disoriented mind. Feeling he "cannot seem to control [him]self" (p. 334), the protagonist, on the verge of falling down, picks up his overcoat and gun, and leaves. Nevertheless, readers should notice that, while he had been sitting, the vertigo could not be harmful. The moment he stands up and steps out of the restaurant, he loses his balance, his mind gets disoriented, and shuts down. This instant is depicted in the chapter by the ellipsis in the end of the paragraph.

Repeated ellipses, or rather, repeated blackouts come down to a moment where Bateman does not appear to recognize his own actions anymore. He says he has just shot the busker who was on the sidewalk playing his saxophone, but cannot recollect what happens afterwards. He gets more and more overwhelmed by these lapses to the point of being doubtful about what he has done:

> […] he stops playing, the tip of the saxophone still in his mouth, I pause too, then nod for him to go on, and, tentatively, he does, then I raise the gun to his face and in midnote pull the trigger, but the silencer doesn't work and in the same instant a huge crimson ring appears behind his head the booming sound of the gunshot deafens me, stunned, his eyes still alive, he falls to his knees, then onto his saxophone, I pop the clip and replace it with a full one, then something bad happens…
>
> … because while doing this I´ve failed to notice the squad car that was traveling behind me – doing what? god only knows, handing out parking tickets? (p. 334-5)

Such lack of self-recognition produces a peculiar narrative outcome. Incapable of perceiving his actions the way he used to, the protagonist is detached from the first-person narrator, as if he had lost touch with his self. The gunshot is heard by police officers in a car, so Bateman tries to escape from them. He hails a taxicab (driven by a young Iranian man), climbs into it, shoots the cabdriver dead, and drives away. The narration of the chasing resembles an action movie scene:

> […] and racing 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 […] (p. 349)

The climax of his mental disorder matches the whole piece in which the third-person narration takes place, and it seems so as long as we recall the word “unglued”. This word stands for detachment, division or separation as well as loss of emotional control or confused distress[36]. In the beginning of chapter “Chase, Manhattan”, we are told by the narrator that (a) he has lately been considering everyone everywhere a “whole host of victims” (ELLIS, 2011, p. 334), (b) his life is extremely unpleasant, (c) he has noticed nobody at the table was attentive to his confession, and that (d) he has decided to leave the restaurant earlier because of his miserable state of mind. We readers can learn from all of this that Bateman is really searching for a way, even though temporarily, to cope with those troubles. As all of his attempts to keep his disorder down have failed, he tries a new alternative: he sets him and his self apart. Accordingly, the narrative becomes third-person.

4.3 **Contextual Signs**

The textual signs I have highlighted so far turned out to be useful to determine the protagonist’s mental disorder. Nevertheless, in order to trace his unreliability, we should not be so hermetic. Ellipses locating intentional and unintentional attitudes, specific words and phrases spotting a disoriented behavior, and a sudden change of narrative perspective ought not to be the only pieces of evidence to settle our assumptions because, although some readers may not believe what it is told, the tale can still be taken as true.

Even though Jonathan Culler did not bear unreliable narrators in mind, cognitive narratologists have exploited his idea of naturalization to claim that the readers’ perception is to come into play when unreliability is involved. The term “naturalization” means “to bring [a text] into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural or legible” (CULLER, 1975, p. 162). This type of discourse, or model, Culler refers to is all of the social, psychological, literary knowledge, or what linguists call “cognitive frames”, readers employ to naturalize texts (to make them readable) in fictional narratives. So, when readers come across an utterance, description, new information or scene that does not match what it is expected to be, they use their knowledge to explain it. Ansgar Nünning argues that,

[36] Check this entry at http://www.thefreedictionary.com/unglued . Last accessed on February 28th, 2015.

to identify narrative unreliability, we should first “be based on the readers’ empirical experience and criteria of verisimilitude […] rather than on literary models” (NÜNNING, 1999, p. 67). Textual signs are important and obviously must be considered. But, in Nünning’s view, they are ranked second place. The reading process to detect unreliability is, then, no longer a give-and-take between an implied author and a narrator, but a cognitive interplay between a narrator and a reader. Textual information needs to associate with reader’s frames to make an analysis effective.

This cognitive turn in the interpretation of unreliable narrations has led Bruno Zerweck (2001, p. 155) to conclude that this reader-oriented model serves more accurately as an approach than those common theories of the phenomenon. Based on Nünning, Zerweck provides a useful summary of the major frames readers apply to texts in order to naturalize them: (i) real-world frames, which includes general and historical world knowledge, shared cultural heritage, personality theories, models of psychological coherence, social, moral and linguistic norms, and the individual values of the reader; (ii) literary frames of reference, which entails general knowledge of literary conventions, knowledge of literary genres, of intertextual reference, of stereotypical models of character; and (iii) a frame located between the two previous ones, namely, the values and norms of a text which are schematized by the reader.

Apart from the summary of major reader’s frames utilized by readers, Zerweck suggests a culturally and historically-based theory of narrative unreliability. In his article, the critic offers eight essential (or minimal, as he puts it) conditions to approach an unreliable narration. I would like, however, to concentrate on the second of them because, counting on it, Zerweck asserts that Patrick Bateman is an unreliable person, but not an unreliable narrator.

Zerweck believes that the unintentional self-incrimination of the narrator is a necessary condition to regard a story as unreliable. As for that, narrations must be regulated by a “detective framework”. According to Monika Fludernik, unreliability seems to be connected to “a kind of detective scenario”, a certain epiphany or revelation readers experience when they uncover “the secret about the narrator persona” (FLUDERNIK, 1999, p. 78). If this detective framework is taken as a central feature for determining narrative unreliability, Fludernik adds, texts which deliver inconspicuous contradictions are to be interpreted as displaying a limited first-person perspective. Thus, unreliability should apply only to those narrations whose inconsistency and disparity are salient in the narrative. Zerweck rejects Bateman’s incongruous accounts because he identifies neither a detective scenario nor unintentionality: “The narrator knows and openly tells of his deeds and

motivations and makes no attempt to 'hide' his nature. There is no 'detective framework' involved and no unintentional self-incrimination takes place" (ZERWECK, 2001, p. 157). Unfortunately, the critic does not go any further on his examination of *American Psycho*. Patrick Bateman does not hide his criminal nature indeed, his descriptions are disgustingly detailed. But we readers can still apply that detective framework. The analysis that follows reinforces that those narrations of killings result from a deeply troubled mind. I additionally contend that contextual signs can help us detect discrepancies in what Bateman says. We are coping, in reality, with a narrative of a potential murderer who mentally projects vivid mayhem. Bateman might want to be read as an "evil psychopath" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 19), but unintentionally reveals his psychosis.

In *American Psycho*, it is perceptible how inconsistent many dialogues are as the protagonist´s narrative unfolds, especially when Bateman refers to his vicious desires. In a conversation with his skin technician Helga, during a beauty treatment, he is interested in knowing whose men's loafers are those he sees outside the door of the a room. So, he asks Helga about it. But, after her answer, he starts talking about his intention to switch a girl's blood with a dog's:

> "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 sharpie, 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?" While I´m speaking I can hear the girl working on my feet humming one of the songs from *Les Misérables* to herself, and then Helga runs a moistered cotton ball across my nose, leaning close to the face, inspecting the pores. I laugh maniacally, then take a deep breath and touch my chest – expecting a heart to be thumping quickly, impatiently, but there´s nothing there, not even a beat. (p. 111-2)

The two events, that is to say, the question about the pair of loafers and the fantasy about the blood transfusion, just do not match within the dialogue, making us suspicious of what has actually been said. On the other hand, once readers agree with the fact that Bateman's world is crowded with narcissistic characters who can barely pay attention to others, such segment, even if it sounds weird, may be taken as reliable. Readers end up concluding that the protagonist has really said that (he even uses the verb "speak"). But these readers should also take seriously into account the rest of the dialogue:

> "Shh, Mr. Bateman," Helga says, running a warm loofah sponge over my face, which stings then cools the skin. "Relax."
>
> "Okay," I say. "I´m relaxing."
>
> "Oh Mr. Bateman," Helga croons, "you have such a nice complexion. How old are you? May I ask?"
>
> "I´m twenty-six."
>
> "Ah, that´s why. It´s so clean. So smooth." She sighs. "Just relax." (p. 116)

After his comments about the transfusion, Bateman says that Helga makes that typical sound of someone requiring someone else to be quiet, to get relaxed. In addition, she asks him how old he is, and she seems to hear his answer. How can she be attentive to this dialogue and not to his raving comments on the blood transfusion? How can the skin technician and the protagonist have a conversation in which there is only a part, the oddest one, she does not pay attention to? The comment itself should make her alert, to say the least, but no reaction whatsoever is mentioned.

There are also scenes in the novel that, when confronted, may make readers doubtful. After having dinner with Paul Owen, Bateman says Owen is so drunk that he could be easily convinced to pay the bill, induced to "admit what a dumb son-of-a-bitch he really is" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 207), and could be easily brought over to Bateman's apartment. The protagonist asserts Owen is killed, and offers a vivid and detailed description of the murder:

> The ax hits him midsentence, straight in the face, its thick blade chopping sideways into his open mouth, shutting him up. Paul´s eyes look up at me, and suddenly his hands are trying to grab at the handle, but the shock of the blow has sapped his strength. There´s no blood at first, no sound either except for the newspapers under Paul´s kicking feet, rustling, tearing. […] This is accompanied by a horrible momentary hissing noise actually coming from the wounds in Paul´s skull, places where bone and flesh no longer connect, and this is followed by a rude farting noise caused by a section of his brain […] I scream at him only once: "Fucking stupid bastard. Fucking bastard." (p. 208-9)

A graphically descriptive scene such as this may lead us to take it as a scene that really happened. The narrator particularizes every minute of the killing. He gives accounts of the direction Owen's eyes looks at and his attempt to clench the ax. He even describes the sound that comes out of the wounds. But even if he does so, readers can still spot signs of unreliability.

The first sign comes up when Bateman records a message on the answering machine saying Owen has moved to London. We readers wonder if he is able to fake Owen's voice. The protagonist answers us right away by affirming his "voice sounds similar to Owen's and to someone hearing it over the phone probably identical" (p. 209). He thinks this statement is enough to convince us. On the contrary, some of us may find this hard to be possible, as it is too coincidental, and still remain suspicious.

A second sign takes place when the protagonist goes back to his apartment from Owen's, puts the corpse into a sleeping bag and utters:

> […] I zip up then drag easily into the elevator, then through the lobby, past the night doorman, down the block, where briefly I run into Arthur Crystal and Kitty Martin […] so they don´t linger, even though Crystal – the rude bastard – asks me what the general rules of wearing a white dinner jacket are. After answering him curtly I hail

> a taxi, effortlessly manage to swing the sleeping bag into the backseat, hop in and give the driver the address in Hell´s Kitchen. (ELLIS, 2011, p. 210).

Bateman describes himself as a brawny man. For this reason, the moment he states he can easily drag a corpse probably as heavy as he is all the way out, we readers do not suspect him. The suspicion lies in the fact that he walks past three people and, surprisingly, none of them questions what he is doing or what is in the sleeping bag. Furthermore, he places the corpse on the backseat of the cab, and again no reaction from the driver is reported. On the one hand, believing Bateman brings a man over his apartment and kills him when there is no one else around does not seem hard to do. On the other, accepting wholeheartedly he can "easily" and "effortlessly" get rid of the corpse the way he does is more unlikely.

Finally, the third sign of the protagonist's unreliability is provided by Harold Carnes in the chapter "New Club", in the latter part of the novel. Bateman is sure he has murdered Paul Owen and the escort women, but this certainty shatters altogether when he meets his lawyer. While Bateman insists on confessing he has committed dozens of murders, Carnes takes it as a joke: "Bateman killing Owen and the escort girls?" He keeps chuckling. "Oh that's bloody marvelous. Really key, as they say at the Groucho Club. Really key." […] (p. 372). The lawyer does so because he is convinced that Bateman cannot have murdered Owen:

> "But that´s simply not possible," he says, brushing me off. "And I´m not finding this amusing anymore."
>
> "It never was supposed to be!" I bellow, and then, "Why isn´t it possible?"
>
> "It´s just not," he says, eyeing me worriedly.
>
> "Why not?" I shout again over the music, though there´s really no need to, adding, "You stupid bastard."
>
> He stares at me as if we are both underwater and shouts back, very clearly over the din of the club, "Because… I had… dinner… with Paul Owen… twice… in London… *just ten days ago*." (p. 373, author's emphasis)

Given Carnes's revelatory reply, we may conclude that Owen's assassination is nothing but a mentally-shaped image, albeit minutely described. And just as a domino effect, we may re-assess all the other killings. The prostitutes, homeless people, immigrants, the homosexual, the child, the dog, all of these victims may have been imagined, as a result of Bateman's constant and severe loss of contact with reality. Unbalanced, disordered, deranged, frantic, and insane are, thus, possible adjectives to label a mind which is totally soaked in violence, torture and bloodshed (not to mention the derangement provoked by drug abuse). So, "psycho", the very word which compounds the title of the novel, should be read as a short for either "psychopath" or "psychotic". In order to come to grips with such a complex character as Patrick Bateman, we need to take into accounts both interpretive readings.

While discussing Bateman's unreliability, Julian Murphet raises this question: "what really happens to Paul Owen?" (MURPHET, 2002, p. 46). The presence of the detective Donald Kimball, the critic says, assures readers that Owen has vanished, to say the least. Moreover, Bateman's inspections of newspapers and his inquiries about "two mutilated prostitutes found in Paul Owen's apartment" (ELLIS, 2011, p. 352) end up being a fruitless search. There are no words printed or rumors about such incidents. Murphet interestingly observes that, when Bateman returns to the apartment, his description of the surroundings is unlike that he had previously given. A different-looking building, unfitting keys and a new attendant are clear indications of an unreliable narration. The revelation Murphet experiences makes him deduce that "Bateman has never been here before" (MURPHET, 2002, p. 47). I want to reiterate that only by employing the detective framework could he reach such conclusion.

Bateman's narration furnishes readers with numerous signs of unreliability. Some of them were pointed out here to illustrate this. In Bateman's narrative, some scenes appear to be reality, others appear to be formed mentally. I do not believe that a reader's framework ought to be more significant than a textual sign, as Ansgar Nünning argues. To reach a satisfactory conclusion on the matter, the latter is to be as important as the former. The analysis supported textually all along might be as mistaken as the one based only on the reader´s perceptions. In *American Psycho*, both approaches must be practiced; otherwise many pieces of evidence to determine the protagonist's unreliability will be overlooked.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to discuss two points mentioned by Daniel Cojocaru in close relation to Bateman's unreliability. Firstly, the critic argues that, though Harold Carnes states that he had dinner with Paul Owen just ten days ago, the fact that the lawyer mistakes Bateman twice (for Davis and, some lines later, for Donaldson) indicates that readers will be never certain of what has happened indeed. I might possibly share with Cojocaru the opinion that "Bateman's role remains ambiguous" (COJOCARU, 2008-9, p. 193). Bret Easton Ellis seems to have artfully written a piece that accommodates both interpretations: the narrator can be either a murderer or a psychotic character. Ambiguity thus becomes a third interpretive option for those who choose to keep undecidability. Secondly, I cannot share the opinion that society would be exempt from responsibility for the making of Patrick Bateman once readers interpret him as psychotic. I asseverate that to break the ambiguity means to clarify analytically the mechanisms of an aesthetic phenomenon which has been reconsidered by narratology lately. The reader-oriented model of unreliability has turned into a prolific narratological approach. Yet, contextually speaking, *American Psycho*

displays a nonmoral protagonist whose bloodshed is mentally projected. In this respect, Bateman is a potential serial killer. It does not mean, however, that his contingency is harmless. It actually depicts a collective desire in the form of a predatory identity. A novel that thematizes consumerism, competition and outrage against ex-centrics brings destruction, violence, and social segregation to the foreground of its narrative – some of the shameful tendencies that make up the episteme of our society. A narrator who says he is just like anyone within his yuppiedom forces an individual behavior to be read as a collective threat. As a potential victimizer, the protagonist may represent an intention of annihilation a whole class might likely have. This interpretation seems to be as appalling as the one the critic considers.

CONCLUSION

If one asked me to describe Patrick Bateman in a word, I would certainly not be able to. I would reply that such a protagonist cannot be reducible to an only view. In this dissertation, I have used many adjectives to cope with the task of describing Bateman, such as intelligent, well-educated, handsome, wealthy, materialistic, yuppie, narcissistic, blank, misogynistic, racist, nonmoral, vicious, monstrous, torturer, paraphilic, cannibal, horrific, grotesque, psychotic, and unreliable. Many of these words are extremely negative. All of them, however, have guided me throughout my critical analysis.

These adjectives are joined together here to make a point, or rather, to recollect a point made in the introduction of this dissertation. The protagonist displays a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality, and, as a result, it could be noticed that he is more inclined to be the image of the latter than of the former. To put it differently, as his narcissism blinds him altogether, it is true to say that "Patrick Bateman is also a Dr. Jekyll who turns into Mr. Hyde in order to get what he wants"[37]. The adjectives used in my analysis have revealed that Bateman lacks those characteristics that might lead us to be sympathetic to him. But a character who is not likeable does not necessarily make his story worthless. As a work of fiction whose plot is intimately attached to competition, yuppiedom, and consumerism, *American Psycho* brings forth some interesting literary interpretations. In this closing section, I would like to recollect them.

Bateman is placed within a hopelessly commodified setting. Atrocities seem to envelope the novel's New York at the end of the eighties just like the headlines on Price's newspaper have shown. To begin with, those words from Dante's *Inferno* in the first line of the novel foreshadow a pervasive disenchantment, a continuous sense of things falling apart, ironically expressed by the Talking Heads lyrics. How can one be protected from harm in a world where dreadful issues, that is, seemingly insurmountable social chasms, are ubiquitous? Christopher Lasch's new narcissism was the key answer.

Bateman sees past and future as useless, so he locks himself inside a specific time and space. Referentiality plays therefore an essential role in *American Psycho*. Brand names, music reviews, and songs work as benchmarks, as reference points to determine the setting. Based on it, I tried to open out some of the mechanisms Bret Easton Ellis has chosen to depict

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[37] BAELLO-ALLUÉ, Sonia, 2011, p. 95.

a materialistic character, especially when the protagonist describes himself and his peers. Through his commodified narration, it becomes clear that Patrick Bateman expresses the relationship which is summed up by the Jamesonian notion of postmodernism (or late capitalism): commodities and aesthetics merge to sprout a new cultural logic. In this sense, the serial killer as a protagonist compounds the worst-case scenario. His figure can be understood as the final organism of a food chain, the apex of a consumer society. In the novel, consuming entails performing each and every meaning of the act. So, the most terrible definition of "consumption" is the one synonymous with "annihilation". Bateman is the predatory consumer who disregards differences between people and objects because he consumes both indistinctly.

Bateman also runs after recognition. Being referred to as "the boy next door" reminds him that he is still in the purgatory, aiming at heaven while trying the keep himself away from hell. The protagonist is a yuppie. Although he belongs to the upper class, he still needs to compete, to fight to be recognized as valuable, as an asset. Under these circumstances, good looks overrun ugliness. In other words, appearance subjugates any other qualities not in accordance with the characteristics of his yuppiedom. This helped us understand how important likeness in appearance is for Bateman and his urban professional friends.

We could also notice that because he and his peers look alike (from an exclusively materially-oriented viewpoint), the protagonist frequently mistakes a person for another and, in turn, is also mistaken for somebody else. Likeness, thus, has produced an unusual effect in the novel once we never know who the characters really are. Bateman says their names, has conversations with many of them, but he realizes that one person looks just like another. The pop song Bateman mentions, sung by Bon Jovi, is quite appropriate in this context: "[…] and turn up the Walkman just as Bon Jovi cries: "*It's all the same, only the names have changed…*"[38]. A protagonist who can speak through no language other than commodities, trademarks, and mass media epitomizes the excesses of a consumer society.

American Psycho denounces this excessive behavior by giving voice to a killer competitor. Henceforth, Lasch's new narcissism could no longer support all of my arguments. I agreed that, since the protagonist fears dependence on people whereas he depends on them to be admired, he is paradoxical. In addition, I also sided with the fact that, since he notices that there are commodities he is not yet able to have, he is notably less confident. But in Lasch's concept of narcissism, there is a third aspect that does not apply to Bateman. The new

[38] ELLIS, Bret Easton, 2011, p. 156, author's emphasis.

narcissist avoids competition for conceiving of it as an urge to annihilation. Bateman, on the contrary, competes, destroys, and annihilates. There is no compassion or cooperation in his attitudes. As seen, the narration of tortures and assassinations is emotionless, blank, as catalogue-like as the listings of designer clothing he delivers. Eagerness to climb ever up led him to kill Paul Owen. Fear of falling down the social ladder led him to kill homeless people, immigrants, homosexuals, and prostitutes.

It is worth recalling as well that the protagonist and his blank narrative walk on divergent tracks. Bateman's behavior perpetuates dichotomous standards. Some of them, I pointed out in this dissertation, such as white/black, rich/poor, heterosexual/homosexual, and men/women. Nevertheless, by approaching the tale from a postmodern view, I noticed that dichotomies are called into question. First, the three epigraphs of the novel not only foreshadow what is about to come in the story, but also subvert the division between high art/low art. Secondly, pornography is used to put aesthetic conventions at stake as well. In the novel, scenes of sexual intercourse are not suggested or hidden, they are explicitly narrated. Taken as a discourse one is for or against, pornographic texts are oftentimes considered to be instruments of mere sexual stimulation. The descriptions of those scenes, nonetheless, turned out to be useful to corroborate Bateman's tendency for images and appearances – in one word, for the simulacrum. Finally, the detective Donald Kimball, the character who could reveal the crime and the criminal through logical deduction, comes into the story to dishearten rationality. Kimball asks questions and takes notes, but he does not provide any final answer. In the end, he becomes another disposable presence of the consumer society. The outcome of his investigation has no relevance, so it is not disclosed.

I also argued that, albeit not a monster, the protagonist is monstrous. Unlike those creatures which emerge from the pages of a horror book or from the screen of a horror movie, Patrick has no physical blemish to determine his monstrosity. Lacking an abnormal appearance, he must be seen as having Jekyll's semblance while performing Hyde's actions. Autodiegesis, present tense and detailed descriptions have contributed to this horror figure as these strategies pull us closer to the narrative, almost forcing us to be part of it. The fact that the protagonist has secretly shared his killer acts with us before he confesses them to his lawyer underscores this closeness. By acting like a monster and not looking like one, Bateman collapses expectations. For the most part, it is not the monster alone which is horrifying, but rather the lack of order it symbolizes. And yet those horrible moments have given some prominence to the grotesque. In *American Psycho*, some passages possess horrific and ludicrous characteristics, which allowed me to spot some grotesque elements in Bateman's

story. The narrative has offered absurd scenes which may provoke reactions as incongruous as laughing out of horror.

All of these accounts appeared to me being narrated by a protagonist with a deranged mind, who shields himself from any other interest but his own. Unable to heed what other characters say or to even distinguish one from another, Bateman can be only attentive to the appeals of commodities. Since he cannot be away from his reified standpoint, he never delivers what is beyond surface. His narration is affectless, his comprehension is shallow, and his story is noncommittal. This is the reason why *American Psycho* has been called blank fiction. Almost entirely, what we find is external events replacing those inner occurrences of psychological novels. This superficiality ultimately makes Bateman oblivious of his stupid decisions. That is, he keeps trying hard to fit in a class that is inherently excludable, and, sadly enough, an exclusion Bateman himself maintains. Nobody pays attention to his miserable condition. Those medicine pills he takes do not prevent him from derangement. The climax of his disturbed mental state takes place the moment his narration turns into third-person.

Bateman is not only mentally-ill, but unreliable as well. Based on inconsistent dialogues and scenes, I examined his narrative to point out signs of unreliability. The adjective "psycho", the very word that compounds the title of the novel, disclosed therefore two interpretive directions: (1) Bateman is a psychopath, if we believe that all of the assassinations have actually happened; (2) Bateman is psychotic, if we consider the murders to be visual products of a deranged mind. I stood for the second direction because, as shown, there are unreliable elements in the novel which cannot be disregarded.

Before concluding, I would like to debate, in brief, the reception of the novel in light of unreliability. *American Psycho* was severely rebuked even before its publication, being considered no more than a "how-to-manual on the torture and dismemberment of women"[39] and a "pornographic piece of writing"[40], as some critics have reported. Much of the commotion fostered by the novel is said to have stemmed from readers' and critics' inability to set Bret Easton Ellis and Patrick Bateman apart, regarding the protagonist as part of the murderous tendencies of the writer[41]. Besides, the mingling of actual violence and representations of violence also contributed to that fuss.

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[39] ANNESLEY, James, 1998, p. 11.

[40] BAELO-ALLUÉ, 2011, p. 88.

[41] ANNESLEY, James, 1998, p. 12.

In this dissertation, I have sided with the interpretation of Bateman as psychotic, rather than that of a psychopath. So, a question has been raised before me: can Bateman's unreliable narrative undermine somehow the negative reception of *American Psycho*? On one hand, I would say it can. Acts of violence and the imaginings of acts of violence do not occupy the same level. Some readers stop reading a text "literally" when they realize they cannot rely on the accounts completely[42]. On the other hand, I would say it can't. In this case, whether just imagined or actually performed, the graphic violence will be disturbing and reprehensible *per se*. Ian Frederik Moulton has offered a helpful answer for the matter: "If I find a book or a picture or a video offensive or arousing, my reasons for feeling this way may be so personal that I may feel strongly that no one has the right to contradict me on the subject. It is arousing or offensive to me, and that is enough for me"[43]. I offer these opposite answers to emphasize that, after all things considered, reactions to *American Psycho* can only be explained by counting on idiosyncratic circumstances. This is what has been happening quite frequently.

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[42] BAELO-ALLUÉ, 2011, p. 118.

[43] MOULTON, Ian Frederik, 2000, p. 4. This statement, in Moulton's book, refers specifically to pornography. However, I believe it can be also applied to the extreme representations of violence in *American Psycho* without compromising my argument.

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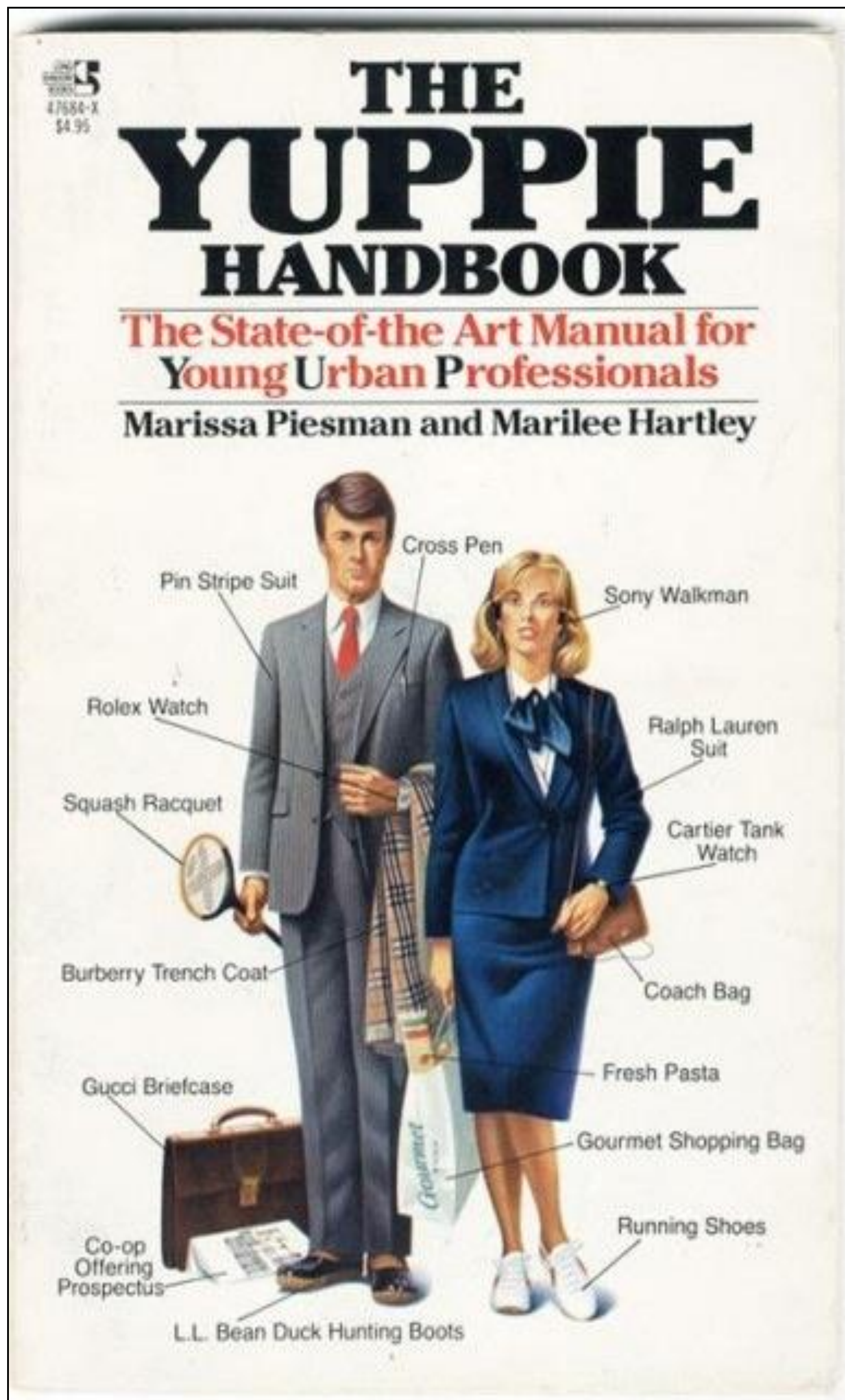
ANNEX A



ANNEX B