"Abandon All Hope" – An Analysis of *American Psycho*

Sophia Fredriksson
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Introduction

"Abandon all hope ye who enter here" Dante writes in his *Divine Comedy*, declared as he enters the gates of hell. The same phrase is what first meets the reader when opening Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*. But Dante’s hell has been altered in the postmodern world that Ellis displays, from suffering and fear to redundancy and numbness. Here, the superficial is celebrated and people are judged by their material status. This is Consumerist America, a postmodern society where no one really lives, breathe or knows anyone.

*American Psycho* tells the story of Patrick Bateman, a young, good-looking Wall Street yuppie living in Manhattan. He leads a successful life, displaying a facade of the perfect male stereotype of the 1980’s, but underneath the polished surface is a homicidal psychopath who is about to burst at any moment.

Bret Easton Ellis has written several novels dealing with the apathy of American youth and the dehumanisation in capitalist consumer culture. However, *American Psycho* raised particularly intense reactions due to it’s violent content and caused the first publisher to reject the novel. Ellis received death threats and hate mail and had to go underground for a while after the novel was released (Lehmann-Haupt).

This thesis will argue that Patrick Bateman is an anti-hero, a product of a society where reality is completely lost. To understand his character and to clarify why he represents a critique aimed at the postmodern consumer lifestyle, this thesis will analyse both Bateman as the main protagonist in *American Psycho* as well as in relation to postmodern theory.
A Postmodern Society

Postmodernism was introduced as a movement as early as 1950’s, some argue even earlier, but it was not until the 1980’s and 1990’s that postmodernism and notions of postmodernity were brought to the main arena of theory in the US and Europe (Malpas 5). Postmodernism can be viewed as both an historic movement and a style or genre, and is a multifaceted key concept that can be applied with slightly different interpretations depending on the discipline (6). It is an ambiguous theory and several of the prominent theorists have argued over what the word really contains. However, Malpas claims that ”in whatever way the terms [postmodernism and postmodernity] are employed by critics, they have vital things to tell us about how we engage with and are shaped by our cultural milieu today” (6). Postmodernism evokes ideas of parody, playfulness, simulations, hyper-reality, irony and discontinuity, and acts as a critique to the preceding modernist era (7). In postmodern literature theory, theorists deals with for example the collapse of grand narratives, metafiction and the discussion of high/low culture.

Before an analysis of the protagonist in American Psycho can take place, the postmodern consumer society must be defined. According to Malpas, the French critic Jean-François Lyotard argues that ”the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age” (36). Lyotard claims that the postmodern society is driven by the urge to make profit, no matter the cost. He also discusses what the concept of knowledge means in a postmodern world, and claims, in Malpas words, that ”knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange” (36).

Knowledge, Lyotard clarifies, is transferred through narratives; information, knowledge and ideas are communicated through story telling. A human being’s
understanding of the world is the added sum of these narratives, regulated by rules and conventions, which vary depending on the narratives themselves. Lyotard refers to these types of regulations at ‘metanarratives’ (37). Parallel to the metanarratives, Lyotard introduces the concept of the ‘grand narrative’, which "constructs accounts of human society and progress” (Malpas 37). Lyotard divides the grand narratives into two parts; the speculative and the emancipating. The former, Lyotard explains, are the ideas of the individual development of knowledge that "builds towards a systematic whole " (Malpas 37). This systematic truth aims to help us to reach freedom by unifying metanarratives, which eventually will lead to enlightenment regarding our place in the universe. The emancipating narrative strives for human freedom, a humanity liberated from "mysticism and dogma through education” (38). Knowledge of the subject is achieved on the basis of civilisation and is a tool by which to free humans from the burden of prejudice and ignorance and to educate people about their place in the world order (38). United, all the metanarratives and the narratives will eventually develop into one grand narrative with its own culture, values and goals, with a view of knowledge "as a progress towards universal enlightenment and freedom “ (38).

The grand narrative of the modernist era, Lyotard claims, changes when postmodernism takes over. The progress transgresses from emancipation and freedom towards the capitalist ideal of profit, and the narratives and metanarratives lose their credibility. Capitalism, according to Lyotard, does not seek the definite, collective knowledge that the grand narrative has to offer, but instead is more than content with fragmented narratives, as long as they contain development. He claims that "capital’s superiority. . .resides in its not seeking to have the last word, to totalise after the facts all the phrases that have taken place. . .but rather in seeking to have the next word” (38). The grand narrative collapses or becomes fragmented as one no longer
can speak of unity: "Starting from Wittgenstein’s premise that each language game [narrative] is autonomous, because it obeys specific rules”, Lyotard argues "that there is no possibility that language games can be unified or totalized in an metadiscourse’’’ (Zima 105). Instead, narration has become a means of persuasion and the value of a narrative is judged solemnly on its ability to be efficient , that is, convincing from the stakeholder’s point of view (Rivkin 355). The ultimate goal is power, and people and innovations are all means to achieve it (Lyotard 361). The ‘mini narratives’ that appear in the place of grande narratives in postmodernist literature as fragmented narratives that reject realistic, omniscient perspectives. This is an extension of the modernist ideals, but where modernism grieves this fragmentation, postmodernism praises it (Barry 81).

Postmodern society also changes our understanding of the world. According to Jean Baudrillard, reality is increasingly replaced by signs that represents an idea of reality. Baudrillard argues that we consume ideas and signs of status instead of the item itself (Rivkin &Ryan 365). Eventually, Baudrillard argues, the original item will disappear altogether, developing into something that ”It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself” (Baudrillard 1733). Baudrillard uses Disneyland as an example of this phenomenon, which he chooses to call ‘simulation’, arguing that Disneyland is an illusion built to conceal the fact that what the guests regard as real is no longer real. Disneyland functions as a display of the fantastic, an image that keeps the illusion that society is real and substantially intact (Malpas 125).
Popular Culture References in the Novel

As simulations replace the reality in postmodern society the foundation that constitutes reality, such as tradition and culture, dissolves. Postmodernism makes no distinction between high and popular culture as the preceding eras did. Instead postmodernism celebrates ‘bad taste’ and the superficial (Barry 81). Furthermore, Jameson argues that the artistic expression has become hollow "and the critical thrust of modern parody has become nothing more than blank mimicry with a pastiche that is ‘amputated of satiric impulse’ and ‘devoid of laughter’” (Malpas 25). Jameson’s claim is validated by and represented several times and in several ways in *American Psycho*. The novel includes a myriad of popular cultural references. Music, theatres, musicals, TV shows and films are mentioned throughout the novel and it seems important for the characters to be up to date with the latest releases and to know what is considered as contemporary. The prestigious musical *Les Miserables* is given equal acknowledgement as the film *Body Double*. These reoccurring references however, are so exaggerated that they become satirical. They ridicule the loss of the substance that Jameson is discussing. There is nothing that presents more than brief amusement, a fleeing sensation of entertainment which is forgotten the second after it has been experienced. The fictional daily morning show, *Patty Winters show*, is a representative phenomenon that emphasises the mixture and collapse of high/low culture. The topics of the show vary from serious subjects like autism to interviews with the US President. UFOs that kill are followed by lively debates on, for example, whether Patrick Swayze has become cynical or not. All of these topics are given the same amount of time, and all of them are wrapped in the sense of light entertainment that the day-time television offers. Nothing is really being taken seriously, and any critical point of view that art is trying to make falls flat as the characters fail to understand its deeper meaning. Instead, art and culture have become yet another way to attain status
without substance. The protagonist tries to be cultivated, by debating which of the recordings of *Les Miserables* are the best, by making full length, in-depth analyses of the music of Genesis and Whitney Huston. He also owns a David Onica, a painter whose motives aims critique towards popular culture. But he fails in his attempt to portray himself as a celebrator of high culture. This becomes apparent when he is being told that his painting is hung upside down. Bateman has not understood anything, the painting has no meaning to him, it is just yet another attempt to buy an identity.

As culture and artistic expression have been reduced to nothing more than just another type of commodity, without emotion or voice, things get complicated when Bateman unexpectedly finds himself face to face with both emotion and voice at a U2 concert. Bateman is at first unwilling to go to the concert at all, claiming to "*hate* live music" (Ellis 143), but suddenly he connects with Bono and his music in a way that he seems to have never connected to music before: "...I get this tremendous surge of feeling, this rush of knowledge and my own heart beats faster because of this and it’s not impossible to believe that an invisible chord attached to Bono has now encircled me. . ." (146). He is touched, this "invisible chord" has stirred up something inside him. When the moment is over, he is flushed and tense. For once, Bateman seems to realise that culture can represent something more than a fleeting amusement, that it actually tries to make a point, and he is not comfortable with this insight:

But suddenly, everything stops, as if a switch has been turned off. . .the feeling in my heart, the sensation combing my brain, vanishes and now more than ever I need to know about the Fisher account that Owen is handling and this information seems vital, more pertinent than the bond I feel I have with Bono, who is now dissolving and remote (146-47)
The touch of individuality that Bateman experiences during his encounter with Bono has no place in the postmodern society, where individuality cannot exist. Therefore he does not know how to handle the situation. Bateman cannot deal with the invasion of ‘reality’ that tears down his barriers of numbness, and he therefore clings to the things that he has previously projected as important in his life.

**The fragmentation of identity**

Ever since Decartes formulated the idea of the 'thinking I’ in his famous thesis *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) the question of the subject has been discussed in academic quarters. Several prominent philosophers has since then developed the discussion of the subject, for example Immanuel Kant through his categorical imperative (Malpas 61). In postmodern theory the question of the thinking subject is central. While modern literature regards the subject as a fixed position around events and concepts revolve (65), the postmodern subject is more fragmented. It can be regarded as an ever changing chameleon, dehumanised and independent of the humanist view of identity (73-76).

*American Psycho* reduces the importance of individuality and personality of the subject to nothing, only displaying a conformist lifestyle that does not allow any individual utterance at all, and no core values. On the contrary, all the characters try to blend in as much as possible. This behaviour can be connected to Baudrillard’s postmodernist theory of simulacra. In his essay "Simulacra and Simulations", Baudrillard argues that reality has been replaced by signs. He claims that we do no longer consume because we need the things that we purchase. Instead, we consume in order to signal our status or self-identity. Representation, Baudrillard argues, ”starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent” (Baudrillard 368). We as consumers has fooled ourselves to believe that what we consume identifies us as
human beings, we believe our own simulation of reality to such extent that no real
distinction between the real and the fake can be made.

The inability to distinguish between the real and the false is precisely what
characterises the protagonist in *American Psycho*. Bateman himself is driven by the
need to be the perfect conformist citizen as he develop his personality by sculpting the
perfect yuppies stereotype. He and the other characters are blending together, all
dressed in the same type of designer clothes, the same non-prescription horn-rimmed
glasses from Oliver People and the same slick backed hair. All women, too, look the
same; blond, large breasts, trimmed bodies. This impersonalisation is a reoccurring
theme throughout the novel. Everyone is constantly mistaken for someone else,
including Bateman. He usually does not even attempt to correct them, but instead
plays along and sometimes even encourages the mistake when it seems as though he
could benefit from it. Bateman has no personal connection with any of the people he
surrounds himself with, on the contrary, he rejects them as idiots, as not important,
even his own fiancé.

In Baudrillard’s postmodern society, everyone is replaceable, because everyone
is the same, and this seems to suit Bateman most of the time. Sometimes however,
this dos effects Bateman in a negative way. He reflects upon the matter towards the
end of the novel, in a conversation with Jean: . . .”there is an idea of Patrick Bateman,
some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something
illusory. . .I am simply not there. . .Myself is fabricated, an aberration. . .My
personality is sketchy and unformed, my heartlessness goes deep and is
persistent” (Ellis 376-77). O’Donell claims that ”Baudrillard suggests [that] the
hyperbolic referentiality and connection in a novel like [Don Delillo’s] *Running Dog*
is due, in part, to a desire for ‘the real,’ the materiality and ‘worldliness,’ that lies
behind all of the information” (O’Donell 468). This theory can also be applied to
American Psycho, as Bateman wants to be acknowledged, to be seen, as an individual yet he remains the ultimate bland character. He is even teased by the others about this, being called "the boy next door" (Ellis 11). No one listens to him, even though he frequently confesses that he is a murderer. On the other hand, he listens to no one in return, which can be understood by the fragmented narrative; while others are speaking, the narration drifts back and forth between him listening and him thinking of other things. He sometimes feels insecure about being too common, and sometimes the reader gets a glimpse that may amount to true emotions in between the constant up-keeping of appearances.

The urge to belong is strong within Bateman, and even the smallest divergence from the stereotype upsets him. Throughout the novel there are several examples of him being on the verge of tears for seemingly trivial things, such as the fear of making a wrong choice at a restaurant, or seeing business cards that look better than his own. These small things take on enormous proportions simply because there is nothing of substance to focus on, and they all add to the displayed image of what is Patrick Bateman.

However, Bateman does not only want to fit in, he wants to be the best at conforming, the one that the others look up to and ask for advice about everything from choice of restaurants to the appropriate rules for wearing a club blazer. For this reason he has a hard time coping with others being more successful in their superficiality than he is. This is a somewhat subliminal urge for Bateman, as he lives in a reality that does not allow identity to be displayed through individuality. Instead, people are identified through their professional success and material wealth. A perfect example of the status that success brings is the character of Paul Owen, who sets the standard as the ideal man for Bateman. Paul Owen looks exactly the same as everyone else, dates the same type of woman as everyone else and has the same job as everyone
else, but for unclear reasons he is still idolised by an envious Bateman. Paul Owen is handling "the Fischer account", and even though the reader is never informed about what it means, it clearly signifies that Owen is a slightly more successful person than the rest of the characters, if only in the eyes of Bateman. Bateman’s admiration for Owen also becomes apparent when he calls himself Paul after picking up prostitutes and bringing them back to his place.

Another example of a character that Bateman envies is his younger brother Sean Bateman whom Patrick regards as more successful then himself. Sean can get a reservation at the most exclusive restaurant in town and travels across the globe, indulging in fleeting amusement. However, Sean is not at all passionate about his life, in fact quite the opposite, he seems totally indifferent to all events happening around him. Simply put, he is the ultimate representation of the postmodern human being. Nothing impresses him, nothing seems to grab his genuine interest. Bateman despises his slacker brother, but he still wants to impress him, still wants Sean to regard him as an equal. He does this in the only way he knows, by compensating for his lack of ‘coolness’, once again, by a display of his wealth: "I place my platinum American Express card over the check. . .When our waitress comes by to pick up the check and the card, I shake my head no. Sean’s eyes finally fall on it, for a second, maybe more, and I wave the waitress back over and allow her to take it” (Ellis 230). By displaying this status symbol, he thinks that he seeks to gain some credibility in the eyes of his brother.

The importance of belonging, of constantly having to be up to date, eventually starts to consume the individual in the postmodern, superficial society that Ellis sketches. Bateman, who can be seen as a product of a society where reality has been replaced by signs, is at loss of an identity. He therefore attaches his personality to his belongings and his clothes. In *Fight Club*, another postmodern novel dealing with
materialism, the narrator exclaims that "the things you used to own, now they own you" (Palahniuk 44), and the same concept can be applied to the consumerist idea of American Psycho, but modified so that the things that are bought in to fit Bateman’s personality, are the items that actually create his personality. These items are the only indications of who he is as a person, and since they are the same items that everyone else has, he cannot be seen as a unique character, only as a carbon copy of a stereotype. Bateman as an individual is not important, in fact he has no identity. He can be whomever, because he is the guy next door, the regular normal guy that no one really ever pays attention to.

However, Bateman has problems with coping with this de-personified life and the accompanying emotional numbness. The longer the novel progresses, the more pointless his life seem to be. He searches in vain for something that he can identify himself with. He starts to torture and kill men, then women, animals and even a child, just to feel something.

**Simulations**

The lack of culture in the characters’ interpretation of ‘reality’, a society that seeks no truth or knowledge, but instead celebrates and encourages the superficial, leads to a loss of identity within Bateman. He has nothing unique by which to identify himself, which he somehow tries to compensate for by killing people.

All the characters in American Psycho worship the representation of the image, a projection of individuality and actions that no longer has a connection to the real. They worship the un-substantial like religious people who are praying to the crucifix merely worshiping the icon of Christ instead of Christ himself. Baudrillard explains the transition from a reality into signs as four phases; in the first phase the sign is a reflection of a basic reality, in the second the reality starts being perverted and
masked, in the third signs starts to mask that there is as absence of reality, and in the forth phase the sign has fully replaced reality as we know it and no longer bears any resemblance to any reality whatsoever. It has become “its own pure simulacrum” (Baudrillard 368). The simulation has become the reality, and the imaginary has become the truth. There can no longer be found a distinction between the reality and the simulated, as the person simulating is not only attempting to fool others, but also successfully fools him/herself into believing that what he/she experiences is real (Baudrillard 93).

This type of simulacrum can be found continuously throughout the novel, as the reader is constantly force fed names of designer clothes, hip food and trendy clubs. The characters are visiting the newest places, but when interrogated about experience they rarely can form an opinion of their own. Instead, they just repeating what others have said and forms their opinion based on that. An example of this type of projected imagery is displayed during a lunch gathering where Bateman asks a friend how his trip to the Bahamas was. His friend, as usual mistaking him for someone else, starts to give elaborate details about hotels, sightseeing and fine dining. ”Travelers [sic] looking for that perfect vacation this summer may do well to look south. . .There are at least five smart reasons for visiting the Caribbean. . .” (Ellis 138). The friend gives Bateman all the facts, presents an image of the perfect vacation, but the description is impersonal, almost distant, and tells nothing of the experience that his friend actually had. Instead, it resembles a text more likely to be found in a travel catalogue. What he really does is replace reality with the representation, the image, of the perfect vacation experience. He seems to be convinced that this is the experience he had, projecting a simulation that he probably also has projected upon himself throughout the trip. Nor can an external listener argue against him, since what he projects is his version of
reality, perfectly simulated in his mind and there is no distinction between what is real or hyperreal. The genuine and the feigned are equivalent.

As nothing is real, nothing can be fake. All things lose substance and relevance as there cannot be any consequences. At the same time, everything is real, just like a patient, who simulates symptoms of an illness, truly feels ill. The reader never gets to truly know if he commits the murders he claims to commit, however that is not the relevant issue of the novel. The essential argument is that Bateman projects these characteristics onto his personality. For Patrick Bateman the distinction between sign and reality is blurred, even dissolved. The murders he allegedly commits are reflected in the video tapes he rents, or can even be considered fiction, since nothing has the appearance of reality. It does not really matter whether Bateman really is a homicidal maniac or not, because he simulates, transforms himself into the character of a mass murderer. Furthermore, it does not really matter whether he actually commits any murders, since he convinces himself that he is insane and is driven by blood thirst. There is no reality that serves as a reference, no criteria that he needs to meet in order to call himself a murderer. He can be whatever, or whomever, he wants to be. Therefore, he is devastated when he is confronted with doubt from his surroundings (Ellis 388), not because he is exposed as a fraud, but because he starts so question his own simulation.

I shop, Therefore I am

Simulation is also reflected in the consumer-oriented lifestyle that Bateman and his friends engage in. It is a fragile reality that is being created, and its artificiality is emphasised by the encounters with the 'outside world' constituted by the less fortunate citizens of New York. With genuine personality replaced by simulations, shopping is the foundation of identity and creation of reality. He is a product of the
postmodern idea of the superficial and is fully convinced that what he buys actually means something, that it is more than a projected illusion of reality. Simply put, he thinks that the things he surrounds himself with define him as an individual. This is a conventional misunderstanding of consumerism according to Malpas, who argues that "the world is now, quite literally, at our fingertips as we choose and purchase lifestyles from wherever we please, eclectically piecing together patchworks of images and signs to produce our identity" (Malpas 1). However, it is not necessarily a fact that more exposure to different cultures automatically leads to a richer and more varied personality, especially when one lacks a fundamental culture with which to identify oneself.

Furthermore, Malpas claims that "contemporary culture in all it's variety rests on 'money', on 'buying power'"(2). This argument is clearly stated in American Psycho. Almost every chapter begins with an account of what people are wearing. Bateman is very fashion sensitive and can pinpoint the exact brands of the clothes that his friends are wearing. Only the best is good enough, and both he and the other characters dress only in clothes by Armani, Lacroix, Calvin Klein and brands of similar status. They dine in exclusive restaurants where the trendiest food is served, often exotic combinations of cuisines, where food is most often left untouched. Consumerism itself is the focus, and if one does not constantly keep up to date with what is 'in', one ends up helplessly behind everyone else. Capitalism and wealth enable the rich and privileged characters of the novel to do pretty much whatever they want and money is the key element in the pursue of happiness. Baudrillard comments on this disillusioned conviction that consumerism equals wellbeing: "The postmodern consumer...‘sets in place a whole array of sham objects, of characteristic signs of happiness, and then waits . . . for happiness to alight’ (177)". The alleged happiness does not, of course, occur and the postmodern consumer is once again misled by the
superficial society he/she lives in. This adds to spiral Bateman deeper into his depression. He tries to numb this feeling with psychotropic drugs, but they do not help, which causes him to indulge in more drastic measures; murders and torture.

Nevertheless, the novel also contains several examples that suggest that the world of Bateman and his friends is artificial; there are numerous homeless people who clearly do not have the financial stability to pull themselves out of poverty. This ‘other reality’ is always present in *American Psycho*, and functions as a sharp contrast to the superficial reality that Bateman lives in. Even though Batman and the others are speaking of world crisis and disasters, it is once again only an act. They acknowledge the world they live in, but can not bring themselves to actually care. His colleagues even joke about and with the homeless, pretending to put dollar bills in their styrofoam cups, thereby reducing the poor people to yet another moment of brief entertainment. They do not see the reflections of themselves as individuals in the less fortunate, for they do not think that their own reality is connected to the homeless in any way. Bateman kills a couple of homeless people in the novel, often speaking to them before he commits the murder. These attempts to interaction can be seen as attempts to penetrate this ‘other reality’, unsuccessfully: ”It’s just that. . .I don’t know. I don’t have anything in common with you” (Ellis 131). Bateman cannot grasp the concept of empathy, and therefore cannot understand the homeless.

**The Unreliable Narrator**

The celebration of capitalism as an ideal for Bateman and his friends is intimately connected with the fragmented narration in *American Psycho*. As mentioned, Lyotard argues that knowledge and power has its offspring in the modernist idea of ‘metanarratives’, and ’grand narratives’, which construct the progress of a nation or a society. However, in the postmodern society, the ideology of the ‘grand narrative’ has
transformed into the idea of profit through Capitalism. The narration no longer serves a united pursuit for freedom, but has rather become fragmented and is now a means of persuasion in order to gain power.

The narration in *American Psycho* is strikingly fragmented. The novel lacks a coherent narrative, even though it is written with Bateman as a first person narrator. The chapters merely display fragmented pieces of Bateman’s life. They just start and stop randomly. This fragmentation becomes more and more apparent as the plot progresses. Some chapters throws the reader into Bateman’s mind, and one get a frank and bold insight into exactly how close to a mental breakdown he really is. These fragmented narrations function as a contrast to and polarisation of the collected facade that Bateman usually displays. It is evident that Bateman is an unreliable narrator. As he falls deeper and deeper into the funnel of identity crisis, the narration become more and more fragmented, until it finally distances itself from Bateman all together and transgresses from a first-person narrator to a third-person narrator (Ellis 349).

The unreliability of Bateman as a narrator is also emphasised when he returns to Paul Owen’s apartment, where he has previously killed both Owen and two escorts. Instead of finding the decayed corpses of the two women, he finds a real estate agent who is selling the apartment. He becomes utterly confused and asks her ”I’m looking for. . .Doesn’t Paul Owen live here?’ A long pause before she answers. ’No. He doesn’t’” (369). Suddenly, the narration has reached a pivotal point as the reader begins to realise that it is no longer certain that any of the homicides actually happened. This questioning of the actual course of events is further emphasised when Bateman confronts Harold Carnes, the man to whom he has confessed all of his murders. Carnes, as usual, mistakes him for someone else and compliments him on the hilarious prank call he made. When Bateman stresses that he has actually committed all those murders, especially the killing of Paul Owen, Carnes becomes
more serious and tells Bateman: It is simply not possible. . .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.’” (388)

Nothing has spawned from his confession, nothing has even changed in his every day life. His horrible secret has left everyone untouched, his supposed actions have all been in vain and he is back where he started.

After this surprising revelation Bateman tries to return to his normal routine, as always commenting on peoples’ outfits (389), but without the same enthusiasm, until he faces the alternative ‘reality’ offered in the novel; the reality of the homeless, poor victims that to him have meant nothing. He is confronted in a taxi by a driver who recognises him from a wanted poster and robs him of both money and his Rolex. Reluctantly, Bateman gives him the items while questioning the taxi driver’s actions: ”’How do you know I’m not going to call you in and get your licence revoked?’ I ask. . .’Because you’re guilty’ he says. . .” (393). The claim that the driver makes is a sharp contrast to the treatment from his peers, and for a split second someone actually acknowledge that his actions have substance and sees through his projected personality. There is, the taxi driver’s comment suggests, a reality outside his own, a reality that exists beyond signs and images, which wants him to face the consequences of his actions. Typically, however, Bateman reacts in his usual manner, in the role of the homicidal maniac: ”’You are a dead man, Abdullah,’ I repeat, no joke. ’Count on it.’” (394). However, this does not seem to frighten the taxi driver, who probably has encountered threats and miseries before in his life, and therefore is not scared of the well-dressed, upper-class man threatening him. The taxi driver responds: ”’Yeah? And you’re a yuppie scumbag. Which is worse?’ (394). This
The Urge for Love

As the clash between the real and the simulated gets closer, the more fragmented does Bateman’s identity become. As every aspect of his personality is created around the signs of success and consumerism, even his bestiality seems to be a product of his idea of how a mass murderer should be. However, he is not content with his situation, and he does search for something more to his life. Something of genuine substance. Bateman cannot fit into a world where his friends makes a sport of disappointing homeless people with one dollar bills, where he is expected to care about appearance and position and the latest technology. He longs for love and for someone to see him. His horrible murders do not fully satisfy him, and he tries to numb this sensation by becoming more and more brutal. But this does not help him and he falls deeper and deeper into depression: "And later the 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" (Ellis 345).

The two characters that are being spared from his homicidal indulgence are secretary Jean and his co-worker Luis. Both of them are standing somewhat outside Bateman’s society, representing an alternate reality. Luis is the co-worker that all the others make fun of. He tries to fit in, but his attempts are always regarded as futile and ridiculous. He is trying to keep up appearances as the stereotypical yuppie, being
engaged to a stereotypical blond, big-breasted woman, but everyone still hates him and calls him a homosexual. He especially enrages Bateman, who initially intends to kill Luis, but the event quickly takes another direction when Luis mistakes his intentions and believes that Bateman is trying to make a pass at him. This leaves Bateman perplexed and he cannot bring himself to fulfil his mission. 

"...and I try to squeeze harder, my face twisted with exertion, but I can't do it, my hand won't tighten, and my arms, still stretched out, look ludicrous and useless in their fixed position (159)" Luis shows genuine affection for Bateman, something he unconsciously longs for, yet represses, and this is what saves Luis from certain death.

Jean is not like the women with which Bateman usually interacts. She has no fortune, does not wear the latest designer couture and does not have the same type of facade that for example Bateman’s fiancé Evelyn has. This realisation comes gradually as the novel progresses, and Bateman has a hard time coming to terms with his reactions to this realisation. His reality is so twisted and superficial that he has no reference of real emotions. This becomes evident at the end of their first date. As Jean kisses him, "...emanates a warmth I’m not familiar with. I am so used to imagining everything happening the way it occurs in movies, visualizing things falling somehow into the shape of events on a screen..." (265). There is something genuine to her character and she seems to represent a possible alternate path in life for Bateman, which he realises at the end of the novel, when she is proclaiming her love for him: "For the first time I see Jean as uninhibited; she seems stronger, less controllable, wanting to take me into a new and unfamiliar land—the dreaded uncertainty of a totally different world" (378). This insight makes Bateman wonder about his true feelings, yet still he is hesitant at first, thinking that even though the coldness he feels within is fading, his numbness will remain. But suddenly the question "Why not end up with her?" (378) strikes him, and he reflects upon her person. He is touched by
her ignorance of his evil character, but still does not really dare to believe that she might be genuine. He therefore questions her one last time:

She has one more test to pass.

'Do you own a briefcase?' I ask her, swallowing.

'No,' she says. 'I don’t'.

'Evelyn carries a briefcase,' I mention.

'She does . . . ?' Jean asks.

'And what about a Filofax?'

'A small one,' she admits.

'Designer?' I ask suspiciously.

'No.'

I sigh, then take her hand, small and hard, in mine (378).

Her answers show that she is not the same type of person as the women he usually interacts with. She does not try to put on a facade of success or simulate being up to date with the latest material goods. She is the real deal, a true human being, and she sees him as another human and appreciates him for who he is, not what he claims to be. With Jean there is a hint of another lifestyle, one without signs or simulation. With Jean, there could be hope, even for him.

**Conclusion**

The society that Ellis sketches is a society that has transgressed completely from reality into Baudrillard’s ‘hyperreality’, a ‘hyperreality’ where "Indifference is the salient feature” (Zima 133). The characters, their material goods and their lifestyle make up an artificial existence, displayed through signs that the characters cling to in order to continue to be ignorant of the fact that nothing about their existence is real.
Everyone is trying to display themselves as perfectly successful and wealthy to the extent that everyone becomes the same person. Individuality and personality have been dissolved to the point where everybody is exchangeable.

Ellis lets this de-personified reality consume Patrick Bateman, who is trying to fit in, wants to belong in this representation of reality, but still wants to be the most perfect version of it, someone that the other characters can refer to as the ultimate concept, the most apt representation of a stereotype. However, he does not succeed and this causes him to fall deeper and deeper into depression and desperation. He starts to lose control both over what he consider to be reality and his place in it, resorting to on more and more extreme means to try to control it. When he finally comes to term with the fact that his world is a mere fabrication of reality, it is too late for him to change, too late for him to find substance elsewhere:

My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone...and coming face-to-face with these truths, there is no catharsis. I gain no deeper knowledge of myself. . .There has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession meant nothing. . .”(Ellis 377)

*American Psycho* is a sharp critique aimed at the postmodern society and its loss of values, especially a critique of the American consumer lifestyle. The title can at first glance be interpreted as a description of Patrick Bateman as a character, an isolated individual in an otherwise civilised society. However, after reading the novel, and bearing in mind the collapse of the individual, one can argue that Ellis intends the title to describe the ruining of the American society itself, a society that has become so perverted that it is forever distanced from reality and without ability to escape its destiny. The collective simulation has gone too far and there is no turning back. All that is left is an empty stage where humanity has been erased in favour for signs that
displays nothing but illusions of success and wealth. We are forever lost and without a change in the collective mentality there is no escape. As the novel concludes: "This is not an exit. (399)"
Works cited


