

Exam course 5: American Psycho

NB: Remember the gender focus at the bottom of the document

Problem statement: How does Ellis portray masculinity through Patrick Bateman?

An analysis of Bret Easton Ellis' novel "American Psycho" (1991) primarily dealing with the issues of masculinity and American yuppie culture.

The analysis will contain a characterization of Patrick Bateman and discuss how narration plays a central role in his character. The analysis will furthermore touch upon the 1980's male dominated yuppie culture, by examining the chapter, "Another night", with an analytical focus on language.

Our way of analysing the novel: Feminist criticism

- How are men and women portrayed in the text
- Are there stereotypical portrayals of gender in the text? If yes, what function do they serve?
- Is the author — whether male or female — able to portray the female experience?

This type of reading takes its point of departure in the assumption that most cultures are patriarchal – women and the female experience are secondary to men and the male experience. Thus, feminist criticism (re) reads literature from a female perspective.

Resume

NB: Some argue that American Psycho is essentially a collection of short stories, as there is no storyline as such. American Psycho does not have a plot, but gives a unique insight into a 1980's yuppie and his troubled mind.

American Psycho begins with a quote from Dante's *Inferno*: "Abandon all hope ye who enter here" is graffitied across the side of a bank in blood-red paint. It is the late 1980s in New York city. The reader is introduced to the novel's narrator, Patrick Bateman, a 27-year-old Wall Street investment banker. Bateman, who relays the action of the novel, as well as his innermost thoughts, opinions of others, and musings on popular culture, is with his friend, **Timothy Price**, on their way to have dinner at the home of Bateman's girlfriend, **Evelyn Richards**. Evelyn's best friend, Courtney Lawrence, with whom Bateman is having an affair, will also be in attendance, along with two friends of Evelyn, **Stash** and **Vanden**, strange, artistic types who graduated from Camden.

From this first dinner, Bateman goes on to relay the stream-of-consciousness musings and events of his highly-regimented life. He describes his morning routine, which consists of a

fitness regimen, skin-care regimen, and a carefully planned breakfast. He watches “**The Patty Winters Show**” (a daytime talk show) religiously, often calling his friends to ridicule the guests for their strange habits, fears, or perversions, and is always renting and returning VHS tapes of his favorite films. Bateman and his circle of Wall Street friends – which often includes Price, **Craig McDermott**, and **David Van Patten** – dine at only the chicest and most expensive restaurants, wear only the finest designer clothes, and pay attention to only the most physically attractive women (those they deem “Hardbodies”).

What may appear at first to be the perfect life for a wealthy man immersed in the capitalist, materialistic society of 1980s Wall Street, however, has a dark underbelly. Not only is Bateman unhappy in his relationship with Evelyn, he has a sex obsession and occupies most of his evenings with lovers, porn, and prostitutes. He and his friends are also heavy drinkers and drug users; cocaine is the drug of choice for the men, while Courtney and the novel’s other women tend more towards anti-depressants and other pills. Despite spending lots of time together, Bateman and his crowd have little-to-no real connection with one another. They focus solely on the clothes they wear, the places they are seen, and who they are with. They despise and mock anyone who does not have their wealth or taste, especially the homeless, who they often ridicule and taunt. In his world of extreme capitalism and consumption, where people are simply other objects to be valued or discarded, Bateman and his vices are isolated inside his own mind.

To top it all off, Patrick Bateman is revealed as a sociopathic serial killer. Early in the novel, Bateman fantasizes about committing violent acts. When he is out to dinner with Evelyn or at a nightclub with his friends, for example, he will describe the painful things he would like to do to others; he also references murders he has committed in the past, though it is initially unclear whether or not these events truly transpired. As the novel continues, however, Bateman’s violent thoughts are accompanied by violent actions, as he describes in detail acts of rape, torture, and murder.

Patrick Bateman kills people who he believes are devoid of value. One of the first attacks the reader experiences through Bateman’s narration is the murder of a homeless man named **Al** and his dog. Bateman spots him sitting on the sidewalk and stops to taunt him, calling him worthless and disgusting and asking why he doesn’t simply “get a job.” Al begins to cry, and then Bateman suddenly stabs him in the eye. After slicing and gouging out one eye, Bateman goes after the next. Al’s dog begins to bark, and Bateman stamps on his legs, breaking them. He

tosses a quarter at the man and walks away. (Later in the novel, he will see Al again and stab him to death on the street.)

Bateman also describes to the reader the torture and murder of a number of women. He hires call girls to come to his apartment (or occasionally takes a woman home after a date), gets them drunk or high, and has sex with them. The sex, which he describes graphically, is often coercive and very rough and leads into Bateman raping the women, tying them up, and slowly torturing them to their deaths.

The most prominent murder committed by Bateman in the novel is that of **Paul Owen**, a fellow Wall Street investment banker who Bateman despises. Owen is the manager of the mysterious “Fisher account,” a bank account Bateman is obsessed with and always asking after. On top of that, Owen is constantly confusing Bateman for another banker named **Marcus Halberstam**. One night, Bateman (or, rather, Halberstam) takes Owen out to dinner. He gets him incredibly drunk, has him pay the check, and the two go back to Owen’s apartment. There, Bateman murders Owen with an axe. He cleans up the scene, packs a suitcase of Owen’s things, and books a one-way ticket to London to throw off any suspicions surrounding Owen’s disappearance. Bateman disposes of Owen’s body, but will later use his apartment for other murders and leave a number of dead bodies behind.

One day, while at work, Bateman’s doting secretary **Jean** (or, as he calls her, “my secretary who is in love with me”) tells him that a detective has come to see him. The detective, **Donald Kimball**, tells Bateman that he has been hired by Paul Owen’s girlfriend to investigate his disappearance. He wants to ask Bateman for some general information about Owen and details of Bateman’s whereabouts on the night of the disappearance. Bateman tells Kimball that Owen was “part of that whole Yale thing” and “ate a balanced diet” and that he had a (fictional) date with a woman named Veronica on the evening in question. When Bateman asks Kimball if Paul Owen has been seen by anyone in London, he replies that, yes, two people have mentioned possibly spotting him on the other side of the pond. Somewhat relieved, Bateman ends their conversation.

Meanwhile, Bateman is growing more and more erratic in his behavior and sadistic and reckless in his crimes. His drug use increases heavily, as he begins adding to his cocaine habit an addiction to a number of different pills, leading to frequent hallucinations. On one day, he describes to the reader a reaction to pills that leaves him sick and stumbling through the streets

of New York, before ending up in a diner where he is so high he isn't even able to place an order. His torture and murder of young women also escalates. The killings become much more drawn out, and often include Bateman performing sex acts on his victims' dying or dead bodies. In one particularly gruesome moment, he disintegrates a woman's vagina with acid until he is able to stuff it with cheese and then insert into it the end of a cage—where he has been keeping a rat which he found in his toilet. He describes to the reader the rat eating away at the woman's flesh and crawling around inside her body, only to be revealed later when Bateman cuts off the woman's head. He also descends into cannibalism, at one point taking the reader through the meticulous preparation and consumption of a woman's flesh. Bateman also stops reserving his killing for people who may not be missed; he murders his ex-girlfriend **Bethany** after getting her drunk at lunch and even stabs a young child to death in a public park.

One night, as he is walking through New York, Bateman sees a man playing saxophone on the street corner. Bateman quickly pulls out a gun and shoots the man to death, not noticing that he is within sight of a police car. This begins a police chase throughout Manhattan during which Bateman kills several other people, including a taxi driver whose car he hijacks. The chase ends with Bateman hiding in his new office, as SWAT teams and helicopters surround the building. Hysterical, Bateman makes a phone call to his lawyer, **Harold Carnes**, and confesses all of his crimes, including the murder of the missing Paul Owen. Bateman begins to hallucinate, staying in the office until the sun starts to rise, and then breaks from the action to detail to the reader the entire career of the band Huey Lewis and the News.

Days later, Bateman (somehow still free and living his normal life) returns to Paul Owen's apartment, preparing to be greeted with the smell of rotting corpses. Instead, he finds the apartment open and miraculously clean; a realtor is showing the apartment to potential buyers. She asks Bateman if he "saw the add in The Times." Bateman looks around in disbelief, and quickly leaves.

Several weeks later, at the opening of a new club, Bateman spots his lawyer across the room. He decides to go over and confront him about the voicemails he left the night of the police chase. Carnes, his lawyer, is amused, mistaking Bateman for someone else and teasing that the "joke" was unbelievable because Bateman is "such a bloody ass-kisser" that he would never be able to commit the acts described in the voicemail. What's more, Carnes tells him, Bateman couldn't have killed Paul Owen because he dined with Owen twice just the week before.

The novel ends much like it began: with Bateman out for drinks with his friend, discussing clothing, their work, and other vacuous topics. The reader is left to wonder how Bateman's scattered life of drugs, sex, and violence will continue, as his eye is caught by a sign hung on the wall of the bar. The sign reads: "**This is not an exit.**"

Patrick Bateman (analysed with reference to 'Killing Child At Zoo', p. 285)

NB: As Patrick Bateman's character does not change throughout the book, one can freely choose which chapter to work with, when trying to gain a deeper understanding of him (of course some chapters have are analytically more important than others..)

Outer characterisation

Patrick's description of his physical appearance focuses on his **expensive clothes**, suggesting that he is financially well-off: "I'm wearing faded jeans, an Armani jacket, and a white, hundred-and-forty-dollar Comme des Garçons T-shirt." (p. 178, ll. 6-7)

Patrick also compares his eyes to the snowy owl's: "eyes that look just like mine, especially when it widens them." (p. 179, ll. 21-22). This might suggest that his pupils are dilated, which could indicate that he feels anxious, stressed, or excited.

Patrick seems to be obsessed with his **appearance**, with leading an **expensive lifestyle** (p. 178, ll. 5-6), and with **work** (p. 178, ll. 7-8). These details, along with the fact that the story is set in the late 1980s or early 1990s, suggest that Patrick belongs to the **Yuppie** generation.

Inner characterisation

From the beginning, Patrick gives us insight into his state of mind, which suggests that he is troubled: "I feel aimless, things look cloudy, my homicidal compulsion, which surfaces, disappears, surfaces, leaves again, lies barely dormant..." (p. 178, ll. 2-4). This portrays him as **self-centered** and aware of his emotions. His focus on the homicidal compulsion he mentions suggests that he has had this feeling for some time. While he is able to identify his emotions, Patrick seems **detached** from them. He is also able to fake emotion, which helps him **manipulate** others (p. 180, ll. 27-28).

Patrick's thoughts on the people he notices and interacts with portray him as **judgmental and lacking empathy**. He does not hesitate to offend the custodian at the zoo, using a racial slur and confronting him with a knife (p. 179, ll. 5-7). He also uses a negative word to describe two other men: "Two drunks, faggots, console each other on a bench." (p. 179, l. 8). This points to his racist and homophobic views.

The sight of a woman feeding her baby disturbs Patrick: “Nearby a mother breast-feeds her baby, which awakens something awful in me.” (p. 179, l.9). It is unclear why Patrick feels this way, but him throwing a handful of coins in the seals’ tank because he is bothered that other people enjoy watching the seals (p. 179, l. 21) suggests that he cannot stand seeing people have positive experiences or feeling positive emotions. This is probably because **he cannot experience positive emotions himself**.

The way Patrick stabs the boy and then appears to try to flirt with a tourist shows his **lack of remorse** and how **detached** he is from the meaning of his actions. Moreover, Patrick pretends to be a doctor and approaches the dying boy and his mother, his thoughts suggesting that he wants to watch the boy's death up close, while also ensuring that no one actually tries to help him: “if someone makes a phone call or if a real doctor is at hand, there’s a good chance the child can be saved.” (p. 180, ll. 33-35).

Patrick soon becomes **disappointed** as he thinks that the boy’s death will not have a significant impact: “This thing before me, small and twisted and bloody, has no real history, no worthwhile past; nothing is really lost.” (p. 180, ll. 43-44). This suggests that Patrick not only gets satisfaction from killing, but also from the thought that his victim’s death will cause pain to others. However, his belief that the death of a child will not affect people shows his **complete lack of understanding about human nature and grief**.

After the murder, Patrick feels “empty, hardly here at all” (p. 181, l. 16), suggesting that the **murder did not satisfy him**. He is careless – as he commits the murder in a public place and does not seem to fear being caught (p. 181, ll. 16-18) – but still careful enough not to completely expose himself. On the other hand, he mentions that the tension he felt had “recurred after the boy was dragged out of the penguin habitat and I walked away, my hands soaked with blood, uncaught.” (p. 181, ll. 25-26), which could point to the fact that Patrick actually wants to be caught but cannot let himself be caught.

Overall, Patrick is a deeply disturbed and **antisocial individual** who is self-absorbed, completely unable to relate to others, and capable of murder without any restraint or remorse. Killing the boy does not give Patrick true satisfaction, which makes his actions even more tragic and meaningless. However, he is unconcerned with this aspect and only seems to feel some relief as he imagines “a hole, widening in the sun” (p. 181, l. 23), which seems to be a symbol for his own inner emptiness.

Narrator and point of view (analysed with reference to 'Killing Child At Zoo', p. 285)

American Psycho is, besides in the chapter: 'Chase, Manhattan', narrated from a first-person point of view by the main character, Patrick Bateman. As Bateman is deeply troubled mentally, and often claims to have experienced events that are extremely unlikely, he can be referred to as an **unreliable narrator**.

The narrative style highlights Bateman's extreme obsession with himself and his emotions: "I feel empty, hardly here at all, but even the arrival of the police seems an insufficient reason to move and I stand with the crowd outside the penguin habitat." (p. 181, ll. 16-18).

Although he is able to identify his emotions – "my sudden lack of care crests in a massive wave of fury" (p. 180, l. 3) – the narrator describes them in a detached way, as if he is an outside observer. Also, the narrator's disconnection from his violent actions is frequently suggested through his emotionless descriptions of his extreme actions: "Though I'd like to watch this child die, I push him down behind the garbage can, then casually mingle in with the rest of the crowd." (p. 180, ll. 7-9)

As the narrator **does not have access to the minds of the other characters**, their thoughts and feelings are only presented through his interpretation: "When the mother finally notices him she doesn't scream because she can see only his feet and assumes that he's playfully hiding from her. At first she seems relieved that she's spotted him." (p. 180, ll. 15-17). The narrator is also **subjective** when describing the environment. For him, the zoo seems like a desolate place, which lacks any beauty or meaning, suggesting his inner conflict: "Toucans have beaks as sharp as knives. The seals stupidly dive off rocks into swirling black water, barking mindlessly." (p. 179, ll. 12-14).

The narrator is generally **explicit** about the action and about his feelings and thoughts. The narrator seems to be aware of his **troubled state of mind** as he is explicit about having homicidal thoughts (p. 178, ll. 2-3) – which he eventually carries out. He also describes the murder of the child and the mother's reaction in a detailed, precise manner, which suggests his emotional detachment and lack of empathy. However, he is **implicit** about the fact that he still feels an uncontrollable urge to kill, and that he will kill again, hinting at these facts through the tension that he mentions:

I imagine a hole, widening in the sun, and for some reason this breaks the tension I started feeling when I first noticed the snowy owl's eyes and then when it recurred after the boy was dragged out of the penguin habitat and I walked away, my hands soaked with blood, uncaught.
(p. 181, ll. 22-26)

Some of the narrator's thoughts, especially in the first paragraph, seem to be presented like a **stream of consciousness (just like Salman Rushdie's, *Midnight's Children*)**, which each sentence apparently unconnected to the previous one. This also helps to reflect the narrator's troubled state of mind.

Language (analysed with reference to 'Killing Child At Zoo', p. 285)

Style of writing

The language used in "Killing Child at Zoo" by Bret Easton Ellis is mainly **formal** in the narration, with complex words and expressive descriptions that indicate that Patrick is well-educated: "Unable to maintain a credible public persona, I find myself roaming the zoo in Central Park, restlessly." (p. 178, ll. 12-13). The formal style also conveys Patrick's detachment from his own emotions and actions, as it makes him seem like an outside observer: "my sudden lack of care crests in a massive wave of fury and I pull the knife out of my pocket and I stab him quickly, in the neck." (p. 180, ll. 3-4). The narrator sometimes adopts **an informal style**, suggested by contractions and derogatory slang such as "nigger" (p. 179, l. 5) and "faggots" (p. 179, l. 8). These words express the narrator's prejudice and lack of empathy.

The story is written in the **present tense**, even though the text sometimes suggests that Patrick could be describing the events sometime after they happened: "there's this weird kind of tension, a bizarre pressure, that fuels the following, which starts, happens, ends, very quickly." (p. 179, ll. 24-26). The use of the present tense could suggest that Patrick is presenting the events vividly not because the murder had an impact on him but because his state of extreme tension was not resolved by him killing the child.

Choice of words

The author uses many **adjectives and adverbs** to describe his surroundings. These words generally have **negative meanings**, conveying Patrick's twisted view of the world and his mental distress:

The zoo seems empty, devoid of life. The polar bears look stained and drugged. A crocodile floats morosely in an oily makeshift pond. The puffins stare sadly from their glass cage. Toucans have beaks as sharp as knives. The seals stupidly dive off rocks into swirling black water, barking mindlessly. (p. 179, ll. 10-14)

In another example, adjectives and adverbs underline Patrick's contempt for the child's mother: "the mother – homely, Jewish-looking, overweight, pitifully trying to appear stylish in designer jeans and an unsightly leaf patterned black wool sweater - shrieks *do something, do something, do something*" (p. 179, ll. 36-39). The use of these words highlights Patrick's lack of empathy, as he notices these details and judges the mother for her appearance while she is in a state of despair over her child dying. They also hint at Patrick's exaggerated preoccupation with physical appearance.

Similes and metaphor

Similes are used to convey Patrick's state of mind. His comparison of the toucans' beaks with weapons – "beaks as sharp as knives" (p. 179, ll. 12-13) – hint at his "homicidal compulsion" (p. 178, l. 2) which he mentions at the beginning. Patrick himself carries a knife – which he uses to threaten the black custodian and, later, to kill the boy – suggesting his readiness to kill when the occasion arises.

After he stabs the boy, Patrick thinks that he is "gurgling like an infant" (p. 180, l. 5). The simile creates an unsettling image, as the boy is actually in pain and probably gasping for air. Patrick does not seem to have a different emotional and mental response to a dying child than to a baby making a satisfied sound, which further highlights his inability to empathize and feel remorse.

He later compares the boy to an object - "This thing before me, small and twisted and bloody" (p. 181, l. 43). This dehumanizing attitude shows how little value Patrick places on a human life. His attitude is also highlighted later on, when he calls the child's death "meaningless" and "puny" (p. 181, l. 5). This is made even more disturbing by the fact that his victim is an innocent child.

Symbols

Patrick's expensive clothing (p. 178, ll. 6-7) is a symbol of his wealth but also of his preoccupation with his physical appearance and with appearing wealthy. Considering that, in

reality, he is a killer who lacks basic human empathy and is unable to feel guilt and remorse, the clothes he wears are also symbolic of him trying to fit into society and look respectable, which helps him hide his true identity. As the story is set in 1980s or 1990s America, Patrick's clothes are also a symbol of him being part of the Yuppie generation.

Patrick **going to the zoo** seems to be a symbol of him being tormented by his urge to kill and, perhaps, of his fear of acting out on his urge to kill. Although he seems unaware of this, he is likely unconsciously attracted to the zoo both because he feels closer to the animals (as both the animals and Patrick are driven by instinct), and because he feels he can no longer fit into society: "Unable to maintain a credible public persona, I find myself roaming the zoo." (p. 178 ll. 12-13)

The zoo then becomes a symbol for Patrick's mood, as he seems to project his negative feelings and his urge to kill on the atmosphere at the zoo and on the animals: "The zoo seems empty, devoid of life. The polar bears look stained and drugged. (...) Toucans have beaks as sharp as knives." (p. 179, ll. 10-13).

While Patrick is generally critical of what he sees at the zoo, an animal in particular – **the snowy owl** – has a deep effect on him: "(...) something unspoken passes between me and the bird – there's this weird kind of tension, a bizarre pressure, that fuels the following, which starts, happens, ends, very quickly." (p. 179, ll. 23-26). Looking into the owl's eyes seems to push Patrick to kill the boy, suggesting that the owl or its eyes become a symbol for instinct – in Patrick's case, this refers to his instinct to kill. The fact that he takes his cue from an animal also demonstrates Patrick's lack of connection with reality and human logic.

At the end, Patrick is dissatisfied with the murder, because he believes the child's death will not have an important impact. He begins to feel tension again, which lessens only as he imagines "a hole, widening in the sun" (p. 181, l. 23). **The hole** seems to be a symbol for Patrick's own inner feeling of emptiness and dissatisfaction.

A more subtle symbol could be **the tourist** whom Patrick notices taking photographs of the child dying (p. 181, l. 11). The tourist's gesture is inappropriate and can suggest a lack of empathy and disconnection from the tragedy that is taking place. Therefore, the tourist could be symbolic of the author's view on society as dehumanizing and lacking emotions.

Gender theory: How American Psycho advocates the feminist cause

American Psycho works as an example of the instability and insufficiency of strictly masculine language systems, standing in resounding support for Hélène Cixous's critique of masculine writing. As previously discussed, Ellis writes American Psycho in extreme terms of violence, pornography, economics, and the media, all of which are traditionally masculine arenas. As she wrote in her essay, The Laugh of the Medusa,

I mean it when I speak of male writing. I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as marked writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural - hence political, typically masculine - economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction.

What is interesting to note about American Psycho is that Ellis directly asserts the very “libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy” engine behind the masculine language systems present in the novel by taking them to the far extreme. He does not deny that this language oppresses and excludes women and most certainly does not hide or adorn it “with the mystifying charms of fiction” that Cixous warns against. Although he does not directly create a space for the type of feminine writing that Cixous calls for in her essay, **Ellis utilizes his position in power as a male writer to acknowledge, satirize, and undermine the very masculine language present in American Psycho. While it may not be a straightforward or conventional feminist gesture, regardless, Ellis' deliberately extreme masculine language exposes its inadequacy and calls to question the very assumptions that it makes about humanity and the sexes.**

Gender theory: American Psycho as a critique of the patriarchal society

Ellis goes beyond just critiquing masculine language systems and goes so far as to challenge the very patriarchal society that American Psycho both portrays and is itself a part of.

Bateman is the poster child for a patriarchal value system, and consequently, is terrified of “the other”— be it women, homosexuals, non-whites, or any other opposition to his own strictly

defined identity. Not surprisingly, each of his victims poses some sort of threat to his identity as a wealthy, heterosexual, white male. Even though with this identity he is supposedly the greatest beneficiary and person with the most control over society, as Ellis shows over the course of the novel, in reality, Bateman is hopelessly trapped within the rigid confines of the inherently oppressive patriarchal power structure and thus must constantly defend his place in the order. "To Bateman, the rise of the marginalized" groups in society, such as women and ethnic minorities, "threatens his central position as hegemonic male; to protect that position, he lashes out, attempting to eliminate the threat" (Storey 63-4).

Though Ellis never makes a direct critique about the problematic nature of such a patriarchal value system, such is the nature of his satirical style, and Bateman's spiral towards insanity and sheer helplessness at the novel's climax stand as indirect yet pointed testaments to its instability. Just as the infamous final scene of the book concludes with Bateman reading a sign above a door reading "THIS IS NOT AN EXIT," there is no redemption for Bateman and no way out of the strict patriarchal system he himself embodies (Ellis 399).

The novel, then, distinctly operates as a feminist social commentary: in its satire, with its gross exaggerations of masculinity, it works to expose the limitations of a hegemonic system based exclusively on and privileging patriarchal values.

A quick note on the author, Brett Easton Ellis

In 1991, Ellis published his most infamous novel, "American Psycho." The book follows the life of Patrick Bateman, a wealthy investment banker who leads a double life as a sadistic serial killer. "American Psycho" is known for its explicit violence and graphic descriptions, which caused significant controversy upon its release. The novel explores themes of consumerism, narcissism, and the dark underbelly of American society.

Parallels between Ellis' life and "American Psycho" can be seen in the depiction of Patrick Bateman's world of excess and materialism. Like the character Bateman, Ellis himself was part of the privileged upper class and had firsthand exposure to the excesses and vices prevalent in that social circle. The novel's detailed descriptions of designer clothing, expensive restaurants, and luxury brands reflect Ellis' own experiences and observations within those circles.

Moreover, the portrayal of Bateman's disconnected and nihilistic outlook on life also resonates with Ellis' own worldview. Both Ellis and Bateman display a sense of detachment and alienation from the world around them, characterized by a lack of empathy and a fixation on

superficial appearances. The characters in Ellis' novels often navigate a morally ambiguous landscape, where the boundaries between right and wrong become blurred.

It is important to note that while there are similarities between Ellis' life and the themes in "American Psycho," the novel is a work of fiction. Ellis has stated that the character of Patrick Bateman was an exaggeration and a satirical critique of the excesses of the 1980s Wall Street culture. Nevertheless, the parallels between Ellis' own experiences and the world depicted in his novel contribute to its unsettling and provocative nature.

Since "American Psycho," Ellis has continued to write novels, including "The Rules of Attraction" and "Glamorama," among others. While his later works have not garnered the same level of controversy as "American Psycho," they continue to explore themes of alienation, decadence, and the dark side of American culture.

Judith Butler and Erwin Goffman's theories on gender

Judith Butler and Erving Goffman are two prominent theorists who have made significant contributions to the understanding of gender and its social construction. While their perspectives differ in some aspects, both theories emphasize the performative nature of gender and the role of societal norms and expectations in shaping individual identities.

Judith Butler, a philosopher and gender theorist, is best known for her concept of gender performativity, which she introduced in her influential book "Gender Trouble" published in 1990. Butler argues that gender is not an inherent or fixed attribute but rather a social and cultural construct that is performed and reproduced through repeated actions and behaviors. According to Butler, gender is not something one is but something one does.

Butler challenges the binary understanding of gender by asserting that it is a complex and fluid spectrum rather than a strict division between male and female. She suggests that gender identities are not determined by biology but are produced through a continuous performance of norms and expectations assigned to specific genders. In other words, individuals are not born with a predetermined gender but rather acquire and internalize gender through socialization and cultural processes.

Furthermore, Butler critiques the idea of a stable and authentic gender identity, arguing that gender is a constant process of negotiation and contestation. She highlights the performative

nature of gender by stating that individuals "perform" their gender roles based on societal expectations, and this performance reinforces the illusion of fixed gender identities.

Erving Goffman, a sociologist, also explores the performative aspects of gender in his work, particularly in his book "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" published in 1956. Goffman introduces the concept of "dramaturgy," which likens social interactions to a theatrical performance (frontstage & backstage, the performed self). He suggests that individuals present themselves to others in a manner similar to actors performing on a stage, and they carefully manage their behaviours, appearances, and expressions to shape the impressions they want to convey.

In terms of gender, Goffman argues that individuals engage in "impression management" to conform to societal expectations associated with masculinity and femininity. He emphasizes the importance of gender presentation and how individuals use various techniques such as clothing, mannerisms, and speech patterns to project their desired gender identities to others.

Goffman also highlights the concept of "gender displays" in which individuals engage in specific behaviors and performances to signal their gender identities and adhere to social norms. For example, men might engage in dominant and assertive behaviors associated with masculinity, while women might adopt more nurturing and submissive behaviors associated with femininity. Goffman's theory emphasizes that gender is not simply an individual trait but a collective performance influenced by social interactions and expectations.

While both Butler and Goffman focus on the performative aspects of gender, Butler's work emphasizes the deconstruction of gender categories and challenges the notion of fixed identities, while Goffman's work examines how individuals manage and present their gender within existing societal norms. Together, their theories contribute to the understanding that gender is not an innate characteristic but a complex social construction shaped by cultural, historical, and interpersonal dynamics.