

An American Tragedy

Or

Serial Killers R-Us

Senior Thesis

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In his New York Times review of December 16th, 1990, “Snuff This Book,’ Roger Rosenblatt ridicules the fact that Bret Easton Ellis’s novel American Psycho could be “shockingly critical of the amorality of modern urban life”ⁱ (Rosenblatt, Roger. “Snuff This Book.” New York Times 16 Dec. 1990). Bret Easton Ellis’s novel of 1991 American Psycho, however, is indeed a critique of the selfish amorality of modern urban life and the decadence of the 1980’s by portraying its serial-killing protagonist, Patrick Bateman, as the fictional representative of his time and society to show what Reaganomics and multinational capitalism have done to the America of the poor, the workers, women, and minorities in the name of free enterprise. The novel implies that Bateman’s society is as disordered as he is by presenting his schizophrenia as culturally transmitted and his violence as a response to the empty promise of consumer fulfillment in America. American Psycho is a tragedy because Patrick Bateman allegorizes that excessive consuming is circular and does not fill any inner voids, that there is no regeneration through violence, and that love – in an extremely materialistic world- cannot be turned to anymore to fill the void.

American Psycho begins with a quote from Dante’s Inferno: “Abandon all hope ye who enter here,”ⁱⁱ implying that the New York of the 1980’s was a kind of circular hell. The novel plunges its protagonist into disproportionate Dantesque surroundings of torture and suffering, which only his Gold American Express card can afford, but it tells its tale from the point of view of one of the damned souls, namely the Wall-Street banker Patrick Bateman. It is important to point out that the novel does not place Bateman on the

fringes of society as most serial-killer fiction does ⁱⁱⁱ, but in a leading member-position, thereby destroying any chances of blaming his deeds on the individual's disorder or outsider-status alone. American Psycho turns the tables by pinning the blame on the media and materialism-obsessed society of late capitalism itself by portraying Patrick Bateman as the literary spirit of his time. He is the poster-child of all that is desirable: he is white, male, American, handsome and very rich, and he allegorically commits all the crimes that Reaganomics committed: his co-worker Tim Price, who likely is a manifestation of Patrick's own split personality, voices the credo of all yuppies in the beginning of the novel: "I'm resourceful..I'm creative, I'm young, unscrupulous, highly motivated, highly skilled. In essence what I'm saying is that society *cannot* afford to lose me. I'm an *asset*" (3). The implication throughout American Psycho is, however, that Price, Bateman and company are more so what the first syllable of the word 'asset' depicts than what its more general meaning of 'quality' refers to. The latter word-play at the beginning of the novel sets the stage for the unreliable fantasist-narrator Patrick Bateman and immediately warns that neither do words have clear meanings anymore, nor are there any longer clear theories that provide universal explanations in the world of American Psycho. Instead, the novel's self-narrated tale, which brims with exhausting catalogues of consumer product descriptions, pornography and torture, directly refers to an entire social layer's schizophrenia, alienation and commodity fetishism that solely employs Patrick Bateman as its allegorical apotheosis.

The hallmark of Reaganomics was that businesses would prosper if left alone to make decisions with minimal government interference, taxes or regulation. If

corporations did well, working people would eventually reap financial benefits, a process that became known as "the trickle-down theory." Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor under Bill Clinton, describes Reaganomics as a failure: "[] trickle down economics didn't work very well. Very little trickled down to the poor. The gap between the rich and the poor began to widen during the Reagan administration and has continued to widen since then. We also saw that deregulation did not always work. We had a savings and loan crisis partly because of the deregulated financial markets" ^{iv}(Lehrer). American Psycho portrays the life in pursuit of things that Reaganomics glorified as the root of evil. The novel demonstrates the inherent danger of grand narratives such as market fundamentalism through the violence of its protagonist. Jean-Francois Lyotard warned of theories that offer universal explanations (which he called grand narratives), because they feed off the authority their absolute truths give them. Lyotard viewed grand-narratives such as unregulated capitalism (market fundamentalism), which American Psycho comes very close to, as all-embracing explanations that seemingly allow everyone to benefit, but in reality only benefit the people who promote them. Market fundamentalism appears to serve the whole population based on the wealth and product variety it promises everyone, but it actually only fits the schemes of corporate America in that it circulates artificial needs and fills them with equally artificial products. Lyotard argues that these grand narratives create authoritarianism and are destructive toward the creativity of the individual in The Postmodern Condition because they violently dictate what a person 'ought to' want or need, not what they really do want or need. Bateman allegorizes the inherent barbarism in the power dynamic of an almost-unregulated market within late

capitalism because his violence is a reaction against something he cannot see from his vantage point being that he exists in the middle of it: unfulfilled consumer promise.

Bateman's rage is largely caused by his lack of understanding of his own situation: he feeds into the circular logic of corporations and consistently buys products expecting them to fulfill his inner void as promised by commercials and magazine-ads, but they don't. From his perspective, he can neither understand what is missing nor find any meaning in the corrupt society he himself helped perpetuate: "Desire—meaningless. Intellect is not a cure. Justice is dead. Fear, recrimination, innocence, sympathy, guilt, waste, failure, grief, were things, emotions, that no one really felt anymore. Reflection is useless, the world is senseless. Evil is its only permanence. God is not alive. Love cannot be trusted. Surface surface surface was all that anyone found meaning in" (375).

Bateman's Nietzschean notion that "God is dead"^v demonstrates that he has come to embrace the wrong universal truths, such as selfish market fundamentalism over altruistic connections of love with other people or a God. With evil as his only meaningful connection, Bateman turns to killing people. US Senator Barbara Boxer's statement on the failure of Reaganomics gets to the heart of what American Psycho actualizes through its protagonist, namely that Reaganomics "doesn't work, it has never worked," ... "It's killing us"^{vi} (Katzanek).

American Psycho exposes one of the hallmarks of the Reagan-era, American exceptionalism – the notion that America is unique not only internationally, but also on a domestic level because each generation will forever move upwards concerning earnings and consumption- as a myth. The belief in the latter, the novel reveals, is a cause of class

warfare through its exclusion and labeling as threat of everyone who is not part of the patriarchic system founded on white economic supremacy at the expense of others. As an example, Bateman – as the spirit of his social layer – oppresses minorities; he doesn't recognize his own doorman, only the fact that he is "Hispanic," which leads Bateman to immediately conclude based on race, class, and stereotype-prejudice that the doorman is on the phone with "his dealer or some crack addict" (70). He condescends on the lady at the Chinese dry-cleaners because she doesn't speak any English. He calls her talking 'jabbering,' 'yipping,' 'blabbering,' and he makes fun of her accent: "Are you trying to say bleach-ee' or 'stupid bitch-ee" (82-83). Her speech doesn't have any notation, but Bateman's speech is diligently drawn-out and his gestures are even given stage directions. The injustice of how 'the other' is represented is a sign that Bateman simply has no way of relating to anybody outside of his system and class, and neither can he relate to their speech. American Psycho goes a step further when it ridicules Bateman as typically Western-cultured American who cannot tell a Chinese person from a Japanese. To allegorize the fear of the Japanese Reaganomics had, Patrick kills an Asian delivery boy, thinking he has killed a Japanese, who turns out to be Chinese: Patrick calls this "an irritating setback –accidentally killing the wrong type of Asian" (181).

If American Psycho is considered from the Barthesian theory developed in Mythologies as creating a discourse that was influenced by its author's social and historical context which influences the writing with unintended meanings^{vii} – Ellis wrote the novel in the late 1980's in New York City – the aspect of the novel being made up of a constant flow of monotone ad-speak and sound bytes takes on a new level of power in

respect to how identities and narratives are impacted and constructed through media imposition, a symptom Fredric Jameson describes as a lack of real history and truth outside of culture. In Barthes's sense, American Psycho not only represents a story from its time and culture, it *is* its time and culture: texts are "a tissue of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture" (Barthes). The novel exposes – even though it satirizes it - the victory of capitalist thinking over all other forms of thought, which Jameson calls "the cultural logic of late capitalism" (Jameson – title^{viii}). As Barthes pointed out in Mythologies when he asked: "By providing children with "artificial" materials and toys are we, in turn, providing them with an "artificial" view of the world" (Barthes 53). Patrick has been born into an artificial world filled with consumer products that causes his fragmented mind; since he doesn't know anything else beyond his world, he doesn't question the inflated consumer culture's co-existence with him, if not its dominance over him: "J&B I am thinking...Charivari. Shirt from Charivari. Fusilli I am thinking. Jami Gertz I am thinking...Porsche 911. A sharpei I am thinking...A valium... Cellular phone I am thinking" (80-81).

To understand Patrick Bateman's struggle with his split personality – he leads two different lives as a banker and serial killer - and to argue that his schizophrenia is culturally transmitted, it is necessary to analyze the historical causes for his disordered state within late capitalism, also called 'spectacle society' by Fredric Jameson.^{ix} As someone who has lost all sense of distinction between the real and the artificial who lives in the middle of 'spectacle society,' Bateman himself is unaware of the historical causes for his schizophrenia. Jameson contends that capitalism has moved into its third stage:

from competitive capitalism – the move from producing to service industry at the turn of the century to monopolist capitalism, and then into late capitalism or multinational capitalism. Late capitalism has information and technology as its major mode of commodity, is “more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive,” (Jameson xxi) and is also called “infantile capitalism” by Jameson, “inasmuch as everyone has been born into it, takes it for granted, and has never known anything else, the friction, resistance, effort of the earlier moments having given way to the free play of automation” (Jameson 367). Patrick exists during the third stage of capitalism, at which time he has been so far removed from natural instincts that he is horrified and alienated by it: “Nearby a mother breast-feeds her baby, which awakens something awful in me” (297). While people during competitive and monopolist capitalism were still aware of how much and what was being commodified, people in the age of multinational capitalism are so immersed in their over-commodified surroundings that they don’t question them any longer.

According to Jameson, the new elements of late capitalism include "new forms of business organization (multinationals, transnationals) beyond the monopoly stage" (Jameson xviii-xiv), internationalization of business- "the flight of production to advanced Third World areas, along with all the more familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labor, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now-global scale", “new dynamic in international banking,” “new forms of media interrelationship,” in which the media constitutes one of the more influential new products of late capitalism (print, internet, television, film) and a new means for the

capitalist take-over of our lives (Jameson xix). Through the mediatization of culture, we become increasingly reliant on the media's version of our reality, a version of reality that is filled predominantly with capitalist values; “computers and automation” (Jameson xix) have allowed for an unprecedented level of mass production; planned obsolescence is “the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods,” and last, American Military domination: “this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror” (Jameson 5). The latter is exactly the kind of culture that the protagonist of American Psycho returns to, without being aware of why he does so: “There wasn’t a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and, possibly, total disgust. I had all the characteristics of a human being—flesh, blood, skin, hair—but my depersonalization was so intense, had gone so deep, that the normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow, purposeful erasure. I was simply imitating reality” (282).

Patrick Bateman is the schizophrenic individual within multinational capitalism whom Baudrillard describes as a passive screen or receptacle of media inundation in Simulacra and Simulation: “We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning” x(Baudrillard). Baudrillard, after having analyzed the role played by consumerism within late capitalism, argues that there exists a system of objects that are subject to a process of commodification, during which they

develop into signs. Latter 'sign-values' undergo a process of replication and mass production, which not only (seems to) fulfill the needs of consumer society, but also creates those very needs in the first place. The way Patrick Bateman functions is dictated by what the media deems 'right' at the moment. He lives in what is considered the best neighborhood, he wears what are considered the best clothes, and he frequents what are considered the best restaurants, but it is never *he* who is doing the considering. American Psycho bares its textual fangs when it describes the surface-obsession of the 1980's with things: people do not go to a restaurant, they go to Dorsia. They do not go to a club, they go to Nell's. They do not dress in a suit, they dress in Valentino Couture, and they do not drink water, but Evian: "Once inside Harry's we spot David Van Patten and Craig McDermott at a table upfront. Van Patten is wearing a double-breasted wool and silk sport coat, button-fly wool and silk trouser with inverted pleats by Mario Valentino, a cotton shirt by Gitman Brothers, a polka-dot silk tie by Bill Blass and leather shoes from Brooks Brothers. McDermott is wearing a woven-linen suit with pleated trousers, a button-down cotton and linen shirt by Basile, a silk tie by Joseph Abboud and ostrich loafers from Susan Bennis Warren Edwards" (31).

Elizabeth Young, in her essay of 1997 "Shopping in Space" notices that: "Towards the end of the book, when Patrick's narrative increasingly tends to shiver and shake around the edges, the litany of designer names begins to falter: shoes by "Susan Warren Bennis Edwards" becomes shoes by "Warren Susan Allen Edmonds" and then shoes by "Edward Susan Bennis Allen."^{xi}For such a tiny detail this is conspicuous in its effects.

What ego-madness possesses a designer (and she's certainly not the only one) that she will inflict an insanely complex name on an entire retinue of stockists, advertisers, fashion-journalists and consumers” (Young 94). To Bateman and his contemporaries, the proliferation of communications media has obliterated the meaning behind the name. The era of rampant consumption has turned into the era of alienation where the market governs all of culture, products, sexuality, human relations, people’s fantasies and desires. Patrick’s thoughts move schizophrenically from consumer products to violence and back, and his only glimpse of a spiritual idea (infinity) is reduced to a car brand by the same name: “warrants, stock offerings, ESOP’s, LBO’s, IPO’s, finances, refinances...infinity, Infinity...the Christmas Eve when I was fourteen and had raped one of our maids... envying someone’s life, whether someone could survive a fractured skull...credit cards... a book of matches from La Cote Basque splattered with blood, surface surface surface, a Rolls is a Rolls is a Rolls” (342). Quoting Gertrude Stein,^{xii} Patrick reveals consumer society’s malaise: a Rolls is forever a Rolls, because there is no meaning behind the brand anymore; There also is no meaning behind the sign Patrick Bateman anymore as he states at the end of the novel by manipulating another Gertrude Stein quote: (“There is no there there,”) into his nihilistic comment: “*I simply am not there*” (377). So fragmented is Patrick’s self that he points out “how truly vacant” he is and that “there is no evidence of animate life” within him (275). In a culture where media entertains the individual everywhere, there is no distinction between the signifier and the signified anymore or between a sign and its referent. Instead, as Frederic Jameson points out: “when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of

distinct and unrelated signifiers” (Jameson 26).

Baudrillard finds the causes for the lack of touch with reality in the media and multinational capitalism: the media is not satisfied by giving information to the public, but wants to interpret the public's selves for them, thereby forcing people to see each other and the world through the lens of these media images. The novel reflects a consumer society that is drowning in an ocean of commercials, superficiality and in a hole where heart used to be. As opposed to creating greater variety and choice, the overabundance of consumer products breeds confusion and consequently conformism. Everyone looks the same in Patrick's class. Free will has made space for corporate dictatorship. Patrick no longer acquires goods because of real needs but because of desires that have been defined by the media, which keeps him one step removed from the reality of the world around him. The media is, therefore, responsible for the breakdown of reality in Patrick Bateman's existence, since it only provides him with simulated, artificial events. In multinational capitalism, goods are divorced from their origin, in urbanization humans are separated from the natural world, and language is often used to obscure rather than reveal reality. As the things Patrick uses are products of increasingly complicated industrial processes, he loses touch with the underlying reality of the goods he consumes. He seeks satisfaction in things, because he cannot find it in people. He even kills to find solace in a thing, taking consumer culture to a literal level: a thing being a person reduced and cut into pieces because only then can Patrick relate to 'it.' Only then is 'it' as fragmented as Patrick: “Disintegration—I'm taking it in stride” he says when his

schizophrenia has reached the limit and an Automated Teller Machine tells him to “Cause a Terrible Scene at Sotheby’s,” to “Kill the President,” and to “Feed me a Stray Cat” while “a park bench” is following him (395).

Patrick’s cannibalism reveals the close affinity between extreme consumption and savagery, calling to mind Montaigne’s warning of not being hypocritical of others without self-knowledge in his essay “On Cannibalism,”^{xiii} in which he points out how ‘civilized’ people may be no better or worse than ‘savages: “I am not sorry that we notice the barbarous horror of such acts, but I am heartily sorry that, judging their faults rightly, we should be so blind to our own” (Montaigne); He also questions if artificiality within civilized culture creates a more savage person than the one in the wilderness, and if civilization has repressed the natural instincts of human beings: “whereas really it is those that we have changed artificially and led astray from the common order, that we should rather call wild” (Montaigne). Before hypocritically blaming the serial killer, American Psycho similarly relates, a closer look at how the individual killer resembles most people within consumer culture is necessary. Bateman’s one-upmanship and extreme consumption is matched by the other Yuppies around him who indulge in the same savage decadence as he does that allows for earning money to be treated as a game: “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” (139).

The fact that there is an overload of products that confuses people, that “there are too many fucking movies to choose from” does not escape Patrick, who realizes that he

has been programmed; Patrick resorts to renting the same old video due to product-confusion: “Then, almost by rote, as if I’ve been programmed, I reach for *Body Double*-a movie I have rented thirty-seven times” (112). Nonetheless, Patrick’s failure to desist from indulging in retail-therapy reveals that he is so deeply entrenched in consumer culture that he can only explain his inner fragmentation through more product-thinking: “Some kind of existential chasm opens before me while I am browsing in Bloomingdale’s...[] I head toward the Clinique counter where with my platinum American Express card I buy six tubes of shaving cream..[].and I decide this emptiness has, at least in part, some connection with the way I treated Evelyn at Barcadia the other night, though there is always the possibility it could just as easily have something to do with the tracking device on my VCR” (112, 179-180). Patrick picks up on the root of the problem over and over again without realizing it: “I count three silk-crepe ties, one Versace silk-satin woven tie, two silk foulard ties, one silk Kenzo, two silk jacquard ties. The fragrances of Xeryus and Tuscany and Armani and Obsession and Polo and Grey Flannel and even Antaeus mingle, wafting into each other, rising from the suits and into the air, forming their own mixture: a cold, sickening perfume” (110). Patrick, of course, smells the scent of market fundamentalism within multinational capitalism. Since he has been born into the media-assault, he cannot figure out why he is so miserable: “All vestiges of Patrick have vanished in the veneer of promotion” (Murphet 29),^{xiv} so his surface and one-upmanship-thinking carry on in a vicious cycle: “all I can see is the red Lamborghini and all I can hear is my own even, steady panting. I’m still standing, drooling, in front of the store, staring, minutes later (I don’t know how many)” (114).

It gets harder and harder for Patrick to compose himself in front of others:

“..sweat-drenched, I find myself back downtown in Tower Records and I compose myself, muttering over and over to no one, “I’ve gotta return some videotapes, I’ve gotta return some videotapes,” and I buy two copies of my favorite compact disc ...and then I’m stuck in the revolving door for five full spins and I trip out onto the street, bumping into Charles Murphy from Kidder Peabody or it could be Bruce Barker from Morgan Stanley, *whoever*, and he says “Hey, Kinsley” and I belch into his face, my eyes rolling back into my head, greenish bile dripping in strings from my bared fangs” (151).. Patrick has to stare at his designer shoes (a thing) to calm himself down. Only a thing can bring him to his senses anymore, and not just any-thing, but a designer-thing: “I’m able to compose myself by simply staring at my feet, actually at the A. Testoni loafers” (152).

The novel ridicules rampant consumption, when, in an satiric twist of fate, Patrick’s beloved credit card breaks in half: “My platinum American Express card had gone through so much use that it snapped in half, self-destructed” (279). In spite of all his financial and physical advantages, Bateman is imprisoned within a closed circuitous hell: he lives a life of instant gratification in which he fills his inner void with products, only to wind up as spiritually empty as before. Clearly, something is rotten in the state of Reaganomics-reification, in which a consumer in society is supposed to feel satisfied both materially and spiritually after buying a product: “Something horrible was happening and yet I couldn't figure out why - I couldn't put my finger on it. The only thing that calmed me was the satisfying sound of ice being dropped into a glass of J&B” (282). The novel demonstrates that capitalist society has turned on itself by immersing its

populace in a looping vicious cycle of materialistic answers to philosophical questions that leaves everyone feeling fragmented and clueless.

If Bateman is viewed as an allegory for the crimes of a deregulated market, and if he is considered from Frederic Jameson's perspective, who understands literature as a symbolic reflection of political and social thought and institutions, American Psycho is a strong indictment against Reaganomics, the media assault of late capitalism, and the schizophrenia it incurs in people; in latter sense, the novel has been misunderstood and falsely condemned as "moronic ... themeless ... pointless...everythingless"^{xv} (Rosenblatt), "superficial"^{xvi} (Sheppard), "not literature ... immoral, but also artless"^{xvii} (Miner), "flat...tedious...boring"^{xviii} (Lehmann-Haupt), "the essence of trash," and "serving no purpose save that of morbidity, titillation and sensation ... pure trash"^{xix} (Yardley), "garbage"^{xx} (Gurley Brown), "the single most boring book I have ever had to endure"^{xxi} (Naomi Woolf 34). Jameson's approach of analyzing literature from an historically-grounded point of view helps to expose the profound and unapologetic condemnation of greed and market fundamentalism the novel has at its core: The serial-killing, raping, raving, racist protagonist Patrick Bateman gets away with murder because his white male moneyed social layer does. American Psycho exposes the hypocrisy of Reaganomics in respect to wealth by revealing that the money of Patrick's class is made at the expense of the poor: the more emotionally-bankrupt the ruling class becomes, the more financially distraught do the poor.

Patrick's many monotonous excursions on sartorial etiquette, restaurants, gym and stereo equipment that have bored so many of the novel's critics are, in fact, essential to

prove possible what Jameson leaves open in “Postmodernism and Consumer Culture.”^{xxii} he asks if “there is also a way in which [postmodernism]... resists” the logic of capitalism (Jameson 125). American Psycho does resist the logic of late capitalism by imposing its endless shopping-lists as unapologetically as it does its gruesome murder details: in direct, first-person narration. The latter enables the resistance to the logic of capitalism as opposed to reinforcing it by narrating a third-person story about a serial-killer, which would have resulted in a detective-story that omits the most gruesome murder-details and obsesses about the pattern of the killer and the question of why he kills. The novel’s “aesthetics of boredom [is] more than the white noise it appears to be”^{xxiii} because Ellis bores us on purpose: the narrator offers “an interminable monologue of the non-self, which is, at some hypothetical socio-psychological limit, the lived self in contemporary America” and should also be seen “as a corrective to literary escapism” (Murphet 25, 27). By not omitting the horror of the murders, the novel exposes what Reaganomics did to its threats; by denying a childhood-etiology of why Patrick kills, but instead revealing an obvious pattern – he kills all the threats to Reaganomics - the novel clarifies where the blame lies: Patrick Bateman is the zeitgeist of the Eighties. By being obviously tedious, sarcastic, cruel, and exaggerated in its long descriptions, American Psycho will not let the resistance to Reaganomics and late capitalism go unnoticed: “Tandoori chicken and foie gras, and lots of jazz, and he adored the Savoy, but shad roe, the colors were gorgeous, aloe, shell, citrus, Morgan Stanley” buzzes Evelyn at a “pitch that cannot be ignored” (122). The novel’s lists are clearly presented in a satiric manner and thus evoke ridicule.

John Conley writes in his essay of 2007 “The Poverty of Bret Easton Ellis”^{xxiv} that “Bret Easton Ellis is not a writer of the glittering fantasies of consumer society, nor is he a writer of excruciating violence or graphic sex: rather, he is first and foremost a writer of capitalism, which is to say, he is first and foremost a writer of poverty” (Conley 119).^{xxv} Ellis describes urban decay, poverty, the homeless, the problem of gentrification, urban renewal gone bad, rising rents, factory closures, evictions, class resentment and struggle, racism, homophobia and general resentment caused by capitalism: “Ellis uses run-on sentences; his work does not only depict its own period, it speaks the commodified language of its own period” (Conley 120); “it is the language of commodity culture, it is the language that has been always-already read” (Conley 121). The novel plunges into the capitalistic life style immediately, describing how the rich erase the poor through gentrification or literal painting-over them: “Another bus appears, another poster for *Les Misérables* replaces the word – not the same bus because someone has written DYKE over Eponine’s face” (4). Victor Hugo’s novel Les Misérables has been ‘gentrified’ into a musical for the middle and upper classes that makes the content of destitution and poverty more easily digestible. American Psycho regularly mentions musicals such as Les Misérables or The Threepenny Opera to draw attention to New York’s underworld and the massive amount of poor people, who only exist to the ruling class if they have been zip-locked into a Broadway musical. The novel portrays Patrick’s class as walking all over the ‘miserables’ of his city while poking fun of them: Eponine’s face has been painted over with a derogatory term and is therefore being erased.

To emphasize how little concerned and even disgusted Patrick's social layer is with the poor side of life, Timothy Price, a co-worker of Bateman's, obsessively rants about the homeless in New York and the city's general destitution in the opening passage of the book: "... the trash, the garbage, the disease, about how filthy this city really is and you know and I know that it is a sty...[]...strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway, a Communist rally, Mafia boss wiped out, Nazis' [] 'baseball players with AIDS, more Mafia shit, gridlock, the homeless, various maniacs, faggots dropping like flies in the streets..." (4). The city's gap between the wealthy and the poor is getting wider while Bateman and his cronies attempt to accept the existence of the homeless by humiliating them, ignoring them or, literally eliminating them. Bateman tells the homeless man Al to "Get a goddamn job" (130). He also lays out the rift between his class and Al's when he tells the latter: "I don't have anything in common with you" before he attacks him and his dog in the most vicious manner (131). "Affronted by Al's being there and being poor, Bateman attacks," and yet, "though dehumanized, Al stubbornly remains all-too human" (Conley 129). As John Ehrmann points out in his book on The Eighties – America in the age of Reagan: "Job displacement had a terrible impact on black men, another group that lost heavily in the 1980's." [...] "The decline in industrial jobs meant that blacks in the cities had few prospects, and social writers began to speak of a growing black underclass – poor, unemployed, uneducated, and trapped in urban poverty" (Ehrmann).^{xxvi} Meanwhile, Patrick and his co-workers are getting drunk on champagne at Harry's, convincing each other that "white guys" cannot get AIDS," implying that their social layer is too powerful to fail (34).

Al stands in for all the other poverty-stricken and homeless people in the city who have no access to lavatories due to the strategic removal of the latter to gentrify city streets: “Al’s body is revealed to be ravaged by the exact conditions that all the signs of his existence figure him out to be, his rashes indicating a bio-historical texture to his destitution, the acidity of urine and the grime of feces ground into his ‘flabby black thighs’: the harsh symptoms of repeatedly being denied access to lavatories or simply fresh water with which to wash, much less bathe” (Conley 129-130). The urban poor are victims of the raging greed of Patrick’s class: the desire to transform all of Manhattan into a consumer wonderland pasted with dollar bills and without the poor. As John Conley puts it: Ellis’s work “isn’t about a world of capitalism without poverty, it is an example of its impossibility, an impossibility that, as Adorno would say, is the genuine content of Ellis’s work” (Conley 134). The homeless are victimized by Patrick and his friends over and over: “McDermott’s eyes are glazed over and he’s waving a dollar bill in front of the woman’s face and she starts sobbing, pathetically trying to grab at it, but of course, typically, he doesn’t give it to her. Instead he ignites the bill with matches from Canal Bar and relights the half-smoked cigar clenched between his straight white teeth—probably caps, the jerk. ‘How gentrifying of you, McDermott,’ I tell him” (210). When Bateman tells Al to get a job, he does exactly what his class did: he blames the homeless and poor for not trying hard enough and for being in their destitute situations.

Bateman inflicts on the poor and homeless exactly what Reaganomics inflicted upon them: he gentrifies them or eliminates them altogether. The excessive amount of homeless people, just like the excess of products, is another allegory American Psycho

employs to show that the signifiers have lost the meaning of what they were signifying: AI is a statistic without meaning to Patrick and his class. A poverty-stricken person doesn't evoke empathy anymore, but resentment: "I beat up a girl today who was asking people for money on the street," Patrick tells one of his dates nonchalantly (213); or "I pass an ugly homeless bum—a member of the genetic underclass" (266); Price is hysterical when he observes and counts the many homeless in the novel's opening chapter: "'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'" (6). Price's reaction is likely based on a class-conscious and derogatory quip the park commissioner of Tompkins Square Park, Henry J. Stern, made on one of the coldest days of winter, right after the police had raided the park and evicted all its homeless on December 14th, 1989: "It would be irresponsible to allow the homeless to sleep outdoors" (Conley 117). The latter quote occurred while Ellis was finishing American Psycho, and it relates the fear of 'the other' very well and the desire to erase them as they present a threat to Patrick's class's power.

The Reagan Administration had cut \$26 billion in federal funding to major cities: "The increasing land value in major cities depends upon the removal of old industrial sectors, squeezing out the factories (i.e. displacing them to the Third World), and letting multi-national corporations erect skyscraper after skyscraper to rake in rental fortunes on office space. As Fitch says, 'There is a nearly 1000 percent spread between the rent received for factory space and the rent landlords get for class A office space. Simply by

changing the land use, one's capital could increase in value many times over" (Murphet 59). The consequences of the latter are speculations in land rent, evictions, factory closures, and unemployment. When Patrick revisits one of the scenes of his crime, Paul Owen's apartment, in which he claims to have murdered two prostitutes, the real-estate agent is only interested in re-letting the apartment; if she has to cover up a major crime to make money, she will do so and remove all evidence of the horror that took place in the apartment, where "the smell from the roses [is] thick, masking something revolting" (369). Apart from the obvious murders of the prostitutes, what the smell of the roses masks is the murder of downtown by finance capital, which Patrick represents; what happened to Owen's apartment is an allegory of what happens to the entire city. Julian Murphet fittingly calls the meeting of the real-estate agent Mrs. Wolfe and Patrick an "allegory of abstractions," because it is what a deregulated market does to people: Mrs. Wolfe represents spatial abstraction and Patrick monetary abstraction. Together they allegorize the capitalistic vortex that strips the lower classes of their existence.

By portraying the serial killer as a respectable member of society who unapologetically removes the threats to the ruling class such as the poor (so to gentrify), foreigners (to remove economic threats such as the Japanese), women (suppress threats to patriarchy), or homosexuals (threat to masculinity), American Psycho implicates late-capitalism-society itself for indulging the killer's acts and looking the other way. As opposed to depicting the ostracized serial killer with the unfortunate upbringing through an omniscient third-person-narrator who can leave out the cruel murder-passages to win sympathy for the killer, the novel is narrated by Bateman himself, who impresses his

first-person narration of detailed crime descriptions onto memory, thereby ruling out American serial-killer glorification awarded to the individual who is not a part of society, because he can be explained away as the 'other.' Patrick Bateman is 'Every-Yuppie' and his crimes therefore hit too close to home: "North America has produced some 80% of all known 20th Century serial killers,"^{xxvii} but prefers to view them as "other" than themselves--as outrageous, alien creatures (Newton 95).

American Psycho portrays Patrick as the warning sign of what will happen if multinational capitalism doesn't find a balanced way of returning to consuming for need and pleasure alone. David Schmid, author of Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture, explains the serial killer cult: "By emphasizing their creepiness, we can deny that they share many of our values and obsessions"^{xxviii} (USA Today quoting Schmid). Schmid also observes that the public follows the serial killer's crimes on TV, ruminates about their patterns, watches TV crime shows based on them, and is relieved when they go to prison because all of the public's guilt over their own obsession with these killers is thereby placed behind bars: "We do it all because we are compelled to resist the idea that these characters, so familiar, so endemic to America, are at all like the rest of us" (USA Today). Schmid theorizes "that people's fantasies and compulsions represent values embedded in our culture, values that permeate our institutions and entertainments: the utter and often brutal supremacy of the white patriarchal system; misogyny; deep ambiguity and anxiety about the body, sex, and sexual orientation; a relish for violence; fear of powerlessness and loss of control; and obsession with celebrity" (USA Today). American Psycho makes no excuses for the serial killer that

would distance him from his society, such as an etiology of a bad childhood, poverty, outsider-status, or the omission of the cruelty of his crimes by an omniscient narrator. Instead, the novel lingers on all the facets of Patrick that make him one with his society's power politics, which leaves no possibility to shift the blame, but enforces a thorough look at the self by repeatedly pointing out that Patrick and his friends represent American greed; as an example, Patrick's mistress Courtney strokes his expensive watch as opposed to his wrist in a failed attempt at compassion: "Courtney reaches over and touches my wrist gently, stroking my Rolex" (98).

American Psycho emphasizes the schizophrenic double life Patrick Bateman leads to expose the two-faced hypocrisy of Reaganomics, and to show that his disorder does not have its origin in the psychic history of the individual, but is culturally transmitted by society within multinational capitalism: Patrick's schizophrenia is portrayed as a culturally syntonetic disorder, which mirrors the schizoid experience of late capitalism with its media culture. The chapters of the book reflect the schizophrenic experience as well: they are short, disordered, and lack continuity; with their overabundance of brand names and disrupting rhythm, the chapters add to expose Bateman's lack of coherence: the chapter 'Paul Owen,' in which Bateman kills his co-worker Paul Owen out of envy and greed, is followed by the chapter 'Paul Smith,' a designer. To place a chapter about a human being and his death alongside one about a designer store reveals Patrick's extreme fragmentation and loss of touch: they are the same to him. Patrick cannot bring his fragmented self into harmony, but has to lead a double life. Bateman stands in for his social layer in every respect: he is polished and politically correct on the outside, but a

killer on the inside; he publicly speaks of helping the poor, but privately kills them.

Patrick Bateman is a walking contradiction: he tells his friends: "I just want everyone to know that I am pro-family and anti-drug," but he does coke every other night (157); in front of his co-workers he espouses: "Well, we have to end apartheid," while silently ridiculing Jean's blind love for him: "I could even explain my pro-apartheid stance and have her find reasons why she too should share them and invest large sums of money in racist corporations" (263). Bateman is not being sarcastic: he is incapable of connecting the contradiction-dots due to his schizophrenic disorder.

Bateman displays the kind of fragmented personality that Frederic Jameson depicts in Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Capitalism. Jameson associates schizophrenia with late capitalism and describes schizophrenic experiences as "isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence,"^{xxix} similar to the many images that shoot across television screens and the sound of white noise from the radio and other media. This bombardment and monotony of a series of never-ending sound bytes is what disorients Patrick Bateman, and what contributes to the lack of 'self' that is characteristic of schizophrenia within multinational capitalism, as Fredric Jameson describes it: the schizophrenic is unable to differentiate between self and world, he lacks one clear identity, and he is unable to experience continuity over time. Bateman realizes throughout the course of the novel that within his spectacle-society, it doesn't matter if he is the person next door or the psychopath next door as long as he represents himself as what people want to see: "inside doesn't matter"

(397). As long as he looks like a respectable Wall Street banker on the outside, no one will believe that he is a schizophrenic serial killer on the inside.

It is latter surface thinking that allows Patrick and his class to get away with murder. Reagan's public apology for the Iran-Contra-affair is portrayed in the book as the ultimate two-faced hypocrisy in American Psycho: “ ‘He presents himself as a harmless old codger. But inside...’ [Tim Price] stops. My interest picks up, flickers briefly. ‘But inside...’ Price can’t finish the sentence, can’t add the words he needs: *doesn’t matter*”

(397). As long as the numbers are right and the economy booms, it doesn't matter how the money was made and to whom the weapons were sold to, or if the politician's inside is wretched: “The TV is tuned to a press conference Reagan is giving but there's a lot of static and no one pays attention, except for me,” relates Patrick. Most people simply don't care about someone's inside, as long as their bank account balance blossoms and they or certain politicians don't get caught making the money through illegal channels (142).

Public perception and private actions do not correspond; therefore identities are defined by the public, not the self anymore, which leads to lack of insight. The implication here is, of course, that Reagan is yet another ‘American Psycho,’ whose appearance belies his dangerousness. The greed-inspired politics of the 1980's are not only the backdrop of American Psycho, but also what has shaped the humanity and identity of the characters or the lack thereof.

Bateman repeatedly oversteps his boundaries in the crimes he commits; he practically asks to be found out and heard, such as when he repeatedly confesses his crimes: He tells his girlfriend: “My...need to engage in...homicidal behavior on a

massive scale cannot, um, be corrected,” of which she “misses the essence” (338). He confesses to his lawyer: “I-killed-Paul-Owen-and-I-liked-it. I can’t make myself any clearer,” to which his lawyer responds: “But that’s simply not possible” (388). Nobody believes that someone with Patrick’s looks, money, social standing, and boy-next-door-personality could be so thoroughly corrupted: “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” (20). In addition to the ignored confessions, the novel shows that nobody listens to anyone. Patrick cannot make himself heard even though he says the most outrageous things to people: “And by the way, did anyone ever tell you that you look exactly like Garfield but run over and skinned and then someone threw an ugly Ferragamo sweater over you before they rushed you to the vet” (95). Latter statement is met by: “where did you find Patrick? He’s so knowledgeable about things” (95). At a night club he confides in a model: “I’m into, oh, murders and executions mostly,” to which she replies: “Do you like it? ...most guys I know who work in mergers and acquisitions don’t really like it” (206). Patrick has become so used to people not listening - “naturally he doesn’t hear” (157) - that he cries out on the verge of a meltdown: “does anyone really see anyone? Does anyone really see anyone else? Did you ever see me? See? What does that mean? Ha! See? Ha” (238).

In reality, Patrick lacks any humanity and unique self; he has no qualities that distinguish him from the people around him. In fact, his identity is created by others and split into a million designer brands of the clothes he wears, the names of the restaurants he frequents, and the music he listens to: “a feeling that others are creating my fate for me

will not leave me” (370). Patrick’s narration is unreliable throughout the entire novel: he portrays himself as very suave, but the accounts of the other characters often deny him any kind of distinguishing features. He is not as knowledgeable and cosmopolitan as his narration leads to believe: it is, for example, impossible to know all the brand names of what each person is wearing the way Patrick relates it in American Psycho. He wants to be treated as an individual and express his real personality, but, as Baudrillard describes it in The Consumer Society Myths + Structures: “to differentiate oneself is precisely to affiliate to a model, to label oneself by reference to an abstract model, to a combinational pattern of fashion, and therefore relinquish any real difference, any singularity”^{xxx} (cf. Baudrillard). Hence the running joke within the novel about all the Wall Street bankers confusing each other with someone else has a bitter aftertaste because others are, in fact, creating these characters’ fate: “Owen has mistaken me for Marcus Halberstam” (89); Madison, who thought I was Ebersol..” (55); “Marcus! Merry Christmas,” Paul Owen says to Patrick” (186). Everyone is diligently filed away into their social layer: the era that appears to be an era of individualism is really the era of conformism to the will of corporate America. As Patrick states in his excursion on *Huey Lewis and The News’s* Song ‘Hip To Be Square’: “It’s not just about the pleasures of conformity and the importance of trends--it’s also a personal statement” (357). Connections are only made through work or class-identification, leaving people unfulfilled because they only see more of what they already know and have: “Since it’s impossible in the world we live in to empathize with others, we can always empathize with ourselves,” states Patrick, voicing the spirit of his time and class perfectly (254).

Patrick, who lacks any kind of valuable connection to the people around him, attempts to find meaning through dreams, because they promise an escape from his ineffectual, vacant, and schizophrenic self. In his day-to-day-life, he is incompetent and nothing special: he embarrasses himself at a club when trying to imitate a rapper; he embarrasses Jean and himself when he lies about a dinner reservation; he cannot get anything done at work and really only works “to..fit..in” (237); his sex life is pathetic: “When [their couple-therapist] asked about [Evelyn’s] preferred sexual act,” Patrick responds: “Foreclosure” (334); while sleeping with Courtney, he fusses over the right condom long enough to kill the mood or he refuses to wear one because he won’t ‘feel’ anything, to which Courtney replies: “If you don’t use one you’re not going to feel anything anyway” (105). Patrick acts out his sexual fantasies with prostitutes that are inspired by the pornographic videos he watches, because he has no sense of what natural sexuality is. As Baudrillard puts it in The Illusion of the End: “At the heart of pornography is sexuality haunted by its own disappearance”^{xxxi} (Baudrillard 6). Everything Patrick thinks he wants has already been created and made popular by others. Both his natural and creative instincts are virtually non-existent and he has to watch films to teach him how to be human. He is, essentially, an alien in his own world.

Since his real life clearly lacks improvement, Patrick creates another identity for himself, the kind he so conspicuously lacks in reality: he casts himself into a movie that plays in his head with him as the star. American Psycho demonstrates that Bateman’s perceptions of the world are based on Hollywood film-techniques: “I...dissolve into my living room” (24); “As in a movie, I turn around” (61); “it’s played out in slow motion”

(86); “but in slow motion, like in a movie—the sun goes down” (114); “her dialogue overlaps her own dialogue” (123); “this is all happening in slow motion” (231); “Scene Two” (236); “As if in slow motion, like in a movie, she turns around” (245); “I’m moving in jump-cut, walking along a beach, the film is black-and-white...I’m looking into the camera, now I’m holding up the product” (372). Not even in his dreams can Patrick truly escape the curse of his media-cultured upbringing. Hence he sinks further and further into his own nightmare of product-mania, in which he creates himself the only identities (which are second-hand-identities) he can dream up.

The novel explicitly reveals that – even when Bateman’s imagination is given free reign – he can only piece together a dream world made up of pop culture and media because that is all he knows: he casts himself in the role of serial killer and porn star. Both horror-films and pornographic videos are popular consumer items that Bateman has grown up with. The fact that he cannot dream up anything creative that doesn’t pertain to the world he knows reveals that, as Jameson explains, Bateman cannot differentiate between his ‘self’ and the world: reality is a kind of hallucination to Bateman: “I hallucinate the buildings into mountains, into volcanoes, the streets become jungles, the sky freezes into a backdrop...Lunch at Hubert’s becomes a permanent hallucination in which I find myself dreaming while still awake” (86). When he confuses the fashionable college girl with a homeless person, only to recognize that he has just dropped a dollar bill into an expensive coffee cup, the novel clarifies that Patrick perceives everything on a sign-basis. As do the people around Patrick only see him for his outward appearance, he similarly only sees the coffee cup in the girl’s hands and links it to what he knows, a

homeless person, not to the person herself. Patrick's chain of signifiers breaks down more and more; the fact that there is no meaning behind the signs he perceives makes his quest for meaning impossible and leads him to find solace in his other identity within his imagined dream-reels.

American Psycho, with its many references to Patrick's 'only dreaming,' establishes that Patrick's serial-killer-life is his imagination. The way in which he kills people often appears to be inspired by popular culture, such as murder mystery-, action-, and horror-film-conceits, such as a scene from The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: Patrick murders a prostitute by throwing a chainsaw down flights of stairs, which is impossible to do in reality; he uses an axe to kill Paul Owen, another overblown horror-movie-conceit; Detective Kimball appears as the stereotypical Hollywood detective; in the chase scene, the switch in narration from first to third person, makes it obvious that Patrick is watching himself star in his own imagined action movie. Everything he encounters during the action-'scene' is inspired by the films he has watched, and Patrick himself describes it as an "optical illusion (352). He turns himself into an action-hero and adheres to all action-movie-genre-conventions: when he fires at the cop car, it explodes, because there has to be an explosion; there is a car-chase; he knows that the bad guy in a film never gets away with murder, so "the dream threatens to break" (350) while he imagines an outrageous gunfire-exchange and then a chase into his own office building, from which he confesses all his crimes onto his lawyer's answering machine: "I decide to make public what has been, until now, my private dementia" (352).

His alter-ego-existence as a smooth and ice-cold serial-killer is, in fact, nothing but ‘dementia,’ a self-constructed dream to find meaning and a unique self that stands out amongst all the other clones on Wall Street. In reality, Patrick likely is the ineffectual ‘boy-next-door’ his girlfriend and acquaintances describe him as. His lawyer Harold Carnes is the one who checks Patrick back into reality by clarifying why he is not a serial killer: “you had one fatal flaw: Bateman’s such a bloody ass-kisser, such a brown-nosing goody-goody, that I couldn’t fully appreciate it” (387). By ‘it,’ Carnes tells Bateman that he thought the latter’s phone-confession of the murders was a joke. However, far from using the double life and dream as an excuse for Patrick’s gruesome deeds, American Psycho documents part of the etiology of how Patrick’s schizophrenia, loss of touch with reality, and construction of a double life came about through the consumer-culture of late capitalism: Patrick’s identity is pieced together solely through consumer-culture objects, which cause his split personality and violence. Through the character of Patrick Bateman, American Psycho relates that American late-capitalism-consumer-ethos is fundamentally violent. Consequently, neither can the serial killer be blamed for his deeds as an individual outsider of society, nor can his imagination be used as an excuse to describe what he would like to do to people, because all of Patrick’s thoughts, dreams, and actions have been culturally transmitted. As Patrick’s excursion of on a Huey Lewis pop-song reveals: “Some of my Lies are True (Sooner or Later)” (353): Sooner or later, the novel implies, Patrick’s schizophrenia will lead him to act out his dreams of serial-killing, and when it does, no one will believe his confessions.

In this sense, Patrick exists in a Dantesque circular hell as one of the damned souls: the circle doesn't open, because Patrick is born into multinational capitalism with media and corporate dictatorship that doesn't enable him to create his own identity. The circle doesn't close, either, because, both in reality and his world of dream-reels, Patrick only knows how to employ pre-programmed consumer mindsets, which can never fill his inner void. Patrick's general dissatisfaction is caused by his disability to consume a product for satiety or pleasure, the way it was originally meant to be consumed. Patrick only knows how to consume to identify himself as the richest, handsomest, best dressed Yuppie. His perfectly orchestrated night with the prostitutes was highly orchestrated according to consumer-mindset: Patrick served chardonnay, made small-talk, had on the right clothes and played the right music, and yet, he is left as dissatisfied as before after the evening. Bateman has derived from multinational capitalism that consumption can fill his void, that it will embrace him into the status-symbol-world of its brand, and that it will help him identify and distinguish himself. He is not aware of it, but his inner void is caused because product-consumption can never help him establish a self. Since Bateman is impervious to any higher or self-knowledge, he cannot relate to others, which is exactly what would help him fill his void: to empathize with or love another. Instead Bateman is only programmed to 'consume' and possess products and therefore treats people as such; once a person is possessed, Bateman can no longer relate to them as separate entities as they have become part of him. Consequently, for Bateman, to 'consume' is indeed 'to kill.'

“THIS IS NOT AN EXIT” (399) reads the last line of American Psycho, after Bateman has given in to his mindless consumer-existence in the “what’s in it for me”-culture (398). The tragedy of the novel is brought to its climax at this point, because it clarifies that Bateman, unless he were to relate to *someone* else, not *something* else, is stuck in eternal dissatisfaction. American Psycho doesn’t claim that there is ‘no exit,’ only that ‘this’-“how life presets itself [to Patrick]...at the end of the century,” within late capitalism, is not an exit (399). Patrick is even dimly aware of what ‘this’ is; his only attempt at running away from his world of things occurred at Evelyn’s Christmas Party when he tells her: “I want to take you away from all *this*...From Sushi and elves and... *stuff*” (188). The hold ‘this’ world has on Patrick is too strong, however. But ‘that’ exit would be to relate, not consume, as shown in his exchange with Jean who tells him: “a lot of people seem to have...lost touch with life” (375). Jean offers Patrick a glimpse of hope of finding ‘that’ exit, but Patrick is too detached from reality that he would notice that there was an actual meaning behind Jean’s message: “there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory...I simply am not there” (377).

He realizes during a short epiphany that Jean “wants to rearrange my life in a significant way,” but he concludes that “one day, sometime very soon, she too will be locked in the rhythm of my insanity” (378). Thus Patrick implies that, as opposed to him finding love with Jean and both of them escaping from spectacle-society, spectacle-society will eventually envelop and consume them both. Having been raised with extreme consumer-culture as his next-door-neighbor, it is unlikely that Patrick will find ‘that’ exit. The tragedy of American Psycho lies in Patrick allegorizing that love within market

fundamentalism may no longer be an option, because in an affectless, soulless world connections cannot be made anymore. Love cannot be bought and is therefore a foreign concept in Bateman's consumer-driven world. His disconnection from genuine emotions embodies how his entire social layer has lost the ability to relate to others because concepts such as love are 'already-said'-second-hand matters at this point that have lost their meaning; as Umberto Eco describes the attitude: "a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows that he cannot say to her, 'I love you madly', because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland...He can say, 'As Barbara Cartland would put it, 'I love you madly.'" At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman"^{xxxii} (Eco 67-68). In American Psycho, however, not even a 'second-hand-emotion' can be achieved anymore. Late capitalism is, as Patrick says: "no time for the innocent" (382).

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