Pastiche and Abjection in *American Psycho*

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1. Introduction

Bret Easton Ellis’ perhaps most popular novel, *American Psycho*, is today considered one of the best examples of postmodern literature and has become the subject of study in many literary courses in the academia. *American Psycho* is narrated through a first person point of view by its main character, the serial killer Patrick Bateman, who is a young, rich, businessman working at his family-owned company. The novel follows Bateman’s everyday life in New York, where he leads an extravagant lifestyle filled almost exclusively with eating at luxurious restaurants, making expensive purchases, having several loveless relationships, and torturing and killing people. The novel often uses contrasts, having one chapter dedicated to the most mundane acts such as Bateman’s morning face cleansing routine, and the next one to the most vividly depicted tortures and subsequent murders. Even though towards the end of the novel Bateman is seen by the police killing a homeless person and chased in Manhattan, a chase during which he kills several more people and later calls his lawyer confessing his murders, he is not caught and punished for his acts. His lawyer thinks his confession is a joke and mistakes him for someone else. Therefore, the novel does not end with Bateman being brought to justice, and he is left philosophizing about his own situation, admitting that there is no catharsis, and that his "confession has meant nothing" (Ellis 377).

The novel was originally supposed to be published in the late 1990; however, this became complicated after several excerpts containing the most violent scenes of the novel were released to the media, creating a wave of criticism and revolt. In his reading guide of the novel, *Bret Easton Ellis’s American Psycho: A Reader’s Guide*, Julian Murphet discusses the novel’s reception and notes that publications like *Life, Vanity Fair, The Guardian*, as well as feminist organizations like National Organization for Women were just few of the voices that called the novel scandalous and pointed at its violent content, seeing it as a "how-to novel on
the torture and dismemberment of women" (qtd. in Murphet 68). Very few reviewers defended the novel, and the few that did were not entirely convinced that one should look past the graphic content. In the light of all the negative publicity, Simon & Schuster decided to stop the publishing of American Psycho, breaching its contract with Bret Easton Ellis and sacrificing $300,000 that had been previously paid to him. However, the novel was published a year later, this time by the Vintage publishing house, a subsidiary of Random House. The reasons behind Vintage’s decision to take this leap of faith can only be assumed: perhaps they were relying on the massive publicity the novel had at the time (even if negative), or perhaps they saw a different message that the novel aimed at transmitting through its violent depictions. No matter what reasons Vintage had to publish a very problematic novel at the time, they made the correct decision since today American Psycho is a literary best-seller, considered part of the Western Canon, and was adapted into a successful film in 2000.

Despite its major success, the novel remains a mystery of the literary scene, since its critique is still divided between negative voices pointing at its obscene content, and other positive voices praising it as a prime example of postmodernist literature.

Regarding the criticism of the novel, there is an abundance of work that looks into the violence depicted as well as into the consumerism theme, something to be expected since both are two of the most obvious elements. Much space is also dedicated to the main character, Patrick Bateman, who is both puzzlingly shocking and boring to the reader. This thesis acknowledges all these views but will attempt to look into how American Psycho is a problematic novel in the Western Canon by analyzing its content from a different angle. There is a lack of analysis in regards to the intertextuality and repetitions used in American Psycho; even though the presence of these is acknowledged, few explanations are given as to what they aim to achieve in the text. Ellis makes reference to a multitude of other literary works in his novel, and by doing so he creates something new, forms a different message rather than
only repeating what has already been said. This repeated use of previous literary works that
together form a separate narrative is what gives *American Psycho* a pastiche character.
Curiously, this has not been given any attention in the previous analyses of the novel.
Furthermore, the multitude of acts described in the novel that are not acceptable in our society
(murder, torture, racism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, etc) prove to serve another purpose if
analyzed through Julia Kristeva’s concept of *abjection*, rather than from a moralistic angle.
Kristeva looks into violence, as well as other socially unacceptable behavior and analyses them
through her concept of abjection. What makes Kristeva’s analysis especially appealing to
apply to *American Psycho* is the fact that it creates a bridge between violence and society, this
time not by adopting a moral stance but by looking into how it shapes and is shaped by the
people involved. Therefore, this thesis attempts an analysis of *American Psycho* by looking at
its content through Ingeborg Hoesterey’s definition of pastiche described in her book
*Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, Literature*, as well as Kristeva’s notion of abjection
explained in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. The way these two concepts function
(and sometime connect) in *American Psycho* results in a work of satire, a postmodern novel
that becomes innovative through its use of previous literary works and abjection rather than
just a vulgar and graphic novel meant to shock.

Firstly, I will provide insight into a couple of issues that make *American Psycho* a
problematic title, while in the same time assuring its place in the Western Canon. One of these
issues is related to the genre of the novel, which can be argued to be anything from horror,
Gothic, comedy, to transgressive. I will illustrate how the novel can be considered any of
these particular genres, but also why this can complicate future analyses because every genre
has a set of reader expectations from its narrative. In the same time, this situation where the
novel’s genre is difficult to state is typical of postmodernism. Therefore, it is equally
important that I outline what makes the novel to be considered a postmodern one, namely its fragmentation, unreliable narrator, irony, black humor, metafiction, and pastiche character.

Secondly, I will analyze *American Psycho* through Ingeborg Hoestery’s notion of pastiche as a homage type and the cento pastiche. After explaining these terms and how they function in relation to the arts, I will provide examples of repetitions, intertextuality, and usage of older literary works in Ellis’ novel. The pastiche examples in American Psycho are not randomly selected by its author, but they together form a work of satire through their choice and even location in the narrative.

Thirdly, I will move to Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection. After providing a background explanation to the abjection concept, I will apply it to *American Psycho*. Violence is one particular element of abjection that I will focus on in my analysis as it is clearly one that dominates in Ellis’ novel. Furthermore, Kristeva’s work on abjection in regards to violence is relevant to my analysis because of its illustrative examples that use the works of Louis-Ferdinand Céline which are reminiscent of *American Psycho*.

Finally, the last part of will focus on the conclusion drawn from this analysis. By focusing on two concepts that have been previously neglected in relationship to Ellis’ novel I will illustrate how they play an important part in establishing the novel as a satire. This paper makes the claim that *American Psycho* has achieved the status as one of the best postmodernist novel examples in the Western Canon through its use of abjection and its pastiche character. The connection between these two lays in both the specific examples of references in the text, as well as the way in which the abjection is used throughout the novel.
2. The Postmodernism of *American Psycho*

2.1. Genre Issues

One of the problems that appears in any analysis of *American Psycho* is the difficult task of stating which genre the novel belongs to. Various scholars see it as being part of a variety of genres. In his work on postmodernism, *Modern/Postmodern: Society, Philosophy, Literature*, Peter V. Zima notes the fact that "like modernism, postmodern literature cannot be confined to a static and homogenous system of values and norms: to a 'code'" (136). *American Psycho* seems to defy any attempt to be categorized into one singular genre; however, the most popular views regarding this issue seem to place the novel within the genre of horror, Gothic, the transgressive fiction, or satire.

The fact that *American Psycho* can be considered as part of the horror genre does not, perhaps, come as a surprise. Its many graphic depictions of the murders and tortures that Patrick Bateman enjoys doing in the novel are at the very core of the novel’s strongest negative critique. In the novel, Bateman is depicted killing and torturing three dogs, a homeless man, a homosexual man, a Chinese man, his ex-girlfriend, six women, and a child. The tortures and subsequent murders of these characters are graphically and explicitly depicted, so that the novel can easily pass as one of the subgenres of the horror fiction: splatterpunk. The subgenre of splatterpunk is "characterized by the frequent and graphic description of grisly violence, bloody deaths, and extreme sexual situations" (*OED Online*). In his diploma thesis "Satirical and Transgressive Elements in Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*", Jaroslav Matula also notes that "between many other genres that the novel can be considered to pertain to, the splatterpunk is one of them" (14). The novel can be characterized as splatterpunk on the grounds of its extreme violence depicted of which the next passage is just one of several present in the book: "Elizabeth, naked, running from the bedroom, blood already on her, is moving with difficulty and she screams out something garbled. My orgasm
had been prolonged and its release was intense and my knees are weak" (Ellis 289). In this passage from one of Bateman’s many murders following sexual acts, we can recognize all the elements of splatterpunk, namely extreme violence and sexuality, both described in graphic detail.

Ruth Helyer explains in her article "Parodied to Death: The Postmodern Gothic of American Psycho" how the novel can be accepted as Gothic fiction. From the beginning Helyer calls the gothic genre as a "unique combination of the repulsive and the compulsive" (725), continuing to illustrate elements of the gothic that are present in American Psycho. According to Fred Botting, the Gothic genre warns the reader of the dangers of transgressing social rules (qtd. in Helyer 726); this is reflected in Patrick Bateman’s character whose acts, therefore, act as a warning of what is to be avoided in the society. Another element of the Gothic in this novel is the fact that characters are generally stereotypes: Bateman is the serial killer, the rich young man, and the troubled aristocrat (Helyer 728). Above all, he is the romantic character that tends to populate the Gothic genre, characterized by his good looks and success. The Gothic genre also makes use of a combination of the horror and humor. Although the horror is evident, as previously illustrated, the humor lays in Bateman’s own black humor and the comical situations that he often witnesses (for example the characters’ ability to often misidentify their co-workers and friends to a total of approximately 42 times throughout the narrative). As Helyer notes, "He is articulate and clever, with a talent for summarizing a situation, or a character, in an amusing and apt manner, and in much the same way as the traditional Gothic tales, his frightening side is so excessive it can border on the comical" (730). Furthermore, the Gothic’s attention to detail is also found in Bateman’s obsessive tendency to explain his cosmetic routine, describe every person’s attire, or give detailed background to his favorite musicians. The duality present in the Gothic genre is also present in the character of Bateman who is both "wealthy executive and brutal killer, …
charming date and sexual partner from Hell, one of the boys and a rampant homophobic" (Helyer 740). The darkness characteristic to the Gothic genre is replaced in the novel with a cold setting of New York where graffiti as "abandon all hope ye who enter here" (Ellis 3) are adding to the gloom feeling of the place. Helyer marks an important difference in the postmodern Gothic present in *American Psycho*, i.e. the ability to graphically display the violent episodes which in the previous classic Gothic tradition were only hinted at, and acknowledges that trying to classify the novel as one single genre is a difficult task, as it is restrictive (744-745).

Perhaps a better fit to *American Psycho* than the already mentioned genres, is the transgressive fiction. Matula, using the works of Daly and Calcutt, provides a list of the elements of transgressive fiction, such as "drug abuse, crime, or prostitution, aberrant sexual behavior such as incest or sadomasochism; violence in any form and shape; and generally dysfunctional human relationship" (19-20). *American Psycho* has all the elements described: Patrick Bateman and his friends consume drugs on a regular basis; the crimes depicted range from murders, tortures, and gun shootings, to verbal violence; and several of Bateman’s victims are prostitutes. Even though the transgressive fiction has more elements present in Ellis’ novel, it has one major flaw: what is considered transgressive of social norms today might be considered normal or less abnormal in the future, which is something Matula also acknowledges (20). However, a more interesting side of the transgressive fiction is that it can not only be reflected in the social norms that are transgressed in the narrative, but also "the transgressive elements in terms of form" (Barthelot 623-624, qtd. in Matula). The fact that the novel includes chapters that are dedicated to the most gruesome murders, which would lead towards the integration of the novel within a horror genre, to chapters that deal with review-like texts about Whitney Huston’s career, which would integrate in turn the novel in a more non-literary genre, are proof of the novel’s own transgression from form.
Another possible genre, and one that this paper chooses to focus on, is the satire. Defined as "a poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary" (OED Online), there is clear evidence that *American Psycho* can be also part of this genre. The constant aim of the people surrounding Bateman to become richer, to purchase, to become the perfect consumers is one of the most talked about themes of the novel. The numerous occasions when Bateman confesses the truth about his serial killer nature to his lawyer or girlfriend are ignored by the seemingly self-absorbed people. However, as this paper will illustrate, this is not only achieved through the consumerism element or the apparent lack of depth of Bateman and the society around him, although these are the novel’s preferred themes in a range of research that looks into Ellis’ work.

The fact that the novel is a mixture of different genres and appears hard to encompass in one singular format is one of the first elements of postmodernism. Furthermore, there are numerous other postmodern elements that helped give the novel perhaps its only sure classification: that of a postmodern novel.

### 2.2. *American Psycho* as a Postmodern Novel

Although many scholars have stated that it is hard to develop a list of certain clear elements of postmodern literature, some themes have become established as pertaining of the postmodern works. In his work *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, Ihab Hassan attempts a list of eleven postmodern elements, calling them "definiens": indeterminacy, fragmentation, decanonization, depthlessness, the unpresentable, irony, hybridization, carnivalization, performance, constructionism, immanence (170-75). Many of these elements and their sub-elements such as an inconsistent narrator, black humor,
metafiction, or pastiche are found in *American Psycho* and can be used as evidence for the novel’s postmodernism.

Fragmentation is best exemplified in the way the novel includes chapters that completely "break" from the style of the previous ones. For example, if one chapter contains the gruesome episode when Bateman is killing a woman, the next chapter is dedicated completely to the artist Whitney Huston and written in the non-literary form of a review. Fragmentation does not only happen at the level of language in the novel, but also at the level of plot, for example after the detective’s first appearance in the novel, that builds expectations that Bateman will be suspected of the murder of Paul Owen and imprisoned; however, the detective never appears again and Bateman never faces trial.

Patrick Bateman is called by Murphet as "one of the most inconsistent narrative voices in contemporary fiction" (24), since he has proven to be an unreliable narrator. The murder of Paul Owen and the events connected to it shows Bateman as an incredible unreliable narrator, starting with the different descriptions of Owen’s apartment. In the "Paul Owen" chapter the living room is described as: "… very spare, minimalist. The walls are white pigmented concrete, except for one wall, which is covered with a trendy large-scale scientific drawing, and the wall facing Fifth Avenue has a long strip of faux-cowhide paneling stretched across it. A black leather couch sits beneath it. I switch on the wide-screen thirty-one-inch Panasonic to Late Night with David Letterman, then move over to the answering machine to change Owen’s message" (Ellis 218). However, in the later chapter "The Best City for Business" the same room is described as “New Venetian blinds, the cowhide paneling is gone; however, the furniture, the mural, the glass coffee table, Thonet chairs, black leather couch, all seem intact; the large-screen television set has been moved into the living room and it’s been turned on" (Ellis 368). There are discrepancies in Bateman’s description: there was never a glass coffee table in the living room, and the large television was previously in the very room Bateman
tells it has been now moved into. Additionally, his keys do not fit the lock the second time he visits, he cannot recognize the doorman, and in a later chapter the detective investigating Owen’s disappearance informs him that Owen has been seen in London, something puzzling as Bateman had killed him and staged his travel to England. In the light of this evidence, Murphet concludes that this is all the readers need to realize that "Bateman has never been here before" (47).

Ironic and black humor are both present in American Psycho, and can be illustrated in the passage when Bateman is playing with the toddler of his friends, an instance where his confession of his true nature is once again not heard, conveying the society’s lack of attention to anything substantial, as well as being humorous. The little girl’s excitement to play with Bateman’s credit card also makes one think of the children’s future as consumers:

> I’m playing with the baby while Nancy holds her, offering Glenn my platinum American Express card, and she grabs at it excitedly, and I’m shaking my head, talking in a high-pitched baby voice, squeezing her chin, waving the card in front of her face, cooing, “Yes I’m a total psychopathic murderer, oh yes I am, I like to kill people, oh yes I do, honey, little sweetie pie, yes I do. (Ellis 221)

Murphet mentions in his analysis of the novel that we are also dealing with metafiction, yet another postmodern element, evident in Bateman’s philosophical, self-reflective thoughts. These are seldom met in the first part of the novel, but seem to populate it excessively in the last chapters. "The very clarity of the phrases, the philosophical nuance of the exposition, rubs against Bateman’s otherwise imbalanced and disordered language games" (Murphet 50). The instance where the reader’s attention is called upon the fact that Bateman is a fictional character is best illustrated in one of Bateman’s monologues: "... there is an
idea of Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there*" (Ellis 376-377). The previous example is one which conveys the idea of Bateman as a character functioning in a mere fictional plane, which acknowledges that even though he might have similarities to real people he is still a mere fictional presence.

Pastiche is considered by Hassan as part of a new tradition "in which continuity and discontinuity, high and low culture, mingle not to imitate but to expand the past in the present" (172). *American Psycho* contains a great amount of repetitions of genres, repeating typologies of characters such as the serial-killer or the romantic hero, as well as imitating different styles that are sometimes very different from one another (for example the non-literary review genre and the gruesome splatterpunk.) Additionally, the novel contains many references to television shows, magazines, and other literary works. This is important because, although acknowledged by other researchers as being present in the text, their function to help establish the novel as a satire is often ignored. Therefore, the pastiche character of the novel will be further analyzed in the following section of the paper.
3. *American Psycho as Pastiche*

3.1. Pastiche as "Cultural Memory"

Although pastiche has been a constant presence in art throughout history, there has been surprisingly little written on the phenomenon. Pastiche has evolved together with the art it aimed at replicating, but there was little concern given from the art and literary critics (and when that was the case, it was rarely in connection to literature.) From this perspective, Ingeborg Hoesterey’s book *Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, Literature* is considered by Hutcheon a "useful addition to the continuing postmodern debates about intertextuality and self-reflexivity in a variety of art forms" (Pastiche Review 326). Even though the book deals with the phenomenon of pastiche in art, film, and literature, I will rely mainly on Hoesterey’s proposed definition of pastiche in regards to literature for the purpose of this paper.

The first definition of pastiche appeared in 1677 and called the phenomenon "neither original nor copy" (Hoesterey 5). Hoesterey lists writers who have been preoccupied with the phenomenon, like the theoretician Jean- Francois Marmontel who looked into pastiche in French literature (7), Marcel Proust in his *Pastiches et Mélanges* who mirrored Denis Hollier’s view that the key in understanding the pastiche lays not the writing but in the reading (9), or Fredric Jameson who called pastiche "blank parody" in his criticism of postmodernism (x). Another writer and theorist mentioning pastiche in his works was Ihab Hassan, who included pastiche in one of the postmodernism’s elements, namely hybridization, in his work *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*. Hassan affirms that pastiche enriches representation and that "… image or replica may be as valid as its model" (172). However, Hoesterey’s analysis of literary pastiche stands out as it is different than those of her predecessors because it provides a clear definition of the concept, one that is usable for contemporary works such as *American Psycho*. Hoesterey’s work provides the theory that aims to underline the postmodern proprieties of pastiche, something
that is key when it is applied to a postmodern novel like *American Psycho* that makes use of a variety of previous works.

Hoesterey defines postmodern pastiche as being "about cultural memory and the merging of horizons past and present" (xi). This merging of horizons is explained as the past cultural works that are now resurrected and brought into the present to help form or sustain another separate idea. A work of art, be it literary, is brought from the past and re-used in a different context, in a different work, by a different author, not with the purpose of imitating or copying it, but with the intention of anchoring another, new meaning. Hoesterey gives the example of the Venus picture tradition that was and is continually used extensively in the visual arts (18). An example of its use is Leopold Forstner’s painting *Spring*, which uses its central motif from Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* painting, moving "its figure attempting to clothe Venus from right to left, and binds these and two lesser figures into a decorative tableau trimmed in the style of Klimt and Vienna Workshop designs" (Hoesterey 16-17). Hoesterey also notes that the title is reminiscent of another Botticelli painting, and that Forstner’s painting has the characteristics of a pastiche – "... a single taste, manner, style, derived from styles" (17). The object of art exhibits the author’s own style even though it makes use of the same original piece (in Forstern’s case the Venus motif.)

Hoesterey divides the literary pastiche into the homage-type, one that has seen as much admiration as disdain throughout history; and the ancient type, cento pastiche, which is the type that resonates most in postmodern pastiche. The homage (or quasi-homage) pastiche is a work of art which tries to imitate the content of or the style of a previous one for the simple fact that its author holds the original in high regard. It does not attempt to parody the original, but only pays homage to the original author or work. The second pastiche type, cento pastiche, is a term formed by Hoesterey from the old cento— a "patchwork, a poem constructed of individual verses by well-known poets such as Homer and Virgil" (80), an
"aberration of the canon" whose main priority was to parody the original works (80). The antique cento is recycled, Hoesterey explains, into postmodernism as a "stylistic medley" which has lost its main feature, namely the parody, in its current form. The cento pastiche borrows different elements from various works of art and creates a new meaning, without necessarily parodying it, which was the case with the old cento. Hoesterey makes a note that the homage pastiche and the cento pastiche tend to co-exist in most texts (83). Because of the function of the cento pastiche to borrow from the cultural past of art and create a new meaning, Hoesterey calls it "cultural memory". Perhaps its most postmodern element (in the sense of art imitating art in postmodernism) is revealed when the viewer/reader of the cento pastiche is not aware of the original work, therefore not perceiving the pastiche character and missing the meaning that was supposed to be transmitted. Therefore, the pastiche depends on the reader to recognize the original work. This is reflected in Hutcheon’s statement that "the text has a context, and form is given sense perhaps as much through the receiver’s inference of an act of production as by the actual act of perception. This would be especially true of ironic postmodern texts where the receiver does indeed posit or infer an intent to be ironic" (A Poetics of Postmodernism 80). This is true in the case of American Psycho, as Ellis makes use of the massive cultural memory present in literature in order to create a satire, as this paper will later argue. This, as mentioned, depends on the ability of the reader to recognize and react to the cultural products used in the process.

3.2. Innovative Repetition

Hoesterey is not the only scholar that is concerned with cultural repetition in art and how it was perceived as being high or low art throughout history. In his article "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics", Umberto Eco also aims to illustrate how repetition, even though it was frowned upon and regarded as a low culture element in
modernism (192), can also be innovative, especially in a postmodernist context, something that I will later argue is the case with *American Psycho*. Eco’s idea of repetition used to achieve innovation mirrors Hoesterey’s feeling on the matter, both agreeing that old elements used in new art do not necessarily have to be mere repetitions, but create new ideas in original ways.

In his article on repetition in literature and its potential to be innovative, Eco states that "iteration and repetition seem to dominate the whole world of artistic creativity" (194) and that this gave way to a "new aesthetic of seriality" (194), a repetitive art. He mentions that the repetition of a certain format across a genre gives the reader/viewer a certain comfort and can make them derive pleasure by easily allowing them to guess what will happen next (Eco 196). Eco gives the example of the detective story, where the reader can often guess who the murderer is before it is revealed and therefore derives pleasure from this form. Having a certain format used across a genre allows the reader to have certain fixed expectations from the plot/form and to find satisfaction when these expectations are met: "With a series one believes one is enjoying the novelty of the story (which is always the same) while in fact one is enjoying it because of the recurrence of a narrative scheme that remains constant" (Eco 196). Even so, Eco argues that there is nothing that prevents this type of text to become innovative: "In this sense seriality and repetition are not opposed to innovation" (201). In relation to *American Psycho*, Eco’s framework would translate into the idea that even though the novel is one based on perhaps over-used themes like that of the serial killer, its use of that theme is so unique that it becomes innovative. This is especially relevant in the case of Ellis’ novel, since if the reader considers it to be part of a specific genre, he/she will become frustrated since the work disappoints in this sense, and fails to adhere to any genre conventions, especially those of a thriller or detective story (Phillips, qtd. in Matula 12-13).
In her study *Horror as Pleasure: The Aesthetics of Horror Fiction*, Yvonne Leffler mentions that a classical structure of the horror genre is often that where "the audience expects the narrative to reach a satisfactory conclusion in which order is restored" (267). Although *American Psycho* might lead the reader to believe that Bateman will be punished in the "Chase in Manhattan" chapter where he is chased by the police and confesses his murders, or in the "Detective" chapter where is asked questions by a detective who is looking for one of Bateman’s murder victims, but none of these chapters deliver the ending that a reader of a horror novel is accustomed with, if one is to see *American Psycho* as pertaining to that genre. This is perhaps the biggest step away from a genre convention, even though it repeats a theme previously used in many other literary works. However, by frustrating the reader and not offering closure to the narrative, the novel takes a step away from conventions and one towards innovation. Furthermore, repetitions from a plethora of other literary works paint a picture of *American Psycho* as a pastiche that further adds to its innovativeness in the way in which it creates a satire.

3.3. Pastiche Elements in *American Psycho*

*American Psycho* contains a multitude of repetitions in both form and content. As previously mentioned, one such repetition is the theme of the serial killer. From Macbeth to Hannibal Lecter, the serial killer character has been used in a multitude of genres but always tended to populate the horror/thriller novels, so that today the audience expects its presence in such works.

Our reader expectations that Patrick Bateman is a serial killer and will commit murders in the novel are built in the first part of the novel, when the author allows us glimpses at the character’s nature. Before any murders happen in the novel, Bateman responds to Evelyn’s remark that he is the boy next door with "I’m a fucking evil psychopath" (Ellis 20)
and is ignored. Another glimpse at his murderer side is given when his colleagues mention his habit of reading serial killers biographies: "Bateman reads these biographies all the time: Ted Bundy and Son of Sam and Fatal Vision and Charlie Manson" (Ellis 92); or the numerous instances where he is fantasizing about how he would torture and kill people who bother him: "The things I could do to this girl’s body with a hammer, the words I could carve into her with an ice pick" (Ellis 112). Leffler argues that such glimpses arouse the reader’s expectations and are considered an element of suspense (99). Furthermore, the less the reader knows about the character, the more he/she would want to fill in the gaps and achieve a coherent narrative, fueling the curiosity to read the whole novel (Leffler 105). We know that Patrick Bateman is going to kill one or several people and when our expectations are met with the novel’s excess of violence there is a contradiction in the way we perceive this: in one way we derive pleasure because our expectations were met when the murders happen, but at the same time we are shocked at how graphic the depictions of these acts are. The theme of the serial killer is used here, and all the elements that should be repeated are present (murders, a police chase, a poor mental health often exhibited by Bateman, etc.) but in an innovative way through their break from the format.

Further repetitions in the novel are in the field of intertextuality. According to Eco, "it is typical of what is called postmodern literature and art to quote by using *quotation marks* so that the reader pays no attention to the content of the citation but instead to the way in which the excerpt from a first text is introduced into the fabric of a second one" (201). This point is illustrated in the very first words of the novel, *abandon all hope ye who enter here*, (Ellis 3) and the very last, *this is not an exit* (Ellis 399). The first words of the novel are a direct quotation from Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, and the second alluding to Jean-Paul Sartre’s play *No Exit*.
In the novel, the first quotation appears in the form of a blood red graffiti on a bank, while second one on a door sign in a bar. The way the first quotation is used can be interpreted in two ways if we think of who should abandon hope: the people in the city, or the readers who are about to embark on a most disturbing read. The way in which the novel uses quotations, cultural products, and themes is innovative because even though they are repetitions (Dante’s Inferno inscription has been used by a plethora of authors such as Chaucer, Milton, Marx, T.S. Elliot, Philip Pullman, and many more) they help compose a satire. Working in a parallel manner, the very last words of the novel, this is not an exit, also in red letters, have a connection with Dante’s quotation. According to the authors of Morality USA, Ellen G. Friedman and Corinna Squire, this last quote is a reference to Jean-Paul Sartre’s play No Exit (62).

The quotes are not only there to allude to the previous works from a homage-pastiche stand-point, but also function as a cento pastiche to achieve a satire since both Dante’s and Sartre’s works have a common theme: hell. Since the action of the novel is therefore placed between the quotes, they convey the idea that Bateman and the society around him are living in another level of hell. According to Friedman and Squire, both Dante and Sartre’s visions of hell involved the punishment of the sinners: "Dante and Sartre share basic assumptions about the meaning of good and evil. In both their versions of hell, sinners are punished on the basis of their actions. Ellis’s world contains no such equation" (62). Two different meanings are therefore constructed with the help of these allusions: firstly, that the society Bateman lives in, namely the American society, is another vision of hell; and secondly, that there is no escape from it. Both quotes function as satire elements because Bateman’s society is modeled after the American society, and ultimately the fictional world in which he lives resembles the Western society which many readers can recognize. Another way these quotation function as satire elements is through the fact that Bateman is not punished by the society, in contrast to
Dante’s and Sartre’s views. Therefore, the lack of punishment for Bateman’s acts is frustrating for the reader not only because it is expected and not delivered by the narrative, but because it conveys the idea that in the American society (or Ellis’s version of hell) a serial killer’s crimes can be ignored.

Another pastiche element lies in the name of the novel, which is reminiscent of Robert Bloch’s 1959 novel, Psycho. The psychopath’s name in Ellis’ novel, Patrick Bateman, also bears a resemblance to the one in Bloch’s work, Norman Bates. Norman Bates is very different from Bateman in the sense that he is very well anchored in his background and commits the two murders depicted in the novel because he is suffering from double personality disorder (which Bateman does not). From that perspective, one could even argue for the innocence of Bates who is not aware of the fact that he is doing the killings and only covers the murders because he thinks his mother (his other personality) will be punished otherwise. For that reason the readers empathize more with Bates, who is confused about his own situation and appears as a victim trying to protect his deranged mother, ignorant that she is in fact his other personality and long dead: "As long as he was careful about Mother, there’d be no risk. He had to protect her, and he had to protect others. What had happened last week proved it. From now on he'd be extra careful, always. For everyone's sake" (Bloch 98).

Both Bateman and Bates acknowledge that there is something wrong with their mental health, Bates mentioning that he is "mature enough to understand that he might even be the victim of a mild form of schizophrenia, most likely some form of borderline neurosis" (Bloch 94) while Bateman mentions he is seeing a psychiatrist (Ellis 334) but believes his "homicidal behavior on a massive scale cannot be corrected" (Ellis 338). Furthermore, Bateman is successful, rich, attractive, popular, has a girlfriend, and is everything of the romantic character in contrast to Bates who is overweight, balding, middle aged, has very poor social skills, and never had a girlfriend. However, Bates is a character filled with depth, reading on
his situation, and displaying a clear trauma from his childhood when he had poisoned his mother and her husband. The pastiche of *Psycho* in *American Psycho* lays only in its form and not its content, since Bateman only borrows the name and character apparent type of serial killer from Bates and nothing else. This step away from the format, where the reader wants to find a serial killer that is well grounded and motivated (like Norman Bates), that in the end is punished by the society and stopped, is not met well by the readers who instead meet Bateman, a perfect consumer, a killer with no motivation, and above all— a prose that instead of pointing the finger at the killer, does it instead at the world around him.

The lack of closure in the novel is bothering and marks an important difference between Bloch’s and Ellis’ novel. In a general and perhaps more interesting sense, the entire world around Patrick Bateman is one that does not fit with the society that is depicted in Bloch’s novel, one that hunts down its murderers and punishes them. Patrick Bateman’s world is one where people are continually confused about each other’s identities, are focused on making a profit, and often-times puzzle even Bateman. The instance where Bateman looks at the people considered normal and wonders what went wrong are the first hints at the novel attempting to achieve a satire, showing glimpses of the critique to the American society. The novel does not lack analyses regarding its content, but the form is often ignored. This is unfortunate since what Hoesterey calls "homage pastiche" lays exactly in the way Ellis’ novel bears resemblance to Bloch’s novel only in the name of the work and the main characters. The before mentioned serial-killer typology character is also loaned from a format of the genre. The plot does not follow a single action, the narration point of view changes at times, as well as the style and often syntax too. There is nobody trying to capture Bateman for his crimes, no detective is looking for a criminal in New York, there is no complication of the plot in any way, and perhaps the element that frustrates the readers the most is that there is no capture of the serial killer. The satire in relation to Bloch’s *Psycho* is constructed through the contrast
between the two societies of Bates and Bateman, where Bateman’s American society is critiqued for its lack of depth.

"Les Misérables" first makes an appearance in the novel in the very first page when a buss bearing the advert for the musical passes by. Throughout the novel the name of the musical reappears twenty-five times. The choice of this particular musical can be, of course, linked to the element of consumerism that is most obvious in the novel, but it is even more interesting in Murphet’s point of view "as a satiric key to the class politics of Bateman and his gang." (55); in his opinion, the musical being "an opportunity to consume and enjoy the image of misery" (55). The musical works as an element through which the novel attempts a critique of the society through contrasts of the musical advertisements (targeted at a middle- high class) and poverty (one of the musical’s themes): "Once outside, ignoring the bum lounging below the Les Misérables poster and holding a sign that reads: I’VE LOST MY JOB I AM HUNGRY I HAVE NO MONEY PLEASE HELP…” (Ellis 113). This contrast of the poverty presented next to the musical poster conveys the idea that even though the musical, originally a Victor Hugo novel, depicts poverty, the French revolution, orphans, thieves, and beggars, the musical in its current form is "an all-dancing, all-singing extravaganza open only to the middle class and upper class, who are content to spend more on tickets than they will all year on charity" (Murphet 55). Therefore, the original message of the musical is lost, and through its appearance in American Psycho it helps to achieve a critique of a society that consumes only what is fashionable but cares little about the meaning. Bateman and his friends seem to love the musical but despise anyone that is poor and are cruel to homeless people: "Van Patten waves a crisp one-dollar bill in front of the homeless bum’s face, which momentarily lights up, then Van Patten pockets it as we’re whisked into the club, handed a dozen drink tickets and two VIP Basement passes" (Ellis 52).
Ultimately, the entire society is one that lacks depth and it leads to a parody of grotesque magnitude of the entire Western society. Furthermore, the society around Bateman is, in turn, a society that ignores his acts and ends up being a parody of the concerned society around Norman Bates, one that questions the happenings, investigates, and punishes its "psychos". When Bates’ society hires a detective to find one of the victims, find the criminal and bring him to justice, Bateman’s society not only does none of those things but insists in ignoring every hint that he is a killer even when it is directly uttered: “And there are many more people I, uh, want to … want to, well, I guess murder" (Ellis 141).

All the violence that Bateman exhibits in the novel is not randomly included either. The social rules that the characters in the novel ignore, especially Bateman, are important for the narrative’s attempt to become a satire. Even though critics have been hard on pointing out at the violence and obscene as holders of no meaning (Fraccero 45), the next section will demonstrate that, on the contrary, the gruesome parts of *American Psycho* bring a strong contribution to the satire element by including the reader’s own reaction as well as allowing a possible explanation for what motivates Patrick Bateman to commit his crimes.
4. Abjection and Violence in *American Psycho*

4.1. Abjection

Julia Kristeva’s work *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* deals with the concept of *abjection*, which she defines as neither object nor subject, but instead that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). For something to become abject it needs to provoke the audience’s perception of what is socially acceptable; therefore, it is neither object nor subject, but something at the border between them. Kristeva’s example in trying to illustrate abjection is done through the image of a corpse: the corpse itself is not threatening to us, as it cannot harm us in any way, but it nonetheless instills fear and disgust. Kristeva explains why, if the corpse cannot harm us, it is seen as threatening: a corpse does not signify death, but what is instead threatening is the idea that we will all die and become the very corpse that we see. Therefore, we reject not only the corpse itself but the entire idea of the inevitability of our own death: "corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva 3). By rejecting the idea of a corpse we reject the fact that we will one day die- the basis of abjection.

Abjection does not refer exclusively to death or violence. Anything that threatens to disturb our accepted identity and social norms is bound to the same rule (for example food loathing).

Making the transition to abjection represented in literature, Kristeva chooses to analyze the powers of abjection through the French author Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s work. Céline’s prose, often describing death and suffering, is especially appealing to Kristeva in explaining the violence element of abjection. Even though, like mentioned, abjection refers to more than just violence, this particular aspect is of interest in this paper as it will be applied to *American Psycho*. 


4.2. The Abjection in *American Psycho*

As previously shown, *American Psycho* has a history of being a controversial novel mainly because of its graphic content. Gruesome scenes where Bateman derives pleasure from torturing and killing women are presented in gory details throughout the novel and build the main critique against the novel: that its violent content is excessive. The reader is alienated by this content in a way that reflects Kristeva’s explanation of how abjection works. Past the violence that Bateman inflicts upon his victims, there is something else that the reader rejects and that threatens social order: the way the society acts regarding Bateman’s acts. Therefore, through the concept of abjection we can understand how yet another element, i.e. the violence, leads to the novel’s satiric aspect.

In a similar manner to which Kristeva’s before mentioned example of the corpse, Bateman’s acts give rise to the reader’s reaction not because they are threatening— after all we are dealing with representations and fiction— but because of what they stand for. There is nothing threatening in Patrick Bateman, who is a fictional character; however, what is disturbing is the possibility of someone like Bateman existing in our society, threatening our existence. By subjecting the readers to depictions of Bateman’s extreme acts of violence, the novel uses abjection to contribute to its satiric element: the possibility that if someone like Bateman would exist, he could commit murders and tortures without anybody even attempting to stop him in a society that would rather focus on earning more money or consuming fashionable brands.

Although Bateman seems in charge of almost any situation, there are glimpses that contradict this. His inability to control his emotions in a situation when he is not the most superior person in the group show him in the light of an adult with a phobia of not being in control. Kristeva notes that the "the speech of the phobic adult is also characterized by extreme nimbleness" (41). Bateman is not always portrayed as a character in control,
calculated, or a cold blooded killer that fears nothing. On the contrary, if we are to apply Kristeva’s theory, Bateman is an adult that shows clear signs of phobia, namely his intense fear of being less fashionable, rich, and superior than the others around him. This is illustrated in the chapter that depicts him having dinner with Bethany. Put in the position of having to have a conversation with someone with who he was apparently once in love during his student years at Harvard, Bateman is afraid that he will not look superior from all points of view. He has a psychosomatic response when he hears that Bethany’s current love interest is a chef at the Dorsia restaurant, where he had tried (and failed) to make a reservation numerous times:

“It’s called Dorsia,” she says, then, “Patrick, are you okay?”

Yes, my brain does explode and my stomach bursts open inwardly—a spastic, acidic, gastric reaction; stars and planets, whole galaxies made up entirely of little white chef hats, race over the film of my vision. I choke out another question. (Ellis 239)

The meeting with Bethany is not the only time when, confronted by the possibility of not being the most superior person, Bateman has psychosomatic responses. Another incident is the time when he and his colleagues were comparing business cards and Bateman has to admit that his friend has a more sophisticated one:

Even I have to admit it’s magnificent. Suddenly the restaurant seems far away, hushed, the noise distant, a meaningless hum, compared to this card, and we all hear Price’s words: “Raised lettering, pale nimbus white … (Ellis 44)
When Bethany insists paying for the lunch, therefore making Bateman miss one of his ways of showing his wealth by exhibiting his platinum American-Express card:

“No,” she says, opening her handbag. “I invited you.”

“But I have a platinum American Express card,” I tell her.

“But so do I,” she says, smiling.

I pause, then watch her place the card on the tray the check came on. Violent convulsions seem close at hand if I do not get up. (Ellis 242)

We can therefore see that, even before becoming violent, Bateman exhibits psychosomatic responses when confronted with the fact that he is not the most superior person in a room at any given time. His quest to be the best dressed, well spoken, and good looking person is threatened in key moments of the novel, and spark violent reactions that lead to graphically depicted tortures and killings: Paul Owen is killed by Bateman because he is the person who is in charge of the Fisher account that everyone aspires to work on; and Bethany is brutally tortured and killed after she informs Bateman that his most prized possession, his Onica painting, was hung upside down. The society around him is increasingly threatening to Bateman’s status. Bateman’s attitude before committing the murders is, as illustrated, mirroring Kristeva’s definition of the symptoms of the phobic adult.

The idea that the society is threatening Bateman’s identity has also been brought into discussion by Matula, who states that "it may be argued that Bateman’s acts of violence stem largely from his need to fulfill ambitions the realization of which has been thwarted by society— ambitions such as the freedom to decide and any kind of creative expression" (67). This idea would not only serve as a well sought-after motivation for why Bateman is committing the crimes, but would also put him in a victim position rather than a villain. The
last part of the novel contains chapters that portray a different Bateman than in the beginning, through his more complex, philosophical thoughts, but also through his direct way of blaming the society around him for his state:

And later my macabre joy sours and I’m weeping for myself, unable to find solace in any of this, crying out, sobbing “I just want to be loved,” cursing the earth and everything I’ve been taught: principles, distinctions, choices, morals, compromises, knowledge, unity, prayer— all of it was wrong, without any final purpose. All it came down to was: die or adapt. (Ellis 345)

Bateman adapted because he wanted to be creative: the only times in the novel when he exhibits any creativity is when he is committing murders and experimenting new ways of torture; otherwise, he is a mistaken all the time by other characters because he functions in a society where everyone looks and acts in very similar ways. His murders are excessive to the public and alienate precisely because they are narrated by Bateman in detail: he does not only commits cannibalism, but tries to cook one of his victims using a meat loaf recipe although he never cooks; he is considering using a decapitated head as a Halloween lantern; or day-dreams of the possibility of performing a blood transfusion between a dog and a woman. Although extreme in the detail with which they are narrated by Bateman, these are examples of Bateman’s potential creativity exhibited through violence. By committing the murders, Bateman rejects the society’s "principles, distinctions, choices, morals, compromises, knowledge, unity, and prayer" in order to achieve something that has kept its depth: death and suffering.

One of the few authors writing on the presence of abjection in *American Psycho*, Casey Moore, notes that "as the subject confronts the abject, she/he is initially drawn in and
fascinated; however, after the subject realizes the instability of his or her imagined identity . . . s/he must push the abject away or face self annihilation (Creed 10; Moore 4-5; qtd. in Moore 228). This is consistent with Bateman’s abjection of the society’s ways that were imposed on him at the price of his creativity. However, Moore chooses to continue his connection between abjection and *American Psycho* by stating that "the reader/viewer is constantly exposed to the abject" (228). Therefore, we are already meeting two levels of abjection in the novel: what Patrick Bateman rejects and finds threatening to his identity, and what the reader finds abject. At the first level of abjection, when Bateman rejects society’s norms and finds them threatening to his own identity construction and his creativity, the narrative becomes a satire by placing the villain in the place of the victim and blaming the society for creating the monster. At the second level of abjection, namely that of the reader reacting to the graphic scenes in the novel, it is violence that plays a role in building a satire element, as the next section will argue.

4.3. The Violence in *American Psycho*

As Leffler notes in her study, "many scholars and commentators now equate horror with violence" (21). The excess of violence in *American Psycho* comes perhaps as a surprise for the reader which, even though expects such content, is alienated by its, at times, obscene aspect. However, changes appear in both form and content when violence is depicted.

Murphet points out the stylistic changes between the episodes when Bateman is doing mundane things, filling entire pages with advertising-like monologues about products and brands, and episodes when he is committing the murders (or fantasying that he is, according to Murphet). This can be illustrated by making the difference between passages like:

and the more elaborate (and graphic) scene when he is killing his business rival Paul Owen:

The ax hits him midsentence, straight in the face, its thick blade chopping sideways into his open mouth, shutting him up. Paul’s eyes look up at me, then involuntarily roll back into his head, then back at me, and suddenly his hands are trying to grab at the handle, but the shock of the blow has sapped his strength. There’s no blood at first, no sound either except for the newspapers under Paul’s kicking feet, rustling, tearing. Blood starts to slowly pour out of the sides of his mouth shortly after the first chop, and when I pull the ax out—almost yanking Owen out of the chair by his head—and strike him again in the face, splitting it open, his arms flailing at nothing, blood sprays out in twin brownish geysers, staining my raincoat. (Ellis 217)

As Murphet points out, the second passage is much more complex, as are all the instances when Bateman is committing acts of violence: “Here, as nowhere else, Bateman’s voice is capable of complex sentence formation, clausal subordination, detailed analysis of material processes, descriptive verve, adjectival and adverbial precision, and bravure periods” (Murphet 45). Although Murphet draws the conclusion that these are the complex formations
of Bateman’s fantasy, and that he is not committing the actual murders but only imagining that he is, it is enough to point at the stylistic difference to understand that the violence is contained in another sphere of the novel. Although Murphet prefers this example in his attempt to prove that Bateman is not committing any actual murder, he is incorrect in stating that it is the only example when Bateman is capable of complex sentence formulations. Another instance when the syntax changes is towards the end of the novel, when not only Bateman presents himself as more mentally unstable through his acts, but also in the way he communicates his thoughts to the reader: he starts referring to himself in the third person and hears voices (something that was not reveled to have happened before):


I’m having a sort of hard time paying attention because my automated teller has started speaking to me, sometimes actually leaving weird messages on the screen, in green lettering, like “Cause a Terrible Scene at Sotheby’s” or “Kill the President” or “Feed Me a Stray Cat,” and I was freaked out by the park bench that followed me for six blocks last Monday evening and it too spoke to me. (Ellis 395)

Also, in the last chapters Bateman has deep philosophical ponderings about his situation that are also formed through complex sentence constructions such as:

... where there was nature and earth, life and water, I saw a desert landscape that was unending, resembling some sort of crater, so devoid of reason and
light and spirit that the mind could not grasp it on any sort of conscious level and if you came close the mind would reel backward, unable to take it in. It was a vision so clear and real and vital to me that in its purity it was almost abstract. This was what I could understand, this was how I lived my life, what I constructed my movement around, how I dealt with the tangible. This was the geography around which my reality revolved: it did not occur to me, ever, that people were good or that a man was capable of change or that the world could be a better place through one’s taking pleasure in a feeling or a look or a gesture, of receiving another person’s love or kindness. (Ellis 374)

The instances where there is a clear difference in syntax illustrate the difference between what Bateman thinks and what he does, while also marking the abjection operate at the level of Bateman’s character. Although not a split personality case, like in Bloch’s Psycho, Bateman has a clear idea of what he can do and say in public and what he cannot, exhibiting a shallow personality but in the same time being capable of deep thoughts. This point connects to Hans D. Baumann’s claims in Horror: Die Lust am Grauen "that contemporary fiction deals with something commonplace yet taboo within society, namely violence"(qtd. in Leffler 87). Such an idea implies that Bateman’s acts of violence lie dormant in all of us as suppressed acts of anger that we think about doing but do not, stopped by social norms. This is also Leffler’s view, who states that "psychologically-oriented scholars think that the horror story involves us emotionally in such a way as to awaken something repressed within us. This view implies that we are frightened by something very familiar to us, rather than something strange" (81). Therefore, the violence in American Psycho can be interpreted as something lying dormant in all of us. This idea not only helps better formulate the critique to the society, a society that we have grown to dislike in the novel perhaps as much as
Bateman, but bothers in its implication that the "psycho" of the novel is not only Bateman, but everyone around him as a group. The readers therefore are not only threatened by the mere presence of the violence, which is mere fiction, but also of the idea that it is part of everyone, including themselves.

Kristeva notes that abjection protects us, functioning as a shield: "on the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of the reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. Then, abject and abjection are my safeguards" (2). For the reader, Bateman and his acts are abject-we are afraid of the possibility that Bateman exists in our society, while at the same time there is a realization that we do certain things in a similar manner: we consume, work, engage in conversation, and go out with our friends in similar ways. Our similarities to Bateman, the elements we find familiar in the bizarre behavior of the people around him, are also threatening to our identity. Therefore, it is the combination of the way the society responds to the violence in the novel and the way Bateman itself looks puzzled at the world around him that brings together the satire element. This is captured in the episode when Bateman is making random obscene phone calls to young girls:

Most of the time I could tell they were frightened and this pleased me greatly, enabled me to maintain a strong, pulsing erection for the duration of the phone calls, until one of the girls, Hilary Wallace, asked, unfazed, “Dad, is that you?” and whatever enthusiasm I’d built up plummeted. (Ellis 162)

Past the depicted violence, there is another type of violence, the unseen one, which is hinted at throughout the novel, and which should not be ignored as it adds to the society’s critique just as well as the one committed by Bateman. These are hinted as through the numerous times Bateman informs the reader what his favorite show, The Patty Winters Show
was about (some of the titles including "Toddler-Murderers", "Shark-Attack Victims" or "Home Abortion Kits"). Price also recites numerous titles in newspapers that all focus New York criminality, such as "strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway, a Communist rally, Mafia boss wiped out, Nazis" (Ellis 4). But perhaps one of the strongest satire elements is to be found in the last chapter, when Bateman and his friends are in a bar together watching a speech by former president Reagan. The issue is the Iran-Contra affair, and the president’s lies on the matter are making Price very vocal on the matter. Price is commenting on how Reagan "looks so… normal . . . So… undangerous" (Ellis 397), even though his actions resulted in the death of many people. Just like Bateman, more people look normal and harmless but their actions lead to many people’s death. Murphet points out that "inside, like Bateman himself, Reagan is the ‘psycho’ of the novel’s title, selling arms to Iran to back genocide in Nicaragua. No one else cares; everyone is silently complicit"(54). This political statement backs up the claim that the novel does not only contain a society critique agenda, but that this critique is more specifically aimed at the American society.

In connection to pastiche, abjection is related to it through the way in which its most prominent element, i.e. the violence, is used by Ellis. Kristeva describes suffering as abjection’s most intimate side, and horror as its public feature (Kristeva 140). Furthermore, she adds that "…the theme of suffering-horror is the ultimate evidence of such states of abjection within a narrative representation" (Kristeva 141). The violence as abjection in literature is illustrated through Céline’s works which include gruesome depictions of suffering and violence. In American Psycho one would find similarities between Céline’s style of depicting violence and Ellis’:
He sticks his finger into the wound . . . He plunges both hands into the meat . . . he digs into all the holes . . . He tears away the soft edges . . . He pokes around. . . He gets stuck. . . His wrist is caught in the bones . . . Crack! . . . He tugs . . . He struggles like in a trap . . . Some kind of pouch bursts. . . The juice pours out. . . it gushes all over the place . . . all full of brains and blood . . . splashing. . . (Céline, qtd. in Kristeva 150)

I spend the next fifteen minutes beside myself, pulling out a bluish rope of intestine, most of it still connected to the body, and shoving it into my mouth, choking on it, and it feels moist in my mouth and it’s filled with some kind of paste which smells bad. I want to drink this girl’s blood as if it were champagne and I plunge my face deep into what’s left of her stomach, scratching my chomping jaw on a broken rib. (Ellis 344)

The first quotation is part of Céline’s *Death on the Installment Plan*, and depicts the character of Father Fleury dismembering a corpse. The quote from *American Psycho* depicts Patrick Bateman who is doing the same thing to one of his victims. Although the point of view is different in the two examples, and Ellis’ prose seems to be filled with more complex descriptions, there are similarities between the two scenes. The presence of bodily fluids, bones, the fact that both characters are hurt in the process of corpse defilement, and the very presence of a corpse create a similar disgust in the reader. *American Psycho*’s use of violence as abjection is similar to Céline’s work and can be considered a pastiche. Kristeva calls the violence as abjection present in Céline’s prose an apocalyptic vision rather than a narrative. From this point of view, Ellis constructs more than a simple narrative (which is as illustrated previously fragmented and challenged throughout the novel) but a satire of the American
society. Using violence that serves the purpose to not merely shock, but to construct a vision of apocalyptic magnitude, the attention of the reader is drawn upon Bateman’s act and the people surrounding him. Although the readers of both narratives feel threatened by the idea of the corpse, of death intertwining with life, the message of American Psycho seems to suggest that society plays an important role in the serial killer side of Bateman. As Helyer notes, "although Patrick is portrayed as very much a barbarian in a civilized society, the further the plot unfolds the more questionable the morals of the so-called civilized society become" (729).
5. Conclusion

*American Psycho*’s ascension to a canonized literary work has been an interesting subject for many researchers. The novel fascinates through its contrasts: at times extreme, bizarre, and grotesque, while other times humorous, mundane, and ironic. Ellis’ novel entered a select list of works that were not received well by the literary critics at the time when they were first published but are now well established in the universities’ syllabi. From the many interesting aspects that can make the subject of an analysis, this paper chose to focus on two that have proven to be almost ignored in previous research: the novel’s pastiche character, and the function of abjection. Through a careful analysis of how both these concept operate in the novel, proof has been gathered for the novel’s satire element. Although *American Psycho* has been named a satire by several critics, this has mostly been looked into through the consumerism aspect, gender issues, or self-fashioning. Therefore, pastiche and abjection become more appealing to investigate as they are "uncharted territory" and because of the interesting way through which they form a satire.

Pastiche has been proven to be a useful concept to investigate through Ingeborg Hoestery’s definitions and frameworks. *American Psycho* makes use of a multitude of previous cultural products like Dante’s Inferno, Sartre’s *No Exit* play, "Les Misérables" musical, or Robert Bloch’s *Psycho*. Ellis uses these cultural works ironically in *American Psycho* and through their contrasts with the novel’s content develops a critique of the American society, as it has been argued.

Abjection functions on two levels in the text. First, at the level of the reader who rejects the possibility of Bateman’s existence in the real society as well as the possibility that if that would be the case, this certain type of individual would have the chance to be left unpunished. Second, at Bateman’s level who rejects the very society whom he blames for his acts. In both cases, violence serves as the best element of abjection through which a satire can
be constructed. Kristeva’s own analysis of violence as abjection revolves around Céline’s prose which is strongly reminiscent of *American Psycho* and therefore serving as a possible connection to pastiche.

Although this paper’s purpose was to analyze how pastiche and abjection form a satire in *American Psycho*, certain elements that could not find space in the current analysis, could prove to be worthy of more attention in the future. A better link between pastiche and abjection could be further outlined if this would make the primary subject of a future research, since the example of violence as pastiche of the style of Céline does not have to be an isolated case. Moreover, pastiche as a phenomenon in literature would be an interesting topic, especially in relation to postmodern novels, as it is scarcely written about but increasingly present in literature. If *American Psycho* is a pastiche, then it would be interesting in analyzing a novel that can be argued to, in turn, be a pastiche of Ellis’ novel, (for example Alain Mabanckou’s *African Psycho*.)

Although sometimes blamed for showing the wrong which is present in the society but never clearly stating it, *American Psycho* has proven to be a rich source of elements of satire. Through its postmodernist character which allows it the flexibility to operate with a multitude of previous works as well as graphic content, *American Psycho*’s critique of the American society is increasingly hard to ignore.
6. Works Cited


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