The Unreliable Narrator in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*

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MANNILA, SINI: The Unreliable Narrator in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*

Tutkin Pro gradu -työssäni Bret Easton Ellisin romaania *American Psycho* (1991) ja sitä, voidaanko sen kertojaa Patrick Batemania pitää epäluotettavana kertojana. Väitän, että Bateman on epäluotettava kertoja ja että osa teoksesta on hänen mielikuvituksensa tuotosta. Tutkin millaiset ominaisuudet Batemanin kerronnassa viittaavat epäluotettavuuteen ja millaisia seurauksia epäluotettavuudella on teoksen tulkinnan kannalta. Väitän, että kun Bateman tulkitaan epäluotettavaksi kertojaksi, avaa se mahdollisuuden teoksen erilaisille temaattisille tulkinnoille, joihin ei muuten voisi päätyä.

Romaanissa Bateman selostaa juppien elämänmenoa 1980-luvun loppupuolen New Yorkissa ja kuvailee tekemiään raakoja murhia. Hänen kerrontansa tulvii ristiriitaisuuksia ja asiavirheitä, jotka herättävät lukijan epäilyksen siitä, että hänen sanaansa ei voi luottaa. Pohdin Batemanin epäluotettavuuden syitä eri teemojen kautta. Näihin kuuluvat Batemanin depersonalisaatio, hänen taipumuksensa niin sanottuihin toiveentäyttämisfantasioihin sekä romaanissa tiuhaan mainitun keskusteluohjelma *The Patty Winters Show*'n merkitys. Lisäksi tarkastelen, kuinka yhden kohtauksen tai kappaleen epäluotettavuus voi johtaa dominoefektiin, jonka seurauksena usea muu teoksen osa täytyy myös tulkita epäluotettavana.

Tarkastelen Batemania Ansgar Nünningin kognitiivisen dramaattiseen ironiaan nojautuvan epäluotettavan kertojan teorian avulla. Lisäksi käytän apuna luonnollistamisen (engl. *naturalisation*) käsitettä, jonka avulla kuvaan miten lukija ratkaisee teoksen epäjohdonmukaisuudet muodostaakseen mahdollisen tulkinnan Batemanin epäluotettavuuden luonteesta ja syystä. Hyödynnän myös epäluotettavan kertojan kahta alatyyppiä, luonteeltaan epäluotettavien ja erehtyväisten kertojien kahtiajakoa, ja väitän, että Bateman voidaan nähdä esimerkkinä kummastakin kertojatyypistä, etenkin erehtyväisestä kertojasta.

Analyysini perusteella väitän, että Bateman on epäluotettava kertoja, ja että jotkin teoksen osat, mahdollisesti koko romaani, on hänen sepittämäänsä tarinaa. Hänen tarinointinsa saattaa johtua mielisairaudesta, päihteiden käytöstä tai niiden yhdistelmästä. Hän joko tietoisesti tai hallusinaatioiden uhrina luo fantasiamaailman, jossa hän voi tehdä mitä haluaa ilman seurauksia. Koska hän ei voisi tehdä kuvaamiaan asioita todellisessa maailmassa, lukija tulee tietoiseksi läsnä olevasta dramaattisesta ironiasta ja päättelee Batemanin olevan epäluotettava.

avainsanat: epäluotettava kertoja, luotettavuus, dramaattinen ironia, Bret Easton Ellis, luonnollistaminen

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1. Introduction

Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) revolves around Patrick Bateman. Bateman is the epitome of a young American conservative—a white and wealthy Wall Street stock trader whose life seems rather comfortable on the surface. Aged 27 at the beginning of the novel, he is the protagonist and narrator of *American Psycho*. Early on in the narrative, it is revealed that he brutally murders those different from him: women, children, gays, blacks, and the poor. These "random acts of violence" are connected in that the victims are all somehow "othered" by Bateman (Phillips 2009, 63). He is surrounded by friends who are mostly interested in themselves, and the relations between them are superficial. As Bateman gives the reader an account of his daily life, he narrates of clothing, brand names, and slaughtering people with the same emotion, or more accurately, emotional detachment. In this thesis, I will argue that Bateman is an unreliable narrator and examine his unreliability from different perspectives.

Ellis gained critical and commercial success with his first novel *Less than Zero* (1985), but it was "his third novel *American Psycho* that established Ellis as a central figure in contemporary US literature and culture" (Mandel 2011, 2). *American Psycho* can be viewed as satire and critique of the yuppie lifestyle of 1980s, and some of the major themes in the novel deal with materialism, lack of individualism, narcissism and racism. Consequently, academic writing on Ellis's work has become more popular in recent times with much of it centring on themes such as "violence and representation, literature and ethics [and] writing and responsibility" (Mandel 2011, 1). At the time of its publication in 1991, *American Psycho* was almost universally criticised on moral, literary and artistic grounds, and many critics found its lack of a clear plot off-putting (Brien 2006, 3; Mandel 2011, 9), and it is still considered "one of the most controversial novels of the twentieth century" (Mandel 2011, 1). *American Psycho* was deemed meaningless and repulsive, but I believe a great deal of

substance lies under the gore, a fact some critics have noted as well (see, for example, Gomel 2011 and Phillips 2009). It is possible that people misunderstand the novel, or cannot see past the brutal violence (Mandel 2011, 2). Bateman's unreliability in particular is interesting, because it allows for new interpretations of the novel and challenges the aforementioned view of the novel being mere drivel. Indeed, Naomi Mandel (2011, 3) calls it a novel that has been both "violently reviled and vehemently acclaimed".

Some critics maintain that Bateman is reliable (Zerweck 2001, 157), but I disagree. *American Psycho* is littered with discrepancies of numerous kinds, and the cumulative effect of their existence makes Bateman an unreliable narrator. Therefore, in this thesis I intend to argue that Bateman is an unreliable narrator and consequently his account of the events during the novel cannot be fully trusted or accepted by the reader. This, in turn, has an effect on the possible readings of the novel.

Apart from Jennifer Phillips' article "Unreliable Narration in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*: Interaction between Narrative Form and Thematic Content" (2009), I could find no studies that focus exclusively on unreliability in *American Psycho* as most articles focus on other themes in the novel. In articles dealing with unreliability, *American Psycho* is used as one example among many with little in-depth commentary. While there have been different critical views on Bateman's reliability, Phillips (2009, 60) says that those who accept Bateman as a reliable narrator do not question the narrative. The bulk of my analysis will be based on Ansgar Nünning's cognitive model of unreliability which looks at unreliability in relation to the reader's cognitive processes. I will argue that there are two different degrees of unreliability in *American Psycho:* either the entire novel or some parts of the novel are the result of Bateman's hallucinations and imagination because of his drug use and insanity.

This thesis will be divided into four larger parts. I will begin by discussing the theory of unreliable narration in chapter 2. I will start with the origins of unreliable narration in 2.1 before moving on to discussing the cognitive approach to unreliability in 2.2 which I will use in my analysis later on. In 2.3 I will discuss grammatical signs of unreliability which I will return to in the course of my analysis of *American Psycho*. After discussing these theoretical aspects, I will move on to the analysis section. In chapter 3 I will look at several larger themes that pertain to Bateman's unreliability. In 3.1 I will discuss Bateman's self-image, his feelings of depersonalisation and how they might affect his reliability, and in 3.2 I will examine Bateman's tendency for wish-fulfilment. In 3.3 I will examine *The Patty Winters Show*, a talk show that Bateman watches religiously, and how it connects to Bateman's unreliability, and in 3.4 I will look at how deeming one part of the narrative unreliable can alter the reliability of other parts of it, and how it creates a domino effect of (un)reliability. After dealing with these themes, I will look at the two subtypes of unreliable narrators, untrustworthy and fallible narrators in chapter 4, and discuss how Bateman can be seen as either one in 4.1 and 4.2, respectively. Finally, in chapter 5, I will discuss how Bateman's unreliability affects the reading of the novel, and allows for more interpretations than if he were regarded as reliable.

2. Theory of Unreliable Narration

Unreliable narration is part of literary narratology (Phillips 2009, 60). Jan Stühring (2011, 95) says the basic "intuition" behind unreliable narratives is that "some narratives are unreliable because what is said in those narratives is wrong". In other words, there is something in the discourse that makes the reader suspicious of the events depicted in the narrative. I will discuss what that something is in this chapter.

2.1 Origins of Unreliable Narration

Unreliable narration first came to prominence in the early 1960s. Wayne C. Booth (1921–2005), an American literary critic, coined the term *unreliable narrator* in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* when it was published in 1961. Booth's "canonical definition" (Nünning 1999, 53) reads as follows:

> I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not.
> (Booth 1983, 158–159, emphasis in the original)

What Booth means is that unreliability can be detected when there is at least some distance between the narrator and the so-called implied author (Booth 1983, 155; Nünning 2008, 30). In other words, when the narrator says one thing and the implied author seems to say something different, the conclusion is that the narrator is unreliable.

One of the difficulties in understanding Booth's definition is figuring out who the implied author is. According to Booth (1983, 151), the implied author is the author's "second self" who "stands behind the scenes", but is always separate from the real-life person. Booth also says that the implied author "chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices" (1983, 74–75). Tom Kindt and Hans Harald Müller (2006, 52) explain that newer interpretations of Booth's implied author see it as being an "entity that wants to express exactly what the text means". Kindt and Müller's view is at odds with Booth's view (Kindt and Müller 2006, 58–59), and they say that Booth's model assumes that "authors, when they make texts, always create images of themselves in the process" (2006, 58). It is then the author who creates the implied author. Alternatively, in newer interpretations, the implied author can be seen as the image of the text's author that the readers construct while reading a text (Kindt and Müller 2006, 59). Therefore, one of the flaws in Booth's model is the indeterminable origin of the implied author.

Another problem is figuring out to what degree the implied author and the narrator can be separated before the narrator is deemed unreliable. Seymour Chatman's (1978, 148) thoughts on the implied author reveal one important point behind the difficulty:

> Unlike the narrator, the implied author can tell us nothing. He, or better, it has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn.

The implied author has no external way of communicating. Yet, it is the implied author "who carries the reader with him in judging the narrator" (Booth 1983, 158). Chatman (1978, 148) likens the implied author to an instructor figure who chooses to let the reader know something. The implied author is an "ideal reading position inside the text" and real-life flesh and blood readers "can only try to enter this ideal position" (Shen and Xu 2007, 50 fn). Because the implied author has no external voice with which to communicate, the reader is left in an insecure reading position while trying to reach the ideal one.

Because the implied author's role in literary communication is ambiguous and there is no clear method for identifying the implied author (Kindt and Müller 2006, 58), it is problematic to use it to discern between reliability and unreliability. It is because of this ambiguity that I will base my analysis on Ansgar Nünning's newer cognitive model of unreliability that is nevertheless based on Booth's theory.

2.2 Cognitive Model of Unreliability

Booth's work on unreliable narration is held in high regard, but many later critics find his definition imperfect and lacking (Nünning 1999, 53), and it has stirred much debate in the last twenty years (Phillips 2009, 61). Nünning (1999, 53–54) considers Booth's rhetorical model and the implied author to be "ill-defined and elusive" and "terminologically imprecise and theoretically inadequate", but also acknowledges the impact and importance of Booth's work. The problem is the "incoherent" nature of the implied author and how to define it

(Nünning 2005, 92). Booth (1983, 158) himself never claimed the model to be definitive and said that the terminology for the distance between the narrator and the implied author is "almost hopelessly inadequate", a matter also pointed out by Nünning (2008, 30). Even while defining the unreliable narrator, Booth (1983, 158) uses the phrase "for lack of better terms", and in the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* he expresses his later dissatisfaction outright (Booth 1983, 421–422).

Consequently, the inadequacies of Booth's rhetorical model have given rise to alternative models of unreliability. The two main approaches to unreliability are divided between rhetorical and cognitive models. Whereas the rhetorical models focus on the values of the implied author, the cognitive models take the reader's frames of reference into account (Olson 2003, 99). This means that instead of the narrator being "unreliable compared to the implied author's norms and values", the narrator is "unreliable compared to those of the reader" (Nünning 1999, 54). The focus is shifted from the implied author to the reader. Next, I will examine cognitive models of unreliability, specifically that of Nünning.

Because Nünning (1999, 56) sees the inclusion of the implied author as unnecessary and as an insufficient standard against which to measure unreliability, the reader and his or her interpretations gain more prominence. Nünning (1999, 66) says that unreliability is a "pragmatic phenomenon" and cannot be deduced without taking the reader into account. Nünning (1999, 58) also argues that instead of relying on the notion of the implied author, one could substitute it with Nünning's concept of *dramatic irony* which "results from the discrepancy between intentions and value system of the narrator and the foreknowledge and norms of the reader". Unreliable narration can then be explained as "a contrast between a narrator's view of the fictional world and the state of affairs which the reader can grasp" (Nünning 1999, 58). In other words, when the narrator's account of the fictional world differs from what the reader can assume as being fact in the fictional world, the narrator is

unreliable. Therefore, the rhetorical and cognitive models are quite similar: it is only the difficult concept of the implied author that is replaced with the reader, arguably a more accessible point of comparison. This does lead to changes in the number of possible interpretations of unreliable texts. Nünning's cognitive model opens up the possibility of countless interpretations depending on the reader whereas Booth's rhetorical model "envisions a singular textual whole" (Olson 2003, 99), one "ideal" interpretation (Shen and Xu 2007, 50) supplied by the implied author.

In practice, cognitive models of unreliability describe how the reader reads a text on two different levels, interpreting what the narrator says in two different contexts:

> On the one hand, the reader is exposed to what the narrator wants and means to say. On the other hand, however, the statements of the narrator take on additional meaning for the reader, a meaning the narrator is not conscious of and does not intend to convey. Without being aware of it, unreliable narrators continually give the reader indirect information about their idiosyncrasies and state of mind.
>
> (Nünning 1999, 58)

Nünning is describing a situation of dramatic irony in which the narrator's view of the fictional world does not correspond to the view the reader infers. The narrator reports facts as perceived by him or her, or, alternatively, how the narrator chooses to see them. In turn, the reader may assess these facts as being somehow wrong. In order for the reader to be able to do so, the narrative has to provide the reader with "information about what presumably *really happened* and about the narrator's state of mind" (Nünning 1999, 58, emphasis in the original). When the narrator conveys information to the reader without being aware of it, he or she commits an act of "unintentional self-incrimination" (Zerweck 2001, 157), that is to say, conveys the information to the reader without realising it. Additionally, when the reader recognises (an instance of) dramatic irony, the "implicit narrative" "must win" (Chatman 1978, 233). In other words, the hidden meaning the narrator did not intend to convey to the reader should be taken as the most likely state of affairs.

One way of looking at the process that takes place between the reader and the text in the cognitive model is the process of *naturalisation*. It can be understood as "an interpretive strategy or cognitive process" (Nünning 1999, 54). Jonathan Culler (1975, 138) explains naturalisation as bringing a text "into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural and legible". That is to say, the reader relates the text to patterns he or she recognises and judges unreliability based on those comparisons. In a sense, the reader "activates a frame of understanding" that helps "to make sense of the text" (Hansen 2007, 239). The reader adjusts his or her thinking to try to reconcile the information gathered from the text and arrive at a conclusion regarding the narrator's reliability. Monika Fludernik (2010, 926) describes naturalisation as the reader having an ability that enables him or her to "find explanations that neutralise the inconsistencies in the text". According to Kathleen Wall (1994, 30), it is the sum of the readers knowledge of human psychology, history and experiences that dictate the process of evaluating "the probable accuracy of, or motives for, a narrator's assertions". It is then the combination of being able to make the needed evaluations and having prior knowledge of the world that lead to naturalisation. Wall (1994, 30) says that naturalisation is so integral to reading strategies that we are unlikely to notice that it is happening. It is natural for the reader to go through the thought processes that help make sense of the text.

To summarise, the cognitive model of unreliability will give me what I consider to be the most reliable basis for my analysis of *American Psycho* because the focus is shifted from the implied author to the reader. The reader deduces unreliability by detecting dramatic irony when the narrator inadvertently conveys information he is not conscious of or does not intend to convey to the reader. This information allows the reader to deduce what really happened. In other words, there is "a contrast between a narrator's view of the fictional world and the state of affairs which the reader can grasp" (Nünning 1999, 58). The process of detecting

unreliability can be aided by naturalisation. The reader adjusts his or her thinking to try to reconcile the information gathered from the text, such as inconsistencies, to determine whether the narrator is unreliable and what the reason for his unreliability may be.

2.3 Textual Signs as Markers of Unreliability

One of the things that arouses the reader's suspicion of unreliability are various textual signs. Nünning (1999, 64) says that unreliable narration is often marked by textual inconsistencies such as internal contradictions of the text, discrepancies between utterances and actions, and inconsistencies that emerge from multiple descriptions of the same event. In this section, I will examine the types of grammatical markers of unreliability I find most pertinent to the analysis of *American Psycho*.

Grammatical textual markers can be seen as evidence of unreliability. Nünning (1999, 65) has compiled a list of these markers from Fludernik's book *Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction* (1993). I will use the Taylor & Francis e-Library edition of the book from 2005. Based on Fludernik's examination of different kinds of discourse, Nünning proposes four categories for grammatical markers: pragmatic, syntactic, morphological and lexical indications of unreliability. In my analysis of *American Psycho*, I will define and focus on two of said categories: syntactic and lexical markers of unreliability. They are most common in the novel, and in my view carry the most importance in terms of detecting unreliability and lead to significant conclusions about unreliability. Grammatical signs of unreliability are commonplace throughout *American Psycho*, but they are especially frequent in the last chapters of the book when Bateman's behaviour becomes even more erratic than earlier. The chapters themselves start alternating between very short chapters of just ten lines and chapters that are a few pages long. Earlier in the book, longer chapters are the norm.

Syntactic indications of unreliability include the repetition of words or phrases, incomplete sentences, exclamations, interjections, hesitations, and other features that indicate a high degree of emotional involvement (Nünning 1999, 65). In my analysis of *American Psycho*, I will make use of *repetition*, *incomplete sentences*, and *hesitations*, as they are abundant in the novel. That is not to say that one cannot find examples of other syntactic indications of unreliability, but I will focus my analysis only on the indications I find most relevant. I will also interpret these categories loosely, seeing as Nünning gives little indication as to how they should be interpreted. Fludernik (2005) discusses the features, but in this case her work is less concerned with unreliability than describing how speech and thought are represented in fiction. For example, Fludernik (2005, 232) says that repetition of sentence constituents is often indicative of "emotive discourse", and seems to concern mostly one specific word that is repeated. With regard to unreliability, I will also examine repetition of ideas, phrases, and sentences. Similarly, Fludernik (1993, 158) discusses incomplete sentences from the perspective of free indirect discourse. I, on the other hand, will include things like sentences that are missing a co-ordinate clause when the situation is clearly indicated in some way. This happens, for example, when the narration is cut short after a co-ordinate conjunction. As for hesitations, Fludernik (1993, 232) describes a common characteristic of colloquial language which are sounds inserted into the discourse, indicated in text by using "er", "hum", "hmm", or other such onomatopoeic strings of letters. I will include in this category other indications of hesitation, such as the narrator struggling to find the right word to describe something because he or she hesitates, and three full stops, "...", used as an indication of a pause or the narrator's words petering out as the result of hesitation.

Lexical indications of unreliability include expressive intensifiers and evaluative modifiers, (Nünning 1999, 65). *Expressive intensifiers* are "emotionally loaded words" or phrases, such as "too" or "why on earth" (Fludernik 2005, 257–258). I will also include italicised words or

phrases in this category, as the intent—the intensification of expression—is the same. *Evaluative modifiers* are words that signify the narrator's attitude towards something, usually adjectives, such as "awful" or "abysmally delightful" (Fludernik 2005, 256). Expressive intensifiers and evaluative modifiers seem to overlap seeing as evaluative modifiers are by nature "emotionally loaded words" that serve to intensify. Nevertheless, I will use both categories to analyse how their presence affects Bateman's reliability.

Syntactic and lexical indications of unreliability offer a grammatical way of studying unreliability that supports the reader in recognising dramatic irony as defined by Nünning. In addition to syntactic and lexical signs, textual signals of unreliability include internal contradictions of the text, discrepancies between utterances and actions, and other inconsistencies. They provide a tangible method for identifying instances where the narrator may inadvertently communicate information to the reader that will in turn lead to a conclusion about the narrator's state of reliability. They are common in *American Psycho*, and I will give examples of all of them in my analysis, which I will move on to next.

3. Patrick Bateman as an Unreliable Narrator

In this chapter, I will argue that Patrick Bateman, the narrator of *American Psycho*, is an unreliable narrator. I will focus on four themes that surround Bateman's unreliability: his depersonalisation, his tendency for wish-fulfilment, *The Patty Winters Show*, and the domino effect that results from deeming one part of the novel unreliable.

According to Nünning, one of the ways of identifying unreliable narrators is comparing the narrator's values and norms to the value and norm system present in the text or to those of the reader. If there is a contradiction between them, the narrator is deemed unreliable. In such a case, unreliable narration "can be seen as the result of discrepant awareness or dramatic irony". (Nünning 1999, 58–59) Nünning (1999, 63) presents some often-cited norms from

which an unreliable narrator departs. These are (1) common sense, (2) standards that a given culture holds to be constitutive of normal psychological behaviour, (3) agreed-upon moral and ethical standards, and (4) stylistic peculiarities. The problem is that all of the above "tacit presuppositions" are "based on unacknowledged norms". There is no universal standard of normality, morality, or common sense on which to judge the narrator. Therefore, the narrator can be reliable or unreliable depending on the reader. However, values are such an integral part of our lives that it is impossible not to consider them at all. (Nünning 1999, 63–64) Hence, I will briefly discuss the above issues now before delving deeper into specific themes that concern *American Psycho* and Bateman's unreliability.

In *American Psycho*, it is easy to draw conclusions about Bateman's reliability and insanity based on his psychotic behaviour. He regularly says he is insane and acts in a way that the majority of readers would say goes against the four norms as presented by Nünning. This offers the reader an easy way of naturalising the text: by accepting Bateman's own account of his insanity, the reader has at least one possible reason for the gruesome acts Bateman performs. The reader also draws on the "accepted cultural models of 'deviant'" (Nünning 2008, 48) to support and accept Bateman as psychotic. The reader has to consider what he or she would see as the most likely conclusion others would come to. In Bateman's case him being insane is the most popular conclusion (see, for example, Brien 2006).

The reader also has many other possibilities to consider. For example, the reader is told of Bateman's legal and illegal drug habit several times. Elana Gomel (2011, 54) proposes that Bateman "may suffer from acute schizophrenia and yet accurately report the actual murders he commits—or he may be legally sane and simply drugged out of any sense of objective reality". The reader must judge the information gathered from the text to see if Bateman's view of himself and the world around him is faulty in a way that supports one possibility more than the other. Either option offers a way for the naturalisation process to start. Just

these two interpretations of many others lead to vastly different readings regarding the thematic content of *American Psycho* which I will examine more closely in chapter 5.

3.1 Depersonalisation

In the latter half of *American Psycho*, Bateman discusses what he calls his depersonalisation. He says he is "imitating reality" (Ellis 2000, 282, henceforth cited as *AP*), and he has trouble understanding the people and the world around him. In this chapter, I will examine how depersonalisation affects Bateman's reliability and contributes to his unreliability.

As a reliable narrator, Bateman would be exactly how he appears: a man channelling his anger and boredom into acts of brutality, trying to find something to stimulate him (Phillips 2009, 66) as his depersonalisation becomes stronger. Then again, if the reader recognises the dramatic irony within the text, and if one looks at Bateman as an unreliable narrator, his depersonalisation can be looked at from a different angle: instead of depersonalisation only being something that deepens as the novel progresses, it can be regarded as a possible cause of unreliability. When the reader is given a more in-depth look at Bateman's own thoughts on himself, he is already at a point where his "nightly bloodlust overflowed into [his] days and [he] had to leave the city" (*AP* 279) in an attempt to prevent a killing spree:

> Everything failed to subdue me. Soon everything seemed dull: another sunrise, the lives of heroes, falling in love, war, the discoveries people made about each other. The only thing that didn't bore me, obviously enough, was how much money Tim Price made, and yet in its obviousness it did. There wasn't a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and, possibly, total disgust.
>
> (*AP* 282)

The above extract shows Bateman's view of one of the reasons that makes him violate others: he is bored. The first sentence refers to what came before in the chapter where Bateman described how he would go about doing disgusting things in a frenzy. Then, as he says, things

become dull again. His depersonalisation makes it impossible for him to connect with people or emotions that make everyday things enjoyable. The extract also highlights the materialistic pursuit of money. Bateman is only interested in his aptly named friend Price as far the amount of money he makes or his materialistic possessions are concerned.

Bateman also mentions the feeling of disgust—only here it can refer to Bateman's disgust of others, whom he considers lesser people, or Bateman's disgust of himself. If one looks at his depersonalisation as caused by boredom, it would suggest he is referring to his disgust of others, how they are wrong and not stimulating. However, if one factors in Bateman's insanity, and Bateman's possible awareness of it, Bateman is the likely target of his own disgust. Similarly, because Bateman is aware of his depersonalisation, he may be disgusted by himself because he feels he has been inflicted by such a condition.

For further examination, on must take into account how the previous extract continues:

> 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, a rough resemblance of a human being, with only a dim corner of my mind functioning. 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.
>
> (*AP* 282)

Bateman hypothesises that his depersonalisation prevents him from feeling compassion, a fact the reader has already gathered from *American Psycho* by this point. Later in the novel, Bateman also says that he "feels like an automaton" (*AP* 343). Bateman's depersonalisation has led him to only imitate reality, which is important in terms of unreliability. Is Bateman performing humanity and failing, or does he imitate and create reality in his mind as make-believe and the world around him does not exist? For all intents and purposes, Bateman could be in a mental institution, regaling the reader with a story of pure fiction. This is an extreme

way of naturalising the text. Nevertheless, there is evidence to support it, which I will return to later.

It is also worth noting that together the two extracts form a single paragraph in the novel that starts with nothing being able to subdue Bateman, touches on Bateman's view of his depersonalisation in the middle, and ends with a description of the one thing that can calm him. In *American Psycho*, this forms a cycle that keeps repeating: Bateman acting on his violent impulses until he bores of it, followed by a period of relative calm that is often accompanied by Bateman's excessive description of his material possessions or knowledge of popular culture. As erratic as Bateman is, he does follow a pattern, at least to a degree. One could argue that if his depersonalisation has lead Bateman to create a world for himself, his creativity is somewhat lacking, and he repeats the same standard events, especially in the first half of the novel. In the latter half, he starts doubting himself and the world around him and the pattern begins to crack, and the cycle breaks and turns into chaos.

In accordance with Nünning's model, Bateman's depersonalisation can be read as a trigger that allows the reader to infer dramatic irony. Bateman sees his behaviour and depersonalisation as the result of boredom or the ability to connect with the joys of what he perceives to be a normal life, whereas the reader sees these factors as interfering with his ability to report things accurately. For example, once after having lunch with his friend Bethany, Bateman feels he has been "able to give a skilful performance" (*AP* 237). The simplest way of interpreting Bateman's words is that he is referring to surviving the lunch that feels like "a burden" and "an obstacle" (*AP* 237). The skilful performance may also refer to the way Bateman often tries to hide his homicidal urges when around other people. Alternatively, dramatic irony offers another way of interpreting Bateman's words in a wider context in which Bateman's performance refers to his unreliability. He performs the novel, or parts of the novel, in his mind, and his depersonalisation is a reflection of him failing to

perform humanity. Perhaps he cannot imitate reality because in the world that he actually inhabits his perception is altered by his mental instability.

In light of all the points regarding depersonalisation, the reader must take Bateman's depersonalisation into account while reading other parts of the text because it affects the state of the two interpretations of the narrative as described by Nünning (1999, 58). Depersonalisation contributes a layer that helps the reader identify dramatic irony by affecting the reader's thought processes and allows a different interpretation to that presented explicitly in the text. Consequently, depersonalisation is seen as a factor that diminishes Bateman's reliability because it can be seen as hindering Bateman's ability to understand the world around him, be it the real world or one of his own creation. This means that the gap between Bateman's "view of the fictional world and the state of affairs which the reader can grasp" (Nünning 1999, 58) can widen, and thus depersonalisation reveals unreliability.

Bateman does not always mention his depersonalisation directly, but rather alludes to it indirectly in some other way. The following extract is concerned with the effects of Bateman's depersonalisation:

> My platinum American Express card had gone through so much use that it snapped in half, self-destructed, at one of those dinners, when I took two summer associates to Restless and Young, the new Pablo Lester restaurant in midtown, but I had enough cash in my gazelleskin wallet to pay for the meal. *The Patty Winters Shows* were all repeats. Life remained a blank canvas, a cliché, a soap opera. I felt lethal, on the verge of frenzy. My nightly bloodlust overflowed into my days and I had to leave the city. My mask of sanity was a victim of impending slippage. This was the bone season for me and I needed a vacation. I needed to go to the Hamptons.
>
> (*AP* 279)

The quotation is from a chapter entitled "Summer" where Bateman leaves Manhattan for a while. The rhythm of Bateman's narration is rapid, the sentences are short, and the subjects vary from one sentence to the next which can be regarded as one of the effects of his depersonalisation in that Bateman is losing what little focus he had before.

There are also many things in the quotation that hint at dramatic irony. One is the juxtaposition of the restaurant "Restless and Young" with Bateman's feeling of life as a soap opera. *The Young and the Restless* is an American soap opera, so the law firm Restless and Young is, in fact, a soap opera with the names reversed. Because the mention of the restaurant and Bateman's musings of life as a soap opera are as close together in the text, it is not possible to dismiss the significance of the situation. One way of looking at the soap opera comparison is to examine it as a satirical device that highlights how modern life in general has moved towards standards more appropriate for soap operas and how monetary values and material gain have become more prominent. In this view, Bateman is not at the centre, and his reliability is not called into question. However, from the point of view of dramatic irony, the reader must interpret the passage in two different contexts instead of one (Nünning 1999, 58): one possibility is that Bateman gives the name Restless and Young to a fictional restaurant that exists only in his imagination. Another possibility is that the restaurant itself is real but has a different name and Bateman is confused—degrading sanity is affecting his thoughts. In neither case, it is not Bateman's intention to let the reader know that the name or both the name and restaurant are fictional, and it is possible that he himself does not realise they are. Bateman wants the reader to regard everything as being true, but the indirect information, that is to say the name of the restaurant and the mention of soap operas, results in the reader reading the text on an additional level. The implication of the additional level is that Bateman is depicting a false reality and is consequently unreliable.

When Bateman compares his life to soap operas, one cannot but refer to Bateman seeing himself as an action film star in "Chase, Manhattan", a chapter which occurs some time after "Summer". I will argue in the next chapter, chapter 3.2, that "Chase, Manhattan" is entirely fabricated by Bateman. Seeing as "Chase, Manhattan" is the less reliable chapter of the two because it is imaginary in its entirety and "Summer" may not be, it is possible to see "Chase,

Manhattan" as the culmination of Bateman's boredom. After returning from the Hamptons, Bateman commits several murders, arguably even more gruesome than before. When even they do not stave off his boredom, he creates the more thrilling scenario of "Chase, Manhattan". In "Summer", he was already on the verge of a killing "frenzy" (*AP* 279) which is what happens anyway later on. Similarly, *The Patty Winters Shows*, the talk show Bateman watches religiously, were repeats, there was nothing new and stimulating, just boring repetition, and life was "a blank canvas, a cliché" (*AP* 279). In the next chapter, Bateman explains his depersonalisation, how he is unable to be and feel the way he thinks a normal person feels (*AP* 281). In the absence of stimulation, Bateman feels the need to kill, to try to break out of his bored state. Thus, Bateman's fabrication of events owing to insanity and boredom is another way of naturalising the text: they can be used to account for the connection between the name of the restaurant and the concept of life as a repetitious soap opera, and on a larger scale, other inconsistencies and obscurities in *American Psycho*.

The number of times Bateman touches upon his depersonalisation increases towards the end of the novel. This correlates with increase in other indications of unreliability which I will discuss further on in this thesis. Near the end of the novel, Bateman returns to the subject of his depersonalisation in a paragraph situated in the middle of a conversation with his secretary. The paragraph is visually removed from other text in the chapter by the addition of three dots, "...", at the beginning and end of the paragraph, and begins after Bateman cuts the conversation short with an unexpected "Shhh...":

> …there is an idea of a 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*.
>
> (*AP* 376–377, emphasis in the original)

Bateman is in a state of detachment. The above quotation is one of the strongest explicit thoughts from Bateman that supports the argument that *American Psycho* is an imaginary,

illusory, or hallucinatory musing of a man who is not in touch with reality. The reason why there are flaws in the novel, which in this case means signs of unreliability such as inconsistencies, is that Bateman is really not there, it is not a real world but the creation of his mind. It is possible that Bateman feels the same depersonalisation in reality and that it transfers into the fictional world as well. Whichever the case, depersonalisation is one of the key features behind Bateman's unreliability.

The paragraph from which the previous quotation is taken from ends by Bateman saying, "There has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession has meant *nothing...*" (*AP* 377, emphasis in the original). Once again, it is possible for the reader to interpret his statement through dramatic irony by expanding the meaning of Bateman's words to cover the entire novel. Thus, his confession and the regaling of all the events that have passed has meant nothing, because the events are fictional, and the murders never actually occurred (Phillips 2009, 66). Phillips (2009, 66) points out that if all the killings and torture are removed from the novel, all that is left is a bored man "who lives a life of monotonous repetition". Interestingly, Phillips' way of looking at Bateman is uncannily like Bateman's own description of himself and his depersonalisation: Bateman describes himself as being "fabricated, an aberration" (*AP* 377) with a repetitious, dull life (*AP* 279).

Whether one chooses to regard the novel as the product of Bateman's mind in its entirety or not, I have now established that Bateman himself ponders whether he is human or in touch with humanity a few times in the novel. Although other characters in the novel are generally unaware of Bateman's depersonalisation and inhumanity, there are rare instances when it is addressed by someone other than Bateman. One of them occurs when Bateman is trying to defend his aloof behaviour to his girlfriend Evelyn:

> "You're inhuman," she says, trying, I think, not to cry.
> "I'm" —I stall, attempting to defend myself —"in touch with…
> humanity."
> "No, no, no." She shakes her head.
> "I know my behavior is… erratic sometimes," I say, fumbling.
>
> (*AP* 340–341)

When Bateman has to discuss his behaviour with another person, his uncertainty becomes obvious. This of course presupposes that the conversation took place outside of Bateman's mind. In the strictest interpretation of unreliability it is possible that none of the events are real, therefore the above conversation may not have happened. Using a less constricting interpretation, one can argue that because during said scene Bateman is somewhat more reliable because there are not as many indicators of unreliability present. For example, Bateman has not described taking copious amounts of narcotics, so there is a slightly better chance that he is more lucid than usual, although there is no way of knowing for certain.

Humanity is also closely connected with empathy (Monroe 1996, 101). Both of them are features that Bateman lacks and are often brought up when he explains his depersonalisation. The lack of empathy, especially emotional empathy, is one of the typical dysfunctions associated with psychopaths (Blair 2005, 698). On the one hand, it could be argued that Bateman's hesitations in the scene described above are the result of him trying to convince himself that he still has some humanity left in him. It would be a sign that he is trying to fight his depersonalisation. On the other hand, the hesitations may arise from the uncomfortable nature of the situation while Bateman tries to placate Evelyn. Neither interpretation makes the reader think of him as a particularly trustworthy narrator: both alternatives mean he is lying in some way and the hesitations accentuate his uncertainty and draw the reader's attention. As noted earlier, hesitations are also a syntactic indication of unreliability, and therefore add to his unreliability in the scene. These hesitations often occur when Bateman is trying to describe himself, as opposed to how he makes his opinions of

other people known without any trouble. The following extract shows how Bateman is possibly unwittingly trying to explain to his girlfriend Evelyn why he commits violent acts:

> "My… my *need* to engage in… homicidal behavior on a massive scale cannot be, um, corrected," I tell her, measuring each word carefully. "But I… have no other way to express my blocked… needs." I'm surprised at how emotional this admission makes me, and it wears me down; I feel light-headed. As usual, Evelyn misses the essence of what I'm saying, and I wonder how long it will take to finally rid myself of her.
>
> (*AP* 338, emphasis in the original)

Once again the hesitations emerge when Bateman tries to explain his behaviour. He stalls between utterances, trying to think of what to say, as indicated by "..." and "um", both hesitations and therefore syntactic signs of unreliability. He is unsure, and has trouble justifying his actions, and in the end, he feels what he has said has gone unheard. The idea of Bateman being unheard can be taken further, and one can ponder if the above exchange between Bateman and Evelyn ever happened at all. Bateman says he is "measuring each word carefully", yet Evelyn takes no note of him admitting he is a murderer. As noted earlier, evaluative modifiers are a lexical sign of unreliability. Therefore "carefully" is an evaluative modifier and thus a potential sign of unreliability. Bateman is trying to explain exactly what Evelyn is trying to understand and wants to know, and it is then that she appears to stop listening. Something is off the mark in the scene, and all the signs are pointing at Bateman's unreliability. One possible interpretation is that because Bateman exhibits some desire for other people to understand him, and for other people to know of his violent nature, yet the things he says and does go unnoticed, he only thinks he is doing and saying what he says he is. To put it another way, he thinks he murders people and tries to tell about it to others, but he is confusing reality with fiction. In addition, he is unwittingly communicating this difference to the reader. Therefore, a short passage such as the one above can be read as indicative of dramatic irony on a larger scale spanning the entire narrative. I will return to the subject of other characters not hearing or ignoring Bateman in chapter 4.

As I have said, many intriguing things arise when Bateman has to discuss his inhumanity and depersonalisation with someone other than himself. The following exchange between Evelyn and Bateman is part of the conversation I quoted on page 20 with the two still debating Bateman's lack of humanity:

> "You… are not…" She stops, wiping her face, unable to finish.
> "I'm not what?" I ask, waiting, interested.
> "You are not"—she sniffs, looks down, her shoulders heaving—"all there. You"—she chokes —"don't add up."
> "I do too," I say indignantly, defending myself. "I do too add up."
> "You're a ghoul," she sobs.
> "No, no," I say, confused, watching her. "You're the ghoul."
>
> <div align="right">(AP 342)</div>

Evelyn is assuming a position similar to that of the reader, and she too has observed that Bateman does not "add up". When Evelyn calls Bateman a ghoul, it can be seen as a parallel to the reader perceiving Bateman's narration as unreliable, as an illusion. When Bateman retorts by saying that it is Evelyn who is the ghoul, it is Bateman calling Evelyn the unreliable one of the pair. If the entire narrative is regarded as unreliable and the Evelyn Bateman is talking to is a figment of his imagination, then Evelyn would be a ghoul in the sense of being imaginary. However, this does not erase Bateman's unreliability and therefore he is also a ghoul. If Evelyn does exist and the scene does take place in the real world, the reader will still most likely regard Bateman as the more unreliable one based on previous evidence, and thus he is still the actual ghoul referred to in the conversation. In either case, Bateman's assertion that Evelyn is the ghoul instead of him is faulty.

The exchange also contains an example of a lexical sign of unreliability: the expressive intensifier "too" at the end of two of Bateman's statements. He is emphasising that he is "all there", even though he has and will discuss his depersonalisation several times. Thus, Bateman's insistence of adding up to a whole person contradicts not only with Bateman's actual view of himself, but also his supposed actions in the novel: Bateman says he is all there, yet his inability to feel and his hatred towards the other are diametrically opposed to his

insistence of being the average guy he tries to convince Evelyn, and himself, that he is. He does not truly care, and later says that "[a]ll I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it" (*AP* 377). At this point, he admits his indifference, and hints at not "adding up". Thus, Bateman's insistence of being "all there" only serves to indicate his unreliability.

Bateman repeats the phrase "I'm filled with a nameless dread" throughout the novel (Serpell 2010, 57). It is another syntactic sign of unreliability connected to Bateman's depersonalisation, and there are eight occurrences of it (*AP* 115, 137, 142, 248, 264, 267, 334, 383). These occurrences are connected to other signs of unreliability and are found in places where there are strong instances of dramatic irony. For example, once Bateman feels the dread when detective Kimball visits him in his office (*AP* 267). At the time, Bateman is worried that someone might finally be onto him. Another time, Bateman's maid is wiping "blood smears off the walls", and Bateman is plagued by banal ideas "bursting" into his head, and the world keeps repeating itself around him (*AP* 383). Looking at only two of the occurrences of the phrase, it is clear that the "nameless dread" takes on many forms: Bateman is worried that he has been discovered, despite him always avoiding detection, and he feels dread because none of the violent acts has broken the pattern of repetition that is tied to his depersonalisation. The dread creeps in during events that I have and will discuss as unreliable, in scenes where dramatic irony affects the way the reader interprets Bateman's words and actions, which makes the repetition relevant not only syntactically, but also in the narratological sense as applied in this study: when Bateman is filled with the nameless dread repeatedly in said scenes, the reader connects the repetition with his fallibility.

Taking into account my previous arguments, Bateman's depersonalisation greatly affects his reliability. His depersonalisation offers one way of naturalising the text and his unreliability: Bateman performs reality, and depersonalisation is a reflection of him failing to

perform humanity. The cause of the failure is debatable, but the effect is not: he is unreliable. This is also supported by grammatical signs of unreliability connected to parts of the text that deal with Bateman's depersonalisation. Bateman's depersonalisation is also associated with his feelings of boredom and possible insanity, which provides a slightly different point-of-view for naturalising the text: Bateman may be confusing reality with fiction because he is bored and trying to find a way of dealing with his depersonalisation. He tries to get a rise out of himself by fabricating reality, while also showcasing his hatred of the others by imagining to destroy them. This touches upon another theme related to unreliability which I will discuss in the next chapter, wish-fulfilment.

3.2 Wish-fulfilment

Bateman shows signs of a tendency I have chosen to call wish-fulfilment. He either constructs the fictional world around him to conform to his wishes, or augments the real world with his own fantasies and so-called corrections. This, in turn, makes him unreliable, and I will be looking at this phenomenon in this chapter. I will use wish-fulfilment in a more general sense as outlined above, as opposed to the more specific psychoanalytical concept by Sigmund Freud, "Freudian wish-fulfilment" (Levine 2000, 49). Freudian wish-fulfilment is the unconscious realisation of desires. For example, if one "yearn[s] for the impossible, wish-fulfilment may be available in default". (Levine 2000, 50) My use of the term will focus on how Bateman uses wish-fulfilment to live out fantasies in his mind consciously or unconsciously.

There are large sections of chapters and entire chapters that make the reader reconsider Bateman's reliability. One of the reasons for this is that their main function seems to be to display characteristics or events that Bateman thinks of as superior and show off his greatness. "Chase, Manhattan" (*AP* 347–352) is an example of an entire chapter whose

reliability can be brought into question because of Bateman's bravado. In it, Bateman describes being chased around Manhattan with imagery akin to an action film. It begins with him screwing a silencer onto a .357 magnum and killing a saxophonist playing on a desolate street after midnight, but the shot rings out loud anyway. A squad car had been following Bateman and begins chasing him:

> I start walking away from the trembling body, slowly, casually at first, as if innocent, then I break into a run, full-fledged, the cop car screeching after me, over a loudspeaker a cop shouts uselessly, "halt stop halt put down your weapon," ignoring them I make a left on Broadway, heading down toward City Hall Park, ducking into an alleyway, the squad car follows but only makes it halfway as the alley narrows, a spray of blue sparks flying up before it gets stuck and I run out the end of the alley as fast as I can onto Church Street, where I flag down a cab, hop in the front seat and scream at its driver, a young Iranian guy completely taken by surprise […] raising the gun to [the cab driver's] face, pull the trigger, the bullet splatters his head open, cracks it in half like a dark red watermelon against the windshield, and I reach over him, open the door, push the corpse out, slam the door, start driving…
>
> (*AP* 348–349)

As the chapter progresses, the chase after Bateman continues much in the same vain with him dashing through the streets, crashing into other cars and eventually into a deli, and a cop wrestling Bateman for the gun. The chapter ends with Bateman reaching his office while a helicopter, police cars, and a SWAT team investigate the building Bateman was last at while Bateman looks on and calls his lawyer, "admitting everything, leaving nothing out of the thirty, forty, a hundred murders" (*AP* 352). It is exactly the kind of regaling of events that sounds more like fantasy than actuality and once again Bateman's luck is impeccable, as if he is the hero starring in his own action film. Therefore, saying the events in "Chase, Manhattan" did not happen has an effect on the reliability of the events referenced within the chapter, such as Bateman confessing everything to his lawyer.

"Chase, Manhattan" is situated almost at the end of the novel and can be seen as the culmination of action and violence. It can be argued that the last chapters of the novel break away from the chronology of events altogether, which means that a later chapter in the

narrative actually takes place earlier in time. Had "Chase, Manhattan" actually happened, it would have taken place late in the chronology, and it revisits several themes that have emerged earlier on in the novel, especially that of Bateman killing those different to him. In this case the victims include, for example, an Iranian cab driver. What is different about these killings is that they are committed in haste and only described in short unlike most other murders described by Bateman. In the rest of the narrative, the only exception are killings he only mentions in passing and which did not take place in the narrative at the present moment, but the ones that took place outside of the regular narration, often sometime in the past.

The extract also illustrates how Bateman appears to be living in a world with no consequence, a world where he always prevails. Indeed, Bateman's untouchable nature has been touched upon before in other parts of *American Psycho*, so this is not an isolated case. For example, he takes his bloody clothes to same dry cleaners all the time, but the elderly couple who run the place have never said anything, or shown any indication of suspecting a thing (*AP* 81). Bateman also kills people regularly, sometimes in the open in broad daylight, and again, he never gets caught, or gets into any trouble. Nevertheless, arguably the most obvious instance of Bateman's skill and luck in avoiding capture is in "Chase, Manhattan":

> …in an adrenaline rush causing panting, I can only get a few blocks, partly because of panic, mostly because of the blood, brains, chunks of head covering the windshield [...] racing blindly down Greenwich I lose control entirely, the cab swerves into a Korean deli [...] the cab rolling over fruit stands, smashing through a wall of glass, the body of a cashier thudding across the hood, Patrick tries to put the cab in reverse but nothing happens, he staggers out of the cab, leaning against it, a nerve-racking silence follows, "nice going, Bateman," he mutters, limping out of the store, the body on the hood moaning in agony, Patrick with no idea where the cop running toward him across the street has come from, [...] Patrick surprises him by lunging out before the cop can get to his gun and he knocks him over onto the sidewalk…
>
> (*AP* 349)

Among some of the dubious escapes that Bateman manages are the cop car getting stuck in the alley in the previous extract, a spectacular car chase that takes up most of the chapter, the

cab crashing into a deli, and Bateman escaping a SWAT team at the end. These are all common features seen in action films. It can be seen as Bateman's fantasy, a chance for Bateman to show off his skills. At the end of the chapter, when Bateman reaches his office safely, he calls his lawyer and confesses an undisclosed number of murders while sobbing and watching the police and SWAT teams going through the building next door with police flares lighting the night. He then watches the night turn into morning as the chapter ends: "the sun, a planet on fire, gradually rises over Manhattan, another sunrise, and soon the night turns into day so fast it's like some kind of optical illusion…" (*AP* 352). Bateman's description is a common occurrence in film: the story ends with the protagonist safe after a night of evading capture, and the protagonist watches the sun rise after the adrenaline-fuelled adventure is over. This is exactly what Bateman goes through, although to the reader he may be closer to a villain than a hero. To Bateman, however, the chapter is about him being the hero, the one who prevails, and wins.

The extract also shows signs of grammatical unreliability. There is a change of perspective form first person narration to third person narration. The switching back and forth occurs several times in "Chase, Manhattan" and in the middle of paragraphs. This feature sets "Chase, Manhattan" apart from other chapters, and in Nünning's (1999, 65) view this kind of change in form and narration can be seen as a sign of unreliability. Therefore, one of the ways of looking at the switch in narration is that Bateman is fantasising, telling a story and starring in it, and it is not something that took place in reality. The shift in narration also corresponds to the way focalisation works in film: the perspective changes "by the help of the 'camera' as a filmic narrator" (Schlickers 2009, 244). For example, if the camera takes the place and perspective of a character, the viewer sees the world as perceived by the character in first person perspective. If the action is viewed through the camera in the third person narrator position, on the outside of the action looking in, the perspective is again different.

(Schlickers 2009, 244) This is similar to the shift in the narrator's perspective in *American Psycho*, and the parallel strengthens the connection between Bateman believing he is in a film, or wishing his life was more like a film, filled with action.

"Chase, Manhattan" also exhibits other grammatical signs of unreliability, particularly syntactic indications of unreliability. The most notable one is the fragmented nature of the chapter: it consists of paragraphs that start and end with "...", as in "...[paragraph]...", and the paragraphs consist of one long string of text with no full stops, only commas. It creates an effect reminiscent of *interior monologue*, which is a "narrative technique that exhibits the thoughts passing through the minds of the protagonists" and can consist of anything from "loosely related impressions" to something that is "more rationally structured" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* s.v. "interior monologue"). The thoughts can be presented in a way that is "illogical" or "ungrammatical" (Scholes et al. 2006, 177), just like Bateman's thoughts are in *American Psycho*. In *American Psycho*, its use creates a frantic pace that makes the reader re-evaluate the text again, once again identifying the presence of dramatic irony. The absence of full stops and standard sentence structure also points towards "a high degree of emotional involvement" (Nünning 1999, 65) which is another syntactic sign of unreliability.

Dramatic irony is prominent in "Chase, Manhattan". Phillips (2009, 65, emphasis in the original) mentions a "narrative shift" as a marker of unreliability, and differentiates between "what *is* happening" and "what Bateman *wants* to see happen". This divide, the narrative shift, can be seen as one of factors that attracts the reader's attention to the dramatic irony, and Phillips' distinction of what is and what Bateman wishes would happen applies in "Chase, Manhattan". The chapter is a description of events that reflect Bateman's ultimate way of dealing with how he feels, simultaneously overcompensating for his insecurities. He

would go about Manhattan on the rampage, killing people who do not please him or are merely in his way. It is wish-fulfilment, not reality.

Bateman's wish-fulfilment is a way of naturalising the text and explaining why "Chase, Manhattan" feels wrong and is not reliable. One can look at wish-fulfilment as naturalisation instead of only attributing unreliability to insanity or depersonalisation. That is not to say that Bateman is not both insane and in a state of depersonalisation, and Bateman's fantasies and wish-fulfilment are the product of insanity.

Bateman is well versed in popular culture. Even if one regards *American Psycho* as the product of the imagination of an insane man, Bateman has to have been exposed to a plethora of films, music, and magazines to produce fantasies with such a high level of detail. Bateman even describes "guns flashing like in a movie" which makes him "realize he's involved in an actual gunfight of sorts, that he's trying to dodge bullets" (*AP* 350) and a police car explodes as the result of said gunfight. Indeed, there are copious action films that include a scene as described by Bateman. If Bateman is seen as insane, or as Gomel (2011, 53) calls him, "a victim of violent hallucinations", it is plausible that he would imagine a situation that would embellish characteristics he has attributed himself with in other parts of the novel to concoct a wish-fulfilling scenario.

"Chase, Manhattan" is one of the chapters in the last quarter of the book that exhibit an erratic and frantic quality the narrative has built up to. Along with surrounding chapters it is the product of Bateman's mind as he descends further into insanity and/or the hallucinations that plague him get more severe. Taking into account Bateman's depersonalisation and desire to alleviate his feelings of boredom, wish-fulfilment is a viable option.

There is another feature in *American Psycho* connected to wish-fulfilment, which is narcissism. For example, Bateman is obsessed with the way, or more accurately how good he looks, and how much better his appearance, that is to say body, clothes and accessories, are

than those of other people. He tells the reader how much he works out in great detail (*AP* 76), and he will not murder a girl because he does not want to ruin the clothes he is wearing "by having the bitch spray her blood all over" them (*AP* 77). He is also regularly described as gorgeous by other people. For example, a woman named Francesca admires Bateman's profile which looks "totally Roman" (*AP* 206). Because the reader has no idea whether Bateman is as handsome in reality as he thinks he is, a matter that is subjective anyway, his constant attention to it is suspicious. In a chapter entitled "Killing a Dog", the "old queer" whose dog Bateman is planning to kill at any moment asks if Bateman is a model and says that he looks "just like a movie star" while Bateman pets the dog (*AP* 166). They are standing on a thin strip of sidewalk, but not particularly shielded from view. This scene in particular invites the reader to interpret the scene through a veil of irony. The owner of the dog, as seen and described by Bateman, is painted as a silly man who is prone to babbling. Bateman "swear[s] to God" that the man says to himself, "Oh stop it, silly, you're embarrassing yourself" in order to stop talking about Bateman's good looks (*AP* 165). Bateman then kills the dog before killing the man by stabbing him multiple times and then shooting him twice to make sure he is not faking death (*AP* 165–166). Afterwards, Bateman says he is "down the street and out of darkness and like in a movie I appear in front of the D'Agostino's" (*AP* 166). He goes to the store when the sales clerks beckon him to come inside and buys a box of expired cereal:

> I get a small but incendiary thrill when I walk out of the store, opening the box, stuffing handfuls of the cereal into my mouth, trying to whistle "Hip to Be Square" at the same time, and then I've opened my umbrella and I'm running down Broadway, then up Broadway, then down again, screaming like a banshee, my coat open, flying out behind me like some kind of cape.
>
> (*AP* 166)

Keeping in mind that the relationship between the narration and the reader is reliant on dramatic irony, it is impossible for the reader to take the explicit narrative at face value when Bateman demonstrates his invulnerability and tendency for wish-fulfilment in a string of

allusions in the above quotation. An allusion is a "a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing or idea of historical, cultural, literary or political significance" and it often "does not describe in detail the person or thing to which it refers" (*Literary Devices* s.v. "allusion"). Despite Bateman's claims of what happened, not only does he get away with murdering a man again, his wish-fulfilling characteristics make yet another appearance. He appears "like in a movie", and despite the strangeness of his description, he moves as if in a musical: he whistles a tune and opens an umbrella, which harkens back to musicals like *Singin' in the Rain* (1952). He then runs as if dancing up and down Broadway of all places, "screaming", which can be thought of as singing, which combines with the idea of Broadway musicals. Additionally, the cape can be seen as an allusion to superheroes. These comprise a set of allusions that function as markers of unreliability that Bateman is not trying to convey to the reader. The additional meaning means that the reader interprets the text on two different levels instead of one. Bateman wants to portray himself as dashing and untouchable, but by overstating his point, the reader becomes suspicious.

I have argued that sometimes dramatic irony reveals the narrative of *American Psycho* to be unreliable because it is Bateman's wish-fulfilment. It is often accompanied by filmic references, like in "Chase, Manhattan", which is pastiche of the action film genre. Wish-fulfilment also demonstrates how Bateman appears to be living in a world with no consequence and always prevails without being caught. This is amplified by grammatical signs of unreliability, such as the switching between first person and third person narration. Bateman's narcissism plays a part in this, and Bateman wants to portray himself as dashing and untouchable, but by overstating his point, the reader becomes suspicious. Wish-fulfilment is an example of "what Bateman *wants* to see happen" as opposed to "what *is* happening" (Phillips 2009, 65). In the words of Bateman himself, "This is simply how the world, *my* world, moves" (*AP* 77, emphasis in the original).

3.3 The Patty Winters Show

There is a recurring element in *American Psycho*, a morning talk show called *The Patty Winters Show*. Bateman tells the reader the subject of the morning's programme dozens of times in the novel and claims to watch it every morning or tapes it for later viewing. These recaps consist mostly of short sentences with occasional elaboration. The connection that *The Patty Winters Show* has to unreliability, and what makes the titles of the shows interesting, is how the topics evolve as the novel progresses. In order of appearance, some of the subjects covered by the show were "women with multiple personalities" (*AP* 29), autism (*AP* 64), "repeat of an interview with the president" (*AP* 81), "UFOs That Kill" (*AP* 115), "Toddler Murderers" (*AP* 138), aspirin (*AP* 148), Nazis (*AP* 156), "a new sport called Dwarf Tossing" (*AP* 167), "Has Patrick Swayze Become Cynical or Not?" (*AP* 231), "talking animals" (*AP* 250), "a machine that lets people talk to the dead" (*AP* 326) and "Home Abortion Kits" (*AP* 330). As noted by Olson (2003, 97), the degree of unreliability can alter as the story progresses. As mentioned before, during the latter half of the novel, the events described by Bateman begin to turn more and more absurd and this even applies to the already ludicrous topics of the morning talk show. One would be hard-pressed to find a talk show with a special on dwarf tossing.

Most of the daily themes on *The Patty Winters Show* also correspond to aspects of Bateman's personality, or in some other way link to subjects he has mentioned or will mention, or links to traits he exhibits in the novel. Alternatively, the subject of the show may reflect something Bateman wishes he was or had. For example, when he mentions that the day's show is about "Real-Life Rambos" (*AP* 87), it is possible to draw a connection between the film *First Blood* (1982), "Chase, Manhattan", and Bateman's desire for wish-fulfilment as discussed in the previous subchapter. In *First Blood*, the first film in the *Rambo* series, after being arrested, the troubled and misunderstood Vietnam War veteran and protagonist John

Rambo escapes the sheriff's department, steals a motorcycle, and ends up being pursued to nearby mountains in a manhunt. The sheriff and other members of the law enforcement are outwitted by Rambo in the forest, and end up getting wounded. In "Chase, Manhattan" Bateman kills a taxi driver and steals his car and he subsequently becomes the object of a manhunt. No ordinary people or members of the law enforcement can catch Bateman. The difference is that Bateman kills people while on the run, Rambo refrains from doing so, and certainly does not do so for pleasure. Indeed, the emphasis in this comparison is less about the characters having the same motivation, which they do not, and more about the action-packed imagery. Additionally, the mention of Rambo early on foreshadows what is to come: Bateman's misguided and ill-interpreted real-life version of Rambo, even if only in his imagination. Possibly because of his depersonalisation, Bateman cannot connect with the original Rambo's tenet of not killing, so he disregards it and substitutes it with his own desire to engage in violent behaviour. Therefore, even if "Chase, Manhattan" is make-believe, there is a connection between the subject of the day's *The Patty Winters Show* and Bateman's wishes for himself.

The comparison between Bateman and Rambo becomes more complicated if one takes the sequels to *First Blood* into account. While Rambo was mostly righteous in the original film, he descends into a more monstrous version of himself, and by *Rambo III* (1988), the third film in the series, has become a parody of himself. One must remember that all the films were made years before *American Psycho* was published, although *Rambo III* fits in with the novel's timeline. It is therefore plausible to consider a possible parallel between the protagonists of each work. Was Bateman righteous at one point as well? There is some evidence to support this, although not conclusive. During one of the fragmented sections near the end of the novel, Bateman says the following: "My conscience, my pity, my hopes disappeared a long time ago (probably at Harvard) if they ever did exist" (*AP* 377). This

statement could be interpreted as unreliable or true. On the one hand, it is never outright stated that Bateman has always been the way he is portrayed in the novel, and his unreliability prevents any similar statement from being considered the absolute truth. On the other hand, the above quotation is located in one of Bateman's convoluted monologues in a sea of grammatical and other signs of unreliability at the end of the book. Additionally, Bateman has already said that he killed and decapitated a girl and hung her head from a tree during his junior year at Harvard when his "rages [...] were less violent" than now (*AP* 241). According to this, he was anything but righteous when he began to attend Harvard. The latter quotation is, on the whole, from an arguably more reliable part of the novel, although not by much.

The parallel between Bateman and Rambo is perhaps best left at wish-fulfilment, seeing as Bateman himself has little desire for righteousness. Even if one looks at the parallel as imposed on Bateman by the author, it makes little sense with regard to his unreliability. The extended parallel holds no water, because the novel does not deal with the classic oppositions of good and bad or the descent from good to bad. Instead, as I have I argued in this thesis, the novel can be studied from the perspective Bateman's descent into further madness and the dramatic irony that creates unreliability. Therefore, any further parallels between Bateman and Rambo, or other such allusions in the novel, are best left for another study.

To return to the subject of *The Patty Winters Show*, one can argue that the programme itself, or the subjects of the programme, are the product of Bateman's mind. I would argue that the content of *The Patty Winters Show* to be at least in part imaginary or hallucinatory. There is evidence that other people know of or watch the show. For example, while having lunch with a woman called Bethany, Bateman asks her if she watched *The Patty Winters Show* that morning. She says she did not, but says, "It was about Michael J. Fox, right?" Bateman corrects her and says it was about Patrick Swayze. Bethany seems surprised and

asks whether Bateman is sure, admitting that it is hard to keep track. Bateman assures her that he is "positive". (*AP* 232–233) Even if the reader accepts the conversation between Bateman and Bethany as reality, there is a plausible case of Bateman manipulating or confusing reality by substituting parts of it with fancy. In this situation, one of the things the reader has to decide is which of the characters he or she should believe. On the one hand, Bateman has already proven to be unreliable, so one would lean towards Bethany. On the other hand, Bethany is fairly indifferent towards *The Patty Winters Show*, so it is possible to give Bateman the benefit of the doubt on this occasion. When Bateman asks his secretary Jean whether she watched it on a particular morning, she says that she did not and asks how it was, although "[s]he smiles as if somehow charmed by my addiction to *The Patty Winters Show*" (*AP* 64). Just before the discussion with his secretary, Bateman said that the theme was autism. He says to Jean, "I think I was hallucinating while watching it. I don't know. I can't be sure. I don't remember", before finishing with "I really don't know" (*AP* 64). Alternatively, if the reader has deemed the entire narrative as the product of Bateman's mind, the above point becomes moot: everything, including Jean and Bethany, or these versions of them, exists only in Bateman's mind.

There are also syntactic signs of unreliability connected to *The Patty Winters Show* in the form of repetition. "*The Patty Winters Show* this morning was about Salad Bars" (*AP* 225) is repeated twice in a short space of time. First it is at the end of a paragraph about Bateman musing on a gift to his brother Sean, a top of the line Casio watch Bateman knows his brother does not need. The next paragraph is just a few lines and also ends with the same sentence about salad bars. Whether the reader sees this as a sign of unreliability depends on how the repetition is interpreted. If Bateman says it to emphasise the boring, and what he seems to consider inane, situation of his brother's birthday party, then the repetition of the unusually boring subject of *The Patty Winters Show* highlights his frustration over the

dullness. Alternatively, if the repetition is regarded as a lapse in Bateman's memory, or control of the illusion he upholds when he creates titles and themes for *The Patty Winters Show*, it is a grammatical sign of unreliability.

Similarly, when Bateman is struggling with his depersonalisation in the chapter "Summer", all *The Patty Winters Shows* are repeats (*AP* 279)—they reflect his current mental state of being trapped in an endless loop of repetitive days. When the shows do not correspond to Bateman's current situation directly they either foreshadow something that will happen later in the novel or their absurd and ludicrous nature makes the reader suspect something is wrong with the present state of affairs. Therefore, in those cases they convey their message to the reader indirectly.

The Patty Winters Show is often juxtaposed with passages that also have other characteristics of unreliability. For example, during "Chase, Manhattan" Bateman slips in that the morning's *The Patty Winters Show* was about "a man who set his daughter on fire while she was giving birth, at dinner we all had shark…" (*AP* 347). In "Valentine's Day", Bateman watches the show while a maid is silently cleaning up the bloody mess left over from yet another murder (*AP* 382). These are just two examples of many, and in both cases *The Patty Winters Show* is mentioned when the reliability on the narrative is already compromised: in "Chase, Manhattan" by Bateman's wish-fulfilment and in "Valentine's Day" by Bateman's maid ignoring the bloodshed.

At the very end of the book, Bateman says the following: "On *The Patty Winters Show* this morning a Cheerio sat in a very small chair and was interviewed for close to an hour" (*AP* 386). By this time the reader has been forced to acknowledge that the distance between the explicit and implicit narrative is far too wide for Bateman to be considered reliable. It is unclear what or who the cheerio could represent, or if it represents anything or anyone, but arguably the interview as described by Bateman did not happen. Therefore, the above

quotation is further proof that *The Patty Winters Show* is at least partly imaginary, just like some other parts of the novel.

Phillips (2009, 64) notes that the majority of Bateman's violent impulses "are inflicted upon the nameless, vagrants and prostitutes, whose identities cannot be verified and whose existence cannot be proven". Because his victims are nameless, "there is very little proof that [the] attacks occur outside of Bateman's mind" (Phillips 2009, 64). One should also consider the fact that the yuppies, some of whom are Bateman's friends, have names but they are confused with each other constantly. Consequently, the yuppies' identities are unverifiable in some sense as well, and according to Phillips' (2009, 64) argument, their existence cannot be proven either. Therefore, even some of the arguably more coherent and possibly more reliable scenes between Bateman and his friends may be more unreliable than the reader might first think.

Phillips (2009, 65) also says that when Bateman attacks people with names, what Phillips calls "real" people in the context of the novel, the narration includes other clues about unreliability, such as the difference between "what *is* happening" and "what Bateman *wants* to see happen". This is a difference I have examined and will examine on several occasions in this thesis, and it is a central one. What Phillips is saying, and with which I agree, is that Bateman's violent acts are all unreliable in some sense. Within the confines of this thesis, it means that all the violent acts can be seen as exhibiting signs of dramatic irony. Following Chatman's (1978, 233) idea that the hidden meaning that the reader discovers must be taken as the true meaning, one can argue that none of the murders happened.

In a fragmented rant Bateman tells the reader that he was freaked out by a park bench that followed him "for six blocks last Monday evening" and "it too" spoke to him (*AP* 395). By now, Bateman's life sounds like a ridiculous farce:

> Tuesday morning and I'm standing by my desk in the living room on the phone with my lawyer, alternatively keeping an eye on *The Patty Winters Show* and the maid as she waxes the floor, wipes blood smears off the walls, throws away gore-soaked newspapers without a word.
>
> (*AP* 382)

Even though the reader has been told numerous times that no one has taken any notice of the murders Bateman has committed or connected him with any crimes, he now has a maid who has begun to clean after his murders. The reader can question more or less everything on the page. If he or she so pleases, anything can be read as dramatic irony and the distance between the explicit and implicit narrative has become even longer than it was only a few chapters ago. On the other hand, as the reader becomes more convinced that Bateman is unreliable, he or she may begin to reconsider previous events, to search for clues that might help him or her understand his unreliability.

The presence of dramatic irony in connection with *The Patty Winters Show* and when the show is mentioned cannot be ignored. Although *The Patty Winters Show* is not the most overt indicator of unreliability, it is an important one. Most of the daily themes on *The Patty Winters Show* also correspond to aspects of Bateman's personality, or reference his wills and wants. Sometimes the show titles foreshadow future events, as "Real-Life Rambos" foreshadows "Chase, Manhattan". It can also be argued that the subjects of the programme, if not the programme itself, are the product of Bateman's mind, because of the aforementioned factors, and because other characters are mostly indifferent to the programme or do not get the themes right. Additionally, the repetition of the name of the programme and its themes are syntactic signs of unreliability.

3.4 The Domino Effect

Deeming one part of the narrative unreliable in *American Psycho* has an immediate effect on the rest of the text. This means that if a particular scene is considered unreliable other scenes become unreliable as the result of a domino effect. In this chapter, I will examine this phenomenon first in relation to a few select scenes before expanding the discussion to include even more scenes and chapters. This will illustrate how large portions of the book become unreliable because the reader observes one inconsistency.

Firstly, I will examine four dubious events Bateman describes to the reader to illustrate this: (1) Bateman lives in the same apartment building as Tom Cruise and converses with him in an elevator (*AP* 71), (2) Bateman murders a fellow stock broker called Paul Owen in Bateman's apartment (*AP* 217), (3) Bateman later murders two prostitutes in Owen's apartment (*AP* 304), and (4) a detective comes to his office to ask questions regarding Owen's disappearance (*AP* 267–277). Taken out of context some of these facts appear unconnected, but in the narrative they are connected in a way that makes them dependent on each other.

The reader first learns of the connection between Bateman and Tom Cruise as they run into each other in the elevator of the apartment building they both allegedly live in (*AP* 71–72), and they engage in slightly awkward conversation on the films Cruise has made until Bateman's nose begins bleeding and they part ways. While it sounds plausible that these two wealthy men could live in the same building and the conversation they have could have taken place, there is again a certain air of fantasy—especially when Bateman, who has constantly been telling the reader with fairly good accuracy about pop culture phenomena despite getting a few names mixed up, fails to remember the title of Cruise's film. This in itself proves nothing, but the studying of the other facts mentioned above reveal something else.

Sometime after murdering Owen, a detective by the name of Donald Kimball pays Bateman a visit in his office (*AP* 266). Bateman is reluctant to see him and ends up staging a conversation as if on the phone. Kimball had originally come to see Bateman's colleague Luis Carruthers who had not been in. Kimball has also heard that there has been a sighting of Owen in London after Owen's disappearance. Once in Bateman's office, Kimball tells Bateman that he has been hired to look into the disappearance of Owen. Bateman asks the detective why there has not been anything on the murder on the news, and the detective replies that he thinks Owen's family wanted it to be kept quiet (*AP* 268). They continue to discuss Bateman's relationship with Owen and end up briefly discussing where Bateman lives. Kimball inquires if it is true that Tom Cruise lives in the same building as Bateman. Bateman tells him it is true (*AP* 270). At this point Bateman is getting a headache and Kimball notes that Bateman seems nervous.

In another scene, after killing Owen with an axe, Bateman disposed of the body and later returned to Owen's apartment with two prostitutes and supposedly killed them. Months later, Bateman is confused as to why no one has learned of the two mutilated bodies that he left in Owen's apartment without disposing of them (*AP* 367). He has even gone as far as to ask around, but no one has heard anything. Bateman decides to go back to the apartment to see what the situation is as he still has the key he took with him from when he killed Owen. As he walks along the corridor of the apartment building, he overhears estate agents inside Owen's apartment and deduces that the locks must have been changed. The door opens and one of the estate agents asks if Bateman is her next appointment Through the open door, Bateman sees the inside of the apartment is pristine, devoid of any corpses or the blood that was supposed to be splattered all over the walls. Bateman's confusion grows. (*AP* 367–370)

Sometime later in the chapter "New Club" (*AP* 386–389), Bateman encounters his lawyer, Harold Carnes, on whose answering machine he had left a message saying he had

killed possibly hundreds of people. "New Club" is the third to last chapter of *American Psycho*, although its place chronologically is somewhat unclear, and shows Bateman at his most distraught. The entire chapter is devoted to Bateman desperately trying to convince Carnes that he really did kill Owen. Bateman tries to confront Carnes about the message, but Carnes is hardly paying attention to Bateman and instead meets and greets other people at the club. Bateman and Carnes end up yelling at each other over the loud music, Bateman confessing killing Owen and torturing "dozens of girls" which Carnes brushes off and regards the confession as a joke. Bateman grows angrier. It is then that Carnes tells Bateman that he had dinner with Owen twice in London ten days ago (*AP* 388). This is the second mention of someone having met Owen in London, this time more compelling than the one briefly mentioned by detective Kimball earlier in the novel while visiting Bateman in his office. By this time, the killings of the prostitutes in Owen's apartment as described by Bateman had happened months before. Bateman cannot believe what he is hearing and is left dumbfounded (*AP* 388).

If one looks at all these events as a whole, what can be said of their truthfulness? It depends on many things, most notably whether the reader believes Bateman killed Owen or not. Throughout the novel, Bateman describes Owen as a kind of nemesis, but the dislike is largely one-sided. When Bateman goes out after work, Owen is often somewhere in the background, and if their paths cross it is Bateman who presents belligerent behaviour towards Owen, not the other way around. Owen is also different to others Bateman kills—Owen is like Bateman: a wealthy, white stock trader of a similar age, only he seems to be more successful, but Bateman tends to kill people who he considers inferior or pathetic in some way, such as the homeless. There are also two sightings of Owen in London after Bateman supposedly killed him. Granted, the sighting described detective Kimball is far from irrefutable, but the second one by Carnes is not.

If the reader decides Bateman never killed Owen, then the scene in Bateman's office with the detective probably never took place either. Owen's family would not hire a detective to look into a murder that never took place. If the conversation they had never happened, perhaps Tom Cruise does not live in the same building and they have not crossed paths in an elevator and had a floundering conversation. Finally, if Bateman never killed Owen, it is impossible he could have gone to Owen's apartment, killed the two prostitutes, and left their bodies there for months. Another fact that adds to Bateman's unreliability here is that the call to Carnes was made in the previously mentioned "Chase, Manhattan" chapter, which most likely did not happen at all.

The domino effect I have just described can be taken even further. In a chapter entitled "Girls" Bateman meets with a prostitute called Christie and is later joined by another prostitute, Sabrina. Bateman almost kills Christie and Sabrina, but in the end lets them go. After returning from the Hamptons he once again meets up with Christie and another girl called Elizabeth in another chapter also entitled "Girls" and kills them. There are indications that it is the same Christie. For example, Bateman says that this time Christie was not enthusiastic about coming home with him and that "she was still upset about the last time we shared together, and that she had major reservations about tonight" and that "she might need surgery after what happened last time, or a lawyer" (*AP* 284). The humorous remarks conflict with the earlier "Girls" chapter, in that reasonably it seems implausible for Christie to go with Bateman after he literally put salt in the wounds he inflicted on her and Sabrina and nearly massacred them the previous time they met. There are a few options to contemplate: (1) This time Bateman is meeting with a different Christie but something strange also occurred with her when they last met, (2) Bateman fantasised most or the entire second "Girls" chapter and the murders in it never took place, or (3) the events in neither chapter took place.

To make matters more complicated, there is also a third chapter called "Girls". In the third one, Bateman still has at least parts of Christie's mutilated corpse in his apartment. His apartment "reeks" because of rotting bits he "scooped out of Christie's head and poured into a Marco glass bowl that sits on a counter" (*AP* 300). Her head is still in the corner of the living room and Bateman is planning to use it as a jack-o'-lantern come Halloween (*AP* 300–301). It is also in this chapter that Bateman kills two prostitutes in Owen's apartment because Bateman's own apartment is unusable because of the stench. Bateman also mentions that his lawyer has informed him that detective Kimball has heard that Owen really is in London. As I have argued, Bateman did not murder Owen or the prostitutes in Owen's apartment which puts the reliability of the third "Girls" chapter into question. Its validity is challenged further if one believes the earlier "Girls" chapters, or at least the one where he describes killing Christie, to be unreliable.

In light of these connections, I would argue that the likeliest case is option three: the "Girls" chapters are mostly, if not completely fictional as fabricated by Bateman. Without the connection to Owen's fictitious murder, the reader may be able to reconcile the inconsistencies by believing that there were two different Christies, and that Bateman killed one of them and kept her severed head rotting in his apartment. But because Owen's non-death and the issues related to it negate the events in the third "Girls" chapter, it becomes impossible to ignore what Bateman wants to believe is true and what actually happened (Nünning 1999, 58; Phillips 2009, 65). His insanity is making him create imperfect scenarios that he narrates, but the inconsistencies and other flaws in them make the reader suspicious.

The domino effect created by the reader disbelieving one event, the murder of Owen, is an overt example of a "detective framework" that some critics, including Zerweck (2001, 157), do not see in *American Psycho*. As described by Fludernik (1999, 78), the "detective framework" takes unreliability and views it as "a kind of detective scenario" and on

"discovering the truth [...] about the narrator" the reader has "a moment of revelation". In the case of *American Psycho*, this means that on discovering the discrepancy between Bateman's description of the above events, the reader unearths "the secret the implied author was trying to impart" (Fludernik 1999, 78), that is to say, that Bateman is unreliable. The events could not have happened the way Bateman describes them, and the reader is "in the know" (Fludernik 1999, 78). Although Fludernik uses the concept of the implied author, the detective framework has many similarities with Nünning's approach, the major one being the reader's moment of revelation. It can be broadly equated to the reader comparing what the narrator means to say and the additional meaning he or she does not want to say, but nevertheless unwarily conveys to the reader, and the reader's subsequent hypothesis that the two messages do not match. Granted, all models of unreliability require some similar process, and therefore Zerweck's remark about there being no detective framework is relevant to this thesis, despite being based on the work of Fludernik and not Nünning.

Additionally, Phillips (2009, 63) notes that "the inconsistencies in the narrative [...], the 'detective framework', is signified by the character of [d]etective Donald Kimball". She does not elaborate on this idea, but it is indeed possible to see the detective as an entity that not only draws attention to the conflicts in the narrative, but as the signifier of the idea of detection, detective work, and the character of the detective. Gomel (2011, 55) says that Kimball is "significant" because "the detective represents the narrative's epistemological desire for the truth". In classic detective and mystery fiction, the detective's "main function is to restore order from chaos" and "reach the bedrock of reality" (Gomel 2011, 55). The reader must look closer to see through Bateman and the illusion of reliability, and in a sense become a detective themselves.

The effect of Phillips's (2009, 63) thinking can be seen in Bateman panicking when detective Kimball asks him when he last saw Owen. He has a hard time coming up with a

place and ends up contradicting another person's statement which places Bateman with them, not where Bateman says he was. Bateman succeeds in talking himself out of the tense situation with Kimball, and Kimball leaves soon after. Despite Kimball not gaining much from the conversation, the chapter with the detective reveals new information about Bateman to the reader. It is here where Bateman's insecurities become apparent, and for the first time he is truly worried that someone, the detective and the reader, might be onto him. He stumbles over his own words when he tries to come up with a time and place for when he last saw Owen:

> "We had"—oh my god, Bateman, think up something—"gone to a new musical that just opened, called… *Oh Africa*, *Brave Africa*." I gulp. "It was… a laugh riot… and that's about it. I think we had dinner at Orso's… no, Petaluma. No, Orso's."
>
> <div align="right">(AP 273)</div>

Bateman's fabrication mirrors the entire narrative when he is regarded as unreliable: he spends most of his time constructing an empty illusion of reality that lacks anything meaningful. Bateman and his shallow friends go to interchangeable places like clubs and restaurants, have perfunctory conversations, take drugs, and repeat it all over again.

The domino effect is an effective way of describing how judging one scene in *American Psycho* as unreliable affects the way the reader interprets other parts of the novel. Deeming Owen's murder false affects the reliability of the entire novel, both previous and future scenes. It creates a ripple effect that debunks many of Bateman's assertions and descriptions of events.

4. Types of Unreliable Narration

Having argued for Bateman's unreliability, I will now examine the two subtypes of unreliable narrators, and how Bateman can be seen as both an untrustworthy and a fallible narrator, but is mostly a fallible narrator.

While Booth discusses the basics of unreliable narration, he touches upon the matter of different types of unreliable narrator. He characterises unreliable narrators according to how far and in what way they distance themselves from the author in tone or irony, but also according to fallibility. This means that the concept of the unreliable narrator can be divided up into two distinct types of narrator: untrustworthy and fallible narrators. Booth himself does not delve into the difference in great detail. (Booth 1983, 158–159, 163, 439; Olson 2003, 96)

One of the first people to investigate the difference between untrustworthy and fallible narrators further was Chatman (Chatman 1990, 149; Martens 2008, 80). In recent years, Greta Olson has refined the difference further, especially in her article "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators" (2003). It is mainly her work on which I will base my analysis of *American Psycho*.

Booth's mention of degrees of potential fallibility shows that he considers fallibility and untrustworthiness as being "interrelated rather than diametrically opposed" (Olson 2003, 96). In practice, this means that the narrator of a given narrative can exhibit signs of both subtypes at the same time. It is not a question of either–or but rather if: is the narrator untrustworthy as well as fallible, or vice versa. This is also why both subtypes are relevant to the interpretation of *American Psycho*, and I will argue that Bateman can be seen as an untrustworthy and a fallible narrator. In my analysis, I will use the term "unreliable narrator" to refer to the entire concept of unreliable narration, and "untrustworthy" and "fallible" when talking about the two subtypes.

I will first look at Bateman as an untrustworthy narrator, and then move on to examining him as a fallible narrator. As it will soon become clear, my previous arguments have mostly been in favour of Bateman being a fallible narrator. Therefore, my focus will be on Bateman's fallibility instead of his untrustworthiness.

4.1 Bateman as an Untrustworthy Narrator

The first of the two subtypes of unreliable narrator are untrustworthy narrators.

> [The term] "untrustworthy" suggest[s] that the narrator deviates from the general normative standards implicit in the text. For this reason the narrator cannot be trusted on a personal level.
>
> (Olson 2003, 96)

Untrustworthy narrators are therefore "dispositionally unreliable", and their untrustworthiness seems to mainly stem from "ingrained behavioral traits" or "some current self interest" (Olson 2003, 103). Olson (2003, 102) argues that untrustworthiness is thus a "distinct characteristic" of the narrator.

Indeed, several decades earlier, Booth (1983, 105) suggested that untrustworthy narrators can "contradict themselves immediately or announce outright that they are insane". Alternatively, readers may have to infer whether the narrator is trustworthy or not from more implicit factors and to do more "detective work" (Booth 1983, 105). If the narrator has a mental condition of some kind, and even though the narrator might be aware of his or her condition, it does not necessarily make him or her more reliable, because unreliable narration is a narratological and not a psychological concept (Gomel 2011, 54).

Bateman says he is insane frequently. Zerweck (2001, 157) sees Bateman's explicit remarks of being a bored psychopath, which is to say his motivation for committing the murders, as viable evidence of his reliability. Bateman "knows and openly tells of his deeds and motivations and makes no attempt to 'hide' his nature" (Zerweck 2001, 157). This is only one possible reading. I argue that considering the evidence I have presented to the contrary, there is little proof that he actually committed the murders he describes. Thus, his open admissions of why he does the things he does reflect his intrinsic unreliability as opposed to reliability. He makes some attempts to hide his nature, and when he does not, no one hears his confessions, as I will demonstrate next.

Like grammatical indications of unreliability, the frequency of Bateman's admissions increases as the novel progresses. Early on in the novel, Bateman only says he is a psychopath to himself without anyone else hearing. After Evelyn describes him as "the boy next door" for the second time, Bateman whispers "[n]o I'm not" and calls himself a "fucking evil psychopath" (*AP* 20), frustrated that Evelyn keeps calling him that. At this point, the reader has at least three unsettling things to consider. Firstly, there is something wrong with how Bateman portrays the world around him because the tie his friend Price is wearing changes to a different one during the chapter when it reasonably could not. Secondly, Bateman tells the reader of a "moderately interesting" story in the newspaper about two people going missing aboard a yacht, and Bateman has just identified himself as a psychopath. It is later revealed that Bateman did indeed kill the two people aboard the yacht, or at least Bateman believes he killed them, or wants the reader to believe he did. Thirdly, there are Bateman's own views of himself as a psychopath to consider. Disregarding later knowledge for now, there is still a conflict between Bateman's boy next door image and his own perception of himself as a psychopath. The clues in the first chapter are part of the detective work as described by Booth (1983, 105). The mention of the two people who disappeared is made just before Bateman draws the reader's attention to his possible insanity, which invites the reader to do said detective work.

Once while meeting Owen and supposedly playing the part of an active listener, Bateman nods and says things like "this is enlightening" while telling Owen he is insane and that he likes to dissect girls at the same time (*AP* 216). He also leaves a message in his lawyer's answering machine, proclaiming to be "a pretty sick guy" (*AP* 338). Whenever Bateman says these things, no one ever seems to hear him or if they do, they do not take him seriously and treat the admissions as jokes. An example of Bateman's admission going unnoticed is when a woman asks what it is Bateman does for a living:

     "So what do you do?"
[...]
     "I'm into, oh, murders and executions mostly. It depends." I shrug.
     "Do you like it?" she asks, unfazed.
     "Um... It depends. Why?" I take a bite of sorbet.
     "Well, most guys I know who work in mergers and acquisitions don't really like it," she says.
     "That's *not* what I said," I say, adding a forced smile, finishing my J&B.
"Oh, forget it."

                    (*AP* 205–206)

It is as if Bateman had said he mainly works in mergers and acquisitions, not murders and executions. The two phrases are similar, and it is possible the woman was not paying close attention. Alternatively, one can argue Bateman said he works in mergers and acquisitions and only thinks he said murders and executions. The first option would make him untrustworthy, the second fallible. Bateman should be seen as untrustworthy if he knowingly said what he believes to have said, fallible if he is unaware that he did not say what he thinks he said. The difference between untrustworthiness and fallibility is therefore a matter of self-awareness. I will deal with Bateman's fallibility in the next chapter.

4.2 Bateman as a Fallible Narrator

The second type of unreliable narrator is the fallible narrator. According to Olson (2003, 96), "fallible" impl[ies] that the narrator makes mistakes about how she perceives herself or her fictional world". Therefore, as opposed to untrustworthy narrators, fallible narrators are not necessarily aware that they their perception is faulty, and are less likely to be deceptive on purpose. Booth (1983, 159) suggests that fallible narrators' accounts of events and the world are often mistaken or they "believe to have qualities which the author denies [them]". Olson (2003, 101) adds that their views can be biased or their sources of information incomplete, so the information they report to the reader or to other characters within the story can therefore be unreliable.

Narrators who are children, poorly educated, or inexperienced, often fall into this category as a result of their impaired perception (Olson 2003, 101). Olson (2003, 103) also says, that in her opinion, readers regard mistakes made by fallible narrators as "situationally motivated" and they are caused by "external circumstances" and not "inherent characteristics". This can certainly be the case, and it is a clear distinction from untrustworthy narrators whose reliability is an inherent characteristic. Olson (2003, 103) also says that readers tend to justify the narrator's failings in a similar way as they would justify their own mistakes in everyday life, "on the basis of circumstances that impede them rather than on their intellectual or ethical deficiencies" (Olson 2003, 103). Even the label "fallible" suggests less accountability than "untrustworthy*"* (Olson 2003, 96*)*.

It is possible to read *American Psycho* in a way that sees Bateman as a fallible narrator (Phillips 2009, 64). If the reader regards Bateman as a "victim of violent hallucinations" (Gomel 2011, 53), it is possible to argue that only some or none of the murders he describes actually took place. There is evidence that points to this in the novel. One feature that keeps repeating itself in *American Psycho* is other characters ignoring or not hearing Bateman when he divulges information about his psychopathic behaviour. I previously described this as a characteristic of Bateman's untrustworthiness. It can, however, be seen as a feature of fallibility if the moments Bateman describes occur when Bateman is affected by hallucinations, which makes it possible to cast doubt over the entire novel.

This leads to another point regarding Bateman's fallibility connected to his admissions landing on deaf ears: Bateman believes he has done things that never occurred—he is unaware that what he believes to have happened did not happen. This is a key feature of fallible narrators (Olson 2003, 103). As described earlier in connection with the domino effect, at one point, Bateman ends up yelling at his lawyer Carnes—on whose answering machine he had left a message saying he killed Owen—because Carnes regards Bateman's

admissions as jokes (Phillips 2009, 64). Owen's murder is described to the reader earlier in the novel, months prior to Bateman having a conversation with Carnes during which Carnes tells Bateman that he had dinner with a very alive Owen in London ten days ago.

The above situation is an example of how Bateman and the rest of the characters often seem to inhabit separate worlds. His world operates in a way that deviates from what Olson (2003, 96) calls "the general normative standards". The fact that Bateman's admissions of insanity, psychopathy, and various murders or murderous urges that he makes to other characters go mostly unnoticed is something that gradually builds up significance in the reader's mind. When the reader gets to a point where the events and Bateman's description do not add up at all, as with the case of Owen, it is clear that Bateman's narrative credibility is flawed. Indeed, Bateman's "authority as the narrating 'I' grows increasingly unstable as his narrative unfolds" (Clark 2011, 28). If someone had ignored what Bateman said once or twice, it could be dismissible, but the fact that it happens a dozen times is not. Thus, it can be argued that the murders he commits are nothing but fantasy or hallucinations. They are something Bateman's mind has made up but which never happened. Phillips (2009, 64) notes that "[e]ven Bateman considers it odd that his words are unacknowledged" and at one point asks Evelyn "can you hear me?" (*AP* 102) in response to not being heard. In my view, this is further proof of Bateman's fallibility: Bateman himself has trouble comprehending what is happening and what is reality as opposed to fantasy. Yet, he is constantly "trying to prove his narrative reliability" and "he has his attempts thrown back into his face as irrelevant, embarrassing, and 'not amusing'" (Gomel 2011, 55).

Another example of this is Bateman tells us of his latest visit to the dry cleaner's, a scene I have briefly mentioned a few times before. His regular dry cleaner's is situated twenty blocks up from his apartment and he usually sends his "bloody clothes" there (*AP* 80). He is bringing more bloodstained clothes to be cleaned and because of various difficulties at

the cleaner's launches into a melodramatic tirade. The dry cleaner's is also referenced later when they have been "unable to get the bloodstains out of another Soprani jacket" (*AP* 161). No one suspects anything or asks any questions. In Bateman's world, he truly is without consequence—he regularly kills people in broad daylight and in his apartment, but no one ever sees or hears anything, let alone reports him to the police. It is likely that he is unaware these events did not happen and therefore demonstrating his fallibility.

One could also look at the ample use of italics in *American Psycho* as a sign of fallibility. Syllables, words, phrases, and entire sentences are italicised constantly, sometimes producing surprising results. As noted earlier, the use of italics to intensify words is a lexical sign of unreliability, such words function specifically as expressive intensifiers. In *American Psycho*, stress is sometimes placed on syllables that one would normally not put it, not even to emphasise a point. For example, during a dinner between Bateman and some of his friends, a woman by the name of Anne is teased about her choice of wine, a sauvignon blanc. She replies by saying: "You complete *jerk*". Then she smiles "relieved" and adds that the man who teased her is "*fun*ny" (*AP* 96). These stresses are most likely meant to be taken as expressive intensifiers, yet stress on the first syllable of the word "funny" is somewhat difficult to justify. It does not seem like sarcasm because Anne is relieved and smiling. However, it is possible that the strange rhythm of speech and stress are relayed to the reader because of Bateman's altered perception, whereby he wrongly perceives the conversation to have happened and sounded the way he describes it to the reader. Alternatively, if the dinner scene, or indeed the entirety of *American Psycho*, is taken to be unreliable and it possibly never happened, the strangeness of the dialogue could be attributed to Bateman's mind producing it unconvincingly. Consequently, the italicisation and related stress patters could be examples of faulty perception or construction of events and therefore unreliability (Olson 2003, 96). The strange style and speech patterns of the characters and possible purpose of

such patterns could be considered as a subject for further study, especially because of their prevalence throughout the narrative.

Bateman's drug abuse can be seen as a contributing factor to his fallibility and possible hallucinations. Bateman claims to be a legal and illegal drug user (see, for example, *AP* 179 and 226), and his drug-addled mind may be causing him to hallucinate or have other delusions that alter his self-perception and world-view (Gomel 2011, 53). Narcotics are also a kind of "external circumstance" (Olson 2003, 103) that can be seen as a partial cause of his fallibility. Bateman himself may not be aware that there is something wrong with how he perceives his surroundings. Hence, the reader can interpret him as a murderer or someone suffering from delusions brought on by drug overdoses (Gomel 2011, 53).

There is little question that if the reader believes that Bateman is on drugs and at least some of the events in the novel happen, the drugs are having an effect on Bateman and his reliability. A chapter entitled "A Glimpse of a Thursday Afternoon" is an example of this:

> and it's midafternoon and I find myself standing at a phone booth at a corner, I don't know where, but I'm sweaty and a pounding migraine thumps dully in my head and I'm experiencing a major-league anxiety attack, searching my pockets for Valium, Xanax, a leftover Halcion, anything, and all I find are three faded Nuprin in a Gucci pillbox, so I pop all three into my mouth and swallow them down with a Diet Pepsi and I couldn't tell you where it came from if my life depended on it. I've forgotten who I had lunch with earlier and, even more important, *where*.
> (*AP* 148, emphasis in the original)

The extract is from the beginning of the chapter, and it starts as if in the middle of a sentence. According to Nünning (1999, 65), syntactic indications of unreliability include incomplete sentences and "other features that indicate a high degree of emotional involvement", so the syntactic indication of beginning a chapter this way is in itself is a sign of unreliability. Bateman's drug abuse can be seen as a partial cause behind such textual signals. Additionally, the extract demonstrates how disoriented Bateman is because of the drugs: he does not know where he is, he is having an anxiety attack which he is trying to quell by

taking whatever drugs he may have with him, and he has forgotten with whom and where he had lunch, if he even actually had lunch. Bateman's disorientation means that one must take the things he says with a grain of salt, because it is hard to discern between what Bateman thinks happened and what actually happened. In the extract Bateman is aware that his memory is not working correctly, but he does not really understand why he cannot remember. After trying to remember what he ate and with whom, he says "Oh god, *I can't remember*" (*AP* 149, emphasis in the original). If this truly is the case, then he is not deceiving the reader on purpose, and is considered fallible, possibly because he was under the influence of narcotics during the time he cannot remember, and the anxiety attack could be connected to withdrawal symptoms. This is a possible interpretation when he is considered fallible because of his drug addiction.

As I have argued, Bateman's hallucinations, whether they occur because of drugs, insanity or a combination of the two, are a sign of fallibility. Sometimes Bateman acknowledges that he is having hallucinations, other times it is the reader who deems something a hallucination. An example of Bateman entertaining the possibility of him hallucinating is when he is at a Christmas party where he observes small elves: "though I cannot be positive that I'm not hallucinating, there seem to be midgets dressed in green and red elf suits and felt hats walking around with trays of appetizers" (*AP* 183). Bateman also mistakes one of the elf waiters for Laurence Tisch, possibly a colleague of Bateman's, an example of one of the many cases of mistaken identity in the novel. While it is not unfeasible for eccentric millionaires and billionaires to host a party with little people hired as elves, it is unlikely. It is arguably more probable that Bateman is hallucinating the existing catering staff as elves, and showing signs of fallibility. It is common in *American Psycho* that Bateman's hallucinations or images he creates for wish-fulfilment are not otherworldly, only teetering on the edge of plausibility, or just over it. These kinds of scenes also often have an air of

absurdity about them, and absurd scenes such as the Christmas party are plentiful in *American Psycho*. When one adds the case of mistaken identity—which I have earlier argued is a sign of unreliability—to the mix, the Christmas party scene becomes even more unreliable and supports the theory that Bateman is hallucinating.

Another example of mistaken identity emerges in what I call the band chapters. They are chapters about various musical acts of the 1980s which are interspersed among the other chapters in which Bateman gives an account of his life. The band chapters are Bateman's analysis of the musical acts. The artists he analyses include Genesis, Whitney Houston, and Huey Lewis and the News, and all the chapters contain examples of mistaken identity. For example, while analysing Whitney Houston and the track "So Emotional", Bateman mistakenly calls the track's keyboardist and synth bass player Walter Afanasieff "Wolter Afanasieff" (*AP* 255) Similarly, Bateman gets the names of Genesis band members Tony Banks and Mike Rutherford mixed up in the middle of his analysis and calls them "Mike Banks" and "Tom Rutherford" (*AP* 135). Bateman is showing off how knowledgeable he is and acts as if he is an expert, yet his facts are far from reliable. However, Bateman seems to have no idea his account of music history is flawed. According to Booth (1983, 159), this is an example of unreliability in that Bateman "believe[s] to have qualities" he does not, and according to Olson (2003, 96), the factual mistakes made by Bateman and the way he perceives himself wrongly is a sign of fallibility.

In *American Psycho*, the line between Bateman hallucinating, as in the images coming to him, and creating images he wishes to see is not always straightforward. "Chase, Manhattan" is an example of this. Earlier I argued that "Chase, Manhattan" is the product of Bateman's imagination as wish-fulfilment. Wish-fulfilment can, to a degree, be a process of perceiving the world as something it is not, or of possessing qualities Bateman thinks he has but in reality does not, and therefore it is a sign of fallibility.

One of the most prevalent types of textual evidence for unreliability in *American Psycho* is inconsistencies in how Bateman describes physical objects around him. One of the things he regularly tells the reader about in great detail is the kind of clothes he or other characters in the novel are wearing. The first time the reader encounters such an inconsistency is only a few pages into the novel when Bateman's friend Tim Price's tie switches from a "Ralph Lauren silk tie" (*AP* 5) to a "Versace tie" (*AP* 8). There is no reasonable possibility that I can see how the tie could have changed during the scene: everyone stays together and converses with each other. It is possible to read the change as an innocent lapse in Bateman's meticulous attention to detail and his encyclopaedic knowledge of current fashion. It is also possible to read it as one of the first signs of fallibility in the novel, an indirect sign about Bateman's questionable state of mind. Mistakes like this one are something he would not want the reader to know about—he prides himself on being right about every detail and his fellow yuppies hold his knowledge and taste in esteem as well. If the switch is read as a sign of unreliability, the reader will begin to wonder what else could have caused Bateman to make the error. He is inadvertently communicating something to the reader that he does not mean to communicate, in accordance with Nünning's (1999, 58) theory on unreliability.

There are also instances where Bateman's fallibility becomes clear in the middle of the scene. Phillips (2009, 65) notes that one such event is when Bateman attacks Luis Carruthers in the Yacht Club men's room (*AP* 158–160). According to Bateman, he approaches Carruthers from behind with the stall door ajar and begins to choke him. Yet his grip is very loose, because Carruthers turns around while Bateman is supposedly choking him and wanting to see Luis' face "contort and turn purple" (*AP* 158). According to Phillips (2009, 65), at this point it is possible to discern between "what *is* happening" and "what Bateman *wants* to see happen"—these events do not occur and are only a part of Bateman's fantasy.

Luis's reaction to the events is another clue. He kisses Bateman's wrist and responds to the attack in melodramatic longing, asking Bateman to kill him after Bateman rejects his advances: "If I can't have you, I don't want to live. I want to die" (*AP* 295). The difference between "Bateman's perception of the attack and the response it provokes in Luis is a reflection of the distance between the explicit and implicit narrative discourses" and the distance reveals that what Bateman is narrating may not be what has actually occurred (Phillips 2009, 65). Arguably, the fallacy of the above events is established further when later in the novel it is revealed that Luis has got married (*AP* 384). It is certainly not unheard of for gay men to marry women, but seeing as the encounter in the bathroom happened only in Bateman's imagination it has to be taken into account.

The level of Bateman's fallibility depends on what events the reader assumes to be factual. If Bateman did not commit any of the murders, then his visit to Owen's apartment is a clear indicator that he perceives the world as something it is not. Indeed, Booth (1983, 159) describes fallible narrators as believing to have qualities which the author denies them, so Bateman would still be insane, but he would not have actually killed and tortured anyone.

Bateman's fallibility is the result of his altered perception, be it because of insanity, drugs, or a combination of both. His drug abuse may be the cause of his hallucinations, or his mental state may alter his self-perception and world-view. This leads to delusions about invulnerability and acting without consequence. It also means that Bateman is inconsistent in how he describes physical objects around him, and possibly makes him substitute reality with his own version without being aware of it. Some traits of his fallibility can also be seen as characteristics of an untrustworthy narrator, because in Bateman's case, they often pertain to his type of insanity, which is a sign of fallibility. By Bateman's type of insanity I mean a certain type of insanity that is related to and attributes to Bateman's impaired perception of the world around him, which is a marker of unreliability according to Olson (2003, 101).

However, in certain instances the division between untrustworthiness and fallibility depends on the context and reading of the novel which I will discuss next.

5. Effect of Bateman's Unreliability on the Reader

The meaning of *American Psycho* depends on whether the reader deems Bateman a reliable or an unreliable narrator (Gomel 2011, 53). Now that I have argued for Patrick Bateman's unreliability and especially his fallibility, I will briefly discuss how it affects the reader's interpretation of *American Psycho*.

If one reads *American Psycho* without questioning Bateman's reliability, the experience and the reader's interpretation of the text are different from when one regards him as unreliable, because unreliability alters the effect of the work (Booth 1983, 158). In other words, once the reader has inferred dramatic irony as defined by Nünning, the thematic content of the novel changes, and it has an effect on the reading of *American Psycho*.

The morality of unreliable narration has been called into question. One of the drawbacks of unreliable narration is that it can lead readers astray, confuse the reader, and provoke him or her to make false accusations on both the narrator and the entire text. (Booth 1983, 389) This can happen, for example, when the reader misinterprets something as unreliable when it is not. Unreliable texts can also be riddled with traps and readers guide themselves through the text with various degrees of success. How and on what grounds this success is measured seems impossible to determine. (Booth 1983, 239, 288) If one takes into account all the different interpretations of *American Psycho* as made by various critics, one of the most common matters under discussion are misinterpretations of Bateman's unreliability, and whether he imagined, fantasised, or hallucinated some or all of the events in the novel. Indeed, Phillips (2009, 65) says that there are "multiple interpretations" of *American Psycho*, and Mandel (2011, 11) concurs that "the reader is ultimately unsure whether [Bateman]

fantasized some, or all, or none of the violent murders he describes himself committing".

Although I disagree with Mandel including the possibility of Bateman being completely reliable and having fantasised none of the murders, her basic idea stands. According to my analysis in the previous chapters, Bateman is at least partially unreliable, and I include in this the possibility that the entire novel is fantasy.

As mentioned earlier, as a reliable narrator Bateman would be exactly how he appears: a man channelling his anger and boredom into acts of brutality, trying to find something to stimulate him (Phillips 2009, 66). In this view, Bateman is seen as a perpetrator rather than a victim. He is also a victim when he is seen as being plagued by "violent hallucinations" (Gomel 2011, 53). This divide creates a stark difference between how the reader regards Bateman and his actions. When he becomes the victim and the murders are not real, which is to say, no one in the real world is harmed, Bateman becomes easier to sympathise with. Therefore, the division between victim and perpetrator alters the interpretation of the text greatly, as seen in the following extract:

> Each model of human behavior must be assumed to have some validity. Is evil something you are? Or is it something you do? My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape. But even after admitting this—and I have, countless times, in just about every act I've committed—and coming face-to-face with these truths, there is no catharsis. I gain no deeper knowledge about myself, no new understanding can be extracted from my telling. There has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession has meant *nothing*…
>
> (*AP* 377, emphasis in the original)

Bateman's contemplation on the nature of evil, pain, and catharsis concerns the black and white divide between victim and perpetrator. When he asks whether evil is something you are, or something you do, the question corresponds to a degree with his reliability. If evil is something you do, then by only imagining or hallucinating the violent acts, Bateman is arguably less evil. Then again, if evil is something you are, then whether Bateman committed the acts he describes or not becomes a non-issue: he is evil. Because it is nigh impossible to

say for certain whether Bateman knows he is unreliable or not, the question becomes more complicated, because without knowledge of his unreliability he cannot reach a decision. He is in pain, and he sees no catharsis ahead, and the lack of catharsis makes finding the answer futile. Also, if all behaviour is "assumed to have some validity", then the difference between victim and perpetrator becomes blurred even further. It can be argued that Bateman did want to commit the acts he describes, even if he is a victim of hallucinations.

Additionally, Phillips (2009, 66) points out that Bateman's remark "this confession has meant nothing" takes on a new meaning because the murders he is confessing never actually occurred. It no longer means nothing in the sense of there being no catharsis or actions having no consequences. Phillips therefore holds the view that none of the murders happened. She points out that if all the killings and torture are removed from the novel, all that is left is a bored man "who lives a life of monotonous repetition" (2009, 66). In this case, the novel is "a long, increasingly insane rant, a malign chimera conjured by the disturbed mind of Patrick Bateman" (Storey 2005, 58).

Bateman's reliability also affects the way *American Psycho* critiques society. Phillips (2009, 66) says that "Bateman's (real or imagined) violence is an expression of his fear". The fear Phillips (Phillips 2009, 66) is talking about is the fear of the other, of the people Bateman violates, anyone who threatens "his dominant position as a young, successful, white, heterosexual man". This leads to the conclusion that the violent acts are fantasies that stem from Bateman's "rage and fury at how life in America [is] structured" (Ellis 2005, 122, quoted in Phillips 2009, 66). Bateman's fear reflects the fears of society as a whole, only it takes them to the extreme.

American Psycho can therefore be seen as social critique about the "failure of justice" and the lack of consequences (Phillips 2009, 66). Interpreting Bateman as an unreliable narrator also leads to the conclusion that *American Psycho* is a novel about the "the failure of

Bateman himself and the society he represents" (Phillips 2009, 66). This notion ties in neatly with what the critics and readers who see Bateman as a reliable narrator have not taken into account: *American Psycho* is satire on the materialistic yuppie culture and the general style of life in the 1980s (Clark 2011, 20):

> My conscience, my pity, my hopes disappeared a long time ago (probably at Harvard) if they ever did exist. There are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it, I have now surpassed. I still, though, hold on to one single bleak truth: no one is safe, nothing is redeemed. Yet I am blameless.
>
> <div align="right">(AP 377)</div>

Bateman claims to be blameless because society is to blame more than the individual. Bateman shifts between moments when he sees everyone as inferior and feels no need to justify his actions, and trying to find someone or something to blame for the way he is, thus revealing that he thinks something is wrong with him. One could draw on multiple fields to study *American Psycho* using social and societal criticism, and many have, but in the context of this thesis it is only pertinent to note that unreliability offers a different facet of exploring societal criticism in connection with *American Psycho*.

Gomel (2011, 53) suggests that if Bateman's unreliability is rooted in the fact that he is being ravaged by hallucinations, he can be seen as "a victim" and the target of the satire is the "psychological damage done to the yuppies by the materialistic emptiness of their lifestyle". Another option is that he is seen as a serial killer and the target of the satire is the "actual damage perpetrated by Wall Street on the rest of society" (Gomel 2011, 53). At one point Bateman asks how many people like him there are in the world (*AP* 377). Relying on dramatic irony, this question can take various meanings within different contexts. When he says this, Bateman can mean himself, which depending on the reader's interpretation can, for example, mean people struggling with mental problems or alternatively serial killers. In the context of *American Psycho* as satire, the question can be connected with the yuppie lifestyle.

For the reader, the question becomes an amalgam of meanings that differ from one person to the next. Critics who have said the novel possesses no real meaning or is devoid of any substance seem to have foregone the above notion, instead focusing on an immediate 'why' and trying to find an indubitable explanation for his actions.

Alternatively, some have interpreted the novel as being "about an emotionally abandoned son adrift and searching for meaning in a confusing, contradictory world" (Blazer 2011, 41). This interpretation is problematic because the reader is supplied with next to no information about Bateman's relationship with his father other than that Bateman is "a child of divorce" (*AP* 215), and only a brief scene of Bateman visiting his mother at Sandstone, some sort of facility of which she is now "a permanent resident" and also "heavily sedated" (*AP* 365). Bateman and his brother Sean despise each other "unambiguously" (*AP* 224), and Bateman may even be a little envious of him because Sean is able to get tables in restaurants Bateman cannot (*AP* 225). Because of his psychopathy, he feels no connection to his family, and he visits his mother out of obligation in order to fit in to the society (*AP* 365). Is Bateman's psychopathy rooted in emotional abandonment? Is it even possible? The reader is never given a certain answer. Also, if Bateman is hallucinating or imagining in the hope of wish-fulfilment, is the reader supposed to factor in his parents? What the reader is getting is Bateman's view of events, yet he makes no reference to his father, or how the father's absence from Bateman's life has affected him, which is why it is problematic to see the novel as being about Bateman's emotional abandonment by his parents and how it has made him the way he is.

Another aspect of society that is connected to Bateman's reliability is the ability to tell the difference between reality and *simulacra*. *Simulacrum*, the plural of which is simulacra, is a "mere image, a specious imitation or likeness, of something" (*OED*, s.v. "simulacrum", sense 2b), or it can be described as "[s]omething having merely the form or appearance of a

certain thing, without possessing it's substance or proper qualities" (*OED*, s.v. "simulacrum", sense 2a). Serpell (2010, 49) notes the following concerning the relationship between reality and simulacra in *American Psycho*:

> Bateman models his speech on pre-existing discourses including the language of fashion, business, music reviews, and stories about serial killers. He models his behavior on visual simulacra like pornography, snuff films, and magazines.

In effect, Bateman bases his behaviour on things that are not representative of reality. The society that Bateman lives in is a world where "brand names constitute the *only* reality in the world of simulacra" (Gomel 2011, 52, emphasis in the original). Everything is copied, manufactured, and there is no way to strive for individuality. When brand names become the only thing to grab hold of, Gomel (2011, 54) asks "what kind of society does not know the difference between reality and simulacrum and does not care". Bateman's unreliability reflects this well, and Serpell (2010, 60) argues that the blending of reality and simulacra is in part possible because the "filmic language" used by Ellis, such as the use of repetition and frequent references to films. I would argue that Bateman's numerous allusions to films and his action film fantasies contribute to the idea of film and filmic language as well. Serpell (2010, 60) also quotes Ellis from a 1991 *New York Times* article where Ellis talks about brand names and the shallowness of the world in *American Psycho*. Ellis says that he was "writing about a society in which the surface became the only thing. Everything was surface—food, clothes—that is what defined people. So I wrote a book that is all surface" (Cohen 1991). In a world where everything is surface, reality is "inseparable from simulacra" (Serpell 2010, 60). The simulacra can be equated with Bateman's fallibility, and the way Bateman confuses reality with fantasy or hallucinations.

One thing that fascinates critics of *American Psycho* is its violence. While violence is rarely at the centre of attention when examining Bateman's unreliability, the two are undeniably connected. This concerns, for example, Bateman's status as a serial killer.

Bateman's fascination with serial killers does not go unnoticed by his friends, although it mostly annoys them. Bateman's friend and colleague McDermott expresses his frustration with the subject when they are discussing the rules for wearing a sweater vest. Bateman is about to quote someone on the subjects when McDermott says, "Don't tell me he's another serial killer, Bateman. *Not* another serial killer" (*AP* 153, emphasis in the original). The person was not a serial killer, but it does not seem out of the ordinary for Bateman to tell his friends about them. Bateman's familiarity with serial killers, his "virtual absence of humanity" (*AP* 327) and depersonalisation, and his want to inflict his pain on others (*AP* 378), all suggest that his violent impulses stem from some sort of combination of all these factors. It is easier for the reader to regard Bateman as a serial killer in the beginning of *American Psycho* when his unreliability is still debatable. When his unreliability becomes obvious, Bateman's unreliability shifts the focus away from the serial killings. When this happens, one must conclude that the possible fake murders serve another purpose that fits a different thematic, as I will argue next.

Besides the murders, such a thematic is true of other violence in the novel. Serpell (2010, 48) notes that "the initial response to the novel sought to establish that Patrick Bateman was a horrifying and malevolent human being, the embodiment of evil in its most unfathomable and debased form". In this view, Bateman is seen as a man without redeeming qualities, someone who hurts others because he can, because he is bored and possibly scared. Mandel (2006, 11) talks of the difference between regarding the novel as "focusing on the aesthetic impact that the novel performs, and treating the novel like an aesthetic object rather than a perpetrator who needs to be identified, apprehended, and quickly brought to justice". The term *aesthetic* in this context refers to its meaning in modern philosophy as the "sense experience and [...] insight about an object" (Korsmeyer 2011, 7) that the reader experiences while reading the novel. Thus, for those who regard *American Psycho* as aesthetic, the

violence "merely *appears* real" (Mandel 2006, 11, emphasis in the original). Therefore, one can argue that unreliability transforms the novel into an aesthetic object and the apprehending Bateman and bringing him to justice becomes secondary.

Even if the novel is regarded as an aesthetic object, the violence does affect the reader. Serpell (2010, 65) says that despite the violence being "uncertain" and "without consequence", it is "also, and in more than one way, real. We [as the readers] experience it". In other words, if the violence in *American Psycho* only appears real, it does not change the fact that the reader has perceived and pictured it. Serpell (2010, 66) goes on to say that all interpretations of the novel are ultimately in some way "account[s] of the specific way the novel's violence has inhabited each reader for a space of time". This means that even if one considers the novel from the perspective of unreliable narration, it is not possible to disregard the violence and be unaffected, even if it is considered imaginary or hallucinatory. Therefore, the reader experiences and considers the effects of both readings.

If *American Psycho* is viewed as an aesthetic object and experience, then it is necessary to address not only the violence, but the disgusting aspects of the novel. In her book *Savoring Disgust* (2011, 4), Carolyn Korsmeyer discusses types of behaviour "such as those that involve sadistic injury or twisted sexuality" as prime examples of things that make people feel disgust. Indeed, in *American Psycho* the descriptions of murders and often sexual acts preceding them provoke reaction, specifically disgust. Korsmeyer (2011, 3) also writes the following:

> disgusting objects can also fascinate—and even attract [...] This attraction is especially evident in the forms that may be called "aesthetic disgust." By this term I do not mean disapproval or rejection but rather an emotion appropriately aroused by certain works of art—and by other objects as well—that signals appreciative regard and understanding.

While it can seem counterintuitive for disgust to attract, mostly because it is sometimes seen as "the greatest barrier" to enjoyment (Korsmeyer 2011, 39), disgust is not uncommon in art

or entertainment. The most blatant examples are works that exist only for shock value, to deliberately "gross-out" the person experiencing the work (Korsmeyer 2011, 91). This is how many critics have viewed *American Psycho* (Serpell 2010, 48). It is a view that can easily lead to a value or judgement: the shock factor of shock art is often considered of very low artistic merit if any (Young 2002, 1) and often categorised as "filth" by those who oppose it (Silberman 2001, 1). Additionally, because disgust is "a strongly negative emotion" and "deeply immoral behavior prompts condemnation", disgust is often used "to indicate emphatic disapproval" (Korsmeyer 2011, 4), or in other words, to make a moral judgement. But a work can have disgust-inducing properties and also have other value or points of interest, which is the case with *American Psycho*. Disgust can also alter the aesthetic experience or a particular aesthetic characteristic can take on a "different aesthetic character in the course of a story" (Korsmeyer 2011, 152). For example, on the surface, and especially before the reader uncovers the unreliable nature of Bateman's actions, Bateman's actions are seen as immoral and disgusting. That is to say, once the reader discovers the dramatic irony present in the narrative, the disgust the reader feels no more beckons the reader to make a moral judgement but to feel something else, for example pity or sympathy for Bateman and his deteriorating mental state. The reader can still feel disgust, but it is accompanied by feelings that alter the reader's experience of the narrative. Thereby, *American Psycho* has gained "a more acceptable aesthetic emotive quality" and the acts that would be nothing but disgusting in reality have lost at least some of their disgusting nature because the meaning has changed (Korsmeyer 2011, 40).

The violent and disgusting acts are what Korsmeyer (2011, 89) calls "significant feature[s] of aesthetic judgment" because of their ability to alter the thinking of the reader and they end up having a positive effect on the "overall judgment" of the work. Because their transforming effect contributes to the positive value and worthiness of the work, then "the

disgust is a component of recognition of that value" (Korsmeyer 2011, 89). Korsmeyer (2011, 90) goes on to quote Arthur Danto and a term coined by him, *disturbatory art*, which denotes art that is meant to be upsetting. Danto (1997, 299) says that disturbatory art "does not just have disturbing contents" but it "is intended, rather, to modify, through experiencing it, the mentality of those who do experience it." As I mentioned earlier in connection with the violence and disgusting aspects of the *American Psycho*, this is exactly what *American Psycho* does: it makes the reader experience uncomfortable situations. Unreliability adds another layer to it and the disturbatory art becomes more than four hundred pages of shocking the reader.

Based on all the possible readings that unreliability offers with regard to *American Psycho*, it is clear that unreliability does not rule out other interpretations, and instead offers new ways of looking at them. This makes it possible for the reader to receive multiple readings, and consider alternative interpretations and compare them. In her article, Phillips (2009, 65) quotes Mark Storey (2005, 58) who says that "[t]he question is not whether the 'action' [in *American Psycho*] really takes place—a careful reading reveals that was never the point—but what the 'action' tells us about the person who recounts it". Bateman's unreliability forces the reader to reconsider his motives for describing certain events, and reveals things like his tendency for wish-fulfilment that shape the reading *American Psycho* after the reader's first reading of the novel. Thus, the reader receives and must naturalise, which is to say reconcile, the conflicting information that stems from two opposing readings of Bateman as a victim and as a perpetrator.

6. Conclusion

I set out to argue for Bateman's unreliability with the use of a cognitive approach to unreliability. Whereas the rhetorical model places the focus on the implied author, the cognitive model places it on the reader. In the case of *American Psycho*, this means that unreliability is caused by the gap between Bateman's "view of the fictional world and the state of affairs which the reader can grasp" (Nünning 1999, 58), a kind of dramatic irony. Unknowingly, Bateman conveys information about what happened in actuality, as opposed to what he is saying happened, thus revealing his unreliability to the reader.

In my analysis of Bateman's unreliability, I focused on four themes: depersonalisation, wish-fulfilment, *The Patty Winters Show*, and the domino effect. Bateman suffers from depersonalisation, and so the inability to connect with the world around him can be regarded as a possible cause of unreliability. He experiences the sense of imitating reality, of being an automaton, and occasionally outright doubts the world around him. It can be argued that Bateman cannot imitate reality because in the world that he actually inhabits, his perception is altered because of his mental instability. He grows more unstable as the novel progresses and his grip on reality becomes more tenuous. Therefore, Bateman's depersonalisation offers one way of naturalising the text and gives a plausible reason for his unreliability.

Another way of looking at Bateman's unreliability is through wish-fulfilment. In this case, his skilful performance of reality is regarded as fantasy that Bateman would like to be real. He either constructs the entirely fictional world around him to conform to his wishes, or augments the real world with his own fantasies and so-called corrections. This results in unreliability. Bateman's wish-fulfilment is apparent in many facets of the novel. The *Patty Winters Show* offers short glimpses into his wishes as well as foreshadows certain events, such as the spectacle that is "Chase, Manhattan". Wish-fulfilment also explains why Bateman appears to be living in a world with no consequence, a world where he always prevails. He is

never caught despite committing murders in situations that should inevitably lead to his capture. Bateman's narration shows his inclination to see himself as the star of a film, and many scenes in the novel follow common patterns found in cinema. Yet, the reality he tries to portray is too perfect from his perspective to be true and also magnifies his inner turmoil: Bateman tries to portray himself as unflappable but ultimately he is anything but. He is trying to portray himself as dashing and untouchable, but by overstating his point he unwittingly arouses the reader's suspicion. Wish-fulfilment is an example of "what Bateman *wants* to see happen" as opposed to "what *is* happening" (Phillips 2009, 65) and offers another way of naturalising the text.

The Patty Winters Show is a recurring theme in *American Psycho*. The titles and subjects of the morning programme mirror Bateman's personality traits and foreshadow events in the novel. The repetition of the name of the programme itself makes it a syntactic sign of unreliability. The programme is often attached to chapters or events that also have other characteristics of unreliability. This leads to the possibility that the subjects of the programme, if not the programme itself, are the product of Bateman's mind, and that it functions as a part of Bateman's wish-fulfilment process. The presence of dramatic irony in such scenes in connection with *The Patty Winters Show* cannot be ignored, and it is a sign of Bateman's unreliability.

Additionally, deeming one part of the narrative unreliable in *American Psycho* has an immediate effect on the rest of the text. If a particular scene is considered unreliable, other scenes become unreliable because of it as a result of a domino effect. The domino effect is created by the reader disbelieving one event, in this thesis the murder of Owen. Because Bateman does not actually murder Owen, certain preceding events leading up to the non-murder and caused by it must be called into question. The same process is then applied to these events when and if needed. The domino effect leads to the conclusion that Bateman's

insanity or hallucinations make him create imperfect strings of situations, and the inconsistencies and other flaws in them make the reader suspicious. The reader must pay close attention to see through Bateman and the illusion of reliability and detect the dramatic irony that is present during these scenes, and in a sense become a detective themselves.

All the themes mentioned above are interconnected. They are all affected by Bateman's insanity and drug use, and the dramatic irony that betrays Bateman is often the result of all four themes working together and the reader draws on all of them to detect dramatic irony and judge Bateman's unreliability.

As I have argued, Bateman's mental instability and drug use make him a fallible narrator. That is not to say that he is not untrustworthy as well. Many features that in connection to Bateman's unreliability are described under the label of fallibility would be signs of untrustworthiness were it not for his insanity and drug use. But as it is, Bateman is often not aware of his unreliability: he imagines things, he may not realise that his wish-fulfilment is not real, and his depersonalisation and consequently detachment set him aside from the people around him. My interpretation of Bateman's unreliability rests on his perception being hindered by either mental illness or drugs, or both. This view limits the exploration of his untrustworthiness because it makes him fallible and mostly unaware of his erroneous judgment. If one were to approach the text from the point of view of Bateman knowingly deceiving the reader, one could explore his untrustworthiness in greater detail, although this alternative view would require a different explanation for his drug use.

Bateman's unreliability also has a direct effect on the possible readings of *American Psycho*. If one reads the novel without questioning Bateman's reliability, the experience and the reader's interpretation of the text are different from when one regards him as unreliable. In other words, once the reader has inferred dramatic irony, the thematic content of the novel changes, and it has an effect on the reading of *American Psycho*. The most notable result is

the contrast between classing Bateman as a perpetrator as opposed to a victim. Bateman's fallibility absolves him from accountability, but even more so, means that he may never have committed any acts of brutal violence at all. As a reliable narrator, when the reader has to take Bateman's word at face value, he is a monster. The novel can also be regarded as an aesthetic object, or as disturbatory art, whereby the disgusting elements of it gain more meaning, and the gruesome aspects of the novel alter the thinking of the reader, which can lead to a more positive perception of *American Psycho*.

All of the above points lead to the conclusion that Bateman attempts to appear as infallible only for the reader to conclude that he is very fallible indeed. The difficulty is determining to what degree he is unreliable. He is either hallucinating or imagining things as wish-fulfilment or something else, or he is doing all of the above. This thesis has argued that it is not a question of if, but more how. One could look more closely at what the absolute cause behind Bateman's delusions is in another paper. The fact remains that because of his mental instability, the laws of society, and the laws of nature, Bateman cannot exert the kind of power on reality as he can on the fantasy world he inhabits, which manifests itself in dramatic irony. The world that caters to Bateman's desires is where Bateman spends most, if not the entire, novel. The discrepancies between Bateman's world and reality make it possible for the reader to discover dramatic irony and therefore detect Bateman's unreliability.

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