

PAINFUL LUST: STATUS AND CONSUMERISM IN AMERICAN PSYCHO

Luxúria Dolorosa: Status e Consumismo em American Psycho

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Abstract: In a world of ever-changing and material progress, the pursuit of comfort and convenience leads humanity to produce and consume more and more. However, the ideal scenario is never reached because commodities, goods and services are quickly replaced by updated versions of themselves. This process provokes an anxious reaction in the participating actors, leaving them stuck in a world of lust, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In this paper, this process is analyzed in the novel *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis. Depicting the 1980s New York City yuppie generation, the novel offers an interesting and thoughtful insight of a consumerist mindset. This analysis takes into consideration the character's perceptions, with a focus on the goods, clothing and social position of the ones inside this setting. The main theoretical premise behind the analysis is taken from de Botton's studies of status anxiety. We conclude that luxury is the product of an established capitalist ethos.

Keywords: Status. Consumerism. Violence. Capitalism. North American Literature.

Resumo: Em um mundo de constante mudança e progresso material, a busca pelo conforto e conveniência leva a humanidade à produzir e consumir mais e mais. No entanto, o cenário ideal nunca é alcançado pois as mercadorias, bens e serviços são rapidamente substituídos por versões atualizadas. Esse processo causa ansiedade nos indivíduos, deixando-os estagnados em um mundo de luxúria, satisfação e insatisfação. No presente artigo, esse processo é analisado dentro do romance *American Psycho* de Bret Easton Ellis. Em um retrato da geração *yuppie*, vivendo na Nova Iorque dos anos 80, o romance oferece um intrigante entendimento da mente consumista. Tal análise parte das percepções dos personagens, especialmente o protagonista, acerca dos bens de consumo, das roupas e também da posição social dos indivíduos dentro daquele cenário. A premissa teórica principal é o estudo sobre a relação entre status e ansiedade de de Botton. Conclui-se que luxúria é o produto de um arraigado *ethos* capitalista.

Palavras-chave: Status. Consumismo. Violência. Capitalismo. Literatura Norte-Americana.


Recebido em: 14/05/2018

Aceito em: 13/09/2018



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(...) *I'm left with one comforting thought: I am rich – millions are not.*
Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*

Introduction

Alain de Botton (2005, p. 05) claimed that status can be defined as “one’s position in society”, which means, “in the broader – and here more relevant – sense, to one’s value and importance in the eyes of the world”. Therefore, this position in society, which is to say, status, is related to how people see each other. The importance of having a high status lies beneath the privileges that are intrinsic to such high position. Those privileges include having access to comfort, high-quality products and prestigious social events. This process can potentially lead people into a world of luxury, where pleasure is found and lost in every new good and service acquired.

In this paper, we analyze the luxury in the novel *American Psycho*. The basic premise of our argument rests on the study of status apprehension by the writer Alain de Botton. On these grounds, we analyze how de Botton’s concepts of lovelessness, snobbery and meritocracy are behind the motivation in the pursuing of status seen in the novel. Furthermore, we explain how this pursuing led the characters into a luxurious life.

Bret Easton Ellis

Born in a suburban family in Los Angeles, Bret Easton Ellis was introduced to literature by his mother. His father, who had issues with alcohol, divorced his mother when Ellis was an infant. His father had a taste for expensive things and pursued a luxurious lifestyle and this can be seen in Ellis’s body of work, notably in *American Psycho* (MURPHET, 2002).

As a writer, Ellis has been recognized as part of the group called “brat pack” (the others are Tama Janowitz, Jay McInerney, and Mark Lindquist), whose books deal with the angst and hopelessness of urban life. Ellis’s style has been described as “blank, unaffected, cool and ‘non-literary’” (MURPHET, 2002, p. 13), and these characteristics can be explained by authors who influenced him, such as Ernest Hemingway, Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote and Joan Didion.

Less Than Zero, Ellis’s debut, was a commercial success and turned its twenty-one-year-old author in a symbol of his generation (MURPHET, 2002, p. 13) *Less Than Zero* was followed by *Rules of Attraction* (1987), *American Psycho* (1991), *The Informers* (1994), *Glamorama* (1998), *Lunar Park* (2005) and *Imperial Bedrooms* (2010). It is also necessary to say that Ellis’s body work revolves around a certain repetition of places and characters, in other words, “a roster from characters would appear from novel to novel; names from *Less Than Zero* pop up here, and almost all of these characters would appear late in *American Psycho*, *The Informers* and *Glamorama*” (MURPHET, 2002, p. 14). This characteristic is not only evident in the literary elements of the text, such as characters, but can also be seen in the text itself. That is to say that even his themes are recurrent and it serves him as a way “to highlight his larger satiric concerns: the identity, indifference and repetition of human character”

(MURPHET, 2002, p. 15).

With the commercial success of his first novel, a successful and wealthy Ellis moved to New York, a “pivotal factor in his production of *American Psycho*” (MURPHET, 2002, p. 13), where he found a reality molded by a generation of young, well-paid, high-educated professionals, known as yuppies. *American Psycho* draws heavily from the materialistic, greedy and somewhat banal lifestyle that Ellis found in New York.

Patrick Bateman

In *American Psycho* the reader meets Patrick Bateman, a young and shallow man who could easily fit into the absolute stereotype of a yuppie: he is greedy, wealthy, addicted to sex, drugs and obsessed with expensive clothes and furniture. Bateman’s life is worthy of envy: he is handsome, elegant and fashionable to a point that he is mistakenly assumed to be a famous actor or model. He spends his days in Wall Street, working out in fully-equipped gyms and meeting friends in extravagant cafés and restaurants; his nights are spent in nightclubs and in his modern flat. In spite of his lavish lifestyle, Bateman has a dark side; he is tormented with self-insecurity and a painful need to be valued by others. This leads him to feelings of despair and self-hatred, culminating in homicidal tendencies; he rapes, kills, dissects and performs many other hideous acts against people around him. It is important to say that the veracity of these crimes remains doubtable since even Bateman seems to disbelieve in his own sanity.

American Psycho sparked a lot of controversy even before its release. Ellis’s publishers, Simon & Schuster, were expecting the book to have the same success as *Less Than Zero* (MURPHET, 2002, p. 15-23). However, when some violent passages from the book began to circulate in the publishing house, leading Simon & Schuster to cancel the contract, Vintage published the book. Nevertheless, Ellis was severely criticized for the violence and a boycott was called for.

In 2002, a film adaptation was released starring Christian Bale as Patrick Bateman. The movie is visually impressive and grossed more than \$15 million, a value that can be considered as successful, since the production cost \$8 million (MURPHET, 2002, p. 72).

In relation to the work as a piece of literature, *American Psycho* is “presented almost uniformly in a first person, present tense voice in the indicative mood”, which is “fundamental to Ellis’s effects of boredom” (MURPHET, 2002, p. 24). In other words, Ellis attempts to make the reader indifferent to the novel’s events. It happens for a purpose: Bateman’s tedious “monologue dispels most of our expectations of ‘style’ from this reading. It is a provocative and mocking deflation of our hopes that literature should explore the best and most meaningful potentialities of our language” (MURPHET, 2002, p. 25). In this sense, the novel portrays the “solipsism populated by the signs and brand-names of consumer society” (MURPHET, 2002, p. 25). In other words, Bateman’s narrative is a repetition of behavior patterns, situations and reckless consumption of products that leaves the reader with an impression that Bateman’s world is small and futile. Going against the notion that literature should be the platform where the most magnificent and ornamented language would stand, Bateman’s monologue seems to

be abundant in attire descriptions, affectless relationships and absurd hallucinations.

I catch a glimpse of my reflection on the surface of the table. My skin seems darker because of the candlelight and I notice how good the haircut I got at Gio's last Wednesday looks. I make myself another drink. I worry about the sodium level in the soy sauce. (ELLIS, 1991, p. 12)

In this citation, Bateman is having dinner with some friends while he finds himself distracted by his reflection and worries about the sodium level in the soy sauce served with the Japanese food. This short excerpt exemplifies much of the aforementioned boredom of the narrative.

Lovelessness, Snobbery and Meritocracy

In Bateman's world, everything seems to be a thing. In other words, we argue that in his vision, people, objects and services have the same position, that is, a position of being a thing. In addition, this leads him to consume expensive stuff in order to assure and reinforce his social status in that society, to a point that he is unquestionably obsessed with status.

The main theoretical premise behind our analysis of the luxury in *American Psycho* is the book *Status Anxiety* by Alain de Botton. According to de Botton, status can be defined as the legal or professional position that people occupy in the society, or – in a broader and more relevant sense – as how valuable and important they are considered by others (DE BOTTON, 2005, p. 3). That reveals an element that lies at the core of Bateman's (and his friends') motivation: his value in front of society's eyes. Moreover, how is this value (status) obtained? The answer is: buying, consuming and exhibiting things related to success, tastefulness and prestige.

One of the most iconic and funniest moments of the novel is when Bateman and some other yuppies are having some drinks in a restaurant and Bateman decides to show his new business card by pulling it "(...) out of my gazelleskin wallet (Barney's, \$850) and slap it on the table, waiting for reactions." (ELLIS, 1991, p. 44) Even though his friends, McDermott, Van Patten and Price, openly admit that Bateman's card is nice and cool, they do not seem to be so impressed, and they start to check each other's cards. Following Bateman, Van Patten exhibits and passes along his card and by doing this he calls Bateman's card "nothing", causing him distress:

We all lean over and inspect David's card and Price quietly says, "That's *really* nice." A brief spasm of jealousy courses through me when I notice the elegance of the color and the classy type. I clench my fist as Van Patten says, smugly, "Egg-shell with Romalain type..." He turns to me. "What do you think?"
"Nice," I croak, but I manage to nod (...). (ELLIS, 1991, p. 44)

Bateman grows jealous at the sight of Van Patten's card. According to de Botton (2005, p. 5), the anxiety caused by the status obsession "(...) possesses an exceptional capacity to inspire sorrow". In other words, when Bateman's realizes that his card is not highly valued by

his friends, he feels that he himself is also devaluated. This feeling becomes hard to handle when he realizes that Price also liked Van Patten's card more and even harder when Montgomery displays his "magnificent" card, leaving Bateman "depressed" (ELLIS, 1991, p. 45).

The feelings of depression and jealousy experienced by Bateman relate to the first cause appointed by de Botton in relation to the desire of status¹, lovelessness. Love, in this sense, is "(...) to feel ourselves the object of concern" (DE BOTTON, 2005, p. 11); that is, this lovelessness is felt when one's presence and interests are ignored or dismissed. When Bateman's card is less appreciated by his friends, he is "depressed" because he feels that he is not loved by them. Having said that, it is important to emphasize that this love is not of the romantic type, but, the "status forms of love" (DE BOTTON, 2005, p.11), which lacks the "sexual dimension" and "cannot end in marriage", but, "like romantic lovers, enjoy protection under the benevolent gaze of others" (DE BOTTON, 2005, p. 11).

Along with this need for being loved, there is a latent emergency of feeling superior. At many times he and his group behave in a way to assert their presupposed excellence over people who do not belong to their social position. Recurring once again to de Botton's theory, we argue that snobbery, lies at the heart of the yuppies' desires and aspirations for status. "A snob", claims de Botton, is "anyone who practices overt social or cultural bias, who declares one kind of person or music or wine to be plainly better than another" (DE BOTTON, 2005, p. 22); those people do not only discriminate, they insist "on a flawless equation between social rank and human worth" (DE BOTTON, 2005, p. 22). I would like to argue that in *American Psycho*, this aforementioned "flawless equation" is taken to its limits. In a given night, Bateman, Price and others are waiting outside the Tunnel Nightclub, when they notice that nearby there is a homeless man. Bateman compares their appearance with the homeless man's and Price mocks him, offering and denying him some money:

All of the men outside Tunnel tonight are for some reason wearing tuxedos, except for a middle-aged homeless bum who sits by a Dumpster, only a few feet away from the ropes, holding out to anyone who pays attention a Styrofoam coffee cup, begging for change, and as Price leads us around the crowd up to the ropes, motioning to one of the doormen, Van Patten waves a crisp one-dollar bill in front of the homeless bum's face, which momentarily lights up, then Van Patten pockets it as we're whisked into the club, handed a dozen drink tickets and two VIP Basement passes. (ELLIS, 1991, p. 52)

The violence in this scene is outrageous. Bateman recognizes the difference between that beggar and his mates by comparing their attires and, more discreetly, their locations on the scene: the homeless man sits by a trash can, a fact noted by the narrator and that seems to suggest the position of the man itself in that society. The fact that this man is "holding out (...) a Styrofoam coffee cup, begging for change", which suggests he plays a less important - or even

¹ De Botton has identified five causes for status anxiety: lovelessness, snobbery, expectation, meritocracy and dependence. In this paper, we have decided to focus on lovelessness, snobbery and meritocracy since they were enough to support our arguments.

worthless - role in society, reinforces what was previously mentioned. Having said that, it is necessary to note that a rope separates the yuppies and the homeless man, making the division between their social classes visible.

According to Colby (2011, p. 66) the novel "(...) illustrates the mechanisms of domination of the capitalist system in the 1980s". In accord with the philosopher Žižek, Colby claims that in the global capitalism, while people are facing more and more restrictions to circulate, commodities are worldwide spread (COLBY, 2011, p. 66). In other words, the novel seems to represent this global phenomenon in a remarkably restrained environment, the 1980s New York. In the mentioned quotation, this phenomenon takes form in the high-quality tuxedos (certainly manufactured by some prestigious brands) worn by the yuppies and the restriction of movement that can be seen in the rope separating them from the homeless man.

We have claimed that both de Botton's concepts of lovelessness and snobbery are helpful to understand the mindset of the characters in *American Psycho*. Now, in line with de Botton's theory once again, we will bring his concept of meritocracy into this analysis. Meritocracy, in this sense, is the idea that success is the result of personal talent and effort, without interference of social class. According to de Botton (2005), in the western society poorness was first considered a dignified position given by God; poor people were exalted and found relief from their hardships in Christianity. One more narrative can be placed in this line of thought, the idea that rich are rich since they exploit the poor (think of Marx's assertions, for example).

Such narratives had their counterparts as well. The rich were also exalted since they were responsible for giving the poor the opportunity to work and for being the creators of wealth. Besides that, being rich had moral connotations, which means that only individuals that are clever and diligent would be able to build wealth. The other way round, it was also true that people would be poor because they lacked cleverness. These narratives, "more troubling", claims de Botton (2005, p.75), "began to form around the middle of the eighteenth century and steadily gained in influence"; and "at a psychological level, their contribution was to make low status all the harder to endure and the more worrying to contemplate". Having said that, we would like to argue that Bateman seems to find pleasure in reasserting his financial success over people who had not achieved the same success. Departing from a mindset that have de Botton's notion of meritocracy at its core, Bateman expresses how he feels about poor people, who, in his opinion, are unable, stupid and powerless. In doing this, he asserts his position as a prosperous businessperson (even though during the novel he never really works). For the sake of discussion, we quote a moment in which an ill-tempered Bateman feels a shifting in his mood by devaluing a doorman:

On my way out this morning I stopped at the front desk, about to complain to the doorman, when I was confronted with a *new* doorman, my age but balding and homely and *fat*. Three glazed jelly doughnuts *and* two steaming cups of extra-dark *hot chocolate* lay on the desk in front of him beside a copy of the *Post* opened to the comics and it struck me that I was infinitely better-looking, more successful and richer than this poor bastard would ever be and so with a

passing rush of sympathy. I smiled and nodded a curt though not impolite good morning (...). (ELLIS, 1991, p. 138, emphasis in original)

In the passage, Bateman compares his appearance with the doorman's, they are the same age, but the doorman is unattractive, overweight and going bald. On the other hand, Bateman is constantly mistaken for a model or actor, a fact that implies the idea that he is handsome (his morning beauty routine description is almost six pages long). The doorman is having glazed jelly doughnuts and cups of extra-dark hot chocolate, a scene that is noticed with contempt by Bateman, who, in turn, had "slice kiwi and Japanese apple-pear, Evian water, oat-bran muffins, soy milk and cinnamon granola" (ELLIS, 1991, p. 138) for breakfast. All these impressions by Bateman and his conclusion that the doorman will never be as successful and handsome as him, denotes the fact that he is unaware or deliberately ignores the complex relations between social classes and the privileges that culminate in a scenario in which someone can spend hours taking care of themselves and having exotic fruits for breakfast whereas others have to be fed on industrialized food.

As we have shown, Bateman (and his mates, in different degrees) are obsessed with status and this obsession is rooted in concepts of lovelessness, snobbery and meritocracy. Having said that, I will present how these concepts lead the characters to a luxurious existence.

Luxury in *American Psycho*

According to the *Collins Cobuild Student's Dictionary* (COBUILD STAFF, 2005, p. 417), luxury is a "very great comfort, especially among beautiful and expensive surroundings (...); something expensive which you do not really need but enjoy (...); a pleasure which you do not often experience". In other words, luxury is an experience of pleasure that is reached in rare and extravagant circumstances. Moreover, this experience of pleasure is often considered unnecessary, in spite of providing amusement and delight.

In our analysis of *American Psycho*, we have pointed three aspects in which luxurious behavior can be noticed throughout the novel: body, apparel and paraphernalia. We do not defend that these three aspects are separated from each other, actually, they are interrelated. With this in mind, we will analyze each one while supporting our claims with quotations from the novel.

Bateman takes great pleasure in his sensorial experiences. As we said before, one of his biggest concerns is how attractive he is. By the beginning of the novel, the reader will find, in the chapter "Morning", the aforementioned Bateman's beauty morning routine, which gives details about the products used. He frequently works out in order to keep his body in shape. One may notice that, despite the fact that he is a extremely dedicated weightlifter, it seems that he does not do it for health issues, since he takes many drugs during the novel. In other words, Bateman is purely worried about how his body will look, that is, what people will see. The evidence of the body as element of luxury can be clearly seen in the chapter "Facial", which describes Bateman visiting Helga, his skin technician. He waits for her wearing only shorts because

The smock I'm supposed to have on is crumpled next to the shower stall since I want Helga to check my body out, notice my chest, see how fucking *buff* my abdominals have gotten since the last time I was here (...)" (ELLIS, 1991, p. 114, emphasis in original).

Helga only serves to reassure his notion of his self-image. In displaying his body to her and expecting her to appreciate it, we can see the process of the construction of self-image taking form. Therefore, his pleasure comes from the thought of Helga, quoting his own words, checking his body out.

Although we have focused on Bateman's concerns about his body image, the other characters are not seen in a different manner. This point can be illustrated by the shocking way he refers to women along the novel. The word mostly used by him and his mates to refer to women is "hardbody", which, in this context, describes a physically attractive person. According to Colby (2011, p. 82), "the use of such terminology reflects the extent of his reduction of the female form to an onanistic object". Furthermore, this behavior is not limited to labeling women as fat, ugly, stupid, dumb and even Eurotrash. As reported by Colby (2011, p. 82), women are considered commodities by Bateman. In this sense, women are turned into objects that can be consumed by him and this phenomenon is seen in his murders, which, due to their highly detailed descriptions, rendered the novel an association with misogynistic violence (MURPHET, 2002). In contrast, the male characters are usually described by their outfit and sometimes by their features, especially if Bateman envies them.

One may not read the novel without noticing the long clothing descriptions. Every time characters appear in the novel, the reader is presented with a acutely detailed description of their attires, including brands. To give an illustration, we will quote a meeting among Bateman and some of his friends:

The three of us, Todd Hamlin and George Reeves and myself, are sitting in Harry's and it's a little after six. Hamlin is wearing a suit by Lubiam, a great-looking striped spread-collar cotton shirt from Burberry, a silk tie by Resikeio and a belt from Ralph Lauren. Reeves is wearing a six-button double-breasted suit by Christian Dior, a cotton shirt, a patterned silk tie by Claiborne, perforated cap-toe leather lace-ups by Allen-Edmonds, a cotton handkerchief in his pocket, probably from Brooks Brothers; sunglasses by Lafont Paris lie on a napkin by his drink and a fairly nice attaché case from T. Anthony rests on an empty chair by our table. I'm wearing a two-button single-breasted chalk-striped wool-flannel suit, a multicolored candy-striped cotton shirt and a silk pocket square, all by Patrick Aubert, a polka-dot silk tie by Bill Blass and clear prescription eyeglasses with frames by Lafont Paris. One of our CD Walkman headsets lies in the middle of the table surrounded by drinks and a calculator. Reeves and Hamlin left the office early today for facials somewhere and they both look good, faces pink but tan, hair short and slicked back. (ELLIS, 1991, p. 87)

The quote illustrates what we have labeled as apparel. By wearing well-known expensive brand name clothing, Bateman noticeably experiences pleasure. Based on de Botton's concept of lovelessness, we argue that Bateman's anxiety for being loved (in this

sense, love is understood as to be noted, known), leads him to give disproportionate importance to clothing, which is, along with the body, a means for exercising his luxury.

As we have said before, everything seems to be, in an extent, a commodity in the novel. Colby argues that Bateman is

[...] the embodiment of Marcuse's 'second nature of man.' Created from the politics of corporate capitalism, this second nature "ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form." Patrick's endless cataloging of his possessions marks an excessive identification of the subject with the commodity. His hyperbolic object fetishism is not confined to his obsessive detailing of clothes, gadgets, and facial products. (...) As Marcuse observes: "[A]dvanced industrial civilization operates with a greater degree of sexual freedom — 'operates' in the sense that the latter becomes a market value and a factor of social mores." The integration of sex into work and public relations "is thus made more susceptible to controlled satisfaction" and becomes "gratifying to the managed individuals. Just as racing the outboard motor, pushing the power lawn mower, and speeding the automobile are fun." (COLBY, 2011, p. 82)

By taking into account the reflections of the German-American philosopher Herbert Marcuse, Colby sheds light on the mechanism that produces and validates luxury in the core of the novel. As a subject, Bateman identifies himself with things, that is to say, commodities, and this relation provides him much pleasure. Having said that, one may keep in mind that Bateman seems to see everything as a commodity, including other human beings (especially women) and, by this vision, he feels that all that can be managed, and thus satisfaction can be dominated as well. However, Colby (2011, p. 81-82) argued, once again quoting Marcuse, that this relation of exploitation between subject and object works also in the opposite way. As Bateman satisfies his desires, he is also enslaved by them. In other words, the subject's needs and desires are produced and satisfied by the object, however, this satisfaction reproduces the needs and desires, locking the subject in an endless cycle of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Murphet calls this "reification", which means

The transformation of relationships between human beings into relationships between things. Reification is both what is behind the urban alienation Patrick experiences, and his only method for curing it. The infinity of things through which he can identify himself opens up the 'existential chasm' in Bateman; he closes it briefly in the gesture of purchase. (MURPHET, 2002, p. 37)

We would suggest that the aforementioned jealousy felt by Bateman when he checked Van Patten's card is an example of this cycle: first, Bateman attempted to make his mates jealous, which would give him a luxurious pleasure, but as Van Patten's card was considered a better one, Bateman was the one who grew jealous. We would venture to say that if he could, he would have got a new card right away, better than Van Patten's, he would try to get a new card, better than Van Patten's, naturally.

Bateman possesses a deep knowledge of home appliances. His narrative is full of long descriptions on a variety of items, such as bread makers, stereos and cassette decks. This can be

illustrated briefly by his description of products that he has bought:

The following are delivered mid-October.

An audio receiver, the Pioneer VSX-9300S, which features an integrated Dolby Prologic Surround Sound processor with digital delay, plus a full-function infrared remote control that masters up to 154 programmed functions from any other brand's remote and generates 125 watts of front speaker power as well as 30 watts in back.

An analog cassette deck by Akai, the GX-950B, which comes complete with manual bias, Dolby recording level controls, a built-in calibrated tone generator and a spot-erase editing system enabling one to mark the beginning and end points of a certain musical passage, which can then be erased with a single push of a button. The three-head design features a self-enclosed tape unit, resulting in minimized interference, and its noise-reduction setup is fortified with Dolby HX-Pro while its front-panel controls are activated by a full-function wireless remote. (ELLIS, 1991, p. 306)

In the same way he exercises his luxury by celebrating his own body and his clothes, he also adores the material progress of his time. To put it another way, he does not only want to have the comfort of possessing a large number of household items, but he also wants to have the most expensive and modern ones; and it takes him to perform absurd actions such as having expensive ashtrays, even though he does not smoke (ELLIS, 1991, p. 25), and considering having a tanning bed at home (ELLIS, 1991, p. 66). This obsession of having, buying and accumulating stuff we would like to label as paraphernalia.

De Botton (2005) traces the development of material progress as starting in the 18th century in England. Due to drastic transformation in farming techniques, the productivity increased, producing and “(...) releasing capital and manpower that flowed into the cities and was invested in industry and trade” (DE BOTTON, 2005, p. 35). This phenomenon has led to the growing of cities, spread of department stores and invention of a diversity of goods and services.

When people started to have more and more access to products that made life easier and more practical, it provoked a change of mindset: life was expected to become more uncomplicated year after year. This created a necessity of providing endless innovations and, as de Botton pointed out (2005, p. 35), “luxuries became decencies, and decencies necessities”. In other words, goods and products, that were only available for the upper class of the previous generations, would currently become available for the middle class. As these products and goods became more available, they also seem to have lost their status as luxuries and became necessities. Meanwhile, new products, services and goods were available for upper classes and turned into objects of desire to the lower classes. Therefore, Bateman, who is rich and is part of the upper class, requires the latest and most expensive paraphernalia to have his necessities satisfied.

Conclusion

Luxury can be painful. As de Botton (2005, p. 5) pointed out “Status Anxiety possesses

an exceptional capacity to inspire sorrow”; and this sorrow, along with suffering and loneliness is deeply portrayed in Ellis’s tale of yuppies in the 1980s New York City.

We have argued that the luxury in the novel is triggered by lack of love, snobbish behavior and the belief that one’s success depends solely on one’s abilities. Moreover, luxury places the characters in a vicious circle where they find pleasure in objects and feel hungry for more of the same objects. By the very end of the novel, Bateman reads a sign in a bar: “[...] THIS IS NOT AN EXIT” (ELLIS, 1991, p. 399, emphasis in original); these words can perfectly be applied to the characters trapped in lust in the novel.

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