

Gain or Pain: Hedonism in Serial Femicide Fiction—A Psycho-social Critique

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Abstract:

Femicide, a significant issue throughout history, is often understudied in literature. Scrutinizing human rights reports on the horrific acts of violence against women reveals that women have constituted a major part of gender-based violence and serial killings since the rise of *Jack the Ripper* in 1888. Systems have failed to combat violent masculinity or protect women's human rights, nevertheless. This paper tackles the hedonistic development of serial femicide killers in fiction and how it is linked to other factors leading to murder acts from which they get temporary relief and satisfaction. It aims to explore not only the serial killers' ugly monster or animal nature but also to aid law enforcement in identifying, detecting and apprehending the motivations behind their femicide acts. Three novels are examined featuring innovative narrative modes: *Perfume; The Story of a Murderer* (1985) by German writer Patrick Süskind, *American Psycho* (1991) by American writer Bret Easton Ellis, and *An Isolated Incident* (2016) by Australian writer Emily Maguire. They explore brutal femicide serially committed in hedonistic gratification by young, psychopathic, organized and lustful misogynists. Driven by fantasy and sensual pleasure, they struggle in pursuit of power and to maintain feelings of self-identity and self-worth. From an eclectic psychosocial perspective, the research examines the process and aftermath of violent and femicide acts, incorporating Jacques Lacan's concepts of desire, the 'Other,' and the 'mirror stage' along with Howard Becher's social labelling theory, underscoring the impact of social reactions on the deviant's psyche, behaviour and perception.

Keywords: *hedonism, Lacan's theory of desire, misogyny, serial femicide genre, labelling theory.*

1. Introduction:

Literature can interconnect with fields like philosophy, psychology, history, law, human rights, among many others. This interaction is a form of comparative interdisciplinary literature. Nevertheless, a scarcity of literary works that handle human rights plays out despite their inherent importance. A *Global Study on Homicide* (2019) by UNODC highlights "femicide" or "feminicide," as gender/hate-based killing of women and calls for specific measures to tackle the causes of this deadly phenomenon (23). Women and girls' killings carried out by serial killers "should be examined as an extreme act on a continuum of gender-related violence that remains underreported and too often ignored" (UNODC 1).

1.1. Misogynistic and Femicide Tendencies

In the 19th century, serial murders primarily targeted women, with *Jack the Ripper* being a notorious figure and an anonymous murderer who killed at first five prostitutes in London in 1888, and a dozen murders followed until 1892. His knowledge of human anatomy was evident in each case, where the victim's throat was slain, her body mutilated. One time, half of a human kidney was sent to the police. Despite efforts to identify and trap the ripper, they were unsuccessful. *Jack the Ripper* has inspired over 100 books, many of which offer conjectures about the murderer's identity and the circumstances surrounding the crimes, and so coined the term "Ripperology". Common suspects include Aaron Kosminski, a Polish Jew with a strong "animus toward women (particularly prostitutes) who was hospitalized in an asylum several months after the last murder" (britannica.com). For a lack of evidence, Jack was not arrested, nevertheless. Fascination with the serial killer's image dates back to the 1970s and 1980s in the US, captivated by the public and imagination of writers, filmmakers, and artists. Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) and Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell* (1991–96), adapted into a movie (2001), are well-known novels in the serial killer genre.

Femicide, a term evolved with the feminist movement, refers to the deliberate violent killing of women that serve as representations of the feminine sex, highlighting other community contexts. Serial murder, or serial homicide, was defined by the FBI in 1988 "as involving at least four events [reduced to only three in the 1990s] that take place at different locations and are separated by a cooling-off period." The FBI adopted a definition in 2005 with "no limits based on race, gender, or motivation" (Hamraoui and Mortad-Serir 32). The World Health Organization (WHO), in her report "Violence against Women: Key Facts" (2017), indicates that men are more likely to target female victims due to factors such as poor education, childhood abuse, "domestic violence against their mothers, harmful use of alcohol, unequal gender norms, including attitudes that normalize the use of violence, and a sense of entitlement over women" (UNODC 29-30). Women are also capable of being serial killers, though men are more often known to commit violence. In fact, what needs investigation is not the identity of the killer, but rather the lures behind creating the monster.

1.2. Killing for Hedonistic Gratification:

According to Sigmund Freud, people act and are motivated by unconscious impulses; therefore, their violent behaviours can be expressions of their suppressed aggression or sexual desires. He suggested that our personality's triad components--aligned with our needs, demands and desires--contains the *id*, a biological aspect of our personality based on instinct; the *ego*, a psychological aspect or the conscious mind; and

the *superego*, a social aspect or the conscience. The pleasure principle contends that the *id* which exists in our unconscious is driven by desire, not experience or thought, unorganized, insistent, demanding, irrational, morality-deficient, and self-centered. However, when stress results from delaying gratification, the *id* becomes more dependent on gratifying wants, which has an impact on other personality traits. (*The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* 655). The Freudian pleasure principle hence suggests that “people are motivated to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and therefore they attempt to increase or maintain positive emotions and to decrease negative emotions at any given moment” (Tamir 449). Freud’s psychoanalytic view is used in psychological criminology, or forensic psychiatry, to examine the variations among criminals and the causes of psychopathy, such as childhood trauma, job loss, relationship breakups, and other stressful factors.

A series of theories known as hedonism, derived from the Greek term *hdonismos*, suggests the significance of pleasure and delight in human behaviour. However, the term has negative connotations related to the pursuit of temporary enjoyment through sensory pleasures without consideration for the repercussions. In Jacques Lacan’s 1960 subject “Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire” in his papers composed as *Ecrits* (1966), the “enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle (including orgasm) denoted by the French *jouissance*” (315) encompasses various senses of enjoyment, along with suffering and agony. The term *jouissance* refers to the experience of tension beyond pleasure satisfaction where the subject does not wish to be cured of his conscious suffering from which he derives an unconscious pleasure. This paradoxical satisfaction of joy and pain (Evans 93) can cover various drives, such as aggressiveness, violent acts, and even suicide and death.

Serial killers often rely on fantasy that lies under their desire for *jouissance* ‘as a coping mechanism’ similar to any other forms of addiction. They incorporate its elements, such as body condition, attire and position, into the crime scenes, and feel thrilled by killing more people to sustain their ‘equilibrium.’ Their sadistic realm is the most thrilling aspect including sex and cruel fantasy as important factors that have a mutually reinforcing relationship. Trauma, aggression, rebelliousness, and fetish behaviour push the killers further away from social norms and closer to the act of homicide. In fact, “the more the serial killer murders, the greater the psychological gain,” as their fantasies continue to exist and strengthen their actions (Malizia 46-7). In addition, a killer usually “dreams of killing and raping, and of having power over other people’s lives, almost as if, by controlling the lives of victims, he could regain control over his life” (Malizia 52-3).

Control of reality through an act of power and dominance expresses a deeper and underlying fantasy embedded with excessive violence and provide serial killers with a fleeting sense of self-worth and esteem that they lack. Jacques Lacan's theory "accepts Freud's formulations on the importance of fantasy and on its visual quality as a scenario which stages desire" (Evans 61), suggesting that fantasy is an essential aspect of subjectivity, with psychosis as the only alternative. It can be applied to understand the serial killer's motivations and desires (Ormrod 98). Fantasy life helps him construct a world separate from reality, where he can fulfill his deepest impulses and contentment. For Lacan, desire is a "paradoxical, deviant, erratic, eccentric, and even scandalous" quest for the imaginary (276) and represents "the other great generic desire, hunger," (Lacan 143) for torture and killing. This "neuro-psycho-dynamically driven hunger" is the killer's directing 'purpose and mission,' turning him into a merciless and 'relentless' killing monger, never stopping "until he is dead or securely confined" (Sharma 19).

Serial killers may suffer from biological issues or psychosocial challenges. They often have Minimal Brain Dysfunction (MBD), which may cause violent behaviour such as volatile rage, aggression, homicide or suicide. They need more stimulation than normal individuals due to their constant craving for new ways to feel rewarded. The psychosocial perspectives on serial murders often focus on mental disorders and social influences. With murder fueling fantasy and vice versa, factors such as rejection, alienation, frustration, limited positive interactions, and distant relationships with parents and society may lead them to suppress their emotions. Neurological abnormalities, abandonment, and lack of fatherly guidance and belonging are added factors that contribute to psychopathic disorders and sexual sadism. In sociology, classifying individuals engaged in a certain behaviour is termed 'labelling' introduced by Howard S. Becker in his book *Outsiders* (1963). The Labelling Theory helps understand the motivations behind the serial killers' violent acts. A powerful label can influence one's self-concept, often leading to deviant behaviour that fits the label. Becker defines a 'deviant' as "one to whom the label has been successfully applied" (9) and contends that public labelling a deviant "has important consequences for one's further social participation and self-image" (31).

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) identified four types of serial killers based on their "psychological reinforcers and intrinsic motivations": visionary, missionary, hedonistic, and power/control-oriented (qtd in. Sharma 11). Visionary killers commit their crimes responding to voices or images that they believe are from a supreme force, such as God, dark forces, or even their pets, and are compelled to follow them (Hamraoui and Mortad-Serir 4). Psychotic killers commit their crimes due to auditory hallucinations or delusions. Serial killers with specific missions aim to eliminate certain populations from society, such as sex workers, migrants, or people belonging to

specific groups based on their race, age, gender and the like. Power/control-oriented killers find pleasure in carefully planning their crimes and “from exerting their power, control and dominance over their victims,” making them feel defenseless and in control (Sharma 11, 12).

Serial killers take enormous gratification in their deadly crime, driven by urges that make murder pleasurable, such as passion, mission, power, control, comfort, acceptance, and sexual gain. Hedonic killers are either thrill or lust killers. Thrill killers derive gratification from their violent exposure before the killing. “This is why their murders involve extended periods of torture and sadism. Once they realize the victim is dead, the offender loses interest in the murder” (Sharma 11-12). They commonly use tools, knives or bare hands during their brutality and close-range femicide acts. Lust killers obtain some sort of sexual gratification from their murders that do not always involve traditional sexual acts. They attain pleasure through post-murder (postmortem) acts such as masturbation, mutilation, cannibalizing, dismembering, and necrophilia, relating their lust killings to some component of the ritual. They kill to experience orgasm or arouse sexual urges, and they do not consider the lives they are taking. (Hamraoui and Mortad-Serir 32). After the incident, they show no sympathy for the victim and express no guilt or remorse. While guilt is 'painful', 'lack of guilt is pleasurable' and gratifying. Instant gratification is another trait linked to psychopathy, or the indulging of one's own demands which fiercely need to be satisfied (Boduszek and Hyland 867). Some murderers deny committing repeated acts of physical violence and even present themselves as victims of their relationships, insinuating that they are the result of the abuse they have endured.

This peculiar behaviour, namely femicide, is most frequently encountered in literature and a suitable topic of fiction (Bean 3). However, the serial killing genre is often criticized for its violence, sexism, sensationalism, and glorifying brutal crimes against female victims. Examining serial femicide killers in *Perfume; The Story of a Murderer* (1985) by German writer Patrick Süskind, *American Psycho* (1991) by American writer Bret Easton Ellis, and *An Isolated Incident* (2016) by Australian writer Emily Maguire, one finds a nuanced interplay of Lacan's theory of desire and the concepts of pleasure and hedonism within these narratives. The selected novels are also analyzed according to the social labelling theory featuring serial killers who commit violent acts in response to being classified, marginalized or stigmatized, underscoring the profound impact labels can have on the deviant's psyche, behaviour and self-perception. Throughout the whole narrative arc of these works, femicide is committed serially. They focus not only on the serial killer's ugly monster or animal nature but also on the driving forces or motivations of their crimes. The murderers are often misogynists targeting women, seeking pleasure in violence. They are typically

young, psychopathic, white, cunning, and ultimately seeking personal identity, a sense of power, self-knowledge, and social acceptance.

2. Hedonic Beauty and Social Acceptance in Patrick Süskind's *Das Perfume*

The first text examined here is written by Patrick Süskind, a prominent novelist in imaginative literature, who explores the concept of hedonic serial femicide in his novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*. He portrays the killer as an in-human or subhuman creature who effaces himself, while employing rational knowledge to reify his ego and dominate others. *Perfume* is a chilling psycho-social critique of a character and society that provides a stark reflection of the effects of social isolation and the consequences of an unquenchable desire for acceptance and identity. It revolves around the birth and genesis of the main protagonist, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, a quintessential outcast from society who turns into a serial killer. From a psychological perspective, Grenouille is a character with deep-rooted issues stemming from his traumatic childhood. Born in the filth of the Paris fish market, "on the most putrid spot in the whole kingdom" (Süskind 3), he is abandoned and rejected by his mother at birth. "[S]he would definitely have let the thing perish, just as she had with those other four by the way, she is tried, found guilty of multiple infanticide" (Süskind 3). He suffers a defect of primary identity due to a lack of baby smell, and hence love and affection. He is even described by his Wet Nurse as being "possessed by the devil" (5), asserting: "I only know one thing: this baby makes my flesh creep because it doesn't smell the way children ought to smell" (6). And for Father Terrier, he is a "strange, cold creature [who] lay there on his knees, a hostile animal." He is about to describe him as "devil," but caught himself and refrained... away with this monster, with this insufferable child!" (Süskind 9). Grenouille's 'disintegrating self-structure' is reshaped by a sense of 'symbiotic unity,' which prevents him to grieve "the loss of the maternal symbiosis," and instead he "remains trapped in a state of melancholic depression, producing an idealizing fixation on the maternal" (Adams 263).

Growing up devoid of empathy and filled with contempt for humanity, Grenouille becomes an apprentice of a master perfumer but falls in love with a young virgin's aroma, inspiring him to structure his incoherent internal universe. The "master scent" of his first victim, a "redheaded girl in the rue des Marais" (Süskind 218), triggers his grandiose self-perception as an evil genius who possesses an unparalleled sense of smell. He is trapped in Lacan's crucial Mirror Stage in human development as an imaginary construct or ideal image in which the Subject feels alienation and hence gets aggressive. Grenouille is primarily driven by the hedonistic pursuit of transient pleasures, seizing an exceptional olfactory talent, and creating an idealized feminine scent. Patrick Süskind writes:

When she was dead he laid her on the ground among the plum pits, tore off her dress, and the stream of scent became a flood that inundated him with its fragrance. He

thrust his face to her skin and swept his flared nostrils across her, from belly to breast, to neck, over her face and hair, and back to her belly, down to her genitals, to her thighs and white legs. He smelled her over from head to toe, he gathered up the last fragments of her scent under her chin, in her navel, and in the wrinkles inside her elbow. (43)

For a section of the novel, Grenouille withdraws from the world to relax, reflect, and come to know himself “solely for his own personal pleasure, only to be near to himself” (Süskind 123). He embodies a form of hedonism that is born out of a reaction to trauma and the harsh realities of life that lead him to commit horrendous acts of murder with a chilling indifference. “He thought of his dreams. And he thought of all these things with great satisfaction;” he is now “a truly blessed individual” (Süskind 218, 219) whose quest for the lost origin of his identity alters “the conception of creativity from classical Freudian sublimation to a compensatory idealization of the self. In post-Freudian psychoanalysis, artists work to restore a lost beauty and perfection” (Adams 269).

Grenouille’s yearning for the perfect perfume, a symbol of his ideal self, that parallels Lacan’s concept of the ‘Other’ and the Phallus, in his book *écrit* “The Signification of the Phallus” (271). Lacan encapsulates power and desire that largely shape a person’s identity and actions and suggests that “the cause of desire is always a lack” (Evans 44); i.e., desire is a response to a lack. In Grenouille’s case, this lack is the absence of his own scent, highlighting the deadly consequences of unchecked desire and pleasure-seeking. He commits serial femicide acts and fuels his murderous tendencies in pursuit of this goal, to fulfill “*le desir de l’Autre*” (Lacan, 1966, 95) or “the Other’s desire” that can be translated as “desire for the Other” or “desire for what the Other desires” (Lacan, 2002, 353), thereby obscuring the lack in the Other. Grenouille kills “neither children nor grown women, but exclusively ripening but virginal girls” (Süskind 201) in order to capture the essence of the scent of their youth. Seeking a hedonistic scent demonstrates his futile attempts to attain the Phallus, and thus, the satisfaction he pursues. No matter if he will be punished or not, self-determination identity is achieved. In *Perfume*, Süskind says,

He loved this waiting. He had also loved it with the twenty-four other girls, ... He had done his best. He had employed all his artistic skill. He had made not one single mistake.... It filled him with profound satisfaction, this waiting. He had never felt so fine in all his life, so peaceful, so steady, so whole and at one with himself-not even back inside his mountain-as during these hours when a craftsman took his rest sitting in the dark of night beside his victim, waiting and watching. They were the only moments when something like cheerful thoughts formed inside his gloomy brain. (218)

Süskind's *Perfume* paints a picture of 18th-century French and Romantic society, marked by social hierarchies and class differences. Grenouille's lack of his personal scent is a metaphor for his lack of identity and inability to fit into society. The societal labeling and subsequent alienation drive him to develop an obsession with creating "the magic formula for everything that could make a scent, a perfume, great: delicacy, power, stability, variety, and terrifying, irresistible beauty" (Süskind 44). As Becker posits it, this labelling can lead to a "self-fulfilling prophecy. It sets in motion several mechanisms which conspire to shape the person in the image people have of him" (34), and, therefore, Grenouille gets ingrained in his self-concept. The Curious Incident demonstrates his ability to manage a strategy to distract the mysteries of the perfume and even to thank himself for his doings and creative skills. "I thank you, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, for being what you are!" (Süskind 219). He needs his community to "accept him, Grenouille the cuckoo's egg, in their midst as a human being among human beings" (Süskind 153), not like a domestic animal pet. "He must become a creator of scents. And not just an average one. But, rather, the greatest perfumer of all time" (Süskind 44).

The way Grenouille walks, with 'elegant' steps and 'a smile,' effectively silences doubters and detractors, demonstrating how one's behaviour affects people's perceptions.

... so erect and with dainty steps and an elegant swing of the hips, by the way he climbed to the dais without anyone's assistance, bowing deeply and nodding with a smile now to one side now to the other, he silenced every skeptic and critic. Even the friends of the university's botanical garden were embarrassedly speechless. The change was too egregious, the apparent miracle too overwhelming: where but a week ago had cowered a drudge, a brutalized beast, there now stood a truly civilized, properly proportioned human being. (Süskind 157-58)

Grenouille experiences what Raymond Journey calls "his sudden 'gift' of smell as a rebirth" and "selfish pleasure" concealed behind "a scented mask and can pursue his real motive" (78, 82). His femicide and violent acts can be interpreted as a criticism of a society that abuses, marginalizes, or labels its people, creating a monster out of them. *Perfume* has "an unusual device for a novel —the use of smell and scent ... [taking] advantage of the paradox of describing the indescribable." In fact, "Grenouille may be a genius, but he is a murderer. He thus develops masks of human scent for himself in order to break apart from the marginality he is living in" (Journey 75, 81).

Süskind's pursuit exposes the unfulfilled nature of Grenouille's desires and the emptiness of his self-identity in his quest for satisfaction. It is true that Grenouille hates people, but he is motivated by a desire for their affection, and they must love him unconditionally. "He possessed the power. He held it in his hand. A power stronger than the power of money or the power of terror or the power of death: the invincible power to

command the love of mankind” (252 Süskind). When he wears the idealized perfume, everyone wants him for himself, and they become unaware that they are duped by the aroma. Grenouille simply never wanted the perfume of Laure, the girl objectified in terms of her scent, for himself. “He had preserved the best part of her and made it his own: the principle of her scent” (Süskind 44). Even though this appears to be his hedonic desire, the true desires of the people remain a complete ‘mystery’ to them. In the same vein, he struggles with his inability to understand the thoughts and feelings of those around him; they label him as abominable and gifted simultaneously. He is now Grenouille the Great whose old narcissistic fantasies come true; he experiences “the greatest triumph of his life” (Süskind 240). However, Grenouille is labelled with his bad scent as ‘a brutalized beast’ and is aware that he is unable to smell or love himself and, as a result, cannot know who he actually is after being ‘a truly civilized human being.’ His self-centered narcissism uses his brilliance to further his own agenda of gaining power and manipulating the people.

Upon realizing that the aura of identity created by his magic perfume is an illusion, and “He no longer [has] any scent. The miracle [is] over,” (Süskind 245) the unsatisfied Grenouille drenches himself with the full bottle's worth of the priceless ultimate perfume in an attempt to commit suicide. He approaches a little campfire surrounded by a mob of “all sorts of riffraff: thieves, murderers, cutthroats, whores, deserters, young desperadoes,” who have a rough appearance and whose “awe was turning to desire, their amazement to rapture” (Süskind 253-54). They look perplexed, thinking they see “a ghost or an angel or some other supernatural being” (Süskind 253). Therefore, the crowd quickly surrounds him, rips him apart and devours every bit of him; eventually, “the angel was divided into thirty pieces, and every animal in the pack snatched a piece for itself, ... A half hour later, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille had disappeared utterly from the earth” (Süskind 254). The novel closes with a bittersweet statement, as cannibals are extremely thrilled and express pride and satisfaction after doing this deed. “And on their faces was a delicate, virginal glow of happiness.” “For the first time they had done something out of love” (Süskind 255).

Despite its popularity, *Das Perfume* has been criticized for its Enlightenment rationality, fascist allegory, derivative style or postmodern pastiche. The novel raises significant questions about identity that is shaped by sensory perception and social ostracism. Grenouille's appeal stems from his similarities with present-day serial killers, both real and fictional, leading to ego pathology in modern society.

3. Hedonic Superficiality and Sadistic Pleasure in B. E. Ellis's *American Psycho*

In traditional books or TV series, the plot follows the investigation from the police's perspective, creating connections between detectives' personal lives and the

crime scenes. However, the serial killer genre has seen significant innovations in recent years, with writers subverting expected narratorial perspectives. American author and screenwriter Bret Easton Ellis (1964-) challenges the traditional narrative perspective of serial killer fiction using the serial killer as the first-person narrator and the worthiest character for interrogation. He innovates the genre by rejecting the detective perspective but still placing the killer at the center of the narrative. (O'Grady 367-368). In his post-9/11 era novel *American Psycho* (1991), later adapted into a film, Ellis presents an intriguing psycho-social critique of American society during the 1980s, focusing on how the upper-class elite judged others based on money or social standing. It is a society that values people's outward attributes rather than their intrinsic worth. *American Psycho* revolves around the life of Patrick Bateman, a successful Wall Street investment banker and "a rich white heterosexual yuppie whose 'normal' appearance hides a sexist, racist, xenophobic serial killer" (Baelo-Allué 385).

Nathan Rabin regards *American Psycho* as a debatable novel and a popular pop-culture phenomenon, focusing on issues such as "censorship, free expression, misogyny, violence, corporate responsibility, and pornography" (1). Therefore, the novel is difficult to read due to its explicit "violence against animals, homeless people, and young women," as well as its "boring, tedious, monotonous, and repetitive [nature] to the point of perversity" (Rabin 1). Human rights and feminist groups were outraged by the horrible acts committed by the psychopathic protagonist Batman against women, accusing Ellis, who received thirteen death threats (Baelo-Allué 390) of misogyny, describing him as a "confused, sick, young man with a deep hatred of women" (Madden). *American Psycho* is also a controversial film (2000) that satirizes the nature of the book. Having a female director who captures the genuine spirit of the story, Mary Harron skillfully turns its misogynistic elements into a sarcastic depiction of masculinity, transforming the book into a feminist perspective by downplaying violence and mocking Bateman. Guinevere Turner collaborated on the script with the intention of highlighting the humour in the forefront. The film is a powerful and perceptive adaptation, skillfully contrasting satire with the fine details of Ellis's book, highlighting the features of luxury commodities like gadgets, food, booze, electronics and clothing.

Sociologically speaking, *American Psycho*, a novel or movie, presents a unique application of the Labeling Theory that provides a valuable lens for understanding the implications of classification and responding to the events described. In other words, it is "a satire on masculinity that mocks the male characters and the self-absorbed 80s culture they inhabited," focusing on "Bateman's (and all the Wall Street males') obsession with status and appearance" (Madden). Patrick Bateman, who describes his reality in great detail, embodies a hedonistic lifestyle and culture, indulging in material excess and brutal violence. Through him, Ellis reflects on certain socioeconomic issues in modern

American culture, exposing its superficiality, materialism, indifference, moral decay, and dehumanizing effects.

C. Serpell argues that Ellis's novel *American Psycho* examines the effects of serialized violence on society, particularly in rich, consumerist society "where commodities and bodies become interchangeable and indistinguishable" (47–73). This dichotomy underscores the theme of appearance versus reality, showcasing how societal labels can mask reality, thus enabling deviant behaviour. Serial killers are often masked or hidden behind or "appear behind figurative masks, some using them in order to better their appearance, others in order to hide their own marginality" (Jurney 75). Patrick Bateman is specifically labeled as successful and respectable due to his wealth and status that mirrors an American society marked by rampant consumerism and self-interest. He is often mistaken for peers who share similar traits due to their common backgrounds and social circles. He constantly strives to maintain an image of affluence, obsessed with designer brands and high-end restaurants. Bateman reveals his superficial desires as an expression of his lack of inner longing. His reciprocal talks, in which he primarily focuses on reviews of albums and descriptions of fashion and food, hide a lot of his real thoughts and give way to murders and freak-outs.

American Psycho presents a more direct engagement with hedonism and the pleasure of possession. Bateman discusses his daily routines, with allusions to *Les Misérables*, a meticulous drama and creative work that explores poverty and the miserable lifestyles on earth, contrasting "the beggars, the homeless or the insane that Batman tries to get rid of" (Baelo-Allué 396). He keeps a poster for "Les Misérables," not Victor Hugo's novel (1862) but Alain Boublil's and Claude-Michel Schönberg's musical version of the classic (1980-1985). The revolutionary leftist epic that "was once a radical tale of fighting brutal corruption and injustice" has become a trendy item for a "rich-man's consumer," showcasing his link to popular culture (Cainusmaxus 3).

In the context of Jacques Lacan's theory of desire, Batman can be viewed as a character ensnared in the Mirror stage. The appearance versus reality, a socio-cultural construct that Lacan aligns with the concept of the Phallus, is a symbolic representation of the 'Other'. In Batman's case, it is the quest for hedonistic pleasure from power and desire for recognition, seeking to solidify his violent identity and serving as an example of his ongoing entrapment in the pursuit of an ideal self-image or Mirror stage. In fact, beneath this polished facade and lifestyle lies a violent, psychopathic personality who derives pleasure from committing gruesome murders. He admits: "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" (Ellis 279). His superficiality replaces his real personality and can obscure the true nature of his actions. He asserts,

...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.* ... Myself is fabricated, an aberration. I am a noncontingent human being. My personality is sketchy and unformed, my heartlessness goes deep and is persistent. 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. (Ellis 376-77).

Batman comments while observing a lady who loves him and tries to understand his strange character, despite his chilly look and physical allure, "She is searching for a rational analysis of who I am, which is, of course, an impossibility: There . . . is . . . no . . . key" (Ellis 264). These words more significantly bring him to the point where he can no longer control his future though he cannot avoid his fate.

Devoid of empathy and emotional depth, Bateman is unable to communicate with women. Bateman seems to be an attentive and caring partner, yet he practically ignores them, revealing a lack of tolerance. He even tells Evelyn, an affluent socialite to whom he is engaged, that he will not marry her because he simply cannot spare time off work. She, in turn, asserts that Bateman only works to fit in with friends and be part of a conformist class, a desperate attempt to assert his identity. Batman also dismisses Courtney, his mistress and Luis's fiancée, when she attempts to start a conversation after a sexual encounter, describing her as marvelous, and saying, "There's nothing to say. You're going to marry Luis" (Ellis 361).

In horror scenes, Bateman's rage is fueled, causing him to unleash his actual nature of savagery and sexism. For Rabin, the book is not meant to be enjoyed, but rather to be implicated in its portrayal of an inhuman ghoul who is cruel and deranged towards women, "so he can derive an extra level of sadistic pleasure from their agonized screams and soul-consuming terror" (1). Bateman helps foster relationships based on neglect and emotional abuse, expressing and insisting on his sexual urges. "He arbitrarily assigns the women their names, sets the mood by providing a soliloquy on Genesis, and orders them to arrange their bodies in increasingly filthy tableaux" (Mee 96). Batman admits to Evelyn that his massive homicidal behavior cannot be corrected but has "no other way to express [his] blocked needs." While he is described as 'inhuman' by Evelyn, he insists that he remains 'in touch with... humanity,' and concludes by saying, "Evelyn, I'm sorry, I just, uh... You're not terribly important... to me" (Ellis 338, 341). The blood-lust killer wears a 'mask of sanity' to conceal the hedonic power of sexual violence and femicide, which are socially despised, and to flaunt people's fascination with physical image and material wealth.

Batman's acts can be interpreted as unsuccessful attempts to attain the Phallus, and thus, the hedonistic pleasure he seeks. He remembers Evelyn's skeleton with all the glee in the world. "It's an isolation ward that serves only to expose my own severely impaired capacity to feel. I am at its center, out of season, and no one ever asks me for any identification. I suddenly imagine Evelyn's skeleton, twisted and crumbling, and this fills me with glee" (Ellis 243). This ultimately reveals his unfulfilled desires. He is not satisfied with his series of violent and senseless crimes, reflecting the inherent emptiness and hollowness of his constructed self-identity. Henry Bean reflects on this dichotomy emphasizing that "Bateman commits these acts with relish, but it is a mechanical obedience to a compulsion. They bring him no more joy than the rest of his miserable life" (3). Actually, "Bateman's freedom is his curse; he can do anything; therefore, life is meaningless" (Bean 3 sic).

Despite his dreadful crimes, his inability to form connections with others, and his objectification of people, particularly women, Bateman remains undetected and unpunished. However, he becomes less able to suppress his desire. His uncontrollable behavior includes aggressive, coercive sex and drug addiction, causing him to act recklessly sizing-up women, renting porn videos, and hiring prostitutes (often two at a time) before moving into savagery. His murders develop from straightforward stabbings to protracted sequences of rape, torture, mutilation, cannibalism, and necrophilia. Bateman says after torturing and mutilating a girl to death, "She only has half a mouth left, and I fuck it once, then twice, three times in all" (Ellis 329), showcasing the complexities of his sexuality related to femicide and horror acts. He even describes himself as having an erection while torturing a woman.

Bateman rationalizes his behaviour and dual identity in one scene of the chapter "Tries to Cook and Eat Girl" featuring cannibalism, saying,

I grind bone and fat and flesh into patties, and though it does sporadically penetrate how unacceptable some of what I'm doing actually is, I just remind myself that this thing, this girl, this meat, is nothing, is shit, and along with a Xanax (which I am now taking half-hourly) this thought momentarily calms me and then I'm humming, humming the theme to a show I watched often as a child—The Jetsons? (Ellis 345).

The flesh-eating monster is generated by consumer society, in combination with sex, violence, drugs, and other *id*-driven wants. He appears cruel and soulless since his rage-filled lust is the only emotion he expresses. Batman's "inner barbarian, the warrior embedded deep within his DNA, is striving, struggling, agonizing to get out," while he "continues on, smiling, trying not to admit to himself the reality of his own despair" (Cainusmaxus 4, 9).

However, Batman humanizes his victims for a brief period before inflicting pain and domination on them. He discusses with Brice liberal, pacifist, humanist, and anti-racist ideals to add traditional values and less materialism. Moreover, when he meets a homeless man, he initially makes the typical American conservative talk about finding a job. After giving him a quick insult for a bad behaviour, Bateman decides that it is insufficient to feel superior to the man and stabs him many times before smashing his dog. Batman also prepares to kill Paul Owen, one of his coworkers, with an axe after giving a pre-programmed review of Huey Lewis's music and the new album. Combining his fake positivity with his repugnant character and murderous rage, Batman discusses Lewis' "hip to be square" and "the pleasures of conformity and the importance of trends" (Ellis 357), and then screams and hacks Owen to death, symbolizing a spiritually barren society where materialistic pleasures are insufficient. His unfulfilled desire results in violent behavior and hatred for humanity to fill the gap. He takes over Owen's flat to mutilate and slay two prostitutes, and to be used as a host and killing ground for further victims. Being an organized serial killer, Batman puts on a surgical mask in anticipation of the decomposing remains he expects to find there and fills the flat with potent-smelling flowers to cover up the unpleasant stench. Bateman is precise in his planning and execution, but as his drug (Halcion, Valium, and Xanax) usage grows, he becomes more violent and loses self-control.

Bateman finds hedonism boring, casually telling Courtney about a dinner date while watching porn. He rides in a cab to Dorsia with his heavily drugged mistress, and she confesses her desire for a child while unconscious and dozing off. Courtney's inner aspirations as a woman are not satisfied, just as Bateman's preoccupation with materialism and luxury does not satiate his innately masculine determined needs. No matter what we strive to be, at our most basic level, "men are war-like, and women want to be mothers" (Cainusmaxus 7). Courtney is tricked into thinking she is in a trendy restaurant in Dorsia when, in fact, Bateman has taken her somewhere else. She just cares about the fashionable environment, and when he reads a complicated menu description, she unconsciously reacts by thanking him before going into a sleepy unresponsive comatose state. (Cainusmaxus 7)

Batman talks casually about serial killers; however, people around him are often deceived or uncertain about the reality of his killing's brutalization. His friends and colleagues fail to recognize his psychopathic tendencies and only view him as a successful, harmless businessman. His coworkers sometimes misunderstand or do not take him seriously, though warning them about his insane nature and love for dissecting girls. They misinterpret things like 'murders and executions' as 'mergers and acquisitions,' implying that "most guys I know who work in mergers and acquisitions don't really like it" (Ellis 216, 206). However, the merger/murder case cannot be solved

due to Batman's faked appearance; "he resembles both the victim and the murderer too much to be able to distinguish the *differentia specifica* of the case" (Johansen 383). Batman warns his secretary, Jean, about the deceitful nature of appearances; however, as she is unaware of evil and due to her lack of understanding of the consequences of others' actions, she is oblivious of Batman's potential evil and violent urges (Ellis 378-79). In fact, she is completely unresponsive to the signals sent to her by Batman, saving her life by admitting his humanity, which in turn moves him.

Impulsivity, irrationality and insensitivity are characteristics included in social control scales and linked to psychopathy. In the chapter "Chase, Manhattan" (347-352) that foreshadows Batman's psychotic acts, there is a shooting rampage in which he murders three bystanders on the street. The novel's first-person narrative style is altered in this episode to the third-person perspective to recount the events that follow in terms of cinematic depiction and to give "space for him to be more clearly critiqued" (Mee 95). Chased by the police, Bateman runs away and hides in his office, where he calls Harold Carnes, his lawyer, and admits to committing his previous murders over the phone, "leaving out nothing, thirty, forty, a hundred murders" (Ellis 352). But Carnes dismisses the confession to be nothing but a joke and believes that Bateman he knows is too much of a coward to have perpetrated such crimes and maybe he is mistaken for another coworker. Moreover, in a dialogue-heavy conclusion Batman admits: "You don't seem to understand. You're not really comprehending any of this. *I killed him. I did it, Carnes. I chopped Owen's fucking head off. I tortured dozens of girls*" (Ellis 388), yet Carnes stands up to a defiant Bateman and informs him that Owen was not murdered since "he had dinner with him twice in London *just ten days ago*" (Ellis 388).

The novel ends with Bateman and his friends having a casual talk at a brand-new club, just as it started. The last sentence "This is not an exit" is a metaphorical sign and is only referenced in the final scenes of the film in a bright red EXIT sign appearing in the backdrop of shots above Christian Bale's right shoulder. It signifies that Bateman is trapped in his life cycle and eventually aware of its worthlessness. It reminds us of his reflection on his experience with severe 'depersonalization' or feeling unreal and dead inside, triggered by a profound compulsion.

There wasn't a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and, possibly, total disgust. I had all the characteristics of a human being — flesh, blood, skin, hair — but my depersonalization was so intense, had gone so deep, that the normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow, purposeful erasure....Something horrible was happening and yet I couldn't figure out why—I couldn't put my finger on it. (Ellis 282)

However, he is reluctant to change, as it would entail uncertainty, potential discomfort, and perhaps even pain. Though he seems gratified, he is unsatisfied and feels hollow inside in a culture devoid of love, empathy, and compassion.

4. Loud Voices for Women's Perfect Life: Emily Maguire's *An Isolated Incident*:

What seems exceptional in serial thriller novels, which depict victims of violence and murder as central characters, is making the victims possess audible voices and express themselves. The use of this narrative strategy emphasizes how the personal experience of their families is also valued. Only a few novelists have seriously occupied themselves with documenting facts and advocating for change. Emily Maguire, a bold innovator in crime fiction, focuses on technique and significance, transforming her non-conventional plot structure into "a factographic story" uniquely constructed on the lines of a documentary film. A renowned author of five novels, including *Taming the Beast*, and two non-fiction works, Maguire wrote *An Isolated Incident* (2016). The novel aims to provoke thought and question the common consumption of narrating fake accounts of violence against women. Walton argues:

Additionally, Maguire challenges readers by refusing to endorse the conventions of the crime fiction and non-fiction genres. And she works hard to engage readers' emotions and minds. The novel, her fifth, has the power to draw tears from those who have lost loved ones to violence or have struggled through domestic strife.

Maguire's novel *An Isolated Incident* questions fundamental elements of the classic serial killer genre. In a 2016 interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Maguire said that she was inspired to write the novel "in response to her disinterest in crime novels which privilege the voice of the suffering detective over the victims, as well as her frustration that the individual murders of women are rarely linked to recognise the pattern of male violence against women" (O'Grady 371). The *Sydney Morning Herald*, in turn, praises Maguire's "engrossing" and "skillfully constructed" narrative, which explores "the complexity of human personality and what leads somebody to feel destructive" and blends "lyrical language with brutal events" and "psychological acuity." As an anti-crime-cliché author, Maguire's first act is to decline to provide any account from the perspective of the victim before she passed away, refusing to allow us to see the corpse discovery location, forensic examination and body appearance. The novel opens with a conventional scene: a policeman knocks on a house to report the discovery of a dead body, (Walton) "there's been a body found. Matches her description. We need an official ID. Um, need you to come to . . . to do that. To confirm" (Maguire 8). Unfortunately, the isolated incident that led to this story takes place in a typical Australian community, in Strathdee, Scotland, that is rocked by the media frenzy breaking news when 25-year-old Bella Michaels, a popular and appealing young lady, is brutally killed. Bella is kidnapped

and subjected to severe sexual assault; she loses blood until she dies. Several days later, her body is discovered outside the town on a rocky terrain.

The novel's title *An Isolated Incident* is ironic, and we can see the labelling theory at play. It is a label that can be utilized to downplay the significance or prevalence of an event. By labelling an incident as isolated, it is implied that such an occurrence is rare, which might not always reflect reality. It highlights the importance of not viewing an attack on a woman as a standalone event. It includes examples of multiple human killings, assaults, animal killings, and the arrest of a man suspected of previous crimes against women. Murder is not “an isolated incident,” as seen by the media and the public, but rather a part of the femicide serial killer’s sexual fantasy life.

Maguire frames physical violence against women and casual sexism as part of a single continuum, suggesting that the misogyny at the root of all of these incidents is systematic, and interwoven in the fabric of Australian society. These casual, relentless instances of sexism are held up against Bella’s murder, which is positioned not as a standalone, aberrant crime, but rather as an unavoidable consequence of a culture that enables male entitlement. (O’Grady 370)

Maguire's *An Isolated Incident* differs in its treatment from the *American Psycho* and *Perfume*. The serial killer is not the protagonist, and his motivations are largely left unexplored. However, the narrative still allows for an analysis of hedonism and Lacanian desire in a complex and thought-provoking manner. Through its characters and their actions, the novel scrutinizes the pursuit of pleasure in its various forms and implications, offering a critical examination of hedonism in contemporary society. This thriller is narrated, as Jennings notes, “from the perspective of the survivors and casts the investigation as the backdrop to the main action.”

The actions of Bella’s killer can be seen as a perverse hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, and his desire is a response to a perceived lack - perhaps a lack of phallic power or control. It is important to note that Lacan's theories often emphasize the destructive potential of unchecked and unattainable desire, which in this case, is the ultimate possession or domination of the 'Other', represented by Bella, and the act of her killing. Even though the violent serial killer in works of fiction is usually depicted as a ‘villainous monster,’ “Maguire seeks to more accurately reflect what a violent perpetrator looks like, rather than propagate this genre trope of the serial killer being either preternatural or entirely animalistic” (O’Grady 369). Maguire's pursuit is indicative of deeply rooted sexism and the misogynistic notion that women are objects to be possessed and controlled. This entitlement over Bella's life and pleasure from her death represents a disturbing form of patriarchal power dynamics.

An Isolated Incident is a stark critique of the extreme and destructive forms that desire can take when it is shaped by sexist societal structures. May reflects on her frustration with the police investigations in homicide and criticizes the sensationalism of femicide in the media and the lack of attention given to it.

Not only the act itself, though obviously that was, but the way that everything gets dug up and laid out in the aftermath. Homicide investigations—police ones and, sometimes even more so, media ones—open up private lives in an extreme way... And not just of the victim, either. The victim's current and ex-partners, siblings, parents, kids, workmates, friends. All their nasty habits and dirty secrets laid out in the name of truth and justice. It was as terrible as it was irresistible. (Maguire 127)

In Maguire's book, dedicated to her sisters, the murder is investigated from the perspective of the victim's family, with the protagonist Chris Rogers, Bella's loving half-sister, and the primary narrator, resisting sentimentality and tweets while describing the murder's consequences (Walton). The societal labels and assumptions attached to Chris as a grieving sister significantly affect her behaviour and outlook during this traumatic period. She faces hostility from the local police force due to her job as a barmaid in a small town. Despite her laid-back attitude, Chris knows a lot about the world, possessing years of knowledge, expertise, and street smarts. Her ex-husband, friends, and some neighbours stand by her while she searches for answers and explanations for Bella's murder by which she is heavily impacted. However, as days go by without arrest, Chris's suspicion grows, highlighting Maguire's "skill of entering into the heart and soul of her characters' personalities" (David).

Chris's struggle with identity and desire can also be examined within the framework of Lacan's theory. Her attempts to reconcile with her sister's death and the pursuit of justice reflect her quest for the 'Other,' paralleling the relentless pursuits of Patrick Bateman in Suskind's *Perfume* and Jean-Baptiste Grenouille in Ellis' *American Psycho*. She represents another facet of hedonism. Her life, in contrast to Bella's, is marked by stability and conventional success. Yet her pursuit of a perfect life, characterized by the relentless chase for material comforts and societal approval constitute as a more socially acceptable form of hedonism. Her interactions with the media and her journey through grief signify her attempts to attain the Phallus—a symbol of power and dominance, or desire. However, the inherent emptiness of her self-identity and her unfulfilled quests reveal the hollowness and futility in her pursuit.

The other main narrator is May Norman, a crime journalist whose ambitions are stunted by her fixation with the case, covering the story for the online newspaper she works for (Thompson). The novel traces May's personal and professional development as she learns about the realities of another person's pain. She chronicles Chris's hardships

and the media coverage of her sister's death, reporting on the gruesome murder and its impact on the community. May notes long lists of past Australian rapes and killings, which she believes are unrelated:

This had nothing to do with what happened to Bella and what happened to Bella had nothing to do with Tegan Miller and none of it had to do with the rich Sydney housewife left out to rot in the street which had nothing to do with the Nigerian girls stolen as sex slaves or the Indian woman eviscerated on a bus or the man grabbing women off the streets of Brunswick. (Maguire 327)

However, she tries to find a thread connecting the horrors. Through May, Maguire's message is strongly felt and effectively put to “make a world in which women can move about freely without fear of violence” (175). It also highlights the need for a broader understanding of the connection between physical violent crimes against women and other related crimes, such as psychological cruelty.

May fiddled with her phone, reminding herself she was good at this and in control and that getting the story was more important than feminist principles – or no, not even that, it was that feminist principles demanded she tell the truth about this heinous act of violence against a woman and the blokey, misogynist community in which it happened... (Maguire 81)

Narrators in *An Isolated Incident* are key figures, not mere observers. Chris and May “have grown up in dysfunctional family environments,” facing various challenges such as “loss, grief, loneliness, inner battles of self-esteem, abandonment, misogynists, and much more in their 30 years of being born on this planet.” The realistic portrayal of their experiences, “thinking, fears, hopes, struggles and suffering” makes the reader feel empathy and encourages them to overcome. (David). They “decided to organise this event [Thousands march for Bella] to bring together all of those grieving for Bella and all of those who feel overwhelmed by the extent of violence against women in the community” (Maguire 174). The societal response to the murder itself is what worries Maguire more than the perpetrator's identity. The rampant gossip and voyeuristic fascination with the murder by the local people of the town of Strathdee serve as a collective symbol of hedonism. Their morbid curiosity and obsession with sensationalism reveal a community indulging in the pleasure of scandal at the expense of empathy and respect for the tragedy at hand.

Maguire believes that in order to have a conversation with the dead women, contemporary crime narratives should take into account the perspectives of victims, survivors, and those impacted by serial crime, rather than the investigators' or the perpetrators' perspective. Maguire uses a metafictional self-conscious literary style in purpose; she goes through the protracted suffering of her female characters, allowing

them to tell their tales in documentaries. Understanding the tragedy of Bella's horrible crime and its impact on society is made possible in great detail by employing this technique. By reimagining serial crime as affecting both victims and families, particularly women, Maguire emphasizes the experienced trauma of victims in the aftermath "which, in turn, is, or should be the primary goal in the pursuit of justice" (Myers 2006, 738).

Emily Maguire's book *An Isolated Incident* is praised by the *Newtown Review of Books* for its "nuanced portrait of a group of flawed characters, male and female, responding to a tragedy." Each character in the novel resonates in the reader's imagination as it tackles loss and the often-ignored victims of terrible femicide. It is a powerful and thoughtful investigation into grief and mourning. By the end of the novel, the gap between the tragedies occurs in reality and the traditional crime narratives, in which the killer's capture is seen at the moment of closure, then "the disrupted world neatly returned to the status quo. Though the rationality of detection methods prevails in *An Isolated Incident* insofar as the perpetrator is captured, by having Bella's sister tell the story, Maguire refuses to represent homicide as a game or a plot device" (O'Grady 372). She ends it with Chris's wondering, "People ask if what I've been through has made me afraid and of course it has. But not of monsters. Only of those who insist they exist" (Maguire 330).

5. Discussion:

In the novels *Das Perfume* by Patrick Süskind, *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis, and *An Isolated Incident* by Emily Maguire, set in three different communities, French, American and Australian, respectively, femicide is presented in unique and thought-provoking ways, serving as a critique of societal attitudes towards women. The fact that only women are victims reflects how they are often objectified and devalued. The desperate pursuit of olfactory perfection in *Perfume* is a metaphor for the relentless desire for idealized beauty and perfection in society. It provides an intriguing exploration of social perception, ostracism and hierarchies, and their impact on the formation of identity propelling Grenouille further into deviant behavior. Grenouille, who is labelled as a genius evil and an abominable outsider due to his possession of an extraordinary sense of smell and lack of his personal scent, kills virginal girls to fulfill his desire driven by an obsession with the perfect scent, the phallus of power and acceptance by society. In *American Psycho*, the protagonist, Patrick Bateman sees women as expendable objects, reflecting the same end of *Perfume's* societal objectification and devaluation of women. However, *American Psycho* presents femicide more directly and brutally, with torture, mutilation, dissection, cannibalism, and even necrophilia. Bateman primarily targets women, and his horrible acts reveal a deep-seated misogyny.

Suskind and Ellis innovate the narrative style and the serial killer fiction by rejecting the perspective of the detective, and setting the serial killer as the character most worthy of interrogation, whereas Maguire's *An Isolated Incident* explores femicide from the perspective of the victims' suffering over the detective's. "In the end, the female voice has finally been heard (Bella's), and the male voice has not only been silenced but also sexually deactivated, ironically subverting one of the primary powers used by men over women in a traditional patriarchal society, sexual dominance" (Jurney 83). This approach provides a critical examination of the societal attitudes and police and media response to the underlying issue of violence against women, aligning with Howard Becker's theory that the repercussions of labelling individuals and people's reactions can have a greater impact than the deviant behaviour itself.

The three novels have revealed some of the driving forces, the motives behind serial killers' actions, including the serial killers' desires for sexual gratification and their hedonic practice of power and control over their victims, including women, migrants, prostitutes, children, homosexuals, and vagrants (Britannica). Childhood abuse, trauma, rejection, loneliness, insecure and fearful attachment, a history of low self-esteem, and exposure to violent or illicit activities, such as rejection, isolation or addiction, significantly play a role in the killers' personality development and hence fuel their rage and anger toward a materialistic society.

Conclusion:

The paper has explored psychosocial perspectives on hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure and self-indulgence as the highest good, in three narratives. The three serial killers have committed multiple murders and sexual assaults to satisfy their pleasure cravings by meeting their *Id* goals. Their multiple personae, 'aboriginal self,' and 'fake' identities are produced by material gain and superficial image. Their egocentric self-interest and phallogocentric actions can be understood as their pursuit of pleasure and the satisfaction of their desires, aligning with the tenets of hedonism and Lacanian theory. Blood lust killers wearing 'the mask of sanity,' to improve their appearance or to hide their nonconformity, is a symbolic representation of the concept of the 'Other', which serves as an example of their ongoing entrapment in the pursuit of an ideal self-image. However, their pursuits lead to destructive and deviant behavior, suggesting a critique of the dangers of unfulfilled desire, which can be interpreted as unsuccessful attempts to attain their constructed perfect world or the Phallus, and thus, the hedonistic pleasure they seek, leading to a continuous cycle of violence.

This analysis has also underscored the profound impact of the notion of appearance versus reality, showcasing how societal labels can mask reality, thus enabling deviant behaviour, in their quest for acceptance, recognition, self-knowledge, and seeking to

solidify identity through such terror acts. Femicide crimes are often undetected and committed by secret deviants with no legal retribution, as seen in Suskind's *Perfume* and Ellis's *American Psycho*, but in Maguire's *An Isolated Incident*, the perpetrator is caught. In a nutshell, femicide depictions in these novels contribute to investigating the issues of gender-based violence, provoking readers to question and challenge the social attitudes that facilitate such violence. They emphasize the need for better systems to protect women, victims, survivors, and relatives, such as establishing laws or making strict decisions regarding the ongoing consequences of violent masculinity.

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