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قسم الآداب و اللغة الانجليزية



MASTER DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

(ANGLOPHONE LANGUAGE, LITERATURES, AND CIVILIZATIONS)

OPTION: LITERATURE

**Violence and the New Cultural Identity of the Late 20th Century American
Character Case Study: Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991)**

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Introduction

Literature is the reflection of society as it deals with different kinds of issues, notable events, and phenomena that have a critical impact on society. Postmodern American literature depicts the post World War Two American society discussing many subjects concerning the war and the changing American culture. Violence is a recurring theme in literary production in general and in postmodern literature in particular. The 1980s America was dominated by what is known as the Yuppie culture. It is a way of living that promotes physical appearance, social status, and materialism while it demotes social norms, values, and virtues. Bret Easton Ellis, a controversial postmodern American writer, writes very repulsive works about both violence and the Yuppie culture. His master piece *American Psycho* (1991), which is agreed by most critics to be a transgressive novel, is the best representation of violence and the Yuppie culture. The story is about a rich Wall Street man named Patrick Bateman. He is a Yuppie assumed serial killer who throughout the novel commits violent deeds such as rape, murder, cannibalism, etc.

Statement of the Problem

Many Postmodern American writers include violence their works by creating characters who are not only murderous but creative murderous who invent new unexpected methods of killing while enjoying themselves doing so. So, in this regard one can say violence has become an essential means for self assertion as well as self reflection of a general crisis in the American culture. Furthermore, violence is a feature of a new American cultural identity, emerging in the 1980s. This study is an attempt to reveal the role of violence in reshaping the 1980s American cultural identity.

Aims of the Study

This research aims at displaying the moral and psychological shifts in the post World War Two American social life and culture through examining the counter culture of the 1960s and its effects on the American identity. In addition, the study tries to show the relevance of Freud's theories in analyzing contemporary American characters by applying them on Patrick Bateman. Finally, the main focus will be to reveal the extent to which violence has become a pertinent aspect in the newly American cultural identity via examining Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*.

Methodology

The nature of the theme imposes to rely on the psychoanalyst literary approach on one hand. Freud's theories on violence are needed to fully analyze and understand Patrick Bateman's psyche, behaviour, motives, mental state, etc. On the other hand, cultural studies

will be very beneficial to know more and better understand the American culture during the 1980s mainly the Yuppie lifestyle which Patrick Bateman perfectly represents.

Literature Review

This work focuses on violence as a new trait of the American character. However, this subject seems to be overlooked somehow, yet there are some works that discuss violence in American literature. Joseph M. Armingol in *Gendering Men* (2007) discusses the concepts of violence and masculinity in relation to literature and culture. He presents two opposite views of the concepts in two short stories *An African Story* (1954) by Ernest Hemingway and Richard Ford's *The Communist* (1987). Hemingway links violence to manhood and heroism in his work. This represents the traditional perspective. Whereas, Ford totally rejects violence providing new, alternative, non-violent patterns of manhood in American culture and literature. (Armingol 92).

According to Joseph Carroll in *Violence in Literature* (2014) violence in literature may be heroic or vicious in literature due to its possible sources such as events, what characters have as reasons, the writer's general attitude in life and towards his characters, and the readers responses.

In *What Violence in Literature Must Teach Us* (2005), Jack Harrell proposes three requirements so that violence in literature can be morally accepted. First, the characters are interesting enough to attract readers. Second, violence has to only occur in a situation where it is impossible to prevent it. Finally, violence is not the moral significance the story tries to convey, but it condemns instead.

Preliminary Plan

Abstract

Introduction

Chapter I: Violence and the American Culture and Psychology

I.1. The Counter Culture of the 1960s and the Celebration of violence

I.2. Violence through the Lens of Freudian Psychological Theories

I.3. Violence and the New American Cultural and Psychological Identity

Chapter II: Violence as a reflection of a General Crisis in the American Culture

II.1. The Yuppie Culture of the 1980s in The United States of America and its Representations in *American Psycho* (1991)

Chapter III: Violence as a Means for Self Assertion

III.1. Freudian theoris of Violence

III.2.Freudian Analysis of Patrick Bateman

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