

**MSC 2020****International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.  
COMMUNICATION»****STYLISTIC FEATURES OF TRANSGRESSIVE FICTION  
(B. E. ELLIS'S NOVEL "AMERICAN PSYCHO")**

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**Abstract**

The article is an attempt at a literary and aesthetic analysis of the transgression phenomenon in B. E. Ellis's prose, which occupies a significant place in the development of American transgressive fiction abounding in monstrously frightening scenes of violence and cruelty. According to the authors, fixing on marginal topics is an attempt to cross the boundaries of social, moral, and sexual structures aimed at provoking and "invigorating" the established norms. Analyzing the artistic means of the novel "American Psycho", the authors conclude that their stylistic role equals the role of semantic content, which affects the perception of this type of literature as satire, using specific forms to expose and ridicule people's vices, is designed to draw readers' attention to the essence of the described events and consider the roots of the consumer society's immorality. Thus, the research has both literary and philosophical significance. The literary analysis of the novel "American Psycho" reveals minimalism and dynamism of writing, as well as narrative non-linearity which is defined, on the one hand, as B. E. Ellis's idiosyncrasy, and on the other hand, as a distinguished style of transgressive fiction.

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## **1. Introduction**

Transgressive fiction is mainly characterized as “trash literature”, “trash”, “blank literature” because in the description context of value shifts society has specific emotional and ethical registers that go beyond the usual boundaries of literary creativity. In this respect, it is natural that the focus of writers on transgressive fiction is directed at the absurdity of being itself, declaring depersonalization, dehumanization, and depsychologization.

In the works of transgressive fiction, characters talk about philosophical themes, thus addressing the reader. The subjects of conversations can be absolutely different, whether it is conversations about the meaning of life, about human beings, about morality and immorality, about relationships between a man and a woman, about human sexuality, etc. In most cases, the answers to such questions cause misunderstanding and shock to readers, as they are very unusual and immoral from the side of rationality and generally accepted human values. The ultimate component of a transgressive society is collective values that become peripheral ones. Violation of cultural norms in works of transgressive fiction is expressed when the writer describes a specific kind of a society and separate individuals through the aesthetics of shock.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The relevance of this study is stipulated by the keen interest in researching the ways of representing philosophical intentions in transgressive fiction for the purpose of conceptual reading of its content. Writers of transgressive literature suggest the reader to immerse himself in an alternative reality of taboo topics where deviant behaviour of characters is the norm.

Beneath the character's prosperous appearance is mostly hiding a nature that deforms itself, its life, and the lives of those around it. As a result, the characters of transgressive fiction are both cynical and unhappy. Besides, they often fall into extreme reflections and deliberately commit illogical, thoughtless acts. The purpose of such deviant behaviour is to reach a state where spiritual suffering is transformed into clarity, where self-destruction gives a chance for enlightenment. Demonstrating the behavior of characters in which the notions between allowed and forbidden are violated, writers use various stylistic and linguistic means, studying the regularities of their functioning, it is possible to reveal the stylistic specificity of transgressive fiction in general.

## **3. Research Questions**

- 3.1.** What are the characteristic features of transgressive fiction?
- 3.2.** Are various stylistic techniques relevant to B. E. Ellis's idiosyncrasy?
- 3.3.** Can we consider marginal society is described in B. E. Ellis's novel “American psycho”?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The research purpose primarily involves considering the author's style of B. E. Ellis in the context of contemporary transgressive fiction, defining linguistic and stylistic features of B. E. Ellis's novel

“American Psycho”, and interpreting the function of slang language and obscene vocabulary in the present novel.

## 5. Research Methods

The purpose and objectives of the study led to the use of a systematic approach and method of linguistic analysis. The system approach made it possible to consider the text of B. E. Ellis' novel “American Psycho” in the context of transgressive fiction. The method of linguistic analysis made it possible to determine the compositional stylistic methods of B. E. Ellis's novel “American Psycho”.

## 6. Findings

Transgression implies a shift of boundaries between objects and values. The object goes beyond its own boundaries and makes a breakthrough into reality (Faritov, 2016). Transgression reflects the experience of denial and going beyond the boundaries of socio-cultural rules. It is connected with the transformation, which is quite emotionally experienced by a person but helps to understand the essence of what exactly is happening (Iakovleva, 2019).

The term “Transgressive writing” firstly appears in 1993, introduced by the American critic of “Los Angeles Times” Silverblatt (2016): “transgressive writing has violation at its core: violation of norms, of humanistic enterprise, of the body” (p. 1). Transgressive fiction is a countercultural phenomenon characterized by a richness of eroticism, perversity, cruelty, violations of taboos, and independent and marginal characters who lead to an anti communication and live by the laws of hedonism (Chemezova, 2018). It is typical of the transgressive fiction to cover the themes of split personality, drugs, human madness, mental disorder, immoral mutual relations, and various perversions.

The direction of transgressive fiction not only continues to observe the traditions of postmodernism literature but also introduces its own innovations. Among the characteristic features of transgressive fiction, as one of the directions of postmodernism, scientists emphasize the fragmentation and nonlinearity of the narrative.

The characters of such novels are marginalized, lost in society with observed deviant behaviour, as well as representatives of the average society, who are ordinary office workers trying to escape from their daily routine of consumer existence by any, even obnoxious methods. Perverse and hedonistic way of life of characters is relevant. In this case, we can agree with the authors' position: that the consumer society is a capitalist society where “black consciousness”, “sexual permissiveness” and “godlessness” prevail (Avdonina, & Fokina, 2017, p. 532). Such “lost” characters can be found in novels written by B. E. Ellis.

As an artistic direction, transgressive fiction has its own canons, certain distinctive features, and differences including the ideological-content level. Individual displays of transgression include eroticism, laughter, transgressive language, and murder. The plot is based on the collision of the protagonist with the surrounding world. The protagonist has a conflict with society (Uzlov, & Semenova, 2017). The society does not accept the protagonist. The character is lonely, he becomes an outsider, it plays an important role in the formation of his inner world and the motives of his actions.

The analysis of B. E. Ellis's creative work was conducted in the works by I. Young. Transgressive fiction describes the changed behaviour of characters, rigid destruction of stereotypes of society by characters, violation of social norms, and rules of society (Young, 2011). From this point of view, transgression makes it possible to highlight the mobile nature of borders and to detect the moral freedom of a person to remain within those borders of his or her choice (Faritov, 2017). In this regard, the following statement is relevant: transgressive consciousness is a transposition of a person.

In B. E. Ellis's novels, such elements of transgression as split personality, experiments on one's own and someone else's psyche, destruction of established stereotypes and social norms and uncertainty in the future can be traced. The characters of his novels can be called cynical and miserable; they can be neglected or pitied. This happens because they suffer, under the beautiful appearance they hide their abominable nature, their ugly nature, their lives and the lives of people around them with one clear goal – to reach the end in a place, where mental suffering passes into clarity, where the self-destruction gives a chance for enlightenment. It is noteworthy that in the novels of B. E. Ellis the act of transgression in the art world transcends all boundaries allowed, but not punished. However, the reader has the opportunity to grasp its entire essence: depravity and immorality.

On this basis, the author writes about a typical society of consumers. We believe it was not the coincidence that the author gave his character the name Patrick Bateman. The writer uses a formal semantic condensation of the main character's name and surname. Considering the etymology of Patrick Bateman's name and surname, we can notice that from the English "Patrick Bateman": Patrick's name from Latin means noble, aristocrat, and the word bate in translation from English means rage, anger, which well describes the dual nature of the character: noble outside and furious inside.

The French postmodern philosopher J. Beaudriard in his philosophical work "Consumer Society" sees consumption as "a chain psychological reaction aimed at satisfying needs". According to Beaudriard, (2006) "a consumer society is a self-deception, where it is impossible to find real feelings and an authentic culture" (p. 27).

In order to show the absurdity of consumer society in their struggle for individuality, author B. E. Ellis turns to satirical techniques. The characters of the novel "American Psycho" are trying so much to seem individual that they do not even notice that they are similar, they merge with people like them. They are also chasing brands, chasing the perfect life. But their perfect ideas are just an illusion.

The characters in a novel often advise each other on issues of appearance. However, as stated by B. E. Ellis himself, an inattentive reader will not pay attention to the fact that all advice on the selection of clothing is very similar to clown clothes. It is also a kind of satire on contemporary American beau monde:

Scott Montgomery walks over to our booth wearing a double-breasted navy blue blazer with mock-tortoiseshell buttons, a prewashed wrinkled-cotton striped dress shirt with red accent stitching, a red, white and blue fireworks-print silk tie by Hugo Boss and plum washed-wool trousers with a quadruple-pleated front and slashed pockets by Lazo (Ellis, 1991, p. 99).

If you read the descriptions of the characters' outfits carefully, you can conclude that they are very colourful and bright with atypical wardrobe items like clowns usually wear.

In the novel, the author actively uses various lexical and semantic means, which include euphemisms, obscene and jargon vocabulary, and word repetitions. Ch. Palahniuk defines repetitions as

“choruses” – this term is used to refer to specific word repetitions typical for transgressive fiction (Inozemtseva & Sapukh, 2016).

Speech euphemisms are expressed in increased use of taboo vocabulary. Tabooed vocabulary is understood as expressive, evaluative and expressive vocabulary that has historically emerged as a violation of taboo, which includes vulgarisms (simple words – rough words or expressions that are outside the scope of literary vocabulary), swear words (curses), invectives, obscene vocabulary (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2014).

The use of obscene vocabulary is one of the main characteristics of transgressive fiction, where characters violate social and established taboos not only through actions of a certain character but also through verbal aggression: “Listen to me, Luis. If you do not stop crying, you fucking pathetic faggot, I am going to slit your fucking throat. Are you listening to me?”, I slap him lightly on the face a couple of times. “I can't be more emphatic” (Ellis, 1991, p. 696). A vocabulary like that has more expressiveness and emotional colouring. “You are a fucking ugly bitch, I want to stab to death and play around with your blood” (Ellis, 1991, p. 141). In this example there is not only verbal aggression but also there are immoral and sadistic tendencies of the protagonist Patrick Bateman. Using obscene vocabulary the author conveys all the tense atmosphere and immorality of the characters in the most accessible way understandable for the mass reader.

An example of North American slang is the word asshole, most often addressed to a man. “No, but that doesn't explain why Tim acts like such a major asshole”, McDermott says, trying to catch up with me” (Ellis, 1991, p. 126). The use of slang occupies an important place in the novel. Slang units are concentrated in certain semantic groups like clothing, drugs, drinks, money, etc.

Paying attention to the most used obscene word – fuck, it is estimated to be used 185 times in the text, which makes it the most used word in the text. This word is one of the most used taboo words in the novel: “What in the fuck is Morrison wearing?”, Preston asks himself. “Is that really a glen-plaid suit with a checkered shirt?” (Ellis, 1991, p. 86).

Since the protagonist of the novel is a homophobe, he does not miss the opportunity to give a negative assessment or call a representative of unconventional sexual orientation: “I move like a zombie toward Bloomingdale's, where I rush over to the first tie rack I see and murmur to the young faggot working behind the counter, “Too, too fabulous”, while fondling a silk ascot. “He flirts and asks if I'm a model. “I'll see you in hell”, I tell him and move on” (Ellis, 1991, p. 425).

You can find not only American, but also British vulgar slang in the text of the novel. “I scream at him only once: “Fucking stupid bastard. Fucking stupid bastard” (Ellis, 1991, p. 514). The word bastard has more British rather than American origin and has a more neutral connotation than the other obscene vocabulary in the novel.

“You complete jerk”. Anne smiles, relieved. “You're funny” (Ellis, 1991, p. 229). – “I snarl at her, “You're a fool. I can't cope with this” (Ellis, 1991, p. 197). Slang expressions are a feature of transgressive fiction, along with obscene vocabulary. Characters in the novel use slang expressions during small talk with colleagues: “This is really super. How'd a nitwit like you get so tasteful?” (Ellis, 1991, p. 105). Another example of slang use: “Now – with the other hand I pull out my gazelle skin wallet – we would like to

enjoy some fine Cuban cigars afterwards and we don't want to be bothered by some loutish" (Ellis, 1991, p. 111).

Merriam-Webster dictionary provides the following definition of loutish means uncouth in manners or appearance, resembling or befitting a lout. In translation from English it means a person without manners, with boorish behavior (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2014). The following slang example: "And how do you drop this little tidbit of info?" Van Patten asks" (Ellis, 1991, p. 67). The Merriam-Webster's dictionary gave several definitions of tidbit: 1) a choice morsel of food; 2) a choice or pleasing bit (as of information), i.e. a tasty piece or spicy news. The author appeals to the slang to emphasize the figurativeness of his characters and gives brightness to the narrative (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2014).

In the novel you can also find a variety of American slang, which is "black English" or black English. "Whatchoomean?" He sighs thickly, slumped back, still staring at me" (Ellis, 1991, p. 168). "Who Durnit?" profoundly expresses the theme of confusion against a funky groove, and what makes this song so exciting is that it ends with its narrator never finding anything out at all" (Ellis, 1991, p. 318). In these examples, there is African-American slang, or "black English". Bateman himself, without knowing it uses it in his speech, however, he hates black people.

In the "American Psycho", B. E. Ellis refers to various stylistic means such as modality. Analysis of the modal semantics of the novel's text fragments showed that it is based on a functional assessment of the reflection of reality. Sometimes it creates an illusiveness of everything that happens. Thus, presenting the reader the described events in the categories of "reality/non-reality", where the protagonist is between two worlds. There is the author's desire to form an image of the protagonist with signs of a split personality.

All characters described by B. E. Ellis are similar, but the author pays special attention to male characters. Male characters pursue the same goals and talk about fashionable clothes, new music, how to pick up a girl, etc. They do not respect women and their brides, they treat women only as an object of satisfaction of their needs: "A good personality", Reeves begins, "a chick who has a little hard body and who will satisfy all sexual demands without being too slutty about things and who will essentially keep her dumb fucking mouth shut", "Listen, Hamlin says, nodding in agreement. "The only girls with good personalities who are smart or maybe funny or halfway intelligent or even talented-though god knows what the fuck that means – are ugly chicks" (Ellis, 1991, p. 216). This example clearly indicates an obvious consumer attitude toward women.

Among lexical and semantic means, euphemisms can be distinguished. However, in the novel the author does not use euphemisms so often. The most striking example of the use of euphemism is the phrase "I've gotta return some videotapes". Patrick Bateman used this phrase as a euphemism to describe the torture and murder of his victims: "I was... fooling around renting videotapes", I say, pleased, giving myself high-five, the cordless phone cradled in my neck" (Ellis, 1991, p. 280). In that example, Bateman rejects a colleague's offer to go to a restaurant. When he dumps his girlfriend and says he has to leave, he says about the videotapes, "Where are you going?" she whispers, bewildered" "I ... I've gotta ..." Stumped, I look around the crowded dining room, then back at Luis's quivering, yearning face. "I've gotta return some videotapes", I say, jabbing at the elevator button, then, my patience shot, I start to walk away and head back

toward my table” (Ellis, 1991, p. 372). In total, the phrase “I have to return some videotapes” has been used 15 times, which indirectly indicates that the main character had 15 victims.

Black humour is important in the stylistic analysis of a novel. In his novel, B. E. Ellis, on the one hand, exposes only the human weaknesses that are characteristic of all; on the other hand, he humiliates human dignity. In the given examples the following actions are observed: to beat a man to death and enjoy his blood: “I wanna stab you to death and play around with your blood” (Ellis, 1991, p. 141); misogyny: “I slap her hard across the face and hiss the words “Dumb bitch”, spraying her face with spit” (Ellis, 1991, p. 581); homophobia: “The Patty Winters Show this morning was about women who married homosexuals and I almost called Courtney up to warn her – as a joke – but then decided against it, deriving a certain amount of satisfaction from imagining Luis Carruthers proposing to her, Courtney shyly accepting, their nightmarish honeymoon” (Ellis, 1991, p. 422). As Louis Carruthers is a latent gay, Patrick knows about it, but tells nothing of Courtney's fiancée, with whom Patrick cheats on with his fiancée Evelyn. Humour is black because it deals with homosexuality.

Since B. E. Ellis writes about the consumer society, the novel has an intertextuality device, which includes the names of songs, books, films, musical groups. Mainly the writer uses names of brands in a text: Calvin Klein, Oscar de la Renta, Armani, Karl Lagerfeld, Christian Louboutin, Hermes, Yves Saint Laurent (Ellis, 1991). The device of an intertextuality can represent a conscious and openly underlined meaning element, and it can also be semi-open and unintentional (Ryabukha & Troshina, 2018). In the “American psycho” the usage of an intertextuality is intentional as the author underlines the character's dependence on total consumption.

Continuing to analyze the text of the novel, you can find many detailed descriptions of violent and cruel scenes. The scenes are described accurately and in detail, in order to disgust and alienate the reader: “The ax hits him midsentence, straight in the face, his thick blade chopping sideways into his open mouth, shutting him up” (Ellis, 1991, p. 512).

There's no blood at first, no sound either except for the newspapers under Paul's kicking feet, rustling, tearing. Blood starts to slowly pour out the sides of his mouth shortly after the first chop, and when I pull the ax out – almost yanking Owen out of the chair by his head – and strike him again in the face, splitting it open, his arms flailing at nothing, blood sprays out in twin brownish geysers, staining my raincoat (Ellis, 1991, p. 513).

Attention should be paid to a certain Patty Winters Show, which is a kind of satire on popular American TV-shows. With each issue of the show the topics for discussion become more and more absurd. In one episode the participants of the show are discussing the benefits of aspirin, and in another episode people are talking about a young man who fell in love with a soapbox. We should not exclude the fact that the author thus wanted to show not only the absurdity of contemporary American society but also points to the gradual deterioration of the main character and his abnormal obsessions and madness. “Today's guests are with multiple personalities. – “Well, who were you last month – “Well”, the woman begins tiredly, as if she was sick of being asked this question, as if she had answered it over and over again and still no one believed it. “Well, this month I'm ... Lambchop. Mostly ... Lambchop” (Ellis, 1991, p. 72). From this example we can conclude that the writer draws a parallel between the show and the psychological state of

the main character. Every day the psychological state of the protagonist becomes worse and the show becomes more absurd.

The idea of transgression includes a shift in counter-directed gestures, which involves back and forth movements, opening and closing one's eyes, self-consciousness. Consequently the necessity of two conflicting factors in transgressive experience involves discursive thought (“opening one’s eyes”) and implicit failures in the darkness of intimate experience (“closing one's eyes”) (Zenkin, 2019, p. 61). According to the text of the novel you can see that the author is in the opposition between “good” Patrick Bateman and “bad”, as if between “reality” and “dream”. After all, at the end of the novel we learn that all the violent acts committed by Patrick Bateman are fiction, a consequence of his obsessive-maniacal disorder. “Good” Patrick likes to dress well, give advice, and is polite and suave: “I just want everyone to know that I’m pro-family and anti-drug. Excuse me” (Ellis, 1991, p. 372). “I just want to be loved” (Ellis, 1991, p. 813). While the “bad” Patrick secretly becomes a violent psycho-killer with the obsessive-maniacal disorder and dismembers his victims.

To create an adequate emotional effect on the reader, the author uses various stylistic techniques. In particular, simple short sentences set the storyline a certain rhythm and dynamism. In addition, the narration, carried out in the first person removes the author's authority of the creator of the work and sets a certain emotional mood.

Resorting to linguistic means among which the most frequent are irony and black humour, the author shows the spiritual poverty of the characters, which is especially bright against the background of their surrounding luxury. Irony plays an important role in postmodern literature because it is one of the key features of postmodernist aesthetics (Gutorenko, 2016). Characterization of the hedonistic attitudes of the characters is carried out directly or indirectly – through a description of the elements of everyday life, in which everything is arranged to be shown to friends. The linguistic features of the representation of the consumer society are also manifested in the application of obscene vocabulary and slang expressions. The main feature that unites them is giving naturalism and credibility to the events that are described.

## **7. Conclusion**

As a result of the research of stylistic features of the transgressive fiction, it has been revealed that their functional role is equated to the role of the semantic content. The understanding of using language units and also the knowledge of stylistic features of transgressive fiction considerably influence the perception of this genre of literature as satire, the specific forms revealing and ridiculing defects of people and the society. The main compositional principles of the text should include the fragmented presentation of information, as well as nonlinearity and multimedia.

The analysis of the novel “American Psycho” made it possible to reveal the minimalism and dynamism of writing, which we define, on the one hand, as the idiosyncrasy of the writer B. E. Ellis, on the other hand, as a characteristic style of transgressive fiction. We have established that this style of presentation is intended to focus the readers' attention on the very essence of the actions described, to examine the root of immorality, depravity, and immorality of characters. All of the above points to the presence of a research character in transgressive fiction, allowing both writer and reader to penetrate into the atmosphere of topics tabooed by society.

As a result, conceptual transgressive fiction seeks to show the reader the relativity of any assessments and attitudes. Our research represents a new horizon in considering the artistic representation of consumer society, where the reader cannot divide the characters into positive and negative.

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