

Transgressive Fiction: The Accuser Theory. Kristeva's Abject Woman

Anja Housden-Brooks

AHSS, ARU, Cambridge, UK
Email: ap1133@pgr.aru.ac.uk

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Abstract

The Accuser Theory is the term given post-millennial transgressive fiction set within discourses that privilege male sexualized violence. To address this segment of the paper asks: how does males' sexualized violence construct woman in transgressive fiction and how can she be radicalized in the current digitized era? This is answered through a textual analysis of prominent transgressive novels from a late Western capitalist context with an overall aim of radicalizing woman through her undefinable sexuality. Bret Easton Ellis, Irvine Welsh and Chuck Palahniuk write transgressive fiction which makes a socially relevant statement. *Imperial Bedrooms* is focused upon in this paper through a deconstruction of his use of woman as an object as a means for transgression through constructs of male sexualized violence. Using the approach Critical Discourse Analysis through close readings, the ways of seeing that shape woman in transgressive fiction today become available. The immersion of digital media to unprecedented levels has created a new sex industry which has impacted the human subject in profound ways and directly informs woman. Van Dijk proved discourse structures prevalent in society are revealed through the modal verb operators in each text, which point to cultural obligatory ways of seeing, and can detect the presence of ideology governing the lens in which the fiction is told. Locating woman in the transgressive novels under study results from the constructs which emerge from the rogue narrator's use of taboo, which order her sexuality, and its confrontation with death, the transformative trope, and thus reveals if ideology is at play. By deep theories of transgression, it is possible to approach these works as products of a new culture from deeper philosophical aspects. Transgression has a limited character and does not affect the stability of the taboo since it is its expected compliment. However, when the literary articulation of death is present, transformation takes place, promoting equality rather than hierarchy. Informed by a Western twenty-first-century sex industry context, the classic theories are re-historized to the present because of their perennial

ability to engage taboo and transgression, which are more visible today than ever. The changes to the construction of woman across the turn of the century are highlighted to offer greater contextualization to the transgressive literary landscape amidst shifts in the articulation of the sex industry by big tech in the wider social sphere to find woman's inexorable sexuality.

Keywords

The Accuser Theory, Woman, Female Desire, Omni-Visual Pornography, Literary Discourse Analysis, Transgressive Fiction, The Transgressive Window, Abject, Sex-Buyer Ideology

1. Introduction

By using Van Dijk's theory of ideology as a theoretical framework within Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach as CDA methodology, this paper analyzes the language in transgressive fiction which is used as a point of entry into the ways in which male sexualized violence constructs woman. These novels are ripe for the analysis of woman's construct through notions of sexuality as they have an intrinsic link with ways of seeing prevalent in society through their use of taboos which structure the social ordering of woman. Taboos distinguish the transgressive generic armature and only hold efficacy if they are felt in society at large. Mookerjee (2013) calls transgressive novelists "alienated postmodern writers" due to their lost genealogy with satire which is defined by bringing folk voice "into a relationship with the public voice" (ibid.). The divide can be seen in the alteration to the parodic element. This change is described as "a broad academic agreement that contemporary parody [does] not necessarily 'ridicule' a work but instead [calls] attention to that pre-existing source" (McCracken, 2016) which may originate from cultural myth. The transgressive writers disengage with the generalized conceits of satire, through a re-focus on escaping the system of language itself. This is likely in response to the widening gulf between mediated language and ground-level experience in transnational media's profit-making enterprise seeking market through their messages and beliefs that create and reinforce the way things are ideologically. This includes what the overall thesis calls the sex buyer ideology, alive in contemporary culture and the product of the relationship between woman and sex-industry constructs accessible within these novels. These newly institutionalized discourses subjectivize men as an omniscient sex buyer pervading the close relationship between author and narrator in these books, whilst interlocking woman as its object. This is because Western language is still inherently embedded with Christian ways of seeing that "institute hierarchical and non-reciprocal relationships" (Silverman, 2009). Woman exhibiting sexuality within patriarchy is revealed as invariably oppressive in these works through discourses that result from the link between

taboo and transgression, namely the revelatory object. The findings act as an entry point into wider ways of seeing that determine how we make sense of woman today. This is seen in the wide acceptance and prolific exposure of sexualities throughout Western culture via the visual language of internet pornography against the backdrop of draconian conservative politics. The overturn of Roe and Wade (Housman, 2022) is probably one example of the backlash against woman exhibiting sexuality through visually ubiquitous pornography. Whilst conservatism gives pornography its bite, women are at a loss through real threat to the status of their lives. The ruling of June 2022 established a constitutional right over women's bodies regarding their reproductive rights, demonstrating an increasingly conservative direction about the implications for civil rights and democracy in the West and its political polarization. The detection of a conservative ideology governing the transgressive texts under study creates an entry point into the relationship between fiction and its context of production. This allows a viable link between the novels and the conservative push against the ubiquity of women doing sexuality via the new always accessible, omni-visual, graphic language of hard-core hetero-sex-industry pornography in "the impression of reality experienced by the spectator" (Metz, 1991).

The visual speech of the sex industry expands the signification field altering what woman has come to mean in her transpositional back into the transgressive text. She is continually conceptually re-produced across visual to written mediums, where language becomes "at all points reciprocal" (Silverman, 1983). So, whilst woman's uninhibited engagement with a multiplicity of sexualities is possible in real time, she is anchored in these texts in a "uni-dimensional power-structure of gendered defined heterosexuality" (Sonnett, 2013). Transgressive fiction antitheses ideals and systems, and generalized theories, conservatism however appears present. This overall thesis recognizes this gap in literature and expands on it. To this, the aim of the literature review is to determine the changes in these texts by way of new discourses born of male sexualized violence that give life to woman detectable within early twenty-first-century transgressive fiction in contrast to those that came before the turn of the century and the new sex industry. Mookerjee's "social statement" propounded in these novels is only deducible when taking the whole novel's relationship of form and content into consideration. This is because of the pivotal potential of the transformative phase accessible via the death trope. These novels operate differently, rather via "a subjectivist affective response" (the individual reader's reaction and involvement) (Hoey, 2011). This translates to the reader entering a process of rejection and assimilation through a seemingly uninhibited journey through the narrative with the rogue through "a consequence free enactment of taboos and transgression" (ibid.). The symbolic death phase characterizes transgressive fiction through bringing the narrative world to a halt by estranging it. This process was seen in *American Psycho* (1991) when Patrick Bateman, the handsome yet monstrous rogue, having entered a murderous killing spree, progressively becomes con-

fused by the narrative world by questioning whether he's even killed anyone. The rogue becomes engulfed by the signs of capitalism encircling him, to the point where the reader exercises empathy for him, and the system is revealed as the problem: epiphenomenal and unconnected to the body. Through the re-situating of the initial novel world as discourse, belonging to language and unconnected to the body, narrative structure is usurped. This process can be described as "the ability of the subject to rewrite oneself with the same the signs that serve to threaten subjectivity" (Magrino, 2012). The revelation of the physical body through the literary articulation of death estranges the abstract systems of belief created by the rogue and reader relationship.

In the works under study, the subject matter is first presented through the rogue's correspondence of the sexual-social ordering of woman post-millennium, through "an approach to a subject" (Mookerjee, 2013). This infers a subjective interpretation of cultural ways of seeing as opposed a direct extrapolation of an objective discourse by the narrator. Whilst this might be somewhat true, the impetus for this research derives from the genres' un-precedented incessant and increased negative treatment of woman across these books within the relatively short time frame of the early twenty-first century. This realization lies in woman's extreme, sexualized desecration re-positioned as transgressive in these later writings. Violence against women is a regular facet of these novels throughout history, like drug use, extreme sex, and even in the bizarre sprouting of sexual organs seen in Will Self's *Cock and Bull* (1992) and is radical due to its subversion of discourse through a perpetual return to physicality. This takes place through the metaphorical elaboration of death, evident in the focus on the absurd and the body, which "take conventional notions of gender and turn them inside out" (Mambrol, 2022). Contrastingly, the later transgressive set, contextualized by the onslaught of the net porn industry, undermine female agency through the re-enforcement of violence against women during the crucial transformative phase by positioning the grounding physicality as interchangeable with the male-centric sexualized violence against her. To this, readers of these later works are asked to identify with a malignant form of male gaze that sees her body used as a foil for abuse *as transgressive*. These constructions extend to the far reaches of an aberrant sexuality and raise the issue of the widening gulf which exist between heteropatriarchy and heterosexuality created by the sex industry. The focus of this overall thesis considers woman's sexual representation across the transgressive novels under study to see how she is presented through sexual constructs, which can only be judged according to her "confrontation with death", in the symbolic reification of the abject. This is because the abject as the ultimate taboo primes the stereotypical position (used in these texts) of the subject, the man, and his object, woman, through heteropatriarchal ways of seeing dominant in culture today, whilst also holding the innate ability to disturb this polarization. It is the abject, through symbolic literary death, which can disturb gendered hierarchy that seem to have been reinvigorated in these later no-

vels. This is also demonstrated in Palahniuk's other work *Beautiful You* (2014) through an explicit objectification of death and sex compared against the "secret channels of obscenity" (Bataille, 1928) which supersede the social robe, beyond the constraints of the world of objects, asserting sexuality as undefinable.

Palahniuk, through narrator, Penny Harrigan, addresses "woman's sexual disfunction" through the climactic point of the work by way of a utopian dildo industry, offering "infinite, endless pleasure" (ibid.). This comes after the subject matter is set up through Penny, described as the "dumpy" female protagonist, is drug raped in the product testing phase via the taboo process. The reduction of her sexuality to an orgasm by a "purpose-built" product, pitted as transgressive, is revealing in terms of the patriarchal view of woman's desire as definable in society. Contrastingly, transgressive novel, *Blood, Guts and High School* (1984) by Kathy Acker, uses the incest taboo through the voice of rogue narrator. Janey, 10 years old, is the daughter of her father whom she is in a relationship with. The novel world is quickly progressed on the first page through this shocking entry to the subject matter as belonging firmly within the realm of taboo by addressing the initial mental dams that bring woman's subjectivity through language into being. The tactic of using the daughter lens to explain the incest is "more abhorrent [as] the victims speaking for themselves carries more weight than the distanced effects described by a narrator" (Donaldson, 2005), or through the third person. Whilst incest as a taboo contributes to the immemorial heteronormative social ordering of women, when openly positioned through the lens of the daughter and child variable, who shockingly reciprocates the fathers desire, it becomes radical, gaining proximity to the abject which has the effect of releasing sexuality from societal, linguistic constraints. *Blood, Guts ...* was produced within the context of the early 80's and the barely won abortion rights in North America and Acker sharply identifies the gulf between woman's sexuality and the abstract systems that seek to control her. The shocking narrative tells of her lust for her father who has fallen in love with another woman and is about to leave her. The subversive narrative structures are presented through the continual use of this more "disturbing" taboo combined with an exploration of sex and self through alternating literary domains. This process provokes a perpetual release of woman's libido across the multiple contrasting sign systems via poetry, reports, diagrams, and drama-turges, in a metaphorical elaboration of limitless sex and death through "[my] entire body falling beyond the limit, cadaver" (Kristeva, 1982). The concept of "self-objectification" in *Empowerment/Sexism* (Gill, 2008) where woman feels she owns her objectification, which allows masculine representations of her sexuality to maintain provenance as the status quo, even passing them off as belonging to her in "the writing subject(s)" "[homogeneity] to culture" (Kristeva, 1984). "Transgression has gone inwards" (White, 1982), which was starting to take shape through relative media control prior to them millennium. *American Psycho* (1991) created public shock illustrated in *LA Times* article by Michael Silverblatt, *Who Are these Writers and Why Do*

They Want To Hurt Us? (1992) and was widely, publicly decried for its violence towards women. Contrastingly the extreme sexualized violence-characterized within the later works of Ellis', Palahniuk, and Welsh, provoke no such awareness, shown through baron academic and public coverage of the extreme maiming of woman used transgressively today. To this, the examination of male sexualized violence existing within conservative ideologies alive in transgressive fiction today advances the transgressive field to new territories. Using Kristeva's theory of the abject leant from *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) on Ellis' *Imperial Bedrooms* one asks, *how* does Ellis use the transgressive communication frame to assert woman through the abject? A brief answer to this is that he doesn't, however, the abject-through the only woman, Blair, inexorably asserts itself. Blair literally engulfs the narrative world from her beset liminal position shaping the subject and object positions enveloped by the discourse.

The sex buyer ideology is a fragile identity and is shown in the novel through the middle-aged men in positions of power scaffolded by his sexual connection to teenage girls. The girls in the novel act as the conventional motif used to assert male-centric hetero-power positions, in a renewed market territorialization of a "youthful femininity" (McRobbie, 2004). As the novel's hidden frame, Blair appears at the beginning, and at the end as the resultant purveyor of evil and responsible for the ills presented in the novel. Ellis is aware he must explain her noticeable absence from the core of the sequel compared to her primary character status in *Less Than Zero* (1985), the prequel, where all characters were teens themselves. However, in *Imperial Bedrooms* Blair is revealed as upsetting the imbalance that gives life to the sex buyer ideology. The fissures Blair creates within the textual tapestry are evident through the fragility of Clay's subjectivity when in her presence in "a splitting of the ego" (Kristeva, 1982). This is illustrated in the revelation of his repressed sex-buyer status as a construct structured by the hyper-sexualized girl motif defined through her lack of life experience and inability to access power and attendant brutalization of her through the constructed "sexually desirable" girl, using the transgressive climax to further brutalize her in "[Christianity's] constituting strict identities without intermixture" (Kristeva, 1982). The aim of the analysis of Ellis' *Imperial Bedrooms* is to determine the changes that have imbued the sign woman in early twenty-first century Western language byway of new discourses born of male sexualized violence through a new form of mediated sexuality. This is conducted by subsectioning the novel into its four major generic parts that demonstrate transgression as a mechanism, to find the discourses that bring woman into being that derive from the critical and rhetoric discourse analysis explained below.

2. Methodology

The Accuser Theory is the name given to the principle that claims post-millennial transgressive fiction operates within discourses of male sexualized violence

through a branding reproach that women are already equal to men. This theory proposes that male sexualized violence imports meaning to the sign woman and constructs her through ideas of what the world is like through patriarchal sex industry ways of looking positioned as transgressive. Literary discourse analysis, the name given the research methodology as a whole, unpacks the meaning ascribed the sign through found discourses deriving of hetero-sex industry notions of sexuality. The proposition is based upon a preliminary justifiable awareness that the authors of transgressive fiction in the early twenty-first century use male-centric sex industry discourses to transgress by using woman as an object. These constructs position woman as the willing and unwilling victim of extreme sexual abuse, ageism, body-fascism, and outright erasure as somehow radical by virtue of positioning her as the object which pivots the transgression of these discourses within the prominent transformation phase of these works. The indicators for this claim were first discovered through a superficial exploration of these novels lent from the corpus pre- and post-millennium, before designing a bespoke research methodology which synthesizes the defining aspects of this proposition into explainable features for research. The conceptual research frame includes the features of rhetoric device, the ways in which the author uses literary device; verb modalities, which reveal obligatory ways of seeing that accord with society, and the transgressive frame which ultimately reveals how these discourses are used in these novels and insofar ideology is at play.

The transgressive novels under analysis are selected by falling within the category of coming into production post-millennium, as they speak with the shifts in big tech and the attendant visual and graphic language of the hard-core sex industry. These shifts have altered the markers of transgression through the ubiquitous iconic signs of today's sex industry described as "motivational" and "open to multiple significations" (Stam, Burgoyne, & Flitterman-Lewis, 1992) inflect literary texts. Silverman poses this reciprocity in relation to cinema and literary text in its timebound context and by doing so demonstrates the heightened processes of today. To this, the aim of the research is to determine the new discourses born of male sexualized violence which give life to woman within the context of the iconic language of hetero hard-core porn. This language centers woman as the object of the camera and the sequential visual frames. The relationship between the object of what some might term "abuse porn", and changes to the medium by which this content reaches us and the transgressive texts de-secrated use of woman as its object for transgression are probably interlinked. Furthermore, the impetus for this research lay in the genres' unprecedented incessant and increased negative treatment of woman across these later novels within the relatively short time frame of a post twenty-first century context and in alignment with the onslaught of the new omni-visual hardcore hetero-pornography.

The analysis is qualitative, that is interpretative, in that one subjectively extracts meanings from close readings, yet bolstered by peer-reviewed feminist and

transgressive scholarship for justification. Any reader of any given text could be classified as a holder of subjectivity, however discourse controls how we think, therefore subjectivity is contingent on discourse whilst raising the issue of a strong objective element. To this, heteronormative imposed male-sexualized violence as a discourse is explored here. This is done by analyzing the novels for modal and rhetoric discourse structures within the transgressive semiotic frame to reveal underlying belief systems of a given culture. “Modalities are degrees of probability or usuality” that reveal cultural obligation (Halliday, 2000). Rhetoric analysis looks at literary figures of style and technique which play an important role in embodying the themes, as a kind of “semantic device for the enhancement of implied meaning” (Peng, 2017). Both linguistic structures are then cast within the transgressive communication frame through a de-compartmentalizing of Mookerjee’s prescribed tropes to explore the novel’s transgressed meta-message in relation to woman and male sexualized violence to reveal ideologies at play. To do this, one must set out the necessary elements of the theory of ideology as ideas/beliefs, not individual, personal beliefs, but social beliefs shared by members of social groups. The latter emphasizes the vitality of the transgressive text in the implementation of ideologies and even as accused of “motivating murder”. This is due to its radical confrontation with the abject, unrestrained by a conventional moral compass, which has been described as glorifying violence. As mentioned, Metz’s visual sign, which pivots the meaning imparted by the new sex industry, enhances motivation. The iconicity of these signs “coax... the observer’s perception into a preferred reading” (Stam, Burgoyne, & Flitterman-Lewis (1992).

The structure of ideology contains discursive contents which may by default include both discourses of resistance and oppression emphasizing that “ideologies [are] the basis of the shared mental representations of social groups” (ibid.) and can therefore be polysemic. The thesis’ use of this approach determines exactly.

What discourses make up the construction called woman within a Western post-millennial context and in what ways these discourses are used to transgress her in relation to a potential overarching ideology. The practice called “sex industry” predominates itself on certain ways of looking apparent in Western Civilization. This is because of changes to the medium the content is consumed through and it is enabling alternative perspectives of that content.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Imperial Bedrooms is one of nine novels written by Brett Easton Ellis who is described by *The Guardian’s* Anna Leszkiewicz as a “provocative writer” (2019). This reputation, as one would expect, aids commerciality; not least because the transgressive genre he writes through functions via the cultural order of the times. Through an advanced interplay of tropes which have since demarcated what’s become a genre, *American Psycho* used the violence against women ta-

boo to shock the reader into a state of accountability which brings ideas of one's "identity" into question. *American Psycho* does this through revealing the incompatibility of capital circa 1980's North America, with the body, through the revelation "the abject". Masculine identity is in such crisis, described as in the process of redefinition through forms of toxic masculinity. Unlike the transgressive *American Psycho*, *Imperial Bedrooms* acts as a *backlash* against the post-modern fragmentation of the masculine identity, by attacking women and girls. This is illustrated in the book's "punishment" against women and girls, possibly through exhibiting sexualities in the wider pornified climate from the always accessible filmic omni-visual sex industry. What makes *Imperial Bedrooms* more contentious than *American Psycho* is that the extreme violence taboo is heightened during the pivotal Transformation phase, which conventionally uses the abject to transgress dogma, whilst woman as opposed girls are ostracized from the core narrative world, even abjected. The transgressive works under study, which by default arrive post-millennium, expound the frequent use of the violence to women taboo in arguably even more violent frames, through division from their young selves to outright omittance, and might be indicative of new ways of seeing alive in the wider landscape that are perceived as threatening masculinity.

The chapter examines Bret Easton Ellis' *Imperial Bedrooms* as a contemporary example of transgressive fiction, in relation to woman through Kristeva's abject. The novel world is set-in middle to upper class suburban Hollywood and Bel Air and features the cliched notion of the "casting couch", replicated as a staple theme in classic pornography whereby auditions take place, generally of women. The theme is extrapolated into the book in the reification of the film project process of which Clay, the narrator, and protagonist, wrote called "The Listeners". This, at first gives him power over the girls' wanting roles and creates the gendered dynamism of the book. To this, the concept of abjection is explored, and demonstrates the ways in which woman is constructed through a breakdown of meaning. This is explained through Kristeva's theory of the abject through her distinction of identity as deriving from the biblical dichotomy of the pure and impure which orders society byway of the abject and subject to object polarizations.

These structures are built upon interpretations of biblical impurity which underpin conventional patriarchal notions of gender across the feminine which is used as the stronghold against such impurity, "separating God from man" (Ibid.). Through this place of banishment, she is re-interlocked into a gender that is augmented through the taboo process, preventing "demonic force(s) alien to divinity" (Kristeva, 1982) from surfacing. This is apparent in *Imperial Bedrooms* and is evident through the punishment and abjection of her as herself. In other words, the very structurization of the male subject is dependent on taboo's that constricts women's sexuality which they achieve through projecting what Kristeva calls "loathing" (Ibid.) onto the female subject. To charter the newfound

ways woman's "defilement" aka "women doing sexuality" in the wider sphere is treated, it is imperative that the novel's transgressive mechanism is unlocked and evaluated in its relation to woman's immemorial construct as object, which is always founded on the abject, the place which makes *no sense*. Supplementary to our understanding of how this occurs is the "element of will" fostered by these authors which is considered in terms of the extent of their autonomy as writers within the culture that they extrapolate from. In other words, how does the multisensorial porn medium inform how these authors interpret the woman as object position? To answer this, it is important to understand how Ellis uses the transgressive communication frame to assert woman using the abject. By analyzing the prominent four generic parts of the novel in relation to the abject one can access woman of the system today. This examination is conducted by "relating form to content" (Connors & Benson, 2014) which is integral as transgressive fiction is renowned for being read "superficially" (Hoey, 2011). Mookerjee's somewhat typological approach has acted as the most comprehensive analysis of transgressive fiction by looking throughout history to the contemporaneous, asserting the necessary elements which this fiction as a lineage.

The four parts comprising the aforementioned are: Monologic Voice, Taboo, Transgression and Catharsis, and make up the transgressive window which allow the reader into the play of the text and its overall meaning, and through the novels under study, into possibly new ways of seeing recreated by big tech that inform what woman means in the twenty-first century. Having analyzed *Imperial Bedrooms* it becomes clear that Ellis *does* in fact inadvertently illustrate Kristeva's abject. By this it's meant that Ellis hasn't created a transgressive work in *Imperial Bedrooms* by using the abject, but a reading is available through a deconstruction. This is explained through the literary articulation of death aka the abject's evocation of which has no limits in turn destroying narrativized limits as opposed staying within them, or inside of discourse, aka the structuring of women by taboo. A radical reading is prevalent in the character, Blair, the only woman, who primes the subject and object positions (male sex-buyer and girl sex-worker) in the text by remaining opaque throughout the core narrative yet resurfaces as the "mother of all blame" at the end, demonstrated in the analysis that follows below. Ellis' transgression however remains aligned to dominant discourses of female defilement deriving from archaic clusters of conservatism which structure the ideology of the sex-buyer, that re-objectivize sexuality through forgoing expressions of death. Death *is* detectable through Blair within the primers of the gendered constructions within the book with a sense that the human subject emerges at the precise moment that it breaks the boundaries of its own limits... overcom(ing) itself in order to define itself (Andjelkovic, 2019). What this means is that *Imperial Bedrooms* depicts aberrance proper against girl whilst woman is abjected through the risk of usurping a strong conservative yet fragile identity.

Literary liminality, where meaning collapses in the narrative, occurs when facing identity which increases the threat of potentially creating additional sub-

jectivity that threatens that identity. To avoid this, Blair is excluded by Ellis, framing the entire text without having any active contribution to it, as she did as a primary character in the prequel *Less Than Zero* (1985) when she was just a teen. Blair's relegation in *Imperial Bedrooms* (2011) is a necessary decision for Ellis as the additional subjectivity she creates, through life experience and felt equality, reduces his rogue narrator status to an object with attributes which is highly transgressive as it extinguishes patriarchy. Blair's effect is "the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding" (Bataille, 1928). In other words, Blair disturbs the claimed identity of the male speaking subject. The strictness of identity is rebuilt on newly formed discourses created by the new sex industry which re-polarize women and men through transactions of industrial notions of sex through power.

Robin Mookerjee's pivotal transformative phase aka the revelation of the abject, appears through Ellis by *re-objectifying sex* rather than breaking the limits which structure it by reverting transgression to the aggressive whims of the sex buyer, where all women are objects in proximation to patriarchal variables of ageism, body fascism, brutalization, and erasure, which leads to sexual suffocation. The articulation of death, characterized by the literary elaboration of the abject, ultimately decides if a work is transgressive which comes from the transformation of the initial subject matter or novel world, in this case, the casting couch discourse arranged by the male sex-buyer through the sex-worker construct. The extreme violence towards the young sex worker, whilst woman is banished, during transformation is emblematic of the backlash against her and is suggestive of a dominant re-assertion of the symbolic patriarchal order of heteronormativity but with a *renewed* ideological access to the very young.

Considering the wider socio-context in which the text is produced, namely the sex industry's over-sexualization to the teen construct and its subsets in pornography—immersion is heightened by the pornographic language of the image. Male on female porn proper is further normalized through the addition of conventionally extreme activities, termed "kink". In an article by *Rolling Stone Magazine* (2019) entitled, "*Waterboarding for Pleasure: When Kink Violates the Geneva Convention*" a caption follows saying: "It's internationally banned for prisoners of war—but for some in the BDSM scene, simulated drowning is the ultimate expression of arousal and trust" by EJ Dickson. *The Death of The Author*, by Roland Barthes (1977) posits the author isn't of concern when language within that text is of scrutiny. This is based on the perception that language itself "consist(s) of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin" (Ibid.). In this regard language is engaged in an infinite semiosis reciprocally pervading visual culture and literary mediums. Today, language is re-imbued by internet-speed, imagistic changes to meaning, readable through the changing external modalities imposed on us. To this, a hypothetical projection is that the extreme forms of sexual abuse assigned primary and secondary girl characters in *Imperial Bed-*

rooms, positioned by Ellis as transgressive, are a result of Ellis' inability to see beyond the perceived "transgressiveness" of hetero-porn or "the limitless limit" (Foucault, 1963), which explains the thwarted perception that every conceivable sexual act is covered by pornography yet neglects to realize its reliance on woman as an object interlocked within the language of heteropatriarchy which gives it its sadistic bite. The restrictions imposed on women through the defilement taboo bring her into confrontation with the prohibition through pornography and through expressions of pornographic transgression, yet heteropatriarchy is still very much at work. The radicality of the medium is not entirely established not least because the camera centralizes her within the filmic frame as its object, not to mention the tendency for abuse in the medium as opposed to what could be described as her animal sexuality.

The brutalized girl theme is magnified extensively during the pivotal transformation phase which according to Robin Mookerjee's criterion represents a reassertion of physicality in the face of abstract systems. Immediately, it becomes clear that the "abstract systems" on display here are being confused as flush with sexuality born of drive. The blurring exists by Ellis' interchangeability of sex industry ways of seeing, i.e., the sex-buyer/sex-worker transaction, and raw animality. Bataille (1949) achieves this in *Eponine* from *Oeuvres* through "the exteriority of being" (Foucault, 1963). This is achieved from Bataille's address of self, not as religion, but through an unobjectified form of sexuality existing outside of the structures of language. He achieves this though approaching the archaism of female defilement through placing Eponine, the female protagonist, as laughing and half naked on sight of the priest within the enigmatic opening of a "night sky", a metaphor for limitlessness. So, the "animal carnality" Mookerjee refers to which occurs within the Transformation phase is necessary to symbolize the incompatibility of the self/body with systems, not their union. Animality is flush with drive *prior* to language whereas language subverts drive to the paternal order, which is what's happening through the abjection of woman in *Imperial Bedrooms*. Mixed with the lost efficacy of the violence against women taboo through the non-existent commentary awarded *Imperial Bedrooms*, in great contrast to *American Psycho*, it can be deduced that woman as a sign in language is changing negatively, but knowing this enables the limits to be exposed and new possibilities to be staked out.

The male spectator is also under construction by virtue of his polarization to woman, changing according to his re-subjectification. The ways in which the fiction under study portray woman is particular to the motivational qualities of the genre, mixed with the multi-sensorial overdetermination of the filmic medium of porn in "the giving off of ourselves in ways we cannot know in advance" (Mac-Cormack, 2016) which raises the question of unknown affects that operate the re-construction of the male subject. Essentially, the medium re-positions the spectator. To this, Charles Saunders-Pierce regards representations as in systemic flux and as belonging to a process of "infinite semiosis" with each further

interpretant becoming more diaphanous than the former. The Freudian domain of the superego in psychoanalysis is the ethical component of personality and provides the objective moral standards of any given time. The superego essentially marshals the subject through objective modes of prohibition, detectable through discourse. By extension, the process of superego precludes any reference or dependence upon the being himself... (rather) locked in the self-containment (of language) (Silverman, 1983). To this, the changes to the male subject by the filmic mediated systems dominant in the early twenty-first century have altered his relationship to the abject. The heteronormative porn saturated climate, which appears to favor abuse over sexual expression, establishes the context in which the abject re-augments the sign, woman, through the superego. The prohibitions, and inhibitions and ideals deriving from the Freudian Preconscious Typology make the highly altered being “society ready” and represent the ways in which archaic forms of morality still pathologically hide woman, from herself, through an identity that is created by power interests, not faith or even essentialism, and evident in the continuous re-defilement of women exhibiting heterosexual sexuality.

3.1. Synopsis

Imperial Bedrooms is a 2011 novel by Bret Easton Ellis (1991), whose magnum opus, *American Psycho*, had made a defining impact of the genre. Transgression in fiction, alters consensus: “transgressive writing has violation at its core: violation of norms, of humanistic enterprise, of the body” (Silverblatt, 1993). Twenty years or so later, Ellis’ recent offering has had no such appraisal, publicly or academically. The stark references to *Imperial Bedrooms* in peer-reviewed work merely comment on its postmodern attributes rather than the un-transgressed extreme violence against women. It’s murder mystery in style, with a femme fatale character, flawed protagonist, and “misty” imagery, a sub-hybrid of noir within the overarching transgressive communication frame, adding atmosphere to what would otherwise be a typically nihilist piece. On the blurb of the novel, *The Observer* remarks: “Brilliantly written and coolly self-aware... Here, as in *Less Than Zero*, Ellis is plumbing the depths of human nature, exposing it at its worst”; whilst Hari Kunzru expresses his admiration of the writer: “His tautest, most compulsively readable work since *American Psycho*... it imagines what became of that group of over-privileged, dead-eyed kids as forty-year olds” (ibid.)

The plot is set through the first person, omniscient narration of Clay, a highly successful, male screenwriter, middle-aged and generally disenchanted. Having spent time in New York, working, he takes a trip back to LA, the same place where *Less Than Zero* (1985) was set. Now, as forty-plus year olds’, the characters, as we would expect, have changed; this materializes through apathy-driven extreme rebelliousness vis a vis *Less Than Zero*, to apathy-driven desperation for power and control in the sequel. Clay has gone from neutrally likeable in *Less Than Zero*, to re-subjected by the sex buyer ideology in *Imperial Bedrooms*.

This interpretation is garnered through the overall novelistic functions in terms of the operation of form to content and is achieved through Ellis' extrapolation of the language of the default sex-punter which has become synonymous to the status of man (unless otherwise indicated) in the stereotypical male subject to female object positions. The new sex industry appears to have given life to a pervasive subjectivity through its ubiquity via an omni visual pornographic language that's migrated into mainstreamed ways of seeing. The ways of seeing appear to ignore the invisibility of women, the negation of actual women, the possibility of a sexuality outside of the objectified male lens to the brutalized oversexualization of girls, and the theme of rape as a vehicle for personal growth.

This is underpinned by the disengagement of young women and women within the current socio-capitalist context along with the comparative analysis by Emily Spier's on transgressive feminist novels. The texts by post-millennial authors such as Michelle Tea, Maggie Nelson and others alike are comparatively analyzed for similar features. The study extends to paraphernalia and novels in which she describes them as "concerned with the relevance of feminism today", (Spier, 2018) whilst "lamenting feminism" as an unreflecting affirmation of the neo-liberal status quo' (Ibid.). Capitalism has culminated an adjoining of two avenues: the increased sophistication of interactive technology combined with the re-division of woman through an unchecked heteronormativity. Woman doing sexualities *is* radical due to the confrontation with the defilement taboo. However, through the deconstruction of male authored transgressive texts, one can see the corruption that belies this through the blurring of the somewhat "sex robot" aka a sexuality that's defined by hetero norms.

As *Imperial Bedrooms* unfolds, we vicariously align with the seemingly neutral Clay, through the close, introspective lens, feeling his comixed relationship to the objectified girl, who he both hates and wants. The rogue narrator, Clay's repressed despair lies in Ellis' suppressed yet perpetual awareness that teenagers and early twenty-somethings do not want him without some sort of profit. However, his "calm" demeanor, eliciting a seemingly relaxed relationship with himself, is usurped when he encounters Blair, the only woman. Blair, who held a starring role in the prequel *Less Than Zero* (1985) as an eighteen-year-old girl along with the teenage and early twenty-something boys is the only lead character who does not reappear in *Imperial Bedrooms* (2011) in an obvious meaningful way. Blair's role is cut to bit-part appearances as her presence proves too disturbing to the subject and object relationship in which *Imperial Bedrooms* is built upon. Irrespective of Clay's inability to maintain his power over the girls, Ellis blurs the brute fact he must pay to access them; this denial is a component of the sex-buyer. This is realized through Clay's blaming of screenwriters like himself for not having the same "kudos" as directors, omitting his age as a factor. This insidious presentation omits the superficial yet not incorrect reading of older men wanting barely legal aged teens in the wider pornified context where "teen" as a popular porn category; these men operate at the border of legal

frames for fear of repercussion and/or branded pedophiles. This repression is doubly emphasized by Clay's homogenization with Ellis' as narrator, protagonist, and author, and its blurring is found in the naturalization of ideas *with the body* in "the operative belief that ideas correspond in an unmediated way to real objects and values" (Silverman, 1983).

The story is embellished with "cartel" level violence that seems to close in on the group of former "friends", which adorn much of the plot sequence, providing a backdrop of fear, whilst revealing the general disaffectedness that isolates every-one from each other, a metaphor for individualism. The creation of the "focal point" in the work, conducive to the ever-evolving noir generic type, revolves around Clay's development, in tandem with Mookerjee's transgressive "rogue narrator" story type 2, which centers a rogue with an obsessive personality and aligns with the setting up of the "john" unless otherwise indicated, who takes his love of sexual abuse to its aberrant limits. This is realized in the plot by the drug raping and brutalizing of a teenage girl, "purchased" from a pimp in upstate LA. Leading up to this climax, we are traversing the events with forty something Clay and his obvious addiction to the young and teens, through his proclivity for falling "in love" with them, only to be "shocked" each time he has his "heartbroken", having found out they've "demonically" used him for his access to get them acting roles. Firstly, Ellis accepts gendered and age imbalances as the status quo which is a clear indication of the repressed subjectivity, ascribed to powerful and wealthy men, who seek power status over minds as well as bodies, another feature of the sex-buyer ideology, featured in accounts of sex workers witnessed in *The Pimping of Prostitution: Abolishing the Sex Work Myth* by Julie Bindle (2017).

Through Blair's "blotted-outness", Ellis is free to demonize the only woman as a "witch" who ruins men's lives through manipulation as the conclusion or cathartic point of the novel. In her perpetual state of hiding, she suddenly emerges at the finale with mere lip service paid to her as the reason Clay failed in love. To this extent, Ellis chooses to ignore the transgressive potential of deeply oppressive gendered social structures against women which he uses to "provoke the reader" (Mookerjee, 2013) to instead focus on sympathizing with the plight of the abusive "john". The violence of which is anything but shocking to the public in *Imperial Bedrooms*, failing to draw the reader into Molly Hoey's "rejection and assimilation" process due to the taboo's lost efficacy. This process is only effective through "intentionally frustrat(ing) readers ... by refusing to provide an objective meaning, ideology or structure." (ibid.). By pathologically portraying "woman" as fodder for abuse, or nothing, he asserts a definitive moral optic that is at once patriarchal and goes against Mookerjee's criterion of what constitutes transgressive.

Through the pathological abjection of women, he destroys obstacles that allow his perceived privileged identity to roam free to revel in the sexual violation and brutalization of the young providing a very disturbing moral optic and garnered

from a reading of the book in the relation of the use of form and content.

3.2. Woman as Death

What makes all three novels under study interesting to the overall thesis question: How does male sexualized violence construct the sign woman and how can she be radicalized? is the revelation of the usually ambivalent male subject as the newly objectified John aka the sex buyer. This change to the subject is the reason why woman has become abjected, shown through the disturbance she brings to the narrative world by her liminality which transpires to her shaping the semantic parameters of the sex-buyer/sex worker polarization beset by culture. Ellis proceeds in maiming the girl/sex worker expanding her desecration using the violence against women taboo to its extreme end in a vain attempt to progress transgression. In other words, Ellis objectifies sex through retaining girl within male on female sexualized violent constructs akin to the inward transgressions of heteronormativity as opposed liberating her. Ironically however, through Blair, the abject inexorably asserts itself. In other words, via Blair, transformation takes place and literally engulfs the narrative world through a heightened subjectivity of woman as abject which emerges as “extensions of familiar boundaries (and) are spectral” (Andjelkovic 2019). From her liminal position, Blair literally envelops the discourse, which is powerful. The framing woman provides magnifies the subjective male aka sex-buyer as an object *with attributes* -assimilated in the same way the girl as object exists in the narrative world’s signifiable economy. The altered male subject de-naturalize what “the privileged position of the paternal in our culture” (Silverman, 1983) through exposing its fragility. This arrives from the liminality woman provokes and is described as a “threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable” (Kristeva, 1982). Tolerable, because woman in *Imperial Bedrooms* disrupts the illusory nature of the sex-buyer who is encoded in relation to what’s known as the other to autonomize itself. It identifies itself as entitled but at the same token is weak. In other words, the sex-buyer-girl/sex-worker binary in the book has less to do with sexual difference grounded in the real but rather the gendered redistribution of meaning in the early twentieth century. The desire for meaning, makes him ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it... (although) what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded... (and) where meaning collapses (Kristeva, 1982). So, the blotted abjection that Blair upholds overlaps the territory of the once ambivalent male subject. Effectively, through his objectification as the sex-buyer, by virtue of an ability to define him, he is reduced into a collection of visible units in language.

Compared to previous concatenations of woman as object via the sex industry lens, like the now severed to-be-looked-at nineties page 3 tabloid culture of the UK, woman has been re-structured by the sheer force of the omni-visual sex industry that is more immersive than ever. The argument is that the sex industry

of today, through language's iconic properties of the image woman as object is represented in more concentrated ways that have engulfed what sex and woman mean. The new sex industry has re-created a relationship between the stereotypical male and female subject and object positions by magnifying the semiotic units of language in what constitutes them. The sex buyer, formally the male subject, is now by default delusional, by virtue of his self-perceived autonomous subjectivity. These ways of seeing are described "(as) pattern(ing) the socio-symbolic territory" (Kristeva, 1982) which can be linked to the effect from culture and the revolving relations between men and women that have arrived in newfound ways through technology. So, the narrow structure of the sex buyer identity by its rules and regulations have abjected woman. The heightening of mainstreamed targeted hyper-ageism felt by women is seen through the girl/sex-worker who is visible, and frequently inferred in the book as too old at the age of 23 through the character, Rain. This importance of age to the sex-buyer ideology demarks the parameters in terms of what discourses appear within the novel. However, the ability to be able to now name the sex-buyer ideology re-orders woman in newfound ways. This appears through Kristeva's splitting of the ego which materializes in phobia and self-loathing. However, in Blair's presence, the male speaking subject, Clay, recoils into a state of infantilism and aloofness through the usurping of his naturalized identity which translates into to the literary symbolization of *his* phobia and shows an inability to assimilate the subject into the narrative without a "splitting" of his identity. Through woman's acknowledgement, the repressive payer of sex as the unwitting object is revealed.

The inability for the post-millennial writers to achieve transgression could lie in societies ubiquitous wider dissemination of a highly visual graphic hetero-female sexuality as definable by the heteronormative pornographic lens. This process appears to render the author homologous with the male-centric hetero-sex industry imperative, by not being able to *see beyond* it in that the *medium is the message*. It is such that the medium itself has shaped and controlled "the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan, 1964) and to this: "It is the generation of models of a real without origin or reality: hyperreal" (Baudrillard, 1983) of which "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it." (Ibid.). If we apply this with woman's elaboration in the novel, these authors appear to lack the ability or want to triumph the oppressive construct by re-using heteronormativity and its ills as the go to transgression. Applied to IB, the objects that make up the novel world and remain untransgressed are on display through "the rhetorical casting of language" (Kristeva, 1982). To this, the procession of oedipalization is affected symbolically in language through the historical event of "the murder of the father... (which) constitutes the social code... and the symbolic exchange of women ...and exists at the advent of language" (Kristeva, 1982). The secondary status woman already embody through language renders the Cirque d'Soleil limitless sexuality as still limited. In other words, any notion of the limitless sexuality that pornography

propagates cannot exist in a vacuum when on an axis of heteropatriarchy. “The masculine gender has been ... incontestably rooted in the faculty of reason,” and “in recent years ... has come to be seen increasingly as anachronistic, intolerably volatile, and in crisis.” (Schoene, 2008). Ultimately, *American Psycho* is a work of resistance by attacking the center of patriarchy as opposed progressing it.

3.3. The Transgressive Window

The premise that informs the thesis is that male sexualized violence imports meaning to the sign woman through the sexbuyer ideology. “It should not be forgotten that traditionally the subject is without a sign for him, he is ambivalent and occurs only through discourse, that discourse requires a subject, and that subject itself is an effect of discourse” (Silverman, vii). The subject is then homologous to discourse, and the representations bestowed upon their objects that give meaning to such a discourse. This thesis recognizes the inseparability of discourse, signification, and subject. Newly recognized ways of seeing appear in these novels and are notable by virtue of appearing across the works within the topology of the transgressive frame. These new discourses reveal an ideology that is the result of analyzing three types of linguistic structures in *Imperial Bedrooms*: modality, rhetoric, and generic frame, to find their semiotic relationship to woman and the abject. These components are differentially analyzed in how they relate to woman. Incidentally, the discourses revealed might reflect the author’s personal viewpoint along with the unintentional revelation of wider discourse of the society he draws upon by virtue of existing within. To analyze the language, Van Dijk’s theory of ideology is adopted as a theoretical framework, using Fairclough’s dialectical-relational critical discourse approach within Mookerjee’s generic template of what constitutes literary transgression (2013). This template is made up of macro-tropes which characterize transgressive fiction as a genre. The tropes translate to the core functions of the transgressive literary apparatus and when applied with CDA make up the transgressive window into the novel’s cultural point of production.

The generic subcategories taken from the novel are Monologic Voice, Taboo, Transformation and Transgression as mentioned, and along with the research approach act as the transgressive window to new discourses alive in culture today. The pivotal “Transformation” trope and which precedes “Transgression”, make up the final of the four macro-phases under study. Transformation aka the death trope can only be achieved through a complete usurping of the narrative world set by the first two phases: Monologic Voice and Taboo. The depersonalization of these phases together creates a gradual operation whereby the reader is re-established through “I (,) expel (ing) myself; (I) spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion which I claim to establish myself” (Kristeva, 1982). The ability of the taboo process to engender this lay in the relationship of the perceived identity of the reader in accordance with “the Other” (ibid.) that is the perception of self in her relationship to the symbolic order of the times. Both

temporally and geographically, the phenomena of taboo and transgression can be considered omnipresent, that is always existent in all societies (Horlacher, 2010). This is because the literary elaboration of death or abject, is the point in these novels when the social exigencies of life are confronted by the animalistic-sel, revealing as already noted, incompatible. The abject is “the wellspring of sign for a non-object” (Kristeva, 1982) and infuses the narrative world with estrangement to the point where everything read now becomes separate.

What Mookerjee calls “public discourse” or the parodic element, aka the Monologic voice phase displays the arrangement of the subject, object and abject within the initial novel world. Furthermore, the taboo and transgression process that follows can only be made sense of within the context of the societal point of production and can be summed up in “the primers of my culture” (Kristeva, 1982). The primers are expressed in the “Other”, aka the imposed identities of subject and object positions that is the sex-buyer and sex worker. By implementing Kristeva’s abject, an ambiguous space becomes available within the textual layers that structure what woman has come to mean through new notions of sexuality that are leant of the culture the novel is produced within. The *transgressive window*, in its link to society via the taboo and transgression process, reveal “the space ...out of which signs and objects arise” (Kristeva, 1982). She describes the abject as opposed to the notion of “I”, akin to that of the object (Ibid.). Being opposite to “I” implies that I as a pronoun, and one that tallies with the subject in conventional sentence structure, which is in this novel is the sex buying male, is logically separate from the object and the abject. The difference is that the object, as in the stereotypical idea of woman as a sex object, draws the reader into a tapestry of meaning. So, meaning ascribed the object is semiotically differentiated by every other term in the lexicon it derives from according to the wider system that frames it leaving the usual subject as “without a sign (for him)” (Kristeva, 1982).

Due to the changes awarded the stereotypical male subject and female object, namely the latter’s status within the current Western context, the abject will naturally alter its reaches accordingly to changes of “representations and their affects” (Kristeva, 1982). In *Problems in General Linguistics* featured in Silverman (1983), Emile Benveniste’s “peculiar” pronoun I, “denominates no concept” (1971) aside from its position in an instance of discourse, in which IB is replaced as the central point of the sexbuyer lens. The renewed indexical status of I as sex buyer permeates all works under study. The speaking subject’s very rigid restrictions over woman through ideas based on male-centric demands of a constructed sexuality, derived of the new sex industry, the traditionally ambivalent male has become a definable object that cannot be construed as “unknowable”/ ambivalent, as before. The non-object status of I is therefore re-contextualized by the change in the abject’s position within the triangle of subject-object-abject. “If the abject is already a sign for a non-object... the symptom: a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien” (Kristeva, 1982)

can be used to describe the affects the sex-buyer ideology through the changes to the sublimation of language within these texts yet one which permeates them. Sublimation effectively means the ability to name which the abject cannot partake. The non-portrayal of woman, rendered liminal in this work, repositions her as non-dominatable whilst the john shares object status with the girl which poses the question: who makes up the space of the subject. It might not be too far a leap to suggest Woman does. This is recalibrated by trying to erase her through the continuous attempts of theft of her sexuality. Furthermore, there-apportionment of the abject in language, has changed the already highly altered being insofar that “the Other who precedes and possesses... causes me to be me” (Kristeva, 1982).

Woman’s maiming, through the brutalization of her younger self in this work are interchangeable with “taboo” sex, and the result of the objectification of sex and death, Bataille’s “two basic frames of existence” (1928). The sheer insistence of hate speech which the sex-buyer remit projects on its scaffolder, woman, is designed to “protect itself from the shameful, a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it” (Kristeva, 1982) yet has the opposite affect by objectifying the traditionally ambivalent male subject into the fragile john whose self-worth relies on monetary currency to obtain its “object” of desire. Woman is the literary articulation of death, unknowable, which is transgressive.

The severed nineties page 3 Sun tabloid culture of the UK, followed by the lad’s mag zeitgeist ala *Nuts* and *Zoo* (2004-2014) in its featuring of coquettish, young models, half-naked, has been obliterated its minor aspects of transgressiveness by the interactive re-booted language of sex-industry as always accessible film. The impactful imagistic sex industry of today, through its iconic or visual properties coupled with its transgressive content *doubly* propel the male-centric idea of woman’s sexuality into Western consensus to unprecedented levels and have engulfed what sex and woman mean whereby her sexuality is positioned as interchangeable with heteronormativity. Her sexuality as *something definable* is achieved through “self-subjectification” (Gill, 2008) of the mainstreamed female subject, or a sense of owning sex industry ways of seeing, aka “the sex-buyer” ideology, as her own sexuality. This definition consists of the normalization of tropes as (simulated and consensual but also actual) gang-rape, penis purge vomiting, choking/gagging etc., (See *Pornhub* stats for categories.). The tropes have progressively got more depraved-evident in the large spike in interest in audiences of Japanese forms of heteronormative “torture-porn”. Additionally, *woman’s sexual representation*, according to Ellis’ mode of what constitutes transgressive, *is now governed by a teen sex worker who operates at the harmful whims of the john, for payment which is proximate to hierarchy*. Furthermore, the splitting of woman, shown in the novel, is revealed as an ideologized denial of sexual agency to women. This new ideology across the texts under study both erase woman but discursively embed victims of sexualized abuse as holding agency and include a construct called enablers; those who accept and

encourage the adolescent and older male polarization as natural. This construct is revealed as arbitrary and subject to systemic changes as seen across millennia. This point is summed up in Kristeva's remark, "What we designate as 'feminine', far from being a primeval essence, will be seen as an Other' without a name which subjective experience confronts when it does not stop at the appearance of its identity" (1982). To transgress the notion of what "woman" means through the language of the Other... "(which) is appended to the triangulating function of the paternal prohibition" (ibid.) requires a "rolling back" of commonly used gendered ways of seeing that structure sexuality today before reconstruction can take place.

3.4. Monologic Voice

The following shows the first paragraph selected from IB within the Monologic Voice phase of the four parts of the novel, displaying the content and form structures that are analyzed for semiotic realizations of ideology pertaining the "sex-buyer". Monologic Voice sets up the initial subject matter set within a 2011 North American Westernized context of LA through the lens of Clay, the rogue narrator, and acts as an entry point into that timebound geo-culture of LA. The passage is analyzed in relation to their position within the segment and can be considered as setting up the novel world through a prevalent way of seeing in society within that time-bound context.

Pg.20. Imperial Bedrooms

The look is blonde and wholesome, midwestern, distinctly American, not what I'm usually into. She's obviously an actress because girls who look like this aren't out here for any other reason and she just gazes at me like this is all a dare. So, I make it one.

"Do you want to be in a movie?" I ask. The girl keeps smiling. "Why? Do you have a movie you want me in?"

Then the smile freezes and quickly fades as she glances behind me.

I turn around and squints at the woman heading towards us, backlit by the room she's leaving.

When I turn back around the girl's walking away, her silhouette enhanced by the glow of the pool, and from somewhere in the darkness there's the sound of a fountain splashing, and then the girl is replaced.

"Who was that?" Blair asks. "Merry Christmas."

"Why are you here?" "I was invited."

"No. You weren't."

"My friends brought me." "Friends? Congratulations."

"Merry Christmas" again is all I can offer. "Who was that girl you were talking to?"

I turn around and glance back into the darkness. "I don't know".

Imperial Bedrooms extrapolates the language of the "john", or buyer/user of girls and women's bodies which is fully realized in Western civilization through

the mainstreaming of the sex industry via technological advancements. In this phase, this language is set up through the parameters of modalities and literary device. Modalities occurring start with “distinctly” which draws on wider frames of certainty. He is certain she’s American from her cliched “All American” look. “Obviously” she is an actress, he says, again drawing the frame of certainty because girls “aren’t” here for “any other reason”, who look like her. The proposition reveals the superficiality of the John ideology and its entrenched, matter of fact construction of females. As Blair, the woman appears, the girl’s smile “quickly” disappears, says Ellis. This modality unpacks the discourse of *rivalry* inherent to the *splitting of woman* with her younger self by the patriarchy as its emphatically told through its omni-voice via Clay. Rhetoric device is used in repetition of the word “want” which is played with between the girl and the middle-aged man and reveals the polarization Ellis creates between the two. The girl is metaphorically mystified by becoming a “glowing silhouette by the pool” which almost elevates her to celestial status which is very much in contrast to Blair who is immediately abjected by her invisibility. Blair is described as “backlit by the room she is leaving, a metaphor for leaving the spot-light with the aging process. This is confirmed in Ellis’ use of the word “replaced” to describe her, emphasizing her “blotting” capability, her opaqueness within the narrative. He finishes with the derogatory passive aggressive phrase designed for Blair: “Merry Christmas, again is all I can offer”, which is a modality that draws on new frameworks of non-obligation towards women.

The splitting of the narrator foregrounded in the first chapter, and which precedes the above segment and unearths the writer and narrator as separate nihilistic entities; the writer, a construction of Ellis himself, is immediately unveiled on page 1, unlike Clay. This device is designed to explicitly emphasize “anonymity” which in turn invites the writer in and sets up the play of nihilism through Ellis’ preferred reading of Clay as a good guy who has been done wrong, yet primarily in this phase and in *Taboo*, soon reaches a sadistic status, the apex of which exists during Transformation. “The sense of a listening but an implicit presence places the emphasis on the language itself not the meaning” (Mookerjee, 2013). He describes this technique as an “important means for complicating any identification of the author in the text while allowing him to linger outside of it as an implied presence” (Ibid.). This enables a distinction between the constructed initial amorality of Clay, and the immorality of the author. Their eventual merging during Transformation invites objective research methods by reducing subjective scope between the writer and reader hence why objective research methods are appropriate here. Ellis positions the author as a character within the wider signification of *Less Than Zero, the movie*, of the same name based upon the book, and *Imperial Bedrooms*. He conducts this through the details, via Clay’s narration about the author, when he “assure(s)” Clay, “that the screams of children being tortured were faked, but was smiling as he said this and turned away” (Ibid.); and then further goes on to tell how the author failed to convey how afraid (Clay) was when, “(a)twelve-year-old girl had been gang-

raped” whilst they were both (him and the author) present in the same room. Lastly, Clay expresses how unsure he is/was of the author, “a blonde and isolated boy whom the girl (Clay) was dating (Blair) had half fallen in love with” (Ibid).

The re-assertion of discourse through the conflation of the sadist writer and narrator reflects the john’s objective to normalize imbalance, which is where he finds power. The endless emptiness exists as crushed by the finite order of the limited world in which the john exists through his sense of holding a limitless power. Themes of apathy, are enmeshed within the john vernacular which is thematized by the perpetual search for greater inspired transgressions, attempting to dispel the well-documented boredom cycle of the sex-buyer/porn consumer: See *BBC News*, “*My expectations of sex and body image were warped*” (2020). Desensitization, a result of the ever-increasing propensity for inward transgression, clarifies the re-centering of the sexual value toward the very young, inferring pedophilia as a utopia and hinted at by the torrid mention of being made to watch the “gangrape of a 12-year-old” child in the initial pages through what’s constructed as the “normal” narrator, not the evil author, yet who become one.

3.5. Taboo

At this point the reader is inscribed in the text. The language of the john is first established in the novel through the divide between the author and Clay and not only enables enough empathy with Clay to enter a vicarious relationship as the normalized implicit “sex-buyer” but homogenizes the discourse he represents, rendering him “unseen”. The credibility of Clay is in part a result of this contrast to the “demonic” author, a construction of Ellis, which insidiously allows the middle-class white male sex-buyer perspective to frame the events. “(TF) forces the reader to either engage in the text personally or begin a process of rejection and assimilation... (and) opens the way for the text to function as a place for consequence-free exploration and the enactment of taboos and their transgression” (Hoey, 2011).

Page 150-151. *Imperial Bedrooms.*

Amanda is in a hotel room nude and incoherent and being shot up by men wearing ski masks. She has a seizure, and the two enormous men hold her down while her body thrashes on the newspapers taped to the floor. And then tools are removed from what looks like a beer cooler. The men take turns urinating on her and they keep slapping her face to keep her awake. And then the seizures become more intense and during one of them an eyeball is dislodged, bulging from its socket, and then a semierect cock is pushed in and out of her slack mouth, and then its removed once blood starts running down her face and it's about this point that the drugs start wearing off and Amanda realizes what's going to happen to her and she stares at the camera lucidly for one long moment, her panicked expression becoming something else. And then the thing that makes me shut it off happens makes you realize this isn't just about Amanda. I can't help thinking that it's happening because of me.

The above features twenty-one-year-old, Amanda Flew, an actress. Clay tells what he's watching on the "net" through a flat, clinical narration which enables imagination range to picture events outside of a moral cultural stratum. This phase is defined by a "zero moral optic" (Mookerjee, 2013) which extends across the transgressive apparatus. Ellis writes through a stream of consciousness which allows him to insidiously impart extreme violation without being interrupted by morality through reflection on the extreme "punishment". Crossing this affords apathy by the continuous use of the conjunction, "and". This distancing also reflects impunity to the "men" and concretizes voicelessness to the girl victim, Amanda. The depersonalization of herself as having agency is enhanced in the proposition "an" in "an eyeball is dislodged", as opposed to the use of the pronoun "her". Conversely, this works when Clay uses the proposition "a" in "a semierect cock entered her slack mouth", as opposed "his (semierect...)", through distancing. Clay finishes the chapter's subsection off with a re-centering back onto himself, which underscores the fragility of the john and its narcissistic need for power, and control-features of the sex-buyer ideology, seen throughout all the texts under study. Additionally, her supposed friend and roommate, Rain, continues to pursue her acting dreams after having discovered what has happened to Amanda, whilst "consoling" herself with drink and drugs in the aftermath of her brutal rape and murder, "to get through", revealing unprecedented levels of desensitization between the former young friends. Desensitized girls who decry friendship for the sake of monetary aspiration, only accessible via sexual abuse from the john, creates in part what "woman" means in this text. She is divided by ideas of age and is split and set up against patriarchy.

The inward form of transgression, aka the "desecrated profanation of the world of objects" (Foucault, 1963), is on show through this phase. The language used in the above illustrates the "sex buyer", in terms of the aberrant limits the violence against girls' taboo taken too its limit. It's not too far a stretch of the imagination to position it at what lies beyond the antagonistic parameters of abuse porn; especially when consumed through a renewed ideological impunity to men in terms of entitlement to girl's bodies in the contemporary era through a veneer of unencumbered sexuality. This consensus is evident in the large spike in interest of audiences of Japanese forms of torture-porn whereby the pedophilic-underscored "lolicon", seen in Hentai, comprise the two top searches made by Americans in 2000 via *Pornhub* statistics.

According to this book, the john vernacular includes set features: Oversexualized teens, brutalized, self-subjectified (*willingly* objectified) girls who are victim to the financial and ideological constraints of phallogentric-economic capitalism, affirmed at the behest of older men, never positioned as enjoying time with boys of their own age. In fact, the only mention of a young actress' male peer in the book is presented as having a negative effect on her, an indication of the john's agenda of absolute control of girls, disallowing access from them to young men whilst demanding total access. Actual women, through Blair, are os-

tracized here because they upset the “fragile texture in a desire for meaning” (Kristeva, 1982) within which the neo-liberal version of the superego has re-entrenched its resurged female-targeted-ageist construct. By this point in the apparatus, the sex buyer has automatically asserted his status as credible and abjection frames events not through the taboo itself which has startlingly lost efficacy, but through the voidance of woman who disturbs the symbolic cultural order of imbalance both through her maternal protection and *her ability to fracture the john delusion* through her position of having life experience and of being his un-essentialized equal.

3.6. Transformation

The brutalized girl theme is magnified extensively during the pivotal transformation phase in *Imperial bedrooms*, which should reflect “a reassertion of physicality in the face of abstract systems” (Mookerjee, 2013). Immediately, it becomes clear that the “abstract systems” on display here are being confused with “animality” or erotic “carnality”. The blurring exists through Ellis’ interchangeability of patriarchal sex industry inspired extreme abuse, with raw carnality through the symbolization of death. This is enabled through the liberating of discourse, evident in *American Psycho*, through the re-homogenization of the narrative world through its estrangement to form. To this, *Imperial Bedrooms* remains within the literary parameters of the non-efficacious taboo of male sexualized violence against girls and women, a broad element of the sex-buyer ideology; its further emphasized by his retaliation, another feature of the ideology, from “not getting the girl”, Rain, permanently, and without her wanting to profit from her sexualized abusive encounter at his hands. This power-hungry reaction from Clay manifests in severe and elongated rape of a bought and paid-for teenage girl to the point of her becoming mentally ill from having her reproductive body destroyed. This violation is positioned by Ellis as transgressive and set within what’s supposed to be the radical departure point from the initial subject matter.

Page 166. *Imperial Bedrooms*.

“We dragged the girl quickly back inside the house and she was tied up and put in what I had told them to refer to as the kennel, which was her bedroom. ‘Say thank you,’ I told the girl when I bought her a plate of cupcakes laced with laxative and made the girl and boy eat them because it was their reward. Smearred with shit, I was pushing my fist into the girl and her lips were clinging tightly around my wrist and she seemed to be trying to make sense of me while I stared back at her flatly, my arm sticking out of her, my fist clenching and unclenching in her cunt, and then her mouth opened with shock and she started shrieking until the boy lowered his cock into her mouth, gagging her, and the sound of crickets kept playing over the scene.”

The explicit declarations of extreme sexual assault by the narrator who has morphed into the “evil author” are evident by now. “Discourse structures are not

manipulative; they only have such functions or effects in specific communicative situations” (Van Dijk, 2000). The transformative point at which this occurs emphasizes this. Ellis’ confusion of any identification with the author in the initiating phase through an indeterminacy, exposing the author as a sadist, unmappable to a sane sensibility, and whom the narrator doesn’t trust, during Transformation conversely reveals the unification of “the author” as the narrator. Transformation occurs when “transgressors disrupt the consistency of ‘voice’ in the usual sense and use explicit carnal imagery as a reminder of visceral reality (Mookerjee, 2013). However, Ellis synergizes the ‘carnal’ through ‘secularized defilement’” (Kristeva, 1982). The only transformation which occurs is the literal merging of Clay with the author which merely demonstrates the immersion of the author with sexually violent discourse of the wider context. This occurs against the backdrop of ageism against twenty-three-year-old, Rain, Clays “beloved” *object*. Ellis morbidly states: “It will be no fun to watch her age” (Ibid.), amongst other ageist slurs against her. Even the title “Imperial Bedrooms” corresponds with the imperialist ideology of the white, middle-class male and their immemorial agenda of control over women and girls within the Western political economic system based on heteronormativity. Both are constructed in their differing ways across these books, and are treated with contempt in proximation to wider sex industry discourse.

To understand how the novel fails itself, it is integral to recognize context, of which the text is directly connected, demonstrated above. The sex-buyer ideology’s attempted invisibility of any class analysis enables a naturalization of the access to the very young by a malevolent patriarchy within the security of male structured economic systems of 2023. *The Equality Act 2006* was required to promote “equality” which consider working class and existential women, not just false representations of girls prostituted by the system and as insulting icons of a woman’s sexuality. The semantic framework appears to support a renewed aggressive and a bored patriarchy by hiding woman through an increased gulf of alterity that supports the culturally created sexual whims of men through a dominant form of sex industry ways of seeing. This politics, entrenched as transgressive, positions women’s empowerment as found in a misled re-framing of porn and prostitution as a form of female sexual freedom. Statistics show that the sexualized brutalization of very young women is at the heart of the sex-buyer ideology, being at the top favored of choices. This is evidenced in “most searched for” individual porn actresses’ statistics who are very much teenage or not far off. And according to declarations from porn actresses on social media, the milf category (mummy’s I’d like to fuck) is “negatively” awarded to women of around age 27 in the sex industry, who are banefully ranked as “near past it” (*Twitter*, Anon.). This is characterized in *Imperial Bedrooms* through the omission of any girl over 23 in the core narrative. Woman is discursively rendered devalued to the patriarchy within this text by virtue of her omission by Ellis—instead using sex-buyer ideas of sexuality as opposed sexuality flush with animality. Whenever

Blair is present, Clay re-empowers himself by dismissing her, “re-dignifying” himself, in alignment with his *desperate and persistent grooming of the young*.

3.7. Catharsis

Showing the relation between discourse and ideology, a semiotic analysis of textual structures through Mookerjee’s “type two” transgressive communication frame are “submitted to the same set of categories” (Halliday, 2000). So, when I argue that Ellis’ use of modality renders his discourse as manipulative, I do so with the consideration of the institutionalized function of the work, and in its category as transgressive. Modalities construct discourse: the connection of obligation and permission with power is obvious and so are frequent judgments of (un)desirability.

To understand Ellis’ position as an author through the entry point of *Imperial Bedrooms* requires detecting an ideology which would render a work as infringing a definitive trope of what constitutes transgressive fiction, vis a vis Mookerjee’s, “zero moral optic” trope. IB rather, very much propounds a moral optic which is called “patriarchal authoritarianism”, evident from the total sum of novel’s component parts. The following excerpt illustrates one of the rare dialogues that includes Blair, the woman, with Clay as first-person narrator. The treatment is perpetually anchored by the construction of woman as including girl as her semantically inextricable aggregate. The novel is painted by a landscape of teenage girls and older men and Blair, the woman, is used to assist the sex-buyer from latent shame, through her desecration. In other words, women albeit abjected, is needed to create these worlds.

As mentioned, Monologic Voice is shown in the novel’s extrapolation of the john vernacular, but it is recognized clearly that the john ideology is not transgressed, rather inverted. The blame for the ills Clay experiences is shifted onto Blair in this phase, who is brought back into the plotline in the final pages to act as the ideological scapegoat re-embedding the status quo. To this, Emile Benveniste describes the concept of being “in front of the discourse” in the “the speaking subject’s re-subjectification” of its/himself. (Ibid.)

Pgs. 176-177. *Imperial Bedrooms*.

“Well, Blair starts haltingly, ‘If you didn’t do anything then why are you worried?’”

“They think I might have been part of ...a plan, ‘I say casually.’ I actually heard the word ‘conspiracy’ used.”

“What. can they prove it?” she asks softly.

“They have a tape of someone they think is incriminating... this... this drunken rant I made at Julian one night and...”

I stop. “Well, I was sleeping with his girlfriend so...” I look up at her and then away. “I think I know who’s involved and I think they’re going to get away with it... but no one knows where I was.”

“Don’t worry about that,” Blair says. “Why shouldn’t I worry?” I ask.

“Because I’ll tell them you were with me that night,” she says.

“I’ll tell them we spent the entire night together. Trent was away with the girls. I was alone.”

“Why would you do that?” This is a question you ask when you don’t know what to say. “Because…” she starts, then stops. “I guess I want something in return.”

She pauses. “From you.”

“Yeah?” I say, squinting up at her, the muffled sounds of traffic on Gower somewhere in the distance behind me.

She holds out a hand. I wait a beat before reaching out to take it but once I stand up, I let it go. She’s a witch, someone whispers in my ear. Who is she? I ask. She’s a witch, the voice says. Like all of them.

The above passage symbolizes the post-transformative phase but adds extra signification to the book’s realization of woman’s aspects. This occurs in the last few pages of the novel which frames Blair, although absent throughout the novel diegesis, as the person who has incriminated him all along. This accusation indicates that she is to blame for his pathological stalking and sexual abuse of the young girls’ “desperation to survive”, his failed relationships (as a sex-buyer), and the death of Julian, whom Clay instrumented. The compound terms “starts haltingly” are a contradiction of sorts, placing a sudden renewed agency with Blair as if she is acting or mischievous as opposed to passive, as only shown before. “Anything” shows she is being sardonic, through deliberate hyperbole, having control of the fear. “Might” puts Clay in the passive position, as if hinting at his part in the filmed torture and death of friend, Julian, the pimp, and former love of Blair whom Julian left for “the much younger”, “Rain”, Clay’s “beloved”. Blair was left by these men for an early twenty something girl. The subtext is that she wants Clay so much that she is willing to commit murder to be with him. Whilst retrieving agency to account for her demonic identity, Blair is simultaneously used as a scaffolder of Clay’s self-esteem, for all men’s self-esteem, who are in denial of him/their-selves as an arbitrary identity.

The use of the pronoun and verb “I stop” retrieves agency for Clay leading into the end part that completes the meta-message that blames Blair for setting him up “all along”. The use of “was” in “I was sleeping with his girlfriend” is a both indexical determiner and active preposition, reasserting patriarchal subjectivity, and re-normalizes wider socio-power narratives that men, whatever age, are entitled to women’s and girl’s bodies. “I look up at her” he says whilst emplacing Blair as the demoniacal woman suddenly in control of his downfall leading towards a potential arrest. “Softly” is onomatopoeic, bringing Blair’s “demoniacal” prowess into the frame with greater clarity. “Sleeping” used by Clay to denote his “sex” with Rain is a double entendre for relationship sex and not prostitution and blurs reality exposing Ellis’ identification with a repressed john ideology.

Transformation only occurs via the depiction of death yet here is shown

through more vivid portrayal of the John's objective via the "real" Clay. This devolution is subsumed by society's general will to maintain phallogocentric hegemony so fails to transgress the abstract system which Ellis demonstrates through woman's treatment. Clay's characterization as a white, middle-class male and its attendant well-documented privilege devolves into new lows using the re-augmented re-split of subject/object dynamic, the subject becoming visible as the rigid and parasitical user/payer of girl's bodies. Importantly, the message is concluded through the past perfect progressive tense which completes the violation by making it irredeemable, unsalvageable, and therefore psychologically grave to the victim, shutting off her voice. The framing of Blair produces greater objectification of himself as an entity devoid of self-knowing, through astounding self-manipulation, already revealed as a component of ideology.

Pathways out of this writing of the collective, also described as an "economy" by Bataille, are achievable through the consummation of the discourse of the heteronormative structure. This is done by raising the stakes to the highest pitch, (whereby) writing opens onto a general economy, exposing a communication which no longer informs, a communication attenuating a community whose existence and function bear little resemblance (Botting & Wilson, 1997).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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