Unreliable narration in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* and Jeff Lindsay's *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*

Opålitligt berättande i Bret Easton Ellis *American Psycho* och Jeff Lindsays *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the character Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis and his unreliability as a narrator and compares it to the unreliable narration of the character Dexter Morgan in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* by Jeff Lindsay. These characters' respective unreliability is analyzed from the perspective of six types of unreliability suggested by James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin: misreporting, misreading, misregarding, underreporting, underreading and underregarding. The result of the analysis is that while Patrick shows proof of being an unreliable narrator with respect to each one of the six types except underreporting and underregarding, Dexter can be connected to three of them (misreading, underreading and underregarding). Even if this might seem like an insignificant difference, the amount and the clarity in the examples of unreliability adhering to Patrick suggests that he is a much more unreliable narrator than Dexter is. This result indicates that characters can be at opposing ends of a spectrum of unreliability, on which Patrick according to this analysis is placed at the highly unreliable end of the spectrum and Dexter somewhere at the low end.

Keywords: unreliable narration, Patrick Bateman, Dexter Morgan

Sammanfattning på svenska

Denna uppsats fokuserar på karaktären Patrick Bateman i *American Psycho* skriven av Bret Easton Ellis, med tanke på denna karaktärs opålitlighet som berättare. Detta jämförs med karaktären Dexter Morgan från *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* skriven av Jeff Lindsay och denna karaktärs opålitlighet som berättare. Detta opålitliga berättande analyseras utifrån en modell som består av sex kategorier vilka James Phelan och Mary Patricia Martin har formulerat. Dessa kategorier kallas: "misreporting", "misreading", "misregarding", "underreporting", "underreading" och "underregarding". Resultatet av analysen visar på att Patricks berättande kan placeras in i fyra av dessa kategorier ("misreporting", "misreading", "misregarding" och "underreading"). Detta i jämförelse med Dexters berättande som kan placeras in i tre av dem ("misreading", "underreading" och "underregarding"). Även fast denna skillnad kan verka obetydlig är det ändå så att de exempel på opålitlighet som Patrick visar upp står att finna i fler och tydligare exempel än hos Dexter vilket innebär att Patrick kan ses som en mer opålitlig berättare än Dexter. Resultatet av analysen indikerar att olika karaktärers berättande kan återfinnas i olika ändar av ett opålitlighetsspektrum. På detta spektrum kan Patrick då placeras in som en mer opålitlig berättare än Dexter som hamnar i den mer pålitliga delen av spektrumet.

Nyckelord: opålitligt berättande, Patrick Bateman, Dexter Morgan

Introduction

Few characters in contemporary fiction have provoked more controversy than that of Patrick Bateman, the successful, Wall Street-yuppie, perfectionist, misogynist, serial killing, first-person narrator of Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho* (1991). Patrick is a character, who at first sight seems similar to that of yet another famous fictional serial killer in literature, namely Dexter Morgan in Jeff Lindsay's D*arkly Dreaming Dexter* (2004). Dexter Morgan and Patrick Bateman are both serial killers, but to readers they come through as very different characters. On the one hand, Patrick comes through as emotionless, extremely self-centered, and vain, while Dexter, on the other hand, comes through as warm, sensitive, and sympathetic, or even as Lotta Karvonen describes, as "a likeable protagonist" (36). This difference between the characters makes it interesting to compare Dexter and Patrick.

Many articles have been written about Patrick Bateman and one aspect that tends to be discussed is whether Patrick could count as being an unreliable narrator or not. When reading *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* I realized that if Patrick Bateman could be seen as an unreliable narrator, then one could also question Dexter Morgan's reliability as a narrator. None of the texts I have found on Dexter mentions this aspect and I therefore find an analysis and comparison of Dexter and Patrick with regard to their unreliability as narrators interesting. The aim of this essay is to understand Dexter's and Patrick's unreliable narration better, and determine where these two characters' unreliability as narrators differs and/or is similar to each other. The analysis is based on the six types of unreliability discussed by James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin. It is with the help of these types that I will seek an explanation of in what ways and to what extent Dexter Morgan and Patrick Bateman are unreliable as narrators.

Plot summary of *American Psycho* and *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*

Before starting to analyze the two characters Patrick Bateman and Dexter Morgan it might be in order to introduce them and their novels. Ellis's *American Psycho* is a novel set in New York at the end of the 1980s, narrated by the Wall Street businessman Patrick Bateman who describes his life among the wealthy, young, and successful people in New York. The reader is introduced to the jet-set life Patrick leads, and also gets a view of the darker corners of his mind, where he describes how he murders and has murdered a lot of people. His victims are mostly found in the lower social classes, but also include wealthy people like his own colleagues. The violence seems to escalate

during the course of the novel and in the mean-time Patrick tries to confess his crimes to those that are closest to him. His confessions are rarely given any reaction, which finally results in Patrick saying: "This confession has meant *nothing ...*" (Ellis 362).

Dexter Morgan, the first-person narrator of *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* is a blood spatter analyst working for the Miami Metropolitan Police during the beginning of the 21st century. Like Patrick, Dexter has a dark corner of his mind, which is referred to as the *Need* or the *Dark Passenger* in the novel (Lindsay 14). When Harry, his late stepfather and a former police officer, asks Dexter whether it is this *Need* that makes him kill, Dexter answers him that the *Need* rather "makes it seem like a good idea" (38), which leads one to believe that it is a passive force in Dexter's life. Being a serial killer at the same time as working for the police is risky business, and in order to not get caught by his own colleagues Dexter has rules from which he operates and these rules are together known as the *Code* (14). The basics to the Code were taught to him by Harry, who after finding out the truth about Dexter's homicidal instincts wanted to create a solution that made it possible for Dexter to continue his life without killing innocent people. Harry argued that: '" There are plenty of people who deserve it '" (41), a statement from which he based the Code. In contrast to Patrick, who kills people arbitrarily chosen by him, Dexter, in accordance with the Code, only chooses people that he is absolutely certain are killers and who he believes never will be brought to justice by the authorities. Another rule connected to the Code is to have a disguise in order to avert any suspicion of being a serial killer, and what better place could there be for Dexter to work at than the Miami Metropolitan Police were no one, not even his stepsister, who is also a police officer, have a clue to what Dexter really is.

Patrick and Dexter in different ways face problems connected to leading so called double-lives, where on the one hand Patrick wants to confess his crimes but no one listens to him and Dexter on the other hand wants to hide his murders behind a mask of normality. This difference suggests that both characters are interesting to analyze.

Theoretical discussion of unreliable narration

Relatively few articles have been written about Dexter Morgan and none I have found mention him as an unreliable narrator. Instead, many articles have been written about Patrick Bateman, where one of the debates among critical theorists is whether Patrick can be seen as an unreliable narrator or not. Bruno Zerweck states that: "although he is an 'unreliable person', there is hardly any reason for readers to naturalize him as an unreliable narrator" (Zerweck 157). This statement is something that Jennifer Phillips clearly disagrees with in her article "Unreliable narration in Bret Easton Ellis'

American Psycho: Interaction between narrative form and thematic content" in which she mentions several aspects of Bateman's narration that point toward him being not only an unreliable person, but also an unreliable narrator. One such aspect is when Bateman repeatedly reports on events that do not in fact occur, a notion that I agree with and which I also bring up later in this essay. One of the reasons she gives is: "Because of the 'namelessness' of his victims, there is very little proof that these attacks occur outside of Bateman's mind" (Phillips 64). Here, however, I would argue that the anonymity of the victims should be seen as a statement of Bateman's indifference to the social class of those who these bestial attacks are meant for, rather than to be an indication that the attacks do not exist.

Unreliable narration has been intensely discussed in the field of narratology ever since Wayne Booth in 1961 introduced the term "unreliable narrator" (Phelan and Martin 90) in his groundbreaking work *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* His often cited statement that "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not" (Booth 158-159), has been discussed and problematized by many literary theorists. The term implied author has been especially debated as Booth never gave a full definition of it (Phelan and Martin 90). This lack of a clear definition has been criticized by some theorists, for example Ansgar Nünning who claims that: "the implied author is neither a necessary nor a sufficient standard by which to determine a narrator's putative unreliability" (Nünning 36). The problem with the implied author is further illuminated by Schlomith Rimmon-Kenan who in her work *Narrative Fiction Contemporary Poetics* claims that Booth's implied author is "often far superior in intelligence and moral standards to the actual men and women who are real authors" (Rimmon-Kenan 87). If this is a correct description of the term it might be difficult for anyone to understand the implied author's agenda. Nünning even says that: "One might go much further than Rimmon-Kenan and suggest that the implied author's norms are impossible to establish and that the concept of the implied author is dispensable" (Nünning 34).

For the purposes of this essay, Nünning's argument is relevant not only because he criticizes the concept of the implied author, but also the associated notion of unreliable narration. Nünning continues: "Determining whether a narrator is unreliable is not just an innocent descriptive statement but a subjectively tinged value-judgment or projection governed by the normative presuppositions and moral convictions of the critic, which as a rule remain unacknowledged" (40). Based on this statement unreliability cannot be found exclusively through an objective analysis, that will give the same result whoever undertakes the analysis, which suggests that analyzing literature is a highly personal experience. A critic might, for example, not find that a character is demonstrating a homicidal behavior or tendencies towards schizophrenia affects its ability to reliably narrate the plot. This highly personal way of analyzing literature could result in too many

different interpretations of whether the characters are unreliable as narrators or not, and, therefore, it is less important with regard to the analytic part of this essay. Another literary theorist working in the field of narratology, Greta Olson, disagrees with Nünning. She describes the implied author as: "developed by Booth to circumvent problems of naively biographical readings of text in which, for instance, J. Alfred Prufrock's lack of agency was attributed to the same qualities in the writer who gave him form" (Olson 94). Therefore, I would argue that the implied author is relevant to this essay since one need this idea in order to find out whether a narrator is unreliable or not, and it should be seen as a valuable tool to help us objectively analyze literature.

The main part of Olson's article, however, is focused on the distinction between two groups of unreliable narrators, namely, fallible and untrustworthy narrators. Olson holds that the main difference between these two groups is found in the purpose of their unreliable reporting of events. Olson states, "I believe that readers regard the mistakes of fallible narrators as being *situationally motivated*. That is, external circumstances appear to cause the narrator's misperceptions rather than inherent characteristics" (Olson 102). On an imagined spectrum of unreliability an untrustworthy narrator might, therefore, be seen as more unreliable than a fallible narrator since it is not the character itself, but instead circumstances that make the narration unreliable. Olson agrees with Booth who she says: "contends that unreliable narrators are consistently unreliable: once they have revealed themselves to be unreliable, they do not suddenly become infallible or conform to values otherwise asserted in the work" (95). This suggests that it is important not to categorize a narrator as unreliable just because s/he shows unreliability a few times. Olson partly shares this opinion with James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin who say that: "a narrator can also be unreliable in more than one way at any one point in his narration" (Phelan and Martin 96). In contrast to Olson, however, Phelan and Martin seem to believe that just to group unreliable narrators as untrustworthy or fallible reporters of events is far too simplistic and argue that: "narrators exist along a wide spectrum from reliability to unreliability with some totally reliable on all axes, some totally unreliable on all, and some reliable on one or two axes and not on others" (Phelan and Martin 96).

Phelan and Martin offer the following definition of an unreliable narrator: "a homodiegetic narrator is 'unreliable' when he or she offers an account of some event, person, thought, thing, or other object in the narrative world that deviates from the account the implied author would offer" (94).[1] This definition is only a broadening of the previously mentioned definition given by Booth, but Phelan and Martin also give a suggestion as to how this deviation from the account of the implied author can be used in order to find unreliability among narrators:

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1   Homodiegetic narrators participate in the story they narrate, as opposed to heterodiegetic narrators which do not appear in the story they narrate (Rimmon-Kenan 94-96).

narrators may deviate from the implied author's views in their roles as *reporters*, as *evaluators*, and as *readers* or *interpreters*. [...] the metaphor of axes of unreliability helps to differentiate among these kinds: unreliable reporting occurs along the axis of facts/events; unreliable evaluating occurs along the axis of ethics/evaluation; and unreliable reading occurs along the axis of knowledge/perception. (94)

According to Phelan and Martin unreliability falls into six types of unreliability: misreporting, misreading, misregarding, underreporting, underreading and underregarding (95). In the following each type will be described and discussed and used to analyze the unreliability of Dexter's and Patrick's narration. As mentioned before, however, narrators do not have to be unreliable with regard to each type of unreliability and will therefore not be mentioned in every section of the analysis below.[2] I will begin the analytic section with Patrick Bateman and end it with Dexter Morgan.

Comparison of Patrick Bateman's and Dexter Morgan's narration

According to Phelan and Martin, "Misreporting involves unreliability at least on the axis of facts/events. We say 'at least' here because misreporting is typically a consequence of the narrator's lack of knowledge or mistaken values; it almost always occurs with misreading or misevaluating" (Phelan and Martin 95). This is probably the most common type among narrators[3], and wherever misreporting is found in combination with misreading or misevaluating the example will be mentioned in these two types instead.

Patrick Bateman, who in his narration rarely gives the reader any impression that he is less than desirable, reports that almost everyone he meets is flirting with him. It does not matter whether it is Cheryl who is working in the gym reception (Ellis 65), a random beautiful woman, a so-called "hardbody" (46), or even one of his colleagues, such as Luis Carruthers (281). Patrick's description of himself as a desirable man does not have to be false per se. What probably is false, though, is his reporting since any kind word from women and men is transformed into a sexual invitation. When meeting someone with a profession that encourages a pleasant approach, such as bartenders or, as mentioned before, receptionists, Bateman assumes they are flirting with him. A clear example of

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2   Cf. Martin and Phelan on unreliable narration as a spectrum rather than binary pair (96).

3   Cf. Olson's discussion on fallible and untrustworthy narrators.

Patrick misreporting the situation is when he describes his secretary and how her affection for him is shown: "Jean, who is in love with me and who I will probably end up marrying, sits at her desk and this morning, to get my attention as usual, is wearing something improbably expensive and completely inappropriate" (61). It is quite difficult for the reader to decide whether Jean' affection for Patrick is true or not. Jean is, after all, a secretary, a job which as mentioned before encourages her having a pleasant approach, where Patrick just assumes that her clothing is designed especially for his liking alone. In addition, there is nothing in the narrative other than Patrick's own thoughts that supports the idea that what Jean feels is love for Patrick.

There are more examples of misreporting in Patrick's narration, as for example when he is attending Evelyn's dinner party, and the discussion turns to contemporary world problems and what one can do to solve them. Patrick then gives his own solution to the problems:

> We have to provide food and shelter for the homeless and oppose racial discrimination and promote civil rights while also promoting equal rights for women […] We have to encourage a return to traditional moral values and curb graphic sex and violence on TV, in movies, in popular music, everywhere. Most importantly we have to promote general social concern and less materialism in young people. (Ellis 15)

Of course, Patrick's ideas are noble, but the problem is that he is not living according to any of them, and they seem almost fabricated in order to create an illusion of the perfect human being. One can wonder where the social concern is when Patrick later steps on the foot of a blind homeless man, an action that results in the man dropping his cup of change to the ground. Patrick does not even try to excuse his behavior or help the poor man but instead asks: "Did I do this on purpose? What do you think? Or did I do this accidentally?" (79). This utterance further increases the notion of Patrick's attitude towards people from a lower social class than himself. Another example of this negative attitude is when he is asking another homeless man outside Evelyn's house: "Do you take Am Ex?" (7). As this seems to be a rather unnecessary question to ask a person who has to beg for money in order to buy food, it is probably only meant to remind the man of his life situation. Neither of the two above mentioned situations are in line with Patrick's outspoken concern for homeless people. Furthermore, it seems irrelevant for Patrick to promote less materialism among young people when large sections of his narration are dedicated to describe his own wealth. A whole chapter is filled with descriptions of all of his luxurious possessions, such as his "black ebony Baldwin concert grand piano" (24). Clearly, Patrick's utterance regarding social concern and less materialism does not include his own behavior towards the lower classes or his own belongings which makes this an example of Patrick misreporting his own values. And, since he clearly lies

about his values there is also reason to be skeptical towards Patrick's whole narration as such.

Furthermore, a big part of Patrick's life seems to consist of watching movies, and I would argue that most of the events that he reports are something that he has seen on the movie screen. For example, when standing in the video store he says "'I like the part in *Body Double* where the woman … gets drilled by the … power driller in the movie … the best,'" (109). This becomes quite suspicious with regard to misreporting since Patrick later describes how he kills an escort girl with the same weapon (293). Patrick has his own explanation as to why his life seems to be chaotic: "This is my reality. Everything outside of this is like some movie I once saw" (332). He seems to be convinced that everything that happens in his life except murdering innocent people is a movie. Another example of this conviction is when he never gets any indication that the molested remains of the two escort girls he left in Owen's apartment have been found, and he simply refers to it as something that would happen "in some movie" (352). It is almost as if the thought of no one finding the corpses is surrealistic to him, and not the notion that he killed two girls in the same manner as a movie he once saw. In one way or another Patrick lives in a world created out of movies, but he also seems to have a fascination for serial killers. This fascination is noted by his friend Reeves: "'Bateman reads these biographies all the time: Ted Bundy and Son of Sam and *Fatal Vision* and Charles Manson. All of them'"(88). That none of Patrick's victims is reported to be found throughout the whole novel, in combination with his fascination for brutal movies and serial killers, suggests that Patrick's descriptions of all the hideous crimes he has committed are just fantasies. These fantasies are inspired by books, movies, and real-life serial-killers rather than actual events from his life. Patrick seems to confuse reality with fantasy which suggests that he is misreporting the situations and therefore provides the reader with an unreliable narration of the event.

Throughout the novel Patrick gives what might seem as a structured account of his life, where the reader both is introduced to his morning routine (23-29), as well as his exercise routine (65-67). These events make sense and there is nothing in Patrick's narration that suggests that they do not occur. There are, however, some sections where Patrick's narration simply does not make any sense at all. Two examples of this are found when he describes how a park bench had followed him for six blocks and spoken to him (380), or how Bigfoot had attended his favorite talk show *The Patty Winters Show*, where Patrick "found him surprisingly articulate and charming" (366). As park benches are not known to follow people nor to have communicative skills, and as the mythological creature Bigfoot has never taken part in any talk show, these two events can with all certainty be said to never have occurred and are therefore two examples of Patrick misreporting.

Whereas misreporting involves the narrator skewing the facts "Misreading involves unreliability at least on the axis of knowledge/perception" (Phelan and Martin 95). That is, when a narrator insists

on something being true no matter how much suggests otherwise, s/he is misreading.[4]

Throughout the novel, Patrick suggests to the reader that he is a serial killer and that he is trying to confess the crimes he has committed. In many situations, however, it is quite difficult for the reader to decide whether he has killed anyone. Patrick's supposed victims are, for example, rarely mentioned more than one time in the novel, and when a victim is mentioned it is often only by Patrick himself and not by any other of the characters. One exception, though, is found in Patrick's narration regarding his colleague, Paul Owen. Owen and Patrick meet on several occasions throughout the novel since they are working for competing firms. Patrick indicates that he is very interested in Owen, and especially the mysterious so-called Fisher account (Ellis 207) that is handled by Owen, which also seems to be a great source of jealousy for Patrick. Patrick finally acts on his jealousy and kills Owen with an ax (208). Thereafter, Patrick moves the body to a bath tub in an apartment (210). After this event, Patrick is told by someone that Paul Owen has been seen alive in London (310), but Patrick does not accept this to be the truth and he instead calls his lawyer Harold Carnes to confess the murder of Owen (338). Later when Patrick confronts Carnes he is told that this confession cannot be true since Carnes has had dinner twice with Owen in London after Patrick called him to confess. To this Patrick reacts in the following manner: "After we stare at each other for what seems like a minute, I finally have the nerve to say something back to him but my voice lacks any authority and I'm not sure if I believe myself when I tell him, simply, 'No, you...didn't,'"(373). Even when he is presented with this fact by Carnes, who has no reason to lie, Patrick still insists on his own explanation being the correct one and is obviously misreading the situation.

Another example of misreading that involves the supposedly dead Paul Owen is the evening when Patrick brings two escort girls up to Owen's apartment, and kills them with various power tools. Before leaving the two corpses there, he also writes: "I AM BACK" (294), with their blood on the living room wall (294). When Patrick, six months later, has not seen any reports of two murdered escort girls found in an apartment or heard anything about any molested remains in Paul Owen's apartment, he decides to return to the site of the crime. But when Patrick arrives at the place, confusion arises: "The building looks different to me […] I still have the keys I stole from Owen the night I killed him and I take them out, now, to open the lobby door but they don't work, won't fit properly. Instead, a uniformed doorman who wasn't here six months ago opens it for me" (353). While inside the building, Patrick learns that there is a real estate agent in the apartment, Mrs. Wolfe. This confuses Patrick, and when he walks into the apartment, it looks different than he remembers it, and Patrick's confusion increases when Mrs. Wolfe tells him that Paul Owen does not

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4   Cf. Olson's discussion on fallible narrators (102).

live in said apartment (355). Even with all these facts given by various people suggesting that he killed neither the two escort girls nor Paul Owen, Patrick is still convinced of his own guilt and consequently misreads the situation.

The third form of unreliable narration brought up by Phelan and Martin, misregarding, "involves unreliability at least on the axis of ethics/evaluation" (Phelan and Martin, 95). On several occasions throughout the novel Patrick is called other names than Patrick Bateman by the other characters. They call him names such as Simpson (Ellis 136), McCloy (175), or Marcus Halberstam (137). Even if Patrick is probably aware that it is wrong to use a fake name in order to get benefits, he seems to have no problem with it. One example is when Patrick and his date, Patricia, are waiting in line outside a night club called *Tunnel*: "one of the three doormen who stand behind the ropes lets us in, another one patting me on the back saying, 'How are you, Mr. McCullough?' I nod, opening the door for Patricia, and before following her in say, 'Fine, uh, Jim,' and I shake his hand" (76). Here, Patrick is using another person's confusion regarding his name to make it easier for himself to get into a club. In another situation, he uses the fact that Paul Owen believes his name is Marcus Halberstam:

> 'Hi. Pat Bateman,' I say, holding out my hand.
> 'Yeah? Hi. Donald Trump. My wife Ivana's in the back,' he says sarcastically, taking it.
> 'Hey, watch it,' I warn. 'Listen, Mr. Owens says that we can take his car. I'm … oh damn. I mean I'm Marcus.'
> 'You just said your name was Pat.'
> 'No I was wrong,' I say sternly, staring directly at him. 'I was wrong about my name being Pat. My name is Marcus. Marcus Halberstam.' (Ellis 182)

Patrick clearly tries to take advantage of him being mistaken for someone else that Owen is acquainted with, here in order to get a free ride with Owen's private driver. I would argue that Patrick is well aware that if he puts up the charade with Owen, that his name is Marcus Halberstam knowing that he will benefit from it in various ways. Something that supports this argument are his actions before a U2-concert:"Earlier, when I found out that Paul Owen was coming, I tried to call Cecilia Wagner, Marcus Halberstam's girlfriend, since Paul Owen seems fairly sure that *I'm* Marcus" (137).

One recurring incident in the story is when Patrick finds himself in situations where he needs to explain his own whereabouts. In order to avoid the real answer, he constantly says that he needs to return his rented videotapes. This happens when his girlfriend Evelyn wants to know where he spent the evening (211), and when Courtney is wondering why he is leaving a party without her

(122). In both of these situations, Patrick is actually reporting to the reader that he does other things, such as killing Paul Owen (208-209), or stabbing a homeless man in the eye with a knife (126). It is, however, problematic to regard this notion as misregarding since it is probable that Patrick is not in fact a killer. There is, however, nothing in his narration that indicates he returns the videotapes on these occasions, or does anything else for that matter, leading one to believe that the whole truth is not revealed.

In addition to the types of unreliability discussed above, Phelan and Martin, as mentioned previously identify three types of unreliability that they call, underreporting, underreading, underregarding, which "occur at least on the axes of event/fact, understanding/perception, and ethics/evaluation respectively" (Phelan and Martin 95). Underreporting is "when the narrator tells us less than s/he knows" (95), underregarding "occurs when a narrator's ethical judgment is moving along the right track but simply does not go far enough" (96), while underreading, finally, "occurs when the narrator's lack of knowledge, perceptiveness or sophistication yields an insufficient interpretation of an event, character or situation" (96). I have found no instance of underreporting in either of the novels considered in this essay. Nor does underregarding, as far as I have seen, occur in *American Psycho*. Underreading, however, is an important feature of Bateman's narration. Every time Patrick utters something that deviates from what the implied author would say is ethical behavior he could be said to be underreading. In general, this occurs in situations where he confesses a murder or threatens another character and the other character does not respond to the threat. There are, however, some exceptions where this occurs and underreading should not be ascribed to Patrick. That is when it is obvious that a problematic setting such as a noisy background can make it difficult for a character to hear Patrick's threats.[5] One example of this is a situation at the night club *Tunnel* where Patrick is trying to flirt with the bartender. When he gets no response, he is: "staring at her, quite clearly but muffled by 'Pump Up the Volume' and the crowd" (Ellis 57), saying to her: "You are a fucking ugly bitch I want to stab to death and play around with your blood" (57). Obviously, this is a threat that might not be recognized by a victim which makes it difficult to say that Patrick is underreading the situation. Another explanation of the lack of reactions to Patrick's confessions may be found. It might also be that the other characters hear Patrick's confessions, but are, according to Patrick's narration, not reacting to them in a way one would expect them to do. Either way, Patrick is still underreading since his lack of perception results in him not interpreting their reactions well enough.

When Patrick is finally recognized as the killer he claims to be it is by an anonymous cab-driver: "'You kill Solly', he says, definitely recognizing me from somewhere" (377). Since Patrick is

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5   Cf. Olson on fallible narrators' unreliability being seen as situationally motivated (102).

alone in a taxi cab with the unknown character who is accusing him for murder, this accusation does not affect the rest of the plot as much as if it had been made by one of the more central characters. That it is a, for Patrick, unknown person who recognizes him as a killer increases the connection between Patrick's narration and underreading.

An example of Patrick's confusion regarding fantasy versus real-life is to be found towards the end of the novel, where Patrick narrates a manhunt performed by the police, including a SWAT-team that apparently are searching for Patrick to arrest him for all the hideous crimes he has committed. During this manhunt Patrick kills a watchman and a janitor on the ground floor of his office-building before he realizes that it is not his office-building after all. Instead he enters the adjacent building where his office really is in order to call his lawyer Harold Carnes to confess every crime he has ever committed (338). What makes this section doubtable, apart from Patrick not knowing his office's location, is that a spectacular event such as a manhunt involving several police officers and a SWAT-team is not followed up with anything. Nothing in the concluding chapters of the novel reveals that two dead bodies have been found in the building next to Patrick's office, or that Patrick is found and prosecuted for his crimes or not. Since one would assume that a large police-operation should result in more than silence it is close at hand to assume that Patrick's imagination created this scenario. A peculiar thing that occurs during this manhunt is that the narration shifts from being a first-person to a third-person perspective, and then switches back and forth between these for a while. It is almost as if someone is commenting on a movie, wherefore I believe that an explanation to this situation can be found in Patrick's obsession of violent movies. Considering this obsession, I would argue that what actually is happening is that Patrick sits in front of his television set, watching a movie and tries to convince the reader that he is the hunted man in the movie. As Patrick seems to have a problem separating reality from fiction one can assume that he interprets this situation wrongly due to a lack of perception.

Another aspect to take into account is Patrick's description of himself. Throughout the novel, he suggests he is a self-confident, rich, smart, handsome, lunatic, sex-bomb. This description clearly contrasts with how he is described by other characters. Thus Evelyn describes Patrick as "the boy next door" (17), and Harold Carnes describes him as "a bloody ass-kisser" (372). There is, however, one situation in which Patrick is given a description close to the one he gives about himself and that is when Evelyn tells him that he is a lunatic (320). Clearly, they are just using two different meanings of the word lunatic. Evelyn, on the one hand, seems to use the word lunatic as a description of Patrick's obsession with other peoples' choice of clothing, while Patrick, on the other hand, implies that he is an actual lunatic. These examples suggest that Patrick is not the person he describes himself to be, which makes his narration a subject of underreading here.

As we have seen above, unreliable narration is a prominent feature of *American Psycho*.

While it is much less prominent in *Dexter* it occurs there as well. Misreading, for instance, occurs in Dexter's narration regarding his constant description of his own inhumanity or as he says in the beginning of the novel: "Feeling. Me, feeling. What a concept" (Lindsay 33). The idea that Dexter has no feelings is repeated throughout the novel, but it seems more of a fantasized notion that he is desperately holding on to than an actual fact, especially when he utters: "Killing makes me feel good" (13). Furthermore, a person without human feelings simply cannot declare that he feels "human anxiety, desperation, actual emotional distress" (82), without being accused of misreading.

There is also an example of underregarding to be found in Dexter's narration. His ethics is, at a first sight, fabricated in the same manner as Patrick's, but while Patrick does not live according to his outspoken high moral standards, Dexter has the Code that he has to live according to. Dexter only follows this set of rules in order not to get caught, which makes the Code a defense mechanism rather than Dexter's own moral conviction. Therefore, I argue that if this defense mechanism did not exist, Dexter would kill innocent people as well. An example that supports my argument is found towards the end of the novel when Dexter's brother Brian asks Dexter to kill Deborah which is a request that Dexter nearly goes through with. But when he is about to put the knife into Deborah's heart he hears Harry's voice inside his own head, telling him "'*Choose what ... or WHO ... you kill,'* […] *'There are plenty of people who deserve it'*" (271). This voice clearly reminds him of the rules he is supposed to live according to as he puts his knife away instead of killing his stepsister (272). I find that this section indicates how closely bound Dexter is to the Code and that it is the Code's existence rather than any moral convictions that prevents Dexter from killing people in the same arbitrary way as Patrick does.

Finally, in comparison to Patrick, there are few things in Dexter's narration that suggests that he is not the serial killer he describes himself to be. For example, one of his victims, a pederast named Jamie Jaworski (143), is found on the construction site where Dexter left him and the murder is later mentioned by both Deborah and the televised Channel 7 News (164). However, Dexter's narration can when taking the re-occurring switching between the first and third-person perspective into account, be a subject to underreading. When saying things like: "the Dark Passenger was driving from the backseat now and how I felt was not terribly important anymore because *he* felt strong and cold and eager and ready" (130), he leaves it completely to the reader to decide whether it is he himself or the Dark Passenger, who is in charge on the specific occasion. Therefore, this quotation makes it difficult to decide whether Dexter is a serial killer or just a passive spectator. His perception of who is in charge is vague in certain situations, wherefore it is difficult for a reader to fully understand the character Dexter.

Conclusion

The six types of unreliability suggested by James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin: misreporting, misreading, misregarding, underreeporting, underreading, and underregarding, have been used to analyze Dexter Morgan's and Patrick Bateman's respective narration. As I have argued, Patrick and Dexter are both unreliable as narrators, yet of different kinds. Whereas Patrick exhibits every type of unreliability except underreporting and underregarding, Dexter exhibits three of them: misreading, underreading and underregarding. I am well aware of the possibility that I in this analysis have missed some aspects where both Patrick and Dexter can be proven to be unreliable as narrators; however, the point of Patrick being a more complex and unreliable narrator than Dexter has been made clear. Patrick's unreliability with regard to four of these types occurs many more times than the unreliability that has been found in Dexter's narration. This suggests that while both characters are unreliable as narrators there is a difference as to what extent they are unreliable. Therefore, this result is in line with the previously mentioned statement by Phelan and Martin that unreliable narrators may exist in a wide spectrum, where I in this essay have shown that Patrick belongs to the most unreliable end of the spectrum of unreliability, while Dexter belongs to the less unreliable end. Even more important though is that characters which at a first glance have very similar characteristic behaviors, such as serial killing and lying, can be placed very differently when it comes to their respective position on the spectrum of unreliability.

This difference in terms of unreliability might also to some degree clarify the way the texts have been received, Roger Cohen once wrote in an interview with Ellis for *The New York Times* that *American Psycho* "sparked the biggest literary brouhaha since Salman Rushdie's 'Satanic Verses'" (Cohen). In support of this statement Cohen mentions how Ellis had been accused of being no better than his fictional character since he could write such a gross story as *American Psycho*. Especially the detailed representation of violent dismemberment of women seemed to be something that created an outcry from female organizations such as *The Los Angeles Chapter of the National Organization for Women* which even "called for a boycott of 'American Psycho'"(Cohen). In comparison to these reactions to Ellis' serial killer, the reactions to Lindsay's serial killer was calm. However, this lack of reactions does not have to be an effect of Dexter being a less violent killer than Patrick. Janet Maslin writes in her review of *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* for the *New York Times* that "We have reached the point where this qualifies as mainstream material. Crime scenes, forensic data and ritual dismemberment are nothing special in the realm of contemporary crime fiction"

(Maslin). As the violence in fiction has become more visual and explicit it might have had the effect of numbing the audience to it. This numbness, in turn, could result in readers not reacting as strongly to a fictional serial-killer in the beginning of the 21th century as they evidently did more than a decade earlier when *American Psycho* was published. It is possible that the outcry generated by *American Psycho* was a result of the critics not noticing Patrick Bateman's unreliability as a narrator and therefore took his bestial actions at face value. When comparing this to how the publication of *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* went by relatively unnoticed it might suggest that the critics in this case had noticed Dexter's unreliability as a narrator. Therefore, the extent to which a narrator is perceived as unreliable might be an explanation as to why the two novels were received so differently by critics when published.

To sum up, as shown in this essay unreliable narration can be an important aspect on how we understand narrators and their respective narration. I have shown how one can use the six types of unreliability along an imagined spectrum of unreliability, and also how this makes it possible for the reader not only to decide whether a narrator is unreliable or not but also to understand in what ways and to what extent a narrator could be seen as unreliable.

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