

# The wasp factory and american psycho protagonist comparison

[Literature](#)



" The authors of 'American Psycho' and 'The Wasp Factory' present their protagonists Patrick Bateman and Frank Cauldhame to have very similar personalities. " How far do you agree? ' American Psycho' and ' The Wasp Factory' are two controversial dark novels in which the protagonist gets away with murder. They were published only seven years apart, ' The Wasp Factory' being the first. ' The Wasp Factory' was Iain Banks first published novel, and was released into the conservative United Kingdom in 1984, which would have coolly accepted it.

This era of the United Kingdom did not approve of horror, especially when the protagonist remained uncaught. However, the book gained a great deal of attention and publicity via its controversy, and has maintained popularity throughout the years. ' American Psycho' by Bret Easton Ellis was originally published in 1991. At this time there was great controversy over its extent of gore and pornographic scenes, so much so that Ellis received numerous death threats and hate mail after its publication.

Both protagonists narrate their author's novel and each appears to mirror their author himself. However, the protagonists clash with each other when it comes to their settings, needs and reasons for behaviour. This demonstrates how the personalities of both Patrick Bateman and Frank Claudhame are presented differently by their authors. On the other hand, there are ways in which Bateman and Frank are presented to have similar personalities. For instance, they are both obsessive, misogynistic, have the desire to kill and have an abnormal mind set.

These factors suggest a strong similarity between Patrick Bateman from 'American Psycho' and Frank from 'The Wasp Factory', even though their upbringing and personal characteristics more than often differ. Due to this, the true extent of similarity between their personalities is hard to distinguish. Through Bateman's narration in 'American Psycho' the reader learns of his career on Wall Street and everyday life in great detail. For example, when describing to the reader his morning routine, the yuppie states how he uses "a deep pore cleanser lotion [...] a water activated gel cleanser, then a honey almond body scrub".

This shows the true extent of unnecessary detail that he will go into. As well as this, from the very start of the novel the reader is introduced to this rich and perfected lifestyle in New York of this "self-absorbed" character who thinks of himself to always "look great", be superior to everyone else and constantly try to maintain his hierarchy within society. Ellis starts the novel with Bateman and his friends at a posh dinner party; this immediately demonstrates his wealthy lifestyle that Ellis is trying to portray.

As well as this, Bateman showing off his "platinum American Express Card" demonstrates his feeling of superiority. This provides the reader with a strong rather negative impression of Bateman as a rich, selfish, predatory man living in New York. This lifestyle can relate to that of Ellis himself, a man who isn't affected by the recent recession, in his late twenties and living in the city that never sleeps. As well as this, like Ellis, Bateman's parents are divorced. Validating this, Ellis has even admitted in an interview that "Patrick Bateman was about me".

In contrast to Bateman's lifestyle is Frank's. Frank is half-educated and lives in an isolated unnamed island off the Scottish coast. Frank is only sixteen, unemployed and greatly controlled by his father. This can be said to relate to the life of Iain Banks, who lived in a small village on the Scottish coast and moved around due to his father's work. As well as this, Banks was sixteen when he completed his first book, indicating why he might have chosen this age for Frank. He also spends most of his time with the wildlife torturing, killing, collecting and "sacrificing" animals.

In addition to this Frank entertains himself with his imagination and talks to his wasp factory. When Frank plays games such as building the dams and chooses which of the imaginary people live or die. Here the reader sees his childish and dark side as well as how there is little for him to actually do on the island. This also relates to Banks as he must have been very imaginative at Frank's age as he was writing. In relation to this, making him seem incapable of his own choices, Angus has a huge amount of control over Frank.

For example he home-schooled him, limiting his contact with society; he constantly tests him on the measurements of the furniture in their house; and uses the story of their dog, Old Saul, to cover up Frank's real identity. This shows the great contrast between Bateman's busy city life and of Frank's in the rural; as well as the contrast of their author's lives. However, the protagonists Frank and Patrick do have things in common, such as obsessions and their love of control. Both Patrick and Frank have obsessions which are seen throughout through the novels. Ellis uses Patrick Bateman to demonstrate the obsessions which one might have.

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Most of Bateman's obsessions are very artificial, such as his obsessions over designer brands and technology. Patrick's obsession to keep up to date with the latest technology, such as VCR, CD's and Walkman's, reflects the lifestyle of many American's living 1980s-1990s. This demonstrates Ellis using Patrick's obsessions to connect with the readers of his novel. Patrick also obsesses over "taking care of [himself]"; which can be shown via his "balanced diet and rigorous exercise routine" and his detailed daily movements which link to his obsession of detail and routine.

His comment stating how he only uses "an after shave lotion with little or no alcohol, because alcohol dries your face out and makes you look older", further validates his obsession over appearance and health. Ellis places the information of Patrick's obsessions from the very start of the novel to increase their impact upon the reader and to truly reveal their importance to Patrick. Throughout the novel, Ellis also portrays Bateman's true love and need for control. The reader sees this many times, for instance the control he can have over people's lives. He is always control of a life.

Even when he "can't control [himself]", (which often occurs when committing murder), he is still controlling the life of his victim. This idea of control is used by Ellis to demonstrate the power Bateman feels, and needs to feel, he has. Similarly to Patrick, Frank's obsessions are frequently mentioned throughout 'The Wasp Factory'; however some of Frank's obsessions are different to Patrick's. Frank appears to have an obsession with animals and torture. Throughout the book we see how Frank is fascinated by animals and collects their remains suggesting that Frank is obsessed with animals.

In addition to this, Frank is shown to be obsessed with killing and torturing. For instance, within the novel he states how he once tied wasps to the "striking-surface of each of the copper-coloured bells" on his alarm clock "where the little hammer would hit them" when the alarm went off, and that he always woke up before his alarm went off, "so [he] got to watch." This shows Frank's dark mind consisting of thoughts about death, torture and the need for control over others, like Bateman.

This shows the reader how even young minds can think this sadistically. Similarly to this, the reader learns of Frank's need for control when he is placing signs around their "private property" to warn off "intruders". This demonstrates a way in which Frank feels it's essential to control people and his father's property. Frank's overly meticulous attention to detail also connects with Patrick's obsessions. Like Bateman this can be seen in the description of his grooming routine which, like Patrick, is the same every time.

These obsessions show a similarity between Patrick and Frank's personalities, demonstrating how Ellis and Banks present their protagonists in a similar manner even though they have different lifestyles. In conjunction to this, both Ellis and Banks show their protagonist's to have misogynistic attitudes; further presenting them to have similar personalities with one another. Frank states how his "greatest enemies are Women and the sea" and that Women "are weak and stupid and live in the shadow of men and are nothing compared to them", expressing Frank's misogynist view towards women.

Showing Bateman's views on women are his comments such as " you're a fucking ugly bitch" and " you piece of bitch trash". These comments are used by Ellis to portray Bateman to have an aggressive misogynistic view. This shows a way in which the authors of 'American Psycho' and 'The Wasp Factory' present their protagonists to have similar personality traits as they are both sexist and have anger towards women. However, saying this both Bateman and Frank show misogynistic behaviour for different reasons. Frank's hatred towards women has stemmed from his father who independently brought Frank and his brothers up.

Angus dislikes women so much so that he changes Frank's gender from female to male and leads him to state how he hates his mother " her name, the idea of her". In contrast to this, Bateman's misogynistic behaviour is based more on the idea of dominance, lust and control. This shows a way in which Ellis and Banks portray their protagonist's to have contrasting personalities with each other, disagreeing with the statement. Although Bateman and Frank have contrasting lifestyles; a ten year age gap; different obsessions and versions of hate towards women; they both have one pastime in common: killing.

Their murderous ways and attitudes towards it present Frank and Patrick to have mental disabilities like that of a sociopath and psychopath. For instance, Bateman and Frank both display symptoms of antisocial personality disorder, (which is a factor of both psychopathic and sociopathic behaviour). As well as this, they both display a high predisposition to violence, maybe Patrick more erratically, and a tendency to act impulsively

when it comes to crime, which a psychopath can display. In addition to this, both protagonists find it hard to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

This, and his psychopathic ways, can be shown when Frank states how he “must be lots of different people inside [his] brain”. Banks uses Frank's psychopathic and sociopathic behaviour to show the importance of parenting, stability and connections within society that a child needs to be able to function adequately. Patrick's confusion with reality is also shown to the reader. For instance, as said by Andrew Jacobsen, (a literacy critic), “the supposed ‘real’ world around him becomes as one with his insane imagination world.”

As well as this the mystery of the bodies at the end of the novel can be said to demonstrate Bateman's misperception of reality. Due to this, Ellis and Banks can be seen to portray their protagonist's to have similar personalities. This is because they are presented to be mentally ill and confused with reality. In connection to this, both protagonists show a lack of empathy towards their victims, and are able to commit a crime and act as though it's the norm and not really a crime at all. For example in 'The Wasp Factory' Frank states how he killed Esmerelda because she was “simply the easiest and most obvious target”.

This simple view and minimal motive for murder displays Frank's lack of empathy, and expresses his absence of perception that murder is abnormal or morally wrong. Iain Banks presents Frank in this way to illustrate how cold, cruel and absent-minded humans can be, even the young. In relation to this, Bateman sleeping with and killing girls whilst in a relationship with

Evelyn as well as the homeless and young shows his lack of moral rights and <https://assignbuster.com/the-wasp-factory-and-american-psycho-protagonist-comparison/>

care towards others. Furthermore, Patrick crimes are opportunistic with little or no motive, normally due to urges, lust or as a means of superiority.

Bateman commits these crimes without hesitation, suggesting that to him it is just the norm. Also demonstrating Patrick's dark personality, lack of empathy and morals he jokingly says how he is "into, uh, well, murders and executions, mostly". This comment and others similar to it demonstrate to the reader Patrick's sinister view on his murders; thus, they are used by Ellis to cause the reader to despise Patrick yet be slightly amused by his satirical sense of humour. These similarities suggest that the personalities of the protagonist's from 'American Psycho' and 'The Wasp Factory' are presented in the same way.

To conclude, I believe that the authors of 'American Psycho' and 'The Wasp Factory' present their protagonists to have personalities which are similar with each other as well as dissimilar. Aspects such as their lifestyles; having different obsessions; and reasons for being misogynistic present a complete contrast between Patrick's and Frank's life, and their personalities. This is because their lifestyles can lead them to desiring different effects. This links to obsessions, as for example, Frank obsesses over animals but Patrick doesn't, as there are a lot less in the city.

Also, Bateman, who unlike Frank has frequent contact with people, obsesses more over appearance and health. As well as this, there reasons for being misogynistic are due to their upbringing and the environments surrounding them. This shows how lifestyle and upbringing can affect one's personality traits such as their obsessions. Therefore, this demonstrates how lifestyle is a key subject which has been used by Ellis and Banks to present their

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protagonist's personalities in different ways, which also results in other personality traits being different too.

However, both the protagonists have similar obsessions with one another; have a desire to kill; personality traits suggesting they have mental issues; and misogynistic views resulting in them having similar personalities with each other. These are very strong personality traits which all connect Frank and Patrick closely together, even though there are some ways in which they are dissimilar. Therefore, I believe to a great extent that “ the authors of ‘ American Psycho’ and ‘ The Wasp Factory’ present their protagonist’s Patrick Bateman and Frank Claudhame to have very similar personalities”.