



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**IDENTITY EROSION IN BRET EASTON ELLIS' LESS THAN  
ZERO AND IMPERIAL BEDROOMS**

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*IMPERIAL BEDROOMS***

By

**SARA VAHABI KALIMANI**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies,  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, in fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts**

**June 2014**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia  
in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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**June 2014**

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**Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication**

The present study concerns itself with identity erosion in Ellis' two novels, *Less Than Zero* (1985) and *Imperial Bedrooms* (2010), the latter of which is the sequel to the former. The focus of research is to explore two objectives by applying postmodern theory. Firstly, the characters were studied in terms of their portrayal of postmodern features and the novels were investigated in terms of narration and the features that have been categorised as postmodern and postmodernist fiction. Secondly, the next objective was to explore the protagonist's identity erosion through 25 years, from *Less Than Zero*, when he was teen aged, to *Imperial Bedrooms*, when he is an adult and a business person. Although Ellis is more famous for his novel *American Psycho*, these two mentioned novels were selected because a sequel provides an opportunity to explore the character's identity erosion precisely and observe the changes he went through. The other reason for this preference was that these novels are cultural satires of contemporary society.

Therefore, this study specifically analysed the postmodern identity presented in Ellis' novels. Through this study, theories of postmodern theorists such as Baudrillard (1983), Kellner (1992), and Jameson (1991) were used to support the argumentation. Baudrillard's (1983) simulation supported the argumentation concerning postmodern conspicuous consumption, and Kellner (1992)'s ideas of identity erosion supported the changes postmodern identity is experiencing today. Finally, Jameson's (1991) concept of postmodern narrative supported argumentation concerning Ellis' narrative style.

The selected methodology for this study was qualitative with employing textual analysis of the characterization in both novels. In this regard, the major characters of both novels were explored in terms of their behaviour. Since simulation and commodification are the two prominent features of

postmodernity, this study focused on how these features appear in Ellis' novels and give the characters face values and new identities, as well. This is done by examining characters' symbolic interactions in terms of objects they used and behaviour they show in different social contexts.



Abstrak yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Sarjana Sastera

## **HAKISAN IDENTITI DALAM KARYA BRET EASTON ELLIS *LESS THAN ZERO* DAN *IMPERIAL BEDROOMS***

Oleh

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Kajian ini membincangkan fenomena hakisan identiti dalam dua novel Ellis iaitu *Less Than Zero* (1985) dan *Imperial Bedrooms* (2010) dimana *Imperial Bedrooms* merupakan bahagian kedua kepada novel *Less Than Zero*. Fokus penyelidikan adalah untuk mencapai tiga objektif dengan menggunakan teori pascamoden. Pertama, watak telah dikaji dari segi pemaparan ciri-ciri pascamoden mereka. Kedua, novel dikaji dari segi penceritaan dan ciri-ciri yang telah dikategorikan sebagai fiksyen pascamoden. Akhir sekali, objektif ketiga meneroka hakisan identiti dalam watak utama menelusuri 25 tahun hidupnya, bermula dari *Less Than Zero*, ketika zaman remajanya, dan seterusnya ke *Imperial Bedrooms*, semasa beliau dewasa dan berkerjaya sebagai seorang ahli perniagaan. Walaupun Ellis lebih terkenal dengan novel *American Psycho*, kedua-dua novel yang dikaji telah dipilih kerana sebagai sekuel kedua-dua novel menyediakan peluang untuk meneroka hakisan identiti watak dengan tepat dan juga dapat memerhati perubahan yang beliau lalui. Justifikasi kedua bagi pemilihan ini adalah kerana novel ini merupakan satira kebudayaan masyarakat kontemporari.

Oleh itu, kajian ini secara khusus menganalisa identiti pascamoden yang dikemukakan dalam novel Ellis. Melalui kajian ini, pandangan ahli teori pascamoden seperti Baudrillard (1983), Kellner (1992), dan Jameson (1991) digunakan untuk menyokong argumentation tersebut. Simulasi di Baudrillard (1983) menyokong hujah yang berkaitan penggunaan mudah lihat era pascamoden, dan teori Kellner (1992) tentang idea hakisan identiti menyokong perubahan identiti pascamoden dikala ini. Akhirnya, konsep yang dibawa oleh Jameson (1991) iaitu naratif pascamoden menyokong hujah mengenai gaya naratif Ellis.

Metodologi yang dipilih untuk kajian ini bersifat kualitatif dengan menggunakan analisis watak berpusatkan teks dalam kedua-dua novel. Dalam hal ini, watak utama kedua-dua novel diterokai dari segi tingkah laku mereka. Memandangkan simulasi dan komodifikasi merupakan dua ciri menonjol konsep pascamoden, kajian ini

tertumpu kepada bagaimana ciri perwatakan dizahirkan dalam novel Ellis dan memberi nilai muka serta identiti baru kepada watak. Ini dilakukan dengan menilai interaksi simbolik antara watak dari segi penggunaan objek dan tingkah laku mereka dalam konteks sosial yang berbeza.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 4 June 2014 to conduct the final examination of Sara Vahabi Kalimani on her thesis entitled 'Identity Erosion in Bret Easton Ellis' *Less Than Zero and Imperial Bedrooms*' in accordance with the Universities and University College Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The committee recommends that the student be awarded the master degree. Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

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