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## Using Hamlet and Peter Pan: Family Issues, Ghosts, and Memory in Bret Easton Ellis's Lunar Park

Michael L. Hardie  
*University of New Orleans*, [mikehardie@gmail.com](mailto:mikehardie@gmail.com)

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Using *Hamlet* and *Peter Pan*: Family Issues, Ghosts, and Memory in Bret Easton Ellis's *Lunar Park*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
English

By  
Michael Hardie  
B.A. Covenant College, 1988  
M.Ed. University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 1997

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“There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember.”  
*Hamlet*, 4.5.174-175.

“Boy, why are you crying?”  
J. M. Barrie

This is for my sister, Joy Amelia Hardie Williams. I remember.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the use of *Hamlet* and *Peter Pan* as sources in Bret Easton Ellis's novel *Lunar Park*.

Readers know what to expect from a Bret Easton Ellis novel: narcissism, degeneracy, absent parents, broken families, extreme consumerism, shallow thinking, hedonism, cynicism, and dark humor. Ellis is always whistling past the graveyard of contemporary American life and showing us scenes and horrors we do not necessarily want to see, in order to point out our obsessions and our failures. *American Psycho* is, perhaps, the best example of this, with its 1980s decadence, displays of high-end luxuries, objectification of people, and sexual brutality. However, Ellis's typical skewering of modern society comes to a screeching halt in *Lunar Park*. He dedicates the novel to his deceased father. That gesture is the first indication that Ellis will be working out his problems with his father in a very public venue. As the novel progresses, it becomes evident that, like several other famous writers, Ellis is using his art to wrestle highly specific, lively, and intimate ghosts.

## The Sources

*Lunar Park* draws on *Hamlet* and *Peter Pan* to show the isolation and dissipation of an American male.<sup>1</sup> What are the issues this man faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century? As always, family relationships, the idea of home, and the safety that home and family provide are important, but have an urgency and emphasis here that were not present in Ellis's work before the events of September 11, 2001. Madness and insanity are also on Ellis's mind in this novel, and he incorporates into *Lunar Park* Hamlet's manic and self-destructive behavior and Peter Pan's devil-may-care inability to distinguish fantasy from reality. Ellis also considers memory and the act of remembering to be essential, using Hamlet's need to remember and Peter

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis also uses Stephen King's *The Shining* as a source, paying direct homage to a master of horror writing. The expanded version of this paper will examine Jack Torrance's occupation, the Torrance family dynamics, and the haunting in the Overlook resort hotel as relevant influences on *Lunar Park*. The expanded version will also include Ellis's use of *Death of a Salesman*, *On the Road*, and *Frankenstein* as sources.

Pan's inability to remember, Peter's forgetfulness, to inform a rewriting and revision of fictional reality. Additionally, Ellis uses elements of horror to point to the ghosts in the life of every reader. Finally, Ellis uses the conventions of doubling from *Hamlet* and *Peter Pan* to emphasize the horror of fathers visiting their sins upon their children, the horror of failed masculinity, and the horror of losing a child. These powerful sources--*Hamlet* and *Peter Pan*--represent the best of their genres and are literary works that permeate Western culture. It is not a coincidence that these works examine aspects of domesticity and masculinity and that Ellis uses them as sources. It is not a coincidence that both of these works are tragedies, a genre which Russ McDonald defines as

a literary structure that moves toward an unhappy ending and thus implies an unfavorable assessment of human experience. Death is the tragic counterpart to the marriage that concludes comedy. Not only does the hero or heroine die, but others do also, often at the hands of the tragic figure. Tragedy ends in annihilation, misery, separation, loss.

McDonald 157

Most people are familiar with the Disney version of Peter Pan, the charming boy who does not grow up and do not think of it as a tragedy. Barrie's original character, however, is a young killer and trickster who is at turns "gay and innocent and heartless" and who is, at the end of Barrie's novel, alone in his adventures, except for a week of spring-cleaning with Wendy or her progeny when he can remember the ritual (Barrie 153). Using these popular works as sources provides a gravity to this work of Ellis's, who has previously been perceived as a lightweight author whose main purpose is to shock the reading public and to sell a significant number of books.

Ellis also uses his previous work, as he is wont to do, as a source in portraying his protagonist's progressive downfall and his loss of masculinity. Patrick Bateman, the protagonist

of *American Psycho*, appears, like a ghost, early in *Lunar Park* and forces the later novel's protagonist, Bret<sup>2</sup>, to reflect on his past behavior. He haunts Bret by seeming to recreate various murders from *American Psycho* and by breaking into Bret's family's house on Elsinore Lane. Donald Kimball, a detective from *American Psycho*, also appears in *Lunar Park* to torment Bret.

### The Story: Mixing Fact and Fiction

*Lunar Park* starts as an autobiography, but by page twelve the line between factual autobiography and fiction begins to blur. In the first chapter Ellis reviews the first sentences of his previous novels, comparing their increasingly convoluted structure to his progressively uncontrollable life. He quotes the *New York Times*'s evaluation of his more recent work as "bloated and trivial...hyped up" (Ellis 5) and says that he had become bloated, hopped up (on drugs and alcohol), and disconnected from reality while writing those novels. He wants, and needs, to stop the craziness. He writes: "I wanted a return to that past simplicity. I was overwhelmed by my life, and those first sentences [of his novels] seemed a reflection of what had gone wrong. It was time to get back to basics" (Ellis 5). Ellis then recounts the major events of his life, starting with college, and moves on to discuss the experience of publishing a successful novel at an early age, his continuing success, the consequent (and constant) debauchery, his estrangement from his father, his father's death, and the "flameout" of hitting rock bottom (Ellis 33). The exposition of this first chapter, however, is not strict autobiography. Ellis liberally mixes fact and fiction. For example, he factually discusses the controversy concerning the publication of *American Psycho*:

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of clarity, I will refer to the author of *Lunar Park* as "Ellis" and refer to the protagonist of the novel as "Bret."



I was taken seriously. I was a joke. I was avant-garde. I was a traditionalist. I was underrated. I was overrated. I was innocent. I was partly guilty. I had orchestrated the controversy. I was incapable of orchestrating anything. I was considered the most misogynist American writer in existence. I was a victim of the burgeoning culture of the politically correct. (Ellis 16)

These seemingly paradoxical statements are true. Ellis was praised and castigated by critics and public alike. Then Ellis begins to mix fact and fiction. Bret references Camden College, a fictional college that appears in Ellis's previous novels and which Bret claims as his alma mater. Bret is married to Jayne Dennis, a movie star who worked with Keanu Reeves, an actual actor. Ellis writes that Bret and Jayne have a son together. However, Jayne cannot have starred in a movie with Reeves and cannot have mothered Ellis's son, because Jayne is a fictional character. (As part of the marketing strategy for *Lunar Park*, Ellis's publishing company created jayne-dennis.com, still an active page even though the outgoing links are broken, to further the sense of fictional autobiography.) Additionally, Ellis writes that he lunched with fans Jeb and George W. Bush at the White House. While Jeb and George W. Bush exist, it is highly unlikely that they are fans of Ellis's writing and it is highly unlikely that he socialized with them. Ellis is playing fast and loose with reality. He closes his first chapter, his prologue, saying, "There's one thing you must remember as you hold this book in your hands: all of it really happened, every word is true" (Ellis 30). But this is a novel, not an autobiography, and Ellis knows that his readers will be at least slightly familiar with the facts of his biography. He also knows that those details will not correspond with his autobiographical introduction and that the dissonance will inform his readers that this narrator, Bret, is an unreliable narrator. The details do not correspond to reality. The

details do not fit together, and the time is out of joint (1.5.186). Bret himself, from the very beginning of the novel, does not fit into his life and cannot set things right.

### Using *Hamlet*

Ellis casts himself as the protagonist of *Lunar Park* and overtly compares that protagonist to Shakespeare's Hamlet. And who does not identify with Hamlet? Harry Levin summarizes Hamlet's appeal by saying:

We are Hamlet. His circumstances are ours, to the extent that every man, in some measure is born to privilege and anxiety, committed where he has never been consulted, hemmed in on all sides by an overbearing situation, and called upon to perform what must seem an ungrateful task. No wonder he undertakes it with many misgivings, tests it with much groping and some backsliding, pursues it with revisions and indecisions, and parses every affirmation by the grammar of doubt. (Levin 43)

Ellis borrows many names from Shakespeare's tragedy, making unmistakable allusions to the play. Bret, the protagonist, and his family live on Elsinore Lane and frequent Fortinbras Mall. Bret's intended mistress is murdered at Orsic [sic] Hotel in a scene that duplicates in character name and details a private and unpublished portion of *American Psycho*. Ellis also writes of Voltemand Drive, Horatio Park, Claudius Street, and Ophelia Boulevard. Bret, the protagonist, is haunted by his father and destroys his family. Additionally, one of the epigraphs of the novel quotes Hamlet's promise to his father: "From the table of my memory/ I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,/ All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past/ That youth and observation copied there" (1.5.98). Memory and remembering are both extremely important to Hamlet and to Bret, as I will discuss.

Ellis shows us that Bret, his fictional double, is, ostensibly, trying to build a new life in suburbia with Jayne. He is trying to play the role of husband to Jayne and the role of father to his son, Robby, and Jayne's daughter, Sarah. Like an actor playing Hamlet, Bret is acting and he cannot, or does not, live authentically in that his words and actions do not reflect his feelings. Hamlet discusses this sort of disassociation in his soliloquy after the touring actors arrive, saying, "this player here,/ But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,/ could force his soul so to his own conceit" showing tears, distraction, and a breaking voice, "for nothing" (2.2.486-492). Bret is trying to escape his past excesses and his poor life/lifestyle choices but because his heart is not committed to the project he does not fit into suburbia and cannot meet the expectations of normal nuclear family life, just as Hamlet does not fit into the court structure of Elsinore.

At the beginning of *Lunar Park*, Ellis signals that this suburban paradise is troubled. Bret makes a pass at Jayne just before their (really his) Halloween party, saying, "I'm going as a hunk" (Ellis 42) and she ignores his overture. The Halloween party, perfectly decorated and catered, opens the door to horror, both the horror of Bret's continued dissipation and manifestations of the ghosts and monsters that confront him with the reality of his life and his situation. Ellis's Halloween functions as it often does in fiction, as a day when the boundary between the living and the dead is thinnest; it is the day when the dead and the supernatural can enter the living, natural world and it is the day when the living mask in order to confuse the spirits that manifest on Halloween night. Bret eschews a mask and a costume for the Halloween party, saying that he is costuming as himself. Hamlet also tells his mother that he is himself, not his costume. Hamlet's inky cloak shows his exterior appearance, but he has "that within that passeth show"--he has actual, authentic emotions and thoughts, and presumably would maintain those even if he changed his clothes (1.2.85). This internal authenticity belies the modern fashion

dictum that “You are what you wear.” Ellis is not telling us that Bret is lazy for not costuming; he is telling us that Bret is unreal or disconnected from reality. How real can you be when you are costumed for Halloween and how dressed up can you be if you are costuming as yourself? (Nielsen 135). Jayne responds, “You do an awfully good impression of yourself” (Ellis 41). Jayne’s comment shows that their new marriage, which they based on an old relationship, is in trouble and also shows that Bret is a continual masker and a caricature of a father, lover and decent human being. Jayne is saying that Bret’s caricature is his actual self and that in trying to be real and authentic by not costuming, he is actually being inauthentic. Bret proves her right during their party by getting high, getting drunk, and groping an admiring grad student. Bret’s mask is himself, and he acts as himself: a professional partier and philanderer. Bret, costumed as himself, acts accordingly. His costume is a man who harms the ones he loves. Costumed as himself, Bret behaves badly, echoing Hamlet’s pretense of madness, the “antic disposition” he adopts in his effort to avenge his father’s death (1.5.170). Unfortunately, Bret is aware of his pretense and the cruelty of his actions. Bret’s madness, therefore, may be real. Bret’s mask and his behavior echo Hamlet’s explanation to Horatio, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Gertrude, that he might appear to be mad but is only pretending to be insane and mentally off-kilter.

Bret assumes a different mask the morning after the Halloween party. He wakes up extremely hung over in the guest bedroom of Jayne’s McMansion, wraps himself in a sheet, donning a belated costume, floats to the kitchen to surreptitiously procure a healthy shot of vodka, and explicitly refers to himself as a ghost, saying, “I walked out of the room [the guest bedroom] a ghost” (Ellis 69). This affirmation of ghostliness alludes to Old Hamlet’s affirmation to his son: “I am thy father’s spirit/ Doomed for a certain term to walk the night” (1.5.9-10). Bret, unlike Old Hamlet, is ignored and unacknowledged, unseen, at breakfast by his family and

especially by his son, whom Bret is trying to connect with after years of absence. This ghost of a father watches his family get ready for a typical school and work day without his participation and without needing that participation. Bret is ineffectual and pathetic. This is not a sympathetic ghost. Bret has created his own isolation, partly through his continued abuse of drugs and alcohol and partly through his denial of his own father and previous avoidance of his own role as a father. He is not needed in this household, and he does not fit in. So, here we come upon the issue of domesticity and family life.

## Home and Family

Domesticity and fatherhood, as well as relationships with fathers, are of central importance in *Lunar Park*. Ellis is drawing on his sources, but also on his personal history, having said in a *Playboy* interview in 2015 that:

He [Ellis's father] was an unhappy man, and the abuse he took out on his family was an extension of his depression. It permeated the house, and that is a form of abuse when you're a child or adolescent. There were a few times when he was physically abusive to me, not to the point where I was in the hospital, but there was drunken hitting. He was just very angry, for a lot of reasons that seem silly to me now as someone who is much older than he was at that time. I can't understand why he couldn't just deal with it. Why couldn't he deal with this dream that he and so many other people of that generation bought into, which was, "I'm going to get married to a perfect-looking woman. I'm going to move into a house, have three children and balance it with a career." I think a lot of men bought into this idea. I think he really just wanted to be an athlete. I don't think the whole thing he bought into made him happy. He might have been much happier being a

bachelor. That really wasn't what people did in 1961. You can see this dissatisfaction flourish in shows like *Mad Men*. He bought into the idea of suburbia, which was Sherman Oaks, here in L.A. I don't think he liked his job, and all these factors coalesced into him drinking a lot and taking it out on his family. My mother and him had a very volatile relationship, but my sisters and him less so. I just kind of checked out. I disappeared into film, which I was obsessed with. I knew I was gonna get out of here, so I was writing all the time. I'm painting my childhood to be one of utter misery. It wasn't. It was just an unhappy father who was occasionally abusive. (Fortune)

Bret has good reason to forsake and try to forget his father, because Robert was alcoholic and abusive. Bret says that Robert wanted to weaken his family and to convince them that they, instead of his behavior, are the reason he is no longer welcome in their lives. Bret writes of his father's rage, of his monetary control of the family via alimony and child support, and says, essentially, that his father was mad/insane and locked in a "demented fury" (Ellis 7). That fury and anger wreak havoc on Bret's family. Bret describes that destruction, saying that:

...the world was threatening to us in a vague and abstract way we couldn't work ourselves out of--the map had disappeared, the compass had been smashed, we were lost. My sisters and I discovered a dark side to life at an unusually early age. We learned from our father's behavior that the world lacked coherence, and that within this chaos people were doomed to failure, and these realizations clouded our every ambition. (Ellis 7)

Any counselor would tell Bret to avoid his father like the plague, but fathers cannot be avoided. As influential as mothers, they transmit their emotional patterns and worldviews to their children, which we could name as "visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children." Ironically

and unfortunately, Robby also has an alcoholic and unstable father. Bret is repeating his father's mistakes.<sup>3</sup>

Domesticity plays a large role in *Peter Pan*, and Ellis uses that theme and the relationships of the characters in his novel. Because Peter Pan ran away from his family (as Robby will at the end of *Lunar Park*) he does not have a father, but he plays at being one. Underground, in their Neverland home, Peter and Wendy play at being husband and wife, at being father and mother. Peter likes to be in charge, and so in some ways he enjoys playing at fatherhood. He enjoys the good parts, like telling everyone what to do and how to behave. But he does not want the responsibility of being a husband and father, and has to get Wendy to reassure him about the reality of their make-believe situation. She tells him, despite her own desire for a romantic relationship with Peter, that they are only acting. Barrie writes:

“I was just thinking,” he [Peter] said, a little scared. “It is only make-believe, isn’t it; that I am their father?”

“Oh yes,” Wendy said primly.

“You see,” he continued apologetically, “it would make me seem so old to be their real father.”

“But they are ours, Peter, yours and mine.”

“But not really, Wendy?” he asked anxiously.

“Not if you don’t wish it,” she replied; and she distinctly heard his sigh of relief.

(Barrie 92)

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<sup>3</sup> The expanded version of this paper will include a relevant discussion of family dynamics in *The Shining* here. Jack Torrance, an unhappy and alcoholic writer, the son of an alcoholic and abusive father, unintentionally abuses his son, Danny. Additional discussion will include intertextual connections between Wendy Torrance and Wendy Darling.

Wendy is telling the truth; they are not romantically involved. Their home and their relationship is based on make believe--meals are often pretend meals without food and Wendy's younger brother Michael is made to pretend to be an infant. Bret and Jayne's relationship closely mirrors the relationship between Peter and Wendy: Bret and Jayne do not have sex; Bret seems to be playing at being a father and husband; and Jayne, like Wendy, would like a grownup relationship based on maturity, commitment, and clear communication. Bret, like Peter, is avoiding responsibility and has trouble distinguishing between fantasy and reality. He is playing house. Bret, like Peter, knows that Jayne wants something more from him. Peter, apparently the only eligible male in Neverland, says that all three female characters--Wendy, Tinker Bell, and Tiger Lily--want something from him and want to be something to him, but he does not understand. Peter says,

"You are so queer," he said, frankly puzzled, "and Tiger Lily is just the same. There is something she wants to be to me, but she says it is not my mother."

"No, indeed, it is not," Wendy replied with frightful emphasis. Now we know why she was prejudiced against the redskins.

"Then what is it?"

"It isn't for a lady to tell."

"Oh, very well," Peter said, a little nettled. "Perhaps Tinker Bell will tell me."

"Oh yes, Tinker Bell will tell you," Wendy retorted scornfully. "She is an abandoned little creature."

Here Tink, who was in her bedroom, eavesdropping, squeaked out something impudent.

"She says she glories in being abandoned," Peter interpreted.



He had a sudden idea. "Perhaps Tink wants to be my mother?"

"You silly ass!" cried Tinker Bell in a passion. (Barrie 92-93)

Peter, in this situation, is clueless. Bret is not quite as naive as Peter. He knows what Jayne and the family want and need, but he cannot seem to provide it. Bret's life and decisions have left him emotionally deficient. Just as Peter Pan is not a genuine father, Bret is unable to be a genuine father. He is not the master of his house.

Bret and Jayne's suburban house, the family's refuge and castle, is also haunted by the specter of Bret's father, just as the ghost of Old Hamlet appears in Elsinore. The home, typically symbolic of ownership, financial well-being, and family inheritance, becomes infected by the manifestation of his father: "It was lurching down the staircase, pausing, on various steps. It was tall and had a vaguely human form, and though it was skeletal it had eyes. Rapidly my father's face was illuminated in the skull" (Ellis 354). Even though the ghost is easily identified as an apparition of his father, Bret uses the word "it" in his description, increasing the horror of the situation by depersonalizing the ghost and denying his relationship to it. However, he cannot ignore its eyes. Even though it lacks a proper body, the ghost can still "exercise judgment" over Bret, the son, through its vision (Watkiss 248). The ghost of old Hamlet also judges his own son in Act Three of *Hamlet*, appearing to remind his son of his purpose and promise, which Hamlet has appeared to forget in his machinations. Unlike the ghost of Robert, the ghost of Old Hamlet speaks. He does, however, glare balefully, and Hamlet says that his appearance and purpose in appearing would cause even stones to respond. The judgment of the ghost of Robert is that Bret has disobeyed his wishes and must reestablish, even recreate, his role as a son, in regard to his father's wishes concerning the disposal of his body, therefore reestablishing a proper relationship with his deceased father. Until the end of the novel, Bret resists that work. He

prefers to ignore and deflect the truth that his hauntings are revealing to him and he intentionally clouds his reality with Xanax and vodka, producing an antic, unreliable disposition, much like Hamlet's. Even though the physical house on Elsinore Lane is cleansed and restored at the end of the novel, Bret and his immediate family are torn apart. Robby disappears, leaving his family in order to protect himself. Jayne divorces Bret, a situation analogous to Ophelia's suicide. Jayne had hoped and planned for a happier, longer marriage. Jayne did love Bret, and perhaps he meant to love her, but the consequence of Bret's betrayals and Robby's disappearance is that Bret loses her. She removes herself from his life, almost as if she had died. The breaking apart of Bret's family is not revenge, as Hamlet's ghost desired; this is a picture of American suburban life, a life beset by thwarted and decrepit father-son relationships. In *Lunar Park*, the sons indeed inherit the sins of the fathers.

Several broken father-son relationships cause hauntings in the novel. Marjorie Worthington writes that the ghosts in *Lunar Park* are the "lynchpin that links Ellis's concerns and anxieties about masculinity, ebbing authorial authority, and the trauma of losing that power" (60). The novel begins as a ghost story, showing how an author can be haunted by parts of his past, including literary creations that he can no longer control. *Lunar Park*, as a ghost story, connects Ellis's past and Bret's present in horrible ways, in scenes that show the horror of the past intruding into the present and in scenes that show Bret as an ineffectual husband, father, and author. If you cannot control your characters, if they show up to haunt you and reenact murders that you imagined in your novels, then you have lost your authority.

Ellis, however, cannot be seen as a marginalized, disempowered author. He has been critically acclaimed and his writing has made him famous. His novels, which mined his personal history for material, connected him to his characters and made him a celebrity. Especially at the

zenith of his career in the eighties and nineties, his sometimes violent, mostly shallow, self-absorbed characters were assumed to reflect Ellis's own personality and his celebrity status as part of the young, literary "brat pack" that included Jay McInerney (who also appears in *Lunar Park*). Readers and critics directly connected the immorality and profligacy of his characters to Ellis (Worthington 61-62).

Ellis "makes literal the limited control authors have over their work" by resurrecting Patrick Bateman, the psychotic protagonist of *American Psycho* (Worthington 64). In Bret's case, the ghost of Patrick Bateman shows his continued impact on Bret, his creator, by terrorizing him and threatening to destroy the life Bret is trying to build (Worthington 65)<sup>4</sup>. The author's work has taken on a life of its own and the author has lost his power. Bateman is, apparently, sleeping with the graduate student Bret desires and, horribly, recreating murders from *American Psycho*. This incarnation of Patrick Bateman drives a perfect replica of the Mercedes Bret drove as a teenager, and the license plate matches the one on Bret's previous car.

Bret is also haunted by his father; he receives daily early morning emails from a bank in California where he has stored his father's ashes in a safe deposit box, ignoring his father's wishes concerning the disposal of his remains. Bret's intentional deflection of his father's desire is similar to the nature of Hamlet's relationship with his father's ghost because it shows a breakdown of paternal authority. Hamlet is also obsessed with his father's remains, as he begs his father's ghost: "Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell/ Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,/ Have burst their cerements" (1.4). Joanne Watkiss examines the ideas of legacy and family relations as a gothic element of *Lunar Park* that shows a direct correlation between Bret and Hamlet. While Bret has attempted to ignore his father and erase him from his life, Hamlet

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<sup>4</sup> In an expanded version of this paper, I will discuss this version of Patrick Bateman, showing that he is a version of Frankenstein's monster—a creation that torments his creator.

has his prior memories and conceptions of learning and memory replaced by the horror of his father's demands. In a 2010 essay Watkiss writes, "Like the supernatural that exceeds the boundary of the natural, Hamlet's mind is exceeded and rewritten by the poison inherited from his father" (244). Legacy and inheritance, as well as patriarchal authority, which should pass from father to son through bloodlines, have been diverted and thwarted, and previous actions must be corrected. Bret must reconsider his father (and consider that he is becoming like his father) while Hamlet must obey his father. Hamlet must also become like his father, because his revenge, like his father's hand-to-hand combat with the King of Norway, is old-fashioned, extra-judicial, and bloody. Ironically, the reestablishing of their family legacies and the honoring of their father's wishes result in chaos and unlawful behavior for both protagonists. The cure is also a poison. Bret recoils from his father's reappearance and self-medicates with alcohol and drugs. Hamlet self-destructs and destroys his significant others.

Bret is not only a Hamlet-like figure; he is also like Claudius, the usurper. He is a latecomer to Jayne's household and his attempts to establish authority while integrating into the family go awry. Sarah, Jayne's daughter, is not antagonistic but maintains a rigid emotional distance from him. Robby, Bret's son, is not used to his presence and father and son are scared of each other. Describing his relationship with Robby, Bret says, "I was the one who needed to make a connection, to mend us, but his reluctance--as loud and insistent as an anthem--seemed impossible to overcome. There was no way of winning him over. I had failed him utterly...And yet I still resented the fact that he--not myself--lacked the proper courage to make the first move" (Ellis 80). This separation shows another iteration of a broken father-son relationship. Bret is Robby's actual father, but he has been turned into a stepfather, a caricature or a ghost of a father, by the years he was absent from Robby's and Jayne's lives. In the one seemingly honest

conversation between Bret and Robby, Bret is aware that his son is acting a part and consciously perceives that his son is following a script. Even so, the exchange is heartrending. Robby says that he wants his family to be a family but that Bret never acted like he wanted it--Bret is "so angry all the time" (Ellis 291). Like Old Hamlet, and in ways reminiscent of Claudius, Bret is unable to bridge the emotional gap between himself and his abandoned son, even though Bret himself has been abandoned by his own father's behavior and by his father's death. The usurper cannot take on the role of father; consequently, family patterns of absence and removal are repeated in a poisonous inheritance. This inheritance is highlighted by the name shared by the males in the novel. Bret's father is Robert. Bret is an anagram of Robert. Robby is Bret's son. Bret discusses the issue of names early in the novel, saying, "I realized she had named the child after my father, but when I confronted her about it...she swore it had never occurred to her. (Which I still do not believe, and which I am certain is the reason that the following events in *Lunar Park* happened—it was the catalyst)" (Ellis 21). Ellis's use of names directly alludes to Shakespeare's use of the name "Hamlet." Hamlet the older had a son named Hamlet. That son died before he could produce an heir, but both Hamlets, most likely, recall Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, a name interchangeable with the name "Hamlet."

Bret's poison, inherited from his father, is not only internal. It contaminates his external physical circumstances as well, specifically the family home on Elsinore Lane. After the Halloween party the house becomes haunted and begins to change physically. Ellis writes that the exterior white paint "was peeling off in a fine white shower, revealing more of the pink stucco underneath. It was doing this without any assistance" (Ellis 222). The living room furniture is constantly rearranged. Bret's castle, like Elsinore, becomes a threatening environment, the opposite of a comforting refuge. Hallway lights flicker on and off as he walks

past them. Bret finds an unexplainable, and therefore uncanny, replica of his father's tombstone, inscribed with the exact dates of his birth and death, in the back yard. Ashy footprints of a ghostly nature appear in the living room carpet and reappear after they are cleaned. Bret eventually realizes that the flaking paint and rearranged furniture are manifestations of his childhood home; the house is frighteningly renovating itself into a replica of that house. Bret also realizes that the style and placement of furniture in his son's room is more than strongly reminiscent of the furniture in his childhood bedroom, with even his son's bedside lamps echoing the lamps in his childhood bedroom.<sup>5</sup> Having the house terrifyingly renovate itself shows Bret's internal contention with his father and Bret's continuing struggle with his father's disastrous effect on his childhood.

#### Doubling For Effect, Not For Fun

Doubling plays a key part in the structure of *Lunar Park*. Shakespeare was known to play the ghost of Hamlet in early productions of the play. Additionally, we can reasonably conjecture that he was thinking of his dead son Hamnet (who was eleven years old when he died in 1596, just as Robby is eleven in Ellis's novel when he disappears) as well as his dead or dying father. Shakespeare, in essence, abandoned his son in Stratford, just as Bret abandoned Robby during his childhood. So, we have two authors writing about deceased fathers and vanished sons. Because *Lunar Park* must be read as fiction and as nonfiction, Nielsen says that the novel can be seen as a double exposure, a method of photography in which one image is laid over another: "the (nonfictional) story about the author is superimposed on the (fictional) story about the character" (139). A second double exposure is the imposition of *Lunar Park* on the enduring

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<sup>5</sup> The expanded version of this paper will include a discussion of the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* as an oppressive and diabolical building.

story of the prince of Denmark. Additionally, Bret is a doubly exposed character as a haunted son and a haunting ghost. Bret's ghostly status is reaffirmed by the statement he makes to himself: "Because--in the end, Bret--you were the ghost" (Ellis 387).<sup>6</sup>

Doubling and double exposures rampage through Ellis's novel. He has written himself as a fictional protagonist. Clayton, who is eventually revealed as the physical incarnation of Patrick Bateman, looks like a younger Bret.<sup>7</sup> Clayton also drives a double of the car Bret drove as a teenager, a Mercedes with a license plate that duplicates the license plate on Bret's Mercedes. Bret and Jayne's house reveals itself as a double of Bret's childhood home. Ellis also employs an almost unsustainable level of metanarrative when he splits Bret's consciousness and introduces the character of "the writer." This writer is a manifestation of an omniscient author. Bret, as a narrator, is limited in his knowledge, but "the writer" has "information that Bret lacks" (Nielsen 135). For example, the writer tells Bret that two police officers (on the scene at Elsinore Lane) had masturbated to scenes in *American Psycho*. The writer also questions Bret, saying, "Do you really believe that, Bret?" (Ellis 218).

Bret's son Robby is a double, or reflection, of Shakespeare's son Hamnet. They are both eleven years old when they disappear, Hamnet because he died and Robby because he intentionally escapes from his father, just as Bret wanted to escape the influence of his own father. Part of the exaggerated reality, and intertextuality, of *Lunar Park* are news stories that young boys, Robby's age, are disappearing. The disappearances cannot be explained and the boys cannot be found. Bret begins to suspect that the boys are orchestrating their own

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<sup>6</sup> In an expanded version of this paper, I will discuss Shakespeare's use of double plots, for instance, Laertes and Pyrrhus as avenging sons.

<sup>7</sup> Ellis has used the name "Clay" previously. Clay is the protagonist in *Less Than Zero* and is a supporting character in *Rules of Attraction*. Also, the name of the first man in the Christian story of creation, Adam, translates as "clay." This can be analyzed in two ways. Clay and Clayton are created by Ellis, making Ellis equivalent to God. Additionally, we can say that all men are descended from Adam and, consequently, are reflections or doubles of him.

disappearances and that the boys are intentionally removing themselves from their families and lives. The boys have run away and become lost boys, like the Lost Boys in *Peter Pan*.<sup>8</sup> Bret's suspicions are confirmed when he breaks into Robby's computer with the Peter Pan inspired password "Neverneverland" and finds email correspondence between Robby and the missing boys. Another important signifier of Robby's intention to leave his family is a poster on his bedroom wall that reads "Disappear Here," a textual signifier Ellis has used since his first novel, *Less Than Zero*, where it appears on a billboard in Los Angeles. While Robby runs away to grow up without his father, Bret is a Peter Pan figure and is unable to grow up. Early in the novel, Bret asks his friend Jay McInerney if he thinks they have matured: "Weren't we supposed to give up acting twenty-two forever?" Jay replies, "Well, you're wearing a marijuana T-shirt at your own Halloween party, where you were just making out with a coed, so the answer to that, my friend, is a definite nope" (Ellis 60). Bret also fantasizes about escaping back to his bachelor life because he is completely failing to fulfill his roles as husband and father (Baelo-Allue 183). He says to himself: "There was no place for me in his [Robby's] world in that house. I knew this. Why was I holding on to something that would never be mine?...The idea of returning to a bachelor's life, and the condo I still kept on East 13th Street in Manhattan was sliding toward me with an acid hiss" (Ellis 228). As Bret's desire to abandon his family slides toward him, like a tempting and poisonous snake, he is committing one of the worst transgressions a male can execute: failure to provide for and to protect his family. Because he is neglectful and cowardly, he cannot face life in suburbia and cannot face the prescribed roles of husband and father. Escaping those roles by leaving his new family, while providing relief, would defeat him and greatly diminish his masculinity. Hamlet also evidences dissatisfaction with his role in Elsinore,

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<sup>8</sup> Ellis adds another element of intertextuality with Sarah's school reading assignment: *Lord of the Flies*, a post-apocalyptic story about unsupervised boys on an island and the violence they inflict on each other. Those stranded English boys could also have used a mother.



saying, “The time is out of joint; O cursed spite/ That ever I was born to set it right!” (1.5.186-187).

Ellis draws on the theatrical tradition of doubling and on the specific doubling found in *Hamlet* and *Peter Pan*. The parts of Old Hamlet and Claudius were often played by the same actor, which would bring a certain eerie quality to the staging. If one actor can portray both a victim and a murderer, a dead king and a new king, what does that tell the audience about human nature? Also, Mr. Darling and Captain Hook were often played by the same actor, which brings an interesting dynamic to those parts. Mr. Darling is the quintessential representative of a workplace oppressed Victorian man and also of a husband and father who lacks authority in the household that he is charged with supporting. Bret closely resembles Mr. Darling in this way; Bret is not respected and is unable to connect, emotionally, with his family. One of Mr. Darling’s problems is financial--he does not make enough money, and Barrie shows this through Mr. Darling’s anxiety about whether he can afford his daughter and sons. Barrie writes:

For a week or two after Wendy came it was doubtful whether they would be able to keep her, as she was another mouth to feed. Mr. Darling was frightfully proud of her, but he was very honourable, and he sat on the edge of Mrs. Darling’s bed, holding her hand and calculating expenses, while she looked at him imploringly. She wanted to risk it, come what might, but that was not his way. (Barrie 6)

Mr. Darling is stuck in a lowly clerical position, so he is concerned about finances and he is concerned about respect for him in his household and his reputation in his neighborhood. The Darling household must keep up appearances and have a nurse for the children, but they are so financially challenged that they must engage a dog to take care of the children. Mr. Darling knows Nana takes excellent care of the children, but he wonders if the neighbors talk about their

unusual childcare situation. It always matters what the neighbors think, and you might say that these neighbors probably think that Mr. Darling is not very masculine, especially after he puts himself, literally, in the dog house. Captain Hook, on the other hand, should be extremely masculine. As a pirate captain, he should be ruthless, independent, roguish, bold, and brave. Captain Hook is, to some extent, all those things, as Barrie wrote him with several masculine signifiers. One is that he treats and addresses his crew like dogs. Another masculine signifier is his self-constructed cigar holder, with which he smokes two cigars at once. And certainly his hook is fearsome. Bret, like this pirate captain, is destructive. However, Hook is also written with some very feminine qualities and he is often played as a bloodthirsty, yet still very fey, drag queen. His dark hair is decorated in curls, his eyes are blue and melancholy, he is polite and well bred, and his word choice characterizes him as educated. Captain Hook is refined, not rough. Despite these feminine characteristics, Barrie describes him as fearsome and courageous. As a masculine figure, Captain Hook commands the respect that Mr. Darling cannot. However, a closer analysis shows that Mr. Darling and Captain are very similar and are doubles of each other. Allison Kavey and Lester Freedman write in the introduction to a collection of essays on *Peter Pan*:

Both men steal for a living, one through the august institution of a bank and the other more honestly as a pirate. Both men are disturbed by the wanton light hearted disregard that children show for their accomplishments. Both men are terrified by what other people think of them and change their behavior accordingly. Both men want children to love them. Both men are locked in a struggle to the death with time and responsibility. Suddenly, the banker and the pirate, though clad very differently, seem to have a lot in

common, and those similarities serve as a commentary on the stringent boundaries placed on men by the cultural expectations of the early twentieth century. (10)

Peter Pan and Hook are also doubles of each other. At one point in the novel, Peter very credibly and convincingly imitates Hook's voice. In one of their confrontations, Peter and Hook are climbing up opposite sides of the same rock at the same time. Barrie writes:

Hook rose to the rock to breathe, and at the same moment Peter scaled it on the opposite side. The rock was slippery as a ball, and they had to crawl rather than climb. Neither knew that the other was coming. Each feeling for a grip met the other's arm: in surprise they raised their heads; their faces were almost touching; so they met. (Barrie 81)

Additionally, after Peter kills the pirate captain, he puts on Hook's clothing, holds his cigar holder, and crooks his finger like a hook in a very credible imitation of the enemy he has just killed. You might say that Peter becomes Hook by killing the adult male figure and taking his place. One becomes the other, just as Bret doubles and comes to embody his father in physical form and in action.

## Horror and Violence

Using hauntings and exaggerated reality gives Ellis the opportunity to comment on the nature of fiction and its relation to reality. Enhancing and distorting reality in fiction demonstrates that "fiction is the movement between reality and the opposition to it" (Baker 487). For example, Patrick Bateman obsesses equally about murder and fine suits in *American Psycho*. Neither topic could be described as being "closer to reality" than the other, because both topics are addressed by an unreliable narrator (Baker 487). In *Lunar Park*, Ellis distorts reality by

placing himself in a fictional marriage and by exaggerating the effects of September 11, 2001 on American society. In the United States of *Lunar Park*,

suicide bombers were blowing themselves up in crowded Burger Kings and Starbucks [sic] and Wal-marts and in subways at rush hour...Bulletproof vests were on sale everywhere, because scores of snipers had suddenly appeared; the military police stationed on every corner offered no solace, and surveillance cameras proved useless.

(Ellis 36)

Here is Ellis's characteristic violence, but it is muted by distortion. We know these facts are not true, but these facts give Ellis space to explore reality and unreality in his fictional autobiography. In this America, an America under constant internal attack, which resembles the state of Denmark facing attack from Norway, the question of to stay or not to stay in large cities resembles Hamlet's question about being. Should Americans take up arms against their sea of troubles or should they flee them? Hamlet discusses "the dread of something after death,/ The undiscovered country" (3.1.77-78) and the boundary between life and death much as Ellis writes that same boundary with the addition of a city and suburb comparison:

Cities [after 9/11] had become mournful places, where everyday life was suddenly interrupted by jagged mounds of steel and glass and stone, and grief on an unimaginable scale was rising up over them...There were too many fearful moments when the living envied the dead, and people started moving away to the country, the suburbs, anywhere.

(Ellis 36)

In this distorted, enhanced world, Ellis is free to question the place of reality in fiction and free to use threatening supernatural phenomena in unreal ways. By mingling real and surreal, Ellis creates a narrator who is unable to perceive reality accurately. Bret does not understand his world

and cannot differentiate his inner and outer life, appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and the particular and the whole (Baker 499). In this way, Bret is like Hamlet, who recognizes the dismal, rotten state of affairs in Elsinore but is furious that he is forced to “set it right” despite not having contributed to the situation. Ellis’s typical distortion of reality into fiction, using realistic details and facts is, however, reversed for *Lunar Park*. Here, the details are not realistic but are used to show a true psychological state and authentic states of human relationships (Baker 500). Bret runs from his father’s ghost just as he denied his father a relationship. Ellis refers to the father-son relationship of Hamlet and his father and the horror of establishing that relationship across the boundary of death by showing how Bret, an author, creates corresponding horrors. He created Patrick Bateman to deal with his issues with his father and he created his father’s ghost by disappearing from his father’s life.

Ellis also uses elements of horror genres and gothic writing in *Lunar Park* to show true emotional states and situations. Transgression is a key element in horror and gothic fiction. Reality and possibility have, according to science and reason, definite boundaries. But the amazing beings and impossible events found in gothic writing (or movies and television shows) challenge our rational thinking and subvert our habitual understanding of reality. As part of the gothic tradition, betrayal, conspiracy, and murder show an excess of emotion and passion that, as productive members of a free market, nine-to-five respectable society, we are not free to have or indulge. These terrors, whether they are vampires lurking in a gloomy castle, the dark desires of a villain, a father’s ghost, or the simple unknown, are sources of pleasure, stimulation, and excitement that allow us to feel, vicariously, what we should not feel. The excitement of frightening violence and adventurous freedom are both gothic terrors that threaten “not only the loss of sanity, honor, property, or social standing but the very order which supports and is

regulated by the coherence of those terms” (Botting 7). Reading about depravity is fun, and readers identify with heroes and heroines escaping monsters, negotiating terrifying forests, and solving labyrinths. When the world seems weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable we need excitement and adventure, and if our entertainment is tragic and cathartic then so much the better (1.2.133). We need to see Hamlet talking to his father’s spirit, killing Polonius, escaping from pirates, dueling with Laertes, and at the end of his life, taking up arms against his troubles. We need to fly with Peter Pan, hear Tinker Bell swear at everyone, see Wendy long for something she can never have, and return home to grow up with the Darling children and Lost Boys. We need to watch Bret try to seduce Aimee Light, we need to see him fumbling through his life, and we need to see him fail at all facets of adulthood. Bret is our negative example and the star of a cautionary tale. He does the things we may want to do--drink to excess, get high, work as little as possible, and live luxuriously. But we know that we cannot follow his example. Bret’s cathartic gift to us is a warning. He says, essentially, “Don’t do this; don’t be like me.”

One defining characteristic of gothic art is terror and horror stemming from transgression of reality--things not being what they seem. In this sense, *Lunar Park* is a gothic novel. Even though Bret purports to be telling the truth, Ellis confuses the boundary between reality and fiction. This uncertainty produces an ambivalence and uncertainty that permeate the book, and can be described as narrative anxiety and duplicity. The reader might wonder if the author is lying. If so, why? From one perspective, however, a work of fiction is a lie, an untruth. Readers know that a novel is not reality, that a novel is, as Picasso said concerning art, a lie which tells the truth. Sir Philip Sidney wrote very much the same thing in *Defense of Poesy*, saying that poetry is not a lie,

for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true that which is false...in truth, not laboring to tell you what is or is not, but what should or should not be. And therefore, though he recount things that are not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not. (Sidney 103)

The problem for readers of *Lunar Park* is that a mix of fact and fiction is confusing, even uncanny, as we expect a novel to be a creation, not a creation based on facts.

An example of uncanniness, of things not being what they seem, in *Lunar Park* is a toy that comes to life. Bret's daughter plays with a Terby (a cultural reference to the Furby, an electronic robotic toy that was the high-demand toy of the 1999 holiday season in the United States), a stuffed crow, which is creepy to begin with, because crows should not be toys. The crow, a mechanical item, becomes animated and is terrifying in its combination of death and life. This toy should not have actual claws or a menacing beak. It should not claw walls or doors. It should not lay eggs and it should not crawl inside the family dog, possessing it internally and bursting it open, a possible reference to Hamlet's proposition to Polonius: "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog" (2.2.181). Bret adds two additional levels of creepiness to the Terby when when he realizes that its name is an anagram of his own that asks a question: "Y Bret?" and when he realizes that the Terby is a manifestation of a character from a short story he wrote as a child. He has forgotten about the short story, juvenilia dealing with his feelings about his father.

Another short story, also juvenilia, Bret has forgotten is "The Tomb." That short story is about a monster that lived in the woods and is afraid of light. That unnamed monster materializes in Bret's home and threatens him and the children after Jayne, like Wendy Darling, has flown away from home to work on a movie, another work of fiction. Bret says that, "It was covered

with hair entangled with twigs and dead leaves and feathers. It had no features. A cloud of gnats was buzzing above the thing, following it to where it had pushed itself up against the wall...Within the hair, a bright red hole ringed with teeth appeared” (Ellis 307). Once again, Bret’s past is haunting him. This vagina dentata-like monster chases the family out of their home. The monster, Bret’s creation, which he has forgotten, threatens his present life. Additionally, it shows his ineptness as a father because he is able to remove his children from danger, but he does not have an explanation for the police. If he tells the whole truth he will seem to be mad, so he creates more fiction by withholding much of the truth. He explains that “‘something’ had gotten into the house” (Ellis 314). Bret is caught in a terrible situation--fiction, his own fiction, is intruding into reality.

#### Boundaries Between the Living and the Dead

The gothic is cathartic, but we must return to reality (just as Wendy, John, and Michael return home) with an increased sense of identity and our place within the too solid realities of justice, morality, and social order (Botting 6-7). There are boundaries and we must observe them, or pay the consequences. Shakespeare violates the boundaries of life and death, the limits of appropriate behavior regarding graves, and the confines of sanity in *Hamlet*, showing us how we ought to act. The spaces of the dead--cemeteries, graveyards, battlefields, crypts, churches--are rigidly governed by social, religious, and governmental rules, as Ophelia’s stunted funeral and Hamlet’s reference to his father’s corpse bursting from its tomb show. Breaking those rules violates cultural customs and codes of honor that delineate the transgressor as aberrant or criminal. Death is an important event and the places as well as the customs surrounding “passing on” give it an important place in society. We have appropriate mourning ceremonies. We have



expectations concerning the duration of mourning, appropriate dress at a memorial service or funeral, and proper ways to speak of the dead. Hamlet discusses appropriate “trappings and suits of woe” in Act 1, listing “customary suits of solemn black” as well as sighs, tears, and dejected behavior. These customs, our attitudes toward death and dying, show and delineate the boundaries between the living and the dead. That boundary was theologically reinforced in the 1552 revision of the Edwardian prayer book. Instead of addressing the corpse directly, saying, “I commend thy soul to God the father almighty, and thy body to the ground,” the priest was to address the mourners, saying, “We therefore commit his body to the ground” (Greenblatt 245). When Shakespeare’s characters, including Hamlet, transgress those boundaries, when they interact with the dead and with the spaces of the dead in culturally taboo ways, they are punished. They lose their virtue, faith, safety, God’s protection, and ultimately life itself (Emmerichs 171-173). Transgressing cultural norms, while good for dramatic effect, can produce tragic consequences. Hamlet and Laertes show this when they invade Ophelia’s grave. Laertes jumps in to disrupt the funeral ceremony and they both disrupt the boundary between the living and the dead by fighting in the grave. This scene foreshadows their deaths at the end of the play and also shows a flagrant disregard for the sacred space of the dead and for the sacred resting place of one dead young woman.

In *Shakespeare After All*, Marjorie Garber writes that *Hamlet* is very concerned with boundaries, including thresholds and the crossing of borders. The borderlines in the play include: “boundary disputes between Norway and Denmark, boundaries between youth and age, boundaries between reality and imagination, [and boundaries] between audience and actor. And these boundaries seem to be constantly shifting” (470). Hamlet discusses, with himself, the boundary between life and afterlife, comparing death to sleep and speculating on the nature of

dreams in that sleep and also comparing death to an “undiscovered country from whose bourn/ No traveller returns” (3.1.78-79). Even though Old Hamlet has returned, Hamlet is thinking about the division between life and death, saying that under normal circumstances, death is permanent and the dead should not return to life.

Several boundaries are violated when Hamlet interacts with his father’s ghost. First, burial rites and ceremonies have not kept old Hamlet in his grave. The consecration of his body has failed and his spirit is not at rest. In fact, he is tormented, and says that he is “Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,/ And for the day confined to fast in fires” (1.5.11-12). The safe space of the grave has been violated; there is no resting in peace for old Hamlet. The space reserved for the living, Elsinore, is invaded by the deceased. In addition, by listening to and heeding the instruction of a ghost, Hamlet sets himself apart from characters that fear the ghost in appropriate ways. Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo see a spirit in full armor, prepared for war, and they evidence suspicion and distrust. Hamlet, however, pledges to serve his dead father, violating the boundary between the living and the dead (Emmerichs 179). By serving the dead, he brings about his own death. The expected line between “the real and the fictive or imagined” crumbles (Garber 470). As an essential part of the play’s structure, there is madness and method here. The dead should not meet the living, and the resulting chaos is only resolved by additional deaths.

Shakespeare shows three different kinds of death in *Hamlet*’s graveyard. Ophelia is newly dead, Yorick is long-dead, and Hamlet (as well as Laertes) are the living but are soon to be the dead, as the audience knows, having heard Claudius and Laertes plot to kill Hamlet. As Act 5 opens, the gravedigger is making room for Ophelia in one of his graves. While this may seem transgressive and disrespectful, moving bones to make room for a newly dead body was

not sacrilegious or inappropriate, just as it is not considered transgressive in places like New Orleans where crypt space is limited. The exact location of a body or bones was of little relevance at that time, as long as the bones remained near or in a church. Bones were often dug up, polished, and neatly stacked in a charnel house (Emmerichs 183). So, Hamlet holding Yorick's skull and reflecting on his life is not improper. However, Hamlet, at this moment, is ignoring the possibility of his own death. He is charged with murdering a murderer and he has previously contemplated suicide, but in this scene he is, curiously, not thinking about dying. He focuses on Yorick's "gibes" and "gambols" (5.1.189) and he speculates that Alexander the Great, decomposed to dust, might eventually become a stopper in a barrel. He ignores his own peril, just as Bret ignores his own peril.

Ellis also shows three kinds of death in *Lunar Park*, which might be easy, for, as Gertrude says, "All that lives must die,/ Passing through nature to eternity" (1.2.72-73). Death is common. Even though one of the Ophelia figures, Jayne, is not literally dead, her marriage to Bret is a dying relationship. They do not have sexual relations, Bret often sleeps in a guest bedroom, and their conversations are either stilted or filled with Jayne's accusations and Bret's excuses. Bret's father is long-dead, even though his remains have not been dealt with as he wished. Bret turns into a person who is functionally dead but still technically living; Ellis describes him much as an author of horror fiction would describe a zombie. At the end of the novel, he passively moves into a homosexual relationship with a lover whose name is Mike Graves, an audible pun that indicates Bret's removal from life and is accentuated by Ellis's description of Graves as grim. Bret has embraced a "grave man," the phrase Mercutio uses to describe himself in *Romeo and Juliet* after he is fatally wounded (3.1.100). Bret uses heroin daily, removing himself from reality. Additionally, he begins to resemble his dead father. Bret

says, “My sisters marveled at how much I had begun resembling my father as I moved toward middle age. I just nodded” (Ellis 363). This living dead person, this zombie, is bereft of family, intentionality, joy, and hope. His condo in New York might as well be a tomb, with its shrine of newspaper clippings concerning the disappearance of his son. Bret remembers what has been and he is in mourning, like Hamlet in Act 1 of the play. His memory is, in one sense, his grave.

### Remember Me

Examining the use of memory is one way to analyze the intertextuality of *Hamlet*, *Peter Pan*, and *Lunar Park*. Hamlet promises to remember the charge given to him by his father’s ghost, and “remember me” (1.5.91) are the ghost’s last words to him in their first encounter. Earlier in Act 1, Hamlet asks himself in frustration, “Heaven and earth,/ Must I remember?” (1.2.143). Ophelia, speaking to Laertes after she has lost her mind, says, “There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance./ Pray you love, remember” (4.5.174-175). The epigraph that Ellis provides at the beginning of *Lunar Park* shows Hamlet promising to wipe trivial matters away from his mind, including elements from his education and any other earthly concerns. Hamlet says, after his father’s ghost has left him: “Yea, from the table of my memory/ I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,/ All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past/ That youth and observation copied there” (1.5.94-101). His father’s request will be at the forefront of his mind. However, that epigraph from the beginning of *Lunar Park* is only the first part of that sentence. Hamlet continues: “And thy commandment all alone shall live/ Within the book and volume of my brain,/ Unmix’d with baser matter. Yes, by heaven” (1.5.102-104). The command, revenge, is personified and given the primary place in Hamlet’s mind, which he compares to a book. The command will live in his mind, not simply be a fact that he will consult (Lewis 610). The

primacy of the ghost's command will not be mixed with any hindrance, and the book of Hamlet's mind will be revised to contain one text: to remember and, therefore, to revenge. Shakespeare uses the combination of those words to focus on Hamlet's emotional life. Hamlet is to remember, and therefore revenge. By showing that a mental process will precede and instigate action, Shakespeare bypasses the conventions of a revenge play and establishes that the subsequent events in Elsinore will be taking a unique course (Lewis 612).

Shakespeare highlights the importance of memory and remembering both earlier and later in the play. Claudius, in his first speech of the play, invokes the memory of his brother, describing the memory of his death as green and therefore new. In Act 1, Hamlet cries, "Heaven and earth,/ Must I remember?" (1.2.142-143). Hamlet is referring to how gently and lovingly his father acted toward Hamlet's mother. Later in that same scene, Hamlet tells Horatio that he thinks he sees his father in his mind's eye, in his memory. Ophelia tells her brother that she will lock his advice in her memory and that he will keep the key. She also tells Hamlet that she wants to return "remembrances of yours" (3.1.92). Hamlet remembers speeches that the players have previously performed, and that same troupe must, like all actors, remember their lines. The Player King reminds the audience that "Purpose is but the slave to the memory" (3.2.188). Hamlet tries to make his mother remember her first husband by showing her his picture and by comparing him to Roman gods and saying, "This was your husband" (3.4.63). Hamlet asks Horatio if he remembers what Hamlet wrote in his letter and Horatio exclaims, "Remember it, my lord!" (5.2.3) because he cannot forget it. Fortinbras claims his place in Elsinore by proclaiming, "I have some rights, of memory in this kingdom,/ Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me" (5.2.389-390). In all, the words memory, remember, and remembrance occur

nearly thirty times in the play, and various objects serve as visual memories: portraits, Yorick's skull, and love letters (Cartwright).

In Shakespeare's time, discussion of memory took its lead from Aristotle, for whom memory was visual; images were pressed on the inner eye of the brain and Hamlet reflects this theory when he says he sees his father in his mind's eye. Memory was an internal sense and was believed to be a physical part of the brain, which was divided into three parts: imagination, reason, and memory. One popular idea of memory was visual: memory was a series of buildings, wax tablets, or pieces of papyrus that were arranged in a logical order. These visual "places" in the memory were marked with particular images that provoked a particular memory. The process of remembering included recalling the particular place of a memory and using the image to produce the needed memory. Consequently, the process of forgetting included erasing the images from their particular location. The wax tablets would be cleaned of their marks and walls would be cleaned of their paint (Lewis 610-612). This is what Hamlet says he will do when he promises to remember his father and "wipe away all trivial fond records" (1.5.99). He is going to revise his memory so that he will not forget his father and his command. Hamlet is trying to convince himself that he has control over what he does and does not remember. This project, of course, fails.

Memory and remembrance are also important issues in *Peter Pan*. Peter forgets very easily. He forgets people, he forgets his adventures, and he forgets almost everything except what is happening in the present. Barrie introduces Peter's inability on the children's journey to Neverland, writing:

He [Peter] could go so much faster than they that he would suddenly shoot out of sight, to have some adventure in which they had no share. He would come down laughing over

something fearfully funny he had been saying to a star, but he had already forgotten what it was, or he would come up with mermaid scales still sticking to him, and yet not be able to say for certain what had been happening. (Barrie 39)

He forgets Hook, his most important enemy, soon after he kills him. He forgets Tinker Bell. He forgets to return on an annual basis to London to pick up Wendy for spring cleaning. One year, when he does remember to return for Wendy, she wants to talk to him about their previous adventures, but Barrie writes that Peter doesn't remember those times:

“Who is Captain Hook?” he asked with interest when she spoke of the arch enemy.

“Don't you remember,” she asked, amazed, “how you killed him and saved all our lives?”

“I forget them after I kill them,” he replied carelessly.

When she expressed a doubtful hope that Tinker Bell would be glad to see her he said, “Who is Tinker Bell?”

“O Peter!” she said, shocked; but even when she explained he could not remember.

“There are such a lot of them,” he said. “I expect she is no more.”

(Barrie 146)

When Wendy becomes too old to return to Neverland, he happily takes her daughters and granddaughters instead, forgetting that they are not Wendy.

One thing Peter clearly remembers is his reason for running away from his father and mother. Barrie writes:

“It was because I heard father and mother,” he [Peter] explained in a low voice, “talking about what I was to be when I became a man.” He was extraordinarily agitated now. “I

don't want ever to be a man," he said with passion. "I want to always be a little boy and to have fun. So I ran away to Kensington Gardens and lived a long time among the fairies."

(Barrie 27)

The only other Peter retains in his memory is his failed attempt to return to his family. Barrie writes:

"Long ago," [Peter] said, "I thought like you that my mother would always keep the window open for me, so I stayed away for moons and moons and moons, and then flew back; but the window was barred, for mother had forgotten all about me, and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed."

(Barrie 98)

Bret's actions are directed toward psychological escape and mentally burying what he does not want to remember. Cocaine, Xanax, and vodka help him (in harmful ways), as they always have. Perhaps they are his fairy dust, enabling him to fly away from his situation; unfortunately, Bret's thoughts are not happy thoughts. However, his abilities as an author work better than drugs and alcohol. Writing fiction has made him a master of revision, and he believes that he can control his circumstances. Bret says:

I was adept at erasing reality. As a writer, it was easy for me to dream up the more viable scenario than the one that had actually played itself out...As a writer you slant all the evidence in favor of the conclusions you want to produce and you rarely tilt in favor of the truth...And since I was good at making things up and detailing them meticulously, giving them the necessary spin and shine, I began realizing a new film with different scenes and a happier ending.



(Ellis 192-193)

Bret works to forget. He intentionally revises the record of his memory, as Hamlet swears to do, but Bret is working to wipe away his father instead of remember him, as Hamlet promises. Bret, instead of promising to serve and to remember his father, wants to forget him and therefore violates the line between the living and the dead differently than Hamlet. Bret consistently denies his father, first by enrolling at a far away college that is not approved by his father, by seeking to remove his father from his life, and by ignoring his father's final wishes. He has good reason to forget and disavow his father. Bret describes him as "careless, abusive, alcoholic, vain, angry, paranoid" (Ellis 6). He learns from his father that "the world lacked coherence, and that within this chaos people were doomed to failure" (Ellis 7).

Bret, however, is not able to forget his father and instead, becomes like him. Bret writes, "My father had blackened my perception of the world, and his sneering, sarcastic attitude toward everything had latched on to me. As much as I wanted to escape his influence, I couldn't. It had soaked into me, shaped me into the man I was becoming" (Ellis 7). Bret's inheritance, his fate, is to continue as a version of his father, and eventually he causes his own son to sever their relationship, as Bret had with his father. Bret deflects reality and attempts to revise his history and memory by refusing to remember his father in appropriate ways, by not learning from his father's negative example and by not creating positive, loving relationships. Instead, he acts like his father and can be described just as he described his father: "careless, abusive, alcoholic, vain, angry, paranoid" (Ellis 6). Bret attempts to control his memory, what he does and does not remember, and the consequences are tragic. When memory, and consequently the past, is revised, reality becomes fiction.

Bret (and possibly Ellis) also uses *Lunar Park* to disavow *American Psycho*, his most violent novel. In this disavowal he says he has no memory of writing it and that it was written by someone else:

I kept resisting, but the novel forced itself to be written. I would often black out for hours at a time only to realize that another ten pages had been scrawled out. My point--and I'm not quite sure how else to put this--is that the book *wanted* to be written by someone else. It wrote itself, and didn't care how I felt about it. I would fearfully watch my hand as the pen swept across the yellow legal pads I did the first draft on. I was repulsed by this creation and wanted to take no credit for it. (Ellis 16)

This automatic writing shows that Bret has been haunted for years, oppressed by some thing that he cannot identify or name and that he has lost control of his art. Perhaps he is disavowing the dark, anti-social elements of his art and talent. Perhaps Ellis is again deliberately confusing fact and fiction by using his writing abilities to deny authorship, fatherhood, of the novel he created. In a similar way, James Barrie denied writing *Peter Pan* in several different ways. When the play opened just after Christmas in 1904, the program designated the author as Ela Q. May, the youngest actress in the production. When the audience called for the author, she appeared and said that her friend, Mr. Barrie, was not in the theater. In 1928, when the play was finally published, Barrie wrote in the dedication that he did not recall writing the original play and had only a few pages of the original manuscript in his possession. He suggests that the original author was one of the Davies boys, who inspired the play, or possibly a "depressed man in overalls" found backstage in the theater (Stirling 13-14).

Bret has never told anyone about his extended period of automatic writing, and revealing this secret distances him from his work, which even he describes as evil. *American Psycho* also

serves as an example of the separation between Bret and his father because they never discussed it.

Hamlet and Bret are both caught, and truth does not set them free. When the play opens, Hamlet has been moping, caught up in his grief. He says, “I am too much in the sun” (1.2.67). He prefers the clouds of his mourning. Gertrude urges him to cast his “nighted color off,/ And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark./ Do not for ever with thy veiled lids/ Seek for thy noble father in the dust” (1.2.68-71). Claudius insults him, saying that he is obstinate, unmanly, peevish, and simple (1.2.93-100). Claudius wants Hamlet to act like a prince, setting his mourning aside. Hamlet is detached from life and absorbed by death. Gertrude and Claudius do, indeed, get what they want, as Hamlet learns the truth about his father’s death and puts aside his mourning. He is commanded to remember and, is, in a sense, called back to life. He becomes energized by memory, pain, and anger. He becomes antic instead of sullen. Memory is his motivation and his undoing.

Remembering is also part of Bret’s undoing. Bret is haunted by his past and by his father. By seeking to forget, he ignores reality and his place in it. He is unable to perform as a man, husband, or father. Also, he is unable to perform his role as an author when his characters bedevil him. Not only is he out of place in suburbia because he is unable to fully adjust to that life, he loses his place in reality because he has revised his history. By denying his father a relationship he has severed his connection to masculinity and patriarchal lineage and is doomed to follow his father’s example. Bret is haunted, not by the powerful, commanding ghost of old Hamlet, but by the

vulnerable and insecure specter of postmodern fatherhood. Such a specter cannot haunt the son in the conventional way by ordering Bret to “be a man” and avenge him, since it

is precisely the definition of manhood that has come undone. In combination with the fact that Bret's father was not murdered by a rival but died a failed father and man, this precludes vengeance as the ghost's command. In effect, the ghost cannot order the son to do anything; it can only warn Bret not to repeat his father's mistakes. (Peeren 314)

At the end of *Lunar Park*, Bret is lonely and mostly alone in the crowds of Manhattan. His punishment is not death, but a living death in which he continues to be aware of the consequences of his actions.

### Hope Rises From Ashes

While Bret's situation at the end of *Lunar Park* is sad, the ending of the novel is hopeful and somewhat beautiful. Robby has run away, but Bret has one last chance to see him, six or seven years after his disappearance. They meet in a McDonald's, a place where divorced parents often meet to exchange children, in California, with that restaurant signifying Bret's downfall. Bret would never have thought to eat at such a low brow restaurant before. However, Ellis uses the connotation of McDonald's as a typical American place of consumption and as a symbol of American ubiquity. It is common, and he knows it. When Robby gets out of the car, another Mercedes replica of Bret's teenage Mercedes, Bret is not sure he is real until he sees Robby's shadow. Given our perception of Bret as an unreliable narrator, one who cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy, we are somewhat reassured by the mundane details of a hamburger and Diet Coke and also by the fact that Bret is seeking to confirm his observations. The shadow belongs to Robby and is attached to him, just like Peter Pan's shadow after it is reattached to Peter, so this must be a real boy, one who was lost but now is found. Robby is not quite "found," as he does not return to a father-son relationship with Bret, but he does reassure Bret twice that

he is not lost. The second time he says, “I’m not lost anymore” (Ellis 396). It is a poignant moment. Bret cries and Robbie does not tell him what he needs to hear, only what he can honestly say. This scene is a recreation, a double, of Bret’s last meeting with his father. Robert and Bret were in a Los Angeles restaurant, and Bret had the opportunity to lie to his father, to say, “I love you,” and save him. However, Bret did not lie, and he drove away from the restaurant and his father in his Mercedes.

The beautiful part of the last chapter is a fantastical description of Robert’s ashes blowing over the ocean, into the past, into the world of the dead, and across the pages of *Lunar Park*. This is a last bit of magical realism. As readers, we know that it cannot be factual, yet it is emotionally real. Ellis writes that the ashes form images of the dead. He personifies the ashes, and they whisper to Bret, “I want to show you something” (Ellis 398). Ellis uses the pronoun *I*, so he is saying that Robert wants to show Bret something. Bret sees joyful scenes from his childhood, his childhood home, holidays and birthdays, as well as all the negative actions of his family, the ways in which every family damages the ones it should be protecting. Once again, Ellis is writing about memory, but this time Bret is actually remembering instead of suppressing or denying his past. This time, he is remembering appropriately. Ellis writes that the ash blew over: “all the promises canceled and the connections missed, the desires left unfulfilled and the disappointments met and the fears confirmed and every slammed door and reconciliation never made” (Ellis 399). These ashes are healing. The language here is poetic, and Bret is saying goodbye to his father and to the pain of the past in an appropriate way.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In an expanded work, it would be appropriate to discuss other symbolic uses of ash, including imagery of a phoenix rising from the ashes of its own death, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Valley of Ashes in *The Great Gatsby*, and repentance connotations from the Christian observance of Ash Wednesday.

*Lunar Park* was published in 2005, which makes the ashes significant. They signify the death (and self-destruction) of Bret's father as well as Bret's avoidance of grief, his avoidance of family responsibility, and his broken familial relationships, but they also point to New York City on September 11, 2001. A novel which discusses 9/11 and which uses the image of ashes is commenting on America, the state of the United States, and Ellis does it by writing of suburbia, the home and domesticity (alluding to domestic terrorism). Ellis, as usual, is commenting on American culture and does it by writing his own fictional history. Bret and America both deal with almost unthinkable wounds that have been inflicted by Bret's father, by father figures such as the President of the United States, and by events and situations present at the founding of the New World--by the founding fathers, so to speak. These conditions include massacre of the native population of North America, slavery, and oppression of migrant populations. American Exceptionalism necessitates a cover up of fantasy, a mix of fact and fiction, to enable American citizens to feel endorse and embrace the American dream and our national identity even though oppression, repression, and mass murder of Indian Americans and African Americans are foundations of the United States. We have to practice disavowal of the horrible elements of our early history. *Hamlet's* Player King discusses this use of memory when he says "Most necessary 'tis that we forget" in order to continue living; certain things must be forgotten or the passion of our joys and griefs would overwhelm us (3.2.186). Ellis has shown us this sort of disavowal or split before; Patrick Bateman wants both to attain the American ideal and to murder. He has dual, or dueling, desires. He splits, or doubles, reflecting the American desire for a better life and the trauma resulting from that lifestyle. Bret also shows this division, as he seems to want a quieter, less hedonistic life in suburbia but cannot fulfill the expectations of husband and father. He seems to desire the American dream but cannot suppress the trauma that results from his attempt

to live in that dream. Patrick Bateman covers up his trauma, his vile acts, with lists of luxuries and consumption of consumer goods, just as Americans might. The destruction of September 11, 2001 shows a crack in the cover up and disavowal of American trauma, and Ellis clearly points to the destruction of that day with Bret's father's ashes (Loewy 211). The transformation of Jayne and Bret's house also points to trauma and to concealment of painful history, as the house transforms itself into a replica of Bret's childhood home. The transformation shows Bret's failure to deny and forget the past through his rejection and disavowal of his father--his childhood home, the place where he experienced emotional pain, will not remain hidden in his psyche. The paint flakes off and the house reveals itself.

Ellis uses one man, himself, to show the consequences of death and destruction. Bret's personal destruction reflects trauma in the United States, showing that there is something rotten in Denmark. Ellis portrays tragedy and broken relationships, but also shows hope. Bret's hope is Robby. He loves his son even though he cannot have a relationship with him, as Robby has broken the cycle of relational destruction. Robby's decision to leave his family and his father makes all the difference. While Bret is broken, Robby is a more complete, less wounded young man. Bret cannot set everything right, just as Hamlet is unable to restore Elsinore. Just as there are bodies littering the stage at the end of *Hamlet*, Ellis finishes *Lunar Park* with broken people and broken relationships. Just as Peter Pan looks through closed nursery windows at the reunited Darling family, Bret is excluded from his own family. If *Lunar Park* is a confession of personal wrongdoing and authorial abuse, Bret performs Ellis's penance, incorporating and embodying the fates of Hamlet and Peter Pan.

Hamlet, being Hamlet, became a precursor to modern philosophy and psychology movements and has invaded our culture to such an extent that most people do not know that

common conversational phrases are quotes from the play. Peter Pan remains perennially popular, though most people think of Peter Pan as happy, not heartless, as Barrie describes him. Use of *Hamlet* and *Peter Pan* in this novel shows Ellis's familiarity with the canon of British literature, but he, more importantly, uses the allusions and intertextuality to discuss large issues: the destruction of father-son relationships, the fragility of family and home, isolation of men in Western society, and the importance of memory. A larger issue, however, is how humanity engages reality in the twenty-first century. Adam Phillips writes in his review of *Lunar Park* that: "a contemporary man [is] trying to get real having learned too much unreality from his relationship with his father, and so having acquired too much of a taste for it. And writing, he has begun to realize, is part of this taste for unreality, perhaps the most persuasive way of legitimating it" (Phillips). Writing is Ellis's forte, and here he writes of unreal things, perhaps convinced that we will keep reading only as long as we do not have to look directly at and engage reality. But Ellis is also showing a man who is not engaging reality. It is certainly possible to describe Bret as at least mildly insane because he describes characters and situations that cannot possibly be real. His reactions and interactions are at least bizarre if not deranged. Yet Bret tells us, at the beginning of the novel: "Regardless of how horrible the events described here might seem, there's one thing you must remember as you hold this book in your hands: all of it really happened, every word is true" (Ellis 40). Ellis is combining truth and non-truth and possibly showing us the starting point of insanity.

Ellis's use of *Hamlet* reminds us that father-son relationship issues permeate Western culture, much as *Hamlet* has become part of psychological theories and everyday conversation. *Hamlet* shows us that "the actions that a man might play" (1.2.84) can be destructive and indeed fatal. Ellis's use of *Peter Pan*, another work that has permeated Western culture, alludes to



Barrie's assertion of the magic and the danger of making believe. Peter's Neverland, which Barrie clearly sets in a mental location, is a fantastic, wonderful place but it is also dangerous. Neverland, like Elsinore, can be fatal. Death, in Neverland, Denmark, and the United States, is real. But another of the dangers of Neverland is spending too much time there—the constant inhabitant of Neverland might never grow up, like Bret, and be excluded from the real world, like Bret.

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## Vita

The author was born in Gadsden, Alabama. He obtained his Bachelor's degree from Covenant College in 1992 and a Master's degree in Education from the University of Tennessee Chattanooga in 1997. He currently teaches at St. James High School, St. James, Louisiana.