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CELEBRITY, FATHERHOOD, PARANOIA: THE POST-POSTMODERN GOTHIC OF *LUNAR PARK*

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The article considers Bret Easton Ellis's *Lunar Park* (2005) an example of the post-postmodern approach in genre fiction, highlighting the distance from the characteristically postmodern parody. The themes and the form of the horror novel are deployed by Ellis to identify and critique specific aspects of contemporary American society in the context of a canonically structured narration.

Il saggio propone un'analisi di *Lunar Park* (2005) di Bret Easton Ellis come esempio di attitudine post-postmoderna verso la ripresa del romanzo di genere, ben distante dal riuso parodico e dal pastiche tipici della postmodernità. L'adozione dei topoi e delle soluzioni formali del romanzo horror serve a nominare e indagare aspetti specifici della società americana nel contesto di una costruzione narrativa canonicamente strutturata.

To quote Sonia Baelo-Allué, Bret Easton Ellis «has been redeemed»[1] from his fame of pulp celebrity author with a tendency towards sensationalism and pornography, and has started to be considered more seriously by critics, as proved by the number of recent academic publications dedicated to his work. His novels, especially *American Psycho* (1991) and *Glamorama* (1998), which were initially received as controversial and senseless exploitations of violence and sex, have been re-read and analysed as social satires and textual representations of Baudrillard's consumerist hyperreality.[2]

Lunar Park (2005)[3] is significantly distant from Ellis's previous novels, and yet in constant dialogue with them. Ellis composes a horror novel pivoting on his own (fictitious) experience as father and husband, resulting in the disappearance of his son Robby. The author merges his tendency to literary self-reflexiveness (which takes the form of a meta- and autofictional construction of the novel) and a satirical representation of contemporary America with a more formally conventional and traditional construction of the novel, compared to his previous efforts. The aim of this article is to explore the meaning and purpose of Ellis's recovery of horror fiction[4] and to frame it in the context of the post-postmodern tendency to recover genre fiction non-ironically.

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1 Sonia Baelo-Allué, *Bret Easton Ellis's Controversial Fiction. Writing Between High and Low Culture*, London, Continuum, 2011, p. 19.

2 See for instance Martin Weinreich, *"Into the Void": The Hyperrealism of Simulation in Bret Easton Ellis's* American Psycho, in «Amerikastudien / American Studies», XLIX/1 (2004), pp. 65-78 and Georgina Colby Colby, *Repressive Desublimation and the Great Refusal in Bret Easton Ellis's Fiction*, in «Textual Practice», XVI/2 (2012), pp. 319-345.

3 Quotations from the novel will be from now on in the text.

4 Although I will use the terminology and the theory of the Gothic, I prefer to employ the more generic term "horror" as I believe (in accordance with David Punter, *The Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, 2 vols., Harlow and New York, Longman, 1996, p. 146) that the contemporary production of "literature of terror" cannot be reduced simply and specifically to the Gothic tradition. Moreover, as we will see, in his novel Ellis refers to books and films which are commercialized with the label "horror" rather than "Gothic".

1   Textual hauntings

Lunar Park reports the supernatural events taking place during twelve days and involving the writer Bret Easton Ellis and his family. The novel begins with a long summary of Ellis's career as a young celebrity author and his problems of addiction to alcohol and drugs, until his decision, at the beginning of his forties, to settle down with his former girlfriend and actress Jayne Dennis (a fictional character). They had their son, Robby, when they were in their twenties. Bret and Jayne move to Midland, a fictional town close to New York, because Jayne is worried about living in the city after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. They live with eleven-year-old Robby and six-year-old Sarah, Jayne's daughter from a previous relationship. The family becomes disturbed by a series of mysterious events, including changes in the disposition of the furniture and Sarah complaining that her doll is alive. The strange events culminate in the appearance of Clay, a Patrick Bateman lookalike (the serial killer protagonist of Bret's most famous novel, *American Psycho*) and in the actions of a copycat killer who takes his inspiration from that book. At the same time, Bret is disturbed by supernatural references to his estranged father's death: he finds a gravestone with his father's name in his garden, the furniture of the house is moved by a supernatural force in order to resemble Bret's childhood home, and Clay's car is the same model and number plate as Bret's father's. As these supernatural events climax, Bret understands that the manifestation of his literary creations and the ghost of his father are intertwined, as his father is appearing to warn Bret of the dangers of his fiction and his celebrity lifestyle, which are estranging him from his own son, Robby. At the end of the novel Bret manages to fight his ghosts and pacify his father's spectre. However, in an interesting turn of events, Robby disappears and joins a group of children escaping the over-controlling, unhappy adults of Midland.

As this brief summary of the novel reveals, *Lunar Park* is innervated with references to some of the most prominent themes in Gothic fiction (particularly the double and the dangers of creation), filtered through the tradition of American horror fiction of the twentieth century and especially relevant to the work of Stephen King.[5] A first and major Gothic theme in *Lunar Park* is, of course, the reflection on the dangers of creation and imagination. This preoccupation can be traced to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein*,[6] a text obliquely referred to in the novel (p. 51). While the act

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[5] *Lunar Park* is also rich in references to several horror films. The POV videos recording the death of Bret's father hint at the found footage horror genre, of which the most famous example is *The Blair Witch Project* (2000). More generally, the depiction of the suburban haunting has significant traits in common with *The Amityville Horror* (1979), while the figure of the investigators of the occult are derived from *Poltergeist* (1982) and *Ghostbusters* (1984). Details such as a scratched door or the ash prints are also taken respectively from *Children of the Corn* (1984) and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), as Godden has noted (Richard Godden, *Bret Easton Ellis,* Lunar Park*, and the Exquisite Corpse of Deficit Finance*, in «American Literary History», xxv/3 (2013), pp. 588-606, p. 600). The theme of the killer doll references two successful franchises, *Child's Play* (1988-2017) and *Puppet Master* (1989-2018). Finally, the presence of a possessed dog in *Lunar Park* reminds us of King's novel *Cujo* (1981) (Baelo-Allué, *Bret Easton Ellis's Controversial Fiction*, cit., p. 181). Ellis's interest in genre films as a source of both entertainment and social criticism also manifests in his podcast, where he interviews genre directors like Walter Hill and Mike Garris.

[6] Sherry R. Truffin, *Creation Anxiety in Gothic Metafiction:* The Dark Half *and* Lunar Park, in *A Companion to the American Gothic*, ed. by Charlers L. Crow, Malden (MA), John Wiley and Sons, 2014,

of creation in *Frankenstein* is physical, in Ellis's novel it is purely intellectual: the creatures that haunt Bret and his family are the results of his work as a writer. Even Sarah's doll, Terby, is revealed to be the object of a story Bret wrote in his childhood (and reads as *Y Bret*, *Why, Bret?*, spelled backwards). However, Ellis's preoccupation with the undesired effects of his literary creation is also evident in the significantly more concrete fear of the actions of copycat killers, as well as the supernatural manifestations. In the first chapter of the novel, Bret reports his concern for the fact that the savage homicides of Jeffrey Dahmer, «the infamous homosexual/cannibal/serial killer from Wisconsin», were inspired by *American Psycho* (pp. 19-20).

In this sense, *Lunar Park* establishes itself within the genre of contemporary horror fiction which has been labelled "Postmodern Gothic" due to the preoccupation with the dangers of representation.[7] As Fred Botting argues, the Postmodern Gothic makes use of a typical feature of classical Gothic texts: the lack of boundaries between reality and representation, which leads to the evanescence of identity and social norms. This ambiguity is greatly emphasised by the typically postmodern schizophrenic separation of the text and the referent, leading to a crisis of (social and personal) identity that is characteristic both of Gothic and postmodern literature.[8] This field contains texts such as T.E.D. Klein's novella *The Events at Poroth Farm* (1972; 1990), Clive Barker's short story *Son of Celluloid* (in the third volume of *Books of Blood*, 1984-1985) and his novel *Weaveworld* (1987) and Stephen King's *IT* (1986) and *The Dark Half* (1989). Klein's novella pivots on a scholar whose studies in horror fiction parallel the appearance of a supernatural menace bearing resemblance to the books he has been reading. In Barker's short story, the tumour of an escaped convict who died behind a film screen gains sentience and power from the emotions of the spectators and murders the workers of the cinema. In *Weaveworld*, an elaborated carpet is the access to a world of hidden people. In *IT*, the demonic entity IT takes the shape, amongst other things, of those movie monsters that scare the children it hunts.[9] The most obvious model of *Lunar Park* is King's *The Dark*

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pp. 56-67, pp. 64 ff.

7 Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 141.

8 Fred Botting, *Gothic*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 170-171. Another definition for this field is Gothic-postmodernism (Maria Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism. Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2009). As the formulation suggests, this category is as interested in highlighting postmodern tendencies in Gothic texts (coherently with the aforementioned category of Postmodern Gothic) as it is in underlining the essentially Gothic insistence of postmodern texts on unspeakable and sublime terror (pp. 10-11). As long as Beville suggests that both the Gothic and the postmodern are interested in the dangers of representation, Gothic-postmodernism essentially coincides with the Postmodern Gothic. However, when explaining the role of terror and the sublime as a connecting trait of the Gothic and the postmodern, Beville's text is less clear and her critical tool proves to be too general. Except for the insistence on the fact that we live in times of constant utter terror (although it is not clear why this situation should be considered unprecedented in human history), one fails to understand precisely how this preoccupation with terror manifests itself in postmodern literature. Moreover, Beville does not take into account the stylistic features of postmodernism that make it a literary current on its own, and thus wrongfully equates two texts such as Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985) and *Lunar Park*, whose approach to genre literature is essentially opposite.

9 King has also exploited this theme in the more recent *Bag of Bones* (1999) and *Duma Key* (2005). See Timothy C. Baker, *The Neuro-Aesthetics of Caricature: Representations of Reality in Bret Easton Ellis's* Lunar Park, in «Poetics Today», xxx/3 (2009), pp. 471-515, p. 498.

Half (and indeed, Ellis himself described his novel as a homage to King).[10] *The Dark Half* tells the story of Thad Beaumont, a successful author of crime novels under the pen name of George Stark. When Thad decides to abandon his literary persona, George Stark takes on a physical incarnation and starts killing Thad's collaborators and friends. Although in the end Stark is defeated, the novel is innervated with Thad's ambiguous attitude towards his fictional persona, whose crimes he abhors but whom he cannot help find fascinating.

The plot structure of *The Dark Half* is referred to by Ellis in the duplication of Bret the character and Bret the writer, respectively, the man who wants to settle down with his family and the writer who is hungry for (self) destruction: «The writer yearned for chaos, mystery, death. These were his inspirations. This was the impulse he leaned toward. The writer wanted bombs exploding. The writer wanted an Olympian defeat. The writer craved myth and legend and coincidence and flames. The writer wanted Patrick Bateman back in our lives. The writer was hoping the horror of it all would galvanize me» (p. 312). The opposition between the writer and the character is made evident by Bret's literary creations, who commit murders and threaten his family, and is explicitly evoked by the frequent dialogue between the fictional Bret and "the writer", who seems to be the source of the horror of *Lunar Park* («Look how black the sky is, the writer said. I made it this way», p. 318).

While the dangers of artificial creation have been a central topos in Gothic fiction at least since *Frankenstein* or Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (1816), the dangers of literature as a source of distraction from real life, and indeed as something that could take it over, have always represented a source of critique of the romance novel in general and of the Gothic romance in particular. Jane Austen's emblematic *Northanger Abbey* (1818) is one clear example of the extent to which this critique was diffused even at the beginnings of the genre. Nevertheless, the recovery of this theme in Ellis' fiction is also intended to be a way to reflect on the mechanisms of fame and authorship from which his writing and literary career are inseparable. The first chapter of the novel summarises Bret's career as a celebrity author, reflecting the sensationalist accounts of his life in magazines and the prejudice of academics, rather than describing the literary efforts of a serious writer (as Ellis indubitably is). Bret's fame and success are intertwined with the scandalous content of his novels, which are possibly more successful because of his reputation for excess as a public figure. On the one hand, Ellis depicts the character Bret as a figure bound to his literary achievements, but on the other, he highlights how writing can inhibit the construction of a private life. Indeed, regarding Ellis and King, literature and life do not seem to be able to coexist, to the extent that a change of writing habits, of style, or of genre, generates ominous consequences in the lives of Bret and Thad. This opposition underlines the contradiction of the writing life as a «Gothic trap»: «if the author is identified with his text, if he exists only in writing, then writer's block is a threat of annihilation» not only for his pseudonyms, but for the author himself.[11]

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10 STEPHEN KING, *Stephen King on "Lunar Park" being an homage to him*, in «Entertainment» (1/02/2007), https://ew.com/article/2007/02/01/stephen-king-lunar-park-being-homage-him/.
11 TRUFFIN, *Creation Anxiety in Gothic Metafiction:* The Dark Half *and* Lunar Park, cit., p. 58. See also

In comparison to King, Ellis creates an additional layer of complexity by structuring his novel as an auto- (and meta) fiction.[12] By choosing a character with his own name and biography, Ellis does not simply thematize the opposition between literature and life, but he renders it textually. The readers face a dichotomy between Bret Easton Ellis (the author of *Lunar Park*) and Bret (a character in a horror novel), who is doubled in the opposition between his "real" life and literature, a dichotomy incarnated by Bret's dialogues with "the writer". This blurring is so essential to the understanding of *Lunar Park* that it was exploited during the commercial launch of the book. The publisher created a website with two versions of Ellis, the one described in the novel and the biographical one, including slight differences concerning which college he went to, his weight and his height.[13]

Autofiction is a mode of narration in which author, protagonist, and narrator coincide, similarly to autobiography except the 'facts' narrated are false. Developed by French literary critics and writers during the Seventies in a moment of literary experimentalism,[14] autofiction functioned as a means to comment on the unreliability of autobiographical writing, on the fragmentation of the postmodern self, and on the mediatization and fictionalization of reality. Specifically, authors such as Philip Roth (in *Operation Shylock*, 1993) and Paul Auster (whose novel *City of Glass*, 1985, contains autofictional elements) employ autofictional devices to make readers question the boundaries that separate reality and invention. Thus, autofiction challenges the knowledgeability of the world.

Indeed, Ellis uses autofiction to create ambivalence in the readers about the nature of *Lunar Park*. Its nature of confession is contradicted by the implausibility of the story, while elements of horror fiction are blurred with elements of (apparent) autobiographical confession. This is reinforced by the metafictional frame of the novel. Ellis also merges real characters such as Jay McInerney and Keanu Reeves with fictional ones, which is a typical feature of autofiction. Moreover, in the first pages of the book Ellis contradictorily exhibits the characteristics of a witness and an unreliable narrator, highlighting and undermining the truthfulness of the text simultaneously:

> I've recounted the "incidents" in sequential order. *Lunar Park* follows these events in a fairly straightforward manner, and though this is, ostensibly, a true story, no research was involved in the writing of this book. For example, I did

Georgina Colby, *Bret Easton Ellis. Underwriting the Contemporary*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 159.

12 Marjorie Worthington, *Fiction in the "Post-Truth" Era: The Ironic Effects of Autofiction*, in «Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction», lviii/5 (2017), pp. 471-483, p. 479.

13 Baelo-Allué, *Bret Easton Ellis's Controversial Fiction*, cit., p. 176.

14 Lorenzo Marchese, *L'io possibile*, Massa, Transeuropa, 2014, pp. 16-17 and pp. 35-37. Although conceived in such a milieu, in the 2000s autofiction has grown to have the function of validation: the presence of the author in the first-person serves to increase the reader's suspension of disbelief and participation, rather than to make them question the fictionality of the events. See Philippe Forest, *Le Roman, le réel*, in *Le Roman, le réel et autres essais*, Nantes, Cécile Defaut, 2007, pp. 19-107, Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique 2. Signes de vie*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, pp. 25 ff., Arnaud Schmitt, *Je réel/je fictif. Au-delà d'une confusion postmoderne*, Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2010, and Carlo Tirinanzi De Medici, *Su alcuni aspetti dell'autofinzione*, in «Il Verri», lxiv (2017), pp. 19-39.

> not consult the autopsy reports concerning the murders that occurred during this
> period because, in my own way, I had committed them. I was responsible, and
> I knew what had happened to the victims without referring to the coroner. [...]
> The "witnesses" who could corroborate these events have disappeared. [...] My
> psychiatrist at the time, Dr. Janet Kim, offered the suggestion that I was "not
> myself" during this period, and has hinted that "perhaps" drugs and alcohol were
> "key factors" in what was a "delusional state". (pp. 44-45)

The character Bret is an unreliable narrator because he claims he intends to be faithful to the events, but at the same time he strongly suggests that he may have imagined everything. The contradiction displayed by Ellis at the very beginning of his novel shows the ambiguity between the writer's life and fiction. By blurring these borders, Ellis makes evident the danger of writing that is central to *Lunar Park*.

Furthermore, the novel's opening lines qualify *Lunar Park* as a metafiction. A metafiction is a text that depicts the process of its own making, drawing attention to its composition and tracing an equivalence between fiction and reality: «"You do an awfully good impression of yourself". That is the first line of *Lunar Park* and in its brevity and simplicity it was supposed to be a return to form, and echo, of the opening line from my debut novel, *Less than Zero*» (p. 3). *Lunar Park*'s opening lines include the composition of the text in the plot itself. The phrase «You do an awfully good impression of yourself» is also the first sentence of the second chapter of the novel. The novel immediately draws attention to the mechanisms of fiction. The ending of the novel is equally self-reflective. After pathetically mourning his disappeared son, Bret writes that «he can always find me here, whenever he wants, right here, my arms held out and waiting, in the pages, behind the covers, at the end of *Lunar Park*» (p. 453). As Timothy C. Baker argues, «the meaning of the title is finally that it is the title of this novel and nothing more».[15]

This peculiar recursivity in the construction of *Lunar Park* may be considered, to a certain extent, a postmodern attempt to highlight the equivalence of facts and fiction. In this sense, *Lunar Park* would not refer to anything real but its own nature of novel. Nevertheless, I would argue that the metafictional frame of *Lunar Park* has to be placed in the wider context of the theme of autofictional haunting. While it is true that the duplication of the character Bret and the overlapping of the writer and his protagonist continue the discourse on «the disintegrated, multiple, and ephemeral identities» of postmodernity that Ellis started in *American Psycho* and *Glamorama*,[16] it is also evident that Ellis's use of the literary device of autofiction aims to articulate «a sense of the writer as a commodity».[17] By writing *Lunar Park* as an autofiction, Ellis recreates the same voyeuristic patterns that characterize the relationship between the celebrity and the pub-

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15 Baker, *The Neuro-Aesthetics of Caricature: Representations of Reality in Bret Easton Ellis's* Lunar Park, cit., p. 494.

16 Esther Peeren, *Ghostly Generation Games. Multidirectional Hauntings and Self-Spectralization in Bret Easton Ellis's* Lunar Park, in «Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction», LIII/4 (2012), pp. 305-321, p. 309.

17 James Annesley, *Brand Ellis. Celebrity Authorship in* Lunar Park, in Naomi Mandel (ed.), *Bret Easton Ellis.* American Psycho*,* Glamorama*,* Lunar Park, New York, Bloomsbury, 2010, pp. 143-157, p. 150.

lic, engaging the reader's morbid curiosity with apparently realistic, and otherwise believable, revelations about his personal life. The conventions of horror fiction combine with the postmodern device of autofiction to generate a critique of literary stardom.

More specifically, the use of autofiction reinforces the spectral hauntings present in the text by extending them to the figure of the author himself. Indeed, Bret is the source of the hauntings not simply because he had a spoilt relationship with his father, but because he is a writer. The theme of haunting is intended to critique the perception of the writer as commodity, and vice versa. It is also worth noting that Bret often displays the characteristics of a spectre. In the third chapter of the novel, half-drunk and wearing a sheet, Bret walks into the kitchen like «a ghost» (p. 78). Clay, the incarnation of the serial killer tormenting Bret's family, is said to look like Christian Bale, the actor who plays Bateman in the 2000 cinematic version of *American Psycho*, and like a young version of Bret (p. 122). At the same time, the spectral nature of Bret is coherent with the superficial, evanescent nature of his fame. As the opening line of the novel states, Bret's life is not real, it is simply an imitation of a life. For example, Bret is often mistaken for fellow writer and friend Jay McInerney. He is also trying to write a novel, *Teenage Pussy*, which resembles a parody of Ellis's previous books, containing the features of his style including excess and his «trademark laconic humor» (p. 102). It is even suggested by detective Kimball (another incarnation of a literary invention by Ellis) that Bret may be a fictional character himself (p. 185).

The confusion between life and literature and, indeed, the danger that this confusion implies, are present in *Lunar Park* in the double form of the evanescence of the celebrity writer and of the author in the series of misunderstandings generated by the autofiction genre. Bret's spectral nature is due to his inability to escape the dynamics of literary fame and addiction, and, on a textual level, this inability is expressed in the close, self-referential metafictional structure of the novel. At the end of *Lunar Park* Bret abandons any attempt to create a family and escape those dynamics, and his addiction to cocaine changes into an addiction to heroin (p. 446). If Robby is able to escape this dynamic it is because he abandons Bret, and therefore the text. The novel ends coherently with a reference to its nature as *only* a novel, suggesting that its own fictionality is the only thing that matters.

2   Inter-generational hauntings

To a certain extent, if the recovery of horror fiction in *Lunar Park* were limited to the reflection on the theme of the double, the novel would not be so distant from Ellis's previous works[18] and could be easily labelled postmodern Gothic. On the contrary, contemporary horror fiction provides a frame in which two themes are developed: fa-

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18 Although I am stressing the distance between *Lunar Park* and Ellis's previous novels, there is nevertheless a thematic continuity between them, and particularly with *Glamorama*. Preponderant features of this novel are, like in *Lunar Park*, the theme of the double, the invasive presence of doppelgängers, the blurring of reality and representation, and the role of terrorism.

therhood, and the crisis of American society after 9/11. In this sense, the model of the horror novel is employed by Ellis to structure the story of an inter-generational haunting.

To this regard, the other Stephen King's novel intertextually referenced in *Lunar Park* is *The Shining* (1977). The plot of *The Shining* famously is about the possession of the Overlook Hotel by supernatural forces, threatening and endangering the family of the winter caretaker, Jack Torrance, who accepts the position at the Overlook Hotel in order to finish writing his play. The central theme in *The Shining* is Jack's desire to kill his son, Danny, inspired by forces haunting the hotel, which reinforce his previous history of alcoholism and anger episodes. However, at the end of the novel, Jack saves his son by sacrificing himself when the hotel is destroyed.

Bret's parental menace towards his son takes inspiration from *The Shining*. Moreover, in both Ellis's and King's fiction this menace takes its form in both a supernatural presence and in alcohol abuse (and drug abuse, in Bret's case). Jack Torrance and Bret have several common traits. Both of them are writers suffering from writer's block and both fail at fatherhood because they pursue literary careers. For example, Jack breaks his son's arm because he interferes with his papers, while Bret initially refuses to recognize his child, rejecting the responsibilities this would have implied. In *Lunar Park*, Bret is explicitly compared to Jack by his wife, who complains about his «big Jack Torrance routine» (p. 248).

The most interesting common trait between Bret and Jack Torrance is the memory of their abusive fathers that prevents them from having a positive relationship with their sons. In *The Shining*, Jack's alcoholism and anger issues are a consequence of his father's violent behaviour. In *Lunar Park*, Bret's commitment issues, cynicism, and addiction are a consequence of the influence of his father, Martin Ellis, a greedy 'yuppie' who alienated his entire family. As Bret explains, «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» (p. 8). Indeed, a «sneering, sarcastic attitude» is what characterizes not only Bret, but Ellis's fiction in general. Thirty years later, Bret has become his father, and Robbie, consequently, has become Bret: a child scared of his own father who attempts unsuccessfully to fill the gap with his own son (p. 237). As Ruth Cain argues, Bret represents a model of a father who fails on a double front: he is simultaneously unable to escape the «outdated, useless masculine norms» his father represented, or to «embody [the] traditional masculine hegemony» that would allow him to build a solid family life.[19]

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19 Ruth Cain, *"Imperfectly Incarnate": Father Absence, Law and Lies in Bret Easton Ellis'* Lunar Park *and John Burnside's* A Lie About My Father, in «Law, Culture and the Humanities», x/11 (2014), pp. 130-154, p. 140. Coherently with the theme of inter-generational haunting, the novel references *Hamlet* throughout. Bret and his family live in Elsinore Lane, close to Ophelia Boulevard, Fortinbras Mall, Horatio Park, Voltemand Drive, and Osric Motel, and the novel opens with an epigraph from *Hamlet* (Baelo-Allué, *Bret Easton Ellis's Controversial Fiction*, cit., p. 183). The similarities between *Lunar Park* and *Hamlet* are evident: both of them tell the story of a man driven crazy by the spectral presence of his father. Nevertheless, as Nielsen argues, «attempts to read *Lunar Park* as a retelling of Hamlet are doomed to fail» (Henrik Skov Nielsen, *What's in a Name? Double Exposure in* Lunar Park, in Mandel, *Bret Easton Ellis*, cit., pp. 129-142, p. 137) because the themes of fratricide, incest, and vengeance so central in *Hamlet* are absent

To merge the two otherwise parallel themes of the dangers of fiction and fatherhood, Ellis establishes a difference between a ghost haunting (in this case, his father's) and a demon that takes on the form of his literary creations (pp. 386-390). This distinction, nevertheless, is never fully explained. Bret's father wants to save Bret from repeating the very same error he made when raising him, and thus to save Robby from Bret's self-referential status of celebrity author. Bret's father is the source of the hauntings both in the sense that his spirit torments Bret, and that Bret's choice of being a writer has its origins in his spoilt relationship with him. Patrick Bateman, the protagonist of Bret's most successful novel *American Psycho*, is said to be modelled on Bret's father (pp. 18-19).[20]

The theme of fatherhood is connected to the multiplicity and multi-directionality of hauntings taking place in the novel. Bret the character is haunted by Bret the writer, who creates Bateman and Terby; this haunting is extended to Ellis as author by the autofictional frame of the novel. At the same time, Bret's father haunts him to warn him about Robbie, who is haunted by the unpleasant presence of Bret himself. For instance, the fact that the furniture of Bret's house is mysteriously moved in the night-time to recreate Bret's childhood home shapes a space in which Bret is, at the same time, father and son.[21] Coherently, this inter-generational haunting (a familiar past casting its shadow on the following generations) also acts in reverse, as Bret is disturbed by the uncanny presence of his children. Most significantly, Sarah seems to become aware of the spectral activities in the house sooner than Bret. The duplicity of these hauntings finds a connection in the manifestation of Bret's literary creation, Patrick Bateman, who is both an effect of his imaginative effort and of his relationship with his father, while Bret, as Georgina Colby has noted, «takes on the characteristics of both a trauma victim and a spectre».[22]

In *Lunar Park* the theme of the inter-generational haunting is intertwined with the theme of the literary haunting. Ellis's recovery of King's fiction merges two main models, *The Dark Half* and *The Shining* into an autofictional test in order to create a novel able to contain and give coherence to these separate aspects of his story.

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from Ellis's book. In other words, Ellis's references to Hamlet can be read simply as a superficial recovery of a fundamental text of English literature dealing with the problematic influence of the paternal figure, and at the same time as a provocation, «as if Ellis could not resist teasing his readers with the possibility that America's most self-consciously trashy author might dare to rewrite *Hamlet* (ANNESLEY, *Brand Ellis. Celebrity Authorship in* Lunar Park, cit., p. 155).

20 Problematic relationships with fathers are present in Ellis's previous novels, including the deranged youth in *Less Than Zero* and *The Rules of Attraction*, and in *American Psycho* Patrick Bateman is estranged from his father (and generally has an unpleasant relationship with his family). In *Glamorama* Victor Ward's father, a US senator, organizes a complex and unrealistic plot to distance Victor from America and finally substitute him with a doppelgänger.

21 GRAHAM MATTHEWS, *Ethics and Desire in the Wake of Postmodernism. Contemporary Satire*, London, Continuum, 2012, p. 47.

22 COLBY, *Bret Easton Ellis. Underwriting the Contemporary*, cit., p. 153. In this sense, as Esther Peeren notes, Bret is in line with the Derridean notion of a spectre as something that merges different temporalities, bringing together the past of a traumatic event and the future of its possible repetition (PEEREN, *Ghostly Generation Games*, cit., p. 306). See JACQUES DERRIDA, *Spettri di Marx*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 1994, p. 18.

3 Suburban hauntings

According to Freud's theory of the *unheimlich*, the effect of uncanniness in super-natural fiction is not motivated simply by the presence of something that is unfamiliar, but rather by the perception of something disturbing *in* the familiar: «the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long famil-iar».[23] This dialectic between the familiar and the alien is particularly evident in the two subgenres of the haunted house and of the small-town horror. The latter can be traced at the roots of the American Gothic, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's seminal work *Young Good-man Brown* (1835).[24] Another important author is Howard Phillips Lovecraft, a pioneer of the horror genre who uses the familiar, civilized, and historical New England land-scape as a setting for a cosmic horror. Nevertheless, the fortune that this subgenre had in American literature of the second half of the twentieth century is due to the influ-ence of the work of Stephen King, whose novels, from *Salem's Lot* (1979) onwards, are often set in small towns troubled with an external or internal menace. Ellis's suburban setting in *Lunar Park* is evidently reminiscent of several important works of twentieth century small-town horror fiction: Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* and *IT*, Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* (1979) and *Floating Dragon* (1982), Dan Simmons' *Summer of Night* (1991), Malcom McDowell's *Cold Moon Over Babylon* (1980) and the *Blackwater* series (1983), to mention only a few. In this category of horror fiction, a small town and its inhabi-tants are endangered by a supernatural menace that can either have an external (*Salem's Lot*) or internal (*Ghost Story*) origin, or they represent a menace in themselves because they are hiding a secret (which is the case in Thomas Tryon's *Harvest Home*, 1973).[25] In both instances, small-town horror presents an evident ambiguity: small towns and their placid suburban landscapes represent conservative idyllic spaces, but their peaceful ap-pearance hides a secret menace. The behaviour of the inhabitants (when they are not the source of this menace) is often complicit, tending «to compromise, if not collapse, the distinctions between the town's inhabitants and whatever is threatening them».[26]

Both the haunted house and the small-town horror genre thematize the role of the past in the haunting of the present. It is significant that the latter tends to incorporate the previous, since small-town horror is also often centered on a specific building in the town, like the school in Simmons' *Summer of Night* or the abandoned houses in King's *IT* and *Salem's Lot*. In the traditional haunted house novel buildings are haunted because of the crimes previously committed in them and because of the sufferance they generated. Similarly, a small-town can be haunted as the result of an ancient crime, as in Straub's

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23 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 1917-1919*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1955, vol. xvii, p. 220.

24 John Langan, *The Small-Town Horror*, in *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural. An Encyclopedia of Our Worst Nightmares*, ed. by Sunand T. Joshi, Westport (CT)/London, Greenwood, 2006, vol. ii, pp. 537-564, pp. 538-540.

25 I have taken this distinction, slightly modified, from Hank Wagner, *Small Town Horror*, in *Supernatu-ral Literature of the World: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Sunand T. Joshi and Stefan Dziemianowicz, Westport, Greenwood Press, 2005, vol. iii, pp. 1037-40, p. 1037, and Langan, *The Small-Town Horror*, cit., p. 561.

26 *Ibid.*

Ghost Story or *Floating Dragon*. In other words, a central element in haunting episodes (whether in houses or cities) is history: haunted houses and towns are not inherently evil, but become such because of a specific event that happened in their past. Even in the case of cosmic haunting, like *IT*, the supernatural presence is bound to the city of Derry and manifests itself cyclically, expanding the historical span of the novel. The return of the past, a central theme of Gothic fiction, takes a physical form in houses or towns.

Interestingly, although it is a haunted house/town novel, *Lunar Park* does not entirely follow the same trope. The house is haunted, but the source of the haunting is Bret's personal past and not the history of the house, which is unrelated to and almost untouched by the fate of its occupants. The places described in *Lunar Park* are anesthetized and without history. They are all newly created spaces for the cosmopolitan American upper-middle class and wealthy celebrities. The names of the topography in Midland are all arbitrarily recovered from Hamlet, and the only facilities are international franchises including Starbucks and Walmart, and malls full of fashionable delicacies and luxury brands. Even the houses are disturbingly similar, «palatial and minimalist and immaculate» (p. 196), giving an image of uniformity and, as is typical in Ellis's fiction, of a superficial lack of depth.

As David Punter argues, the Gothic haunted house reflects, in its impossible planimetrics, the mysterious, uncanny stratification of its history and of the family who lives there: «The Gothic mansion or castle is always without a total plan: Udolpho and the House of the Seven Gables are equally of doubtful extent and shape, no matter how solid their details might appear. And this, of course, reflects their metaphorical nature; the secret of the house is the secret of the family [...]».[27] The Gothic house and the Gothic town are full of secrets and ambiguities, both physical (secret passages or chambers) and historical (a hidden episode of the familiar past). Most importantly, there is often a coincidence between the discovery of a topographical secret and a historical one. On the contrary, there is nothing inherently disturbing in Bret's house, which is carefully described in each of his parts with the neutral enthusiasm of a magazine of interior design:

> The house had been referred to as a McMansion in the Talk article: nine thousand square feet and situated in a fast-growing and wealthy suburb, and 307 Elsinore Lane wasn't even the grandest in the community – it merely reflected the routine affluence of the neighbourhood. It was, according to a spread in Elle Décor, "minimalist global eclectic with an emphasis on Spanish revival" but with "elements of midcentury French chateau and a touch of sixties Palm Springs modernism" (imagine that if you can; it was not a design concept everyone grasped). The interior was done in soothing shades of sandcastle and white corn, lily and bleached flour. Stately and lavish, slick and sparsely furnished, the house had four high-ceiling bedrooms and a master suite that occupied half of the second story and included a fire-place, a wet bar, a refrigerator, two 165-square-foot walk-in closets and window shades that disappeared into pockets in the ceiling, and each of the two adjoining bathrooms had a giant sunken tub. (pp. 78-79)

In this passage, Ellis seems to refer ironically to the traditional impossibility of mapping the Gothic mansion by referring to the difficulty of understanding the style of the

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27 Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, cit., vol. 1, p. 200.

house design. Indeed, the house is vast, and its opulence and grandeur are exaggerated in this passage to the extent that it is complicated for the reader to get an idea of it. Nevertheless, there is nothing mysterious in Bret's house, which is luminous, modern, and «sparsely furnished», as opposed to the Gothic model of a house crowded with the remnants of its previous owners. Most significantly, the house is brand new and standardized, so it cannot possibly be a vehicle for a mysterious past.

The town where Bret and his family live reflects the same characteristics as their house. The town seems «dreamed up and fractured and modern», spacious, elegant, and crowded with modern technologies such as «gigantic liquid-crystal display screens». It is complete with a «2000-acre nature preserve and horse farms and two golf courses», «more children's bookstores than there were Barnes & Nobles», «numerous playgrounds and a baseball field», and «a variety of gourmet food stores, a first-class cheese shop, a row of patisseries» (p. 110). Concurrent with the small-town horror genre, Midland qualifies as a haunted town since it is plagued by the Patrick Bateman killings (or his copycat) and a supernatural wind that menaces Bret. However, Midland does not follow all the conventions of the genre. While the small-town horror genre is centered on the reaction of a *community* against a threat, to the extent that the narration is often from multiple viewpoints, Ellis carefully avoids to create a sense of community between Bret and the other inhabitants of the town. The few encounters that take place between them are characterized by anxieties and use of drugs, while the insistence on the modernity and commoditization of every part of the town inhibits the possibility of the individual to create a personal bond with the spaces he lives in.

The spaces in *Lunar Park* are *familiar* spaces, and at the same time, they are not. They are familiar in the sense that they are so generic they can become familiar to anyone, and are thus deprived of that historical depth that marks the Gothic spaces of the haunted house/town. What characterizes the spaces of *Lunar Park* is precisely this attempt to cancel history, which is a topographical figure of Bret's attempt to build a new life for himself as a father and a family man: an attempt doomed to fail. Although superficially new, perfect, and entirely set up for family life, the spaces in *Lunar Park* are innervated with the same tensions that shatter American society, reflected on a personal level by Bret's addiction, anxiety, and responsibility issues. The suburban town that Bret and his family move to is populated by people who left larger metropolitan cities in fear of terrorist attacks (pp. 40-41 and 81-82). Children (p. 159) and even animals (p. 47) take several drugs for anxiety and concentration. The routine of the inhabitants of Midland is regulated by appointments with psychiatrists, couples therapists and personal trainers, highlighting the constant necessity for regulation that is indeed the symptom of a lack of control. Consequently, the children of Midland, distressed and anxious about the world of adults, organize their own disappearance. Indeed, their plot is the only real activity in the novel that is organized on a social, and not individual, level. The immaculate and aseptic spaces of *Lunar Park*, which cannot prevent or avoid Bret's haunting, are similarly unable to hide the paranoia haunting American society.

It is interesting to note that the source of the haunting in Ellis' fiction is an individual rather than a place. The view of a haunting deprived of a geographical centre can be read in the context of the Reaganian individualism that Ellis criticizes through-

out his novels. Bret's excessive focus on himself generates the haunting, and, at the same time, prevents him from saving himself and his family. Once again, the parallels of Bret's personal haunting and the crisis of American society have a connection in the figure of Bret's father, a yuppie who «made the bulk of his money from highly speculative real estate deals, most of them during the Reagan years» (p. 7). The allusion to «real estate deals», in the context of a ghost story centered on a state-of-the-art house, shows Ellis's intention to comment on the fragmentation produced in American society during the Eighties. Specifically, as Georgina Colby argues, this connection is made evident by the spectral appearances of Steven Spielberg's movie *1941* on Bret's televisions. *1941* is the year Martin Ellis was born, and is thus one of the ways in which Martin tries to manifest his presence to his son to warn him about Robby.

At the same time, Spielberg's comedy (which describes the reactions, in the city of Los Angeles, to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor) can be read as a metaphor for the panic pervading post-9/11 America.[28] As Peeren, following Baudrillard, notes, the aftermath of 9/11 can be described as spectral, «with its extreme mediatization, elusive villains and the ghostly prisoners of Guantanamo Bay and extraordinary rendition which was itself an extremely spectral event».[29] According to Baudrillard, the 9/11 attacks can be considered a spectral event: in a historical moment labelled as the "end of history", the attacks represented the violent re-emersion of the faults of capitalism. Moreover, terrorism adopts the same «principle of uncertainty» in the form of the insecurity that characterises the capitalist system, built upon «the random and virtual form it imposes everywhere – lean production, floating capital, forced mobility and acceleration».[30] Similarly, Bret's haunting takes place in a social context that tries to situate itself outside history, and greed and envy (the faults that poisoned his father's mind, therefore transforming him into a ghost) remain the founding values of that community. For example, it is worth noting that the ashes of Bret's father are held in the *caveau* of a bank.

Such a view of terrorism also characterizes Ellis's previous novel, *Glamorama*, which follows a group of supermodels-turned-terrorists. Like *Lunar Park*, *Glamorama* is profoundly concerned with the relationship between reality and representation. It is never clear in the novel whether events are actually taking place or if they are simply a part of a movie currently being filmed. The hyperrealistic style of the novel, as well as the emphasis on mediation and the indistinguishability of reality and fiction, seem to prefigure Baudrillard's (and Žižek's) considerations of the Twin Tower attacks.[31] Nevertheless, while *Glamorama* is rich in graphic descriptions of terrorist attacks, in *Lunar Park* terrorism is completely absent. 9/11 is mentioned only once, and no further details are provided

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28 Colby, *Bret Easton Ellis. Underwriting the Contemporary*, cit., p. 154.

29 Peeren, *Ghostly Generation Games*, cit., p. 305.

30 Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, New York, Verso, 2002, pp. 58-59. See also Derrida, *Spettri di Marx*, cit., p. 108.

31 On terrorism in *Glamorama*, see William Stephenson, *A Terrorism of the Rich: Symbolic Violence in Bret Easton Ellis's* Glamorama *and J. G. Ballard's* Super-Cannes, in «Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction», xlviii/3 (2007), pp. 278-93 and Stephen Klöckner, *Systemic insecurity, spectacular violence: Bret Easton Ellis' Glamorama*, in «Estrema. Interdisciplinary Review for the Humanities», v (2014), pp. 1-18; on terrorism in *Lunar Park*, see Monika Loewy, Lunar Park*: From Ashes to Ashes*, in «European Journal of American Culture», xxxiii/3 (2014), pp. 209-222.

about the threat that the inhabitants of Midland fear. What remains after this removal (or repression) is the trauma of the attacks, their spectral reverberation in everyday life in the form of mass migration from big cities to rural areas, anxiety, and addiction to pharmaceuticals. Coherently, Ellis chooses to leave the social menace present in *Lunar Park* unmotivated, performed by unnamed terroristic groups. The only form that this menace takes is an actual spectre.

4   Conclusion: towards a post-postmodern gothic

By adopting the tropes and the plot solutions of the horror novel, Ellis succeeds in articulating and drawing parallels between three central themes: the self-spectralizing dangers of fiction, the spectral nature of intergenerational relationships, and the fragmentation and crisis of post-9/11 American society. Although it is true that the Gothic and horror novel have a political and social content *per se*, as the monstrous and the horrifying patrol the borders of the possible and announce category crisis,[32] Ellis's repurposing of its forms is important because it is emblematic of an attitude towards genre literature that is significantly different to postmodernism. Ellis's use of horror is not a playful recovery of a popular literary genre, but rather the respectful recognition of its potential as a tool of social criticism. It is also worth noticing that, despite a general diffusion of singular Gothic tropes (the doppelgänger, the spectre), the horror fiction genre (and especially its most modern evolutions) has been overlooked by authors of postmodern literature in favour of other genres (for instance, crime fiction or science fiction).

Ellis has always gravitated towards genre literature throughout his career. Although *Lunar Park* was his first explicit genre novel, his previous books are innervated with references to genre fiction, be it noir in *Less Than Zero*, the serial-killer novel *American Psycho*, or the spy story in *Glamorama*. While *Lunar Park* is, especially in its first part, an almost comical novel, this irony is directed towards the main character rather than at the mechanism of horror fiction. Although derivative, Ellis's recovery of the topoi of horror fiction is entirely serious, and it aims to be a textual representation of the very mechanism of intergenerational haunting that is thematized in the text as a tool of social criticism. In *American Psycho* and *Glamorama*, on the contrary, the serial-killer novel and the spy story are ridiculed as insufficient tools that cannot help us to understand, or represent, the chaos of the world. In these novels, Ellis's evanescent characters and seemingly pointless plots are coherent with the postmodern tradition of repurposing genre literature to comment on the fictionalization and the commodification of reality.[33] In *American Psycho*, for instance, the detective sub-plot concerning the disappearance of Paul Owen does not reach a conclusion and serves instead to increase the protagonist's state of paranoia. Similarly, in *Glamorama*, the complex international spy network in which the protagonist is involved and which results in several terrorist attacks and the

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32 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, in *Monster Theory. Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 3-25, pp. 3-25.

33 Weinreich, *"Into the Void": The Hyperrealism of Simulation in Bret Easton Ellis's* American Psycho, cit., p. 71.

death of hundreds of people is grotesquely and unrealistically revealed to be his father's machination to push him away from the US and substitute him with a more controllable doppelgänger, in view of the father's presidential campaign.

Ellis's previous novels did not fit into the structure of a particular genre and were often composed of fragmentary, almost unrelated sketches and characterised by the absence of linear plot. Through this (lack of) structure, Ellis intended to comment on the lack of purpose and exchangeability of individuals in late consumerism. *Lunar Park*, on the contrary, is entirely structured as a horror novel. While *American Psycho* and *Glamorama* have circular plots without solutions and exhibit grotesque violence, the plot of *Lunar Park* is based on suspense rather than shock, and on mystery rather than pulp effects. This recovery of narrability and the conventions of the traditional novel, such as round characters, a clear temporality and a plot with a distinct mechanism of consequentiality[34] (all of which were absent in *American Psycho* and *Glamorama*) places *Lunar Park* in a field that I define as post-postmodern.[35] Post-postmodernism is not forgetful of the crisis of the great meta-narrations started by postmodernism, but tries to recover them (and, in turn, the traditional and modernist novel) in literary forms that do not aim to simply reflect on themselves and their fictional status, but also to engage a discourse with a referent. In this sense, post-postmodernism requires a voluntary oscillation between naiveté and cynicism, sincerity and irony; between, in other words, the acceptance of the fictionality of the literary work and the intention to not reduce the literary discourse to this fictionality. Stylistically, post-postmodernism merges the realistic effects of the traditional novel that postmodernism had left behind[36] with several traits of postmodern fiction, such as meta- and auto-fiction and the recovery of genre literature. While the autofictional dimension of *Lunar Park* shows a continuity with Ellis's previous novels in the concern with blurring the distinction between reality and fiction, this device simultaneously comments on the author's own status of celebrity and on the relational problems that his activity as a writer creates.

If parody is a form of imitation «characterised by ironic inversion» and «repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity»,[37] we can see that

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34 Carlo Tirinanzi De Medici, *Il vero e il convenzionale*, Torino, Utet, 2012, p. 167.

35 As I have stated elsewhere (Marco Malvestio, *Wargames, etica e responsabilità: la Seconda Guerra Mondiale in* El Tercer Reich *e* 2666, in «Orillas», vi (2017), pp. 85-97, p. 92), my choice to use Jeffrey T. Nealon's term "post-postmodernism" (2012) is due to its relative neutrality, and to the continuity it expresses with the postmodern period (Nealon's study, however, focuses on socio-political context rather than literature). Nevertheless, the period and the literary style successive to postmodernism have received a variety of labels (*hypermodernism*, *renewalism*, *performatism*, *digimodernism*, *automodernism*, *postirony*, *new sincerity*), which reflects the complexity of the debate about this phenomenon. A similar and maybe more specific category to post-postmodernism is metamodernism, coined by Robin van der Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen (2017), who use the prefix meta- with its Greek etymology meaning with or among, between, and after. Hence, metamodernism is situated with or among «older and newer structures of feeling», «is characterized by an oscillating in-betweenness, or, rather, a dialectical movement that identifies with and negates [...] conflicting positions, while being never congruent with these positions», and historically happens after postmodernism. This oscillation between postmodern features and concerns, and a more traditional narrative style, is also central in *Lunar Park*.

36 Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London, Routledge, 2007, p. 2.

37 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 6.

this definition does not apply to *Lunar Park*. Ellis does not *imitate* a horror novel: he writes one. The repetition of tropes, which is essential in genre fiction, is not aimed to mark a difference but rather to incorporate and exploit the potentiality of social criticism intrinsic to horror as a genre. This recovery is carried out coherently and respectfully with the texts on which the novel is modelled, without playful discrepancies between them and *Lunar Park*. To deliver his message Ellis makes use of the dangerous incarnations of literary creation, inter-generational hauntings, and suburban hauntings, all of which belong to the horror genre, and there is no insistence on a gap between the author's purpose and the models he adopts. *Lunar Park* is not a pastiche (the result of the assembling of different styles and genres), unlike *American Psycho* and *Glamorama*, with their various descriptions of jet-set life and noir investigations.[38]

Of course, it is difficult to distinguish neatly between two adjacent literary styles, especially if one is conceived as a reaction to the other. Indeed, the very term "post-postmodernism" implies a dialectic relationship between the poetics that followed postmodernism and postmodernism itself, like "postmodernism" implies a reaction to modernism.[39] Postmodernism itself has been a complex literary phenomenon, spanning through decades and eliciting a multitude of sometimes contradicting theoretical framings: and it is thus for the sake of clarity that I, for the purposes of this article, reduce it to what can be considered one of his main characteristics, which is to say an anti-realistic self-reflexiveness. This is not to say that postmodern fiction is not concerned with social and political problems (which are extensively addressed, for instance, in Ellis's postmodern production), but that postmodern authors tend to face them through a reflection on language and an understanding of history and culture as human constructs: as such, although not escapist, postmodernism can be seen as a more detached and definitely less realistic poetics than post-postmodernism. Referring to Ellis's previous, markedly postmodern novels, I have often highlighted in these pages the similarities with *Lunar Park*, which shares with them several thematic (fatherhood, terrorism) and stylistic traits. Although more plot-driven than *American Psycho* and *Glamorama*, *Lunar Park* continues to exhibit, in its complex metafictional frame, a self-reflexiveness that is essentially postmodern.

Postmodernism and post-postmodernism have to be understood on a spectrum, rather than as neatly separate categories. Consequently, by defining *Lunar Park* post-postmodern, I do not aim to deny the similarities with Ellis's previous works, nor to undermine the novel's postmodern traits, but rather to highlight the differences which mark a new season of Ellis's work and are symptomatic of a new literary paradigm. In *Lunar Park* Ellis abandons parody and pastiche in favour of a different commitment to the structure of the genre novel. The plot of *Lunar Park* is regulated by a precise scheme of causes and consequences, while the characters are not hollow figures that represent the emptiness of American values like Patrick Bateman and Victor Ward in his previous novels. Rather, they are round individuals with specific background stories and ambi-

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38 On postmodern parody, see also Margaret Rose, *Parody. Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 195-274, and Simon Dentith, *Parody*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 154-185.

39 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, London, Routledge, 1987 (2003), p. 5.

tions. Although more self-conscious than the majority of horror novels, *Lunar Park* is faithful to the norms of the genre: the ghost and demon figures we encounter during the hauntings are not parodies. At the same time, Ellis makes significant use of postmodern poetics in the form of the auto- and metafictional frame of the story. This frame is intended to comment on specific problems concerning contemporary American society, as well as the impossibility of representation and its hermeneutical limits.

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PAROLE CHIAVE

Bret Easton Ellis; Horror; Gothic; Parody; Postmodernism; Post-Postmodernism; Autofiction.

NOTIZIE DELL'AUTORE

Marco Malvestio si è addottorato in letteratura comparata all'Università di Padova nel marzo 2019, con una tesi sulla rappresentazione della Seconda Guerra Mondiale nel romanzo globale degli anni Duemila; da luglio sarà postdoctoral fellow in Italian Studies all'Università di Toronto. Un libro basato sulla sua tesi dottorale, *The Conflict Revisited: The Second World War in Post-Postmodern Fiction*, sarà pubblicato nel 2020 da Peter Lang. Ha pubblicato articoli su Philip Roth, Roberto Bolaño, William T. Vollmann, e sulla fantascienza italiana. Con Valentina Sturli ha curato il volume *Vecchi maestri e nuovi mostri. Tendenze e prospettive della letteratura horror all'inizio del nuovo millennio*, di prossima pubblicazione presso Mimesis.

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