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# “I Wonder if He’s for Sale”: (Mis)spent Youth and (Re)written Subjectivities in the Fiction of Bret Easton Ellis

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“I WONDER IF HE’S FOR SALE”:  
(MIS)SPENT YOUTH AND (RE)WRITTEN SUBJECTIVITIES  
IN THE FICTION OF BRET EASTON ELLIS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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We hereby approve the dissertation of

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Title: "I Wonder if He's for Sale": (Mis)spent Youth and (Re)written Subjectivities in the Fiction of Bret Easton Ellis

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This project examines the function of the commodified subject in Bret Easton Ellis's novels and short stories. In addition, it illustrates the "rewriting" of these characters taking place through a transgressive approach to language. These works focus primarily upon the cultural impact of discourse upon the young subject in contemporary America. Ellis, the author of six novels and one collection of short stories dating from 1985 until the present time, has been the subject of much scrutiny in terms of his subject matter and style. As a result of his immersion in the celebrity culture that he purports to satirize, the vast majority of criticism of Ellis's work has taken the form of the popular press. For the most part, even the limited amount of serious scholarship is based on a misreading of his work.

Ellis has been accused of promoting the amoral malaise that constitutes the lives of his characters. There is little doubt that Ellis's characters act out in violent and sexually aggressive ways. However, his decision to include at times vivid descriptions of these actions is not an endorsement of them. It is instead a criticism, at the level of discourse, of a culture in which these transgressions can take place.

Similar to his characters' attempts to reclaim their subjectivities amid the mass of signs that serve to define them, this dissertation aims to rescue Ellis's work from the misguided critique of the past three decades. Looking at Ellis's work through the lens of

his postmodernist context as provided by such theorists as Julia Kristeva, Fredric Jameson, and Jean Baudrillard, this project focuses on the cultural signs encircling and therefore defining his subjects and the subsequent “violence” of language as an attempt to work within the realities presented to them and a means to reclaim identity.