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Bret Easton Ellis, of late-'80s literary brat-pack notoriety, has resonated controversy ever since his first novel, Less Than Zero, was published during his senior year at Bennington College in 1985. Ellis went on to write American Psycho in 1991, a scathing critique of nihilistic excess and '80s' greed, which focused further negative attention on the author - including boycotts and death threats; threats, according to Ellis, like "being raped with a nail-studded baseball bat. It was worse than a lot of the stuff in American Psycho." The Informers is Ellis's latest book, described in his own words as "a kaleidoscopic and fractured view of Los Angeles in the early '80s," and it's every bit as violent and depraved as his previous works.

baphomet asks: When will we hear from Donna Tartt again? I understand you know her.

Ellis: She's working on a new book. I know she has a contract to deliver it soon to her publishers. A murder mystery.

alexadroog asks: I've noticed in the majority of your books, you write about experiences and the usage of narcotics. What is your interest with them and how do you know so much about them?

Ellis: I don't really know that much about narcotics. At least not more than the average young American. But I think that doing or trying drugs is a right of passage amongst the American youth, as much as the SATs, drivers licenses, etc. Drugs just seem to be something my characters like to do. But I'm really not that interested in them, at least not on the same level as Burroughs.

capasso asks: What is your fascination with the 1980s?

Ellis: I have no fascination with the 1980s. It just so happens that I've written all the books I've published so far during that time. The book I've been working on the last five years takes place in the '90s so....

pold asks: What's your relation to the classics of realism? What I want to say is that to me it seems like you're trying to reintroduce some classic realistic rhetorics and accustomize them to the modern society. For example the recurring characters (like in Balzac) and the way you treat the commodity society of today. Can you comment on that?

Ellis: I'm not trying to do anything. I just don't think about things like that when I'm working on a book. It's a very instinctual process and I'm not aware of doing things like that. But what your saying sounds good.

grifter asks: I noticed that *The Informers* has a lot more types of voices than you've previously done: men, women, young, older. As you write more, and get older yourself, do you find yourself wanting to tackle more "universal" themes and not just deal with stuff about "Generation X" age characters?

Ellis: *The Informers* was written over a long period of time and I wasn't conscious of the fact that I was putting together a book that was filled with older people, women, etc. But yes, as I get older, the characters seem to age with me.

capasso asks: Some of the details in *American Psycho* were a little too real. I.e., the sound

that the small intestine makes when it is stepped on. Did you take anatomy classes in college?

Ellis: No.

djwayneb asks: What do you think of Cormac McCarthy....?

Ellis: *All the Pretty Horses* is his most conventional yet also his best book. I think *Blood Meridian* is really overrated and overall I'm kind of surprised by his popularity.

alexadroog asks: Mr. Ellis, in your reply you mentioned W. S. Burroughs. What, if any, is your experience, thoughts about, and influence by him?

Ellis: None. I was not influenced by him. Read him after I was influenced by everybody I was going to be influenced by. And like most of the beats, thought his life was much, much, cooler than any of the actual writings.

janelleb asks: Why did you need intensely graphic rapes and violence against women in *American Psycho*? Although I understand that the book was not meant to be "pretty," I threw up (literally) after reading one particular 10-page detailed violent rape description. Couldn't help but wonder - what on earth was going through your mind as you wrote those? Kinda sick and over the top, don't you think?

Ellis: I don't remember any 10-page detailed violent rape description. What was going through my mind was the thoughts of this monster I was writing about. And though it was not exactly fun to write those scenes, I felt they needed to be there and I still feel they need to be there. Sorry that you puked.

arcadio asks: Who are the writers working today that interest you?

Ellis: Don Delillo, Robert Stone, Dennis Cooper, James Ellroy, of course Joan Didion, some William Vollman. Among young writers, Pinckney Benedict.

alijon asks: Do you feel that your success is deserved, given the exploitative nature of your books?

Ellis: I don't feel any success is deserved.

alijon asks: What do you think will be the social relevance of, say, *Less Than Zero* in 10 years or so?

Ellis: Don't know. I'm not really that concerned. If it's around, that will be cool. If it's not, no sweat.

grifter asks: Especially in the last two novels, you explore themes (social decadence, for example, and how it rots character) similar to noir writers like Jim Thompson. Are you a reader of much noir fiction, and if so, who do you particularly like?

Ellis: No, though maybe James Ellroy comes sort of close. I'm not a fan of Jim Thompson's.

capasso asks: Was your college life as crazy as the ones you exemplify in your novels?

Ellis: If it was, I wouldn't have been able to write the novels. I was fairly straight-laced, even boring in college. I liked to watch.

arcadio asks: What were your grand designs when you en you started working on *The Informers*?

Ellis: I had no grand designs. Started the informers in 1983, finished it in 1994. It's really more a collection of stories than a novel.

djwayneb asks: In *American Psycho* I found the passages of music commentary (about Genesis, et al.) very interesting and more "sick" than some of the real violence ... what was up with that?

Ellis: Those groups just happened to be Patrick Bateman's faves and the research that went into those chapters was much more grueling than any of the violent chapters.

pold asks: Do you in any way feel related to the realists I mentioned above (Balzac, Zola, Flaubert)? Have you read them? To me it seems as if you're trying to do what they did for the late 20th century - or at least that's what my PhD is about.

Ellis: You're totally right. Flaubert is one of my all time favorite writers. *Sentimental Education* is one of my five all time favorite books. Zola, so-so, Balzac, OK, but Flaubert, pretty major.

arcadio asks: Here's a bloated question. Delillo has talked about the ease with which cultural materials are assimilated in the West, has pointed out the speed of accommodation. Are you performing any sort of cultural critique with your work? Or would you tend to think about your writing in literary historical terms ... say a tradition?

Ellis: Neither. Neither. Neither. I tend not to think about what my work means while I'm writing it. And then after it's published, I just kind of listen to other's interpretations and most of the time, everyone is right.

alexadroog asks: Mr. Ellis, are you currently working on something new? If so, what?

Ellis: Besides the novel about the fashion world, I'm working on the screenplay for *the Rules of Attraction*

grifter asks: The fashion industry seems, in many ways, a natural for you to write about. What set off your novel on it, and about how far are you from finishing it?

Ellis: I don't know what sent me off on writing about models and fashion industry. It was just an intuitive response to something big going on in the culture and I'm very, very far from finishing it.

scamp asks: I read recently that you think Susanna Moore's latest book is harsher & more horrifically violent than *American Psycho*. Why is this? On another note, do you even think she's a good writer?

Ellis: I've never said that Moore's new book is harsher and more horrifically violent than A. P. And yes, I do think she is a good writer.

grifter asks: That does bring up an interesting issue, though. Norman Mailer went to great lengths to praise the rawness of A. P. at the time. *Do* you think there's been any writer of literary merit who's been able to be as harsh and violent *and* of serious consideration? You can't name Ellroy, he's the "gimme" choice.

Ellis: Yes, Dennis Cooper.

capasso asks: when did you know that you wanted to be a writer?

Ellis: Very young, maybe five, but I hate to consider myself A WRITER. I just like to write.

alexadroog asks: Bret, Do you have any suggestions for aspiring writers?

Ellis: Yes, read, read, read.

pold asks: Don't you ever get afraid of your own writing, or what your literary method makes you write?

Ellis: No, I just get afraid of ... other peoples's writing.

capasso asks: Do you feel that human nature is inherently evil?

Ellis: Yes.

alexadroog asks: Mr. Ellis, What are some of your interests outside of writing? Any favorite hobbies and such?

Ellis: Actually, writing takes up a vast amount of time as does reading. Hobbies: cooking? movies? O. J. I feel like I'm on the dating game. Weird question.

faido1 asks: there does not seem to be any overt signs of gender differentiation - was this intentional? I did not know the chapter One narrator was a chick until chapter Five. Lots of first person only references. (this refers to *The Informers*)

Ellis: You're right. And it's something I think I'm pretty critical of. These characters' lives are so blurry and indistinct that it even hazes over something as primal and elemental as sexuality.

capasso asks: Was Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* based on anyone you know?

Ellis: Partly guys I met on Wall Street, partly myself, partly my father.

pold asks: What about this band going to Japan in *The Informers*. The singer reached a low point, I guess. Was there any model or is it just a symbol of the '80s? Or to put it in other words. Are the nineties going to be any different in your view/novels?

Ellis: I guess the '90s haven't really effected any of the themes or motives that I'm interested in exploring so no, the rock star's story in *The Informers* was maybe written as a warning to myself. "Could you, if it was possible become like this?" is what I ask myself.

capasso asks: How come there isn't much mention of black people in your books?

Because I'm writing about rich white people who don't come into contact with any other races and who are more often than not racists themselves.

alexadroog asks: what role if any, do computers play in your life?

Ellis: I type in my long-hand notes.

capasso asks: Is O. J. guilty?

Ellis: Yes, but Johnny Cochran is guiltier.

capasso asks: Who is your favorite daytime talk show host?

Ellis: I have many. Least offensive I find is Jenny Jones but I probably like Ricki the best. Worst, Montel, Carnie, and Maury.

carlosfr asks: Can you imagine the characters from *The Rules of Attraction* in a third world tropical environment? Isn't it too far from Beverly Hills?

Ellis: Actually, my new book is narrated by a character from *R. O. A.*. It doesn't take place in a third world environment but much of the book takes place in London, Paris, and Milan.

arcadio asks: What sorts of frustrations and/or opportunities do you recognize as you shift from novel writing to drafting a screenplay?

Ellis: Far fewer frustrations on a creative level but since the creative level makes up such a small portion of the whole endeavor, I prefer the control I have over a novel.

faido1 asks: after reading *The Informers*, I'm kinda all vacuous myself, perhaps wondering how and if I am like some of your characters. Is this an intended affect, and will it wear off?

Ellis: Funny. Not an intended effect and after a few drinks it should wear off.

alijon asks: What kind of drugs do YOU do?

Ellis: Mostly alcohol and since I'm on anti-anxiety medication, it's hard to dabble in recreational drugs though I did mushrooms over the summer and was reminded of how much I miss them. Other drugs as well but just the usual boring stuff. I can't write when I'm partaking, so not as often as perhaps I'd like.

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