

1,550,000 CIRCULATION

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1994

U

The National College Magazine®

CLASS CLOWNS

TAKING COMEDY SERIOUSLY

ELLIS' ISLAND:
Informers,
Yuppies,
Psychos

THE GOOD BOOK
Just Got
Better

KNOCK, KNOCK. WHO'S THERE? U. U. WHO? YOO-HOO: THE DRINKABLE CHOCOLATE TREAT.

Stoners, rock stars, suicidal yuppies, serial killers and vampires. These are the denizens of Bret Easton Ellis' world. That is, at least, the world contained within his novels.

In the '80s, Ellis made a career of satirizing the petty beliefs and gaudy desires of the beautiful people. His first book, *Less Than Zero*, was published in 1985 when he was just 21 and still attending Bennington College in Vermont. It depicted the world of Los Angeles' young elite — spoiled by wealth and jaded by drugs and sex. His second novel, *The Rules of Attraction*, published in 1987, took that same crowd and placed them in an Ivy League environment.

However, it was his depiction of a yuppie serial killer in 1991's *American Psycho* that brought Ellis infamy. A satire of the morals of New York City's movers and shakers, its graphic descriptions of murder and mutilations raised eyebrows and voices in protest.

The controversy over *American Psycho*, which is now being made into a feature film, seems to have died down, but Ellis is still asked to justify the greed-and-death epic. "If anyone should have protested the book," he says, "it should have been yuppies and serial killers. They were the ones I was depicting."

The 30-year-old Ellis, now in the midst of a promotional tour for his latest book, *The Informers*, is not taking advantage of the perks one would suspect come with a tour. Rather than spend his time wading in the surf that breaks mere feet away from his Miami hotel, he has chosen to hole up in his room and work on one of his numerous writing projects.

Exiting the hotel lobby elevator, Ellis wears a plain T-shirt, shorts and an L.A. Kings hat. He admits, "I'm not very comfortable with [interviews]." We settle in the hotel's restaurant and attempt to break the ice by chit-chatting about writing and the interview process.

Sufficiently defrosted, we sit at a table surrounded by countless pictures of the restaurant's owner, Burt Reynolds. Ellis may not like doing promotion for *The Informers*, but he must — as his character Sean Bateman would say in *The Rules of Attraction* — deal with it.

U.: Are you nervous about your promotional tour?

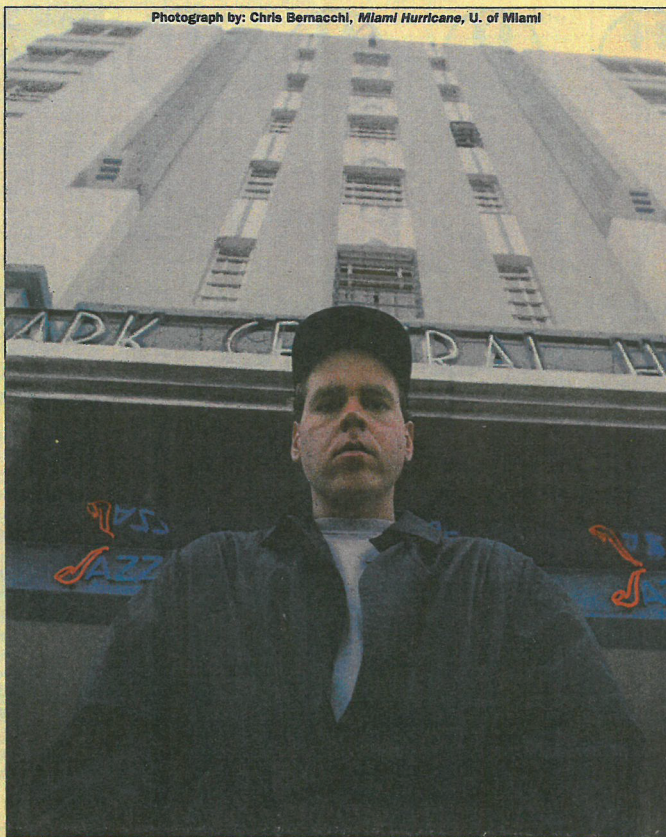
Bret Easton Ellis: This is the third day on tour. Yeah, I'm incredibly nervous.

U.: It's a lot of pressure?

Ellis: I'm finding that out. I've never done a U.S. tour before. Never. I don't understand how rock bands can do it.... I mean, all I have to do is stay in my hotel room and then come down and talk to people. But the traveling — going to a city a day — is hard.

U.: Why have you avoided doing a promotional tour up until now?

Ellis: Because I'd heard how hellish they are. When my first book was published, I was still in college, so I could use that as an excuse. Then, as disgusting as this might sound, I had sold enough copies of my first book to be able to tell my publisher, "No!" when my second book [*The Rules of Attraction*] came out. Then with *American Psycho*, no one was



Photograph by: Chris Bernacchi, Miami Hurricane, U. of Miami

Days of Whining Poseurs

willing to send me out on tour.

U.: Because you were too busy defending it?

Ellis: Well, not only that, but we were getting death threats. We take those pretty seriously.

U.: It's been almost 10 years since *Less Than Zero* was published. What made you decide to write about L.A. again?

Ellis: A total accident. I was working on another novel after I finished *American Psycho*. It's this very long, very complicated book. And every time I had writer's block, I would go to this huge folder of stories I was working on.

The Informers was a book I never intended to publish. It was just something to work with on the side, a project to relax me and loosen me up whenever I couldn't work on another book.

U.: There are so many characters

in *The Informers*. What do they all have in common?

Ellis: The milieu they all share — having money, looking really good, having nice cars, tans, plus a willingness not to fight against apathy and passivity, which I think hurts them in the end.

I think there's too much mellowing out and too much carelessness among the characters. Everyone's too laid back. The combination of not being alert, not being aware and not having to struggle for anything is really dangerous. I think it leads to the violence and brutality in the book.

U.: Your books are written in first person. Is there a reason why?

Ellis: Yes, but I really don't know why. I'm just comfortable with that mode.

U.: After *American Psycho* was published, what was the weirdest letter of support you received?

Ellis: (pauses) A guy in prison sent me

a fan letter with a picture of himself and asked me to send a picture of myself back.

U.: You've done a great deal of research on serial killers. What was your opinion of the movie *Natural Born Killers*?

Ellis: I didn't care for it. I found it to be a very loud and grating movie. It was very unrealistic and also very unfrightening. And there were no real performances. What Quentin Tarantino [who wrote the original script] was trying to do [Tarantino has said it was supposed to be a Bonnie and Clyde road movie] got lost in all the changes.

U.: You attended college at Bennington with Donna Tartt (best-selling author of *The Secret History*, published in 1993). Did you have anything to do with her getting a book deal?

Ellis: Not a lot. I mean, someone with her talent isn't going to need a lot of help. That book would have been published anyway. The stuff I read today, 90 percent of it is crap. Publishers are starving for young talent to sign.

U.: Your first four books satirized the 1980s. When you start satirizing the 1990s, what's your first target?

Ellis: That's actually what I'm working on now. It's about models and the fashion world and how our society is obsessed with glamour.

U.: Music references have always been common in your work. Do you listen to anything when you write?

Ellis: Not anymore. I used to be able to write with both the stereo and the TV blasting. Now I can't do that. It's hard enough to write without having any type of distraction. But on the other hand, I like all that stuff... really, I like all types of music.

U.: Style-wise, can you see yourself doing the same type of writing in 20 years?

Ellis: It depends. I like to write from the mouths of narrators. I guess the style has been the same through all four books because it's the same sort of people. I

think with tiny adjustments, it will be the same style.

U.: Are you comfortable being labeled the voice of a generation?

Ellis: It really doesn't mean anything. I'm not writing for other people as much as I am for myself. If I stood on the street on a soapbox and claimed to be the voice of a generation, who would listen? What I write about is a small snippet of society.

Besides, a phrase like that is really only used to sell books. It's like how publishers take a young author's first book and put it in the same sentence with *Catcher in the Rye*.

U.: You're 30 years old and coming out with your fourth novel. Do you feel fortunate?

Ellis: Incredibly fortunate. It's very rare to be able to make a living off your writing. Other writers I know are either independently wealthy or have other jobs and write in their spare time. I really have nothing to complain about.

By Joshua Mann, *The Catalyst*, Miami-Dade College South