

IDOL CHATTER: CHRISTIAN BALE

On a *Psycho* Path to Success

text Deborah Baxtrom, photograph Jim Wright

American Psycho generated a lot of controversy. Why do you think that is? It's a knee-jerk reaction against the character without really allowing the whole piece to be considered. *American Psycho* is not meant to be realism. It is a satire. While it's not quite a cartoon, there is something ridiculous about everything to do with it. And it's not a movie that gives people easy answers. It isn't a *Silence of the Lambs*. It isn't a gore-fest. It's not a slasher flick, either. It's far more intelligent than that. It's not an analysis of a serial killer, but an analysis of an era – and of men at their sort of bitchy worst.

The role of Bateman was a big departure for you. Were you intentionally trying to change your image by taking this part? I was never really aware of an image particularly. I had done a fair number of costume dramas. But, suddenly, Mary [Harron] asked me to play Bateman. He's the bad guy, which I'd never played. And while it's not contemporary – it is a period piece – it's more recent than a lot of stuff I've done. And it's American. So it was a whole different kind of role that somebody was willing to cast me in, and it opens up a variety of other roles that people will consider me for. I think the best actors are the ones who are prepared to go a bit further than anybody else, and are not concerned about making fools of themselves. You always get stunning performances when an actor decides to take that sort of leap. If you take nothing else from my performance in *American Psycho*, you can see that I did take a plunge.

And you were offered *Shaft Returns* — And I play the bad guy again. That doesn't mean I'm going to continue to play bad guys. I want to play a variety of roles, and [I] have a new confidence that I can do that. That's why I wasn't concerned with taking the role of Bateman. People were saying, "It's a villainous role. Everyone will just think of you for that." But it doesn't really concern me. If I'm that talentless that I can't rise above the character, then I probably shouldn't be working too much anyway.

"I think it's about making a good living and then being able to get smaller films made."

At twenty-six, you're already considered a veteran. You've been working consistently since you made *Empire of the Sun* when you were thirteen, but you've kept a low profile. *Empire of the Sun* changed my life quite considerably and I didn't like it one bit. I did a fair amount of publicity for the film and felt like I'd been kicked in the teeth by it, so I really didn't do much after that. It's always a bit of a *Catch-22* with acting. You're encouraged to go out and do interviews. Get "exposure," as it's called. And, yes, you'll get put on all the lists it is that they have, but you run the danger of becoming a celebrity who happens to act. You've done both independent and studio films. Will you continue to go back and forth between the two, or is your goal to become a major studio star? I'll always go back and forth. I hold no flag for any one group of financiers, as long as it's a good filmmaker and a good script. I think it's about making a good living and then being able to get smaller films made. A lot of people forget about that once they get very big. Suddenly, people appear telling you not to take risks. I would love it if I could greenlight a movie. I think that would be fantastic. ●



