Clarion Review

General

Stalking Brett Easton Ellis
Caroline Weiss
Margaret Wallace
iUniverse
978-1-4401-2073-2
Three Stars (out of Five)

Too old to be considered children, too young to have a strong handle on adulthood, the characters that populate *Stalking Bret Easton Ellis* are self-destructive, depressed, depressing, self-indulgent, and mostly blind to their own damage. Will they wake up with enough time to save themselves, or are they awake already? Have they discovered their numb lives are the best they can expect?

Caroline Weiss and Margaret Wallace offer quick glimpses into the lives of several young people who seem intent on their own destruction. Nico is going to college on the East Coast but flies back to L.A. to meet up with an older man. Dexter goes to college with Nico and does a lot of drugs. Lanie attends the same college until she leaves for work and eventual marriage. On the West Coast, Carson, Sarah, and Sadie go to endless parties with their friends Taylor, Jack, and Brock. Everyone drinks, does drugs, has sex, wears designer clothing, and drives expensive cars. A couple of them die. Their parents are in rehab or having affairs. Nobody seems to eat any healthy meals.

The authors produce some lovely prose: “It’s Thursday and I feel everything closing in somehow and there are clouds on the horizon that we all think we can still outrun,” they write. Like the well-known author in the title, Weiss and Wallace are adept at capturing druggy dialogue, aimless drunken encounters, and fumbling sex on the page. Their sometimes delicate language gives the novel a subtle tenderness.

They also show skill in the art of deadpan humor. When Ryan finds Taylor watching movies and getting high, he says, “I sit down next to her and gently take the Afrin and put it in my pocket—that stuff is addictive.” The cocaine, however, he lets her keep.

A better book might have been produced if the authors had offered characters with more

definition. Without the chapter headings that state which character is the narrator for the next few pages, readers would be lost. The footnotes that clarify the titles and artists of the songs mentioned in the text also include personal explanations of the applicability of the lyrics, but these could be interchangeable and add no distinctness. The static characters do not encourage readers to connect or sympathize, and by the end of the book readers may not care when Chelsea says, resignedly, “It was always like this,” while she packs for school and drinks her way through two bottles of wine and a couple of shots of gin.

Weiss and Wallace have obvious talent. Perhaps their next book will be populated by characters of varying personalities and will address the question of what happens after the party has ended. Certainly other worlds lie well within their range of ability.