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Actor, Author Eisenberg Wows Students at Illinois Wesleyan

Oct. 27, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Actor and author Jesse Eisenberg impressed students with his wit, warmth and writing talent during a packed day of appearances Oct. 26 at Illinois Wesleyan University.

Sponsored by the University's **Center for Human Rights and Social Justice**, Eisenberg visited campus during the tour promoting his debut book, *Bream Gives Me Hiccups* (Grove Press, 2015). The Oscar-nominated actor from *The Social Network* with feature roles in *The End of the Tour*, *Now You See Me* and *Adventureland* spoke with theatre and English students during the day. Associate Professor of English Joanne Diaz moderated an evening question-and-answer session in which Eisenberg spoke about his first foray into fiction, Thanksgiving at his sister's house and why he won't watch his own films:



Jesse Eisenberg answered audience questions with wit and candor.

Woody Allen, Part 1: Influenced by Allen's films, a 16-year-old Eisenberg wrote a script about Allen at age 16 but set in modern-day life. A staffer at Eisenberg's performing arts high school read the script and sent it to an agent. The agent sent it on and the script began to gain traction. "I felt very good about it," said Eisenberg, "and then about a month later I got a cease and desist letter from Woody Allen's lawyers saying if I do it, they'll sue me to the fullest extent of the law, which apparently is very full." Eisenberg said he received another cease and desist letter from Allen's legal team about two months later. "That is when I first felt I could write something that people liked. I then had to think of something that wouldn't get me in trouble. And everything I've written has gotten me into a little trouble, whether with friends or revealing family things... If you do it with a sensitivity, I think you can get away with it."

Woody Allen, Part 2: "He's very funny to be around, but I suspect he's constantly thinking of movies. When you are telling him a story, you can see his mind wandering to see if it has an ending. I once asked him, 'what are you thinking about?' And he said, 'I'm trying to think about the story you just told has a beginning, a middle and an end. And I said, 'yes, cause this happened.' And he said, 'yes, but the character's unlikeable so it won't work'and that was just the story of my childhood."



Jesse Eisenberg talked with students, signed books, and posed for many selfies.

Write what you know: "I grew up in a vegetarian home and my sister insists we have 'Thanksgiving' instead of Thanksgiving, where not only do we not eat turkey, but they rescue turkeys and put the pictures of the rescued turkeys on the table with – I'm not joking – with a little paragraph describing "This is Bessie. Bessie likes basketball." It doesn't specify what position. And then my sister for 45 minutes before we eat the tofu, she reads what it's like to be a caged animal from the perspective of the animal about to be killed...If there is anything crazy in your life, if you're a writer, you have no excuse not to use it. Unless you're going to hurt somebody, then just change the name slightly."

On his participation in *The Theater of War*: For several years theater director Bryan Doerries has led an innovative public health project that produces ancient tragedies for current and returned soldiers, addicts, and other at-risk people. Eisenberg and other star performers

less art has redemptive and therapeutic value, according to Eisenberg. "What I took away from it more broadly, is the catharsis, which sounds very self-centered, but there's this other

element ...which in some way allows other people to experience their own emotions. Seeing people in dramatic situations allows for a catharsis from the audience.”

Motivated by fear: “Even the most successful actors find themselves out of work for six months at a time. I’m serious, even people you’d think ‘they don’t worry for a minute.’ Everybody’s terrified. It’s just the nature of freelance work, caring about what you do, knowing that at some point you are going to age out of desirability. It’s something I think about, I eat fish eggs to stay young. I inject myself with a live squid, but other than that, you worry. I try to always be doing something, more out of the fear of not being hired than the enjoyment of the thing. I don’t hate it, but I some day want to just eat a muffin.”

Don’t judge: “I don’t watch the movies I’ve been in, and I act in plays where you can’t see the thing so I just go by, if I’m feeling OK about it. I don’t like to watch myself because I don’t like to judge myself as an outsider. If I felt good that day [during filming,] I’m satisfied. I just use my own barometer.”