



Conversations with E. L. Doctorow (Literary Conversations)

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"We're living a national ideology that's invisible to us because we're inside it."

At the outset of his career E. L. Doctorow told Paul Levine, "History written by historians is clearly insufficient." Doctorow's novels carry out that conviction by imagining the great moments of American history--the Old West, the gilded age, the Depression, the cold war--as backdrops for tales of excruciating moral pain and injustice in America.

In *Conversations with E. L. Doctorow* Christopher D. Morris has gathered over twenty of the most revelatory interviews with the acclaimed author of *Ragtime*, *World's Fair*, *Billy Bathgate*, *The Book of Daniel*, and other novels, plays, and short stories. Whatever the setting or time period, Doctorow's characters spark an unparalleled urgency in the novelist's recreations of history. In his work the American dream and the values his characters try to live by turn to madness and ashes.

Within this collection Doctorow explores the themes of his work not only in the contexts of national and literary history but also in terms of disturbing trends in contemporary American culture. Talking about style, Doctorow discusses his experiments with shifting points of view and unreliable narrators as part of the modernist heritage to which readers have become accustomed. But he stresses that these techniques are always subordinate to the telling of a good story and the creation of memorable characters.

"My portrait of J. P. Morgan in *Ragtime* is truer to the man's soul and the substance of his life than his authorized biography," he says. Doctorow's critical and popular success comes from the creation and re-creation of such great characters and the telling of captivating stories in which the writer serves as an independent witness to both the ideals and the corruptions that have driven our history.

Christopher D. Morris has been the Charles A. Dana Professor of English at Norwich University in Northfield, Vermont, since 1996. He is also the author of *Models of Misrepresentation: On the Fiction of E. L. Doctorow* and regularly publishes in journals like *The Ohio Review*, *Critique*, and *Film Criticism*.

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