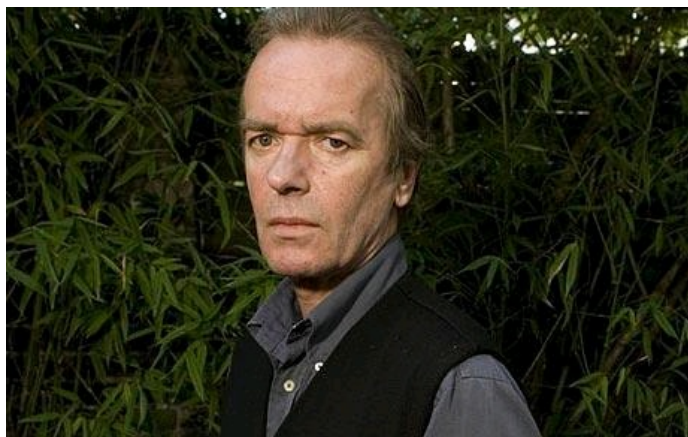


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Martin Amis calls for euthanasia booths to deal with 'silver tsunami'

Martin Amis, the novelist, has compared Britain's fast-growing population of elderly people to "an invasion of terrible immigrants", as he called for 'death booths' to be placed on street corners so they can kill themselves.

By Stephen Adams, Arts Correspondent
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Martin Amis: 'The denial of death is a great curse' Photo: RICHARD SAKER

Amis, who is 60, predicted that "civil war" would break out between young and old within 10 or 15 years because of the pressures of supporting what he described as a "silver tsunami".

Britain's population is rapidly ageing.

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Between 1983 to 2008 the proportion of people aged 65 or over grew by 1.5 million to 9.8 million, up from 15 to 16 per cent.

That trend will accelerate in the coming decades.

By 2033, 23 per cent of the population will be 65 or over. If the population hits 70 million by 2029, as recently forecast by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), that will mean the working population will have to support at least 16 million people of current retirement age by 2033.

The fastest increase is in the "oldest old", who need much more care and support than younger pensioners.

In 1983 there were some 600,000 people in the UK aged 85 or over, according to the ONS, a figure which had more than doubled to 1.3 million by 2008.

But by 2033 the 85-plus population is projected to more than double again, to 3.2 million, the ONS has

stated.

Amis asked: "How is society going to support this silver tsunami? There'll be a population of demented very old people, like an invasion of terrible immigrants stinking out the restaurants and cafés and shops."

"I can imagine a sort of civil war between the old and the young in 10 or 15 years' time," he told The Sunday Times.

The author of The Rachel Papers and Money, who has in the past been

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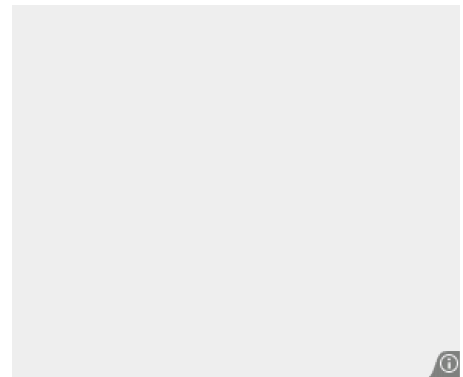
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criticised by Muslims and feminists for his outspoken views, suggested that widespread euthanasia was the solution.

"There should be a booth on every corner where you could get a Martini and a medal" before taking one's life, he said.

Amis is known for his hyperbole, and it is unlikely he meant this as a practical measure.

But his support for euthanasia comes from first-hand experience of friends and family who have suffered from a slow descent into death, most notably Lord Kilmarnock, his stepfather; and Iris Murdoch, the author.

He said of Lord Kilmarnock, the former SDP peer and writer, who died last March aged 81: "My stepfather died very horribly last year ... He always thought he was going to get better. But he didn't get better and I think the denial of death is a great curse."

Of Murdoch, who died in 1999, two years after her husband said she had Alzheimer's disease, Amis said: "I remember talking to her just as it started happening, and she said, 'I've entered a dark place.' That famous quote. That awareness of loss is gone, the track is gone."

He proposed: "There should be a way out for rational people who've decided they're in the negative. That should be available, and it should be quite easy."

He did not think it would be "too hard" to have some sort of test that established a person's capacity to decide their own fate, he said.

Devina Hehir, head of legal strategy and policy at the pro-euthanasia group Dignity in Dying, said: "Like all too many people in the UK, Martin Amis has witnessed the bad death of a loved one.

"The answer to this problem is twofold: we need better access to, and investment in, high quality end-of-life care; and we need a change in the law to allow the choice of assisted dying for those terminally ill, mentally competent, adults who want it.

"Dignity in Dying's campaign for a change in the law is not about the introduction of 'euthanasia booths', nor is it in anticipation of a 'silver tsunami'.

"Our campaign is about allowing dying adults who have mental capacity a compassionate choice to end their suffering, subject to strict legal safeguards."

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