

# Martin Amis bemoans England's 'moral decrepitude'

Novelist despairs of country with 'philistine' royal family where 'celebrity is the new religion' and 'all is rotten inside'

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Martin Amis ... 'what goes on in Britain doesn't really matter'. Photograph: David Levenson/Getty Images

Martin Amis has told a French magazine that he "would prefer not to be English", saying that his native country is in a condition of "moral decrepitude". As he prepares to leave Britain for good, he added that although he "adores" the English themselves – if not their "philistine" royal family - his next novel *State of England* will deliver "the final insult".

Speaking to *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Amis – no stranger to controversy over his opinions – said he would soon be leaving England for the US for family reasons. "Since the second world war, what goes on in Great Britain doesn't really matter. The biggest empire which has ever existed has become a power of the second or third order," he said.

The novel Amis is currently working on, *State of England*, will, he believes, "be considered as the final insult" to his country. The story of a violent criminal, Lionel Asbo, who wins the lottery, it's "a metaphor which translates well, I think, our state of moral decrepitude: a huge reward for no effort".

"You can have no talent, no ambition, and you win all the same. All young people dream of that. Young girls dream of becoming models. Celebrity is the new religion," said Amis. "So it's a book about the decline of my country, about the rage, the dissatisfaction, the bitterness, all unconscious, caused by this decline ... One can have the impression that life in London is pretty pleasant. But all is rotten inside."

Amis is made most angry by Britain's "superficiality", by its tabloids, by "all these

excited models and these rock stars in short shorts". But he "adores" the English themselves: "they have spirit, they are tolerant, full of good humour", he said, also praising Shakespeare – "an absolute giant", and the UK's "very advanced" political system. "We had a revolution 100 years before France, and our civil war was not so horrible."

The interview also saw Amis describe the Royal family as "philistines", and speak of his own encounters with the royals: the problem with the Queen, he said, is that she "does not listen to what you tell her". He recalled telling her, "you knighted my father" [Kingsley Amis]. Her response? "She looked into the distance, vaguely staring at a picture on the wall." Amis made clear in the interview that he would not accept a knighthood himself if it were to be offered to him. "I don't want to be linked at all to the British empire. It's so ridiculous," he said. "No, there's no chance of that happening. Really, I would prefer not to be English."

When he met the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip "appeared very surprised" at the bestselling author's profession. "Ah, you're a writer?" he said, according to Amis. Prince Charles, though, is "charming", with a "pretty extraordinary laugh, like the snore of a pig". Amis added that he recalled "one fairly memorable conversation with him on the subject of Salman Rushdie, just after the fatwa, in 1989. He was very anti-Rushdie. I asked him why. He told me: 'I'm sorry, but when someone insults the profound beliefs of a people ...'" Amis replied that a novel is not a stance. "It insults nobody. It asserts nothing. A novel is a game, a mind play," he told Charles.

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