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13 MAY 09

In conversation with Martin Amis Part 1: Crises and literature

James Crabtree

Earlier this year, journalist Toby Muse interviewed Martin Amis for *Prospect*, at the Hay Festival in Cartagena, Colombia. Over the coming days, *First Drafts* will be featuring the highlights of that conversation, with Amis expressing views on topics ranging from terrorism and Barack Obama to his new (much anticipated) novel, and the challenges of portraying the sexual revolution in fiction.

In this first excerpt, Amis talks about the role of literature in a time of crisis, the response to 9/11, and the relevance of Joseph Conrad to Al Qaeda. You can now also view [the second excerpt](#) on our blog.

Amis's assertion in the clip above that the best fiction occurs "belatedly... three years or so [after a crisis]" is intriguing. In response, today we are also publishing a web-exclusive article from our own arts and books editor, Tom Chatfield, entitled "[The Return of the Master](#)."

The next ten months will be an ecstasy of anticipation for Amis-watchers, with the publication of his repeatedly-delayed new novel, *The Pregnant Widow*, finally due at the start of 2010. The title itself refers to a sentiment he mentions in both today's video clip, and the second clip (which we'll put up tomorrow)—namely that there is often a gap between conception and birth in art, literature and society alike. It's an intriguing choice, given, as Tom points out, that Amis himself has of late been all too keen to act as midwife to the intellectual response to world catastrophe, rather than waiting for things to settle:

*Since 9/11, however, Amis's determination to prove equal to even the deepest crisis has been accompanied by a constriction of the verve that made [his earlier work] so engaging—a hankering for definitive moral utterance that has left him looking, often, nervously out of kilter with his times. As Michael Tomasky put it in [his review](#) of 2008's *The Second Plane*, Amis in his most recent incarnation as a public intellectual "sounds increasingly like the embarrassing uncle screaming at the television."*

Tomasky's sentiment is widely shared; and with it the feeling that Amis' detour into the politics of terror has been an unfortunate digression. Tom Chatfield's conclusion is even simpler: "If we're lucky, *The Pregnant Widow* may be the book in which the master rediscovers his voice."

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4 Responses

[In conversation with Martin Amis - Part 2: The new novel - First Drafts - The Prospect magazine blog](#) says:

May 14, 2009 at 10:43 am

[...] [Prospect](#) about his work-in-progress *The Pregnant Widow* (part one of the interview can be viewed here). As Amis explains, the book's title is a reference to the "long night of chaos and [...]"

 **Frederick Willman** says:

May 17, 2009 at 1:40 am

Hello, Reviewer:

The greatest UK writer of our times is the late Max Sebald. If you have read him, you

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PROSPECT BUZZ 

No article on immigration and multiculturalism, including [this one](#) from the *Australian*, is complete without a reference to *Prospect* editor David Goodhart's solidarity vs diversity thesis

Australia's *Courier-Mail* thought our headline "Sarko the sex dwarf" was [definitive](#)

don't expend too much energy on much else.

fbenjul
Madison, WI, USA

 **Tom Chatfield** says:
May 17, 2009 at 2:02 pm

WG Sebald is both late and German. A towering genius, but not really in the running for the title of greatest living, or even recent, British author....

In conversation with Martin Amis - Part 4: Meeting Colombia's assassins - First Drafts - The Prospect magazine blog says:

May 21, 2009 at 6:11 pm

[...] can view Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 of the Amis interviews at these links, plus a web exclusive article from our [...]

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The *Oxford Mail* has a [write-up](#) of one of the winners of the Prospect/Franco British Council short story prize

The [expenses incident](#) mentioned in Lucy Kellaway's *FT* column was a long time ago, and does not involve a current member of Prospect staff

Jonathan Derbyshire draws upon the wisdom of *Prospect's* managing editor James Crabtree in his *New Statesman* [profile of Michael Sandel](#)

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Analysis of Iran, from the man who inspired [Syriana](#)

It's Bloomsday! [Slugger O'Toole](#) rounds up how the world is celebrating Joyce's epic.

When bandwidth thieves [get angry](#)

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