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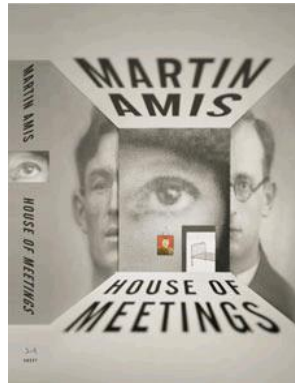
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SPOTLIGHT

THE BARD OF BRASH

I think it's a largely European thing, that open, unapologetic anti-Semitism. Yes, exactly. Do you know the French thinker Bernard-Henri Lévy? He had a piece in the *New York Times* magazine about Israel during the Lebanon war. He said, when these spastic rockets are being shot out of Gaza and from beyond the border into Lebanon, there's a dread every time you hear one coming. But there's also a projected dread about what kind of weapons they're going to have in 10 or 20 years. And, there's a feeling of, "Could this be the beginning of the end?"



BACK TO THE USSR Amis' new book

Have you discussed that prospect with your old friend Christopher Hitchens?

Yeah, we had a chat about it in Las Vegas of all places, in the summer. And he, too, had a similar kind of presentiment that this might be the beginning of the end. It looks as though it's unsustainable.

As long as there isn't a robust U.S. diplomatic effort to solve the Palestinian problem, it looks very, very dismal.

But even if you seem to solve it, just look at the mass of that hatred in the region: 400 million against 7 million.

I do think there are potential sectarian divisions within the Arab world that could be turned to the West's advantage. But the problem is that Iraq has united all of the opposition in a way Al Qaeda could not.

There's that, although I bet Hitch doesn't lose any sleep over sectarian killings, does he?

How are things between you and Salman Rushdie? Has the war complicated the dynamic between the two of you and Hitchens?

I think we're not out there with the Hitch, although we respect him. We think he's gone too far on occasion, but rather him than the completely defeatist anti-West, self-hating masochistic stuff that we're surrounded by. I had dinner with Salman in London a few weeks ago, with Ian McEwan, and I think we had all concurred that the centrist view is that we should have made a glowing success with Afghanistan, torn up the Earth to find Osama bin Laden. You know, after 9/11, Noam Chomsky eagerly predicted that the invasion of Afghanistan would result in the genocide of the Afghan people. And it's been more the other way around; it's been a kind of parthenogenesis, the creation of a race. Three million have come back since the Taliban fell, and that's a fantastic thing.

That makes the compulsion to go into Iraq all the more puzzling.

I'm surprised that by a familiar psychological mechanism, Hitch wasn't alerted by the fact that the eminence grise for this war is Kissinger. The Baker-Hamilton report on the Iraq war is an attempt to put the whole thing back under adult supervision, but in fact, Bush has been listening to Kissinger and meeting regularly with him. And the Kissinger doctrine, according at least to Bob

"It's so wrong to have that kind of a politicized reader ... if they are that politicized then they've got no business reading fiction"

ON THE RADAR

FEATURES

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And survive one that isn't, in...

Woodward in his latest book, the slogan there is that "Afghanistan is not enough." A bigger show of muscle was needed.

How has the British political scene struck you now that you're back in England? Is Tony Blair more a tragic figure or a buffoon, in your view?

British politics is really only interesting to me as a subset of American politics. And as for Blair, I think he performed the essential task that Americans wanted, to hear the Iraq War justified by someone with a British accent.

I am impressed, though, that Britain really is much more of an immigrant society these days. It has come into a kind of multicultural maturity with a minimum of friction.

Though it does seem that European countries find it harder to get Muslim minorities to assimilate.

That's right. There's something profoundly creepy in knowing that the people behind the 7/7 bombings were largely homegrown Brits.

I think, by contrast, that the most militant Muslims tend to emigrate to the U.S. with the express idea of blowing shit up.

That's right. You get all the cool terrorists. But it's true, a Ghanaian man from Boston can say, in a very uncomplicated way, "I am an American," and that is not so much the case in England. That's our next challenge, to make that possible.

Finally, how are your teeth these days?

I'm not really going to comment there. Just say that I'm comfortable.

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