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MARTIN AMIS

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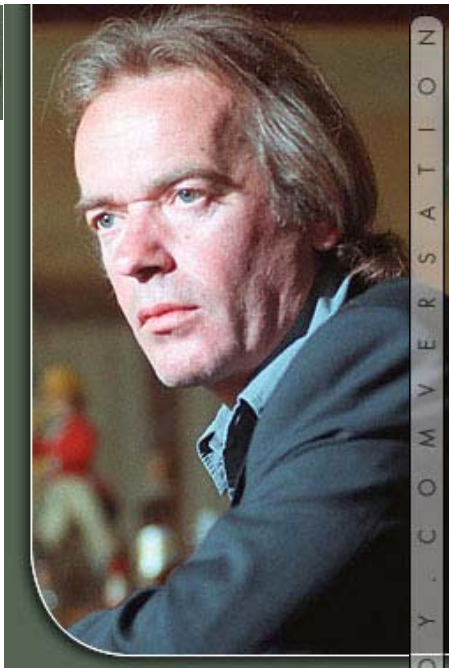
By **Sam Jemielity**

He's been called the Mick Jagger of literature, but at 54 Martin Amis is showing no signs of the creative burnout so obviously afflicting Mick and the Stones. With the publication of his new novel *Yellow Dog*, Amis has reclaimed his spot as British literature's preeminent bad boy. The novel came out in the United Kingdom in August, prompting a barrage of press -- much of it viciously negative. No stranger to bad publicity, Amis told Playboy.com the response "has set a new low in English so-called 'literary journalism.'"

His 10th novel, *Yellow Dog* is at times hilariously funny, at times philosophical and searching. In it, Amis focuses his trademark black humor on the sordid side of life he so loves to explore.

The book opens with a savage beating and unfolds into a Tarantino-esque melee of vicious mobsters, coked-up catty ex-wives, potency pill-popping porn stars, smarmy journalists and despoiled innocents. The main character is Xan Meo, a famous actor who takes two blows to the head in a pub garden. The injury transforms him from an ideal husband into a leering lech who demands sex constantly from his wife and takes an unsettling interest in his own four-year-old daughter.

The intensity of Xan's beating parallels the lambasting Amis himself received in the British media over the book. The son of Kingsley Amis, the late British satirist, Amis has been a whipping boy in the British



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media almost since the 1973 publication of his debut novel *The Rachel Papers*, a hysterical look at teenage sex. Amis's divorce, his split with a longtime agent and even his dental work have earned him unflattering, often vitriolic ink. So it was par for the course when British novelist Tibor Fischer, assigned to review *Yellow Dog*, likened reading the book to catching a favorite uncle masturbating in front of children. Or that the British press gleefully celebrated *Yellow Dog*'s recent failure to win the Booker Prize, the U.K.'s highest literary award.

American audiences have usually been much kinder to Amis, but this time Yankee critics are lining up on both sides of the fence. *The New York Times*'s Michiko Kakutani fired the first shot with her shrill observation that *Yellow Dog* "bears as much resemblance to Mr. Amis's best fiction as a bad karaoke singer does to Frank Sinatra." *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist* volleyed back with much more favorable reviews. As he prepared for a reading tour of the United States, Amis shared his thoughts with Playboy.com on the furor surrounding his book in England, the power of pornography and the cultural significance of exposed navels.



photo: Vince Talotta/Toronto
Star

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