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# MARTIN AMIS

THE PLAYBOY.COMVERSATION

**Playboy.com:** What have the last few months in Britain been like for you?

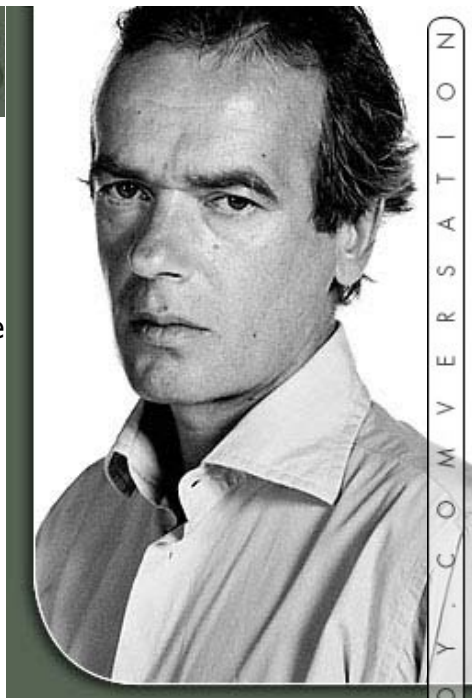
**Martin Amis:** Well, you'd like to say you've ridden above it without a scar. You can't but feel beaten up, although there were good reviews, too. It's like having the flu, basically. It fades, and you're all right.

**PB:** What explains the response to the book?

**MA:** I seem to have stepped into a culture war. There is the personal stuff, which I'm bored with. There's an element in the British press that thinks I'm my father as well as me. That I was born in 1922 and that I'm now 81, although, in fact, I'm 54. There's a feeling that I have overstayed my welcome, which I think is irrational. But there's the culture war side, too, which is more interesting. Egalitarianism, individualism, populism, that is the ideology in England where we're all equal and the reader wants an even exchange with the author. He doesn't want to feel there's a gulf or an elevation between the two. And my stuff to them feels like a drone of elitist self-congratulation.

**PB:** What is it about your style that irritates them?

**MA:** I like to say that it reminds certain people how thick they are, and how numb and smug. Actually, that's what I love when I read. I want to feel thick and smug and



AUDIO EXCLUSIVE

Amis on why some people dislike his writing style



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numb. I want a transfusion from above. The whole idea of "above" is verboten in England. I'm not sure what the American convulsion at the moment is, but I get the impression that people have moved beyond political correctness there by now. But here it lingers, although much ridiculed. It's there subliminally. I think the whole idea of aesthetic pleasure is in retreat in England. Is this true in America? I think it is. Look what's happened to poetry in the last two generations. It's no longer part of our lives the way it was.

**PB:** The big thing in America is reality TV, where there's no need to think anything up, because reality is supposedly more entertaining than what a writer can do.

**MA:** Right. It's the celebration of mediocrity or even non-entity. The things that have to do with the elite and hierarchy are dealt with very uneasily here. Also, [in England] we have what you don't have, which is a sharply philistine-tending press. America has always had more time for its writers, because everyone grasps on some level that writers would play a big part in determining what America was, this New World. But here, England has never needed to be told what it was, it's so entrenched. There's a kind of giggly, scurrilous culture in the press here that there isn't in America.

**PB:** Why are you better received by American audiences than by British?

**MA:** Paradoxically, I've always felt that they get me in America in a way they don't here. It's counterintuitive, in that England is known as the home of irony and wit. And Americans, although raucous and humorous, are not meant to be great connoisseurs of irony. But I've always felt they cut to the chase when they read me in America, whereas here, I drive them crazy. Also, my father Kingsley is such an English type and a representative part of the culture in a way he isn't in America. He's a great definer and satirist of Englishness. My stuff is more transatlantic than his. He wrote one novel set in America, but he didn't go back and forth the way I have.

**PB:** One line that pops out from all of the negative press was Tibor Fischer saying that reading *Yellow Dog* was like "your favorite uncle being caught in the school playground, masturbating." What was your reaction to that?

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