

# FLYING PIG, FOLDING CHAIR

ART ASSAILING VICE

THURSDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2008

## An Open Letter From The Martin Amis In Me

(A Thought Experiment)

I said

You may have noticed that poetry

Is dead.

The obituary has already been written.

Not many people curl up of an evening

With a book of poetry. Do we like

These moments of communion with the poet?

Reading a poem involves self-examination,

We don't have the time or the inclination.

But then, that night, you revealed to me

That you were a poet too,

One who speaks for the more lyrical

Face of poetry

As opposed to mere limerick-writers.

In fact you endeared yourself to me

When you said that poetry is concerned with language.

But then you tried explaining that it

Is also a biography of words

At their most essentially protean.

You told me to think of poetry

As a punch up in a cocoon,

A wild paper bag that rarely catches fire,

And I had to stop you there.

Afterwards you did a cursory search

Of the internet like the dreary

Little bore you are

And tried mugging me with my own sayings.

You found an interview

I did in The Independent answering emails

From the general public, and in

One of them I wrote

That it was time to look down on people

Who use the words everybody else uses.

I denigrated 'second-hand speech',

'mouldering novelties', what might be called 'herd-words'.

And you said, 'herd-words', I like that idea,

But who do you think

Is best placed to attack these miserable droves

And drive them apart; to scatter and startle

These dreary flocks and provoke the most

Vital stampedes?

And who do you think is going to keep them apart

In future?

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I said

There's nothing I like better  
Than looking up a word in the dictionary.

I said

That when I'm reading the New York Review  
Of Books – a piece on North Korea or the Middle  
East – and there's a poem in the middle of it,  
I think to myself, What is that doing there?  
My eye won't go near it.

You said how come a single word

Rocks your world

While you find yourself affronted  
By those handfuls that are strung together  
striving to make all kinds of sense?

You said poetry

Is the grit in the eye  
That greases the wheels of language  
And does precious little for commerce:  
A worthwhile confinement of words.

I said that a poem slows

the clock down;

indeed it stops the clock and says  
Wait, what's going on in the moment?  
Let's recreate the moment very carefully.

And you said, there you go,

That's not a bad poem right there.

I said that time

Moves more slowly in  
Iran and Pakistan  
And that there is something the matter  
With the Islamic clock.

And you said perhaps

The problem is a surfeit of poets amongst their ranks,  
and shouldn't we then lure these wordsmiths over here?  
Perhaps this might propel  
Their own nations into the twenty first century  
And meanwhile counter our own debilitating haste?

I said, you're being facetious again,

And clearly you have me at a marked disadvantage  
By inserting me into a poem  
and employing these underhanded tricks.  
You have filled me up with helium, in essence,  
and invited me to speak  
and then laughed at my squeaky voice.

POSTED BY NFA AT 13:12 

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