

## Muddled Brilliance

### Finding the Significance in Martin Amis' New Novel *Yellow Dog*

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Perhaps the enlightenment was too thinly veiled to last anyway: "He was a good modern person; was a liberal, a feminist (indeed a gynocrat: 'Give the girls a go,' he'd say. 'I know it's asking the earth. Still, *we're* no good. Give the girls a go')."

We find this much out about Xan and then he gets worked on the head in a decidedly male exchange, slowly regressing ("de-enlightenment") to the unrestrainedly masculine instincts he'd grown beyond. A man who formerly bragged of being more feminist than his wife now bluntly starts arguments with her by stating that "Chicks like salads", whereas men never seek out "some bullshit tomato". His libido begins to lose its sense of place. At first, he pesters and pressures his wife for nearly constant sex. When she begins to say no, he asserts his will further and nearly forces his way with her. His response the morning after is oblivious rationalization: "How can a man *rape* his wife? She's his *wife*." Xan contemplates cheating on his wife, on the one woman he's sure would never hurt him. Worse, until the end of the novel, he becomes frighteningly closer and closer to justifying urges to commit incest with his four-year-old daughter. A character pushes Xan towards acting on these desires: "If you wanted to sexualize your relationship with your daughter – she'd go along with it. What else can she do?" [...] Her power, her rights (which depended on what? Civilization?) had seemed to disappear; and his powers, his rights – they had corrosively burgeoned."

Along side Xan's tale come several other stories with inevitable connections revealing themselves through the improbable links we're used to seeing in parallel plots. A slightly altered line of descent places King Henry IX on the British throne, whose royal duties pale in comparison to the deep anxiety he feels over a videotape of his nude fifteen year old daughter that's about to appear in the press. And there's Clint Smoker, a "massive pale" piece of shit, his "flesh [...] the rubbery look of cold pasta". Clint works as a journalist for the *Morning Lark*, a wildly popular porn version of a tabloid where his sexual failures come out in increasingly hostile descriptions of ultra-brutish sexual scenarios. He isn't only someone who spends his life immersed in the scummy mannerisms of porn like the "wankers" (readers) of the *Morning Lark*. He actually writes them in filler pieces and fake letters sections: "So high time [Princess Victoria] had herself deflowered [...] and jumped aboard the cherryground."

Testifying to Amis' overall extraordinary ability to write, is the fact that it wasn't until I'd finished *Yellow Dog*, that I realized I hadn't even minded the several well-worn clichés it contains. Clint Smoker ... has an embarrassingly *small penis* (a therapist tells him to "regard his organ as a middle finger without the nail"). So Clint ... *over-compensates* with an SUV. (In his black Avenger, "[H]e now weighed four tons and had a top speed of 160 miles per hour.") Later, he gets all excited about an extended e-mail correspondence he's having with a woman, and when they meet, just as the joke goes, she ends up being a transsexual man. The several stories eventually converge on

release of mock Princess Victoria porn videos, and Xan, an actor without his full mental awareness back, is invited to do a paid cameo on a porn movie, one of the few ways he can still work on camera. And it's here that Amis throws the reader head long into what happens when all restraint, all meaningfulness, either personal or artistic, is taken away from sex: namely, what goes on in the adult industry.

At the maelstrom's center of all this porn we get Karla White, a former porn actress, who is introduced to propel the sense of the industry, as well as to plainly spell out just what Amis wants to say. The nature and purpose of Karla's character varies drastically; she'll later surrealistically reveal herself as a sibling of Xan's. At first, she appears as an affair from Xan's past intent on seducing him again, but soon becomes the moral voice of the novel. Amis' directing hand is almost visible as she implausibly gives him a very psychological argument for father-daughter incest:

*"Some fathers really do believe incest is 'natural'. I made you so I can touch you, your first child should always be your dad's: all that. It's an atavism. Because getting rid of incest, outgrowing incest, was part of the evolutionary advance, like outgrowing oestrus.' .....*

*"Look at the future. Us, us victims, we're not so frightened and repelled by the way the world is now: the end of normalcy. We always knew there was no moral order. So sleep with Billie [Xan's daughter], and introduce her to the void."*

Later, she gives a tour of the porn realm to Clint, who's there to interview her for the *Princess Lolita* video. "Hatefuck", she says, became the principal genre in porn with the loosening of obscenity prosecution under the last administration:

*"Immediately there was an over-whelming emphasis on male-female sodomy. The rallying cry was Pussies Are Bullshit. [...] One director said, 'With anal, the actress's personality comes out.' Oh sure: her personality." .....*

*"The essential self-policing had to do with two areas, male-female violence and paedophilia. Male-female violence was called Black Eye, and began with the notorious 'line', Male Dawn. They'd tell the girls: Don't be too proud to cry while we do this. Basically, they roughed them up, and roughed them up for real. The paedophilia tendency was unofficially known as Short Eye, where the girls wore kiddie clothes and talked in squeaky voices and played with dolls. [...] And worse. I'm serious."*

The book is similarly, and very starkly, unsettling throughout. Terse as these examples are, though, they're real and are actual quotes from interviews Amis conducted for a 2001 article on the porn industry. For such sermonizing on the perils of sex to be convincing in a generally "sex-positive" age, he had

it might make you want to do pornography." The content of the novel, is that once the funnelling into full time, in a -- or at least, and you have to with men. Of women's pornographic sexuality, Amis just couldn't bear to see it tr: that peopled the world."

At its most powerful, *Yellow Dog* is a discomfiting thesis. That es skipping pages in search of matter how essential the rest won't last long here. There lit you want to skip pages for. I sex. The argument that poi social restraint necessarily le may be a bit reductive, or account other formidably st the immense and general sat (Pornography has zero po plenty of people guiltily purs and then don't touch it for lo make claims for the natural b when that unredeemable seg the pedophiles and sex prec under complete control. repression ...

But the novel's point, and t reading the novel, is still ri clear from Amis' other books. *Experience*, that he's a famil; to write so lovingly of small cf movements, as he did here a He's a father trying to re crazed tides of libido with th feels for his family, as we all lust doesn't drive most of t towards Clint Smoker-style v most people toward straying relationships or risking pregn brief encounter.) And it's l distraction-filled novel, that most permanent moment.

Xan eventually returns to a b of affection (with lust ne tucked away, off to the side, place). He regains the memor and recalls seeing the "hum that knew no blindspots". Suc could never, ever happen to th bodily area in pornography, i in male thought. That spo delivery room, nurses refer peek" as men sneak a glance of women in labor. To see th that – the *human vulva*, an the many shapes that make protection as a sleep-curl female gender outside of s fatherly, brotherly, or purely r

pornography as the book wears on: Clint and Xan go to Los Angeles, to its adult district; Clint to cover the massive

to quote directly from the triple-X video box. From his previous article, Amis wrote, "Gore Vidal once said that the only danger in watching

