

# Martin Amis: Only brain injury could make me write for children

Children's authors have expressed anger over 'insult' to their work on BBC programme

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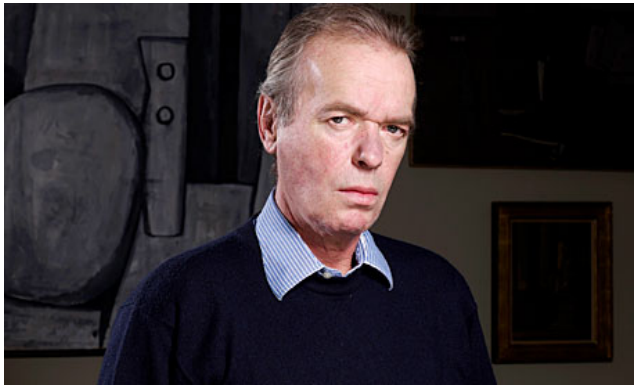
**Benedicte Page**

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Martin Amis: 'The idea of being conscious of who you're directing the story to is anathema to me'. Photograph: Suki Dhandra

Remarks about children's books made by [Martin Amis](#) on the BBC's new book programme [Faulks on Fiction](#), broadcast this week, have caused anger and offence among children's writers.

"People ask me if I ever thought of writing a children's book," [Amis said, in a sideways excursion from a chat about John Self](#), the antihero of his 1984 novel *Money*. "I say, 'If I had a serious brain injury I might well write a children's book', but otherwise the idea of being conscious of who you're directing the story to is anathema to me, because, in my view, fiction is freedom and any restraints on that are intolerable."

"I would never write about someone that forced me to write at a lower register than what I can write," he added.

But [in an angry blog response on her website](#), author [Lucy Coats](#), whose books include the Greek Beasts and Heroes series and novel *Hootcat Hill*, called Amis's remark "arrogant twaddle" with an "implicit insult to those of us who do write children's books".

And writer Jane Stemp, whose book *The Secret Songs* was shortlisted for the 1998 Guardian children's fiction award, and who has cerebral palsy, said: "I have brain damage ... So Amis couldn't have insulted me harder if he'd sat down and thought about it for a year. Superglueing him to a wheelchair and piping children's fiction into his auditory canal suddenly seems like a good idea."

Coats said that as a children's writer she certainly did not "write down" to her young

readership. "Children are astute observers of tone – they loathe adults who patronise them with a passion, adults who somehow assume they are not sentient beings because they are children," she said. "When I write fiction, I research and plan just as (I assume) Amis does. Then I sit down and let what comes, come. The story generally tells itself without any inner voice saying, 'Oh, but you're writing for children – you mustn't say this, or – oh goodness, certainly not that!'"

Every writer is the amanuensis to their characters, often using language they never consciously would, she added. "It's not a feat of the writer's art exclusive to highbrow literary fiction. When I write, I think about language, the richness and complexity and wonder of it, and I use it to hook the reader into my story, to ensnare them in my net of words, to take them so far that they forget that what they are seeing is only print on a page of a dead tree. I say the reader – and that means whoever is reading my book regardless of age."

Troll Fell author Katherine Langrish also took up the debate, asking: "People who make shoes or clothes, or who prepare food for children, aren't generally considered less skilful than those who do the same things for adults – why is the opposite so often assumed to be true of books?" Writer John Dougherty contented himself with the put-down: "Don't worry Martin. We can't all be imaginative and versatile."

Controversial remarks from Amis, known in his younger years as the enfant terrible of the British literary world, remain a regular occurrence. The author, whose most recent novel is *The Pregnant Widow*, caused outrage in a 2006 interview with the *Times*, in which he said Muslims ought to "suffer until they get their house in order", while in 2009 he dismissed Katie Price, the glamour model-turned-brand-author, with the blunt appraisal that "all we are really worshipping is two bags of silicone."

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