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THE INDEPENDENT

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Martin Amis: Now we are 60

Andrew Johnson, Gemma Mcintosh and Russell Arkininstall find the literary world's former enfant terrible still dividing critical opinion

To his critics he is an arrogant misogynist who wouldn't be where he is without his famous father, Kingsley. To his fans he is a brilliant chronicler of our times whose literary success - and success with women - has fuelled resentment and envy. As Martin Amis prepares to celebrate his 60th birthday on Tuesday, we asked 15 leading literary figures whether they love him or loathe him.

Marina Warner, Writer

I haven't read him for a while. I parted company with him because of his attitude towards the Iraq war. I admired his early work a lot. I liked *Other People: A Mystery Story*. It was a very powerful dystopian vision of contemporary society. He's a very stylish wordsmith, and he can bring about some terrific effects. I do read him with a mongoose fascination for his unrepentant misogyny. I know he says he isn't, but everyone says they aren't. It's his puritanical attitude towards sex that makes me feel that; sexual purity and misogyny go together. He's a barometer of misanthropy.

He was prophetic in *Money: A Suicide Note*, but I think he's overestimated his far-sightedness now. He's far from being a Tiresias.

Al Alvarez Poet, writer, and critic

I have known Martin since he was in his pram. What I admire about him is his current devotion to literary excellence as he sees it. He has very high standards for himself, which are very hard to keep.

It is hard for me to comment on whether he is a misogynist or not; his father was, there is no doubt about that, but I would not have thought that he was. When he was young he did screw around, as everyone does, but that could be simply because he loved women.

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Claire Tomalin, Biographer

I think he is a really terrific writer - one of the best writers of prose of his generation, and he has had a mixed good fortune of being a celebrity due to his father. I think he stepped out of his father's shadow with his first book. I'm very fond of him, but I wouldn't rush out to read his latest book. Every writer goes through ups and downs, but he has kept up a very good standard over time.

Ann Widdecombe, MP

I just don't enjoy it. Nothing more than that. He has made a huge reputation for himself.

Jacqueline Wilson, Children's author

My only acquaintance with Amis was once in Edinburgh when I remember his lovely daughter came up to me - and Amis also came up - asking for an autograph, and a little bit of me thought: "Martin Amis is grovelling to me!"

His works are always interesting and a talking point, and he's not frightened of taking critical comments. I'd certainly be interested to see his new book. I think he has stepped out of his father's shadow. It is very difficult [to have a famous parent], although in any profession it can help, too. But I'm sure The Rachel Papers would have been well received no matter who his parents were.

David Lodge, Novelist

Martin Amis is the most original prose stylist of his generation and a very influential one. Money, published in his heyday, I would say is his best book, but Time's Arrow and Experience, published much later, were also terrific books.

I don't think Amis is a misogynist writer, the way his father certainly was in some of his work. The nicest character in Money is a woman, for instance. Because he writes about males lusting after and complaining about women very expressively and amusingly it is easy to assume that he identifies uncritically with such characters, but I don't think that's the case. They are often made to look ridiculous.

There was an Oedipal struggle between Martin and his father that was literary as well as personal. He differentiated himself from his father and made his own mark, but the underlying family resemblance in style is fascinating to observe.

Michael Frayn, Playwright and novelist

I am a tremendous admirer of his work and particularly of Money.

Germaine Greer, Feminist academic

I can't really work up any enthusiasm for him. I read the early novels. He was outstanding. Then I was a friend of his. I'm not a friend anymore, our paths have diverged.

I don't think he's any more misogynist than the average Englishman. Martin is a small man and not quite perfectly formed. He had a polished routine of seduction, but that's very ordinary. The only thing that's not ordinary about Martin is that he's a writer - and he could have been a very good one. He might still be a very good one. We thought he was going to be brilliant when he wrote The Rachel Papers and then Success.

But then it all went a bit wrong. There was magical realism, restless surface

glitter in the prose. It became exhausting and tedious and irritating. It's very hard to watch clever boys showing off because all the time there's a different kind of writer, writing perfect stories.

Lionel Shriver, Novelist

Martin Amis has always impressed me as a writer who capitalised on his parentage, but who also distinguished himself in his own right. I adored *Money*, for example, which has a vague relationship to Kingsley's satirical work without being imitative. As for his latter years being "disappointing", I admit I'm one of the many readers who didn't fancy *Yellow Dog*. But I thought *House of Meetings* was a tour de force, and anyone who can write that is hardly suffering from a weakening of his authorial powers.

I was especially struck by the fact that that novel is deeply serious (albeit full of deadpan drollery), thus representing a big departure from the likes of *Yellow Dog*. It does not come across as lazily autobiographical; rather, as a magnificently successful imaginary inhabitation of another people's experience and another country's history. In general, I rue the public pettiness that has dogged Amis - all that rubbish about his teeth, the ludicrously outsized indignation about his quite modest salary as a university tutor.

He's intelligent, he takes risks and he is a skilful craftsman. He is a national treasure, and an underappreciated one.

Jilly Cooper, Author

I knew him when he was very young and he was very sweet and kind. He is a very, very funny man. I remember a touching story about him - when his father left with Jane, he marched across London to find him and knocked on his door, begging him to come back home. He did just absolutely adore his father.

Martin writes with passion and tenderness, and he is a charming and attractive man.

Barry Fantoni, Cartoonist

I met Martin's father a number of times and my feeling is that it's very difficult when you are the child of someone who is very famous or very good at what they do.

Martin's work is rather watery and not really worthy of the attention that is given to him. I don't find his work interesting but that is not to say that his books are good or bad. Having said all that, he has stuck in there and kept going all this time.

Peter Florence, Founder of the Hay festival

He is actually fantastically important in my life for a number of reasons, one of which being *Money*, as it was the first contemporary novel I ever read. The whole of my career and life I have searched to find something as satisfactory as that book. He may have more significance, I believe, than a lot of people who have won prizes around him.

Calling him a misogynist is bad journalistic shorthand. If you take what he is writing about literally then you will not get it; people fail to understand that it's satire. I have known him professionally for 20 years and he is courteous and amazingly generous with his time. I am bewildered by the media perception of him.

Beryl Bainbridge, Novelist

I first met Martin when he was quite young, we have done one or two literary tours together. I enjoyed his earlier books enormously, but I haven't read his later work. What is very interesting is that he didn't do very well at school. I think he was a bit lost. Then all of a sudden he buckled down and worked extremely hard.

Ruth Rendell, Novelist

I like Martin Amis very much. I particularly like his early work. I used to know him slightly, as one does, and I very much like London Fields. Time's Arrow and Experience - about him and his father - are two other favourites of mine.

I would say he has earned his reputation. I knew his father much better and I liked all his books. I think Martin is still to write a great masterpiece. People get labelled as misogynists for saying one wrong thing about women - but no, I don't think he is a misogynist.

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