

Family detective

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Nick Barratt's investigation into hidden histories. This week: Martin Amis

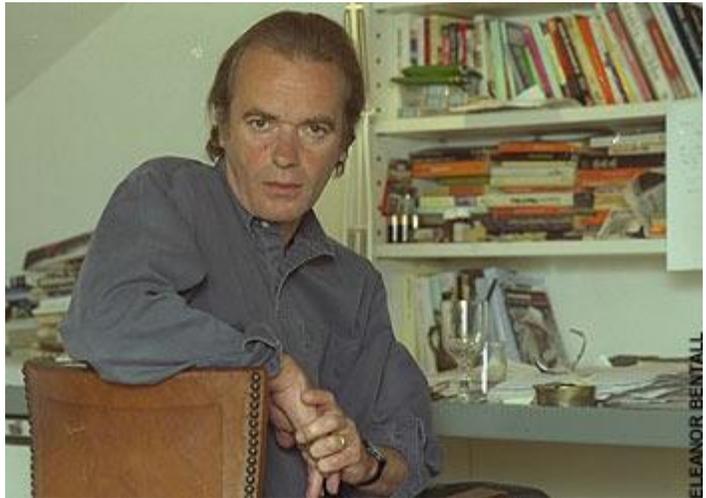
Martin Amis is a prolific author whose first novel *The Rachel Papers* was published in 1973. Later books include *Money*, his most critically acclaimed work; *London Fields*, which is set against a future climate disaster; and the Booker Prize short-listed *Time's Arrow*.

His short novel *House of Meetings* was published last year and this year sees the release of *The Pregnant Widow*.

Amis was appointed Professor of Creative Writing for the University of Manchester in February and has used his high media profile to air outspoken views about the state of the world post-9/11. His literary inspiration and general background is investigated here.

Who is he related to?

Martin Louis Amis was born on August 25, 1949, in Oxford, the son of Kingsley William Amis, a university lecturer and former student of St John's College, Oxford. Kingsley went there in 1941 to read English but was called up into the army in 1942, only completing his studies in 1947 after his demob.



With the exception of Amis' father, there is little evidence of literary scholarship in the family tree

By this date, he had met Hilary Bardwell and the couple were married in Oxford in 1948. The marriage lasted until 1963, after Kingsley's affair with novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard was discovered.

He achieved great fame as an author of more than 20 books, including *Lucky Jim*, his most famous work, and was knighted in 1990.

With such a fine literary background from which to draw, it is hardly surprising that Martin gained a first class degree from Exeter College, Oxford, in English. Another key influence was his stepmother, who introduced him to Jane Austen's works.

Until his father, there is little evidence of literary scholarship in the family tree. Instead there are traders, craftsmen and the occasional millionaire. Kingsley was the son of William Robert Amis, a mustard manufacturer's clerk working and living in Clapham.

Writing was, however, an important part of his job and this skill was passed down from at least one generation further up - his father, Joseph James Amis, was described as a clerk when he married in 1884, though he ended up managing the glass merchant's firm where he started out. Even Joseph's father was able to turn his hand to clerical work in his profession as a builder.

Martin's maternal line contains quite a mix of talent. Just glancing through the list of occupations stated in the census returns and certificates that chronicle the lives of Hilary's ancestors, we find decorators, clothiers, compositors, master builders and bootmakers.

Perhaps the most remarkable is Martin's maternal grandfather, Leonard Sidney Bardwell, who started work as a clerk, at the board of agriculture, but went on to make a fortune as a shoe manufacturer.

- If you suspect your ancestors might have been of aristocratic origins, look out for *So You Think You're Royal* on Sky One (Mondays, 10pm), where I set out to test the claims of families who have heard they may have blue blood flowing through their veins.

- Next week: cricketer Geoffrey Boycott

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