

Series: Author, author

Martin Amis muses on the fourth estate

'I'm not turning into Kingsley. I'm already Kingsley'

Martin Amis

The Guardian, Saturday 13 February 2010
Article history

The following correction was printed in the Guardian's Corrections and clarifications column, Tuesday 16 February 2010

"In truth this is easily the most unusual thing about me," wrote Martin Amis in the column below. "I am the only hereditary novelist in the anglophone literary corpus." A reader points to at least one other, Anthony Trollope, following from his mother Frances.

I was born in Clapham in 1922. My literary career kicked off in 1956 when, as a resident of Swansea, South Wales, I published my first novel, *Lucky Jim*. This was followed by *That Uncertain Feeling* and *Take a Girl Like You*, among others; but my really productive period began in 1973, when I published both *The Riverside Villas Murder* and *The Rachel Papers*. 1978 saw the appearance of *Jake's Thing* and *Success*; in 1984 it was *Stanley and the Women* and *Money*; in 1991 it was *The Russian Girl* and *Time's Arrow*. This last was shortlisted for the Booker prize; but I had already been a winner with *The Old Devils* in 1986. I am, incidentally, the only writer to have received the Somerset Maugham award twice – the first time for my first first novel, the second time for my second first novel.

That period, alas, came to an end in 1995. Since then, though, I have been far from sluggardly. This year, for instance, at the age of 88, I publish my 37th work of fiction, *The Pregnant Widow*, and next year will see another novel, *State of England* – my 67th book, which nicely sets the scene for my 90th birthday. I have written five volumes' worth of journalism; I have taught at Princeton, Cambridge and Manchester. May I quote Anthony Burgess? "Wedged as we are between two eternities of idleness, there is no excuse for being idle now." I have been married four times (two of my wives are novelists), and I have eight children and seven grandchildren – so far. Oh, and I almost forgot to mention my *Collected Poems* (1979).



The creature described above is of course imaginary. But such a phantasm, such a monster of longevity and industriousness, seems to exist in the minds, or in the anxiety dreams, of a tiny stratum: British – no, English – feature-writers who occasionally address themselves to literary affairs. Incidentally, this is what they're groping to express when they say I'm "turning into Kingsley". They should relax: I'm already Kingsley. In truth, this is easily the most unusual thing about me: I am the only hereditary novelist in the anglophone literary corpus. Thus I am the workaholic and hypermanic, and by now very elderly, Prince Charles of English letters. I have overstayed my welcome. I have been about the place for much too long.

About 90% of the coverage has passed me by, but some new tendencies

Previous | Next | Index

(16)

Tweet this (25)

A larger | smaller

Books
KingsleyAmis

Media
Newspapers

Culture

Series
Author, author

More features

More on this story



Oh, and another thing
Letters: Christopher Hitchens steps in to media scuffle between Martin Amis and Anna Ford again

Anna Ford v Martin Amis – the final episode (for now)

'Dear chaps ...' Ford's conclusion

'To whom it may concern ...' Hitchens's contribution

'Dear Anna Ford ...' Amis's response

'Dear Martin Amis ...' Ford's letter

More on Martin Amis

Related

10 Jan 2010
Martin Amis: The wunderkind comes of age

23 Aug 2009
The Movement Reconsidered; edited by Zachary Leader | Book review

11 Jan 2009



Log onto **EarthShare.org** and see what you can do.
One environment. One simple way to care for it.[®]
Earth Share Ad Council

On Books

Most viewed | Zeitgeist | Latest

Last 24 hours



1. AS Byatt: 'I don't believe in God. I believe in Wallace Stevens'

2. Why I'm going to the Discworld convention

3. Alexander the Great novel gets bum rap in Canada

4. Jennifer Weiner speaks out against Jonathan Franzen 'overcoverage'

5. Ayn Rand fan spells out appreciation in world's largest book ad

More most viewed

Guardian Books on Twitter

Latest news, views and links from the Guardian's books team



richardlea: What does a literary prize really, really need? Yep - an app. The Booker's got one ...
<http://tinyurl.com/38c96wx#books>
about 4 hours, 35 minutes ago



samjordison: Haunting, charming, strange, familiar scenes from Victorian childhood: <http://bit.ly/9Eedl8#books>
about 9 hours, 34 minutes ago



Sarah_Crown: RT @parisreview "At night you dream six dreams. But ARE they six dreams?" - Philip Roth's Paris Review interview <http://tpr.ly/dkPrPB#books>
about 1 day, 3 hours ago

- Find more tweets from our books team
- Follow our books team on a Twitter list

guardianbookshop

are clear enough. What's different, this time round, is that the writer, or this writer, gets blamed for all the slanders he incites in the press. Some quite serious commentators (DJ Taylor, for one) have said that I'm controversial-on-purpose whenever I have a book coming out. Haven't they noticed that the papers pick up on my remarks whether I have a book coming out or not? And how can you be controversial- on-purpose without ceasing to care what you say? The Telegraph, on its front page, offers the following: "Martin Amis: 'Women have too much power for their own good'." This is the equivalent of "Rowan Williams: 'Christianity is a vulgar fraud'." I suppose the Telegraph was trying to make me sound "provocative". Well, they messed that up too. I don't sound provocative. I sound like a much-feared pub bore in Hove.

And yet experienced journalists will look me in the eye and solemnly ask, "Why do you do it?" They are not asking me why I say things in public (which is an increasingly pertinent question). They are asking me why I deliberately stir up the [newspapers](#). How can they have such a slender understanding of their own trade? Getting taken up (and recklessly distorted) in the newspapers is not something I do. It's something the news- papers do. The only person in England who can manipulate the fourth estate is, appropriately, Katie Price. But there I go again. No, the vow of silence looks more and more attractive. That would be a story too, but it would only be a story once. Wouldn't it?



To return briefly to the longevity theme – and all the stuff about street-corner suicide parlours, and the "silver tsunami" (which is the demographers' shorthand for what has been described as "the most profound population shift in history"). The press reacted to my remarks with righteous dismay; but I saw no recent headlines saying "Terry Pratchett is mad", by way of commentary on his resonant statement about euthanasia. In addition, it turns out that 75% of Britons (but none of the political parties) agree with him and agree with me. Thus the euthanasia question, eerily, is the reverse image of capital punishment at the time of its abolition. The people wanted judicial killing, but the government, highmindedly and quite rightly in this case, said no.

Of course, Sir Terry's dignified remarks were taken from a public lecture; mine were a mishmash of half-quotes from a satirical novel. For the interested, the passage reads (I am referring to Europe's distorted age structures): "*Hoi polloi*: the many. And, oh, we will be many (he meant the generation less and less affectionately known as the Baby Boomers). And we will be hated, too. *Governance, for at least a generation*, he read, *will be a matter of transferring wealth from the young to the old*. And they won't like that, the young. They won't like the *silver tsunami*, with the old hogging the social services and stinking up the clinics and the hospitals, like an inundation of monstrous immigrants. There will be age wars, and chronological cleansing . . ."

Then, too, Sir Terry has Alzheimer's – a condition made yet more tragic by the liveliness of the mind it here afflicts (I am thinking also of Iris Murdoch and Saul Bellow). And Sir Terry is older than me. Or is he? Well, yes and no. I am 88 – but I am also 24. Look at the photographs. A 60-year-old grandfather, I am still the "bad boy" (not even the bad man) of English letters. Who could possibly "manipulate" perceptions as chaotic as these?

AUTHOR, AUTHOR

[Printable version](#) [Send to a friend](#) [Share](#) [Clip](#) [Contact us](#) [Article history](#)

Ads by Google

Kindle™ - Official Site

Now only \$189. Free Shipping. Now with Global Wireless.
Amazon.com/Kindle

Free Story of the Week

Read a classic short story each Monday from The Library of America.
www.loa.org

90% Off A Kindle Ebook?

No Where Else Can You Save Up To 90% On A Kindle Ebook. Bid Today!

11 Jan 2009
[Kingsley Amis as an angry atheist](#)

23 Nov 2008
[Review: Everyday Drinking by Kingsley Amis](#)

This week's bestsellers

- 1. American Caesars**
by Nigel Hamilton £25.00
- 2. It's All About the Bike**
by Robert Penn £16.99
- 3. Red Men**
by John Williams £16.99
- 4. Finkler Question**
by Howard Jacobson £18.99
- 5. Flavour Thesaurus**
by Niki Segnit £18.99

Search the Guardian bookshop

Latest reviews



[On Deception by Harry Houdini](#)

[Encounter: Essays by Milan Kundera](#)
Milan Kundera's exhumed essays cast a spell with their insights into creativity, writes **Geoff Dyer**

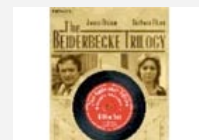
[Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music by Rob Young](#)

[Human Chain by Seamus Heaney](#)

[John L Williams: Mss Shirley Bassey](#)

[More books reviews](#)

Bestsellers from the Guardian shop



[The Beiderbecke Trilogy, starring James Bolam](#)
This box set contains all three series written by Alan Plater, plus soundtrack CD for just £19.99 plus (plus p&p)

From: **£22.98**

[Visit the Guardian reader offers shop](#)
Green & ethical shopping at Guardian ecostore

Latest news on guardian.co.uk

Last updated one minute ago

News

[Asil Nadir arrives in Britain to face fraud charges](#)

Sponsored features



[guardianjobs](#)



Lecturer in Theatre Arts £33,758 - £38,802 pa including Outer London Weight ... I MIDDLESEX

Lecturer in Music and Arts Management £33,758 - £38,802 pa including Outer

More from Author, author

Writers reflect on writing

Latest: 26 Jun 2010: Author, author: Joanna Kavenna
Next: 20 Feb 2010: Jane Gardam on bringing poetry to the streets of Sandwich
Previous: 6 Feb 2010: Robert Macfarlane on filming in Essex

Author, author index

Related information

Books KingsleyAmis

Media Newspapers

Culture

Series Author, author



Gallery (13 pictures): European newspapers on Van Rompuy and Ashton
20 Nov 2009: How press around the EU reported the appointment of a president and foreign minister

More galleries

10 May 2003 Lucky Jim: swearing

15 Jun 2002 Rereading: One Fat Englishman by Kingsley Amis

12 May 2000 The Letters of Kingsley Amis

8 May 2000 All about my father



Video (4min 10sec), Alexander Lebedev: How to become a billionaire
2 Mar 2009: Russian oligarch and London Evening Standard owner Alexander Lebedev talks us through his rise to riches

More video

Hot topics Comic-Con Book news Book reviews

UNIVERSITY (view job details)

London Weight ... | MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY (view job details)

Search jobs

Search



Legacy Development Executive
London | £22,472 pa
ENGLISH HERITAGE