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# Amis flies into fresh controversy with story of 9/11 hijacker

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Whether it be his teeth, his relationships or his writing, he has a seemingly endless capacity to provoke controversy.

And the fevered commentary that constantly attends the writer Martin Amis is unlikely to be diminished this autumn, given the subject matter covered in his new book.

House of Meetings, his first since the widely derided Yellow Dog two years ago, begins with a straightforward novella, the title story, a gothic love triangle involving two brothers and a Jewish girl across four decades in post-war Russia.

But in the first of two short stories that follow, Amis will once more court the kind of controversy for which he is now famed. It imagines the final movements of Mohamed Atta, the lead hijacker of the 11 September attacks in America.

As explained by his publisher, Jonathan Cape, the tale can be summarised like this: "Accompanied by one of the 'muscle' Saudis, Mohamed Atta drove to Portland, Maine, on 10 September 2001. Noone knows why. In 'The Last Days of Mohamed Atta', Martin Amis provides a rationale for Atta's insouciant detour, and for other lacunae in the 'planes operation'. We follow Atta on that day: from his small-hour awakening in the budget hotel room in Portland, all the way to 8:46am - and beyond."

Atta, the Egyptian whose plotting began in Germany as documented in the Channel 4 film, Hamburg Cell, was on American Airlines Flight 11 - one of the two planes commandeered and steered into the World Trade Centre in New York.

His fellow hijacker Abdul Alomari, a Saudi who had been living in America, was seated alongside him on the flight.

Although the publicity for Amis's version of events suggests no one knew why Atta went to Portland, one explanation was forthcoming in the wake of the attacks. A guide, entitled Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants, was reported to recommend that attackers should start from smaller airports - such as Portland - where security was more likely to be lax. At Boston, Atta and Alomari transferred on to the plane used to help destroy the World Trade Centre.

The final story in Amis's latest book also draws on contemporary world events. "In the Palace of the End" is narrated by one of the doubles for a Middle Eastern tyrant - clearly a figure such as Saddam Hussein or his demented son and heir, Uday.

"The double divides his day between epic torture and epic lovemaking with picked beauties - all of it filmed for the delectation of the dictator," according to the publisher's blurb.

It continues: "He also has a third obligation: he must duplicate on his person the wounds sustained by the dictator in the almost-daily attempts on his life."

Rumours have long circulated in the Middle East that Saddam Hussein, the now deposed Iraqi dictator, did, indeed, have up to four doubles, though none has ever surfaced.

The publisher said of the new work, which will be released in September: "These themes and settings may look like unfamiliar ground

for Martin Amis. But in fact he is returning to his central preoccupation: the nature of masculinity, and the connections between male sexuality and violence."

Amis has previously used world events, such as the Holocaust, in his writing. The son of the novelist Kingsley Amis, he has written nine novels, two collections of stories and six collections of non-fiction.

Once feted as the voice of his generation with novels such as *Money*, critics and the public alike seem to have taken great delight when he has faltered since.

*Yellow Dog*, a satire on the post-September 11 world order, was not well received. The *Times Literary Supplement* said his prose had become "a nightmare of pointless periphrasis, fruity pomp and numb tautology".

But it has been his perceived personal failings which have been most discussed. He was widely mocked for spending \$20,000 (£11,400) on fixing his rotting teeth but angrily rebutted claims of vanity. The work was not cosmetic, he insisted.

More damning for some were his decisions to leave his wife, Antonia, for a younger woman and to fire his literary agent, Pat Kavanagh - the wife of his friend Julian Barnes - in favour of a mercenary American, Andrew "The Jackal" Wylie.

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