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Amis to adapt Jane Austen for Hollywood romantic comedy

By Catherine Milner, Arts Correspondent

(Filed: 05/05/2002)

MARTIN AMIS is to launch himself on Hollywood by adapting a Jane Austen novel into a romantic comedy film for teenagers.

Amis, the author of dark satires such as London Fields and Money, is writing the screenplay for Northanger Abbey, the only Austen novel not to have been made into a feature film.

Last week Amis confirmed his new role, and said he was already halfway through writing the screenplay, which he expected to finish by July. "I am greatly enjoying it," he said. "Jane Austen is a genius, and Northanger Abbey is hugely underrated."



Amis is replacing Andrew Davies, the British scriptwriter who adapted Pride and Prejudice and Emma for the screen, who left the project three years ago after falling out with Harvey Weinstein, the president of Miramax Pictures, the film production company.

Mr Davies objected to the "teen flick" treatment of the story being promoted by Mr Weinstein, who was said to have originally favoured turning the book into a "high-school drama". Mr Davies wrote two drafts of the script before he left the project because he did not agree with the interpretation.

"I think Harvey wanted to drag it in the direction of a teen flick," said Mr Davies last week. "The book does have the youngest of all Jane Austen's heroines, and with the Gothic horror element of the book I guess there was a temptation to think of teen movies like *Scream* and meld it all together. But I felt uncomfortable about moving too far away from the original book."

The novel, which is a spoof on Gothic horror tales such as *Frankenstein*, features the youngest of all Austen's heroines, Catherine Morland. The 15-year-old daughter of

External Links

▶ The Martin Amis Web

▶ Northanger Abbey - The Electronic Literature Foundation

▶ The Republic of Pemberly [Austen appreciation site]

▶ Miramax

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a clergyman, Catherine is taken to Bath for the season.

While there, she meets Henry Tilney - the son of an eccentric Army general - who invites her to stay at his medieval mansion, Northanger Abbey.

Somewhat unhinged by reading too many books such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otrano* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Catherine imagines that Henry's father, Gen Tilney, has murdered his wife.

When the general discovers that she is not the rich heiress he thought she was, she is thrown out of the house and he forbids his son from having anything to do with her. Disobeying his father he follows Catherine to her home, and proposes to her, and is accepted.

According to Alison Owen, the film's producer, the project will be "a romantic comedy with the emphasis on the romantic", set in Bath and the surrounding countryside. She said that Amis was "incredibly informed about Jane Austen" and had some "great ideas" about how to re-structure the script.

Amis, 53, has won plaudits for his numerous books. However, his film-writing career has gone largely unnoticed.

In 1980 he wrote the screenplay for *Saturn 3*, a science-fiction film which received poor reviews and featured the unlikely pairing of Farrah Fawcett and Harvey Keitel. He also helped with the script for Tim Burton's film *Mars Attacks*, but later said that although he had "highly enjoyed it, it did not contain a word I wrote".

His new commission is the fruit of a million-dollar deal he struck three years ago with Tina Brown, another of his contemporaries at Oxford University, who took Amis on as a writer for the now-defunct *Talk* magazine, owned by Miramax.

In addition to writing articles for the magazine, Amis agreed to publish three of his books with *Talk Miramax*, and to write screenplays for the company. Five of his books - *The Information*, *London Fields*, *Money: a Suicide Note*, *Night Train* and *Rachel Papers: the Next Volume* - have been optioned by Miramax, with *Time's Arrow* currently in production.

A film version of *The Rachel Papers*, his first novel, was adapted in 1989, but he did not write the script. Not only does it look as if Amis will not be adapting his own books for the big screen, he does not want to know those who do.

"Writers are advised not to study these things too closely," he said.

▶ [23 May 2001: Extinct sea creatures keep Amis off shortlist](#)

▶ [11 May 2000: Missing girls in Martin Amis's life](#)

▶ [7 September 1996: How Jane Austen's Emma became a lesbian](#)

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var _hbEC=0,_hbE=new Array;function _hbEvent(a,b){b=_hbE[_hbEC++]=new Object();b._N=a;b._C=0;return b;}
var hbx=_hbEvent("pv");hbz.vpc="HBX0100u";hbz.gn="a.telegraph.co.uk";hbz.acct="DM550808OANC78EN3";
hbz.pndef="title";hbz.ctdef="full";hbz.elf=".!telegraph.";
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