

Martin Amis: 'I wish my sister had converted to Islam'

Martin Amis suggests to Dubai English-language newspaper that his sister, an alcoholic who died in 2000, "might still be alive" if she had converted to Islam

Alison Flood

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Martin Amis Photograph: Suki Dhanda

Martin Amis might have expressed negative views about Islam in the past, but the author told an Abu Dhabi newspaper this week that he believed that if his sister, Sally, an alcoholic who died in 2000, had converted to the religion she might still be alive.

Interviewed by Abu Dhabi English-language newspaper The National, Amis said he wished his sister had converted to Islam. "To this day I have this wish – she was always religious and she converted to Catholicism. I wish she had converted to Islam. She might still be alive because of the continence of Islam, the austerity, the demands it makes on you. I just sort of helplessly think it every now and then. She would only be 56 now and she'd still be here," said Amis, who is in Dubai to take part in the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature.

Sally Amis, whom the author has described as "pathologically promiscuous", died aged 46 after periods of depression and alcoholism. Her brother believes that the structure of Islam might have saved her life. "She was such an uncontrollable girl that there was even talk of her joining the army when she was 17 or 18 because we all sensed that she needed a really tight structure, an esprit de corps of shared belief," he told The National. "Islam in its way gives you that, a collectivity that she could have been a part of, which incidentally forbade alcohol and premarital sex. She might have had a chance. She would have had to embrace it earlier than she embraced Catholicism."

Amis courted controversy in 2006 with his comment to a newspaper that "there's a definite urge – don't you have it? – to say the Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order". The National reported that the author "seemed somewhat penitent" over the remarks



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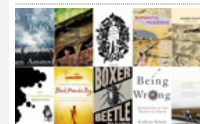
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during an event at the literary festival, where he was interviewed by author and broadcaster Paul Blezzard.

"It was a rash remark made at a terrible time. Ten years on from September 2001, we have still not got a usable word for what we mean. People think you are talking about Islam but you are not. 'Islamism' is hopeless because it has got too many letters in common with Islam. I suggest we call it al-Qaida," said Amis. "What I said was that there was an urge. No one can tell me that there was not. By the next day, I had changed my mind because that is collective punishment, but people were saying that. More than 95% of Muslims are horrified by this ridiculous, nihilistic wing and should not be connected verbally or otherwise with these extremists."

After Blezzard joked that there had been a sweepstake over how long it would take Amis to get through immigration when he arrived in Dubai, the author said he had "met with nothing but extreme courtesy in this country".

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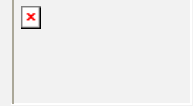
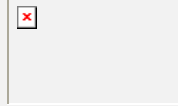
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