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The Martin Amis Experience



By Bob Chaundy of the BBC's News Profiles Unit

It is a rare breed of English author who combines a showbiz-style stardom with a high reputation for serious literature. Martin Amis is among that breed.

With his good looks, rakish past, beautiful wife, and business acumen, he is the rock star of English novelists.

With the help of his agent Andrew "The Jackal" Wylie, he has benefited from hugely lucrative deals with publishers and film companies.

The serialisation alone of Experience, his book of memoirs, in the Guardian, is reported to have earned him around £100,000.

No wonder he could afford to spend £20,000 having his teeth fixed.

This financial success prompted some seemingly uncomplimentary remarks about him by his increasingly curmudgeonly father Kingsley Amis in recently-released letters to Philip Larkin,



Martin Amis: a rare breed of writer

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Video

Amis in 1998, on his father Kingsley **28k**

Video

Amis on critics of his female characters **28k**

though friends have attributed these to Kingsley's ironic sense of humour.

But Kingsley showed little enthusiasm for his son's books. "He couldn't get on with them, too elaborate, too worked at".

Martin was Kingsley's second son, born in 1949 and brought up initially in Wales. In his new book his relationship with his father is portrayed as turbulent, but with an underlying tenderness.

He inherited his father's love of the good life believing "there was a lot of bachelorhood to be swum through".

Martin Amis, though feasting on a literary diet of mainly comics at boarding school in Brighton, eventually went up to Oxford and achieved the highest class degree in English.



His precocious talent found success early on. His first novel, *The Rachel Papers*, was published when he was only 24.

His first book was published at the age of 24.

With subsequent novels such as *Dead Babies*, *London Fields*, *Money*, *The Information* and *Time's Arrow*, he has established a reputation of stylistic brilliance, mesmerising verbal agility and imagination, sly characterisation and grotesque satire.

"He is the master at being comfortable and confident and you know where he's coming from", says Suzi Feay, Literary Editor of the *Independent on Sunday*.

Yet a common criticism is that, for all his literary skills, his work lacks emotional depth, and reeks of narcissism. Particular scorn is levelled at his

female characters;
one-dimensional and
too male-fantasy.

His new book comes
at the end of five
years of emotional
turbulence.

In 1995 he fell out
with his long-time
friend and tennis
adversary, the author
Julian Barnes whose wife, Pat Kavanagh, had
been his long-time literary agent.



Father and son

After leaving his wife and sons, he met a 20
year-old woman, Delilah Seale, who turned
out to be his daughter by a former girlfriend
Lamorna Heath who had committed suicide.

He discovered that a long-lost cousin, Lucy
Partington, had been murdered by Fred West.

And he lost his father.

All this either
accompanied or
triggered a mid-life
crisis which he has
defined as an
"hysterical over-
reaction to the
suddenly clear fact
that you're going to
die".



Martin with second wife,
Isabel Fonseca

His marriage to
another American, writer Isabel Fonseca, by
whom he now has a baby daughter, suggests
the crisis is over.

But it is hardly surprising that the man who
once said that "fiction is the only way to
redeem the formlessness of life", should have
turned to autobiography.

Nevertheless the new departure does not
impress Suzi Feay enough to make her want
to read the new book. Though she regards
Money as a masterpiece, so beautifully of its
time, she has found other Amis books
passionless.

"The events of Martin Amis's recent past, whilst very sad, are exactly the thing that would set the writerly imagination clicking rather than the heart and the emotions".



Amis believes there is a resentment at work amongst his critics, that he is regarded as

"I'm like the son of the lord of the manor"

"like the son of the lord of the manor who has inherited the estate by right of birth where others have had to struggle. In as much as heredity counts, there might be something in it".

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