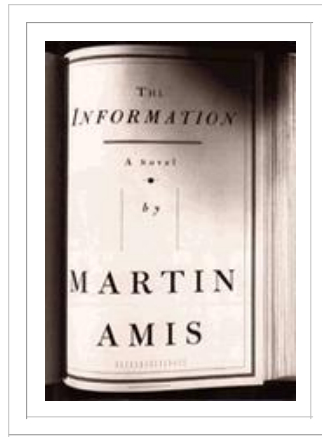




Urban Desires Book Reviews



Harmony Books

review by **Judith Van Buren**



Martin Amis must have made very, very good grades at Oxford. And to listen to the gossip surrounding the publication of this book, he now has loads of money -- and good teeth. Free dental work was part of the advance. Amis is exceptionally smart as one can find out by reading this book -- even if it leads nowhere else but to that conclusion. And as per the title -- *The Information* -- this is a wonderful book for people who would like to become erudite in the English manner in a few days' time. Memorize passages, they are terribly funny, and you are set.

The story is about a man, Richard, who is jealous of his best friend. The best friend, Gwyn, wrote a book Richard says would have been remarkable had it been written with Gwyn's foot. Amis' description of this awful novel is hilarious:

In *Amelior* itself twelve youngish human beings forgathered Each of them boasted a serious but non-disfiguring affliction: Piotr had hemophilia, Conchita endometriosis, Sachine colitis, Eagle Woman diabetes. Of this twelve, naturally, six were men and six were women; but the sexual characteristics were deliberately hazed. The women were broad-shouldered and thin-hipped. The men tended to be comfortably plump. In the place called Amelior, where they had come to dwell, there was no beauty, no humor and no incident; there was no hate and there was no love.

Such prose has brought Richard's friend many goodies -- a beautiful aristocratic wife -- Lady Demeter -- health (he quit smoking), tons of money, and a finalist placing in the Profundity Requit, an American prize which comes with more money than the Nobel.

Early on, we learn that Richard, in an epiphanic moment, decides that he is "going to fuck Gwyn up." Thereby hangs the tale. We learn in flashback how Richard intends to do this. We are introduced to the hired hands who ultimately mistake Richard for the prey, Gwyn. Everything blows up in



Richard's face.

The quest for vengeance can feel good in a bracing acerbic way, especially when the English jerks are pitted against the English twits. The tone of the novel, however, is of one note and that is where it fails. It is too epigrammatic and anecdotal to sustain for the time it takes to read. It works as a parody, but for only so long.

I don't believe poignancy was Amis' goal in writing this novel, but the most interesting thing we learn about the main character is in this conversation with his wife. She says,

"It's not that you spend. You don't earn."

"I can't give up novels."

"Why not?"

Because ... because then he would be left with experience, with untranslated and unmediated experience. Because then he would be left with life.

This is Richard's core conflict, what makes him tick. Unfortunately, this dialogue is on page sixty of the book and we have several hundred more pages of unadulterated brilliant wit to go. It is a lot of fun and very tasty, but I wish there had been more life to it.



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