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## MEN WHO HATE WOMEN

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**Byline:** By JAY PARINI; Jay Parini teaches at Middlebury College in Vermont. His latest novel is "The Patch Boys"; a book of poems, "Town Life," will be published in January.

**Lead:** LEAD: **SUCCESS** By Martin Amis. 224 pp. New York: Harmony Books/Crown Publishers. \$15.95.

**Text:**

**SUCCESS** By Martin Amis. 224 pp. New York: Harmony Books/Crown Publishers. \$15.95.

**SUCCESS** has dogged Martin Amis from the outset. The son of Kingsley Amis (how he must hate to hear reviewers say this), he wrote "The Rachel Papers" - an energetic but immature novel about a young man's obsessive quest for sexual fulfillment - soon after graduating from Oxford in the early 1970's. He soon became a fixture on the London literary scene, a satirist of the smart set in the tradition of Evelyn Waugh - with whom he shares a profound misanthropy, the sine qua non of all successful satirists. His third novel, "**Success**" (originally published in Britain in 1978 and now issued here for the first time), might easily have been called "Vile Bodies" had Waugh not got there before him.

Misanthropy becomes misogyny in "**Success**," another novel on the theme of sexual obsession. The novel's two narrators, Gregory Riding and Terry Service, hate women almost as much as they hate themselves, though it remains unclear where Mr. Amis stands on all this. Recalling a particular tryst, for instance, Gregory says: "That first morning she sprang out of bed - having had her noisome way with me -and knelt naked before the bookcase, rummaging in her bag for some item that her genes loved. I watched, dressing her with my eyes. Her bottom is quite out of control, I thought; and I can't take the smell she has down there. It's not her fault, I know. It's her nerves' fault." A little of this goes a long way, and there's a lot of it here.

The novel is a double memoir, told in alternating and remarkably distinct voices. Gregory is an esthete, endlessly supercilious and charming, prone to view the world through rose-tinted pince-nez. "I work in an art gallery," he tells us. "Yes, the job is rather a grand one, as you'd expect. High salary, undemanding hours, opportunities for travel, lots of future." More to the point of "**Success**," Gregory is sexually overactive. A bisexual, he would happily be a trisexual if a third sex suddenly materialized. People offer him their favors at every turn, much to the chagrin of

unsuccessful Terry, his foster brother and reluctant flatmate.

Unlike Gregory, Terry is down on himself. "I look like educated lower-class middle-management, the sort of person you walk past in the street every day and never glance at or notice or recognize again," he informs us at the beginning. Even worse, from his viewpoint, he has not seduced a woman for six months, and it's driving him crazy. Obsessed by this lack of amatory **success**, his speech is clogged with the most famous four-letter word in the language. Its abrasive monosyllable accounts for, perhaps, 15 percent of his vocabulary. One feels sorry for Terry, whose mother is dead and whose father butchered his little sister, thus forcing him upon the charity of the upper-class Ridings (Mr. Riding stumbles through the novel like a lost character from P. G. Wodehouse). But Terry's self-denigrations and complaints soon wear thin, and one quickly looks forward to Gregory's preening and strutting.


As Terry's prospects at work begin to improve through dealings with a seedy union organizer, and his relationship with Ursula, Gregory's psychotic sister, takes on a sinister aspect, one senses a shift in the wind. Eerily, Terry's rise seems to precipitate Gregory's fall, and Mr. Amis holds our attention quite skillfully as we wait, like a gallows crowd, for the floor to drop beneath Gregory's feet. Yet "**Success**" is, finally, a distasteful book, full of loathing that the author seems not fully to have understood or drawn through the crucible of art. UGLY AND POOR AND MAD

Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems that approximately one in three of this city's indigenous population is quite mad - obviously, openly, candidly, brazenly mad. Their lives are entirely given over to a bitter commentary on the world, the light, the time of day it is. In every busload there will be six or seven people who just sit there growling about nothing with tears in their eyes. Every café contains, at all times, a working minimum of two gesticulating maniacs who have to be shown or chucked out into the street, where they will hover and shout and threaten until someone redoubles their efforts to make them go away again. On every street you walk along you find the same proportion of people who do nothing but fizz all the hours there are, fizz with hatred or disappointment or grief, or fizz simply because they are ugly and poor and mad. They ought to get together. They ought to organize (they would form a very powerful lobby). They ought to organize, and make everyone else . . . tonto too.

From "**Success**."



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