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Martin Amis: How the sexual revolution helped destroy my sister Sally



Ed Black
20.11.09

Martin Amis told today how the sexual revolution of the Sixties and Seventies played a part in destroying his sister by putting terrifying pressure on women.

The author is exploring the devastating fallout of the period in his new novel, *The Pregnant Widow*.

He has written his late sister, Sally, into the storyline, nine years after she died at the age of 46.

She had long fought alcoholism and periods of depression, but Amis today attributed many of her problems to the appalling tensions created by the sexual revolution.

He said its impact was still being felt because "it's astonishingly difficult to find a decent deal between men and women and we haven't found it yet".

The Pregnant Widow is set in 1970, with a group of twentysomethings gathering to party in an Italian castle.

The new idea in 1970 was sex before marriage, said Amis - but he claimed such alleged freedom imposed more strain on women than men: women could emerge as heroines of the sexual revolution, but they could also fall victim to it, as his sister had done.

Of Sally, he said: "She was pathologically promiscuous. She really had the mental age of someone who was 12 or 13 and I think she was terrified. I think what she was doing was seeking protection from men, but it went the other way, she was often beaten up, abused and she simply used herself up."

Sally died in 2000 from an infection after five days in intensive care. She was said never to have recovered from the death of their father, Kingsley, in 1995. Her marriage in the previous decade had lasted only months and a baby daughter, conceived after a one-night stand, had been given up for adoption.

"She died at the age of 46, not of anything sudden; she was one of the most spectacular victims of the revolution," Amis said. "It would have needed the Taliban to protect her."

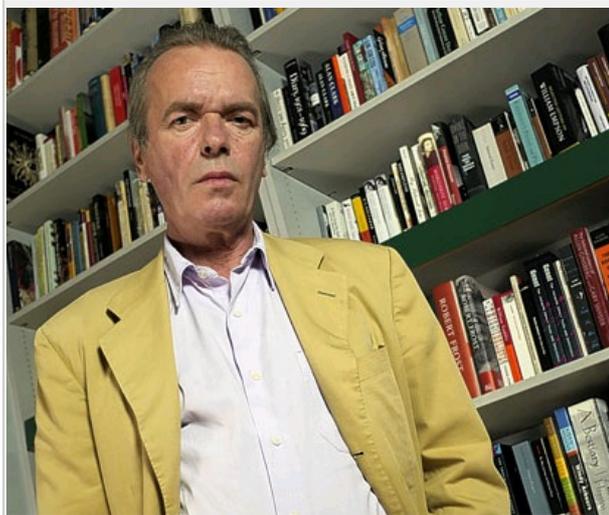
The Pregnant Widow is scheduled for publication early next year. It is "rather like a country house mystery, except it's not whether the butler did it but who's going to have sex with whom", said the author. "It's a tragicomedy with a cautionary tale running alongside the main story. This is quite emotional."

Amis, 60, is already expecting trouble with the work, having acquired a reputation in some quarters for inheriting his father's legendary misogyny, despite persistent claims to the contrary.

He said he had already been told by someone who had read the novel that he would "get in trouble with the feminists", but insisted: "It's a very feminist book. They haven't got a case."

Going further, he said he was a feminist himself. "Women can't rise far enough to suit me. I'm a gynocrat - I'd like rule by women."

Womanhood of another type entirely will be a feature of his next book but one, *State*



Amis's new book, *The Pregnant Widow*, incorporates the story of his sister Sally



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Of England, which will include a character based on glamour model [Jordan](#), whom Amis has described as "two bags of silicon".

He said he had no regrets about his rudeness: "Snobbery has to start somewhere and if you can't be snobbish about Katie Price then it's the end of the world. My character [in *State Of England*] is a glamour model and a best-selling poet. And she's not really the same sort of girl as Jordan. But I mean details of her life, the sort of thing she goes to every night - the Elle Style awards - that's the sort of thing I'm interested in."

Speaking at the Richmond Book Now Festival, the author condemned Britain's obsession with celebrity.

"It is important because if you lavish a really abnormal amount of attention on the trivial, it sort of dries up the attention you've got for the serious and it brings the whole level down," he said. It's a lot to do with Britain's loss of a seat at the high table and this has given us an interest in the superficial."

Amis has never won Britain's most prestigious literary prize, the Booker, or indeed any since the [Somerset Maugham Award](#) for his first novel, *The Rachel Papers*, more than 35 years ago. But he said: "I'm not a prizewinning kind of writer. I don't bring people together. Everyone likes my novel, *Money*, but the chairman of the [Booker Prize](#) that year nominated it as the worst novel. So that's how against the grain I tend to be."

The title of his latest book comes from Russian thinker Alexander Herzen, who said a revolution created "not an heir but a pregnant widow". Amis elaborated: "In other words, revolution isn't a flip. It's a churning process that goes on for a long time before the baby is born. It's not the instant replacement of one order by another."

The writer returned to [London](#) in 2006 after living in [Uruguay](#) for more than two years. He said he enjoyed the contrast of the capital with his grey upbringing in [Swansea](#): "What I love about London is how multiracial it is. I don't think I could live in provincial Britain now."

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What a silly, old (?) fool.

- Sue R, London, 20/11/2009 15:05

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Coming in the same week as the Headmistress admitting women can't have it all, this is very refreshing. I hope it upsets a lot of die-hard feminists: their revolution was incredibly important but they went too far and still cannot see that the invention of the pill, far from giving women more choices, removed the polite excuse for not wanting to be used and degraded by men who were after just one thing. The sexual revolution was simply a load of really unpleasant and manipulative people decreeing that you weren't 'cool' if you didn't let them use you. The knock-on effect is to have made women even more self-conscious about their bodies, pointlessly competitive with each other and still valuing themselves (and others) on sexual attractiveness alone, whilst wishing that men could just accept them 'for being themselves'. Enter Katie Price, stage left.

- Roz, France, 20/11/2009 09:59

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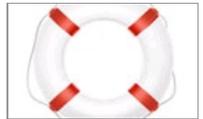
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