guardian.co.uk

Search

Books



News Sport Comment Culture Business Money Life & style Travel Environment TV Video Community Blogs Jobs

Culture Books Martin Amis

'This remarkably tedious novel': Michiko Kakutani skewers Martin Amis

New York Times reviewer of The Pregnant Widow has a wince with words for English novelist

🥳 **b** 🖪 (29) Tweet this (52)

Ed Pilkington in New York guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 11 May 2010 16.07 BST **Article history**



Martin Amis, who is accused of self-indulgence in The Pregnant Widow by New York Times critic Michiko Kakutani. Photograph: Christopher Thomond for the Guardian

It is the curse of the English novelist. First, you have to sit back and take it on the chin as literary critics from the British papers hurl rotten tomatoes at you then, just as the dust has settled and you are starting to pick yourself off the floor, the American edition of your novel comes out and it is the turn of Michiko Kakutani of the New York Times to give her

The name alone is enough to induce terror in a writer. From the very first sentence of her notoriously direct criticism you know how things are going to go, which is why Martin Amis must have winced when he read the opening of Kakutani's review of his new book The Pregnant Widow

"This remarkably tedious new novel," was how she began. And it only got worse from there.

Kakutani accused Amis of deploying cheap tricks and exchanging his mastery of language for "a mannered, self-indulgent style". She reserved her worst opprobrium for the characters he has depicted, whom she described as "a bunch of spoiled, self-absorbed twits, who natter on endlessly about their desires and resentments and body parts".

The main hero of the work, Keith Nearing, was a "pretentious jerk, blathering on about the novels he's read". As a whole the characters were "shoddily drawn" and "off-the-rack generic" to the extent that one cared little about them.

Amis might draw comfort from the long and distinguished list of Kakutani's literary victims. Since she joined the New York Times in 1979, where she is now chief literary critic, the largely reclusive journalist has skewered the likes of Salman Rushdie. Jonathan Franzen and Nick



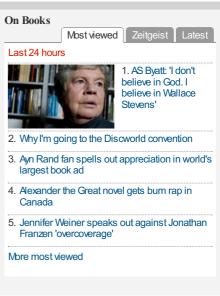
World news **United States**

UK news

Culture

More news





Guardian Books on Twitter

Latest news, views and links from the Guardian's books team



richardlea: What does a literary prize



Hornby. Nicholson Baker memorably likened her review of his book to "having my liver taken out without anaesthesia", and Norman Mailer dubbed her a "one-woman kamikaze" who disdained white male writers and couldn't be sacked by the Times because she was an "Asiatic feminist".

On the other hand, Amis will already be sensitised to her excoriating feedback. This is by no means the first time she has fried him slowly over a red-hot grill. In 2008 she applied herself to his collection of essays on the post 11 September world, The Second Plane, calling it "weak, risible and often objectionable", adding the advice that he should stick to writing fiction "as he's thoroughly discredited himself with these essays as any sort of political or social commentator".

To be fair, she rather liked his 2007 work, House of Meetings, which she praised as powerful and deeply affecting. If only the same could be said of his 2003 effort, Yellow Dog, which Kakutani said read like a sendup of a Martin Amis novel. "It bears as much resemblance to Amis's best fiction as a bad karaoke singer does to Frank Sinatra, as a kitchen magnet of Munch's Scream does to the real painting."

In short, the best that can be said about Martin Amis's morning, as he sat at the breakfast table reading the New York Times review, is that he's been here before. It's doubtful though that repetition will lessen the pain of Kakutani's multiple stab wounds.













Ads by Google

Have You Written A Book?

We'll Find APublisher For You in 3 Easy Steps. Start Now! www.FindYourPublisher.com

"I own 1,382 books"

How many do you own? Catalog your books and find out. www.Collectorz.com/Free-Trial

Creative Writing Software

Plan and write your first novel with MyNovel. Free demo. www.MMovel.biz

Related information

Books

Martin Amis · Publishing **Fiction**

Media

New York Times

World news

United States **UK news**

Culture



Video (12min 58sec). Martin Amis at the Guardian book club 1 Feb 2010:

Martin Amis joins John Mullan to talk about his novel from 1991, Time's Arrow

More video

30 May 2010 Money, Lost; Damages | Television review

30 Jan 2010 Time's Arrow by Martin **Amis**

25 Jan 2010 Whitbread winner condemns Martin Amis call for euthanasia

booths 28 Jul 2009 Martin Amis is wrong about Iran | Arshin Adib-

Moghaddam



Gallery (14 pictures): Martin Amis at 60 25 Aug 2009: Martin Amis, the one-time

enfant terrible of the British literary establishment, turns 60 today. Take a look at a life in pictures of the author of Money, London Fields, and Time's Arrow

More galleries



really, really need? Yep - an app. The Booker's got one.

http://tinyurl.com/38c96wx#books about 10 hours, 21 minutes ago



samjordison: Haunting, charming, strange, familiar scenes from Victorian childhood: http://bit.ly/9Eedl8 #books about 15 hours. 20 minutes ago



Sarah_Crown: RT @parisreview "At night you dream six dreams. But ARE they six dreams?" - Philip Roth's Paris Review interview http://tpr.ly/dkPrPB #books about 1 day, 9 hours ago

- Find more tweets from our books team
- Follow our books team on a Twitter list

guardianbookshop

This week's bestsellers

CORTING THE S AMERICAN

by Nigel Hamilton £25.00

1. American Caesars



- 2. It's All About the Bike by Robert Penn £16.99
- 3. Red Men by John Williams £16.99
- 4. Finkler Question by Howard Jacobson £18.99
- 5. Havour Thesaurus by Niki Segnit £18.99

Search the Guardian bookshop

Search

Latest reviews



Encounter: Essays by Milan Kundera Milan Kundera's exhumed essays cast a spell with their insights into creativity, writes Geoff Dyer

On Deception by Harry Houdini

Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music by Rob Young

Human Chain by Seamus Heaney

John L Williams: Mss Shirley Bassey

More books reviews

Bestsellers from the Guardian shop



Mondaine Swiss Railway Watch - date

The design classic for men or women, made from recycled materials. From: £99.00

Visit the Guardian reader offers shop Green & ethical shopping at Guardian ecostore

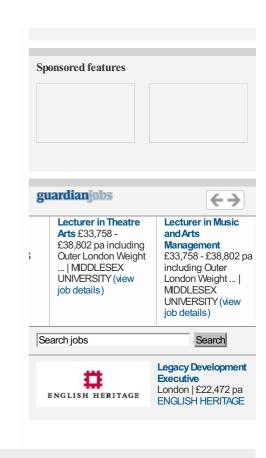
Latest news on guardian.co.uk

Last updated less than one minute ago

News

Terror warning over radicalised prisoners





Hot topics Comic-Con Book news Book reviews

License/buy our content | Privacy policy | Terms & conditions | Advertising guide | Accessibility | A-Z index | Inside guardian.co.uk blog | About guardian.co.uk | Join our dating site today guardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2010

