

Like Father, Like Son?  
The Fiction of Kingsley and Martin Amis



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(Editor's note: Stuart Kerr, a native of England, began his university career at Royal Holloway University of London in 1995. He graduated with an English honours degree in 1998, and is currently cultivating a passion for post-war English fiction, particularly writing from and about the Capital. In his own words, he explains the genesis of his dissertation "Like Father Like Son?":

*My interest in British fiction, both realist and postmodern, and love for the city have evolved into an admiration for the works of both Kingsley and Martin Amis. This dissertation, the first piece I have had published beyond the boundaries of my educational institutions, marks this interest in these writers. To write the first comprehensive and learned introduction to an edition of London Fields remains my greatest (academic) ambition. Failing this, I will continue to study and to write upon the works of both Amis senior and junior, and other English novelists. This dissertation was originally written for Professor Kiernan Ryan, my Head of Department at Holloway, who helped encourage my thoughts and enthusiasm for the topic.*

*Martin Amis has recently announced his intention of emigrating, we learn from the newspapers, which regularly make a fuss about his life - the size of his advances, his passion for snooker, his failure to win the Booker Prize, the disastrous condition of his teeth, his divorce, his fractured friendships with his agent and her husband, the novelist Julian Barnes. And behind all this is the odd fact, now seen as almost too familiar to be worth mentioning, that he is the son of a celebrated novelist, from whom he has inherited an English brand of elegant misanthropy and an interest in the satirical possibilities of virtuoso syntax and popular semantic variations - admittedly, Americanized to a degree that would probably not have greatly pleased Kingsley Amis.<sup>1</sup>*

In a recent review of Martin Amis' *Night Train*, his latest fiction, Frank Kermode acknowledges the literary relationship between the author and his father Kingsley, as a great many critics do. This acknowledgement, however brief, rests on a common, though rarely considered assumption that readers will recognise the significance of such a relationship when examining the works of father or son. The review appeared in *The*

*Atlantic Monthly*, several months after the release of *Night Train*, and like many other reviews of the novel (and despite Kermode's protestations to the contrary), it is preoccupied with Amis' private life. Whether or not Kermode had made a conscious effort to do so, his first mention of Amis senior comes after an account of the negative aspects of Martin's life and career. Martin has freely discussed the powerful and overbearing influence of such a prolific, esteemed, and opinionated literary father figure as Kingsley; but despite Kermode's apparent conclusions, it is yet to be determined whether such an influence has been of detriment or benefit to the works of either men.

In his comprehensive study on the works of Martin Amis, James Diedrick makes at least some attempt to address those assumptions made by Kermode and others. The opening pages of the introduction to *Understanding Martin Amis* hold within them a brief yet thorough discussion of the stylistic, ideological, and aesthetic differences, and similarities, between the work of its primary subject and that of Kingsley. Diedrick reluctantly but inevitably employs Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence" in discussing the psychological dimensions of the filial relationship, and in doing so rests the bulk of his discussion on a psychology which he calls "unrepentantly phallogocentric, in which a writer unconsciously perceives his most significant precursors as potentially castrating father figures, and thus employs strategies intended to disarm them. These characteristically involve taking up the literary forms of the precursors and revising, recasting, displacing them."<sup>2</sup> With this last sentence, Diedrick has rendered Bloom's aged Oedipal psychology relevant to this discussion, which will explore the extents to which Martin does or does not "take up the literary forms" of his father.

Eric Jacobs, in his biography of Kingsley Amis, makes only a brief mention of the literary relationship between Amis senior and Amis junior, listing only superficial differences and falling prey to several misconceptions as he does so. Jacob's discussion of the topic rests primarily on Kingsley's often well publicized opinions of his son's work:

*"Between ourselves I only read about half," Amis said of Money; "too boring. Little sod said on TV you had to read it twice. Well then HE'S FAILED hasn't he?"<sup>3</sup>*

Comments such as this must inevitably lead to a discussion of the two very different literary forms employed by Kingsley and his son. Kingsley's contempt for experimentation in the novel and for all modernist ideals led him to a return to traditional forms, and also, though rather more reluctantly, to the embracing arms of no less than three literary movements:

*First, there was the provincial movement, a group headed by William Cooper. Second, there was The Movement itself, a loose collection, mainly of poets said to be in the process of knocking some hard commonsense into English letters. And finally he was an Angry Young Man, left wing and obsessed with the vacuity of our national life. <sup>4</sup>*

While Brian Appleyard goes on to reiterate that none of these "movements" actually existed, other than to serve "a journalistic purpose and to help book sales," Rubin

Rabinovitz also encourages one to consider that many of "The Angry Young Men" were neither angry, nor young, nor even men. 5

From the release of his first novel in 1973, Martin Amis has seemed intent on disposing with those traditional literary tropes which have served his father so well. Working beyond the boundaries of realist conventions, the younger Amis has developed a brand of postmodernism all his own. Despite the obvious and radical differences in form, however, similarities between the work of father and son have appeared greater over time. Malcolm Bradbury, for example, draws a parallel between Martin's first novels and the early work of his father, in terms of attitude and tone. Referring to *The Rachel Papers*, Bradbury writes:

*the story of the adolescent Charles Highway, exploiting sex on his way to Oxford, was a savagely bitter portrait of contemporary society, and also technically disturbing; if the Angry Young Man had come back, it was as a disturbed and perhaps malevolent child, a troubled and extravagant fantasist.* 6

Both Martin and Kingsley have been referred to as voices of their respective generations, their work often addressing contemporary social concerns, often through satire, while also introducing aesthetic and technical innovations to the novel form. While Martin's early novels have been pre-occupied with the once omnipresent threat of nuclear apocalypse, for example, Kingsley Amis' early work received great acclaim for its iconoclastic enunciation of the post-war crises in the country's class systems. As William Van O'Connor remarks, "the attention given to *Lucky Jim* suggests that Amis is looked to as a voice, perhaps the chief voice, of his generation." 7 Furthermore, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, a phrase taken from the meandering thoughts of *Lucky Jim* Dixon, is the title of an essay by Bradbury in which he compares Kingsley to Evelyn Waugh, the voice of an earlier generation. 8 Both writers, Bradbury observes, "had captured in subject and style, the manners, the moral upsets, cultural dislocations and social instabilities generated by a recent war." 9

In a brief summation of the more circumstantial similarities between the two writers, Diedrick writes of how "both attended Oxford, and how both won the prestigious Somerset Maugham prize for their first novels." 10 Rather more interestingly, however, Diedrick also goes on to emphasise that "even the significant aesthetic and political differences between the two should not obscure two larger ideological affinities: to differing degrees, bourgeois and patriarchal assumptions inform all their writing." 11 Although a great many discussions on the relationship between the life and works of these writers have been based largely upon the inherent assumptions made by Kermode and others, several critics, quite clearly, have taken some pains to explore this "all too familiar" relationship a little further, throwing open to discussion such issues as form, political ideology, social influence, and filial conflict on their way.

*Martin was inclined to think that the novel had simply moved on into postmodern forms, leaving his father behind stuck in-old fashioned realism. Any suggestions of that kind were apt to rouse snorts of derision from his father.* 12

After a second failed marriage, Kingsley Amis spent his last years living in a peculiar ménage à trois with his first wife Hilly and her third husband, Lord Kilmarnock. Martin became a frequent visitor during these years, his relationship with his father always amicable and mutually respectful. As Jacobs writes, however, any discussions on the novelistic form were diligently avoided for the sake of peace. Although many of Kingsley Amis' apparently once passionate views and opinions have developed, mutated, and even inverted over time, his beliefs concerning literature have remained firm. In the 1950's, Amis' return to the traditional traits of the novel, as established by the form's founding fathers, marked a break from the modernist trend which had dominated the literary scene for much of the first half of the century.

The decision to return to earlier models, a decision by no means exclusive to Amis, served to remove the novel from the sole interest of intellectuals and academics, and return it to popular culture and the masses. This apparent reversion came partly as a result of an increasingly common distrust and dislike of pretence and elitism, and partly through a concern for the novel form itself. As Norman Macleod remarks, "Amis's quarrel with modernism is fundamentally over the technical unwarrantedness of the artistic crisis it represents and promotes, and how it hastens towards a foreshortened end the natural extension of the tradition." 13

The development of this "anti-experimental and anti-romantic, anti-ideological, and eminently realistic" trend has been well documented in a work by Rubin Rabinovitz. 14 Citing John Braine, Alan Silitoe, and John Wain, along with Kingsley Amis, as examples of mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century writers adopting a common neo-realist style, Rabinovitz draws attention to their basic principles in relation to those of James, Woolf, and Joyce:

*Their styles are plain, their time sequences are chronological, and they make no use of myth, symbolism, or stream-of-conscious inner narratives. Their prose is realistic, documentary, and even journalistic ... Elaborate descriptions, sensitivity, and plotless novels are avoided, ... and to display too much individuality in style would be egregious and in bad taste.* 15

In his study, Rabinovitz discusses a number of arguments against the experimental novelists, and in doing so provides several reasons why a new wave of writers should choose to abandon the modernist temperament and return to aged conventions. The modernists sought to produce something entirely new, as they experimented with narrative techniques, symbolism, ambiguity, and style. While some may consider these experiments and, arguably, *developments* essential to the history, and perhaps the ultimate survival of the novel form, writers such as Kingsley Amis and his close acquaintance Philip Larkin, would have passionately disagreed.

Amis saw in the development of, and over indulgence in one's own definitive style, for example, a paucity of ideas, and ultimately an "idiosyncratic noise-level in the writing, with plenty of rumble and wow from imagery, syntax, and diction." 16 Although the works of Kingsley Amis are distinctly his own, he makes no effort to "display too much individuality." Character development, acute and biting social observations, and,

throughout his early novels at least, the "way he controls the development of an action ... to create that combination of surprise and logicity," all mark Amis' work as distinctive, as his own, yet we are never overwhelmed by any heavily stylistic idiosyncrasies. 17 Amis' "style" is notoriously difficult to define, yet instantly recognisable, marking perhaps the greatest testament to his work in view of the philosophy behind it. In his study of Kingsley Amis, Norman Macleod attempts to distinguish the recognisable, though never distracting, characteristics of his subject's style. Macleod eventually formulates a far from succinct appraisal and definition of Amis' style, which rests largely upon linguistic observations, but in doing so he also places a useful emphasis on the fact "that each new work redefines and extends his range, and that each of his novels needs and finds its own stylistic specifications." In the same essay, Macleod refers to the remarks other critics have made on the same subject:

*David Hughes gives the style its own name - "Amispeak," a token of its unmistakability - and defines it in terms of paradox as "spiky prose, aimed at both accuracy and funniness." And Martin Cropper, very acutely -- and perhaps pinpointing the essence of what he calls an "educated blokeish dialect"-- sees that Amis's funniest sentences have been born of a marriage of two voices, erudite and demotic."18*

Cropper's definition is perhaps the most noteworthy, loaded as it is with references to Amis' most celebrated and intransigent trademarks. Although Kingsley has suppressed stylistic experimentation and idiosyncrasy, Martin has endeavoured to do just the opposite. The "Amis" referred to by Cropper, however, removed from the context of Macleod's essay, could refer quite readily to either Martin or Kingsley. Patriarchal, or "blokeish," assumptions exist throughout the works of both father and son, as does learned discourse and comment accompany an often demotic voice.

Although Cropper has inadvertently highlighted ideological similarities between the work of Martin and his father, the dominant philosophies behind their very different styles of fiction remain manifest. As Kingsley avoided the development and extravagance of style, Martin has persistently challenged the very notions and assumptions surrounding style and form. In a discussion between the two, broadcast in 1974, Martin observed:

*I have always thought it remarkable that someone who is as linguistically aware as my father should never have sought to experiment in prose at all, or to have seen any virtue whatever in slightly experimental prose.19*

In response to this Kingsley replied "Experimental prose is death." The many stylistic, thematic, aesthetic, and philosophical differences between the postmodern vein in which Martin Amis writes, and the brand of realism adopted by his late father, are overt and various enough as to suggest that not a single significant similarity exists between the works of these prolific authors. Indeed, everything that the one stands for, as the above quote suggests, grates against and contradicts the other. If one assumes, as a great many do, that the postmodern is in many ways an extension, a conscious development of modernism, this immediately stands the work of Martin in opposition to that of his father. 20 While Kingsley and his contemporaries sought to overthrow the dominance of

modernism in literature, Martin has reversed this process once more, picking up on the tropes and ideals of the early modernists, well aware of the limitations and delusions of realist writing, and developed his own postmodern aesthetic which will no doubt eventually spawn a new breed of reactionary writer seeking a post-postmodern form. In reacting against what are essentially literary polar opposites, father and son have perhaps destroyed any possibility of marked similarity emerging between their works.

Discarding the logic, the order, and the temperament of the realist text, Martin Amis has sought to explore style, to experiment with narrative forms, and to "challenge the 'logocentric,' ... the authority of the word, the possibility of final meanings or of being in the presence of pure 'sense.'" <sup>21</sup> Throughout Martin's work, we are presented with fictions which explore an abundance of differing themes yet rest on none. Postmodern writings "are calculated to engage the reader in a play of plural interpretations, so that the reader's sense of a stable, reliable (fictional) world is disturbed."<sup>22</sup>

Whereas Kingsley's novels attempt to steer their readers down an often meandering path through their narratives, without challenge or ambiguity, the work of his son attempts to engage the reader in this so-called "play of plural interpretations." Martin's 1989 novel *London Fields*, for example, covers contemporary fears of nuclear apocalypse; it pokes fun at the struggles faced by those living at both extremes of our social spectrum; we are given a rich and violent insight into the world of pro-am darts; while Richard Todd sees in it "the question of whether an honest portrayal of the inadequate aspects of male heterosexual consciousness can ever escape fantasies of domination and appropriation."<sup>23</sup> There is no single, simple way of reading *London Fields*.

In writing novels such as *London Fields*, Martin has also avoided many of the realist tropes abundant in the work of his father. There is no strong emphasis on plot, as, essentially, it is only of minor significance. Characters are grotesque caricatures, rarely realistic, and descriptions are vague and ambiguous. Consider for example Keith's "heavy Cavalier" in *London Fields*; is it "heavy" only in physical mass, "heavy" in its polluting emissions, or "heavy" in age or even colour? In contrast, as Diedrick writes, the classic realism of Kingsley

*strives for verisimilitude, the artfully constructed illusion of reality, achieved in part by a balanced, unified combination of indirect discourse and represented speech. The author seeks to fade into the background as the reader is immersed in narrative detail.* <sup>24</sup>

Throughout the bulk of his work Kingsley Amis has consistently turned his attention to the smallest details of everyday life in order to present his fictions as 'real', to render them as "realistic" as possible. While Joan Rockwell writes of "the novel being remarkably selective for emotional, rather than emotionally neutral events," Amis, in *Take A Girl Like You* describes in great detail, through a series of seemingly incidental observations, the various door-knockers to be found in the lodging house. <sup>25</sup> Despite his protestations in *Memoirs*, that he was never "much good at houses at the best of times," this focalisation of certain details within Amis' work marks an attempt to bring the

fictional world of the novel closer to our own physical world, in which we are invariably subsumed in a multitude of detail, whether noted or not. 26

Plot and the chronological unfolding of events are realist conventions also common to all of Amis' novels. In *Take A Girl Like You* for example, Amis turns to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, written between 1747 and 1749, for a plot outline, again emphasizing his return to the foundations of the novelistic form. As Rabinovitz writes:

*Samuel Richardson influenced Amis in formulating the plot of Take A Girl Like You. His heroine, Jenny Bunn is a modern Clarissa who spends her time alternately defending her virginity and providing an opportunity for the next assault. The plot of That Uncertain Feeling is reminiscent of Richardson's Pamela and of Fielding's parodies of Richardson.*27

While much of Kingsley's literary talent is spent on carefully weaving narrative events into a cogent and complete plot, whether entirely his own or inspired by the great novelists of previous centuries, we see in the work of Martin, as in that of a great many postmodern writers, a rejection of this chronological unfolding of narrative elements.

In *Time's Arrow*, for example, we see a complete inversion of this traditional narrative path, as the chief protagonist wakes from his death and re-lives his life in reverse. The novel illustrates one of John Mepham's four definitions of postmodernism, as it "problematizes reality ... and unsettles the reader's sense of reality."28 Although Amis overtly disturbs the generally accepted narrative structure in *Time's Arrow*, by effectively turning it on its head, he deals with the same convention a little more playfully in *London Fields*. Whereas a Kingsley Amis, or any realist narrative will plough through the events of a narrative in a straight, continuous track, the events which make up the 'plot' of *London Fields* are experienced by, and witnessed through one character before appearing again from the perspective of another, the narrative taking a zigzagging course through its fabula. As Randall Stevenson writes, "readers can hardly remain passive consumers, or be seduced by covert ideologies of a text they have literally had to piece together, page by page, for themselves," as postmodern writers "introduce a comparable questioning of conventional patterns and expectations, often heightened by the novelist's explicit commentary on their own activity."29

This "explicit commentary on their own activity" is also present in the work of Martin Amis. Whereas realist writers gladly, and blindly ignore the fictionality, the literariness, of their work, postmodern authors will ensure that their texts "own up to their fictionalizing function." Referring once again to Kingsley's one, and unsuccessful, attempt at reading *Money*, Martin is confident that he can point to the one page in the novel which, as Jacobs writes, would have his father "sending the book spinning across the room in exasperation" 30: "That's where the character named Martin Amis comes in. Breaking the rules, bugging about with the reader, drawing attention to [my]self." 31

In *The Rachel Papers*, *Success*, *Dead Babies*, *Money*, and *London Fields*, Amis draws attention to the status of his work as fiction through involution. Invariably the writer

appears in some capacity, sometimes literally, in all of these works. In *Money* we see the chief protagonist, John Self, meet a writer called Martin Amis in a pub. At first just another character, this fictional Martin Amis evolves into the author of the text itself. Self eventually acknowledges his own susceptibility to the whim of this controlling force, this "Martin Amis," who actually exists beyond the 'reality' of the fiction:

*I clamped my hands over my ears. Martin talked on, shadowy, waxy, flicker-faced. I don't know if this strange new voice of mine carried anywhere when I said, "I'm the joke. I'm it! It was you. It was you."*

*I didn't see my first swing coming - but he did. ... I hurled myself round the room like a big ape in a small cage. But I could never connect. Oh Christ, he just isn't here, he isn't there. 32*

John Self's initial confusion becomes manifest through this fruitless physical confrontation, over which the God-like Amis has complete control. Self's inability to 'connect' with a single swing comes with the realization that all his actions are foreseen, engineered, and doctored by a force beyond his control and, up until this point, quite beyond his comprehension. This existential revelation ultimately brings about in Self a surprisingly liberating feeling, as Amis himself remarked in interview:

*"The Large Agencies" [Money p.359] are the ones that control the novel in which he's been enmeshed. Self has escaped the novel. He's escaped control of the author figure, me. That's why that last section is in italics because it is, in a way, outside the novel. He really was meant to kill himself, but he screwed it up, as he screwed everything up. So he's in a poorer but more controllable kind of existence. 33*

Victoria N. Alexander goes some way to explain why Amis should be so compelled to reveal himself as the controlling force within his fictions. As Amis puts it down to the natural evolution of the novel form, emphasizing that it is never with "any hobbyist attitude that one explores these things, it just feels inevitable that the illusion is broken, that one reminds the readers that they are reading," Alexander seems compelled to question her subject's egotism. In a remark which would surely have amused Kingsley (Merritt Moseley fatuously remarking that "Amis is a typical English novelist (of his generation, anyway) in his lack of pomposity about his calling, his ready demystification of the writer's art" 34), she writes that throughout Martin's fiction, "the reader's willing suspension of disbelief is discouraged, his awe of the artist writer encouraged," before suggesting that the "temptation to reveal himself [Martin] to his creation (to wink at the readers, to show-off really) is too great to resist." 35 This 'wink at the reader' appears in a number of Amis' works, including the disturbing and grotesque *Dead Babies*. In a novel in which grotesque visions become boorishly abundant, author allies with reader to laugh at one of his most unfortunate comic creations:

*Well, we're sorry about it, Keith, of course, but we're afraid that you simply had to be that way. Nothing personal, please understand - merely in order to serve the designs of this particular fiction. In fact, things get much, much worse for you later on. 36*



In *London Fields*, Martin pokes fun at this postmodern tendency toward involution, in a way that could confirm or dispel Alexander's concern with the size of his ego. Throughout the book, its narrator Samson Young refers to his "fictional" literary counterpart Mark Asprey, the bane of his professional life, only as MA. MA (Mark Asprey/Martin Amis?) is described as "the handsomest, the cruelest, and the best in bed (by far) ...".<sup>37</sup> Whether these passages arise out of authorial pride and egotism, or from deeper philosophical concerns, it is clear that Amis does touch on the traditionally postmodern questioning of reality. As Jean-François Lyotard comments:

*Modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the "lack of reality," together with the invention of other realities.* <sup>38</sup>

Our own sense of reality, or lack of it, is disturbed and placed under question when the postmodern author has created his literary reality only to reveal it as fiction. Amis has often referred to his authorial role as God-like, in which he can 'invent other realities', only to do with them as he pleases: "In a novel you are the weather, you are the crowd scene, and you do have these illusions of omnipotence." <sup>39</sup>

Amis' work also subscribes to many other postmodern traits, Diederick drawing attention to his work as pastiche, and his 'central concern with self-consciousness, mediation and inauthenticity; Richard Todd to his 'self-conscious yet faultless ear for ... what Amy J. Elias has coined the term "junk noise"; his tendency toward the macabre, the hopeless, and the disillusioned, illustrating A. Walton Litz philosophy that "relates the term postmodernism to the semanteme it contains in a particularly pessimistic way, suggesting that "like post-mortem or post-coital," it implies the fun is over." <sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Amis acknowledges the structure of *London Fields* as a postmodern joke, "in that the narrator is taking something down that's actually happening, he's incapable of making anything up." <sup>41</sup> Paradoxically, however, this particular "postmodern" joke has been played before, in 1741, by one of his father's greatest literary influences, Henry Fielding. In *Shamela*, a parody of Richardson's epistolary epic *Pamela*, Fielding's narrator is also caught writing about events in progress:

*Mrs Jervis and I are just in bed, and the door unlocked; if my master should come -- Odsbobs! I hear him just coming in at the door. You see I write in the present tense, as Parson Williams says. Well, he is in bed between us, we both shamming a sleep; he steals his hand into my bosom, which I, as if in my sleep, press close to me with mine, and then pretend to awake.* <sup>42</sup>

Although Fielding and Amis are using this notion to very different ends, it does serve to obscure the boundaries between works considered classically realist, and those pertaining to be wholly postmodern.

Just as parallels can be drawn, however tenuously, between classical realism and the fiction of Martin Amis, hints of postmodernist tropes and ideas become apparent in several of Kingsley's novels. Literary self-consciousness is evident in Amis' work, for example. In *Take A Girl Like You*, the text itself is only too well aware of its status as

fiction, but makes desperate attempts to disguise its own fictionality. Early in the novel we see the heroine consciously gaze at herself as a fictional character trapped in a classic literary or cinematic cliché:

*She could tell that if he had been smoking a cigarette he would have taken it out of his mouth and thrown it away without taking his eyes off her. As was her habit in this situation, she stared right back at him as blankly as she could.*<sup>43</sup>

Long before the term "postmodern" was employed in relation to literature, "Harry Levin, Irving Howe, Fiedler, Frank Kermode, and Ihab Hassan first using the term in the 1960's," Kingsley Amis was at least toying with the notion of involution.<sup>44</sup> While formulating the principle ideas behind *I Like It Here*, Eric Jacobs writes:

*Lucky Jim ended with Dixon taking a leap into an uncertain future when the wealthy Scotsman, Gore-Urquhart, offers him a job as his secretary. In the new book, Gore-Urquhart was to send him on a mission to Portugal where he would encounter the real Kingsley Amis.* <sup>45</sup>

Here, we would have witnessed a clash of the real and the fictional, a recognizable disturbance or unsettling of the reader's sense of reality. As it was, *I Like It Here* featured a new character, Garnet Bowen, but remained heavily autobiographical. The "here" in the title does of course refer to England, as Garnet's, or perhaps Kingsley's reluctance to travel, and coarse xenophobia manifest themselves throughout the novel, supplementing an otherwise sketchy plot.

The book was inspired by, and based largely upon a trip to Portugal, taken by the Amis family as part of the Somerset Maugham prize awarded to Kingsley for *Lucky Jim*. Despite Amis' final decision not to include himself in the fiction, *I Like It Here* remained innovative, even experimental, as a new direction in the travel writing genre. As Eric Jacobs writes, *I Like It Here* avoided all that "Amis had previously objected to in travel-writing: their escapism and their style. ... *I Like It Here* would be a new kind of travel book, if such could be devised, which would avoid the double pitfalls of overdoing the enchantments of abroad and overblowing the prose." <sup>46</sup> Just as the dominant ideology behind all Amis' fiction rests upon realistic representation, *I Like It Here* strives to produce a realistic portrayal of travels abroad, Bowen concluding the novel with his down to earth, although all too pessimistic conclusions about foreign travel:

*I think what it is, there's such a host of things that can go wrong, so many more than there are here, that when you're not actually being eaten up by insects and your guts aren't playing hell with you and an official isn't telling you your papers aren't in order and nobody's putting you right in the picture about the local writers and you've got a decent bed and you aren't writhing about with sunburn and there aren't any smells to speak of ... well then you tell yourself you're having a bloody marvelous time. And then there's the weather...*<sup>47</sup>

Despite his professed return to traditional literary forms, there are, therefore, instances of experimentation in Amis' fiction. This is an issue taken up by Macleod who questions the very meaning of "experimentation," and whether it can be applied to the work of Kingsley, who, after all, 'has been experimenting in subtle and restrained ways' with many of his fictions, including *I Like It Here*.<sup>48</sup>

Although it is far from being recognizably postmodern, the "realist" work of Kingsley Amis does incorporate several trademarks of this later literary form. While he picks up on traditional conventions, Amis experiments and innovates to a degree, bringing a freshness to what would otherwise be a stuffy, tired regurgitation of dated forms. Malcolm Bradbury writes of the innovations in his work, innovations which "lay not in its form but its spirit, tone, and voice," while Lodge writes of how *Lucky Jim* 'introduced a distinctly new tone into English fiction.'<sup>49</sup> While we find traces of the postmodern in pre-postmodern realist texts, in a breach of the temporal flow of things, traditionally realist tropes are also unavoidable in much postmodernist fiction. In his latest novel, *Night Train*, for example, we see in the work of Martin Amis the slow development of the postmodern form as it turns back to an emphasis on plot and character:

*As someone writing for a so-called literary audience, I always rather despised plot, up to a point. Then when you have to do some, you realize it is rather demanding, it's hard.* <sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, Martin has stressed that however he presents his characters, as grotesque caricatures, or as types, readers will still empathize with those characters, promoting verisimilitude in even the most postmodern texts. In the taking up of previous literary forms, and the unique development of those forms, it may well be argued that what Kingsley Amis has done for classical realism, Martin has done for postmodernism, the two meeting over several stylistic points throughout their careers.

*As a member of the same household and as a reader of his books he [Kingsley] has influenced me. It's more a kind of humour really than anything else. I've always thought that if our birth dates were transposed then he would have written something like my novels, and I would have written something like his.* <sup>51</sup>

The above statement goes some way to acknowledge the influence father has had over son, and the potential for concordance between their works. At the same time, however, by commenting on their birth dates, Martin has also acknowledged the more dominant forces of the very different social and literary trends which were contemporary to each writer as their respective careers began. Just as different literary trends and movements have partially dictated the style and form of their novels, very different political and social ideologies have also influenced the content and tone of their work.

During his years at Oxford, for example, Kingsley would develop an interest, of fluctuating intensity, in politics, while cultivating his passions for alcohol and sex. Indeed, by the time he was eighteen, Amis was already recognizable as the character of *Lucky Jim* Dixon, a fictional creation who wouldn't come into published existence for another fourteen years. The frequently made association between Kingsley and Jim has

been a constant source of irritation to the author, but there must have once been enough similarities to warrant the connection.

Many of Kingsley's early opinions and lifetime experiences made some sort of appearance in his debut novel, although he would rather remain distanced and distinct from its hero, or rather non-hero, Jim Dixon. *Lucky Jim*, appearing on British bookshelves for the first time in 1954, is the novel most often turned to for a model of 1950's English fiction, emphasizing the extent to which Kingsley's voice is the voice of a generation. The novel, as Paul Fussell writes, made Kingsley "the object of intense social admiration."<sup>52</sup> Questioning the uncertainties faced by a young man striving for the nicer things in life against a torrent of adversity and apathy, *Lucky Jim* struck a universal chord with a new wave of novel readers. While established literary figures, Somerset Maugham included, were quite appalled by Amis' work, others appreciated the honest and anti-elitist qualities of *Lucky Jim*, whose chief protagonist relies on the virtues of commonsense over pretence, and serendipity over hard work.

Like Kingsley, Jim has arrived at his current seat of employment in an unnamed provincial university, from the ranks of the lower-middle classes. Unlike his creator, however, Jim has only a superficial, if not accidental, interest in the field of medieval history on which he is supposed to be lecturing. It is through his efforts to secure himself a permanent position at the university that Jim comes into contact with the bourgeois prejudices and pretences of the university establishment, personified by Professor Welch. Through a mix of frustration and discontent, a hatred toward the professor is born, only to intensify as the novel proceeds along its farcical, and often bitter narrative. The dislike and resentment Jim directs at his prospective employer brings with it a hate not just for Welch himself, but for everything the professor believes in or finds enjoyable. The apparent philistinism displayed by Jim throughout the book, so loathed by Maugham et al., is not a mark of his true character, or that of Amis', but rather representative of his dislike for Welch. Amis is far too well read to promote philistinism with any great sincerity. While it is true that he attempted to promote jazz music, the *James Bond* novels of Ian Fleming, and science fiction as a literary genre, Amis employed high-brow media to do so. Furthermore, any comic will admit to the fact that a subject cannot be ridiculed unless thoroughly researched first, and as Amis pokes fun at more literary and cultural icons than the man in the street could name, it would be impertinent to consider him as any form of philistine.<sup>53</sup> As Martin Amis has observed, Kingsley, like Dixon, would "be for something because he was against the people who were against it."<sup>54</sup>

Just as Dixon stands in opposition to all that Welch stands for, rather than Welch himself, Bradbury remarks that Jim is not necessarily: "against contemporary British society or culture, but against genteel high culture, aestheticism and bohemianism, the hangover of Bloomsbury." <sup>55</sup>

Amis' attempts to dispel the previous dominance and lingering marks of the Bloomsbury era are quite clearly present in the tone and attitude of *Lucky Jim*, which earned itself a generally appreciative reception from the new British reading public as a result. For David Lodge, despite his affection for modernist writing, *Lucky Jim* "established

precisely the linguistic register we needed to articulate our sense of social identity, a precarious balance of independence and self-doubt, irony and hope."<sup>56</sup> Merritt Moseley goes on to cite Walter Allen, among other's, who could relate to and admire Jim Dixon, not only for the way in which he has become "the hero of a generation in the everlasting battle between the generations," but also for the bracing freshness of his "irreverence, his powerlessness, his comic (though bloodless) rebellion against the forces of 'the establishment', which disgusted him and frustrated his desire to have nice things." <sup>57</sup>

From voicing the 50's generation, Kingsley's tone changed with the times, adapting to social developments, until his novels were shouting the issues of 60's contemporary England. Amis' 1968 novel *I Want It Now*, for example, discusses sexual liberation, racism, and feminism, while illustrating the anti-American, and anti-rich feelings rife in many corners of society at the time. Ronnie Appleyard, a rising television celebrity with a shallow moral outlook and even shallower aspirations, is the device through which Kingsley unleashes some of his most pointed satire. As the narrator informs us, Ronnie

*had no feelings for old people as such beyond a mild dislike, never wasted his time sweating about the H-bomb, and would not have cared a curse if the British army were to set about re-occupying the Indian sub-continent, provided they did so without calling on him for assistance.*<sup>58</sup>

Despite Appleyard's dubious morality and careless disregard for current world issues, he does have the capacity to highlight faults greater than his in those even he considers to be bastards, notably the mega-rich. In the year that The Beatles released *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and in a time when the "moral intonations of the 1950's gave way to the freer, franker, and often more frantic liberationist attitudes of the 1960's," it is love that eventually reforms Ronnie.<sup>59</sup>

While Ronnie's reformation stands, as dubious as it may appear, Kingsley is able to use Appleyard as a tool, a moral yardstick, through which he is able to highlight the gross failings of the novel's other characters. Although Malcolm Bradbury considers the final attack on the established English aristocracy as being 'slight and trite', Appleyard does uncloak Lady Baldock and friends as superficial, self-absorbed, and above all dated. In part, however, Ronnie's entanglements with the Baldocks only serve to bring other topical issues to the fore. It is during the company's stay at 'Fort Charles', for example, in which Amis promotes racist ideology as being the sole interest of irrational bumbling idiots:

*"And," shouted Mansfield finally, using this particle for the twentieth time as an indication that he had more to say, however long it might take him to decide what it was, "and ... we've solved the Negro problem. By realizing there is no problem, except keeping 'em down. They're inferior, they always will be inferior, and we in the South have the honest-to-God common sense to realize it." ...*

*"Balls. What you're saying is balls. Rubbish, nonsense, tosh, junk. And also extremely offensive, barbaric, inhumane, foolish, ignorant, out-moded, and in the circumstances unforgivably rude."* 60

Gender issues are also raised in the novel, through the exploration of these heavily flawed fictional aristocrats, in the character of the androgynous Simona/Simon/Mona Quick. Throughout the novel we see Simon come to terms with her sexuality, to feel comfortable and empowered by her own femininity, and ultimately liberated from the over-bearing and frightfully out-moded matriarchal figure of Lady Baldock.

Ultimately, however, as Bradbury remarks, what is important about *I Want It Now*

is that Amis clearly is seeking, generally, to widen the confines of the social and moral novel, and attempt a new range, one that will capture the flavour of contemporary culture in its fashionable, frantic, elusive turnover.61

If their birth dates were transposed, then perhaps Martin would have written something like *Lucky Jim* or *I Want It Now*. Just as these novels voiced the concerns and happenings of the generations into which they were born, Martin's fictions have also encapsulated the essence of definable periods of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, most notably the 1980's. The influence of recent historical developments has shaped the literary concerns of Martin Amis, just as they have done his father. Diedrick, however, introduces Martin's social and political concerns into his discussion of Amis and postmodernism, as he reminds us that 'aesthetic postmodernism can never be separated from, is always implicated in, political postmodernity'.62 By turning to the work of Sven Birkets, Diedrick observes that many postmodern writers are pre-occupied with three historical conditions in particular:

*the existence of the 'actual and psychological' fact of the nuclear age and the possibility of human annihilation that has dominated power relations and political agendas since WWII; the cumulative effects of the Western world's shift from 'industrial mechanization to information processing'; and the saturation of Western societies by electronic media, 'particularly television.'* 63

Throughout the work of Martin Amis, we can find instances of all three of these major postmodern pre-occupations. Martin is, or has been, notoriously pre-occupied with the threat of nuclear apocalypse. The issue was covered most strikingly, some say too excessively, in *London Fields*, and also in *Einstein's Monsters*.

Born in 1949, the younger Amis considers himself a child of the nuclear age, taking upon himself a share of the burden of this great responsibility. He has commented that his birth date coming after the dawn of the nuclear age marks a major difference between his political ideologies and those of his father. *London Fields* is loaded with references to the nuclear age, and the omnipresent fears of apocalypse, from "Enola Gay," the name given to the B-52 bomber which delivered the atom bomb to Hiroshima, to the nameless disease, afflicting Samson Young, which resembles radiation poisoning. From its very

beginning, the novel professes to be primarily concerned with the "death of love," but we soon learn, as Diedrick points out, "that nuclear terror is the main suspect." <sup>64</sup> In the novel, the narrator gives us Nicola's philosophy:

*She had this idea about the death of love ... Which began with the planet and its coup de vieux. Imagine the terrestrial timespan as an outstretched arm: a single swipe of an emery-board, across the nail of the third finger, erases human history. We haven't been around for very long. And we've turned the earth's hair white. Jesus, have you seen her lately? Hard to love when you're bracing yourself for impact. <sup>65</sup>*

Towards the novel's end Amis also includes a disturbing, and, perhaps once quite feasible, prophetic vision of the first nuclear strikes in a world wide conflict. The vision comes from the apparently omniscient character of Richard, "un-married, childless - he loved nobody," the cold and distanced harbinger of bad tidings: "at the moment of full eclipse, ... as the Chancellor made his speech in Bonn, two very big and very dirty nuclear weapons would be detonated." <sup>66</sup> Through the character of Guy Clinch, Martin also preaches to his readers about other contemporary environmental concerns. In pondering his child's need for fresh air, for example, Guy shoulders a degree of responsibility for polluting his atmosphere:

*Hard to explain that one away, hard to justify it - to the young (Guy meant), to those who would come after. How would you begin? Well, we suspected that sacrifices might have to be made, later, for all the wonderful times we had with our spray cans and junk-food packaging. We knew there'd be a price. Admittedly, to you, the destruction of the o-zone layer looks a bit steep. But don't forget how good it was for us: our tangy armpits, our piping hamburgers.<sup>67</sup>*

As *London Fields* illustrates Birket's first pre-occupation, it can also be used to illustrate his third. In his work on the Booker prize and contemporary British fiction, Richard Todd "underlines the point that Keith Talent is entirely a construction of the rhetorical tricks by which tabloid media reporting covers up for its own imaginative sterility." <sup>68</sup> To illustrate his point, Todd turns to a chapter in the novel, in which we see Samson ask Keith about a local football match. Keith's ensuing description of the game is riddled with the unmistakable language of a sports commentator:

*Reveling in space, the speed of Sylvester Drayon was always going to pose problems for the home side's number two. With scant minutes remaining before the half time whistle, the black winger cut in on the left back and delivered a searching cross ... <sup>69</sup>*

This comparatively short quote from Keith's highly stylized speech is surely indicative of the way in which modern culture has indeed become saturated with the influence of mass media.

Amis' earlier novel *Success* can be used to illustrate Birket's second postmodern concern. As Western civilization moves from the industrial age to that of the microchip, information processing, and the extremes of capitalist ideology, Martin has explored the

issues associated with this massive cultural shift. In his 1978 novel, *Success*, we see a clash of established aristocratic wealth and attitudes, against the considerable force of the new rich, riding the capitalist wave, personified by Gregory Riding and Terence Service respectively.

The "success" to which the title of the novel refers, seems to be the dubious success of Terry, as he finds himself the unlikely recipient of a run of good luck. Throughout the book, Terry often refers to his job, a city job in which he first finds himself bemused and unsure:

*I don't really know what I do here. Sometimes I want to say, 'What do I do here - just in case people ask?' I don't know what I do here, but then no one really does. 70*

As the narrative progresses, however, this job materializes into a highly lucrative profession. The exact type of profession remains a mystery, Amis only hinting at the entrepreneurial explorations of what were later to be known as "Yuppies":

*I sell things - so much is obvious. I think I buy things too. It's all done by telephone; we talk about "items." I am required to say things and to listen to things. Some of these things often strike me as possibly evasive or misleading or not quite 100 per cent true. But I shall say whatever I have to say to sell whatever it is I sell. 71*

While Terry's seemingly complicated telephone dealings ultimately empower him with substantial wealth, Gregory's family money disappears, and his apparently lucrative and promising job at an art gallery also comes to an end, revealing itself to have been no more than a poorly paid, prospectless position at a quiet, "hopeful" gallery. To complete the reversal of fortune, Gregory is finally revealed to be an impotent, emotionally disturbed neurotic, happy to "help mother," and to walk in the woods "drenched, dripping with dreams and death." 72

*Lucky* Terry ultimately finds himself victor over the bourgeois attitudes of the Ridings, who had always made him feel at the least subservient, at the worst worthless. While Mr. Riding's eventual death represents the crumbling death of the aristocracy,

Greg's father has gone broke, ... broke scares him. Broke broke his heart. His heart attacked him again. And they think its going to win this time,"

Terry's 'success' is representative of that achieved by the newly empowered lower echelons of society, working to destabilize class and cultural assumptions. 73 After a lifetime of perceiving himself as something owned, 'Mr and Mrs Riding signed what was presumably a receipt' when he was handed over to their custody from the authorities, it is capitalist ideology that finally brings about his self-identity and liberation. 74 These same ideologies, however, eventually consume his own humanity, turning him into an incarnation of the 'capitalist monster', subsumed in his own wealth and greed:

*"Fuck you."*



*"Fuck me? Fuck me? You'd better watch what you say, tramp." I knelt, and added in a whisper, "I could do what I liked to you, you dumb hippie. Who would protect you? No one would notice or mind." ... I kicked him clumsily on the side of the head...75*

Just as Amis satirizes the tired aristocracy and their views of the poor, as they tend to 'squint through the undergrowth of others' needs and desires', he also questions the ethics and stability of the new class of super rich.<sup>76</sup> Terry's success, Amis' *Success*, works to question the notions of high and low culture and class, in a time when boundaries between them were becoming highly obscured, thanks, in part, to new opportunities presented by the information processing revolution and the Thatcherite era.

While contemporary social issues can be found in the works of both authors, the difference lies in the fact that Kingsley refuses to be an overt social commentator, while Martin does not. A concern for his characters and the unfolding of plot will ultimately outweigh any great contemporary social worry in the work of Amis senior. Despite the critical attention given to *Lucky Jim* and others, one must suspect Kingsley's political sincerity. As a young man at Oxford, Amis senior became an apparent promoter of communism, but, as Eric Jacobs implies, this political stance may have had its alteria motives:

*The orthodoxy of the left included permissiveness about sex, and left-wing girls were apt to be earnest in their duties, including their duty to sexual freedom. ... It was through the Labour Club that Amis contrived to do what he had been wanting to do for several years-lose his virginity. 77*

From communism and *Lucky Jim* Dixon, Kingsley has become an established and well known supporter of the Conservative Party. There are several reasons why this political turn-about may have occurred. Martin, for example, suspects that after having to support a family on an assistant lecturer's wage in Wales before finding fame, notoriety, and incredible wealth, would make any man, his father included want to hang on to as much of that new found wealth as possible. Reading *Memoirs*, however, one suspects that the shift may have had something more to do with Kingsley's sexually orientated infatuation with Margaret Thatcher:

*She can trap me for split seconds into thinking I am looking at a science-fiction illustration of some time ago showing the beautiful girl who has become President of the Solar Federation in the year 2220. The fact that it is not a sensual or sexy beauty does not make it a less sexy beauty, and that sexuality is still, I think, an underrated factor in her appeal. 78*

As William Van O'Connor observes, Amis has remarked that 'the intellectual, in comparison with the steelworker or the banker has no political interests to defend except the very general one of not getting himself bossed around by a totalitarian government'.<sup>79</sup>

Kingsley's attention does shift from exploring the interests of the lower classes to those of the upper classes, but this is only a reflection on changes in his life brought about by considerable wealth, not a marked change in political philosophy. Several aspects of the unattractive Professor Welch, for example, are evident in the make-up of Richard Vaisey, the hero of Amis' 1992 novel, *The Russian Girl*. Vaisey is a lecturer of Russian at an unnamed London university, deeply entrenched in his archaic teaching philosophies, and out of touch with the values professed by the department's new generation of teaching staff. Unlike Welch, but also in complete contrast to Jim Dixon, Vaisey, married to the wealthy and beautiful Cordelia, lives in a salubrious London suburb and is the friend of a hugely wealthy Czech entrepreneur, who seems intent on passing himself off as an English aristocrat. The exploration of these upper-class inventions are not representative of a conscious shift in sympathy from the financially insecure and socially oppressed to those of wealth and influence, but rather indicative of Kingsley's own changing experiences; *The Russian Girl* is, after all a tale essentially of love and literary integrity. Just as the heroes in his novels tend to be of a similar age to him at the time of their creation, the social situations which arise in his fictions adapt and develop in line with Amis' own evolution.

While any political revelations appearing in Kingsley's work are purely incidental, or at the least secondary to the importance placed upon character development, we see in the work of Martin a deep, and genuine concern for topical issues. In an interview with David Aaronovitch, Martin has expressed his deep felt anxieties about the once very real threat of nuclear apocalypse, and the "certain amount of hatred and resentment" he feels that Mrs. Thatcher and her extremist ideologies have "enlivened in the writers of the country." <sup>80</sup> In the same interview, Aaronovitch has suggested that Martin Amis has indeed been a chronicler of the Thatcher years, but questions the writers direction now that this particular era has come to an end. In response, Amis replied:

*In a sense we lived our childhoods under a desk, as in a nuclear drill, hoping that this desk lid was going to save you from the end of the world. Now I know this completely formed me, this great shadow that was hanging over the world, an omnipresent death that might suddenly engulf us all in an afternoon.* <sup>81</sup>

Now this shadow has passed we may well see a brighter, more hopeful fiction from Amis, but as his political views change, in line with human progression as opposed to his own life experiences, there is never a question of his sincerity.

*He has a quality he shares with Bob Dylan and very few others: what could come over as hateful in writers of lesser talent does not in Martin Amis's work, because he is taking such great relish in all of it with such an apparent lack of self-doubt. He is also very funny. Perhaps one attribute that is present in the work of both Kingsley and Martin Amis is the capacity to make the reader laugh out loud.* <sup>82</sup>

While the works of Kingsley and Martin Amis differ in style and substance, intention and motivation, attitude and tone, all in varying degrees, they do have in common an elegant British misanthropy which becomes manifest through humour and pointed irony.

Although David Lodge rightly emphasizes that Kingsley Amis' comedy lies in a combination of situation and style, surprise and conformity, the true nature of Amis' humour lies in an often disturbing blend of misanthropic bitterness and a satirical voice, which comes more from a moral quicksand than from any moral high ground.

As Lodge reminds us that Jim Dixon's resentment is often "interiorized, sometimes in fantasies of violence," we are in turn reminded of the moment in the novel which stands as Jim's first major breakthrough against the oppressive bourgeois forces which propel his actions throughout the narrative. <sup>83</sup> The move from violent fantasy to the liberating act of violence itself, comes as Jim flattens Bertrand Welch:

*The bloody old towser-faced boot-faced totem-pole on a crap reservation, Dixon thought. "You bloody towser-faced boot-faced totem-pole on a crap reservation," he said.* <sup>84</sup>

While we can appreciate the obvious humour in this passage, it is also worth noting Jim's other violent fantasies. Once he had acted on the above impulse, how likely is it that Jim would act on others:

*Margaret came in ... Dixon wanted to rush at her and tip her backwards in the chair, to make a deafening rude noise in her face, to push a bead up her nose.* <sup>85</sup>

As funny as Kingsley makes violent assault on a woman seem, it does raise questions over his morality. This point is made more overtly in *I Want It Now*, in which Ronnie Appleyard becomes frustrated over Simon's frigidity. During their stay on Malakos, Appleyard considers rape as the best possible remedy, this being "a simple and splendid idea on the drive back and all the way to the bedroom." <sup>86</sup> While rape is ultimately discounted, how seriously are we to take Ronnie? The passage is apparently straightforward satire, encouraging us to find Ronnie's lack of moral integrity amusing in its outrageous defiance of our own moral standards. When reconsidered, however, we may ask whether Kingsley's satire is Janus-like, in that it actually reveals truths about his own moral fibre, his own opinions, while asking its readers to question their own integrity. It may take only an instant to find Ronnie's idea of rape quite offensive, but how many of Kingsley's male readers would have considered the same notion, regardless of final outcome, given the same situation?

Martin Amis uses a similar brand of humour, which leaves the reader feeling amazed and startled at what he is reading, but also in quiet self-disgust at the thought of being able to appreciate, or at the least to understand what is being said. In *The Rachel Papers*, for example, Jenny and her husband spend weeks in fierce debate concerning her pregnancy, and whether or not she should keep the baby. Norman is passionately against the idea for reasons unknown; unknown, that is, until late in the novel when he finally reveals his argument to Charles:

"Have you, *have you ever fucked a tart who's had a kid?*"

"*No.*" He didn't hear and turned to me, mouth ajar. I shook my head. ...

"Well I fucking have. And it's no joke. Don't know you're there." 87

While we laugh at Norman's atrocious self-absorbed reasoning, it is hard not to feel slight unease at your empathy for him. And who couldn't laugh when we learn that Terry's father had killed his sister by hitting her over the head with a frying pan?

The great anxieties and fears of both authors go some way to explain their misanthropic tendencies. They share the great ability of finding all that is bitter and wrong with life, and making it funny. Kingsley's great insecurities, made manifest in real life through a terror of the dark and of being left alone, have made him all the more sensitive to the anxieties of others, giving him the ability to create such brilliant comedy at their expense. *Lucky Jim* Dixon, for example, is deeply unhappy with his lot, as well as being the victim of a run of appalling bad luck, yet we find him greatly amusing.

While Kingsley was deeply afraid of the dark, Martin has also confessed to waking, "defending himself in the middle of the night" from the painful criticism and personal attacks of fellow writers. 88 This particular anxiety, coupled with the more general fears brought about by the mid-life crisis, eventually produced *The Information*. In a novel which spawned so much adverse press before it had even arrived on the shelves, we see some of Amis' greatest comic writing before, as Diedrick suggests, its "dark ending, an emotionally charged 'pregnant arrest' that abandons the generic stability of satire and leaves the reader stranded in the realm of nightmare." 89

While Kingsley's fiction darkened over time, his anxieties biting deeper, the work of his son may break free from this precedent. Whereas there was certainly no cure for Kingsley's most deep-rooted anxieties, other than the consumption of a gross amount of alcohol, the primary forces behind Martin's greatest fears have now disappeared. In the *Booked* interview with Aaronovitch, the younger Amis not only reminds us that the real threat of nuclear apocalypse is over, "the human species having passed the test," but also goes on to reassure us that his mid-life crisis is over. 90 Perhaps now we can look forward to some lighter, more hopeful fiction from Martin Amis, as the heavy personal, if not literary, influence of his father has also passed on:

*My mid-life crisis was wrapped up by the death of my father. It invigorates you, funnily enough. Even though you never get over the death of your father because he's apart of yourself and that part has gone for ever, it makes you feel that you've come into your own seniority at last.* 91

#### Notes

1. Frank Kermode, "A Thriller With Something on its Mind," *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1998.
2. James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, p. 5.
3. Eric Jacobs, *Kingsley Amis, A Biography*, pp. 344-5. This quotation comes from one of the many letters Amis wrote to Robert Conquest, in which he revealed "his sharpest and most abrasive opinions."

4. Brian Appleyard, "The Entertainer in Old Age," from Dale Salwak (ed.), *Kingsley Amis in Life and Letters*, p. 3.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, p. 389.
7. William Van O'Connor, *The New University Wits*, p. 99.
8. Will Self draws a comparison between Martin Amis and Evelyn Waugh, observing that both write of "a world in which we've fallen from grace" ("An Interview With Martin Amis," *The Mississippi Review* 21:3; quoted here from <http://sushi.st.usm.edu/mrw/07oct/07amis.html>). .
9. Malcolm Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 206.
10. James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, p. 4.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Eric Jacobs, *Kingsley Amis, A Biography*, p. 345.
13. Norman Macleod, "The Language of Kingsley Amis," from Dale Salwak (ed.) *Kingsley Amis, in Life and Letters*, p. 116.
14. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, p. 315.
15. Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Reaction Against Experimentation in the English Novel, 1950-1960*, p. 9.
16. *Ibid.* p. 39, taken from an article written by Amis which appeared in *The Spectator*, November 1959.
17. David Lodge, an introduction to the 1992 Penguin edition of *Lucky Jim*, p. vi.
18. Norman Macleod, "The Language of Kingsley Amis," from Dale Salwak (ed.) *Kingsley Amis, in Life and Letters*, p.116. Here Macleod quotes from David Hughes, "Amis Hits the Mark," from *Mail On Sunday* 25<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1988; and Martin Cropper, "Babyish Jingles," *Weekend Telegraph* 24<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1988.
19. "The Two Amises," *Listener*, 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1974; here quoted from Norman Macleod, "The Language of Kingsley Amis," from Dale Salwak (ed.) *Kingsley Amis, in Life and Letters*, p. 117.
20. With reference to the work of Ihab Hassan, Connor writes: "the postmodernist transformation, or advance, can be seen as a selective intensification of certain tendencies within modernism itself," *Postmodern Culture*, p. 109.
21. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, p. 186.
22. John Mepham, "Narratives of Postmodernism," from Edmund J. Smyth (ed.) *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, pp. 144-5.
23. Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions, The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*, p. 155.
24. James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, p. 6.
25. Kingsley Amis, *Take A Girl Like You*: "Its door had *another* little brass knocker on it, this time representing a religious looking person on a donkey" (p. 15).
26. Kingsley Amis, *Memoirs*, p. 248.
27. Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Reaction Against Experimentation in the English Novel, 1950-1960*, pp. 43-4.
28. John Mepham, "Narratives of Postmodernism," from Edmund J. Smyth (ed.), *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, p. 138.

29. Randall Stevenson, "Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction in Britain," from Edmund J. Smyth (ed.) *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, p. 27.
30. Eric Jacobs, *Kingsley Amis, A Biography*, p. 345.
31. Mira Stout, 'Down London's Mean Streets', *The New York Times Magazine*, 4<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1990, here quoted from Victoria N. Alexander, "Between the Influences of Bellow and Nabokov," *The Antioch Review*, Autumn 1994 or at <http://www.dactyl.org/amis.html>
32. Martin Amis, *Money*, p. 353.
33. Martin Amis, from an interview with Victoria N. Alexander, 'Between the Influences of Bellow and Nabokov', *The Antioch Review*, Autumn 1994 or at <http://www.dactyl.org/amis.html>
34. Merritt Moseley, *Understanding Kingsley Amis*, p. 11.
35. Victoria N. Alexander, 'Between the Influences of Bellow and Nabokov', *The Antioch Review*, Autumn 1994 or at <http://www.dactyl.org/amis.html>
36. Martin Amis, *Dead Babies*, p.162.
37. Martin Amis, *London Fields*, p.160.
38. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi), p. 77.
39. Martin Amis, in interview with David Aaronovitch, for *Booked*, Channel 4 Television.
40. James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, p.13; Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions, The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*, p.193; A. Walton Litz "Modernist Making and Self Making," *TLS*, Oct. 1986 here quoted from Randall Stevenson; "Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction in Britain," from Edmund J. Smyth (ed.) *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, p. 35.
41. Martin Amis from an interview with Will Self, *The Mississippi Review* 21:3; quoted here from <http://sushi.st.usm.edu/mrw/07oct/07amis.html>
42. Henry Fielding, *Shamela*, p. 15.
43. Kingsley Amis, *Take A Girl Like You*, p. 13.
44. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (eds.), *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, 'POSTMODERNISM', p. 584.
45. Eric Jacobs, *Kingsley Amis, A Biography*, p. 211.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 206/211.
47. Kingsley Amis, *I Like It Here*, p. 184.
48. Norman Macleod, "The Language of Kingsley Amis." from Dale Salwak (ed.) *Kingsley Amis, in Life and Letters*, p. 117.
49. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, p.320; David Lodge, an introduction to the 1992 Penguin edition of *Lucky Jim*, p. vi .
50. Martin Amis, in interview, *Salon* 10.02.1998.
51. Martin Amis, in interview with Victoria N. Alexander, "Between the Influences of Bellow and Nabokov," *The Antioch Review*, Autumn 1994 or at <http://www.dactyl.org/amis.html>
52. Paul Fussell, "Kingsley As I Know Him," from Dale Salwak (ed.) *Kingsley Amis, in Life and Letters*, p. 18.
53. Consider for example Les Dawson's apparently horrific piano recitals. He was of course a gifted pianist.

54. Martin Amis, in interview with David Flusfeder, "The *Esquire* Interview," *Esquire* magazine, v. 7, no. 8, Oct. 1997, p. 28.
55. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, p. 321.
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