



Candid Amis relives a bad year

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The novelist Martin Amis is considering writing his first work of non-fiction - an account of his annus horribilis.

The autobiographical work, based on last year, would give his side of the story about twelve months in which he left his wife and children, saw his famous father die and endured a barrage of bad publicity about his desire for a pounds 500,000 advance on his most recent novel, *The Information*.

Speaking for the first time since he was "hung out to dry" in the gleeful row over his apparent greed and subsequent rift with his agent, Pat Kavanagh, and her husband, the novelist Julian Barnes, Amis also says he "still has no idea what all the fuss was about".

Kavanagh was Amis's agent when he made the "idle remark" to her that he would like the half-million pound advance for *The Information*. His publishers, Cape, were unable to come up with the money.

Amis then left Kavanagh for the New York agent Andrew Wiley - nicknamed "The Jackal" - who managed to squeeze the desired sum out of HarperCollins, in return for the novel and a book of short stories.

The story leaked out, gaining momentum from the remarks of novelist AS Byatt, who observed that writers should earn their advances and lamented the behaviour of the "strutting boys of the book world".

But Amis says he is still confused by the affair. "Was it because of my father? Was it just the money? But other writers get that kind of money; it's not so much for two books, written over several years - it's not a huge income if you spread it out," he says in a remarkably frank interview with *Waterstone's* magazine published this week.

The rift with Barnes, a close friend, was painful, he admits. "It wasn't in the contract. I felt like I'd lost control. I was hung out to dry. An idle remark about what we should ask for my novel became like a banner over my head and I was marching alone."

The scandal over his decision to leave his wife and two children for the writer Isabel Fonseca also mystified Amis. "It seems very English to me. Everyone said I'd abandoned my children and was living in New York with an heiress, and I must say I sometimes wished I was. People said my affair with Isabel was a cliché - but excuse me, that's not how lives get lived, not my life anyway."

Amis talks about the death of his novelist father Kingsley and admits he felt energised, as though the "great obstacle of the father" had gone and he was fulfilling his destiny to be in the forefront. "It feels very different without him - although I haven't worked out what the difference is, exactly," he says.

"There's a way in which it's liberating; I don't run things by him in my mind, don't ask myself what Dad would think of that, or hear his voice inside me saying impatiently, 'Crappy idea'.

"Dad was my ghostly sub- editor. Although he didn't read my books, of course, though I read all of his. I dedicated London Fields to him and he read about 30 pages. He didn't get it ... But yeah, I minded when it was clear he just couldn't finish my novels - it was a generational kind of taste, I think."