

Comment is free

Martin Amis: Ageing provocateur

As a award-winning writer in my 70s, I find Martin Amis's attack on 'worthless' old people as vile as any racism



Joan Brady
guardian.co.uk, Monday 25 January 2010 23.30 GMT
Article history

As a writer who's just turned 70, I have to admit that Martin Amis has riled me with his remarks in the [Sunday Times](#) about euthanasia and what he sees as the worthlessness of old people. It's not just that he is suggesting that at my age I can or should no longer carry out my profession. He also seems to be casting doubt on my right to be alive at all.

Ageism seems to me almost indistinguishable from racism, a point that couldn't be made clearer than he makes himself: old people are "like an invasion of terrible immigrants, stinking out the restaurants and cafes and shops". That's what racists say about anybody with a different skin colour or an alien headdress: "They stink." True, there is such a thing as a smell of death. I know it all too well – I nursed my husband through a long and terrible illness – and very ill people of any age tend to stink of it, young ones as well as old ones. But people that are sick, no matter what their age, aren't eating out in restaurants and cafes or buying tufted carpets at Habitat.

Ageists also tend to say the old are stupid. Here's Amis again: "Talent dies before the body." But what about the poet John Keats or the cellist Jacqueline du Pré? Their bodies gave out way before their talents. In my own field there are and have been many prose writers writing well past their 70s and into their 80s, some of whom have had a falling away of their talent, but many of whom, like one of Amis's heroes, [Philip Roth](#), now 76, come roaring back. Lots of people go through bad periods at all kinds of ages. Lots of elderly writers are very productive and at the peak of form: PD James (89) and Ruth Rendell (79) come to mind at once.

Which brings me to the question: Should people be allowed to work when they're older? Of course they should. It's idiotic to pension off people just because of age. True, some people do need pensioning off. Some of them need it at 40, some at 50. Some should never have been employed at all. And some should definitely be kept on at 70 or 80, especially now with the old skills in decline: writing readable sentences, manipulating basic mathematics, everyday diplomacy in interpersonal relationships.

It's health that matters, not age. What people are capable of at any age depends partly on that and partly on luck. Some aren't ever good at anything. Some lose their capacity early. Some don't. But everybody who lives gets old.

I remember Shirley MacLaine on the box talking to an interviewer about it. "You think it's not going to happen to you," she said, shaking her finger at the grinning younger man in the chair opposite her. "You just wait. It is going to happen." He didn't believe her. But by now, he's probably as old as Amis. I'm not saying it's pleasant to get old, to sense the edge coming closer, to know the body is weaker, the energy levels lower. But that's true of many athletes who have to retire at 30, crippled with arthritis. And many of the very old remain fit and well.

To get personal about it, I've just turned 70, and my new book is a thriller called [Venom](#), not exactly an old lady's kind of thing. I wrote it under difficult circumstances. I have a hereditary heart condition that flared up

Tweet this (30)
Comments (158)

larger | smaller

- Books**
Martin Amis · Ruth Rendell · PD James · John Keats
- Politics**
Welfare
- UK news**
- Science**
Ageing
- Society**
Older people · Long-term care · Assisted suicide

More comment

More from Comment is free on

- Books**
Martin Amis · Ruth Rendell · PD James · John Keats
- Politics**
Welfare
- UK news**
- Science**
Ageing
- Society**
Older people · Long-term care · Assisted suicide

More on this story



- Whitbread winner condemns Martin Amis call for euthanasia booths**
News: Joan Brady accuses author of 'prostitution just to flog a book'
- News: Martin Amis in new row over 'euthanasia booths'**
- Comment: Amis is no stranger to controversy**

On Comment is free

Most viewed Zeitgeist Latest

Last 24 hours



1. Festivals are no place for children | Rebecca Wearm

- 2. Gareth Williams: the sad, fascinating death of a spy | Jonathan Freedland
- 3. Video: David Mitchell's Soap Box: Communal eating
- 4. The Labour party faces a choice of either politics or religion | Martin Kettle
- 5. Islamophobia: the new antisemitism | Mya Guarnieri

More most viewed

Guardian Books on Twitter

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

- carmitstead:** I've discovered some wonderful books - more than could fit on first book longlist - but am frustrated by the standard of editing #books about 6 hours, 2 minutes ago
- paullaity:** Colm Toibin at Guardian Review book club last night. Wonderful. He can't write a bad sentence, and is an expert distributor of charm #books about 6 hours, 16 minutes ago
- michellepauli:** Authors+games: With Chris Ryan writing Medal of Honour novel, should Terry Pratchett novelise Monkey Island? [#books](http://gu.com/p/2jam/tw) about 12 hours, 49 minutes ago

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

Health: best treatments



Read information about the best treatments for 180 common conditions, including: Bronchitis, High cholesterol, High blood pressure.

Search all conditions and treatments:

Search

This information is brought to you by the British Medical Journal in partnership with Guardian.co.uk

About our partnership

Gadgets from the Guardian shop



Lloydtron Amplified Analogue and Digital Indoor TV Aerial
Enjoy crystal-clear TV reception, ideal for

and called for major surgery. That was two years ago and I feel stronger than ever. I do Pilates and I box to keep fit and, to tell you the truth, my writing is better as a result.

One of God's nastiest tricks is that often people don't realise they're getting old. My brother-in-law caught sight of an ancient man in a shop window and thought, "Jesus, look at that poor old fool". Then he realised that old man was himself. And here's Amis, talking like a callow teenager, who sees the old as a smelly, ugly invasion, blissfully unaware that he's already one of them.

[Printable version](#) [Send to a friend](#) [Share](#) [Clip](#) [Contact us](#) [Article history](#)

Ads by Google

Anger Management Workshop

Individual, Group, Court Mandated Certified & Professional Specialist
www.GardenCityMFT.com

Anger Management

Individualized Program Domestic Violence - Court Approved!
www.talktomartyb.com

Online Diversity Training

Building inclusion through engaging online diversity training
www.ibiselearning.com

Comments in chronological order (Total 158 comments)

Comments are now closed for this entry.

[g](#) Staff
[C](#) Contributor

Showing first 50 comments | [Go to all comments](#) | [Go to latest comment](#)



legalcynic

25 Jan 2010, 11:36PM

So stop writing, get yourself down to the Groucho and give the muppet a bloody good 'talking to'.

I'm not a member and you'd get away with it, go on, live a little.

[Recommend?](#) (22)
[Report abuse](#)
[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



fridgemagnet

25 Jan 2010, 11:37PM

What an enormous surprise - he has a book out next month! Who would have guessed?

[Recommend?](#) (24)
[Report abuse](#)
[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



DrGee

25 Jan 2010, 11:38PM

Don't rise to Amis's brainless and moronic outpourings. If everyone ignores him there's a chance he might just go away. Alternatively maybe try cooking and eating him.

[Recommend?](#) (49)
[Report abuse](#)
[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



matteo80

25 Jan 2010, 11:40PM

I used to like Martin Amis, but after his disgusting rants in recent years (First the Muslims, now old people) I wouldn't piss on him if he were to spontaneously combust.

[Recommend?](#) (56)
[Report abuse](#)
[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



Charl

25 Jan 2010, 11:41PM

(cont'd, p. 94)

[Recommend?](#) (3)
[Report abuse](#)
[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



Lokischild

25 Jan 2010, 11:45PM

[Recommend?](#) (7)
[Report abuse](#)

rooms without access to a roof-top aerial.

From: £29.95

[Browse more technology products](#)
[Visit the Guardian reader offers shop](#)

comment is free...



Latest posts



55min ago

Therapy in a pencil case

Joe Moran: In these uncertain, digital times there's nothing more reassuring than ink, graphite and a new eraser
[7 comments](#)



2hr 54min ago

Sky TV should invest far more in talent

Mark Thompson: Murdoch's corporation is much more powerful than ITV ever was. Yet its investment in original content is lamentable
[45 comments](#)

Comment from the paper

Martin Kettle: [The Labour party faces a choice of either politics or religion](#)

Lynsey Hanley: [Us and them is the cultural problem, not Pomp and Circumstance](#)

Ian McMillan: [Farewell to Cleggy and co](#)

Latest news on guardian.co.uk

Last updated three minutes ago

News

BBC's Mark Thompson takes aim at Murdoch empire in MacTaggart lecture

Comment is free

Britain's rough sleepers deserve a stay of execution this winter

guardianbookshop

This week's bestsellers



1. **American Caesars**
by Nigel Hamilton
£25.00



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. **Favour Thesaurus**
by Niki Segnit £18.99

Search the Guardian bookshop

Sponsored features



How can you equate racism with ageism? Racism must by definition exist throughout life, cradle to the grave, as race is relatively fixed. But the old were once young, and being young and stupid were no doubt ageist.

"It's idiotic to pension off people just because of age. True, some people do need pensioning off. Some of them need it at 40, some at 50. Some should never have been employed at all. And some should definitely be kept on at 70 or 80, especially now with the old skills in decline: writing readable sentences, manipulating basic mathematics, everyday diplomacy in interpersonal relationships."

This elitism is what really annoys me!



romannosejob
25 Jan 2010, 11:46PM

Amis is not literally suggesting it, and certainly wouldn't if there was even the mildest possibility anyone would take him seriously. So what's the point of rebuking him?

I don't agree with anything he says these days, of course, but I admire him for standing up and saying things no one else would, should they wish gamer popularity, even if it's purely to rile people.

he's an anarchist. I like anarchists.

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

[Recommend?](#) (11)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



Clunie
25 Jan 2010, 11:47PM

You've got to admit he was right in his own case when he said "Talent dies before the body." One good book - Money - and downhill ever since. On his latest attempt to be rebellious and provocative to get attention (which gets a bit sad after 15 - and still pulling the enfant terrible schtick at 60 is tragic, though I guess he's got nothing else to do but pose for moody pics), perhaps he should remember that actions speak louder than words.

He's just trying to flog his latest shite book, I wouldn't worry too much. I'd take him about as seriously on this as on his pronouncements on Muslims, eg. not at all.

[Recommend?](#) (52)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



hermionegingold
25 Jan 2010, 11:47PM

to paraphrase sir jjohn gielgud:

'whatever happened to martin amis?'

....'he failed, went to america & got his teeth done'

x

[Recommend?](#) (37)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



Modshavnofriends
25 Jan 2010, 11:49PM

Martin Amis is a self aggrandizing old twat. I suggest you ignore his pointless ramblings and stop drawing attention to him (which is all he wants anyway).

Oh and while we're on the subject of pointless ramblings:

Ageism seems to me almost indistinguishable from racism

I suspect you're about to get a pasting for that one...

[Recommend?](#) (15)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



Clunie
25 Jan 2010, 11:49PM

romannosejob: Amis an anarchist? Yup, he's up there with Richard Littlejohn in the annals of great anarchists of our time.

[Recommend?](#) (29)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)



VforVintage
25 Jan 2010, 11:50PM

fridgemagnet is spot on. New book coming out soon. But why does the Guardian allow this incestuous relationship continue? Writer wants publicity, writes pompous article, Guardian then pays someone to 'discuss' it. Amis must be having a rather miserable existence if he feels knackered at 60. I am slightly younger but still turn out for my football team (and yes I still run). There are so many books I still want to read, paintings to paint, places to visit, shows to see, people to meet and old movies to watch yet again. If Amis gives me his money, I will build him a special booth and he can dispatch himself and I will dispatch myself to Venice, Paris and all the other places I want to see. Why do people

[Recommend?](#) (21)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

guardianjobs



Account Sales Manager

£competitive + excellent benefits | FUTURE PUBLISHING LIMITED ([view job details](#))

Market Research Assistant

£competitive + excellent benefits | FUTURE PUBLISHING LIMITED ([view job details](#))

Search jobs

Search

HAYS

Community Team Supervisor

Bournemouth | £18495 - £20543 per annum + pension, healthcare, career progression
HAYS

like Amis have the cash and a death wish, while those of us who love it have to make do on meagre rations? I bet he is a great company in a broken down lift.



CordeliaM

25 Jan 2010, 11:51PM

@Dr Gee

Alternatively maybe try cooking and eating him.

Nah he would taste horrible.

romannosejob

Yep we all like anarchists from the comfort of our cosy sofa.

There's enough ageism and everyother kind of 'ism' going on without some numpty author joining in

[Recommend? \(8\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)



Algebraist

25 Jan 2010, 11:51PM

You know, if Amis believes that people who have outlived their usefulness should march themselves down to the Solvent Green Farm.. he should volunteer to go first, for obvious reasons.

[Recommend? \(17\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)



RufusT

25 Jan 2010, 11:52PM

RIP Martin Amis' talent. Died peacefully in its sleep sometime in the late 1980's. Survived by a big mouth with fine dentistry.

[Recommend? \(33\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)



CordeliaM

25 Jan 2010, 11:54PM

FFs should read **joining in**

Time for bed

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)



robbo100

25 Jan 2010, 11:56PM

Somehow I get the feeling he didn't literally mean it.

[Recommend? \(11\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)



Clunie

25 Jan 2010, 11:58PM

VforVintage: He doesn't actually believe it, he only does it to annoy because he knows it teases. And he wants to flog his latest crappy book, so he has to say something "shocking" to get attention because, well, that's what he does and otherwise he'd have to say something intelligent. He's the ultimate kiddult.

Compare and contrast to John Le Carré who's still writing brilliant books in his 70s, having never stopped, but for some reason never seems to pose for moody pensive pics in the colour supplements.

[Recommend? \(32\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)



Pinnington

26 Jan 2010, 12:05AM

That is amazing! If you invoke Godwin's law and use the relevant terminology the Grauniad prevents you from posting!! So you can't use variations on the names of the awful parties, etc, to talk about Martin's piece. I'm going to post this now and see what happens

[Recommend? \(0\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)



romannosejob

26 Jan 2010, 12:05AM

Yep we all like anarchists from the comfort of our cosy sofa.

There's enough ageism and everyother kind of 'ism' going on without some numpty author joining in

the author in question is 60 and perfectly entitled to hate himself and everyone else like him by extension. It's funny.

For a start he goaded some prat into researching and writing a serious article on why old people should not be killed.

[Recommend? \(12\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)



Benjine

26 Jan 2010, 12:05AM

[Recommend? \(15\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Notwithstanding the unpleasant language Amis uses, surely the bigger point he's making is that Euthanasia should be a legal option for people who feel they're past it and want to bow out gracefully?

Wouldn't you agree, Ms Brady, that it is a preferable option for our lives to come to an end 3 years too "early" than 3 years too "late"?

If we go when we've still got a bit of life left in us, at least our loved ones are left with a sense of wanting more rather than the more common reaction when somebody dies "late" which is a sense of relief as we ritually mutter to one other, "well, it was a blessing really" or "at least they are now at peace".

I know which one of the two I'd prefer.



RufusT

26 Jan 2010, 12:07AM

[Recommend? \(25\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Clunie

Excellent point about Le Carre. There have never been more great writers producing great work in their sixties, seventies and even eighties than at the present time and it must be hard for Amis to take, having only just turned sixty and knowing his best years are well behind him.



Pinnington

26 Jan 2010, 12:09AM

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

What is happening is the the Grauniad has a proscribed list of words: this must be an acquiescence to the Home Office or other censor who says that you cannot put some words/constructions in your posts. I have to keep my posts short otherwise they will not make it to the CiF pages.



BurgermaS

26 Jan 2010, 12:10AM

[Recommend? \(13\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Thing about Amis is that it's always *autobiographical*. He feels this way about himself. When he talks of the death of talent, he means his own. He's not relevant anymore and hasn't written a novel worth reading since LondonFields. It upsets me a bit that he's gone like this, I used to be a fan, but the Islam stuff is so wrong and misguided. He's basically turning into his dad isn't he?



Pinnington

26 Jan 2010, 12:15AM

This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.



romannosejob

26 Jan 2010, 12:23AM

[Recommend? \(6\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

He's not relevant anymore

more relevant than joan "my wikipedia article is a stub and needs expanding" brady.



salmonberry

26 Jan 2010, 12:26AM

[Recommend? \(8\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

My Grandmother worked into her seventies. Shame on Martin Amis for being so unnecessarily unpleasant.

Mary Midgley-highly intelligent philosopher whose still writing aged 90, June Brown --brilliant soap actress aged 82, Clare Raynor still campaigning aged 80 or there about, Ann Clwyd still an active MP aged 72, Shirley Bassey aged 72, Barbara Walters around 80

And many many more...



sarka

26 Jan 2010, 12:27AM

[Recommend? \(19\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Hey, be kind to Martin Amis!

Getting on is dead tough if your whole image thing over the decades has been as "enfant terrible", and son of your father.

Martin seems to have left it miles too late to reinvent himself, as many more fortunate and sawy writers and pundits have done, as wise olf patriarch/matriarch, source of wisdom bla bla...or even, like his old dad, as gumpy, grim, pissed but always (somewhere in the corner of his black soul) humane chronicler of human weakness, so that for Kingsley, old age was another opportunity for a couple of quite a decent viciously funny but illuminating novels on the subject, very much felt from inside and all the better for that..

Alas, unlike these, Martin invested far too heavily in being the young, sexy hero, and now he's a bit stumped and miserable - and probably in some weird way trying to assert his fictional identification with youth by railing at the old... I don't mind it, I just feel a bit sorry for the guy..He probably should have died young, like Rimbaud or something....



Clunie

26 Jan 2010, 12:31AM

[Recommend?](#) (12)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

Rufus T: A friend who lectures in nursing and specialises in working with the elderly told me that our characteristics really do just become more concentrated with age - so it makes sense that the truly talented and creative really do get better at their craft, in writing as in other fields.

It would also make sense by the same measure that those who once grabbed the mood of the moment but were fundamentally mediocre and superficial to start off with just demonstrate their mediocrity and superficiality more and more, which I'd say is the case with Amis, which is why he has to resort to the pitiful adolescent "controversial statements." Only way to flog his dud books, I guess. Seems to work - we're talking about him after all, rather than just ignoring him as he deserves.



monopolygod

26 Jan 2010, 12:43AM

[Recommend?](#) (2)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

Clunie:

Yes.

(Screw the idiotic quotes).

Provide a caption for the photo.

e.g.: "Now, where did I leave my magnum opus...?"



BurgermaS

26 Jan 2010, 12:52AM

[Recommend?](#) (7)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

Hey Sarka, I don't disagree really. He was, for me, a superb technician, a real intellect, and could be incredibly funny and socially perceptive. But one thing he is not is a storyteller. He can write rings around anyone on a technical level but he relied on production values instead of content which gets difficult when your production values are no longer hip. (Witness the txtspk/email disaster in Yellow Dog). Anyway, bedtime, night.



ellis

26 Jan 2010, 1:02AM

[Recommend?](#) (20)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

The oldest enfant terrible in town: the guy is a fascist, just like his dad, his dad's best friend and his dad's best friend's dad.

Afascist, who makes a living trying to rally mobs behind him to make life unpleasant for immigrants, muslims and anyone else who looks defenceless and has wealthy enemies. From self-abuse to abuse of others, that is his life in a nutshell.

Next stop: babies who aren't working. At least then he'll be taking on someone his own size.



PaulBJ

26 Jan 2010, 1:08AM

[Recommend?](#) (10)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

Amis may or may not be a schmuck. To be honest I haven't read enough of his work to comment either way. But with regard to his comments about old people being worthless isn't he just articulating an attitude that many people have but dare not be up front about? And that some of the non-elderly people who react so vehemently to his posturings about the elderly clearly don't give a shit about them either?

The fact of the matter is that the elderly of Britain are not revered they are treated as though they are a burden. How different it may or may not be in other societies is up for debate. But in Britain unless you are one of the wealthy elderly who can afford to buy into the best that is on offer you are expected to sit back and be grateful for whatever you are given. And let's face it too often that isn't very

much.

People talk incessantly about ageing and ageism but too be honest i think it,s all talk.And i don,t think that things will radically change for older people until more of them organise amongst themselves and basically stop behaving the way older people are expected to behave.Women,gay people and ethnic minorities proved that to be the case when fighting for their rights but even amongst those groups older people were often overlooked.So Martin Amis can shoot his mouth off all he likes.Because until we have a grey revolution in this country i fear many older people will in effect be treated as though they are worthless.Despite whatever younger people may say to the contrary.



assortedbiscuits

26 Jan 2010, 1:53AM

[Recommend?](#) (34)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Where to start? I'm just home from hearing Bad Martin speak at a Guardian event at which he gave several thoughtful replies to people's questions about his stance on euthanasia.

Are we all talking about the same person, I wonder. Both the columnist above and most of the commenters seem happy to pour scorn on an entirely fictional 'Martin Amis' - who seems to be a talentless failed novelist and also a loathsome racist, misogynist and, now, granny-hating snob. Deeply unfashionable, he revels in his vileness like some gloating demon. His unacceptability is so well established now that whatever you say about him is actually fine, and if anyone would like to stone him, this 'Martin Amis', that would probably be cool too.

At the event the evening he spoke sensitively and sadly about the deaths from Alzheimer's and other degenerative diseases of people he loved. He said that his views on euthanasia were actually quite pertinent to himself, as a 60-year-old; and he spoke *from the point of view of the sufferer* when he said that life without dignity and mind might not be worth living. All his remarks on the subject began from the premise that the euthanasia he was discussing was the personal-choice kind, not the Nazi-state kind.

Any jerk can wilfully misread someone's intentions and make spite out of it. Any sheep can follow another. But it's quite meaningless, and rather stupid.



beastless

26 Jan 2010, 2:52AM

[Recommend?](#) (5)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

If this article shows anything, it's that the old lose their sense of humour and perspective. He tries to wind you up, and you walk right into it.



GordonCoventry

26 Jan 2010, 4:27AM

[Recommend?](#) (7)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

What gets me are the groups of oldies hanging outside the shops smoking and swearing as I walk past. If they were kids, someone would call the police, but be they're wrinklies they get away with it...



auxesis

26 Jan 2010, 4:57AM

[Recommend?](#) (2)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Given the [news](#) Jan 18th Guardian article about "aerobic exercise triggers new cell growth ? study shows region of brain affected linked to recollection", it's not surprising that Joan Brady's boxing and pilates has made her writing better than ever.

However I really do think she's missed the point about Amis' article, which to me was reflecting on the vastly increasing number of old people who recognise they have little to live for, are in constant pain and anguish, but for whom our self righteous legal and religious systems force them to continue to live lives they really wouldn't. And of course Joan Brady falls in to the same trap that she accuses Amis of being in when she says in her final paragraph - *"One of God's nastiest tricks is that often people don't realise they're getting old. My brother-in-law caught sight of an ancient man in a shop window and thought, "Jesus, look at that poor old fool".*

So when did appearance, particularly that of being "ancient", have such prime importance on a person's value?



RascalOfRue

26 Jan 2010, 5:36AM

[Recommend?](#) (6)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

I think you are rather missing the point, Amis's own generation, the babyboomers seem to be the people he is targeting. Perhaps attempting to convey the selfishness of the 60s generation and their refusal to accept any of the realities old age, including the not so cheery certainty that no matter how strongly they vituperate against it, they are going to die. But why should they accept such inconvenient and unpleasant realities that so disrupt all their plans of how to spend all the extra money they have gained at

everyone else's expense. Yes it must be hard to accept, after all, they've had everything handed to them without much graft in terms of house prices, education, pension plans.

And now they are kicking out against another reality of old age they find unacceptable, compulsory retirement. As the commenter Bluebird pointed out on Victor Keegan's Cif thread criticizing default retirement:

No surprise to see the babyboomers agitating for the abolition of compulsory retirement. They are now at the height of their careers monopolising the top jobs and the last thing they want is to be forced to retire so that a youngster can take their pay and perks. Of course, this is how the babyboomer got to his position in the first place through compulsory redundancy of his elders and now the drawbridge will be pulled up.



Auric

26 Jan 2010, 6:26AM

[Recommend? \(3\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

As a award-winning writer in my 70s,

Huh? Clearly the award was not for grammar.

To be fair to the author, I'm sure she did not write that part. Note to the person who did. By introducing her in this arrogant way, you do her no favours. It is a dishonest trick in argument known as 'the appeal to prestige'.

Anyway, she tells us 'It's health that matters, not age.' So - as she also makes a fuss about racism - I presume she is meaning that race and age should not be factors in deciding to liquidate people, just health.



Auric

26 Jan 2010, 6:31AM

[Recommend? \(4\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

She also tells us that

here's Amis, talking like a callow teenager, who sees the old as a smelly, ugly invasion, blissfully unaware that he's already one of them.

Really? I looked at a photo of him just now. I don't think he is ugly. Not all old people are, Joan! Are you being ageist?

I won't comment on whether he smells bad or not, but again it would be somewhat ageist to assume that was true, so I presume Joan is talking from experience. But maybe he just hadn't had a bath that day.



pilyle

26 Jan 2010, 6:53AM

[Recommend? \(3\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

What I think Martin really needs is a late-life conversion. Catholicism has been done to death, and I really think the attention of 75 virgins would do wonders for his self-esteem, muse and mood.

Meanwhile, I at least give thanks that, though his automated mid-life crisis outbursts and outrages are no more subtle or less sixth form debating society than those of N.Cohen, A. Anthony *et al*, he at least still sometimes cares about turning a nice turn of phrase, whereas his Enlightenment-defending journo chums positively revel in the regurgitation of cliché in lieu of argument.



thegreatfatsby

26 Jan 2010, 6:59AM

[Recommend? \(4\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

The Guardian is not above manipulating the mob. Tasty titbits in inverted commas

are the middle class equivalent of nipples on page 3. Your ire is being poked and stoked. Martin Amis may have been on his creative uppers for years but as the only sensible poster (and un-rabble like) assortedbiscuits points out, the rather more interesting and less sensational things he said about old age seem to have been ignored.



italia90

26 Jan 2010, 7:53AM

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

What Martin Amis says doesn't really matter a bit. It's what he writes that matters, and unfortunately, that's not much good any more. Almost everyone seems to run out of tunes in the end, with Amis (and most of his 'golden generation') it seemed to happen around 25 years ago - 'London Fields' was his turning point - and it's been a slow decline ever since. The critic and journalism seemed to hold up for a while, these comments illustrate why even that isn't true any more. Not particularly because they're offensive - a finely judged sense of the offensive was always one of his strengths - but because they're so banal. 'Old people should be put on ice floes and pushed out to sea' seems to be the general gist of it, which is an idea I remember my own parents cackling over at

least 40 years ago.

His new novel is imminent - 'The Pregnant Widow'. Adull, tired title and I would bet quite a lot on it being a dull and tired book too. Who still buys stuff like this? Why would you have bought the wretched last shakes of Amis, McEwan, Rushdie et al over the last ten years when you could have been feasting on Cormac McCarthy, Geoff Dyer or any of a thousand other writers still in the first flush of vibrancy.



pilyle

26 Jan 2010, 7:55AM

[Recommend? \(3\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Fatsby, even if we'd wanted to, we couldn't all have squeezed in to hear Martin talk live, so all we have to go on is his media profile.

He's often more interesting and nuanced in public conversation than in privately-composed print these days - considered, qualified, careful, aware he has an audience; when he's typing alone the rhetorical dutch courage seems to kick in.

All comment threads anywhere are ultimately about revenge and mob mentalities and venting - that is a large part of why the internet is rubbish and will destroy the world.

It is a continuation of the logic of the newspaper columnist: getting a response is the thing - everything else, from truth to subtlety to fairness, secondary.

As a former journalist for the Guardian's sister paper, I'm sure Amis knows all this very well himself. And that's why, though you and biscuits and Amis all make good points, we baying mobsters are also entitled to turn on his well-timed pre-publication proclamations for the promotional, attention-seeking utterances they so often seem.

And again, Amis has never been sentimental about calling out those he considers fat, past it, revolting, and so forth, in the name of the sword of truth, so I'm sure he can take that too.



gondwanaland

26 Jan 2010, 8:08AM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Perhaps Amis was alluding to the public sector pension time bomb ticking away?



gondwanaland

26 Jan 2010, 8:08AM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Perhaps Amis was alluding to the public sector pension time bomb ticking away?



tybo

26 Jan 2010, 8:18AM

[Recommend? \(7\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

BurgermaS

He's not relevant anymore and hasn't written a novel worth reading since *London Fields*.

Eh? That is the only one of his I have read and I thought it was a crashing disappointment. I kept expecting it to get better and find out what the fuss was about but it was just a dull, very mediocre book by a privileged middle class boy trying and failing to evoke a seamy side of London that he clearly had not the slightest acquaintance with.

Lots of people have told me *Money* is good but after *London Fields* (which got good good reviews too) I couldn't be arsed.

Maybe I should read *Money* now as it does seem to be emerging as (perhaps) his one decent book, but then I have also read that it has dated horribly.



christopherhawtree

26 Jan 2010, 8:57AM

[Recommend? \(3\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Didn't Martin Amis take up a great deal of space to go on about one rotten year he'd had, and that included the death of his father?

At the time of this grief, he did not declare that Kingsley's later books were not as incisive - such as the brilliant depiction of the old in *Ending Up* - and that it might have been better had he conked out earlier rather than write them.

Martin Amis's work, which should be writing, has gone awry since he took it upon himself to be a commentator with that *Left Bank* posing: the drawl, the cigarette...



shuggles

26 Jan 2010, 9:02AM

[Recommend? \(4\)](#)

Why stop there Amis? What about the worthless young, the worthless lovelies in the media, CEOs, bankers, politicians, celebrities, the footballing thugocracy, public sector principal officers?

In fact, explaining your own worth would be a start.

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)



Clunie

26 Jan 2010, 9:08AM

[Recommend? \(7\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

RascalofRue: You seem to be making the same mistake bluebird did in assuming that all the babyboomer generation are wealthy upper middle class graduate professionals when, as in any generation, that's actually a very small minority. Sort of like assuming that all twenty somethings took a gap year and went to Goa.
In reality, many people are working later in life because they don't have an option - ask those in the same generation in crappy minimum wage jobs exactly how happy they are at the idea of working into their 80s. One thing's sure as hell the Amises of the world won't be writing about them - and shouldn't, given the painful ignorance displayed of the non-wealthy non-Hampstead folk live in earlier works.

[Showing first 50 comments](#) | [Go to all comments](#) | [Go to latest comment](#)

Comments are now closed for this entry.

Related information

Books

[Martin Amis](#) · [Ruth Rendell](#) · [PD James](#) · [John Keats](#)

Politics

[Welfare](#)

UK news

Science

[Ageing](#)

Society

[Older people](#) · [Long-term care](#) · [Assisted suicide](#)

More from Comment is free on

Books

[Martin Amis](#) · [Ruth Rendell](#) · [PD James](#) · [John Keats](#)

Politics

[Welfare](#)

UK news

Science

[Ageing](#)

Society

[Older people](#) · [Long-term care](#) · [Assisted suicide](#)



Video (8min 38sec), **PD James: 'Some people find conventions liberating'**
3 Aug 2010:

On her 90th birthday, renowned crime author PD James talks to Sarah Crown about her best-loved character, detective Adam Dalgliesh, her science fiction book, The Children of Men, and why she's worried about starting a new book

[More video](#)

2 Jan 2010

This week: [Umar Farouk Abdulmullatab](#), [Margaret Thatcher](#) and [PD James](#)

31 Dec 2009

BBC director general [Mark Thompson](#) thrown by [PD James's](#) detective work

26 Sep 2009

[The Private Patient](#) by [PD James](#) | [Book review](#)

20 Sep 2009

[The Private Patient](#) by [PD James](#) | [Book review](#)



Gallery (12 pictures):

Pieces of me: Ruth Rendell, author

2 Sep 2008: [Ruth Rendell](#) on her most meaningful possessions

[More galleries](#)