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# Students, meet your new tutor: Amis, the enfant terrible, turns professor

Alexandra Topping  
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Martin Amis says his teaching experiences at Manchester University may spawn a new novel. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod

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To those who seek a career as a writer, Martin Amis has some well chosen words of advice.

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"Well, it is a sort of sedentary, carpet slippers, self-inspecting, nose-picking, arse-scratching kind of job, just you in your study and there is absolutely no way round that. So, anyone who is in it for worldly gains and razzmatazz I don't think will get very far at all."

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It's the method that worked for Amis, who is often described as Britain's greatest living author. And it just might inspire another one like him. Today, Manchester University will announce an academic coup: Amis has agreed to take up his first teaching role as its professor of creative writing, a decision that will bring the one-time enfant terrible of British literature, author of 11 novels, including Money and London Fields, firmly into the literary establishment.

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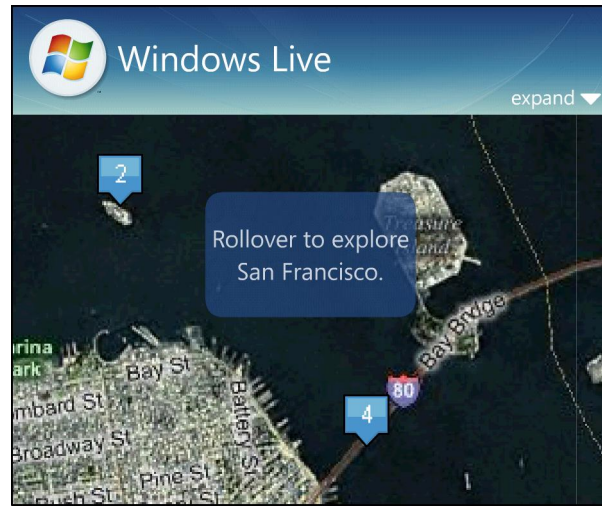
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Speaking exclusively to the Guardian ahead of today's announcement, Amis admitted that he hopes a new novel will germinate during his time as a professor.

He also insisted that, despite his reputation as an caustic and unforgiving critic, he will be a generous tutor.

"I may be acerbic in how I write but I'm not how I live. And I would find it very difficult to say cruel things to people in such a vulnerable position. I imagine I'll be surprisingly sweet and gentle with them. One of the things I've learned about fiction - you really do lay yourself open in a way that no other so-called creative artist does. Most other art you're just exhibiting a particular talent, even poetry up to a point, but by writing fiction you expose not only your talent but your whole being, your social, sexual and psychological being and you're never more vulnerable than when you do that, and I'm well aware of that fact and will take it into account."

Amis said he felt it was time to experience something quite different, and this might inspire him to write a new book. Asked what he hoped to get out of the teaching, he said: "A novel perhaps. I suppose I can own up to this, I'm 57 and there comes a point when, my father [author Kingsley Amis] put it very well, he said: 'There comes a point where you think, it's not like that any more.' A social change in the collective consciousness has happened and you feel you are not seeing it."

Amis said his children gave him a "partial view of what's going on". His new students, and his time on campus, might provide him with something more revealing. "I have a lot of children, but children only give you a very partial view of what is going on. They are quite secretive and edit what they tell you. I want to get out there and take my own reading of what young people are like now; it's very hard to tell. They don't interact with you at all, the young. They hardly see you [and] they don't show themselves to you.

"I have a lot of curiosity about that and maybe, when these strange experiences are out of the way, when it's over, it might form itself into a novel." He added dryly: "A campus novel written by an elderly novelist, that's what the world wants."

Amis returned to Britain in September after living in Uruguay for two and a half years with his second wife, the writer Isabel Fonseca, and their two young daughters. Despite being "delighted on the whole" to be back, Amis thinks there has been a significant cultural shift during his self-imposed exile.

"Some strange things have happened, it seems to me, in my absence. I didn't feel like I was getting more rightwing when I was in Uruguay, but when I got back I felt that I had moved quite a distance to the right while staying in the same place."

He is disquieted by what he sees as increasingly undisguised hostility towards Israel and the United States, and bemoans what he calls "woozy multiculturalism".

"There is a dislike of the British state that probably goes back a century or two but is manifesting itself in a weird way," he said. "It's as if we're ashamed of ever having been proud of our country and also pretending that we are overjoyed that we are no longer a world power, whereas in fact people do very much lament the loss of power. Some would say the British feel schadenfreude even about themselves: there is a discomfort in their skins."

Amis said he sensed a profound unease beneath Britain's "stirringly successful multicultural society".

He doesn't see the decision to take an academic role as following in the footsteps of his father, Sir Kingsley, who taught between 1949 and 1961. "I seldom compare my life to my father's," he said. "We had this one thing in common, and we got on very well, but that's the end of it."

He doesn't think that his new job will put to rest the image of him as the British literary maverick. "It's my dream to go from being the bad boy of English letters to the bad man of English letters. I thought that might happen after my father died but it still seems to be with me. So, I'll probably go to my grave as the bad boy of English letters."

• Read Louise Doughty on what Martin Amis might expect from his students, [blogs.guardian.co.uk/arts](http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/arts)

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