



Amis says *au revoir* to all that

Martin Amis's new novel will deliver a withering attack on British society – but it is no parting shot, he tells Andrew Johnson

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Martin Amis has written a "devastating portrayal" of British society in his latest novel, as he prepares to leave England. The writer told *The Independent on Sunday* yesterday that the much-anticipated novel was not intended to be a "parting shot", however, and that he "feels incurably English" despite his intended move to New York.

Amis said that the book, which was to be titled *State of England*, will probably be published as *Lionel Asbo* when it finally appears later this year or early next. Publishing insiders are describing the novel as "a return to form" for the author of *The Rachel Papers* and *London Fields*, combining his trademark black humour with acute observations of contemporary Britain.

The IoS has learnt that the novel has been dedicated to his best friend, Christopher Hitchens, another British emigre living in New York, who is currently being treated for cancer.

Lionel Asbo, is, according to a publishing source, "savage in its portrayal of the modern world. The style is cynical, witty, flippant, cruel and acutely observed." If so, it is likely to draw a warmer reception than recent Amis works such as *Yellow Dog* and *The Pregnant Widow*.

The novel tells the story of *Lionel Asbo*, a skinhead lout who wins the lottery while in prison. Amis has revealed that one of the characters, "Threnody", is loosely based on Katie Price, whom he has previously described as little more than "two bags of silicone". Other objects of Amis's satire include the British press and a society obsessed with sex and money.

"The reader is left with a dispiriting view of a society in which pornography is substituted for relationships, children are sexually active and teenagers routinely pregnant, money is prized above all else and violence is both casual and premeditated," said the publishing source.

Despite this Amis said yesterday: "The book is in no sense a parting shot; I wrote most of it before we even thought about going away, and anyway I'm glad to say I feel incurably English."

Rumours that Amis planned to emigrate first surfaced last summer after he put his north London home up for sale for £4.5m, though it was later taken off the market.

However, last month Amis was reported to have bought a \$2.5m (£1.6m) mansion in the exclusive Cobble Hill area of Brooklyn, after his wife, the American-born novelist Isabel Fonseca, was quoted in *The Wall Street Journal* as saying: "I want to go home. I am violently missing my parents."

Yesterday Amis confirmed his planned move for the first time. "We probably are moving to Brooklyn for family reasons, in the summer, but we'll keep a flat here," he said.

It would not be the first time the Amises have left the country. Following the critical mauling of *Yellow Dog* in 2003, they departed for a two and a half year stint in Uruguay.

From 'very funny' to 'a pumped cruiserweight'

Hits

The Rachel Papers, 1973

Amis's first novel, about a young couple's relationship, won the Somerset Maugham Prize.

"Very funny" – TLS

Money, 1984

A hedonistic film director's adventures in America captured the zeitgeist of 1980s greed.

A "wonderfully funny book" – Time

London Fields, 1989

Tapped into millennium anxiety as a woman searches for her own killer.

"A virtuoso depiction of a wild and lustful society" – The New York Times

Time's Arrow, 1991

Written in reverse chronology, the story of a German doctor who experimented on Jews during the Holocaust was shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

"Amis's most daring and ambitious novel" – The Daily Telegraph

Misses

The Information, 1995

The story of two novelist friends – one successful, one not – received mixed reviews.

"A pumped cruiserweight, flashy, fast, brave and hopelessly overmatched" – The Independent

Night Train, 1997

Crime novella featuring a female detective that was criticised by John Updike for a misplaced use of American vernacular.

"A marking of time, replete with the usual staged set pieces" – The Guardian

Yellow Dog, 2003

The tale of the actor son of a London gangster provoked so much derision that Amis left the country for Uruguay.

"A further plummeting in his literary trajectory" – The Times

The Pregnant Widow, 2010

Analysis of the pressures the sexual revolution placed on women, partly based on his sister,

who committed suicide in 2000.

A "thumping disappointment" – The Irish Times