

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
MARTIN AMIS

Over a career spanning fifteen novels, two short story collections, and eight volumes of non-fiction, Sir Martin Amis helped to define his era. Through his published work and public commentaries, his voice featured prominently in the important socio-literary debates of his time. His work contributes to literary discussions about realism, postmodernism, satire, and comedy, and his core themes range across the Holocaust, nuclear anxiety, apocalyptic millennialism, and, more recently, the war on terror. His words were rarely without controversy. This Companion identifies the essential elements of Amis's work and then evaluates their potential for longevity. From his earliest publications in the 1970s to his death as one of England's most well-known writers in 2023, Amis was an outspoken critic of social myopia: how societies – and their citizens – continually choose selfishness over altruism, fatalism over improvement, and blindness over enlightenment.

Gavin Keulks is the author of *Father and Son: Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis, and the British Novel since 1950* (2003) and the editor of *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond* (2006).

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of the book.

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
MARTIN AMIS

EDITED BY
GAVIN KEULKS
Western Oregon University



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Gavin Keulks
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In memory of Jerome Meckier, 1941–2025

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M. HUNTER HAYES is Professor of English at East Texas A&M University, where he specialises in contemporary British literature. His previous publications include essays on Martin Amis, Will Self, and Christopher Reid. He is the author of *Understanding Will Self* (2007) and, along with James Diedrick, is compiling a comprehensive bibliography of Amis's published works, a project that represents all facets of Amis's career, including journalism and pieces published

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

under pseudonyms. He also serves as General Editor for the Sam Rayburn Series on Rural Life for Texas A&M University Press.

CRISTINA IONICA (Fanshawe College, Canada) has previously published contributions on Martin Amis in the essay collection *Contemporary Vulnerabilities*, edited by Pier Paolo Piciucco ('Pretend Vulnerabilities: The Masculinist Drive "Forward" in Martin Amis's Novels and Current Political Discourse', 2023) and in *English Studies in Canada* ('Masculinism as Global Psychosis: A Cognitive-Enactivist Reading of Martin Amis's "Men"', 2017/2018). Her book *The Affects, Cognition, and Politics of Samuel Beckett's Postwar Drama and Fiction* (2020) appeared in the series *New Interpretations of Beckett in the Twenty-First Century*. Her scholarship also appears in the essay collection *Modernism, Theory, and Responsible Reading: A Critical Conversation* (2021) and such journals as the *Journal of Modern Literature*, *Angelaki*, *Modern Language Studies*, *Critique*, *Literature Interpretation Theory*, and *Horror Studies*.

GAVIN KEULKS is Professor of English at Western Oregon University. His professional specialties include twentieth-century English and Irish literature, especially fiction of the post-World War II period. Prior publications on Martin Amis include the book *Father and Son: Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis, and the British Novel since 1950* (2003) and the edited collection *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond* (2006). He has also published essays on Salman Rushdie, Jeanette Winterson, and other contemporary writers. From 2006 to 2022, he was the webmaster for the Martin Amis Web, until a server upgrade permanently damaged the site.

MAGDALENA MACZYŃSKA is Teaching Professor of English at Drexel University in Philadelphia. Her research areas include contemporary anglophone fiction, urban fiction, climate fiction, and critical climate pedagogy. Her scholarship has been published in *Contemporary Literature*, *The Journal of Modern Literature*, *Literature and Religion*, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, and *Transformations: Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*. She is the author of *The Gospel According to the Novelist: Religious Scripture and Contemporary Fiction* (2015) and is an award-winning academic teacher.

PETER MOREY is Professor of Twentieth-Century Literature at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of *Fictions of India: Narrative and Power* (2000); *Robinton Mistry* (2004); *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (2011, with Amina Yaqin); and *Islamophobia and the Novel* (2018). He has co-edited the volumes *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism* (2006); *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing* (2012); *Muslims, Trust and Multiculturalism* (2018); and *Contesting Islamophobia* (2019). He has written numerous articles and book chapters on

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contemporary literature and postcolonial culture and has led three major funded interdisciplinary research projects on Islamophobia and Muslim communities. His latest book is *Kamila Shamsie* (2025).

KEVIN POWER is the author of two novels, *Bad Day in Blackrock* (2008) and *White City* (2021). He has also published a book of criticism, *The Written World* (2022). In 2013 he completed a PhD in American literature at University College Dublin. He is the primary book reviewer for *The Irish Times* and writes regularly for *The New York Review of Books*, *The Guardian*, and *The Dublin Review of Books*. In 2009 he was awarded the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature. He is Associate Professor of Literary Practice in the School of English, Trinity College Dublin. He once borrowed Martin Amis's cigarette lighter at a book festival, having taken up smoking again five minutes previously for just this purpose.

MATTHEW CAREY SALYER is the author of two poetry collections, *Probation* and *Ravage and Snare*, as well as two pamphlets, *lambkin* and *inis*. He has been a finalist for the Iowa Review Prize, the Brittingham and Felix Pollack Prizes in Poetry, and other awards. He holds a PhD in English from the University of Connecticut and has taught at several institutions including Fordham, the US Military Academy at West Point, University of Connecticut, and the US Coast Guard Academy. He is the author of a monograph, *Brokering Culture in Britain's Empire and the Historical Novel*. His research areas are varied, spanning the literature of the British Empire to, more recently, medieval history, including such topics as Bohemond of Antioch, medieval criminals on Crusade, ninth-century settlement enclosures in County Kerry, and scraps of Templar legal writs found between column stones during architectural renovations.

SEAN SEEGER is Senior Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature in the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies at the University of Essex. His main areas of interest are twentieth-century literature, modernism, speculative fiction, and queer studies. His first book, *Nonlinear Temporality in Joyce and Walcott: History Repeating Itself with a Difference* (2017), was the first comparative critical study of James Joyce and Derek Walcott. His second book, *Utopian Variations: Utopia in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture* (2025), considers forms of utopia and utopianism that have received less attention among scholars of utopia. He has also published journal articles and essays on a wide range of authors, including Martin Amis, Margaret Atwood, J. G. Ballard, Octavia Butler, Mark Fisher, Aldous Huxley, Ursula Le Guin, Rose Macaulay, Tom McCarthy, Olaf Stapledon, Yanis Varoufakis, and Lidia Yuknavitch.

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Editing this collection has been an unexpected joy. As any editor can attest, essay collections usually present a complex set of uncontrolled variables. Joy is never guaranteed and rarely to be expected. Thankfully, I have been blessed to collaborate with an inspiring group of collegial, dedicated, international experts. Fourteen contributors from five different countries participated in this project. We have shared many ideas, approaches, reactions, and updates over the last year, and it is our collective honour to share our work with you.

I wish to thank Brian Finney especially for his early, behind-the-scenes support. He is a reminder that professional relationships, even those formed decades ago, can persist into the present. Gratitude is also owed to Ray Ryan, my commissioning editor, and Biju Singh, his editorial assistant. Ray was especially helpful with early advice during the curation and organisational stages of this book. The Syndics and other reviewers at Cambridge University Press provided timely, astute, and rigorous feedback. Appreciation is also owed to Michael Allan, co-editor of the forthcoming *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arabic Literature*, whose counsel has been invaluable as we've navigated our separate paths. Linsey Hague and Joanna Penning worked tirelessly as the volume's copyeditor and indexer. Nicola McLean and, especially, Swati Kumari's prompt communications were essential to shepherding this book through final production. Finally, I thank the Faculty Development Committee and the Provost's Office at Western Oregon University for supporting this work through their reassignment and major project award processes.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1948 Parents Kingsley Amis and Hilary Bardwell wed. Martin Amis's older brother, Philip, born.
- 1949 Martin Louis Amis born, 25 August, in Oxford, Oxfordshire, England. The Amis family relocates to Swansea, Wales, where Kingsley Amis begins teaching at University College, Swansea. His experiences there will inspire his first novel, *Lucky Jim*.
- 1954 Younger sister, Sally, born and also commemorated by Philip Larkin in the poem 'Born Yesterday'. Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* published and wins the Somerset Maugham Award for first novel.
- 1958–59 Martin Amis experiences the United States for the first time when the family moves to Princeton, New Jersey, where Kingsley Amis has a visiting lectureship.
- 1961 Amises move from Swansea, Wales, to Cambridge, where Kingsley Amis assumes a teaching fellowship.
- 1962 Amises visit poet Robert Graves in Majorca, off the coast of Spain, the first of many trips there.
- 1963 Parents formally separate; mother takes children to Majorca for four months. Kingsley Amis and Elizabeth Jane Howard move in together.
- 1964 Martin Amis experiences filmmaking for the first time when he travels with his mother to the West Indies to perform as John Thornton in the film *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1965).
- 1965 Expelled from Sir Walter St John's Grammar School, Battersea, due to missing excessive days for filming. Amis's parents formally divorce. Kingsley Amis and Elizabeth Jane Howard marry.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1967 Attends a crammer, Sussex Tutors, in Brighton, credited with helping him gain admission to Oxford University.
- 1968 Begins attending Exeter College, Oxford, studying English literature. Kingsley Amis and Elizabeth Jane Howard purchase Lemmons, a Georgian villa, where they will live until 1976.
- 1969 First introduced to Christopher Hitchens and James Fenton, by Gully Wells, at Oxford.
- 1971 Awarded a formal first in English from Oxford. Moves back to Lemmons, until Christmas. Works briefly for ad agency J. Walter Thompson. In November, publishes his first reviews in *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Observer*. Begins work as editorial assistant at the *Times Literary Supplement*.
- 1972 Begins writing regularly for *The Observer*, most notably science fiction reviews under the pseudonym 'Henry Tilney'.
- 1973 Amis's first novel, *The Rachel Papers*, published and wins the 1974 Somerset Maugham Award. Begins publishing in *The New Statesman*, solidifying friendships with colleagues James Fenton and Christopher Hitchens. Cousin, Lucy Partington, mysteriously disappears.
- 1974 Affair with novelist Lamorna Heath produces a daughter, Delilah. Moves from the *Times Literary Supplement* to *The New Statesman* to work as deputy to literary editor Claire Tomalin.
- 1975 Second novel, *Dead Babies*, published.
- 1976 Amis's only theatrical play, *It's Disgusting at Your Age*, published.
- 1977 Promoted to literary editor at *The New Statesman*.
- 1978 *Success* published. Lamorna Heath commits suicide. Her husband, Patrick Seale, would continue to raise Amis's daughter, Delilah.
- 1979 Amis leaves *The New Statesman* and commits to writing full-time, spending the fiscal year 1979–80 living abroad (Paris) as a tax exile. Kingsley Amis writes to Philip Larkin: 'Did I tell you Martin is spending a year abroad as a TAX EXILE? Last year he earned £38,000. Little shit. 29, he is. Little shit.'

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- 1980 Writes the screenplay for *Saturn 3*, starring Kirk Douglas, Farrah Fawcett, and Harvey Keitel. Also publicly accuses Jacob Epstein of plagiarising from *The Rachel Papers*. Elizabeth Jane Howard leaves Kingsley Amis.
- 1981 *Other People: A Mystery Story* published. At Amis's request, his mother, Hilary, and her third husband, Alistair Boyd, 7th Baron Kilmarnock, invite Kingsley to live with them. They will help care for him until his death in 1995.
- 1982 *Invasion of the Space Invaders*, a guide to arcade video games, published.
- 1983 Amis meets Saul Bellow for the first time. Kingsley Amis and Elizabeth Jane Howard finalise their divorce.
- 1984 *Money: A Suicide Note* published. Amis marries American academic Antonia Phillips.
- 1985 Amis's first son, Louis, born. Philip Larkin dies aged sixty-three.
- 1986 Essay collection, *The Moronic Inferno and Other Visits to America*, published. Second son, Jacob, born. Kingsley Amis wins Booker Prize for *The Old Devils*.
- 1987 Short story collection, *Einstein's Monsters*, published.
- 1989 *London Fields* published and later excluded, amid controversy over perceived sexism, from the Booker Prize shortlist.
- 1990 Sir Kingsley Amis knighted.
- 1991 *Time's Arrow, or the Nature of the Offence* published and shortlisted for the Booker Prize.
- 1992 Writes film script (rejected) for *Mars Attacks*. Begins affair with writer Isabel Fonseca.
- 1993 Essay collection, *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov and Other Excursions*, published. Amis and Antonia Phillips separate.
- 1994 Cousin Lucy Partington's death reclassified as murder, by serial killer Frederick West. Amis undergoes dental reconstruction surgery in New York.
- 1995 *The Information* published. Sir Kingsley Amis dies aged seventy-three. Amis meets his daughter, Delilah Seale (today Delilah Jeary), for the first time. Highly publicised split

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- with literary agent Pat Kavanagh, wife of friend and fellow novelist Julian Barnes. Signs with new agent Andrew Wylie. Isabel Fonseca's *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey* published.
- 1996 Amis and Antonia Phillips officially divorce. Amis marries Isabel Fonseca.
- 1997 *Night Train* published. Amis's first daughter with Fonseca, Fernanda, born.
- 1998 *Heavy Water and Other Stories* published.
- 1999 Amis's second daughter with Fonseca, Clio, born.
- 2000 Amis's memoir, *Experience*, published and wins James Tait Black Memorial Prize. *Mood Swingers*, a film adaptation of *Dead Babies*, is released. Sister, Sally, dies aged forty-six. Her daughter, Catherine, placed into adoption in 1979, contacts the Amises for the first time. Isabel Fonseca's *Bruno Fonseca: The Secret Life of Painting* published.
- 2001 *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971–2000* published and wins the 2002 National Book Critics Circle Award. 'Fear and Loathing', the first of Amis's newspaper essays on Islamism, published.
- 2002 *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million*, a political memoir, published.
- 2003 *Yellow Dog* published and longlisted for Booker Prize.
- 2004 *Vintage Amis*, a compendium of fiction and non-fiction, published. Amis family relocates to José Ignacio, Uruguay.
- 2005 *Time* magazine ranks *Money* among the best 100 English-language novels from 1923 to 2005. Saul Bellow dies aged eighty-nine.
- 2006 *House of Meetings* published. Amis family returns from Uruguay and moves back into their home in Primrose Hill, London.
- 2007 Begins teaching creative writing at the University of Manchester. In the new edition of his book *Ideology: An Introduction*, fellow Manchester professor Terry Eagleton attacks Amis for his (misrepresented) comments on Islam.

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- 2008 *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom*, a collection of political journalism and two short stories, published. Amis named by *The Times* as one of the fifty best British writers since 1945. Delilah Jeary (Seale) gives birth to a son, making Amis a grandfather.
- 2009 Isabel Fonseca's debut novel, *Attachment*, published.
- 2010 *The Pregnant Widow: Inside History* published. *Money* adapted for television by BBC Two. Amis named *GQ* writer of the year and also shares UK National Book Award for Outstanding Achievement with Terry Pratchett. Amis's mother, Lady Hilary Kilmarnock, dies aged eighty-one. In December, the Amises finalise the purchase of a brownstone in the Cobble Hill Historic District, Brooklyn, New York.
- 2011 Death of Christopher Hitchens by oesophageal cancer. Amis concludes his teaching stint at the University of Manchester, and the family relocates to Brooklyn.
- 2012 *Lionel Asbo: State of England* published.
- 2014 *The Zone of Interest* published. In January, Elizabeth Jane Howard dies.
- 2016 On New Year's Eve, the top floor of the Amises' Brooklyn brownstone burns, due to a deteriorated chimney. The home becomes uninhabitable during renovations.
- 2017 *The Rub of Time: Bellow, Nabokov, Hitchens, Travolta, Trump: Essays and Reportage, 1986–2016* published.
- 2018 Film adaptation of *London Fields*, featuring a screenplay partly written by Amis. Film adaptation of *Night Train*, as *Out of Blue*. The Amises sell their now-gutted Brooklyn home to actors Daniel Craig and Rachel Weisz.
- 2020 Amis's final novel, *Inside Story*, published.
- 2021 Philip Amis, Martin's older brother, dies in February.
- 2023 Death by oesophageal cancer, 19 May, in Lake Worth Beach, Florida, aged seventy-three. *The Zone of Interest*, a Jonathan Glaser film based on Amis's novel, premieres at the Cannes Film Festival on the same day. At the King's Birthday Honours, Amis is appointed a Knight Bachelor for his services

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to literature. Because honours cannot be posthumously conferred, his knighthood is backdated to 18 May, the day before his death.

- 2024 Memorial service at St Martin-in-the-Fields church in Trafalgar Square, London, 10 June. On 12 June, Lady Amis, Isabel Fonseca, receives the official insignia of Knight Bachelor on her husband's behalf from the Princess Royal at Windsor Castle.