Martin Amis says new novel will get him 'in trouble with the feminists'

Author expects criticism of The Pregnant Widow, but insists it's "actually a very feminist book" that shows how his sister fell victim to the sexual revolution

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Martin Amis’s new novel The Pregnant Widow will explore his belief that the apparent freedom of the sexual revolution actually placed huge pressure on women, with his late sister Sally one of its victims. The author has written his sister – who died in 2000 after periods of depression and alcoholism – into the forthcoming book’s storyline, and has attributed many of her problems to the sexual revolution of the 60s and 70s.

"She was pathologically promiscuous. She really had the mental age of someone who was 12 or 13 and I think she was terrified. I think what she was doing was seeking protection from men, but it went the other way, she was often beaten up, abused and she simply used herself up," Amis is reported by the Evening Standard to have told a London festival audience earlier this week.

"She died at the age of 46, not of anything sudden; she was one of the most spectacular victims of the revolution. It would have needed the Taliban to protect her."

The Pregnant Widow will also include "a minor Islamic theme", he told the Epsom Guardian, which "has to do with how Muslims and Christians seemed to be getting on reasonably well and we had no idea that this millennium old hatred would burst forward on [September 11]."

Amis has previously come under fire over Islam, with Terry Eagleton accusing him of views appropriate to a "British National Party thug" following Amis’s comments to a newspaper that "there’s a definite urge – don’t you have it? – to say the Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order".
He has been accused of misogyny in the past, but told the Richmond Book Now festival audience he was a feminist himself. "Women can't rise far enough to suit me," he said. "I'm a gynocrat – I'd like rule by women."

The Pregnant Widow, described by its publisher as a tragicomedy, follows the lives of six young people spending a long, hot summer holiday in an Italian castle during the sexual revolution and the "sea change" of 1970.

Amis said he had been told it would get him "in trouble with the feminists", but he insisted that it was actually "a very feminist book" and that "they haven't got a case".

The title of the novel, which will be published in February 2010, is taken from the Russian intellectual Alexander Herzen, who said that after a revolution we are left with "not an heir but a pregnant widow".

"In other words, revolution isn't a flip," said Amis. "It's a churning process that goes on for a long time before the baby is born. It's not the instant replacement of one order by another."