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Anyone familiar with Amis' fiction can puzzle out the reason for this undue emphasis on Lucy, and for the artificiality of the passages about her. Amis the novelist has always had a favorite trope. His novels invariably contain working-class monsters who prey, drooling and slaving in (usually) Cockney accents, upon the innocent or naive middle classes. Amis is at his funniest and most coruscating when he makes us giggle at the dialogue, the phonetics and even the violence of these characters. Amis fills a chip off the old block in treating anyone who speaks in accents other than BBC English (working-class Brits, country yokels, Americans) as "unbelievable," training on them the same kind of entertained astonishment with which one might regard a chimpanzee dressed in a fez and embroidered waistcoat. He never finds a similar humor in the clipped vowels and paralyzed rhythms of British middle-class speech, and darkness always seethes, vaporous and malign, from the uneducated side of the track.

"I am a novelist," Amis heralds at the outset of the memoir, "trained to use experience for other ends. Why should I tell the story of my life?" He pushes this further, promising "to speak, for once, without artifice." Yet it is in turning Lucy's story into a bit of artifice that the memoir gets stuck. Lucy is emblematic. Lucy becomes an instrument in his favorite device. The horror and the grief suffered over her fate are dissolved and reconfigured to serve the purposes of the trained novelist.

Amis tirelessly repeats that the name Lucy means "light," that Lucy wrote poetry and studied medieval literature. An unbending ray of light, he tells us, Lucy walked into darkness, the darkness he has so often located in the predatory hearts of the working class. He juxtaposes an articulate juvenile poem of Lucy's against a comically misspelled and Neolithic missive that the hideous West scratched out in his prison cell. When Amis learned about Lucy, he must have seen -- in horrible and giant relief -- confirmation of his view of the social order. His old class horror had been written in blood and light.

Amis genuinely weeps for Lucy, there's no doubt. But he

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does so only because while she's close enough to count, she's distant enough for safety. He numbers her among his "missing," which include his father and his long-absent daughter. At the same time he betrays no emotion at witnessing his parents' separation, or over his own divorce; and while he squeezes out a tear when it comes to his separation from his sons after that divorce, his emotional tepidness over his "lost daughter" is -- considering how much he makes of his attachment to the distant Lucy -- the oddest omission of all.

For any man, meeting his grown daughter for the first time at 46 must be a scorching experience. But while Amis engages in a dignified lamentation and the construction (to say invention would be unfair) of an intense emotional response to the ultimately unknown details of Lucy's last days, he tells us little of his feelings about the daughter with whom he is reconciled. We're offered only the cold facts of the date and place of reunion. And yet Amis insists that his daughter's absence has unconsciously haunted his every novel.

I don't believe Amis ever considered that the notoriety of the Fred West case would help move copies of "Experience." Amis is probably above all that. But in writing the book, he let the novelist take over when the memoirist should have been in charge. The underclass monster, West, and his innocent victim, Lucy, were too much like characters he could have invented himself.

Sure, "Experience" shows an evolution in Amis' work, and a great tenderness in the portrait of Kingsley, even from a distance, as well as hurt and betrayal over his rift with writer [Julian Barnes](#). But where "Experience" doesn't deliver on its autobiographical promise is in its avoidance of the lesser horrors and humor of everyday defeats: the divorces, the responsibilities to your kids, the unspectacular and unsensational events.

Perhaps Martin Amis stands accused of doing no more than what all novelists do, and if "Experience" were a novel then there would be no significant charge to answer. Meanwhile, poor Lucy's fate rightly belongs to another family's experience, and in someone else's memoir.

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salon.com | June 29, 2000

About the writer