This essay examines Martin Amis’s use of the authorial figure, from his debut novel, *The Rachel Papers*, to his most recent work of fiction, *The Information*. The twin subjects of analysis are Amis’s thematic interest in the subject of authorship, and his playful foregrounding of the authorial role on the level of novelistic technique. While Amis’s postmodern play with the ontological levels of the text poses questions regarding the relationship between the author, the work and the audience, his comments on the commercialization of the literary milieu, the interface of literature and criticism, or the dialogue between high and low culture provide a vivid, and at times hilarious, commentary on the condition of the author in the contemporary world.

Martin Amis belongs to the generation that introduced the postmodernist novel into the literature of Great Britain. In contrast to the unalloyed mimesis of most modernist and postwar British fiction, the works of Amis and his contemporaries tend to break the novelistic illusion of reality by drawing attention to their own status as textual artifacts. Brian McHale’s influential study characterized postmodernist fiction as primarily interested in matters of ontology, posing such questions as: “What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?” ¹ Martin Amis’s narratives explore exactly this order of questions. His penchant for postmodern experimentation does not, however, mean that Amis is not interested in the more traditional effects of fiction. In fact, his ability to combine a postmodern awareness of the problems and limitations of textual representation with an attempt at representing contemporary urban reality has been noted by a number of critics. Peter Stokes saw Amis as “the nearest postmodern fiction has come to offering something other than a mere critique of the mediating effects

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of language and the consequences of such language for contemporary notions about subject construction.”

2 Amy J. Elias has argued convincingly that Amis’s work belongs to British Postmodern Realism, which, in spite of its experimental character, retains the traditional realist ambition of recording the real. In a similar vein, Catherine Bernard postulated that if the works of Martin Amis “question and foreground the way we make sense of the world,” they also “reaffirm the necessity for fiction to shoulder reality.” Amis’s dual investment in ontological experiment and novelistic representation is evident in his fictional analyses of authorship. While foregrounding the complexities of the authorial role through a number of favorite postmodern literary techniques, Amis’s novels present, with much realism and humor, the personal and institutional dilemmas faced by authors in the late twentieth century.

One of Amis’s favorite devices is the use of an intrusive narrator, the “dramatized spokesman for the implied author” popular in 17th, 18th and much of 19th century fiction. This device, dismissed by Henry James as “a horrible crime,” has been enthusiastically re-introduced in the postmodern novel. In Amis’s work, intrusive narrators may stand outside the narrated story, as in Dead Babies, or enter it in person, as in The Rachel Papers, Other People, London Fields, and, in a minimal degree, The Information. The narrators’ direct addresses to the readers are frequently metafictional, offering insights into the process of narration rather than into the story narrated. This results in a heightened awareness of the fiction’s special ontological status. A similar effect is achieved by Amis’s use of narrative involution, whereby the fictional world is entered by its author, or, rather, by an author-character, in this case called Martin Amis, or bearing the initials M.A. Thus, as Edmondson put it, the writer becomes a “character within the larger narrative line and therefore not omniscient, but rather a discursively constructed character himself.” Both involution and intrusive narration foreground and complicate the role of the author on the level of metafictional play. On the level of representation, Amis

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