

Light Thoughts on Kingsley Amis

by [Samuel Hux](#) (May 2019)



Kingsley Amis, Jonathan Burton (for Penguin), 2011

Years ago I introduced my colleague Alan Cooper, author of *Philip Roth and the Jews*, as he was about to lecture on Roth's *The Plot Against America*. As near as I can recall, this is what I said:

When I was growing up in a small city in North Carolina, I used to work after school during the December holiday season for a Jewish haberdasher named Maurice Brody. Mr. Brody, whom I adored, bore that name (I never knew his original name) because he was born in the Polish shtetl Brody. So you can maybe imagine my surprise and delight when I discovered (coincidence one) that my new friend Alan Cooper (born "Kupferman") drew first breath in the same shtetl as my old friend Maurice. Somehow that intensified my pleasure when I began to learn Alan's story. Alan was not yet in his teens when the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, but he matured quickly in terrible circumstances, and by 1944 was a child combatant in a Jewish underground military unit, which facilitated his survival of the war—unfortunately, a common story, as an orphan. Fearful of being swallowed up in the Russian surge he made his way across the German border—ironic escape route for a Jewish lad—where he found himself in a displaced person's camp, which was his salvation (I use the word ironically) since he was adopted by an American official in the occupation of Germany, a Catholic gentleman (coincidence two) named Cooper, the English equivalent of the Yiddish Kipferman. Eventually, as an adult, Alan found his way back to his lost Jewish faith, but only after an unlikely sequence of transformations. In America he studied for the priesthood and would have been ordained in the New York diocese had he not been denied

the cloth because it was discovered he had sexually compromised one of the functionaries at the seminary, a nun . . .

And on my introduction went until I ran out of nonsense, the only truth being the allusions to my old friend Maurice Brody. I was having a hell of a good time creating an alternative biography for my friend Alan who was about to lecture on Roth's alternative "history" in which Charles Lindbergh, not Franklin Delano Roosevelt, won the 1940 presidential election. (I had gotten in the habit of the alternative bio after speaking at the retirement party of a lovely departmental chair when I "recalled" that she had failed in a league-of-her-own because she could not hit a curveball and before entering academe had been an exotic dancer in a bar in Bayonne, New Jersey. Great fun.)

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