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Spori Literary Review: *The Immortals*

In Martin Amis's "The Immortals," the reader is introduced to the main character who believes himself to be immortal. Believing him to be a reliable narrator, the reader is none the wiser and does not think to question this declaration until the end of the story. Here the reader is given new information—that the narrator has been living among humans who have gone insane and believe themselves to be immortal. Under ordinary circumstances, this information would do little to dissuade the reader from his or her previous assumptions. However, the narrator takes the time to tell the reader that he too has had delusions. He explains that there are times when he pictures himself to be one of the regular mortals. In this hallucination he remembers a past where he was a schoolmaster. This past is also centered on a woman and a child. The narrator emphasizes the point of "one woman and one child." This phraseology holds significant weight when contrasted with his past as "The Immortal."

In Andrew Maunder's book "The Facts on File companion to the British short story," he addresses the narrator's predisposition to disregard any and all seriousness of past events and treat history with the humor of a stand-up comedian. According to Maunder, the character tells "bad jokes" that disappear when reverting back to the present day and the aftermath of a nuclear war (Maunder 198). This is especially true when contemplating the narrator's regard for the characters in his stories. When telling of the past, the narrator speaks of a fondness and longing for human companionship. However, this longing is not present when he relates his stories of specific people.

It would seem that over time the narrator began to see people on the same level as he viewed all other animal life. "I thought they were different," he says, "but they weren't. They all got old and died, like my pets." Within these references to early human life, the narrator mentions that he has had relations with their females. There is nothing personal about this comment. There are no mentions of names or the way they made him feel. The statement is cold and detached. This habit of distancing himself from his own story becomes a trend throughout the tale. Mentioning an elephant he bought and named Bablaya, he claims that she was the only woman he ever cared for. This was not for the lack of trying—seeing as how he claims to have been married three or four thousand times. He shrugs these off by stating that staying with a woman for twenty years is the immortal's equivalent to a one night stand. He mentions that he cared for his children but that they probably somewhere in the range of five figures. He claims that he loved them all and misses them dearly, but there is nothing personal in that statement. The narrator deals in the broad view of life naming no names—apart from the elephant—and giving no details.

The most specific the narrator ever gets is when he speaks of the dust people with whom he lives now. They are the last of the humans and as such the narrator feels inclined to remain with them until the end. He pities them, thinking that the human race has finally come full circle. They began as an unintelligent, fragile species and they will die as an unintelligent, fragile species. Though he shows compassion for those who have gone mad in the sunlight and are about to die, this perspective is little better than the dispassionate view he had on previous

generations. In my opinion, this leads to the conclusion that his immortal aspect is nothing but a story, a delusion. The mention of the woman and child from his “delusion” concretes this argument. That “one woman” and her child stood out to him so thoroughly that he refused to think of her. She held so much weight in his mind that a mere dismissal of her was not enough; he had to throw her away completely.

The analysis of the narrator’s relationships with people can only lead to the reader’s conclusion of the narrator’s mortality. It is only through examining the stories of his past that the reader can come to understand that the narrator is unreliable. He is one of the delusional humans that he looks down upon who only thinks himself immortal. He, with his grand tales of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, is no different from the hallucinating mortals who tell fabricated stories of Marie Antoinette or the Queen of Shebas.