

Letters

Martin Amis: a response

guardian.co.uk, Monday 22 February 2010 21.36 GMT Article history

Dear Anna Ford, Your surprise attack at least has the virtue of simplicity (Letters, 20 February). You argue that I should accept the sternest possible treatment from the press, because 1) I was and am a poor godfather to your daughter Claire, and 2) I paid a visit to your husband Mark Boxer's sickroom, with Christopher Hitchens (you say we were "filling in time" before going on to Heathrow), and we stayed too long, smoked cigarettes "over his bed", and then I trumped up a memoir where I lyingly claimed to have left the house in distress.

Your first point is well taken. Your second is an unworthy farrago.

It is true that I am a useless godfather, as Nina Raine and Antonia Hitchens can grimly confirm. And I now recognise a lost opportunity: unlike Nina and Antonia, Claire was abruptly fatherless. And when I met her as a young adult, on the occasion you describe, she expressively and warmly reminded me of Mark (and I told her so). I will be writing to her to offer my apologies and regrets.

As for point 2, you are conflating two separate visits (and I made several such, not only to your house but also to that Tudorbethan hospital in Maida Vale). The visit described in the memoir I wrote about Mark was my final visit. The next morning I was scheduled to fly out with my family for our usual holiday in the US - where, days later, I read Mark's obituary in the New York Times. (Perhaps this is how the "plane to catch" business comes in.) On that occasion I said my last words to him and he said his last words to me, and I remember very clearly what they were. Then I left, and managed to reach my car before I was overwhelmed. (And, for the record, I never smoked a cigarette in Mark's bedroom.)

So I hope you can delete these items, at least, from your overall roster of grievances. And I wonder how it serves Mark's memory, or warms his ghost, to suggest that his two devoted friends (I and Christopher) behaved with such implausible callousness. What sane person "fills in time" at a deathbed? We both loved him, and still mourn him Many did, and many do. He was a powerfully delightful man. As ever,

Martin Amis

London

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