



Christopher Hitchens joins the fray: writer backs Martin Amis in row with Anna Ford

Hitchens, the third man in the room, backs novelist's version of what happened at Mark Boxer's deathbed

Charlotte Higgins, chief arts writer
The Guardian, Wednesday 24 February 2010
Article history



Christopher Hitchens, the writer and commentator, who has backed Martin Amis in his dispute with Anna Ford. Photograph: Felix Clay

Now come the reinforcements. A third combatant has rolled up his sleeves and hurled himself into the epistolary brawl between novelist Martin Amis and former newscaster Anna Ford: writer Christopher Hitchens.

A close friend of Amis, Hitchens has written to the Guardian in support of the novelist, calling Ford's attack on him "spiteful and false" as well as "ungenerous and untrue".

Hitchens writes that he is "quite certain" that, contrary to Ford's charge, Amis did not smoke a cigarette over the deathbed of Ford's late husband, the editor Mark Boxer (though Hitchens himself may have had one).

He ends his letter with a flourish: "As for Ms Ford herself, at least she used to enjoy a slight reputation for throwing only wine" – a reference to the famous occasion on which Ford threw a glass of wine at former Conservative MP Jonathan Aitken in anger at his part in her sacking from TV-am.

Hostilities ensued on Saturday when an open letter from Ford to Amis was published in the Guardian, in which she suggested that his "narcissism and inability to empathise" were at the root of his problems with the press.

She adduced two stories in evidence – one was that Amis had been a lousy godfather to her child, a charge he accepted in his retaliatory letter to the paper. The second concerned the visit to Boxer's deathbed in 1988. As well as claiming that Amis smoked, Ford wrote that he and Hitchens exhausted the sick man with an overlong visit that was "filling in

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time" before Amis caught a flight; and that Amis showed no sign of tears for his old friend, though he would later document his lachrymosity in a memoir.

Amis rejected the latter charges as an "unworthy farrago".

Hitchens – the witness to the sickbed scene Ford describes – is backing the novelist to the hilt, saying that he regards the charge of outstaying their welcome as "mean innuendo". These are not only errors, writes Hitchens – but "lazy and suggestive" ones.

Hitchens also appeals to the memory of Boxer, as did Amis. "I don't care to think of what her late husband would have made of this astonishingly late but still nasty slandering of one of his most cherished and devoted friends," he writes.

Casting Amis as the victim of the piece, he adds: "Apparently where Martin is concerned it is now felt that anything goes."

Ms Ford: the floor is yours.

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MockingbirdGirl
24 February 2010 3:30AM

Hard to believe grown adults can behave so childish. Frankly, *none* of them comes off well.

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csrster
24 February 2010 7:46AM

I think Amis comes out of this rather well. At least he chose to reach for his pen rather than his lawyer.

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JohnBarnesOnToast
24 February 2010 9:30AM

The only thing that strikes me about this story is the utter arrogance of all involved: to think that it's in the public interest to conduct their common petty bickering openly.

Prior to this nonsense I had been, at worst, indifferent to all parties involved in this, but none of them come out of it well.

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JenHarvey
24 February 2010 9:40AM

Self-indulgent. Arrogant. Pompous. Self-important. Honestly, is their world and their outlook this small?

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chiaroscuro
24 February 2010 9:43AM

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why is this even being written about in a national newspaper.



HumOfEvil
24 February 2010 10:05AM

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I have no real problem with what is being said between these people, but have to echo other peoples thoughts: Why are they being aired so publicly?

If you are angry at a former friend could you not just send them a private letter or make a phone call?

Should we all start using the guardian to air our private grievances?

Do any of them have anything to sell/promote at the moment?



shiv
24 February 2010 10:26AM

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I'm a bit peeved that one of my friends hasn't returned my emails promptly? Can I have a column in the Anagram to hold forth on how much I've been wronged?

Mnd you, I do think that Anna Ford probably liked her husband rather more than Amis or Hitchens did.



artmakesmehappy
24 February 2010 10:37AM

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I can't believe this is in the newspaper and I can't believe the egos involved. This is a private matter between them.



HudsonP
24 February 2010 10:48AM

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OK, come on, bored now. Surely there's something happening in the real world?



Brynus
24 February 2010 11:13AM

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Let them go twitter.



HudsonP
24 February 2010 11:28AM

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Amis: Guardian blog commentator "I don't care"

Guardian blog commentator HudsonP left a comment on the books blog today, expressing a complete lack of interest in the continuing spat between novelist Martin Amis and former newsreader Anna Ford.

"I've never read any of Amis's novels," said HudsonP, "And was too young to ever see Anna Ford on the telly. It all just passed me by. I don't really care about the current kerfuffle. Can I have a drink now?"

The sixtyish former enfant terrible of the UK literary establishment who is often photographed smoking controversially has roused passions among a very small group of former acquaintances by writing a novel and going on to give interviews about it. HudsonP is one of many who has expressed mild irritation at how it keeps coming up as if it's the most important thing ever. "I mean it's not the end of the world, is it?" said HudsonP.

Sources close to Amis suggest he neither knows nor cares about HudsonP's comments, but is willing to write a letter to the Guardian decrying them if it'll keep the story rolling a while longer. "You should totally buy a copy of my new novel. I mean Martin's new novel," said the confidential source.



HumOfEvil
24 February 2010 11:33AM

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HudsonP

Nice work. Made me chuckle.



Sweeting
24 February 2010 11:57AM

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Casting Amis as the victim of the piece, Hitchens added: "Apparently

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where Martin is concerned it is now felt that anything goes."

I do see that MA's relentlessly provocative brand of PR gets up people's noses, but I find him very funny, even at his most defensive.

"All Tibor Fischer did, fat-arsed Tibor, was establish that you could say absolutely anything you liked about this book [*Yellow Dog*]. It wasn't just reviewed. Anyone who could hold a pen was having a go."



OffClowns

24 February 2010 12:09PM

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Ms Ford: the floor is yours.

For shame...

Middle of last week the Guardian's literary editor tweeted:

Got an "open letter" attacking one of our contributors on v personal grounds. Big debate as to whether to run it. Probably won't
5:02 AM Feb 15th via web

Whoever won that debate was wrong.



kkkkkkk

24 February 2010 12:13PM

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This latest Mart & Hitch Show isn't just 'bad' as in 'not very good'. It's 'bad' as in 'catching your two favorite uncles with their pants down, w*inking each other off in the Lit-Goss pages of the Grud.'

At least Jordan's got nice big jubbles to distract you from *her* wince-inducing prose.



Sweeting

24 February 2010 12:53PM

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@kkkkkkk: I see what you did there. So now, not just anyone holding a pen, but anyone who can *type* is having a go.



PatrickMc

24 February 2010 12:54PM

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What is this bollocks? How is this at all of interest to anyone at all let alone a newspaper? This occupied the whole of yesterdays page three and you have to ask 'why'. I have been reading the Guardian for over 30 years and now wonder 'why'. The decision to print this ridiculous exchange only help confirm the stereotypical image of the Guardian and Guadian reader as far to up themselves to see any daylight. Today's page three relates the story of the divorce of a 'singer' and her footballer husband. I can't be the only one thinking I need to find another paper.



WillDuff

24 February 2010 12:56PM

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HudsonP:

"I've never read any of Amis's novels," said HudsonP, "And was too young to ever see Anna Ford on the telly. It all just passed me by. I don't really care about the current kerfuffle. Can I have a drink now?"

Do you mean that the Guardian is only allowed to have items on subjects which interest you?



HudsonP

24 February 2010 12:59PM

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@WillDuff - that was exactly what I was getting at, yes.



DocDiv

24 February 2010 1:10PM

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What's the big deal about smoking over someone's deathbed? They're gonna die anyway.



keithgurning

24 February 2010 2:13PM

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Oh my word that's a *dream* of a volley of abuse from Ford there...but Amis reads it

beautifully and produces a deftly constructed lob that the advancing Ford can only cast an envious glance at as it passes way above her head to land just the right side of the line and win the point.

(and I hear he playing with Hitchens in the doubles....)



keithgurning
24 February 2010 2:16PM

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Oh my word that's a *dream* of a volley of abuse from Ford there...but Amis reads it beautifully and produces a deftly constructed lob that the advancing Ford can only cast an envious glance at as it passes way above her head to land just the right side of the line and win the point.

(and I hear he playing with Hitchens in the doubles....)



diabach
24 February 2010 4:06PM

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Doesn't Hitchens have a point of view on everything! Anything to get his name in the media will do him fine



DurkheimwasRight
24 February 2010 4:58PM

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Charlotte Higgins: do some proper work and leave this nonsense alone. Suggestions for you:

1. An article on the late Roberto Bolano and whether he is any good.
2. Something on Roberto Calasso's latest book.
3. a piece on what has happened to radio 3.

In fact anything, anything, but this



kkkkkkk
24 February 2010 7:06PM

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

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@Sweeting: "@kkkkkkk: I see what you did there. So now, not just anyone holding a pen, but anyone who can type is having a go."

Oh spare me the proprietorial tut-tuts, Sweetie-pie. (Seriously, mate - Mart's not gunna ring some online Numpty up out of the blue for a fraternal blokey pint in gratitude, so you might as well stop defending the Great Man's honour online for free.) Little Mart is rich, famous, wildly talented, good-looking, connected, tricked out with a fine set of retirement domestic accoutrements and boasting a shagging back catalogue that stacks up pretty well against Jagger. He's married to an heiress and is currently pulling in big wodge for sitting around on his spotty backside talking about literature, writing and himself with clever energetic doe-eyed undergrads who'd no doubt blow him in a trice at no more than a nod, boy and girl alike.

Even on a sh*t day at the office he's still ten streets ahead of any other prose writer around and neither his eventual literary legacy nor his latest, Preggers, needs all this avoidable crap as publicity outrigger. He's quite happy to take snide potshots at Katie Price for being a media-si*t and reportedly his next book will draw a bead - doubtless with the usual impeccable wit and verve - at Contemptry Meeja Kulcha & Ve Sh*te State Of Ingerland. To which with this shabby little public contretemps he has of course just added a few shabs. He should know better, and he does know better. The way to stop the literary media writing stories about things other than your work is to shut the f**k up about things other than your work. Mart's never done that, which is good, because I like to hear what he's got to say about things other than his work. It's usually smarter than what everyone else is saying. But it's no use complaining about the results. Amis shifts Lit Page units. Lucky him. Lucky, lucky him. Ford was dead right to call b/s on the sooky nonsense in that original whine-piece.

And I'm still waiting to see Mart's t**ts too, Sweetie. Just by the way. So come on the Martster: get 'em oot for the lads, there's a good meeja slag. Get em oot for Ingerland...



OffClowns
25 February 2010 8:58AM

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On Wednesday the Guardian says:

Ms Ford: the floor is yours.

On Thursday the Guardian says:

Just when you thought you had heard the last of the epistolary fisticuffs between Anna Ford and her late husband's friends Martin Amis and Christopher Hitchens...



Cassecou
25 February 2010 9:59AM

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25 February 2010 3:33AM

I rather sympathise with Anna Ford. I remember a group of very clever and brainy young men one of whom compared themselves to top baboons. There is something of that about Mart, Hitch & co - God is not great, but we are. Can't help feeling that old Reggie would have been much nicer over this kind of episode. Would have kept schtum at the very least. Or written her a silly poem.

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wordswort

25 February 2010 2:44PM

He's Not Our Leading Literary Stylist ; He's Just A Horrid Boy

I doubt the Guardian would have published Anna Ford's solipsistic, self-righteous, petulant rant (Dear Martin, Guardian letters Feb 20) if she were just an ordinary nobody of a reader.

And now Feb 25) we have another nobody, an elderly film-maker who reports the breathtaking revelation that a 15 year old Martin refused to jump to his tune and make a prat of himself during a movie no one has ever seen.

wordswort

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lanmacs

26 February 2010 3:52PM

?

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