

Letters

It's open season on Martin Amis

The Guardian, Wednesday 24 February 2010
Article history

I did indeed accompany [Martin Amis](#) on one of the (several) bedside visits he made during Mark Boxer's last illness, and can be quite certain that he abstained from smoking ([Letters](#), 20 February). Conceivably it was I who was the offender, though even in 1988 that could not possibly have been without permission. The same goes for the mean innuendo that any welcome was overstayed (which is in itself incompatible with the hurtful allegation of a swift and heartless "drop-by"): there were persons attending who would have anticipated and cut short any such thing. These lazy but suggestive errors to one side, it is both ungenerous and untrue to doubt, let alone to deny, that the least lachrymose of my friends was more than once overcome with grief at Mark's early death. He told me that after his final call – which was just before he left for America and when Mark had whispered "goodbye" to him – he sat in his car unable to drive away for weeping. (His departure for Heathrow, if it matters, was on the following day.) We both shed further tears when our beloved Mark died not long afterwards.

In recalling this, I feel at least some of the offended propriety of violated discretion that Ms Ford has now managed so cheaply to throw aside. But apparently where Martin is concerned it is now felt that anything goes. To this already-debased cultural free-for-all, she has chosen to add the extra and encouraging thought that – however spiteful and however false – every little bit helps. 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. As for Ms Ford herself, at least she used to enjoy a slight reputation for throwing only wine.

Christopher Hitchens

Washington DC

•I spent a week with Martin Amis last summer in a writing workshop in Toronto. The five other participants and I were expecting to be bullied and humiliated by an arrogant racist bastard – some of us were even looking forward to it.

How disappointing it was to find a kind teacher who took the time to read our poorly written pieces and draw out flattering comparisons to Nabokov and Bellow. What a letdown to discuss the novel and a wide variety of other issues with an intellectually generous man who treated us all as his equals. How shocking to listen to someone articulate nuanced but clear views about the world and his own struggle to make sense of it. I was, I must say, deeply offended by the empathy he demonstrated in respect of a personal issue that had cropped up in my writing.

Elsewhere, Amis would be respected as a man of letters and his contrarian utterances given some consideration. But in England, the obsession with the circumstances of his birth fuels a petty desire to bring him down that leaves the rest of the world shaking its head sadly

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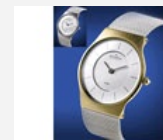
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