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Time for another Martin Amis Arrow

Anna Ford joins the long line of former friends and journalists who have publicly fallen out with the 'narcissistic and attention-seeking' novelist

By Susie Mesure

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He is renowned as a misogynist. Now a woman has turned the tables on the author Martin Amis. His latest adversary is Anna Ford, the former newsreader who has known him for more than three decades, who yesterday joined the novelist's ever-lengthening list of foes, branding him a narcissist lacking in empathy.

Ford, who champions women in the City from her seat on J Sainsbury's board of directors, attacked Amis's "need to court attention", which she claimed has stoked his reputation for controversy. She hit out at the author, who is godfather to one of her two daughters, for years of selfishness, notably at the bedside of her dying husband, the cartoonist Mark Boxer.

Ford said last night that her letter to a newspaper was written "out of exasperation" with the novelist's recent bout of self-justification. The letter charged Amis with "narcissism", an "inability to empathise" and an unwillingness to look "closely and honestly at himself" when it came to his relationships. Her stinging attack is among the most personal the author has received to date. It joins accusations of racism and sexism that have been levelled at him over the years.

One of Britain's best-known writers, Amis is rarely out of the headlines, not least when he has a book to promote. His latest, *The Pregnant Widow*, was published earlier this month. Articles claiming that Amis has called for "euthanasia booths on street corners" and stating that "women have too much power for their own good" have been among the acres of newsprint devoted to the writer during the past few weeks.

For his part, Amis used a newspaper column last week to hit back, arguing that the press has misrepresented him. Rather than being "controversial on purpose" and "stirring up the press" whenever he has a new book out, Amis blamed the media's own "chaotic perceptions" based at least once on "a mishmash of quotes".

But Ford, in her letter describes a visit Amis made to Boxer, when he was in hospital shortly before he died of a brain tumour in 1988, as one made to kill time before Amis caught a plane. Ford said she saw "no evidence" that Amis cried as he left, something the novelist later claimed.

She wrote: "Can I suggest that this level of narcissism and inability to empathise may be at the root of your anger with the press and your need to court attention?"

Ford also criticised Amis for paying no attention to his god-daughter, Claire. When studying English at university, Claire had asked her mother if she knew anything about Amis; Ford told her that he was her godfather. On the sole occasion that the two met, Ford accused Amis in her letter: "you paid scant attention to Claire (didn't even cough up the statutory five bob expected from godfathers!) and she hasn't heard from you since". Ford told the *IoS* last night that she had been "too busy bringing up two children on her own" to chase errant godfathers. "I left people to help if they wanted to."

Earlier this month, Amis provoked anger by claiming it will take women a century to become equal with men. He also said that women had "almost too many powers for the harmony of their own lives". He added: "They've got jobs, they do most of the children's stuff, and they now do most of the administration at home."

The other women in the author's feud-filled life

Katie Price

The novelist recently attacked the glamour model, saying: "She has no waist, no arse... an interesting face... but all we are really worshipping is two bags of silicone." He has written a character based on the ex-*Sun* girl into his next book, *State of England*.

AS Byatt



TERI PENGILLEY

'Women have almost too many powers for the harmony of their lives,' says Martin Amis

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A celebration of the Saatchis

The Booker prize winner, below, berated Amis for "male turkeycocking" after he dumped his agent in the quest for more money. Byatt said: "I don't see why I should subsidise his greed, simply because he has a divorce to pay for and has just had all his teeth redone."

Maggie Gee

Along with Helen McNeil, the writer stood between Amis and the Booker shortlist back in 1989. Gee persuaded the other judges to keep *London Fields*, one of the author's best works, off the shortlist because they were offended by the character Nicola Six, a vampish, sexually reckless young woman who organises her own murder.

Pat Kavanagh

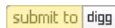
Despite being Amis's literary agent for 22 years, Kavanagh, right, was dumped in the quest for a bigger advance in the early 1990s. Adding to the angst, Kavanagh was married to Amis's long-term friend Julian Barnes. Not surprisingly, the pair fell out spectacularly.

Antonia Phillips

There's splitting up with your wife and then there's splitting up with your wife for her best friend. That was what Amis did when he walked out on his first wife, the American philosopher Phillips, for her best friend and fellow American, Isabel Fonseca, a writer and heiress.

Julie Kavanagh

Not content with falling out with one sister, Amis managed to fall out with Pat's half-sister after the pair became lovers. Once again, the relationship failed because Amis cheated on her with her best friend, Emma Soames.



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