



Comment

The absurd world of Martin Amis

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Look, I'm busy. I'm writing a script and I won't be disturbed. Except that because I'm writing about terrorism and Islam, I keep being distracted by Martin Amis. He prowls the thickets of my research like a demented flasher. Sometimes Christopher Hitchens pops up, too, and flashes along with his friend. They rail against Muslims. They're obviously daft. But people take them seriously.

No matter that they act like senile 12-year-olds on the Today programme website - smoking illegal fags to look tough and cool. No matter that Amis coins truly abominable terms like 'the age of horrorism' and when criticised tells people to 'fuck off'. Surely we all chuckle at the strenuous ennui of his salon drawl. Didn't he once accidentally sneer his face off? His 'insight' about Mohammed Atta involved pretending the hijacker was constipated for six months - brilliantly smuggling into our subconscious that idea that Atta was 'full of shit'. He abandoned his satire on terrorism in which a Muslim unleashes mass rape on America because 'faced with Islamism, even satire withers and dies', not because his idea was obviously rubbish.

Despite his manifest absurdity (he called the World Trade Centre attacks 'edificide' and the towers' destruction an 'apocalypse'), people take him seriously and if they do then we must.

Last week Amis was called a racist. I saw him speak at the ICA last month. Was his negativity about Islam technically racist? I don't know. What I can tell you is that Martin Amis is the new Abu Hamza.

To recap, Amis was called a racist because he said Muslims were backward, violent, homophobic, paranoid, boring, retarded and stupid. Hitchens said no, he's conducting a 'thought experiment'.

Now Amis should be allowed to wonder aloud about anything. He can suggest Muslims should 'experience painful discrimination until they get tough with their children' if he likes. Thought experiments are fine. But if he bundles his thoughts on Islam together and iterates them one after the other as he did when I saw him, he displays not unguarded musing but the forging of an incoherent creed of hate. It goes roughly like this: 9/11 was horrific, its driving ideology was totalitarian, the totalitarians were Muslims, all Muslims follow a book they believe to be the immutable word of God, I don't believe that, therefore all Muslims are idiots, and basically bastards. Idiot bastards moping around the Middle East in a paranoid funk just cos they lost their empire, and what a rubbish empire it was, too, by the way. Now, what is your balanced view of these primitive wife-beating idiotic bastards?

Like Hamza, Amis could only make his nonsense stand up with mock erudition, vitriol and decontextualised quotes from the Koran. To risk a familiar example, it won't do for Amis (or Hamza) to state flatly that the Koran exhorts Muslims to kill Jews without even asking whether this means all Jews or some particular group of Jews with whom the Muslims were fighting in the seventh century, or indeed, whether there are other verses that modify the message by deploring killing of any kind, or describing how 'people of the book [Christians and Jews] shall have nothing to fear or regret'.

I claim no great knowledge on this subject - level-three SATs perhaps - but Amis couldn't pass the test for morning playgroup. If my Shetland pony looks like a high-horse it's only because Amis is trotting round the paddock on a chihuahua.

So how does Amis manage to move from condemning the horrors of suicide bombings to pouring scorn on anyone who can believe in paradise - effectively all Muslims? He muddles his terms. Even Hitchens concedes Amis wrongly conflates Islamism with Islam. By fudging, Amis adds the weight of his reaction against terrorism to his contempt for Muslims in general. Take 'Islamism'. What does it actually mean?

For many it means 'political Islam'. Amis calls it a 'murderous ideology', equating it with terrorism. Now look at the following statement: 'The terrorist killings in New York, Madrid and London were wrong. They were indiscriminate, un-Islamic and based on ideas abstracted to the point of insanity.' I was firmly told this by an ex-Mujahideen who fought in Afghanistan 20 years ago. He was an Islamist. I strongly doubt he was murderous.

These concepts are more complex than Amis would have us believe. This lack of clarity allows him to group Muslims who stop teenagers shooting one another with a man who cheerfully saws the heads off Jews.

It's not easy. Even ex-Islamists seem confused. Ed Husain - whose Hizb ut-Tahrir memoir *The Islamist* made him the summer's top ram-raid sound-biter - condemns Islamism as 'totalitarian' but later allows for 'moderate Islamists'. What sort of braincrash is a 'moderate totalitarian'? I doubt it could even walk.

These distinctions matter because the way out of this mess (and it is a mess, fuelled by ignorance, stupidity, prejudice and weapons) is to clarify and discriminate rather than hurl abuse at anything that goes near a mosque.

I doubt many Muslims can be bothered with Amis. But he nurtures in his audience a corrosive prejudice against people they've never bothered to meet. It is culturally dim for us to form confident opinions about people based upon how they look and what we've heard they think. It is also against our interests. Nonsense abounds on the causes of terrorism but it is hard to argue that alienation doesn't channel potential foot soldiers towards radicalisation. As one solitary Muslim asked him at the ICA, 'Why such contempt for Muslims?' Amis must have known something was up because he dropped his drawl and called the man 'sir'. But he could hardly unspeak his views. And those views are certainly alienating.

With ignorance on his side, Amis can stare east through the salon window and convince us of a single advancing hoard. He's clever. He might put it brilliantly. He might call it a 'Meccalanche' or an 'Attaclysm'. But when he speaks, think 'Hamza'.

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Martin Amis, English satirist known for his virtuoso storytelling technique and his dark views of contemporary English society. His novels included *London Fields*, *Time's Arrow*, *Lionel Lincoln*, *State of England*, and *The Zone of Interest*. He also wrote numerous nonfiction works. Learn more about Amis's life and career. Encyclopaedia Britannica's editors oversee subject areas in which they have extensive knowledge, whether from years of experience gained by working on that content or via study for an advanced degree. See *Article History*. Martin Amis, (born August 25, 1949, Oxford, Oxfordshire, England), English satirist known for his virtuoso storytelling technique and his dark views of contemporary English society. Martin Amis, Brooklyn, NY. 22,909 likes · 12 talking about this. *This site is maintained by the author's publisher Alfred A. Knopf/Vintage Books. Martin... There exists a subterranean world where pathological fantasies disguised as ideas are churned out by crooks and half-educated fanatics [not...ably the lower clergy] for the benefit of the ignorant and superstitious. There are times when this underworld emerges from the depths and suddenly fascinates, captures and dominates multitudes of usually sane and responsible people, who thereupon take leave of sanity and responsibility. And it occasionally happens that this underworld becomes a political power and changes the course of history. In a column entitled "The absurd world of Martin Amis" in a national newspaper, the satirist Chris Morris compared Amis to Abu Hamza and accused him of acting like a senile 12-year-old, telling people to "fuck off" when criticised. Ronan Bennett. The novelist Ronan Bennett decried what he saw as an example of the racism "symptomatic of a much wider and deeper hostility to Islam" after Amis seemed to advocate discrimination against Muslims. Morris, Chris, "The absurd world of Martin Amis", *The Guardian*, 25 novembre 2007, ed. online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/nov/25/bookscomment.religion> 14 crescita demografica delle aree a maggioranza musulmana senza porsi il problema delle vere cause del fenomeno, come la povertà o la condizione di discriminazione in cui vivono le donne. Yet the world so created aspire to pattern and shape and moral point. A novel is a rational undertaking; it is reason at play, perhaps, but it is still reason 11. 9. Bradley and Tate, op.cit., p.41 10. 359 quotes from Martin Amis: 'Love is an abstract noun, something nebulous. And yet love turns out to be the only part of us that is solid, as the world turns upside down and the screen goes black.', 'Style is not neutral; it gives moral directions.', and 'And meanwhile time goes about its immemorial work of making everyone look and feel like shit.' Love is an abstract noun, something nebulous. And yet love turns out to be the only part of us that is solid, as the world turns upside down and the screen goes black. • Martin Amis, *The Second Plane: 14 Responses to September 11*. tags: love. 1468 likes. Like. Style is not neutral; it gives moral directions. • Martin Amis. 668 likes. Like. And meanwhile time goes about its immemorial work of making everyone look and feel like shit.