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Hero or Villain?: Smug he may be. A pedant, certainly. But a snarling poodle of the BNP? Never!

By Neil Norman

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Martin Amis seems intent on treading in his father's footsteps. Like Kingsley, he began as an abrasive and uncompromising chronicler of his society before morphing into a literary agent provocateur, a stirrer-up of matters political and social – a mandarin of ruthless satire and barbed contempt for the political status quo. Most recently, he has emerged as a self-styled crusader against the tsunami of political correctness that has engulfed much of the western world.

Amis père was labelled a misogynist and a homophobe for his efforts. His son is currently being vilified as an Islamaphobe.

In an interview on **Channel Four News**, Amis declared: "I feel morally superior to Islamists, by some distance. I feel an intellectual distance to Islam."

He continued: "There are great problems with Islam. The Koran recommends the beating of women. The anti-Semites, the psychotic misogynists and the homophobes are the Islamists."

Well, don't beat about the bush, Martin. Tell us what you really think.

In truth, Amis has rarely been a bush-beater. He is a man prepared to say the unsayable; to reveal the truth of his own perceptions about the world in general and the effect of Islamic fundamentalism on western democratic countries in particular.

Taken out of context, his remarks may appear to be the stuff of generalised radical hyperbole, a more articulate version of the rant one might expect from an Essex cab driver.

Professor Terry Eagleton, his colleague at Manchester University, would think so, having called Amis "a British National Party thug".

Yet to refer to Amis as a fascist is lazy and intellectually invalid. It is the cheap and easy riposte of the motorist when a parking attendant has just ticketed his car. Amis's pronouncements are a result of considered thought. While some may defend his stance as simply playing devil's advocate – the devil in this case being George Bush – this would be to deny Amis's convictions.

Amis has ever been the enemy of intellectual – and political – flimsiness. The trilogy of Eighties novels depicting Thatcherite Britain bear this out, as does his tremendously powerful work about the Holocaust, **Time's Arrow**.

Of all his contemporaries, Amis has most consistently addressed the society in which he exists and the historical trajectory of events and ideologies that have led to it. In pursuit of his goal he has increasingly exposed his own persona and is less likely to hide behind the fictive guises of a Charles Highway or a John Self.

However wayward Amis's remarks may seem, however smugly he defends himself against attacks from Muslim columnists, his indignation at the marshmallow acquiescence of the liberal Left in the face of ideological murder is palpable.

He is prepared to carry a torch in the fog of fear that has enveloped much of western society – a conflicting fear of being overwhelmed by Islam on the one hand and, on the other, of speaking out in the event of being labelled Islamophobic.

The fact that he is prepared to question the received notions of tolerance, conciliation, and what Christopher Hitchens calls "one-way multiculturalism" is courageous. His remarks, as Salman Rushdie can attest, expose him not only to censure but also potential assassination.

With an irony that would be worthy of an Amis novel, the latter would be the surest way of proving his point.

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