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Eagleton stirs up the campus with attack on 'racist' Amis and son

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If Martin Amis, who has just taken up a teaching post at the University of Manchester, should happen to bump into the Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton on campus, it could be an uncomfortable meeting.

In the new introduction to the 2007 edition of his classic book, *Ideology: An Introduction*, Eagleton launches an impassioned attack on the views of "Amis and his ilk" who argue that the West needs to clamp down on Islam.

Eagleton also attacks Amis's father Kingsley as "a racist, anti-Semitic boor, a drink-sodden, self-hating reviler of women, gays and liberals". He adds that he believes that "Amis fils has clearly learnt more from him than how to turn a shapely phrase".

The spur for Eagleton's criticism is Amis's assertion that, as the Islamic population swells, "the Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order". On 10 September 2006, the day before the fifth anniversary of the bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York, Amis published a controversial essay entitled "The Age of Horrorism", in which he argued that fundamentalists had won the battle between Islam and Islamism.

Amis has suggested "strip-searching people who look like they're from the Middle East or from Pakistan", preventing Muslims from travelling, and further down the road, deportation. "Not the ramblings of a British National Party thug," writes Eagleton, "but the reflections of Martin Amis, leading luminary of the English metropolitan literary world."

He adds that 16 years ago when *Ideology* was first published, Amis would have recognised "the folly and ignorance of believing that authoritarianism and injustice can secure the defence of liberty". The reason for Amis's change of heart, he believes, was the "so-called War Against Terror". "It is this which has inspired a cluster of liberals and leftists in his circle ... to defend Western freedom by actively undermining it."

Instead of pitting two sets of values against one another – Westernism and Islam – Eagleton argues that the "fundamental material critique" which he has pioneered throughout his career was more relevant than ever.

Eagleton has been professor of cultural theory at Manchester University since 2001. Born in Salford in 1943, a third-generation Irish immigrant, into a Roman Catholic family, he was educated at a grammar school run by the De La Salle brotherhood, before attending Trinity College, Cambridge.

He remained a Catholic until 1970, when his religion was replaced by Marxism. He began his academic career as a Victorianist and taught for many years at Oxford University, becoming one of the pre-eminent literary theorists of the age, writing critiques of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Samuel Richardson and the Brontës among others. He has more recently become interested in comparative literature as well as the culture of Ireland. He lives in Dublin with his second wife and their son. *Ideology* was first published by Verso in 1991.

Amis, the author of *The Rachel Papers*, *Money* and *London Fields*, whose next novel, *The Pregnant Widow*, has an Islamic theme, last month took up the post as professor of creative writing at Manchester. Applications for the master of arts course which he is teaching were boosted from 100 to 150 by the news of his arrival. He is teaching two subjects – the novella and the works of Vladimir Nabokov

and Saul Bellow, two of his favourite authors.

When his appointment was announced, Amis gave an insight into what he would be teaching students. "If all this does turn out to have a theme, it'll be, 'Don't go with the crowd, don't do anything for the crowd, don't be of the crowd or with the crowd,'" he said.

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