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## Rebuking obnoxious views is not just a personality kink

I took Martin Amis to task for advocating the hounding of Muslims, but this has been reduced to an academic spat

**Terry Eagleton**  
 Wednesday October 10, 2007  
 The Guardian

In an essay entitled *The Age of Horrorism* published in September 2006, the novelist Martin Amis advocated a deliberate programme of harassing the Muslim community in Britain. "The Muslim community," he wrote, "will have to suffer until it gets its house in order. What sort of suffering? Not letting them travel. Deportation - further down the road. Curtailing of freedoms. Strip-searching people who look like they're from the Middle East or from Pakistan ... Discriminatory stuff, until it hurts the whole community and they start getting tough with their children..."

Amis was not recommending these tactics for criminals or suspects only. He was proposing them as punitive measures against all Muslims, guilty or innocent. The idea was that by hounding and humiliating them as a whole, they would return home and teach their children to be obedient to the White Man's law. There seems something mildly defective about this logic.

In fact, I wrote so in a new introduction to my book *Ideology: An Introduction*, little suspecting that a volume that investigates Lukacs and Adorno would be seized upon by the Daily Express. The press last week resounded with the Amis-Eagleton row. But why? Because there were vital political issues at stake here? Not in the least. What caught the media's eye was the fact that Amis and I are members of the same school of arts at Manchester University. It was the prospect of a senior common room punch-up (not that we have anything as posh as a senior common room at Manchester) that set even the broadsheet press slavering. The question of whether or not to insult a whole sector of the population was instantly reduced to a departmental spat (not that we have anything as dangerously autonomous as departments at Manchester).

Even Professor John Sutherland, who ought to know better, engaged in this trivial pursuit in his Guardian blog. Was this, he implied, a deliberately timed broadside by a crusty old Marxist to coincide with Amis's arrival at Manchester as a professor of creative writing? No doubt some will insist this is the unsavoury truth, just as there are those who refuse to believe that Henri Paul was drunk in charge of a princess. In fact, I had no idea when I wrote the piece that Amis was about to become my colleague, and it makes no difference either way. The views he expressed are vile, and saying so was my only point.

Sutherland is concerned that I may have got Amis into hot water. After my intemperate diatribe, will Muslims and other minorities really want to attend his Manchester classes? Or have I let him in (with malicious forethought, perhaps) for a torrent of politically correct abuse? Astonishingly, Sutherland seems not to consider that Amis may have let himself in for such critical debate by writing what he did. The real crime in the professor's view is to have drawn attention to Amis's words. Perhaps it would have been healthier for liberal democracy to have hushed the thing up, so that insensate student radicals do not swarm into Amis's classes on Nabokov and string him up by his thumbs.

Sutherland even gently insinuates that one might be censured for such uncollegial conduct. Perhaps forcible political disagreements with colleagues should land you on the dean's carpet, like playground brawlers before the beak. Would this include feminists objecting to sexist comments? Or is it alright if they do so sotto voce

I had imagined that liberals such as Sutherland were all for a free market in ideas. So they are; it's just outright conflict that they find distasteful. There is scarcely a word in Sutherland's piece about the obnoxiousness of Amis's views. The same was true of the press reaction as a whole. A Sunday Times profile of me attributed my wrath to a visceral, punk-like obsession with clobbering others. Rebuking influential writers who propose the strip-searching of innocent Muslims is just a kind of personality kink.

If they cannot find a flaw in your reasoning, the great radical William Hazlitt wrote, they will certainly find one in your reputation. In his usual intellectually slovenly style, Rod Liddle accuses Marxists such as myself of supporting "Islamism", despite the fact that blowing the heads off little children in the name of Allah was not exactly what Marx had in mind. Amis's panic-stricken reaction to 9/11 is part of a wider hysteria that has swept over sections of the liberal left, one to which creative writers seem particularly prone.

Suicide bombers must be stopped forcibly in their tracks to protect the innocent. But there is something rather stomach-churning at the sight of those such as Amis and his political allies, champions of a civilisation that for centuries has wreaked untold carnage throughout the world, shrieking for illegal measures when they find themselves for the first time on the sticky end of the same treatment.

Is there a media conspiracy against me? You bet there is. The Sunday Times asked the Manchester University press office for a mugshot of me for its profile, and we graciously obliged. The paper then used the photo to

for litigation, I don't know what is.

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• This article was amended on Thursday October 11 2007. Martin Amis's essay The Age of Horrorism was not published last month, but in September last year. The mistake was ours rather than Terry Eagleton's. It has now been corrected.