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Amis returns fire in Islam row

Richard Lea
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The novelist Martin Amis has defended himself vigorously against accusations of Islamophobia, claiming that Terry Eagleton's attack is full of "venom and sloth", and suggesting that his colleague at Manchester university should "shut up about it".



Not 'advocating anything' ... Martin Amis

In letters to both the Guardian and the Independent published today he has accused Eagleton of a "distortion" of his views, suggesting the professor of English literature at Manchester University displays an "almost neurotic indifference to truth" and claiming his attack is based on "untruths".

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The row began when Eagleton wrote in an introduction to a revised edition of his primer *Ideology: An Introduction* that

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Amis had espoused views appropriate to a "British National Party thug".

Eagleton expanded his attack with a piece in the Guardian that wrongly attributed a series of remarks made by Amis to an essay published by the Observer in September 2006. Eagleton suggested Amis had written: "The Muslim community 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 rejects the claim that he has ever espoused these views, saying that the remarks were made in a newspaper interview and preceded with the following: "What can we do to raise the price of them doing this? There's a definite urge - don't you have it? - to say ... [etc, etc]."

The remarks were not "advocating anything" he continued, they were a thought experiment, merely "conversationally describing an urge - an urge that soon wore off".

The novelist went on to "declare that 'harassing the Muslim community in Britain' would be neither moral nor efficacious", but made no apology for making remarks describing an "urge" that the Muslim community should "suffer", nor any attempt to respond to wider concerns over his views concerning Islamism.

Amis also suggested today that Eagleton's attack is part of a pattern after the professor "did a similar job" on Amis's friend Salman Rushdie earlier this year. This was a reference to an article in which Eagleton suggested that Rushdie's knighthood was a "reward" for moving from being a "remorseless satirist of the west to cheering on its criminal adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan" - an article which led to Eagleton expressing "sincere apologies" for "falsely claiming that [Rushdie] supports the war on Iraq". Rushdie recently accused the Dutch government of "broken promises" in their treatment of the former member of the Dutch parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali, currently in hiding in the US.

Neither Martin Amis nor Terry Eagleton were available for comment this morning.

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