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Martin Amis: Fiction, Form and the Postmodern

by

John A. Dern

**Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee
of Lehigh University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**in
The Department of English**

Lehigh University

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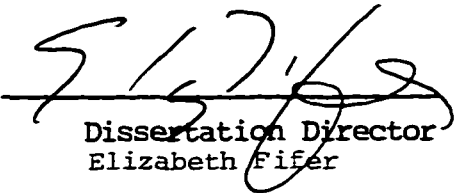
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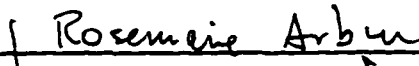

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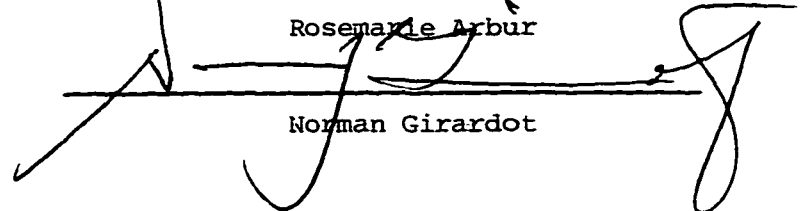
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To My Father

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Abstract

Postmodernism implies fragmentation, distortion of form and a utilization of past styles. It is by its very nature indefinable, for defining it would give it form, thereby nullifying it as a dynamic aspect of present-day culture. The postmodern is, however, conceived in various ways by interpreters such as Martin Amis, whose novels are written in accord with his own understanding of postmodernism. In an essay entitled "Madonna," for example, Amis argues that the pop star lives postmodernism because she presents a constant challenge to present-day social and sexual mores. She always changes, trying not to allow forms or types to be applied to her. The dissertation tracks the development of Amis as a novelist in conjunction with his own postmodern outlook and as contrasted to the views of other thinkers, such as Bradbury, Jameson, Lyotard and Sarup, in regard to post-modernism, modernism and anti-modernism. Amis' development as a postmodern author is also illustrated by comparing and contrasting his works to others' (including Kingsley Amis, Julian Barnes, Saul Bellow, Philip Larkin, Ian McEwan and Vladimir Nabokov) and through a selection of criticism on Amis and the society he envisions.

Amis sees the twentieth century as a period of malaise; the human has been dominated and replaced by both technology and the Enlightenment forces of anti-humanism. His works reflect this notion by subsuming story and theme to style: superficiality in the shape of excessive attention to detail and wordsmithing is now paramount.

Foreword

In the novel Money, a character named "Martin Amis" discusses the relationship of author and character with a character named John Self: "Is there a moral philosophy of fiction? When I create a character and put him or her through certain ordeals, what am I up to--morally? Am I accountable" (241). The question can be expanded to include the growing body of postmodern authors: what has happened to the reliable, realist narrative? What has happened to the sometimes unreliable but erudite modern narrative? Aspects of realism and modernism clearly exist even if the conditions are fading (and it is not unanimous that they are). However, in texts like those of Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan and Will Self, the authoritative position of the author (as maintained in realist and modernist fiction) has contracted. It is no longer certain who is telling a story or even if the structure of a prose piece constitutes what was originally called a "novel": "a prose narrative about characters and their actions in what [is] recognizably everyday life and usually in the present" (Cuddon 599). "Realism," Amis himself claims, "is a footling concern" (Haffenden 8). Wordsmithing has become a game of, to coin a word, "formsmanship," under which challenges to form supersede plot and other aspects of what used to constitute a novel, including time, place and character development. Style is more important than story.

In London Fields, arguably Amis' most successful example of "formsmanship," the idea of the novel and meaning itself are transformed. The hopelessly unreliable narrator/IMPLIED author, Samson Young, discusses

the burgeoning notion of "formlessness":

Perhaps because of their addiction to form, writers always lag behind the contemporary formlessness. They write about an old reality, in a language that's even older. It's not the words: it's the rhythms of thought. In this sense all novels are historical novels. Not really a writer, maybe I see it clearer. But I do it too. (239)

Young constructs a complicated murder story with conventional, named and numbered chapters, a victim ("murderee") and cast of suspects. But when the reader reaches the end of the novel, he discovers Young himself, not any of the other suspects, is the murderer. More important, the meat of the story occurs not in the chapters proper, but in Young's monologues fitted in between. There is a realist novel, semi-properly developed and ordered, but it is only an exercise in style that cannot be considered by itself--a mockery of realist technique that subverts the notion of realism. Young dupes the reader, tells hundreds of pages of lies. He claims to be writing a true account, but he also claims to be writing a "novel." In fact, he sometimes claims not to be a writer at all. He is the fictionalized postmodern author, and through him Amis redefines "the logic of reference itself while implying that the very notion of reference has become increasingly ambiguous" (Bernard 122).

Is Young culpable, as the character "Martin Amis" might ask, for the lies he writes? The metafictionality of London Fields leaves doubt in the reader's mind. Another character named Mark Asprey may be duping Young. And then there is a mysterious "M.A." who writes a "Note" at the front of the novel--is this Mark Asprey or a fictional "Martin Amis"?

In postmodern literature, the concept of authorial culpability, of an implied author or an author in the realist sense, is moot. Meaninglessness and loose suggestions have replaced meanings and lessons. Detail, prose, wordsmithing, style: these are the all-important aspects of postmodern fiction. Every other facet of literature is subsumed by style. The "local explosion of colour, idiom or interest" is favored "over the slow thickening of narrative" (Connor, English Novel 90). More important, the relationship between author and reader takes on a new perspective, for the reader must relate to a new entity, a new artwork which, as Amis claims, is the author's primary concern: "What the reader should do is identify with the writer. You try and see what the writer is up to, what the writer is arranging, and what the writer's point is. Identify with the art, not the people" (S. Morrison 98). A loose sense of "art" created by the commingling of author and reader is the only motivation left for fiction. As the character "Martin Amis" says in Money, "Nowadays motivation comes from inside the head, not from outside. It's neurotic, in other words" (341). All forms are in a state of decay and recombination, and so Amis' novels, responding to a sense of decay, seek to motivate each reader independent of structuralist tradition and expectation.

Like Orwell's Down and Out in Paris and London, the dying Londons of Success, Other People, London Fields and The Information present "an alien and unrecorded England that is both concealed within and yet lurks menacingly outside official England" (Connor, English Novel 84). Coupled with this contemporary social decay is the inner putrefaction of characters, such as Charles Highway in The Rachel Papers, the entire cast of

characters in Dead Babies and John Self in Money, all of whom mirror their societies' corruption. There are glimmers of hope, such as Self's refusal to commit suicide (despite the novel's subtitle, A Suicide Note) and Highway's potential redemption via an incisive Oxford tutor. Time's Arrow, it may be argued, seeks redemption by reversing time and, consequently, the greatest single human failure: the Holocaust. However, it is more of a statement on the Enlightenment, a satiric reversal used to highlight the utter lack of humanity in modernity.

Readers may not immediately recognize their own worlds or selves in those created by Amis. Nonetheless, an intriguing sense of formlessness settles in the mind upon reading his prose. It sticks like a hot glue, burning a bit as it settles. Aspects of the real world and the changing face of fiction then come soaking through, and suddenly one is faced with the realization that the late twentieth century is, in fact, caught in some kind of maelstrom of malaise, as paradoxical as that may sound. An overwhelming sense of worry, fueled by visions of decay, seizes the mind and refuses to let go.

Combined with this malaise (and often overriding it in pursuit of "formsmanship") is the need for stylistic display, the need to be more experimental with each novel--excessive attention to detail, changing narrative viewpoints and potential unreliability merge with anti-novel time sequences, minimal character development and open endings. Amis' texts fuse technical elements using no specified formula and making each attempt a new exercise in, as The Information's narrator might say, "nothing." There is no single agenda in these novels; there are agendas, but they are mixed and matched and remain as dynamic as the

prose, though less daunting, and, at times, as inscrutable as the plot.

John A. Dern

Part 1: Postmodernism

Thief of nature. One of the birds lodging in the nicotined greenery outside his window seemed to have learned how to imitate a car alarm: a looping lasso of sound. Various car alarms belonged to various types, various genres: the nagging, the hysterical, the scandalized. There was even a postmodern car alarm, which trilled out a fruity compendium of all other car alarms. This was the car alarm that all the birds of London would eventually know how to do.

-Martin Amis
The Information (350)

I. Martin Amis' Postmodernism

Postmodernism is, as J.A. Cuddon points out, "no easier to define than many other -isms" (Cuddon 734). The word implies fragmentation and distortion of form and is, by its very nature, indefinable, for giving it an exact definition would give it form, thereby nullifying it as a dynamic aspect of present-day culture. Nonetheless, the amorphous term "postmodern" has sparked much debate in academic circles. The notion that Western societies since the Second World War have changed from industrial to consumer or "post-industrial" societies is central to the idea of the postmodern (Sarup 132-133), but postmodernism is far-reaching, affecting all facets from the industrial to the sociological to the literary.

In considering the fiction of Martin Amis, one cannot avoid a discussion of the postmodern in literature. For Amis, postmodernism is in certain ways amorphous, as it is for Cuddon, being at once an agglomeration of forms (literary techniques and influences) and a challenge to those forms. Paradoxical, self-contradictory perspectives drive this fiction.

Amis often considers postmodernism outside of his fiction as well, and it is best to discern his sense of the postmodern from the exterior before delving into the works themselves, mainly because his fictional spokesmen are so unreliable and his style so dynamic that information provided in his texts can be better scrutinized by first analyzing the author's non-fiction. This tactic will help the reader see beneath the surface of the works themselves (not always an easy task with Amis).

The two main facets of Amis' postmodernism are its agglomeration of forms and challenge to those forms. The first point is propounded by Amis in a 1984 review of Angus Wilson's Diversity and Depth in Fiction:

The contexts, the great forms of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sagas, have been exhausted; realism and experimentation have come and gone without seeming to point a way ahead. The contemporary writer, therefore, must combine these veins, calling on the strengths of the Victorian novel together with the alienations of post-modernism. ("Before Taste" 114-115)

While Amis develops a more complete sense of postmodernism in the next decade (which culminates in works such as London Fields, Time's Arrow and The Information) the idea that older forms, like the post-war industrial society itself, have been exhausted and that a merging of forms must take place for contemporary fiction to be viable, remains pivotal to him. Additionally, the "alienations of post-modernism" are more fully described as self-reliance and self-redefinition. Literature becomes self-contained, having no connection with reality or with other literary works. Each book defines its own moral laws and cultural norms, changing those codes whenever necessary. This idea finds voice in an Amis essay on John Updike: "The dominance of the self is not a flaw, it is an evolutionary characteristic; it is just how things are now" (Mrs. Nabokov 51).¹

The postmodern evolves because it is by its very nature dynamic. Amis recognizes and lauds this quality in the pop star Madonna:

And here Madonna is, as always, on the crest of the

contemporary: post-modern, post-feminist, she is the Woman of the Year of the Woman, incorporating Babe Power with the older, simpler Have It All credo of Cosmopolitan. This is womanhood without sisterhood. This is imaginative self-reliance. (Mrs. Nabokov 262)

Madonna's self-reliance leads to an ability to self-redefine. She is "the self-sufficient post-modern phenomenon" (264) because she combines an eclectic assortment of elements from the pop culture: "pornography, religion, multi-ethnicity, transsexuality, kitsch, camp, worldly power, self-parody and self-invention." And these elements are not static; all are dynamic, ever-changed by Madonna's "ability to redesign herself" (263). She weaves many identities, many forms of being, into one self-revealing whole, unique because of the combination and because it is fluid, representing a constant challenge to itself and to the styles that comprise it.

The redefinition of one's self, in Amis' case the redefinition of fiction and the novel, is accelerated by a more overt "playful awareness of form" (Amis, Mrs. Nabokov 200). In "Short Stories, From Scratch," he writes about judging a short story contest, and although he finds that many entrants seem to have "a morbid fear of dictionaries" (Mrs. Nabokov 198), Amis also finds "glimpses of an intelligent and humorous post-modernism," a phrase he juxtaposes with "a playful awareness of form." Such awareness is found, for example, in a young writer who uses the phrase "a cup of t," which Amis refers to as "post-punk anti-style" (198). "Anti-style" recalls the term "anti-novel," as Cuddon defines it: "It establishes its own conventions and a different kind of realism

which deters the reader from self-identification with the characters, yet at the same time persuades him to 'participate' but not vicariously" (Cuddon 48). Cuddon lists the noteworthy characteristics of the anti-novel, including lack of plot, diffused episode, minimal character development, extensive superficial analysis of objects, repetitions, "innumerable experiments with vocabulary, punctuation and syntax," "variations of time sequence," and alternative beginnings and endings (48). All of these qualities, in addition to "a different kind of realism," exist in the works of Martin Amis, from the hidden plots of Other People and London Fields to the time distortions of The Rachel Papers and Time's Arrow.

An awareness of form itself and the subversion of it are important to Amis because redefining oneself is essential to his idea of fiction. By continuously re-evaluating elements such as plot, character and time sequence, he can keep recreating and renewing his fiction, making sure all the while that each work is independent, self-sufficient, unique. Amis establishes his own rules, his own cultural milieu in each work, which then becomes individual and self-sustaining. Fiction is redefined in his novels because each is a new combination of the elements of the anti-novel and the forms of the past.

Amis' fiction is postmodern in its combination of forms (literary techniques), its challenge to those forms and its dynamic recombination of literary elements (especially those of the anti-novel) in an ongoing attempt to create individuality for each work. Because he concentrates on literary style and detail, critics argue that his, like other post-modern texts, "call attention to their status as fictions, as verbal

artifices" (Diedrick 6). Add to the elements of the anti-novel Amis' predisposition for unreliable narrators and one begins to understand Dodsworth's basis for saying that some of his novels "are too long, their plotting too weak to hold every detail in place" (334). Dodsworth adds that Amis' works are "deeply committed to paradox and relativism" (334), a notion that supports, in a backhand manner, the idea that his novels are paradoxical because of their use and subversion of form and their self-sufficiency. Any such individual or unique work will be criticized as well as lauded for its "relativism."

If Amis' novels were dependent solely on their (ab)use of form, criticism such as Dodsworth's, although it can (and will be) addressed more completely, would be quite damaging. But other critics, such as James Diedrick, argue that Amis' postmodernism, while it contains the elements previously discussed, is also very much dependent on his world view. Diedrick notes that calling his fiction postmodern "involves far more than stylistic analysis, since his style is inseparable from, and embodies, his larger social outlook" (11). The constant redefinition of the self in Amis' novels, "the increasingly fluid, unstable nature of selfhood" (12), is, for Diedrick, a strength that illustrates his negative reaction to "the Enlightenment-inspired fiction of individual autonomy, stability, and agency," which questions "the bourgeois myth of individual autonomy" (11-12). Thus, while his novels themselves are unique and individual because of the manner in which they re-deploy form against itself, the characters within his works lack self-sufficiency, autonomy. Even his third-person narrators, in works such as Other People, Time's Arrow and The Information, despite their supposedly

objective positions, lack autonomy.² The end result--the literary work's autonomy and the characters' dependency--is essentially the paradox Dodsworth disdains. However, readers of Amis' works are required by the author to transcend the paradox and see the critique of fiction beneath. Dead Babies, as Diedrick points out, mocks selfhood through a character "who seems to represent the quintessence of Enlightenment notions of reason, culture and civility, but who is revealed as a moral monster by the end of the narrative" (14). The world of London Fields faces an impending doom beyond the characters' ken (a doom humorously linked to the condition of the American First Lady), and Time's Arrow's helpless third-person narrator is driven backwards in time to the Holocaust in an attempt to correct the Enlightenment's greatest failure, which Amis, in an afterword to the novel, calls "unique" in "its combination of the atavistic and the modern, being at once reptilian and 'logisitical'" (168). For Amis, the Holocaust is not antithetical to the Enlightenment but "represents one of its faces" (Diedrick 11).

Amis' postmodernism runs deeper than his notions of form, which, nonetheless, remain integral to his vision because they are the means by which he communicates. In addition, his development as an author coincides with his growing sense of the postmodern era until "it is a form Amis raises to the level of high postmodern art in several of his later novels" (Diedrick 31). Three of those works, London Fields, Time's Arrow and The Information, reveal the breadth of his mature sense of fiction.

London Fields portrays Amis' post-Enlightenment world view, for the London of 1999 is bleak, and the characters are incapable of or unconcerned with bettering it. Powerlessness, combined with mundane

attempts at living, are at the book's core:

Whereas many of the unsavory passages in Mr. Amis's previous books seemed like gratuitous displays of adolescent voyeurism, the ones in "London Fields" work to underscore the novel's overall theme--its depiction of a decadent and terminally ill world, in which mindless coupling has replaced love and passion, in which violence and greed have eclipsed decency and genuine human emotion, in which class politics have become all-out war. Indeed, Mr. Amis's faintly futuristic England stands light years away from the polite, genteel worlds depicted by traditional British fiction. (Kakutani)

Amis is trying to undermine Enlightenment ideals in London Fields by painting a dark, Larkinesque³ picture of society and adding, on the part of the characters, an apparent ignorance of or unconcern for the world as a whole, as in the case of the narrator, Samson Young:

Even the Old Testament expected the Apocalypse 'shortly'. In times of mass disorientation or anxiety... But I am trying to ignore the world situation. I am hoping it will go away. Not the world. The situation. I want time to get on with this little piece of harmless escapism. (64)

Nevertheless, the reader cannot escape from or ignore the world or human situation in London Fields, for, as is typical, Samson Young says one thing and does another. Kath Talent, Keith's wife, is, for instance, worried about the world situation, so Young continues to discuss it and even consults "the proper papers" and the television for information. More important, he offers details to the reader of the decrepitude in

which characters such as Kath and her baby, Kim, exist:

We parked under the shadow of the craning block—which sparked and flickered like ten thousand TV sets stacked up into the night. Keith hurried. He summoned the elevator but to his silent agony the elevator was dead or elsewhere. We climbed the eleven floors, passing a litter of sick junkies sprawled out on the stairs in grumbling sleep. Keith denounced them through his wheezes: a mixture of personal oaths and campaign slogans from the last election. (102)

Keith's London is reminiscent of "the apocalyptic cityscapes found in the novels of Salman Rushdie" (Kakutani), or, as David Lodge argues, Charles Dickens' urban Gothic (Art 58).⁴ No matter which notion is accepted, it is clear that London Fields, "a bitter tragicomedy of life in a world going noisily to hell" (Pesetsky 1), envisions a postmodern, post-industrial, pre-apocalyptic world created for the reader not only from Amis' less-than-pleasant world view, but also from "all the latest post-modern hardware" (Kakutani).

One piece of "hardware" deftly employed by Amis is the postmodern character Nicola Six. She (like Madonna) is post-modernity personified:

As the narrator's description of her as a "mixture of genres" suggests, Nicola is a literary character down to her linguistic bones. In one of her metafictional incarnations she is an authorial alter ego, an instrument of the author's satirical aims. She is especially adept at parody. In her relationship with Guy she enacts a grotesque parody of love; in her relationship with Keith she performs a grotesque parody

of sex; and in her relationship with Samson, she offers a sly parody of Amis's postmodern narrative habits. (Diedrick 148)

Nicola, like Madonna, is constantly able to redefine herself for those around her: for Keith she plays the slattern, for Guy the immaculate virgin and for Samson the respondent in his "true" story. She can, for any event or person, align herself with the needs at hand. In discussing what makes Nicola tick, Amis himself said, "What drives people is a lot woollier than motivation. The self isn't as coherent as it used to be: it's subject to a lot of babbling from various sources" (Kroll). The "self," in Nicola's case, is not coherent at all. Early in the novel, for instance, she prepares for a funeral: her "elaborate" underwear is black; the clips on her garter are "black, black"; her stockings are black and, "dressed for death, she called her black cab and drank two cups of black coffee and tasted with hunger the black tobacco of a French cigarette" (19-21). Nicola is not just going to a funeral; she becomes the stereotypical funeral-goer, just as she can become the innocent virgin for Guy and the seductress for Keith. Her identity as a "murderess" is submerged beneath her stratified genres. Before she begins her tedious preparations, Young highlights the irony of the situation by saying that the funeral for which she takes so much care in preparing is "not a significant one," that Nicola "hardly knew or remembered the dead woman" (19). In fact, she had to spend "a tedious half an hour on the telephone before she managed to get herself asked along" (19). She is not only highly aware of her self, but also that she must keep changing, like Madonna, in order, paradoxically, to maintain her self-sufficiency. Her transformations allow the novel to

move forward, for a static Nicola would be incapable of the machinations necessary for London Fields to come to its ironic fruition.

Nicola's dynamic nature plays well against the unchanging, very predictable nature of Keith Talent, a petty thug and passable darter who longs to hit the big time in his favorite sport. While awaiting his big opportunity, the "murderer" who looks "like a murderer's dog," engages in various con games and petty crimes. He is "a sex-crazed, emotionally robotic con man, who, we are repeatedly told, is 'modern, modern, modern'" (Kakutani) in the structuralist sense: everything about him, appearance, behavior, etc., is so predictable that he is easily interpreted (as well as manipulated) by Nicola and Samson.⁵ He is unable to change himself, being caught in a very specific niche of self-identification:

When he isn't beating up his wife or cheating tourists out of money, Keith can be found at a filthy pub named the Black Cross, where he plays darts and boasts noisily of his many seductions. (Kakutani)

His life is one of superficiality upon superficiality; the things that are important to him, drink, darts, sex, are important only insofar as they enhance his desultory image of himself. Darts, for instance, is so important to Keith that the word, through frequent and exclamatory use, becomes an expletive, "a gratuitous swear word" (Imlah). He also expects his use of language, his accounts of events, to be accepted at face value, just as he himself accepts things at face value. After Keith has given a less-than-probable account about Nicola to friends at the Black Cross, Young writes, "How is this? Remember: modern, modern.

Because it was all a tribute to Keith's indifference. To Keith not caring about anything" (59). Unlike Nicola, Keith, with his modern mindset, cannot change himself, cannot alter who and what he is. Ironically, however, his static nature does not grant him any greater degree of autonomy or self-assurance. He is actually more powerless in the dying world of London Fields than Nicola who, even though the social and political world is beyond her, can manipulate the modern Keith and the Romantic Guy (this is Amis' way of illustrating that the great forms of the past have been exhausted and need to be re-deployed).

Guy, the novel's "foil" and the least self-assured and least autonomous of Amis' three genre-characters, is manipulated by both Keith and Nicola. He is "a rich upper-class dolt, who seems to have stepped out of an Evelyn Waugh novel into a menacing social netherworld he will never understand" (Kakutani). Like Waugh's William Boot in Scoop, he is described as "a good guy—or a nice one, anyway. He wanted for nothing and lacked everything" (27). He is rich, handsome, tall and in good health, but he is "lifeless." He is a Romantic who needs true love to make his existence worthwhile, but such love is not forthcoming from Hope, his ironically-named wife. The relationship between Hope, who is "intelligent, efficient" and "brightly American," and Guy foundered with the birth of the couple's demon-child, Marmaduke:

World-famous paediatricians marvelled at his hyperactivity, and knelt like magi to his genius for colic. Every half an hour he noisily drained his mother's sore breasts; often he would take a brief nap around midnight; the rest of the time he spent screaming. Only parents and torturers and the

janitors of holocausts are asked to stand the sound of so much human grief. (28-29)

To his credit, Guy continues to love this terror, even though the child has a penchant for poking him in the eyes, for rapidly and violently disposing of the army of nannies hired to care for him and for costing him huge amounts of money. But Guy's marriage to Hope is forever rent by the stress Marmaduke creates. He is left "wide open to Nicola's designs. Wide open because he and his wife Hope have been pushed apart by the birth of their son Marmaduke" (Diedrick 149). Nicola snares Guy and his money by re-creating herself as the bashful virgin, in need of love yet so inexperienced that she is at first afraid even to kiss him and knocks him senseless when he attempts it. For Guy, "Nicola is a woman of beauty and breeding in need of his protection; she fires his nostalgia for the passion that has leaked from his marriage" (Diedrick 151). The ultimate display of Nicola's power over Guy comes when she tells him to go to New England and confess their affair to his mother-in-law. Only then can they truly be together. Guy, who will do anything for Nicola's love, and who has recently acquired a painful genital condition, obeys. Nicola's actual intention is twofold: she wishes to have Guy out of the way in order to further her plans with Keith, and she wishes to manipulate Guy's feelings, his goodheartedness, to such an extent that, when he does find out the truth, he will commit the murder she ardently desires if Keith does not.

London Fields, then, blends three genres, forms or conditions: the postmodern, the modern and the Romantic. And the combination yields a postmodern combination of forms presented symbolically; Nicola, the

postmodern character, snares the other representatives, the modern Keith and the Romantic Guy, in her web. Added to this merging of forms are the narrator's unreliability and various elements of the anti-novel, such as an alternative ending and problematic time sequences.

Time sequence is more completely developed in Time's Arrow, an anti-novel which inverts time flow. Every aspect of life occurs in reverse, from eating to defecation to vomiting, until bodies and souls of Auschwitz victims are reunited in a grotesque, mindless reversal of the process of genocide:

Already showing signs of life, patients were brought in one by one from the pile next door and wedged onto the chair in Room 1, which looked like what it was, a laboratory in the Hygienic Institute, a world of bubbles and bottles. ... "Uncle Pepi" was then sometimes obliged to bring them to their senses with a few slaps about the face. (127-128)

Amis' intent, in reversing the Enlightenment's greatest mistake, is to remove it from history altogether: "The overwhelming majority of the women, the children, and the elderly we process with gas and fire" (122). People are restored to life by the same infernal methods used to destroy them, providing what Diedrick calls "poetic justice--on a grand historical scale" (162). Amis himself, in order to reveal the anti-logic of the Holocaust, deprecatingly writes that "The National Socialists found the core of the reptile brain, and built an autobahn that went there" (Time's Arrow 168).

Corrupt time is the main fictional tool used to travel the autobahn (although it is complemented by a naive, unknowable narrator); it

is a fictional tool Amis uses throughout his fiction, indicating his abandonment of the traditional structure used by novelists, "whose narratives are traditionally founded on causality, continuity and linear progression" (Diedrick 13).

Each of Amis' novels becomes a subject of itself. Novels such as Time's Arrow separate themselves from modern works because they combine the "exhausted" elements of fiction in unique ways and use them to illustrate a decaying world. In his postmodern texts, time has to be controlled by the work, by Amis, "so that time itself becomes a subject of his fiction" (Diedrick 13). As early as his first novel, The Rachel Papers, Amis was subsuming time to the structure of his fiction--that novel stratifies time at the narrator's whim. Time's Arrow, however, controls time as no other Amis work does. Even syntax is momentarily reversed: "How are you today?" becomes "Aid ut oo y'rrah?" (7). (The narrator later translates this speech for the reader, a necessary concession or the work would become too tedious.) If Amis harnesses and reverses time, then speech and all other action occurring within time must also be reversed. Because it unites "Amis's ambitious concerns with inhumanity, time, and the unthinkable" (Updike 86), Time's Arrow is one of Amis' grandest experiments.

The Information is not the grand experiment of Time's Arrow, but no other Amis work mentions postmodernism, or the conflation of forms, so often. The novel rarely moves far without "postmodern interjections from the author" (Sheppard), such as the above commentary on car alarms or the following one on television:

The television in his room went about its transmissions non-

judgmentally, but to Richard the set itself often seem scandalized and even persecuted by these gladiatorial displays-- this modern marriage of window shopping and blood sport. Or this post-modern marriage: pornography tried to occupy the basements of other genres (sex Westerns, sex space operas, sex murder mysteries). (265)

Amis' notion of postmodernism (characterized by a gelling of forms) is fictionalized through the narrator in the mind of the character Richard Tull, but the message is Amis'. In fact, one of the most memorable of The Information's passages, which equates genres and the seasons, is a reiteration of his notion that forms have become exhausted and are by necessity combined by the contemporary writer:

Summer: romance. Journeys, quests, magic, talking animals, damsels in distress.

Autumn: tragedy. Isolation and decline, fatal flaws and falls, the throes of heroes.

Winter: satire. Anti-utopias, inverted worlds, the embrace of the tundra: the embrace of wintry thoughts.

Spring: comedy. Weddings, apple blossom, maypoles, no more misunderstandings--away with the old, on with the new.

We keep waiting for something to go wrong with the seasons. But something has already gone wrong with the genres. They have all bled into one another. Decorum is no longer observed.

(35)⁶

This is one of the passages that Adam Mars-Jones says "are willing to die for their author's sake, pressing their pleading faces against the

paragraph windows and crying, 'Take me, I saw it all, I can explain'" ("blight side"). Mars-Jones' sentiments anticipate others, such as R.Z. Sheppard, who claim that Amis pushes fiction too far, saying that Amis "has always been eager to show that he can juggle words better and push satire further than his competition." Despite the postmodern blend of genres that Amis' narrator sees, Mars-Jones also sees Amis as limited, contending that he "is locked into satire" ("blight side"). Such comments diminish the stylistic experimentation of The Information, and, admittedly, it lacks the world view of Time's Arrow and the all-encompassing apocalyptic backdrop of London Fields. However, The Information is replete with postmodern trickiness, and the manner in which it incessantly reminds the reader of its status as fiction is important to understanding Amis' conception of contemporary literature.

Sometimes to its discredit, The Information is Amis' most self-revealing work of fiction, a postmodern work in style alone. The most basic elements of the anti-novel, from prose printed diagonally on a page to haphazard punctuation, are redundantly employed: "Sentences are either impossibly short or impossibly long. Commas, colons, parentheses and dashes crawl all over the page like flesh-eating microbes" (Giles). Consider the following excerpt about a chess set:

For surely Gwyn, left to his own devices (his taste, and many thousands of pounds) would have come up with something rather different, in which the pieces consisted of thirty-two more or less identical slabs of quartz/onyx/osmium; or else were wincingly florid and detailed--the Windsor castles, the knights with rearing forelegs and full-horse brass, the

practically life-sized bishops with crooks and pointy hats
and filigreed Bibles. (103)

Among the variety of punctuation employed in this single sentence, parentheses are perhaps the most important, for Amis employs them throughout his works in attempts by narrators to speak in confidence to the reader. In the above instance, they serve that same function while adding to the effect that an inundation of punctuation marks has on the reading process: to remind the reader that the book is a construct, a creation of another's mind. Perhaps more than any of his other works, The Information displays and reiterates Amis' belief in the importance of style over story.

Amis' notion of postmodernism depends both on his world outlook and on his sense of literary style. Bleak events, such as the oncoming apocalypse in London Fields or the Holocaust in Time's Arrow, or even a general disillusionment with class, as in Dead Babies and Success, are central to his body of work. More important, the disruptive aspects of those events, the manner in which they challenge Enlightenment notions or social constructs, the way they defy the general forms of the world and human society, are integral to understanding Amis. His works are self-redefining and self-sufficient, but the characters within his works are not; they are the constructs of their exhausted, disintegrating societies. Some of them are staid, some static, some dynamic; many are two-dimensional creations. But the works they inhabit are as a body dynamic, ever-changing. Amis alters the parameters of his satiric world (and hence his notion of the novel) with each new work, making it an individual, autonomous element. His sense of the postmodern depends on

the ability of his fiction to challenge structures, to change so often that forms are forever recombined, continuously confronting accepted notions of fiction and Enlightenment standards.

II. Postmodernism: Other Perspectives

How does Amis' postmodernism compare with those of other thinkers? Is it conservative, mainstream or liberal? Is it based on an interpretation of underlying socio-political elements? How do they compare with other literary interpretations and real-world counterparts?

Ian McEwan, Amis' contemporary, sees both a recombination of forms and social decay as inherently postmodern. In the story "Pornography," for instance, McEwan describes a church that has become a warehouse for pornographic material:

The House of Florence warehouse was a disused church in a narrow terraced street on the Brixton side of Norbury. ...A crude plasterboard office and waiting room had been set up in the west end. The font was a large ashtray in the waiting room. (19)

McEwan's combination of a holy place and warehouse for smut illustrates a merging of structures; the boundaries between the two previously antithetical institutions have dissolved, allowing them to come together in a heretical union. Humanity's atavistic self merges with its modern self until the latter is practically indistinguishable, the same merging Amis uses to describe the barbaric yet systematic work of the Nazis.

With its tall, decrepit buildings dominating the bleak horizon in

Orwellian fashion, the general appearance of McEwan's world compares to Amis':

The Ministry rose from a vast plain of pavement. The pushchair bumped over green wedges of weed. The stones were cracking and subsiding. Human refuse littered the plain. Vegetables, rotten and trodden down, cardboard boxes flattened into beds, the remains of fires and the carcasses of roasted dogs and cats, rusted tin, vomit, worn tires, animal excrement. An old dream of horizontal lines converging on the thrusting steel-and-glass perpendicular was now beyond recall. (52)

The description, from the story "Two Fragments: March 199-", could be that of Keith Talent's domicile or a building from the dying world of Dead Babies. Both McEwan and Amis provide "the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity," placing themselves and the reader squarely in "the ironic mode" (Frye 34). Through the metaphor of disintegrating structures, McEwan and Amis uncreate humanity. They do so, however, while paying heed to literary style. Minute detail rendered in intelligent prose rises paradoxically from a page filled with decay, enhancing language even as it breaks up and drives away any notion of social cohesion. Writers like McEwan and Amis cannot escape, ironically, the desire to be seen as wordsmiths of a world of putrefaction: style supersedes story.

From a non-literary viewpoint, Madan Sarup discusses postmodernism and its social ramifications in a manner mirroring Amis, albeit imperfectly:

Postmodernity emphasizes diverse forms of individual and

social identity. It is now widely held that the autonomous subject has been dispersed into a range of plural, polymorphous subject-positions inscribed within language. Instead of a coercive totality and a totalizing politics, postmodernity stresses a pluralistic and open democracy. Instead of the certainty of progress, associated with "the Enlightenment project" (of which Marxism is a part), there is now an awareness of contingency and ambivalence. (130)

The postmodern society described by Sarup is reminiscent of Amis' non-fictional and fictional notions. Madonna's identity has been "dispersed," as has the character Nicola Six from London Fields. The narrator from Time's Arrow is called upon to play conscience to the many different identities Tod Friendly assumes throughout the novel. In short, the self has been altered both in the real world and in Amis' fiction: "A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before" (Lyotard 15). Additionally, social stratifications collide rather than combine, providing the sense of a "pluralistic" society where different strata coexist. The boorish and poor Richard Tull from The Information contrasts with the suave and rich Gwyn Barry, a meeting of the minds between the two rendered impossible by the sudden onset of class difference that sunders their relationship. Nonetheless, each hoping to better the other, they continue an uneasy association.

By discussing the views of Lyotard, who sees postmodernism as the failure of modernity (the industrial age and the Enlightenment) to realize its goals, Sarup expands the study of postmodernism. For Lyotard,

there can be no universal knowledge, no universal scientific truth (Sarup 132). Lyotard's postmodernism signals the end of the universal in every social facet, "for there is no reason, only reasons" (132). In addition, Lyotard stressed "a shift of emphasis from content to form or style; a transformation of reality into images; the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents. There are continual references to eclecticism, reflexivity, self-referentiality, quotation, artifice, randomness, anarchy, fragmentation, pastiche and allegory" (132).

Lyotard himself argues that narratives of all kinds⁷ are in a state of decay, becoming kitsch, dependent not on a truly aesthetic sense of truth or beauty but on popular taste. A changing sense of language signifies this decay language: "The narrative function is losing its functions, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements-- narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on" (xxiv). Language games, which do not legitimate themselves (as modern narratives do) and under which "every utterance should be thought of as a 'move' in a game" (Lyotard 10), promote the reinvention of language commensurable to the individual. Postmodern fiction reinvents the rules of the "game" of reading, and the reader assents to the new rules by simply "playing" the game. Amis lauds the phrase "a cup of t" because its anti-style reinvents the rules of the "game" while undermining the notion of "rules." The game is now constantly changing; postmodern fiction delights in "the endless invention of turns of phrase, of words and meanings" (Lyotard 10).

Amis' emphasis on form over content is clear; his mixture of

first-person and third-person in narrative construction, his (excessive) attention to minor details, his often unnumbered chapters, and the rest of the anti-novel arsenal of techniques he employs are indicate this emphasis. Certain novels emphasize different parts of Lyotard's post-modernism in varying degrees, such as the fragmented time of The Rachel Papers, the twisted time of Time's Arrow and the self-reflexivity of novels such as London Fields and Other People. All Lyotard's elements can be found throughout Amis' work; however, no novel emphasizes all the elements, for Amis alters the emphasis with each work, helping to keep his canon "pluralistic." There is no guiding concept behind his novels unless it is the idea of making each novel or story different from the others by emphasizing some unique aspect literary condition. True, themes such as pornography and narrative intrusion often recur, but, depending on the work, in different measure each time. Both The Rachel Papers and Time's Arrow distort time, for instance, but the latter uses time in a much more unique fashion than the former. It is a matter of time-stratification versus time-inversion.

Steven Toulmin, in Cosmopolis, suggests that multiplicity is part of the overall condition of postmodernism. Wendy Steiner explains this same issue when she writes, "the shift from formalism to multiplicity and amplitude is a fair (if overly general) characterization of the passage from modernism to post-modernism" (16). As modernity concerns form, post-modernity concerns multiple forms and their re-combinations, or, as noted, "reason" has been replaced by "reasons." Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane echo the same idea, seeing postmodernism (as opposed to modernism, which was "devoted to the paradoxes of form") as "anti-

formalist, though compelled to use form to subvert it" (35). Post-modernism is the breakdown of form into many forms; it is the breakdown of an orderly industrial society and the onset of mass consumerism and a service industry; it is the breakdown of the family as a unit and the rise of alternative and ever-changing sexual relationships; it is the province of the self-sufficient individual who has no true self but keeps redefining his existence; it is "an end to the burden of moral agency, be it attributable to an individual (such as an elected official or a company president) or a collective (decision-making bodies such as a cabinet or a board of directors)" (Rosenau 33). Every individual is creating his own "reasons" for his existence, so there can be no moral agency because there is no authority, no author.

The loss or "death" of the author is a notion characteristic of postmodern fiction. Rosenau, quoting Derrida, explains that "the reading of a text has 'nothing to do with the author as a real person.' What an author writes is generally not what s/he means anyway" (30). The author of a postmodern text has no authority to instill meaning. The notion of "reasons" supplanting "reason" works in this sense as well, for if there is no single reason, no single moral that can simultaneously apply to everyone, then a text can relay no single meaning. Every reader is an individual, just as the text is an individual, and so every time a new reader takes it up, a new mathematical equation can begin. For instance, Nicola Six is all things to all people, Young's subject, Keith's slattern, Guy's virgin. Like a text, she is read differently by every individual who encounters her. Though not as extreme as Nicola, Mary Lamb of Other People is also malleable, having no identity of her own. She be-

comes Russ' fantasy, Alan's lover and Prince's Amy Hide. Just as the postmodern text is recreated by readers, both women are recreated. In this sense, though the symbols are less exact, perception in a post-modern society is more interpretive, more literary.

The postmodern author, then, runs counter to the modern author. The latter was in a position of authority, a position "to educate, instill moral values, or enlighten the reader (who is not held in such high regard)" (Rosenau 27). Rosenau points out that in a modern society the "author" holds positions such as manager, professional, intellectual or educator, one who "assume[s] privileged access to truth, reason and scientific knowledge" (27). Such people are given the authority to make moral decisions and judgements, to direct and to control the flow of meaning. In postmodern literature, it is "foolish to look for wisdom in books, because they have nothing new to say. They contain everything in their one long sentence. Everything and nothing" (Self 159).

The best that can be done in a postmodern text is a parody of that control. For example, the narrators of London Fields and Other People claim to have control over the narratives they relate. London Fields' Samson Young, turns out, however, to have been on the wrong track, or leading the reader down the wrong track, throughout the entire novel. The narrator of Other People, who initially speaks with the voice of authority, is complaining at the end of the text because he cannot control what is happening:

I want Mary out of all this. I want her out of this whole risk-area of clinks and clinics and soup-queues, of hostels and borstals and homes full of mad women. I want her away from

all these deep-divers. She might go bad herself: it happens.

She might smash. (106)

In its uncertainty and fear of being unable to control what "might" happen to Mary, this narrative voice is very much different from the one in the prologue that says, "I didn't want to have to do it to her. I would have infinitely preferred some other solution. Still, there we are" (9). The second example purports to have at least some agency, to have done something, whereas the voice from the later part of the book "wants" but cannot necessarily "do."

Amis' language games, his "playful awareness of form," are evident in his narrative voices, such as that of Other People, and postmodern criticism is aware of this amorphousness:

What is new is the comprehensive nature of postmodern intertextuality, the recognition that we live in a world constituted through multiple kinds of discourse or language games that contradict and contest each other even as they complement and are constructed out of each other. (P. Waugh 50)

Amis' narrator in Other People claims authority but has none, just as Samson Young has none in London Fields. The narrator of Time's Arrow claims to be powerless, yet he makes an astounding number of moral decisions, albeit with an air of uncertainty and often in error. In the latter work, the narrator's uncertainty about the inverse movement of time allows for the orderly and humorous telling of the story:

Tod and I are feeling so terrific that we've joined a club and taken up tennis. Perhaps prematurely. Because--to begin with, at least--it made our back ache like a son of a bitch. Tennis

is a pretty dumb game, I'm finding: the fuzzy ball jumps out of the net, or out of the chicken wire at the back of the court, and the four of us bat it around until it is pocketed-- quite arbitrarily, it seems to me--by the server. (13)

The narrator's ignorance of his actual situation leads him to tell his story in proper temporal sequence, but because the events being told have already happened and are being relived, a meta-narrative is formed. Meanings beyond the superficial are ready to be apprehended even though they are not denoted by the author or narrator. Thus, what the narrator describes isn't what is actually happening, actual events being contradictory. However, the narrator's lack of knowledge and authority prevent him from comprehending the true nature of time. This lack of knowledge, paradoxically, allows the text to continue uninterrupted and allows for the creation of humor.

The reader may ask how humor, as a universal concept, can be found within a postmodern text when such a text is supposed to be the combination of two individuals: text and reader. If there are only "reasons" and not "reason," and if there is no universal, only an ever-recreated individual, then how can a concept like humor exist? The answer lies in two basic conditions of postmodernism:

The postmodernist era is marked by a radical decomposition of all the central principles of literature, the falling into deep questionability of critical ideas about authorship, audience, the processes of reading, and criticism itself.

(Connor, Postmodernist 113)⁸

Added to this "deep questionability" is Bradbury and McFarlane's notion

that postmodernism is "compelled to use form to subvert [form]." That there are cultural forms, idioms, that unite societies is inescapable. In the above selection from Time's Arrow, Amis uses tennis, which is relatively universally understood in Western society, and combines it with a perverted sense of temporality to create humor. This combination and its humor is easily recognized by a Western reader through cultural exchange:

Humour is not for babes, Martians, or congenital idiots. We share our humour with those who have shared our history and who understand our way of interpreting experience. There is a fund of common knowledge and recollection, upon which all jokes draw with instantaneous effect. (Nash 9)

As much as he may want to, the postmodernist can never completely escape form or its impact. Uniqueness can be explored and lauded, but a common sense of language and meaning will always be necessary if a postmodern author is to relay his message, even if that message is, paradoxically, disorderly, discontinuous or disingenuous. Postmodernism is evidenced, but never complete, for once it is complete, and forms are eliminated, there is chaos and meaninglessness. The postmodern condition would, in its culmination, paradoxically bring the study of itself to extinction, for there could be no sense of unity or similarity.

Still, the postmodern condition is important to Amis, and aspects of postmodernism can be found in all his works. They are playfully aware of form and contain many aspects of the anti-novel with which Amis disembowels fiction. His works, especially later novels like London Fields and The Information, represent postmodernism because in them, as Connor

(citing Alan Wilde) notes, "'a world in need of mending is superseded by one beyond repair'" (Postmodernist 116). His ability to be universal in certain ways, such as humor or gaining critical attention, indicates allegiance to more than one guiding condition--postmodernism is an important, but not the only, facet of Amis' work. Competing ideas exist side by side, just as critics like Cuddon maintain that postmodernism and modernism exist side by side (734).

III. Modernism Revisited

The term "post" modernism implies something on the heels of modernism, but some argue that modernism itself is not dead:

Some have suggested that modernism, as an innovative and re-vivifying movement, was played out by the late 1940s, and that it was then that post-modernism began. In fact, such movements, of their nature, do not just start and stop; the evolution is gradual. The impetus and energy of one diminishes (but continues) as the momentum of the other burgeons. (Cuddon 551)

As Connor suggests, the difficulty of separating the two movements may arise, in part, from the fact that "the urge to identify and celebrate the category of the postmodern has been so strong as to produce by back-formation a collective agreement about what modernism was, in order to have something to react against" (Postmodernist 105). In both his non-fiction and fiction, Amis exemplifies consciously (and perhaps unconsciously) the fact that aspects of modernism are still prevalent. The

conditions are muddled in some ways, for both subsume properties of the other, such as "an aesthetic self-consciousness and reflexiveness; a rejection of narrative structure in favour of simultaneity and montage; an exploration of the paradoxical, ambiguous and uncertain" and an open-ended reality, many of which "features appear in definitions of post-modernism as well [as modernism]" (Sarup 131).

The self-awareness and self-reflexivity of Amis' works are evident; novels from The Rachel Papers to The Information call attention to themselves as works of fiction through narrative violation of form or even a direct statement from the author, as in London Fields. Other techniques, such as open-endedness, are also consistently employed. The end of an Amis work challenges the reader to figure out exactly what has happened, let alone why it has happened. At the end of Other People, for example, time has been distorted, Amy's supposedly dead mother is alive, and the narrator says, "I can see her coming to the end of the path and hesitating as she reaches the road, looking this way and that, wondering which way to go" (224). Has the story begun again? Has Amy become Mary again? These questions puzzle the reader, as does the ambiguous "It was me. It was me" (470) at the end of London Fields. Samson Young? Mark Asprey? Martin Amis?

The muddled relationship of modernism and postmodernism thickens with literary definitions. Cuddon sees modernism as "a breaking away from established rules, traditions and conventions, fresh ways of looking at man's position and function in the universe and many (in some cases remarkable) experiments in form and style" (551). Again, the qualities mirror those pertaining to postmodernism. Indeed, Amis

himself employs the term "modern" in his prose when it seems he is referring to postmodernism. In a review of Saul Bellow's More Die of Heartbreak, Amis writes, "Innocence is a claim to immunity, and there is no immunity anymore; modernity makes no exceptions" (Mrs. Nabokov 137). Considering his idea that postmodernism is evidenced by an ever-changing self, the idea that "innocence," or "immunity" from society or the world, is gone seems postmodern in the sense that one's self is forever tied to changes, and those changes are forever socially re-interpreted. In modernism, as Rosenau claims, there is still a sense of authority, enlightenment, but in post-modernity there is no such authority, no sense of enlightenment. With authority comes a sense of immunity, at least from criticism. Someone in authority can make a claim to reason and expect to be heard, and such a person is necessarily be immune to those whose opinions, for lack of a better phrase, do not count. In a postmodern world, however, all opinions are equal and suspect. Therefore, the loss of immunity and the necessary loss of innocence that accompanies it is, in Amis' terms, postmodern rather than modern. Admittedly, when he uses the word "modern" in this essay, he is referring to Bellow: "'Modern': what has Bellow done to that word? In Bellow, modern now comes with its own special static, its own humiliating helplessness, its own unbearable agitation" (Mrs. Nabokov 135). Nevertheless, here he speaks paradoxically of the "modern," combining both "static" and "agitation" as qualities. Paradox is at the heart of postmodernism because of its use of and subversion of form. What Amis and Bellow refer to as "modern" in this essay resembles what Amis, in his fiction and other essays, considers postmodern.

Amis does have a specific understanding of modernity, however. In London Fields, the character Keith Talent was considered modern because of his static, unchanging nature, because of his inability to adapt to any role other than that of two-bit thug. Indeed, Nicola attempts to make him into a murderer by book's end, but he is unable even to follow through with that minor change to his established make-up. A more academic (and more literary) view of modernity comes from his essay "Teacher's Pet," a review of James Joyce's Ulysses. Amis calls Joyce and his work "the exemplary modern--fanatically prolix, innovative, and recondite, and utterly free of obligation to please a reading public" (96). This freedom from obligation recalls Rosenau's point that the modern reader was "not held in such high regard." It also calls to mind Lawrence Rainey's anti-modern contention that "the effect of modernism was not so much to encourage reading as to render it superfluous" (11). Following in this line of reasoning, Amis allows Joyce authorial credibility, calling him a "writer's writer. He is auto-friendly; he is James Joyce friendly" ("Pet" 96), a writer about whom the general public "remains unconsulted" ("Pet" 99). Joyce attains a privileged status, a signal aspect of modernity a postmodern author cannot achieve. Ulysses is removed from the general reading public and placed in academic arenas, written for academics, critics and, mainly, Joyce himself. As Fredric Jameson argues, the moderns, mainly because of academia, have been transformed from disdained, erudite Fabians into acceptable realists: "Not only are Picasso and Joyce no longer ugly; they now strike us, on the whole, as rather 'realistic'; and this is the result of a canonization and an academic institutionalization of the modern movement

generally" (56).

Amis coincides with Rosenau in envisioning the position of the modern author as outside the text in an authoritative posture. The postmodern author, if he exists as "author," is found somewhere inside the text, assuming no authority and functioning more like a message-carrier, perhaps not even a good one. More important, he leaves the reader to interpret and reinterpret his message. Samson Young, of London Fields, claims to be such an "author," offering an objective account for the reader's interpretation: "I can't make anything up. It just isn't in me. Man, am I a reliable narrator" (78). But there is also Mark Asprey, the literary executor who may be the author, and the mysterious M.A. at the front of the book who may be Mark Asprey or Martin Amis. In short, the position of the author(s) in Amis' works is unclear, as is the amount of control they have over their prose.

Amis respects Joyce's genius immensely, but he also understands that Joyce has taken his work away from the average reader by making it difficult to relate to it. He is even not beyond creating humor at Joyce's expense, as two passages from The Information indicate: "Richard looked at his watch and thought: I can't call him yet. Or rather: Can't call him yet. For the interior monologue now waives the initial personal pronoun, in deference to Joyce" (5). Later in the novel, Richard Tull, a "modern" author whose unreadable book Untitled uses sixteen unreliable narrators and causes migraines for anyone who attempts to read it, is "trying to write genius novels, like Joyce: Joyce was the best yet at genius novels, and even he was a drag about half the time" (125). The narrator's thoughts are reminiscent of Amis'

comment in "Teacher's Pet": "Who reads Ulysses for the hell of it?" he asks while admitting he has trouble getting "halfway through" (96). His satire of Joyce aside, his respect for the author, and the techniques of modern literature, are illustrated by the fact that Amis himself is not above employing them for purposes other than satirical. More important, this use is in keeping with his postmodern tendencies, for postmodernism draws on all that came before it, using form, as Bradbury and McFarlane note, to subvert form.

Perhaps the most important literary technique refined by modern authors such as Joyce and Virginia Woolf is stream-of-consciousness, which attempts to "characterize the continuous flow of thought and sensation in the human mind" (Lodge, Art 42). Using a form of this technique called interior monologue, Ulysses offers "an endless tape-recording of the subject's impressions, reflections, questions, memories and fantasies, as they are triggered either by physical sensations or the association of ideas" (Lodge, Art 47). In discussing Ulysses' use of interior monologue, Lodge cites a paragraph describing Leopold Bloom departing from home:

On the doorstep he felt in his hip pocket for the latchkey. Not there. In the trousers I left off. Must get it. Potato I have. Creaky wardrobe. No use disturbing her. She turned over sleepily that time. He pulled the halldoor to after him very quietly, more, till the footleaf dropped gently over the threshold, a limp lid. Looked shut. All right till I come back anyhow. (Ulysses 57)

Amis uses a similar form of this technique from time to time, although

not frequently. In The Information, the technique is especially useful as Gwyn Barry imagines how his future biographer will write about him:

Although Barry was no. A keen. While no jock or gym rat, Barry responded to the heightened life of fierce competition. He loved games and sports. (But he hated games and sports. Because he always lost.) With his old sparring. With his old friend Richard Tull he enjoyed a healthy rivalry--on the tennis court, over the snooker table, and across the chess-board. (And he always lost. He never won.) As a novelist Tull was no. Unfavored by the muses, Tull was nevertheless. In hand-eye coordination and spatial awareness, if not in imaginative fiction, Tull was Barry's....(303)

While trying to compose his biography for his future biographer, Barry's incomplete, semi-incoherent thoughts illustrate interior monologue. More interesting here is that Amis combines a burst of interior monologue and parenthetical comments from the third-person narrator, who has no qualms about interrupting Barry's thoughts and even correcting when necessary. The combination of these techniques and the unique outcome of an edited version of interior monologue, a very postmodern practice, creates an entirely new technique which, recalling the former term, can be called "edited interior monologue."

Stream-of-consciousness writing is also employed via a technique different from interior monologue. Virginia Woolf practices free indirect style, which, David Lodge writes, "renders thought as reported speech (in the third person, past tense) but keeps to the kind of vocabulary that is appropriate to the character, and deletes some of the

tags, like 'she thought,' 'she wondered,' 'she asked herself,' etc. that a more formal narrative style would require" (Art 43). Lodge cites the famous opening line of Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway ("Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" [3]), noting that the reader has been plunged "into the middle of an ongoing life" (Art 44). Such a plunge, without explanation, presents life as a stream in which logical connections between events are not necessarily apparent. The opening line of Amis' Other People similarly employs free indirect style: "Her first feeling, as she smelled the air, was one of intense and helpless gratitude" (13). The reader, as in the case of Mrs. Dalloway, is plunged into the middle of events he can neither describe nor understand. And like Mrs. Dalloway, Other People is not readily forthcoming with background information; in both works, the reader is left to piece events together himself, to pick up clues as to what has happened and what will happen. Mary Lamb/Amy Hide, the heroine (or anti-heroine) of Other People, and Clarissa Dalloway are like blank pages whose vital statistics the reader needs to fill in.

However, Amis quickly abandons free indirect style in Other People, using, in the second line, one of the "tags" Lodge mentions: "I'm all right, she thought with a gasp." Like his limited use of interior monologue, Amis uses only inflections of free indirect style and examples of interior monologue. He admires these techniques, especially when employed with genius, as in Joyce, but he also recognizes that an author of such a work must to forego the postmodern recombination of other elements. Were Amis solely to employ stream-of-consciousness techniques, his writing would be more modern than postmodern. For

him to move forward, he must redefine fiction with each new attempt, and therefore no one technique can be preeminent. Amis and other postmodern practitioners redefine style and form through recombination, whereas modernists search for a brand new style with which to subvert the old.⁹ Even narration, Amis' most used (or abused) tool, is radically altered in his works so each work will possess a unique narrative scheme.

Despite his limited use of stream-of-consciousness techniques, Amis' dependence on modernism to enhance style should not be underrated: modernist style and philosophy are important to his literary outlook. Consider how Bradbury and McFarlane's define modernism: "The movement towards sophistication and mannerism, towards introversion, technical display, internal self-scepticism, has often been taken as a common base for a definition of Modernism" (26). Bradbury and McFarlane list stream-of-consciousness as an example of technical display, but they also list other elements, such as "the violation of expected continuities, the element of de-creation and crisis" (24), as well as "anti-form or desecration of established conventions" (30). Postmodern novels, especially in their distorted temporal aspects, violate expected continuities, as they do when necessary in speech and grammar. But postmodern novels only employ these techniques to a limited extent and then recombine them in unique ways to form agglomerations of stylistic exercises. Rather than "anti-form," Amis' works should be termed "multi-form." One distinction, then, between the modernism and postmodernism discussed in relation to him is the idea of non-form versus all-form. Bradbury and McFarlane continue this line to posit that modernism was the logical result of an idealism that had grown since Romanticism and

that modern artists were anti-form in the sense that they were searching for a new form, a new style that would modernize literature, bringing it in line with the developing and modernizing industrial world around it.¹⁰ Postmodernists like Amis see the disintegration of society, apocalyptically, as in London Fields, socially, as in Dead Babies, or personally, as in Success. They recognize what modernism attempts and take what is best from it while realizing that a new sense "self-exhausting fictionality" has taken hold of literature (Bradbury and McFarlane 34). All selves become works of fiction because they are constantly being re-written.

A distinguishing feature, then, of Amis' contrast to modernism is his opposing social outlook. If modernism is to be understood as "the art of modernization" (Bradbury and McFarlane 27), then postmodernism (ideally) must be the end result of modernization. Jameson cites "abstract expressionism in painting, existentialism in philosophy, the final forms of representation in the novel, the films of the great auteurs, or the modernist school of poetry" as aspects of modernism (53); and he describes postmodernism as an "inverted millenarianism":

The postmodernisms have in fact been fascinated...by [the] whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Readers' Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and science fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer simply 'quote', as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but

incorporate into their very substance. (55)

The assumed erudition and intellectual substance of the former sharply contrasts with the mental decay of the latter. Valid experimentation has been supplanted by haphazard recombination. The "modernization" of the novel moved the form from its nineteenth century adherence to reliable, third-person intrusive narration and "grammatical" structure to a new form more artistically representative of life. The use of stream-of-consciousness techniques is one of the most evident attempts to achieve the representation of "the subconscious or unconscious workings of the human mind" (Lodge, "Language" 481). In short, the novel became a more human production, more fallible (like humans), less concerned with time and open-ended. Postmodernists reveal these aspects of human existence, incorporating them into their works, yet these works cannot rightly be said to be specifically human "productions," for though modern author existed, the postmodern author does not. He has resigned his place, giving full credibility to the interaction of reader and text. The modern author possesses power while the postmodern author does not. The latter's text is amorphous, proud of its own fictionality. Steven Connor illustrates this concept by citing a list of modern/postmodern dichotmies created by Ihab Hassan, including purpose/play; design/chance; hierarchy/anarchy; determinacy/indeterminacy (Postmodernist 111-112). Both modernism and postmodernism concern form and its alteration, but the former wants to alter it only once while the latter wants to continue to alter it.

These attempts to change form, however, are not without consequences. Postmodern writers may have inherited some of their notions

about form from modernists, but Amis also inherited aspects of his literary style from those who rejected modernism: anti-modernists.

IV. Anti-Modernism

Lyotard defines the anti-modern as "the demand for reality--that is, for unity, simplicity, communicability." (75). Sarup employs the term "antimodernists" but does not define it (144), while Bradbury and McFarlane offer a basic definition of the word but do not actually use it, saying that modernism divides people into two groups, "those who understand it and those who do not, those trained in and acquiescent to its techniques and premises, and those who find it not only incomprehensible but hostile" (28).

One of those who was "hostile" is E.M. Forster. In Aspects of the Novel, Forster offers very basic and rigid definitions for fictional structure. He defines a story as "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence--dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday after Monday, decay after death, and so on" (27). This structure is, for a "good novel," "imperative" (29). Added to his rigid idea of story is a similarly rigid notion of plot, which he calls, "a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The King died and then the Queen died' is a story. 'The King died, and then the Queen died of grief' is a plot" (86). Forster's structure is based on cause and effect, whose continuum he sees as imperative to a "good" story. His is a basic concept of fictional structure also recognized by other critics, such as Frye:

In literary fictions the plot consists of somebody doing something. The somebody, if an individual, is the hero, and something he does or fails to do is what he can do, or could have done, on the level of the postulates made about him by the author and the consequent expectations of the audience. (33).

Consistency as it concerns both author and audience figure prominently in Frye's and Forster's interpretations. Cause and effect must remain in line with the "postulates" the author has set forth about his fiction. Forster especially disdains the notion of experimentation, disdains the idea that fiction can more accurately represent humanity by being more idiosyncratic, less pent in by rules of story and plot. He demands that fiction follow rules of story and plot, or else authors risk losing readers and rendering their works unintelligible (like the works of Richard Tull in The Information). For instance, Forster calls Gide's Les Faux Monnayeurs "a violent onslaught on the plot as we have defined it: a constructive attempt to put something in the place of the plot" (97).

Forster saves his most "hostile" words for experimental novels he calls "fantastic," a category under which is subsumed any novel, such as Ulysses, that challenges his notions of proper story construction. Using circus imagery, Forster says that fantastic novels demand "an additional adjustment because of the oddness of [their] method or subject matter-- like a sideshow in an exhibition where you have to pay sixpence as well as the original entrance fee" (109). He begrudgingly admits that novels like Ulysses are curious as literary experiments (120), but in the end

he calls Joyce's book "a dogged attempt to cover the universe with mud, it is an inverted Victorianism, an attempt to make crossness and dirt succeed where sweetness and light failed, a simplification of the human character in the interests of Hell" (121). Lastly, Forster declares that Ulysses does not "come off," that it aims "to degrade all things and more particularly civilization and art, by turning them inside out and upside down" (122). Interestingly, recent research upholds Forster's prediction of reader alienation. Lawrence Rainey writes that most of the first 1,000-print-run of Ulysses was purchased not by discerning readers but by speculators in the rare-book trade:

Paradoxically, the publication of Ulysses did not confirm the importance of discerning readers, but demonstrated for perhaps the first time that readers might be rendered altogether unnecessary to the success of a book. (11)

Associating modernism with "the rise of New Criticism and the triumph of close reading" (11), argues Rainey, may be in error.

Aspects of the Novel, published in 1927, was one of the first literary works to confront modernism in a "hostile" manner. From the 1930s through the 1950s, a small school of anti-modernists developed, taking as their credo an outspokenness, a bluntness that was difficult to misinterpret, and, in the words of an "Angry Young Man," an "us" versus "them" mentality: "If only 'them' and 'us' had the same ideas we'd get on like a house on fire, but they don't see eye to eye with us and we don't see eye to eye with them, so that's how it stands and how it will always stand" (Sillitoe 7-8). Anti-modernists deny the elitism of modernity, its attempt to recreate the novel in a manner

superior to what had come before:

As we might expect, theories of postmodernist writing postulate a regression from or progression beyond such notions of self-sufficient form. One early manifestation of this is the movement towards modest realism in British writing of the 1950s and 1960s, typified in the work of Alan Sillitoe, Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin, writers who refused what seemed to them the high-minded and elitist obscurity of the modernist inheritance and fostered a return to writing which was lodged in experience rather than form. (Connor, Postmodernist 108)

The early 1950s, in fact, saw the establishment of an informal school of writers referred to as "The Movement." It included "Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings, Thom Gunn, John Holloway, Donald Davie, D.J. Enright...Iris Murdoch" and, retrospectively, Philip Larkin (Motion 242). "Movement" writers were described by the school's creator, J.D. Scott, literary editor of the Spectator, as "anti-phoney," "anti-wet," "sceptical, robust, ironic, prepared to be as comfortable as possible in a wicked, commercial, threatened world" (400). Their agenda was clear, their methods traditional and non-experimental. Precursors of this school who should perhaps have their names added as heralds include Evelyn Waugh and George Orwell.

Some of the earliest signs of literary anti-modernism manifest themselves in Waugh's novels, particularly Black Mischief, in which modern Europe confronts barbarism attempting, in the words of Emperor Seth, to transform it:

Defeat is impossible. I have been to Europe. I know. We have the Tank. This is not a war of Seth against Seyid but of Progress against Barbarism. And Progress must prevail. I have seen the great tattoo of Aldershot, the Paris Exhibition, the Oxford Union. I have read modern books--Shaw, Arlen, Priestly. What do the gossips in the bazaars know of all this? The whole might of Evolution rides behind him; at my stirrups run woman's suffrage, vaccination, and vivisection. I am the New Age. I am the Future. (22)

Seth depends on the ideals of the Enlightenment to save his army from defeat, to turn his backwards, third-world nation into a world leader modeled on European efficiency. The "Tank," a child of modern science (and created, in Waugh's book, by a "distinguished mechanic" named Mr. Marx [40]) is the most blatant point of satire in the passage; on this one, broken-down device Seth pins his hopes for victory.

Ironically, his army is initially victorious. And when he is informed that a cannibalistic tribe has devoured his enemy, Seyid, he is duly understanding, as indicated in his response to General Connolly's account:

"I am afraid that as yet the Wanda are totally out of touch with modern thought. They need education. We must start some schools and a university for them when we get things straight."

"That's it, Seth, you can't blame them. It's want of education. That's all it is."

"We might start them on Montessori methods," said Seth

dreamily. "You can't blame them." (57-58)

Seth's dreamy state, his inability to cope with the less-than-pleasant truths that sometimes govern reality, is the main ingredient of Waugh's satire. Seth is a modernist who cannot cope with the barbarism of his nation because, in his arrogance, he refuses to understand it, placing his hopes in technology (science) and in experimental education. He thinks these things are all he needs to transform his nation into a European-style power. Like the Fabians, he believes he himself needs to spearhead this transformation. Like the modern author, Seth feels self-assured in his power and his ability to exercise power, and he is also unconcerned with the real needs of his people.

In the end, his reign is an abysmal failure. Foreshadowing "The Movement," Waugh's satiric message is that modernism is also doomed. His bluntness, the clarity of his satiric message and his prose, it marks anti-modernism and calls for a return to classically realistic representation.

Interestingly, in some criticism, Waugh's contemporary, George Orwell, is considered early postmodern. In Understanding Martin Amis, James Diedrick writes that "1984 is a seminal postmodern novel, and [Amis'] Money extends Orwell's analysis of totalitarian ideology into the realm of post-industrial capitalist democracies" (75). Diedrick rightly sees Orwell's work foreshadowing postindustrialism and post-modernism, but the situation in which the main character of the book, Winston Smith, finds himself illustrates Orwell's anti-modern tendency. Smith attempts to redefine himself in the face of oppressive totalitarianism, attempts to assert a new self with which he will be

free to do as he pleases (foreshadowing postmodernism). But he fails. His self is defined for him by the authority of Big Brother, who, like the paternalistic modern author, does not recognize the ability of the individual to determine any facet of existence for himself. History and the individual have been redefined in Big Brother's image and by his authority. No further changes or redefinition will occur for anyone. Orwell's anti-modern view of this stagnation shows in the bitter irony of Winston's submission to Big Brother: "But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother" (245). Smith is part of a post-industrial world, but he is not postmodern; he is satirically modern because of his loss of control over his destiny. Big Brother is the butt of that satire, the metaphoric modern author.

Another mark of anti-modernism and point of satire for Orwell is the necessity to speak plainly. Forster dislikes and disdains what he sees as a modernist tendency to turn things "inside out and upside down," and that is exactly what happens in Oceania, the world of Big Brother in 1984. Language is reinvented in the concepts of "Newspeak" and "Doublethink." "Newspeak" lets words to be used paradoxically, as in the government slogan, "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength" (17). As author, Big Brother uses words in this fashion to disorient his citizens, or readers, so that they will simply accept his dictates unquestioningly. Another tactic used in conjunction with "Newspeak" is "Doublethink": "To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to

be contradictory" (32). Modern stream-of-consciousness works resemble "Newspeak" and can create within the reader's mind the necessity for "Doublethink." Forster inveighed against modern authors who altered what he believed to be the logic of story and plot, and in the world of 1984, Orwell uses satire to confront the same attempt. Commenting on Orwell's literary stature, Raymond Williams notes that he is not a great writer and that literary interest in him "lies almost wholly in his frankness" (285). Making sure a message is frank, or communicated as clearly as possible, is an anti-modern trait. By having Winston Smith submit to the illogic of Big Brother, after a heroic attempt to free himself from that illogic, Orwell fires a warning shot at those playing games with truth, attempting to obscure it.

Plain speaking, frankness, characterizes anti-modernism, and few literary figures are more frank than Philip Larkin who, in both prose and poetry, is outspoken against modernism's obfuscation of literature. In the introduction to All What Jazz, Larkin calls Joyce "a textbook case of declension from talent to absurdity," and shortly after offers his most poignant criticism of modernism:

I dislike such things not because they are new, but because they are irresponsible exploitations of technique in contradiction of human life as we know it. This is my essential criticism of modernism, whether perpetrated by Parker, Pound or Picasso: it helps us neither to enjoy nor endure. It will divert us as long as we are prepared to be mystified or outraged, but maintains its hold only by being more mystifying and more outrageous: it has no lasting power. (Required 297)

Larkin expands on the ideas represented in 1984, offering a direct criticism of modernism as "mystifying" and "outrageous," and adding that it maintains an imaginative hold on readers only because it is unintelligible, a blemish on the face of the literature that preceded it:

It seems to me undeniable that up to this century literature used language in the way we all use it, painting represented what anyone with normal vision sees, and music was an affair of nice noises rather than nasty ones. The innovation of 'modernism' in the arts consisted of doing the opposite.

(Required 72)

For anti-modernists, modernism subverted literature and literary history, and Larkin spearheaded the literary movement to reject it and return literature to the path of clarity and intelligibility. He accomplishes this return most successfully through poetry, which, he feels, has been as wronged as any other aspect of literature:

It is as obvious as it is strenuously denied that in this century English poetry went off on a loop-line that took it away from the general reader. Several factors caused this. One was the aberration of modernism, that blighted all the arts. (Motion 345)

Larkin believes poetry should not be presumptuous or used as a showcase for erudition:

As a guiding principle I believe that every poem must be its own sole freshly created universe, and therefore have no belief in 'tradition' or a common mythkitty or casual al-

lusions in poems to other poems or poets, which last I find unpleasantly like the talk of literary understrappers letting you see they know the right people. (Motion 273)

The above words were taken by Larkin's contemporaries as "an expression of the anti-modernist feelings which lay at the heart of The Movement" (Motion 273). Even more forcefully and more frankly, however, Larkin declares, "Pound, for instance, I shit. Likewise Joyce" (Motion 75). If frankness is part of anti-modern expression, it is not surprising that Larkin, the premier anti-modern author of mid-century, relies on "the weight of his rigorous honesty" (Fowler 346) for literary power and effectiveness.

The bleakness and depressing outlook on life and humanity that accompany this outlook make Larkin's honesty and imagery all the more stark--and this combination heavily influences Martin Amis, who adds anti-modernism to modernism in his work, culling aspects of opposites to create his postmodern novel.

Consider some of Larkin's poetic imagery and frank style from the Collected Poems. In the poem "A Writer," Larkin says that "though the eye could see / Wide beauty in a motion or a pause, / It need expect no lasting salary / Beyond the bowels' momentary applause" (263). The life of a writer is largely devoid of interest; few may attain fame, but most have to settle for mere existence, continuous bowel movements. Another example of Larkin's frankness (and one that figures significantly in the understanding of Amis' Success) is in "This Be The Verse," which opens "They fuck you up, your mum and dad. / They may not mean to, but they do. / They fill you with the faults they had / And add some extra just

for you" (180). Larkin's "rigorous honesty" does not show so starkly in all his poems (the poem "Sad Steps," for instance, begins "Groping back to bed after a piss" [169] but then moves to a more symbolic meditation on mortality, a typical Larkinesque technique), but his return to it throughout his work demonstrates the importance he places on the candor he feels modernism lacks. It is a quality praised by the "Angry Young Men" who followed him and, in turn, influenced the next generation of writers, including Martin Amis.

The "Angry Young Men" of the 1950s who celebrated candor as much as Philip Larkin devoted themselves to plain speaking and clear images that enhanced the anti-modern cause. The "Angry Young Men" championed a new sense of honesty: brute honesty, as practiced by Alan Sillitoe's Borstal-detained "Long-Distance Runner":

And if I had the whip-hand I wouldn't even bother to build a place like this to put all the cops, governors, posh whose penpushers, army officers, Members of Parliament in; no I'd stick them up against a wall and let them have it, like they'd have done with blokes like us years ago, that is, if they'd ever known what it means to be honest, which they don't and never will so help me God Almighty. (15)

The writer "mainly but indirectly responsible" for the "angry" movement "was John Osborne" (Cuddon 43), whose play Look Back in Anger employed what Matthew Hodgart termed "accomplished invective" (202).¹¹ Another author labelled "angry" was Kingsley Amis, whose frankness and disillusion mirror Larkin's, as indicated in Joel Conarroe's review of his Memoirs: "One grandmother...is introduced as 'a large dreadful hairy-

faced creature,' and one dear old granddad as 'a small fat red-faced fellow with starting moist eyes and a straggly moustache.'" Conarroe adds that "when it comes to insensitivity, this man who can casually refer to 'emigre queers' is able to hold his own." Amis' outspokenness is not only part of his Memoirs, but also his fiction--Lucky Jim, his first novel, is about a young academic's disillusionment with the elitism and phoniness of the academic world. A later novel, Jake's Thing, also deals with phoniness, which Amis finds in subjects from feminism to psychology, and employs what can be considered some of his most "accomplished invective." Consider, for example, the closing thoughts of Jake Richardson, the novel's main character:

Jake did a quick run-through of women in his mind, not of the ones he had known or dealt with in the past few months or years so much as all of them: their concern with the surface of things, with objects and appearances, with their surroundings and how they looked and sounded in them, with seeming to be better and to be right while getting everything wrong, their automatic assumption of the role of injured party in any clash of wills, their certainty that a view is the more credible and useful for the fact that they hold it, their use of misunderstanding and misrepresentation as weapons of debate....(286)

This citation (only half of the whole) demonstrates his willingness to speak plainly and discuss issues through blunt, realistic prose. Jake's cynical view of women is difficult to misinterpret.

Other movements and other ideas do not concern anti-modernists,

who refuse to suppress their words and ideas because of others' sensibilities. They also (as a rule) do not use metaphors or techniques that are too obscure (such as stream-of-consciousness prose) and hide truth to reveal it psychologically. In fact, Jake's Thing satirizes the idea that people's inner workings can be examined and understood by others, including psychologists. For instance, in order to cure his impotence, Jake is subjected to various humiliating treatments by supposed professionals, including masturbating before a room of doctors and joining the "Workshop," a psychological support group run by a "facilitator" called "Ed." At the "Workshop," Jake watches a young, suicidal girl named Kelly engage in self-expression, which includes writhing about the floor, howling and moaning incoherently. The therapy, ultimately, does not stop Kelly from committing suicide, which leads to Jake's final disillusionment with "professionals." Jake's last words to his analyst are, "You know, now it comes to it and I realize I shan't be coming to see you anymore I can't help feeling, how shall I put it, full of fun" (267). Amis satirizes any person or group that authorizes how one should live one's life. He defends the self, albeit a single, clearly defined self as opposed to the ever-changing postmodern self. The paternalistic notion that one group rises above another is, in Jake's Thing, unacceptable, just as the modern tendency towards obscurity and author-orientation as opposed to reader-orientation is unacceptable to anti-modernists. Diedrick argues this point in analyzing the filial connections between Kingsley and Martin Amis and also the writers to whom the latter pays close attention (J.G. Ballard, Saul Bellow, Vladimir Nabokov, Philip Roth, John Updike):

The aesthetic allegiances of most of these writers are clearly opposed to those of Kingsley Amis, whose fiction conforms to the mode of "classic" (as opposed to modernist) realism as David Lodge defines it. "Classic realism, with its concern for coherence and causality in narrative structure, for the autonomy of the individual self in the presentation of character, for a readable homogeneity and urbanity of style, is equated with liberal humanism, common sense and the presentation of bourgeois culture as a kind of norm." (6)

Anti-modernists take up a position straddling the modern and post-modern practitioners around them: they accept the postmodern notions of reader-oriented as opposed to author-oriented novels, as well as the freedom of the self to determine its orientation. However, they reject the notion of the author's death, the postmodern idea under which an author becomes a mere player in his own work rather than a writer. They also reject the postmodernist plurality of selves. Anti-modern authors, as Lodge says, respect "the autonomy of the individual self," and "a readable homogeneity," which postmodernists reject, for the postmodern individual has autonomy only if he keeps redefining himself. Novels attain the same status, rejecting homogeneity to be created anew at each reading. It is true that modernists also reject the notion of an ever-changing self, wanting a more real and exact image gained through introspection. Anti-modernists also accept the single, autonomous self but deny the extensive introspection and the elitist notion of authority possessed by modern art.

How does anti-modernism affect Martin Amis? Like modernism, Amis

culls the best of anti-modernism to incorporate into his work. From modernism he takes inflections of techniques (such as stream-of-consciousness) and uses the movement's primary writer (Joyce) for satire in The Information. From anti-modernism, he takes frankness, plain speaking and a bleak, Larkinesque view of society revealed in unswervingly blunt terms. Philip Larkin, in fact, figures often not only in Amis' fiction, but also in his non-fiction. The author's non-fiction view of the primary anti-modernist demonstrates the latter's sympathy for (but not complete acceptance of) anti-modernism. Amis calls Larkin, in his obituary, "Anti-intellectual, incurious and reactionary," elements that, combined with his inability to love, helped Larkin ironically produce a poetic corpus "full of truth, beauty, instruction, delight--and much wincing humour" (Mrs. Nabokov 201). In the tone of this obituary, Amis laments Larkin's inability to love while lauding the ironic power that made him "an exponent of the ironic romance of exclusion, or inversion" (204). Larkin's inversion, his ability to see into and define himself for himself, is very anti-modern. Like Jake Richardson Jake's Thing, there is no authority fit to examine Larkin other than Larkin. As he says in Required Writing, "I should hate to find myself in agreement with the kind of critic who denies the poet supreme authority regarding his work" (137). Martin Amis recognizes this rigid outlook on the self as part of both Larkin's and his father's makeup:

Larkin the man is separated from us, historically, by changes in the self. For his generation, you were what you were, and that was that. It made you unswervable and adamant. My

father has this quality. I don't. None of us do. There are too many forces at work on us. There are too many fronts to cover. ("Don Juan" 82)

Amis praises Larkin's ability to judge himself, determine himself, an anti-modern quality lost to the postmodern world. Yet, Amis contends, Larkin possesses this quality to such a degree that outside examinations of Larkin's self "pale compared with the self-examinations of the poetry" ("Don Juan" 81).

Some of Amis' fictional characters have difficulty maintaining a self-definition, yet they employ self-examination worthy of Larkin. In addition, they exemplify anti-modern frankness common to the works of Orwell, Larkin and Kingsley Amis. The narrator of Amis' first novel, The Rachel Papers, illustrates these qualities. Initially, Charles Highway, narrator, diarist and almost twenty, writes, "Of course, if Philip Larkin is anyone to go by, we all hate home and having to be there" (11). Highway quotes from "Poetry of Departures": "We all hate home / And having to be there" (Collected Poems 85). Highway hates home particularly because of his father, whom he wants desperately to confront. At one point, having tried to face his father about the latter's mistress, he writes, "I felt ashamed. All worked up and nowhere to go" (109). He continually examines himself and his relationships. He writes a long letter to his father describing his inner feelings, but it never gets delivered. He simply cannot make the connection between his inner self and the world around him, so he accomplishes nothing. One possible means of escape is through a relationship with the title character, Rachel, but the relationship ends up being based more

on what Charles believes it should be, i.e. sex, and, in the end, he pushes her back into the arms of a former boyfriend and decides to be a writer--the only profession that suits him since his self-absorption prevents worthwhile external connections. One critic noted that Highway "is studiously offensive--arrogant, hideously vulnerable, oozing 'self-consciousness and self-disgust and self-infatuation and self-...you name it'" ("Nice and nasty"). In Highway, Amis creates a character combining a healthy degree of Larkinesque introspection and a postmodern inability to create a single self--self-examination and the desire to create a lone self clash with his self-redefinition.

Interestingly, The Rachel Papers has also been called Martin Amis' salute to his father's first novel, Lucky Jim. The alienation of the main character, his inability to make himself fit, reminds critics of Kingsley Amis' "angry" work:

Ah, Lucky Jim thirty years on, you're meant to feel when you start to read; then, on second thoughts, you realize that only a less knowing young man would have felt compelled to reject the Kingsley Amis mode, that a really clever and obnoxious author would do as Martin Amis does and exorcize it by imitation. ("Nice and nasty")

The comparison is not complete, however, for, as Diedrick argues, the earlier novel "conforms to the traditional comic paradigm...in which a well-suited couple, attracted to one another but separated by various social barriers, overcome all obstacles to their union and end up in each other's arms" (27). In short, Jim Dixon ultimately finds himself and his place in the world, but Charles Highway may never truly find

himself or his place. Martin Amis may have initially usurped the theme of alienation as the center of The Rachel Papers, but it becomes post-modern because he makes the alienation itself postmodern, anchoring it to Highway's inability to connect with the world and come to terms with self-definition.

One way he fails is through sex. (The Rachel Papers and other Amis works reveal their anti-modern frankness this way.) In the poem "High Windows," Philip Larkin uses the technique mentioned above, beginning the poem bluntly and gradually becoming more symbolic: "When I see a couple of kids / And guess he's fucking her and she's / Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm, / I know this is paradise." The final verse of the poem, however, is not so plain: "Rather than words comes the thought of high windows: / The sun-comprehending-glass, / And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows / Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless" (165). The narrator of the poem sees the joys of youth and sex as only the young can experience them. But it is a physical experience, lacking emotion. The emotion, ironically, arrives later in life in the form of sadness, an emptiness. The physical act of sex, as pleasing as it was for the narrator when he was young, is gone. No permanent connections were made. Similarly, in the poem "Love Again," the narrator laments a broken relationship. At first, he tries to recapture the physical pleasure: "Love again: wanking at ten past three / (Surely he's taken her home by now?)," but shortly after he realizes that more than this connection is necessary: "Isolate rather this element / That spreads through other lives like a tree / And sways them on in a sort of sense / And say why it never worked for me" (215). Using frankness

and introversion, Larkin uncovers two parts of sex, revealing that the physical without the emotional leads to inner emptiness.

Larkin's detractors accuse him, and there is perhaps some truth to the accusation, of pornographic imagery, but Amis, whose characters' sexual exploits resemble Larkin's poetic metaphors, criticizes modern society rather than Larkin: "The truth is that pornography is just a sad affair all round (and its industrial dimensions are an inescapable modern theme)" ("Don Juan" 78). Pornography exists, and Larkin's frankness is an acknowledgement of it. With their lustful needs and their emotionless and gratuitous sexual escapades, some Amis characters are pornographic, two-dimensional caricatures. For some, they may seem too lustful, too sexual, even for realism, but these caricatures are created around Amis' image of postmodern sexuality in a world dreadfully lacking in morality. As Rosenau notes, postmodernism hails "an end to the burden of moral agency, be it attributable to an individual...or a collective" (33).

If Charles Highway attempts to define himself through his sexual relationship with Rachel, the sex is planned and empty. After the act, Charles realizes its failure:

I know what it's supposed to be like, I've read my Lawrence.
I know also what I felt and thought; I know what that evening was: an aggregate of pleasureless detail, nothing more; an insane, gruelling, blow-by-blow obstacle course. And yet that's what I'm here for tonight. I must be true to myself.
Oh God, I thought this was going to be fun. It isn't. I'm sweating here. I'm afraid. (152)

Highway is ironic because he knows the act was, and will again be, a failure, and yet he decides to proceed, indeed, must proceed, "to be true to" his self, devoid of emotion. It is not surprising that his sexual adventures are failures considering the cool, dispassionate, descriptions with which both extremely detailed accounts begin. The first account begins, "Now, as an opener, I decided to try something rather ambitious" (150), and the second, "Back on the breakfast-room floor, my fingertips awaited instructions" (152). Charles is a true writer who can relate to sex only through diaries, through the replay of emotionless words. He is candid, frank and as empty as Larkin's poetical narrator.

A similar sexual bluntness appears throughout Amis' work. In Dead Babies, for example, the characters do little else than drink, get high and have sex. Diana, for instance, has a narcissistic attitude that echoes Highway's: "For Diana, sex was not a fleshly concern; it was a dial in the machinery of her self-regard" (67). But unlike Highway, "She quite enjoyed it, too, now that most people were good enough at pressing the right buttons to give her clitoral orgasms of admittedly varying quality" (67-68). Part of Diana's makeup just as it is part of Highway's, Sex only helps her to redefine herself whereas for Highway it is a way to be true to his empty self. Diana uses sex as "the means socially to measure herself against others" (67)--she is amorphous, no one if she is not measured, in need of continually gauging herself.

Another character in Dead Babies, Keith Whitehead, resembles her. He feels empty because no woman will have sex with him. His hopes are raised when he discovers that a promiscuous woman is coming to stay for

the weekend. He rejoices in the news that the woman, Lucy Littlejohn, is "quite a nympho," "that she'll fuck anyone" (9). Whitehead believes he will be renewed, viewed differently and gain respect, if he can participate in the sexual act. In his desperation, he resembles the most Larkinesque, anti-modern character in Amis' work: Terence Service.

One of the first-person narrators of Success, Service is sexually starved. His early narrative is replete with references to sex and why he is suffering through life without it:

Not since eleven o'clock on the night of July 25th last year (and even then it wasn't easy. She was an ex-girlfriend. I got us both drunk. I cried when she said she wouldn't: she was so appalled by this that she said she would) have I managed to get anyone to go to bed with me. (11)

Terry follows up this monologue with the question, "What is it with you fucking girls all of a sudden?" (11). Terry, like Whitehead and Diana in Dead Babies, uses sex for self-definition. He simply craves the animal act. He is anti-modern in the sense that he approaches desire straightforwardly, clearly, leaving no doubt as to what he intends (or needs).

In addition, Terry has, by his own admission, been "fucked" up by his parents, recalling the Larkin poem "This Be The Verse" (They fuck you up, your mum and dad...):

I don't know whether my father killed my mother; but I bloody know he killed my sister, because I was there at the time and watched him as he did so. (Suck on that. It's easy to see what it was that fucked me up. I go on about all this a lot. I make no apologies. It's just too bad. I'm allowed to go on about

it, on account of it fucking me up.) (25)

Diedrick notes Larkin's influence in this passage: "Amis's treatment of the damage Terry suffers at the hands of his father, and Terry's own oft-repeated lament that he is 'fucked up,' constitute a narrative excursion into the nihilistic territory Larkin explored in his 1971 poem 'This Be The Verse'" (41). Larkin, in this and other poems like "High Windows" or "Love Again," is nihilistic because of his rejection of morality and moral tradition for a more starkly realist effect. For him, the world is often pessimistically clear, as it is for Terence Service. Terence's life, especially his childhood, provides him with what some might call a jaded outlook, but from Larkin's point of view it is an anti-modern outlook. (In Success, Service's view is enhanced by the fact that, for much of the work, it contrasts with his foster-brother's lack of realism.)

In Service, Amis still manages to fuse modern technique with an anti-modern outlook. Using blunt, anti-modern language, he employs what amounts to an obscene interior monologue based on the physical needs with which Service has been impressing the reader:

Mouth-fuck, bum-fuck, fist-fuck, prick-fuck. Ear-fuck, hair-fuck, nose-fuck, toe-fuck. It's all I think about when I'm in my room. Bed-fuck, floor-fuck, desk-fuck, sill-fuck, rug-fuck.

(52)

Terry prefaces this outburst with, "You'll have to excuse me for a moment" (52), and proceeds to vent his pent-up sexual frustration in four successive paragraphs that list, respectively, items in Terry's room, items in the street, items at work and generic items. In short, Terry

thinks of the sexual act whenever he sees anything. And like a typical Amis narrator, he cannot simply exercise the interior monologue; he intersperses it with editorial commentary like his narrative counterpart in The Information. Amis' experimentation is further illustrated when he allows a first-person narrator to employ interior monologue, meaning that Terry momentarily recedes to a third-person mode and the reader sees directly into his thoughts. (Terry and Gregory, co-first-person-narrators, often slip into third-person.) Amis is again culling the best of modern and anti-modern to create his postmodern text. The modern tool of interior monologue is combined with the plain, decisive language of anti-modernism. There is no ambiguity about Terry's thoughts as there may be about those of Leopold Bloom in Ulysses or Clarissa in Mrs. Dalloway.

Even Gregory Riding, Terry's posh, unreliable co-narrator, slips into a Larkinesque monologue. In discussing (and defaming) Terry, he writes, "Why do I let him roost on my life? Why don't I swat him from my brain like the flea he is? Why do I care?" (94). Riding's sentiments mirror those of Larkin in the poem "Toads": "Why should I let the toad work / Squat on my life? / Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork / And drive the brute off?" (Collected Poems 89). Larkin is lamenting the fact that his life is taken up by work, and he cannot employ his time to better effect; work saps him of what is important. The tone of the poem is reassuringly realistic, keen to break through what is superfluous and unimportant and arrive at what makes life worth living, be it truth or beauty. Such is a capsule definition of Larkin's anti-modernism: his struggle was to disengage the real, the important, the necessary and the

true from the superfluous. Riding is attempting the same separation, at least in word, saying that Terry is the toad (or flea) that squats on his life, that he is held back, kept from achieving and truly living while Terry is about (just as Richard Tull is kept from living by Gwyn Barry, the toad who squats on his life in The Information). Riding's lament, however, is ironic, for Riding, in the end, turns out to be the flea (or toad) of Success, at least to a greater extent than Terry. In this sense, Amis has clearly used an inflection of anti-modernism: he muddles anti-modern sentiment and irony, recasting the anti-modern as the postmodern.

Amis' novels are replete with examples of modernism, anti-modernism and, consequently, the postmodern. In culling aspects of anti-modernism for his work, Amis often refers back to Larkin's poetry. (In addition to the above examples, the poem "Posterity" foreshadows Gwyn's interior monologue in The Information as he thinks of his future biography: Larkin has his own future biographer say that he [Larkin] is "One of those old-type natural fouled-up guys" [Collected Poems 170], a pessimistic but more realistic appraisal than the one Gwyn Barry imagines for himself.) The influence of Waugh and Orwell is evident in a combination of a desire for simple, clear communication, which he supports through satire (as did Waugh), and a post-industrial, postmodern, deconstructed, Orwellian world that corresponds to the imploding worlds of Amis' works. Amis, however, twists and turns anti-modernism about (even combining it with modernism) to make it fit properly into his postmodern text, his self-defining, self-revealing, dynamic fictional compilation. In an ironic twist, novelists such as Amis were envisioned by an original

anti-modernist: Forster. In Aspects of the Novel, Forster foresaw a coming change in the novelist: the need to recombine and redefine: "The novelist of the future will have to pass all the new facts through the old if variable mechanism of the creative mind" (172). For all of his rigidness concerning structure, Forster still determined the future state of the novel, foreseeing that postmodern novelists would somehow be forced to deal with their modern and anti-modern ancestors. Perhaps he did not envision the amorphousness of the postmodern novel, nor the fact that it would, paradoxically, undermine form by combining forms and obtaining a new and ever-changing identity, reader-based rather than author-based. Forster might balk, considering his allegiance to structure, at the reduced status of the author; nonetheless, he foresaw how "new facts" and a "variable" mind would be at work.

V. Summation

Postmodernism. Modernism. Anti-modernism. These three seemingly disparate conditions are combined, sometimes begrudgingly, in the novels of Martin Amis. The first is an amorphous term that, as Conner posits, may have forced a retro-definition of the second. Nonetheless, Amis himself sees the term as signalling a recombination of what has come before. As the introductory quote from The Information illustrates, postmodernism is, for Amis, something new created from a combination of things past. Its newness makes it unique. Postmodern things, including novels, are unique and self-defined. All of the different parts of a postmodern novel, the narrator, the physical structure (or its lack)

the language, literary devices (such as interior monologue) combine to make each novel unique and self-contained--momentarily. Because devices are uniquely combined, the postmodern work is not static, changing with each reader. The postmodern novelist, too, changes each book so his body of work becomes (paradoxically) whole, sharing a common point of origin but (like disparate siblings) each seeking its own destiny. For Martin Amis, Madonna and Nicola Six personify and characterize postmodernism: each is able to adapt and change, to become what the fan or, in Nicola's case, the thug, the lover or the novelist desires. And they must keep on changing, for to stop changing, to become static, is to define oneself unilaterally and become modern or anti-modern in condition (like James Joyce or Philip Larkin).

In present-day society, an anti-modern existence is one that denies the plurality of the outside world as one turns inside. Lyotard argues that anti-modernism is simply not well adapted to the heterogeneity of the late twentieth century:

Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and "retro" clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games. ...By becoming kitsch, art panders to the confusion which reigns in the "taste" of the patrons. (76)

In a capitalist society, Lyotard contends, the only "realism" is that of money: "Such realism accommodates all tendencies, just as capital accommodates all 'needs'" (76). The postmodern world presents too many factors

to allow any one "realism" to exist. To reiterate Amis, "There are too many forces at work on us. There are too many fronts to cover" ("Don Juan" 82).

From modernism and anti-modernism, Amis takes and recreates those elements which, in conjunction with aspects of the anti-novel, assist in assembling each novel's disparate pieces in a dynamic, self-sustaining unit. He uses Joyce for purposes of satire and light humor and borrows Joyce's techniques, like interior monologue, when necessary to help the reader comprehend such inanities as Gwyn Barry's arrogant conception of his own biography. Also borrowed is free indirect style as in the first line of Other People. He uses both of these techniques sparingly, and employs the former, on occasion, in combination with anti-novel or anti-modern techniques, as when Gwyn Barry's biographical thoughts are callously interrupted by the third-person narrator, who edits them for supposed truthfulness. In Success, Terry's sexual thoughts are offered with anti-modern clarity.

It must also be remembered that, in their reflection on the tragedies of the Holocaust and the Cold War, Amis' ideas from Time's Arrow and Einstein's Monsters question the reason of the Enlightenment, the authority that modernists presume and the agency that allows the privileged to make determinations for those "beneath." Modernists presume agency, and this aspect of modernism separates it from postmodernism.

In its plain, blunt and (when necessary) obscene language, anti-modernism pervades Amis' works. Characters such as Charles Highway, Keith Whitehead, Terence Service and their novels demonstrate these tendencies. A realistic pessimism, like that of Larkin, is one part

of each character's psyche that causes him to see the world plainly, even if drearily. An Orwellian anti-utopia surrounds them, and they, like Winston Smith, simply want to describe it. While these characters often speak clearly, using few narrative tricks, it must be remembered that Amis uses only inflections of anti-modernism, meaning that the characters are at any given time subject to personality changes, unreliability or viewpoint alteration. Therefore, even their resemblance to anti-modernists is constantly shifting.

Point of view is one of a complex issue for Martin Amis; each novel is a new and sometimes disconcerting experiment in point of view and reliability. There is little pattern to discern among the works save that, by constantly altering his narrative scheme, Amis tries to avoid a pattern. The novels begin with the semi-simplistic The Rachel Papers and climax with the fabulously unreliable London Fields, all the while altering and re-altering first-person and third-person points of view in combination with varying degrees of unreliability.

Notes

¹ In this essay, Amis also discusses what amounts to a streak of anti-modernism in Updike: "Yet the case of Updike is unquestionably extreme. The textural contrast between your first and second wife's pubic hair, for instance, is something that most writers feel their readers can get along without. ...Updike tags along, not only into the bedroom but into the bathroom." Such frankness is a hallmark of anti-modern speech. See Mrs. Nabokov 51. See Part 1, section IV.

² See Part 2.

³ See Part 1, section IV.

⁴ See Martin Amis, "Entertainment Guide," rev. of The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens' Imagination, by John Carey, New Statesman 23 November 1973: 776-777, for the author's view of Dickens.

⁵ See Cuddon 922-925.

⁶ Amis is parodying Northrop Frye's "Theory of Modes." See Frye, 33-67.

⁷ Lyotard uses the term "narratives" to describe the language of fields ranging from science to literature to the arts. See Lyotard's introduction.

⁸ Connor is discussing the views of Ihab Hassan.

⁹ See Bradbury and McFarlane for an expansion of this argument.

¹⁰ See Bradbury and McFarlane 26-29.

¹¹ Osborne's "angry young man," Jimmy Porter, is given to tirades featuring his "accomplished invective," as illustrated in an impromptu song he sings, "I'm so tired of necking, / of pecking, home wrecking, / of empty bed blues-- / just pass me the booze. / I'm tired of being

hetero / Rather ride on the metero / Just pass me the booze. / This
perpetual whoring / Gets quite dull and boring / So avoid that old
python coil / And pass me the celibate oil. / You can quit etc" (57).
The play calls into question emotions, particularly love, asking, in
anti-modern parlance, whether they are realistic or relevant: "It's no
good trying to fool yourself about love. You can't fall into it like
a soft job, without dirtying up your hands. It takes muscle and guts.
And if you can't bear the thought of messing up your nice, clean soul,
you'd better give up the whole idea of life, and become a saint" (115).
See Look Back in Anger (New York: Bantam, 1967).

Part 2: Postmodern Trickiness

Point of View¹
by Martin Amis

Policemen look suspicious to normal
Murderers. To the mature paedophile
A child's incurious glance is a leer
Of intimate salacity; in more
Or less the same way, live people remain
As good as dead to active necrophiles.

It is often extra affectionate
To leave people you care about alone.
Anyone who has ever walked into
A lamp-post knows that all speeds above
nought
Miles per hour are really pretty fast, thanks.

Some of us look at the sunset and can
See only blood in the vampiric sky.
I've got a clock that turns its back on me,
In disdain. A watch wouldn't dare do that.

If you don't feel a little mad sometimes
Then I think you must be out of your mind.
No one knows what to do. Cliches are true.
Everything depends on your point of view.

I. Unreliability in Fiction

"Everything depends on your point of view." The importance that Amis places on point of view cannot be overestimated. Narrative point of view is the single most important facet of Martin Amis' novels; he alters and distorts point of view throughout his works to help achieve singularity and self-redefinition. Combining first-person and third-person points of view with character traits ranging from anti-modernism to schizophrenia, he has produced one of the most unreliable bodies of narrators in post-modern fiction.

Unreliable narrators are, of course, not a postmodern creation. The technique of unreliability existed in the novel since its inception. One need only journey to the eighteenth century and read Laurence Sterne's inimitable Tristram Shandy, which contains not only a narrator but a narratee:

Rather like a music-hall comedian who plants stooges in the audience, and integrates their heckling into his act, he sometimes personifies his reader as a Lady or a Gentleman whom he interrogates, teases, criticizes and flatters, for the entertainment and instruction of the rest of us. (Lodge, Art 81)

This "highly idiosyncratic novel" (Lodge, Art 81) alters form to such an extent that the reader can never be sure in which direction the story (or the narrator) might be headed. David Lodge rightly points out that Sterne "anticipated Joyce and Virginia Woolf in letting the vagaries of the human mind determine the shape and direction of the narrative" (Art

82). More important, Sterne anticipated the postmodern tendency towards a narrator with an eccentric personality that at once fascinates and bewilders. Consider, for instance, part of the passage to which Lodge refers in his essay:

How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? I told you in it, That my mother was not a papist.
-Papist! You told me no such thing, Sir. Madam, I beg leave to repeat it over again, That I told you as plain, at least as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing.
-Then, Sir, I must have miss'd a page. -No, Madam, -you have not missed a word. -Then I was asleep, Sir. -My pride, Madam, cannot allow you that refuge. -Then, I declare, I know nothing at all about the matter. -That, Madam, is the very fault I lay to your charge; and as punishment for it, I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop, and read the whole chapter over again.

(Tristram Shandy 40)

To his own satisfaction but the merriment and confusion of the reader, the narrator insists that he told the woman "by direct inference" (a delightful oxymoron) that his mother was not a papist. Who the lady is does not seem to be important--the most important aspect of the digression (which becomes an art form in and of itself in Tristram Shandy) is that the narrator alters point of view according to his eccentricities. His strange behavior forces the reader to wonder if the "direct inference" took place and if he should peruse the preceding chapter. It is keen audience manipulation by Sterne, done with such deftness that the

reader is too amused to realize he is being duped. From the dashes that separate conversation (a technique later used by Joyce) to the fact that the narrator (who is a creation of Sterne's) gives voice to a creation of his own (the unknown lady), the paragraph suggests comparison with postmodern narratives. In contemporary literature, the creator has been subsumed by his creation. Characters create characters, and the creator sits in the background, amused or befuddled (as in Other People), or participates in the story itself (as in Money or The Information), seemingly powerless to control his narrative.

Yet unreliability itself need not be a challenge to form. Edgar Allan Poe, one of its most renowned employers, creates narrators who are immediately questionable even by naive readers. In the short story "The Tell-Tale Heart," for instance, Poe's first-person narrator begins in a self-revealing fashion: "TRUE!--nervous--very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses--not destroyed--not dulled them" (Complete Tales 303). The narrator's insistence on sanity convinces the reader of his madness and unreliability. Poe does not attempt to confuse the reader about the narrator's state of mind; rather, he intends that this insane and clearly less-than-reliable storyteller should thrill and entertain him. In short, the reader of "The Tell-Tale Heart" understands his position in relation to the text much more than the reader of Tristram Shandy. Unreliability is overt in the former and covert in the latter.

Even an anti-modernist and realist such as Kingsley Amis uses unreliable narrators, but he does so along the lines of Poe rather than Sterne. In The Green Man, Maurice Allington, the narrator and both a

hypochondriac and an alcoholic, combines traits that cause the reader to question his judgement. Consider, for instance, the mental anguish caused by a pain in Allington's back:

Was it sharper this morning than when I had first noticed it, did it come on more frequently and stay for longer? I thought perhaps it was and did. It was cancer of the kidney. It was not cancer of the kidney, but that disease whereby the kidney ceases to function and has to be removed by surgery, and then the other kidney carries on perfectly well until it too becomes useless and has to be removed by surgery, and then there is total dependence on a machine. It was not a disease of the kidney, but a mild inflammation set up by too much drinking, easily knocked out by a few doses of Holland's gin and a reduction in doses of other liquors. (46-47)

The rambling nature of this quote and the lack of logic contained in it are enough to indicate to the reader that Allington's story should be judged as the narrative of an unstable person. In a later conversation, a deity tells Allington he chose to appear because Allington is "A good security risk," to which Allington replies, "Drunk and seeing ghosts and half off my head. Yes" (191). Allington himself is not certain of what he sees and admits as much; therefore, the reader cannot be certain of the "facts" he relates.

While Allington's dementia is not as overt as in Poe, the aspects of his character indicating impairment are evident. Additionally, he, unlike Sterne's narrator, suffers from a realistic impairment. Alcohol and ghosts affect people in the real world, but Tristram, in trying to

tell his life story, keeps calling attention to the novel as a work of fiction by stepping outside the text proper, as he did in addressing the lady who misinterpreted his message. Despite his dementia, Allington believes his story to be true, non-fictional. Tristram, by leaving blank pages for the reader to fill in, is clearly indicating his work is a fiction.

Unreliability, then, can be used in either realist or self-conscious fiction. In the latter capacity, it assists an author in constructing a work that violates what Poe calls "the unity of effect or impression," a "point of the greatest importance" (Essays 571). Poe theorizes that a story which is too great in length, one that a reader cannot comfortably peruse at one sitting, leaves a disjointed impression on the mind. A message or theme cannot be accurately transmitted in snippets but must be sent as a whole in order to achieve the desired effect: "The ordinary novel is objectionable, from its length, for reasons already stated in substance. As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from totality" (Essays 572). Poe adds that factors like "worldly interests" intervene if a novel is put down, taken up, etc. (572). The effect of a novel, according to Poe, can never be total.

Postmodernists relish a lack of totality. Texts are created, in a sense, haphazardly, to be semi-disjointed so that connections are not perfectly clear; "truth" is, at times, not at all evident. As Lyotard would have it, only truths are clear. Only by being semi-disjointed and purposefully violating the sense of totality that Poe craves can a post-modern novel remain unique and redefine itself with each reader. The

totality Poe sought has been discarded by the literary world at a time when, as Amis himself said in "Don Juan in Hull," "There are too many fronts to cover." Totality is a contemporary fallacy.

"Everything depends on your point of view." Amis uses narrative point of view to help crumble any sense of wholeness or unity his works may otherwise have. His novels, self-defined, self-redefined and full of wayward information and unreliability, defy any notion of totality or unity. Of course, he achieves varying degrees of success when attempting to alter narrative point of view for unique effect and combines his narrative technique with a wholly different method that changes with each work. Every novel explores a different postmodern tool, and his greatest success comes in London Fields.

II. London Fields: The Novel Within a Novel

The narrator of London Fields, Samson Young, is remarkably unreliable for myriad reasons: he is too insistent on his reliability, he cannot create a certain demarcation between fiction and non-fiction, and he is woefully inconsistent. These factors alone are enough to put Young's narrative reliability into question, but other factors surround Young more generally and exacerbate his unreliability. One is "M.A.," and the other is the work's title, "London Fields."

London Fields begins with a "Note" that discusses the title of the novel. This preamble is written by someone named "M.A." who informs the reader he considered various titles for the book, including "Time's Arrow," "Millennium," "The Death of Love" and "The Murdere." But he

settled on "London Fields":

But as you see I kept ironic faith with my narrator, who would have been pleased, no doubt, to remind me that there are two kinds of title--two grades, two orders. The first kind of title decides on a name for something that is already there. The second kind of title is present all along: it lives and breathes, or it tries, on every page. My suggestions (and they cost me sleep) are all the first kind of title. London Fields is the second kind of title. So let's call it London Fields.

The book is called London Fields. London Fields.... (xiv)

The first and most logical assumption to be made by a reader is that "M.A." stands for Martin Amis. But there is another "M.A." involved in London Fields: Mark Asprey. Asprey is an English dramatist who swapped apartments with the American Young. Young writes early on (with confidence) that he has "certainly gotten the better of the deal. Yes, I have well and truly stiffed Mark Asprey. I tramp through the rooms and think with shame of my contorted little crib in Hell's Kitchen" (2). As the novel progresses, however, Young isn't as certain he got the better deal, for he has discovered that Asprey is one of Nicola Six's former lovers (Nicola is the novel's "murderer" and its most important character), and he ponders whether Asprey set in motion the machinations that have twisted their way through the work: in a suicide note to Asprey, Young writes, "PPS: You didn't set me up. Did you?" (468). More important, in the letter, Young names Asprey his literary executor: "Be my literary executor: throw everything out" (468). Is Asprey simply the literary executor of the work or the author-within-the-text? If Young

is a metafictional creation of Asprey's, then Asprey is a metafictional creation of Amis', allowing at least two levels of fiction. However, the relationship between those levels seems as muddled as the relationship between Young and Asprey. Young asks, at one point, whether Asprey ever "took a stroll down the dead-end street" (280). The "dead-end street" is where the murder will take place, and Young's question, at the novel's midpoint, indicates that authority, i.e. who is in control of the events taking place in London Fields, is questionable. This hint may be easy to miss, but it serves as an omen that events in the book are happening on at least two different planes--on that of Samson Young's novel and on that of Mark Asprey's novel (there may also be Martin Amis' novel and Nicola Six's novel).

Interestingly, Asprey and Young communicate only by written word. In this respect, they are more like author and creation than flat-swappers. When Young returns from a trip to America (he never actually got out of Heathrow), for example, he finds a note from Asprey, which reads in part, "My dear Sam: Two things are missing. (Have you been keeping low company?)" (240). Young comments that there is "No mention (except between those brackets?) of my novel, which I'm sure he has looked at--though the pages, it's true, aren't even infinitesimally misaligned" (240), and he continues by wondering whether or not "MA" met and slept with the "murderer" while in London. Young not only imitates his creator (by using brackets), but he also evidences Asprey's authorial powers by admitting Asprey read the "novel" (the story is supposed to be "true") without moving its pages. Asprey read the "novel" without moving the pages because he is writing the novel. Further, Young refers to him as

"MA," creating greater confusion about whether Asprey is an incarnation of Amis, and he wonders whether the authorial Asprey conspired with the "murderer" character during his visit (which recalls the authorial personas of Martin Amis and Martina Twain and their involvement with John Self in Money). Moreover, if Asprey represents Amis' author-within-the-text (and Young Asprey's author-within-the-text), then it is logical to assume Asprey authored the "Note" at London Fields' beginning, which tells the reader the novel's title "lives and breathes" on every page.

The title, London Fields, could hardly be more oblique. It often is referenced by Young but never with further clarity. Like the lack of clarity about the metafictional authorship of the work, this lack of clarity adds to the book's postmodern status. The reader's inability to make any definite statements concerning the title or the author-within-the-text allows the novel to reshape itself for each reader: the title is amorphous enough to be credited to the creative powers of both Asprey and Young. London Fields is two books under one cover.

Young's references to the title are deliberately obscure, part of the book's postmodern trickiness. As Mick Imlah writes, "The title itself stays remote as a motif." Young makes an oblique reference to the title, for instance, when discussing other "fields": "This is London; and there are no fields. Only fields of operation and observation, only fields of electromagnetic attraction and repulsion, only fields of hatred and coercion" (134). The fields in Young's monologue could refer to any number of events in the novel, from Asprey's coercion of Young to Nicola's dealings with Guy, Keith and Young to the marital relationships of Guy and Keith to the world's oncoming doom. The meaning of Young's

words is complicated by ensuing references to the title that are more oblique: "I must go to London Fields, before it's too late. If I shut my eyes or even if I keep them open I can see the parkland and the sloped bank of the railway line. The foliage is tropical and innocuous, the sky is crystalline and innocuous" (323). At the end of the novel, Young writes, "I must go back to London Fields--but of course I'll never do it now. So far away. The time, the time, it never was the time" (463). These and other references to the title serve only to confound the reader's understanding of what "London Fields" represents, a purposeful maneuver by an author who, by his own admission, avoids explicitness:

What you're trying to say is the novel, that 470 pages of work. People say, "What did you mean by it?" I meant that [points to book]. I didn't mean something you could put on a badge. It's starting to screw up the emphasis of reading.
(S. Morrison 101)

Because meanings are no longer clear, Amis is ambiguous. Truths (as opposed to the truth) multiply in the contemporary period. When combined with Rosenau's idea of a postmodern "end to the burden of moral agency" (33), a contemporary novelist has no single verity with which to work, no moral bulwark. His novels must reflect this multiplicity of truths when "meaning" is replaced by "meanings."

This nondescript title, along with Young's descriptions of it (the "crystalline and innocuous" sky, for example) also denote London Fields' stylistic allegiance as more of a museum of wordsmithing than a story. Young, and Amis through him, loves language. Consider Young's descrip-

tion of Guy's home:

The house was a masterpiece. How it scintillated, how it thrummed. So much canvas, and so much oil. How confidently it put forwards its noble themes of continuity and repose, with everything beautifully interlinked. And Nicola's presence was like a fuse. Because she could make the whole thing go up. (275)

Such poetic language overrides the import of the story, at least until the final line, when the portrait reverts from aesthetically Victorian to simple, anti-modern prose. Style is more important than story, plot or character development. London Fields, from title to conclusion, exercises a mastery of language. Nicola, who is important to any idea of narrative in London Fields, herself constitutes style over substance, as indicated by her attitude towards sex:

What saddened and incensed her was the abdication of power, so craven, the surrender so close to home. And power was what she was in it for. Nicola had lived deliciously, but she was promiscuous on principle, as a sign of emancipation, of spiritual freedom, freedom from men. She was, she believed, without appetite, and prided herself on her passionless brilliance in bed. (68)

No love exists for Nicola--it has died (The Death of Love is one of M.A.'s possible titles for the book). She has reduced love to style as Asprey has reduced her: she plays the actress who can be whatever her audience needs. She may possess some sort of "spiritual freedom," but that freedom resides in an empty shell of "passionless brilliance" in

an "insane" world where the "truth" no longer matters (305).

Nicola stylistically opposes Young throughout the novel: a narrative battle occurs between her poetic self-destruction and his "real" murder mystery. By way of interior monologue from Keith, Nicola is described as "Actress like. Real pro: knows what she's doing. The others: amateurs" (289). As an actress, she is just one member of the cast assembled by the dramatist Asprey (the others, Keith, Guy and Young, are the "amateurs"), but she tries to distance herself from Asprey, calling his work "shit" (391) and putatively manipulating Young herself:

She said, 'How do you feel about me? The truth.'

'The truth?' I got to my feet saying, 'You're a bad dream, baby. I keep thinking I'm going to wake up'--here I snapped my fingers weakly--and you'll disappear. You're a nightmare.'

She stood and came toward me. The way her head was inclined made me say at once:

'I can't.'

'You must know that it has to happen.'

'You've come across this. When men can't.'

'Only by design. It's easy: you make yourself leaden. Don't worry. I'll fix it. I'll do it all. Don't even try and think about love. Think about--think about the other thing.' (391)

Nicola squelches Young's brief attempt at assertive truthfulness. Though superficially discussing sex with him, she is actually coercing him into committing the murder she fervently desires. She tells him to make himself "leaden," i.e. easily molded, and to submit to her "design." He becomes "the leading actor in Nicola's private tragedy, her organized su-

icide, that mock-Marquesian 'chronicle of a death foretold'" (Bernard 125). Nicola is the paradoxical "motionless Cause" (133), in love with death (including "The Death of the Novel" and the "Death of Naive Reality," i.e. Samson's reality [296]) and in love with Mark Asprey, the one man to whom she surrenders both power and authorship. (Her "private tragedy" is, after all, contained in his.) Asprey, the reader eventually discovers keeps nude photographs of her in a locked drawer, and when Young finally obtains and returns them to Nicola, he asks her if it is "over" between her and Asprey. She replies, "Some things are never over" (305). The creation cannot separate itself from the creator; despite the fact that she burned one of his novels, page by page, in a fire, Nicola and Asprey are forever linked in fiction, pitted against one another in a battle over Young. Within the sub-chapters, Nicola claims a measure of control over Young and manipulates him into committing the murder. She is writing a narrative of her own in an attempt to gain her "spiritual freedom" from Asprey; she is "A 'puppetmaster' to whom any emotional involvement is denied, a destructive Cassandra who remains alien to a world she nevertheless metaphorizes" (Bernard 139). Because she acts in any role Asprey casts, she is, in the end, as much a pawn as Young, who, by realizing his predicament, retains at least an iota of selfhood:

Apparently it was all hopeless right from the start. I don't understand how it happened. There was a sense in which I used everybody.... And still I lost. ...I feel seamless and insubstantial, like a creation. As if someone made me up, for money. And I don't care. (469-470).

Nicola interposes herself between Asprey and Young in a metanarrative:

she is trying to "write" herself, to free herself from Asprey's power. Ultimately, she can only be a role-player (albeit in the starring role) designated (both by herself and Asprey) to be killed off in the novel's "last act" (463), erasing all but the scantiest notions of plot and reliability.

London Fields is not Amis' first novel to employ an unreliable narrator or time distortions and various narrative inconsistencies. He gleaned the basics of the novel from two previous works:

The plot of London Fields recycles and combines elements from Success and Other People. As in Success, the reader follows the crossing paths of a falling aristocrat and a rising job, both involved with the same doomed female. And like Other People, London Fields focuses on a woman who is more symbol than character, a woman who is fatefully, synergistically involved with her narrator. (Diedrick 160)

Such a comparison, while basically true, does not account for the complexities of London Fields with its perplexing metanarratives created by the conflation of first-person and third-person narration. Success and Other People also mix first-person and third-person, but hesitantly and experimentally. In London Fields, this continuous conflation causes a narrative schism throughout the novel that allows for a much more naive, unreliable narrator in Samson Young, who speaks more freely and reveals his disrepute subtly between waves of esoteric detail. Consider, for instance, an anti-modern digression on dog excretion:

One thing about London: not so much dogshit everywhere. A lot still. Compared to New York, even old New York, it's

the cloaca maxima. But nothing like it used to be, when the streets of London were paved with dogshit. (97)

The term "cloaca maxima" indicates this digression serves as little more than stylistic showcasing on Amis' part. Only by wading through such detail can the reader discover more about Young's character. (The large quantity of apparently extraneous detail is what causes the work to be "not a whodunit but a 'whydoit,' an upside-down murder mystery, morality tale, nuclear science fiction and postmodern love story" [Kroll].) Using fervent claims to veracity, false juxtaposition and inconsistencies sunk in the quagmire of his details, Young reveals himself as Amis' most developed narrative creation, even though the ever-increasing probability that Young's novel is not the primary text being written undermines his position as narrator.

London Fields possesses a two-part structure that blends first-person and third-person points of view, a strategy P.G. Wodehouse uses in his Jeeves and Wooster novels. (Young, ironically, writes, "The only writer who gives me any unfeigned pleasure is P.G. Wodehouse [284].) Wodehouse separates Bertie Wooster the first-person narrator from Bertie Wooster the character by having the former refer to the latter in the third-person. For instance, in the novel Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit, Bertie the narrator says, "It is at moments like this that you catch Bertram Wooster at his superb best, his ice-cold brain working like a machine" (187).² The separation results in an effective, albeit limited, blend of the two points of view. In London Fields, the separation is more obvious, at least at first, because Amis combines numbered and titled chapters narrated in the third-person (with Young as an omnis-

cient narrator) and Young's first-person narrative digressions (hereafter referred to as sub-chapters). These divagations allow Young to editorialize on the text and to vent personal angst. The scheme has been called both "the novel-within-a-novel format" (Stuewe) and "a story behind a story, which has to do with Sam's own failures and betrayal" (Dodsworth 332). Amis may argue that he writes no "novel-within-a-novel," only London Fields. Nonetheless, his heterogeneous authorship calls for some qualification of Young's position, either as creation, creator or both. Admittedly, despite their discontinuities, the two parts inextricably bind in the ending's revelation that the reader (and Samson Young and Nicola Six) has been duped. The fervent claims Young makes to reliable storytelling and the veracity of his story fall resoundingly to the ground. Still, the two narratives "written" within London Fields and the way one eventually subsumes the other do not eliminate the need to consider the dismemberment of reality deriving from their juxtaposition.

Young, like Poe's narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart," persists in proclamations of truthfulness and reliability (all of which occur in sub-chapters) to such a degree that the reader immediately suspects his unreliability. The opening line of the novel, for instance, reads, "This is a true story, but I can't believe it's really happening" (1)--Young's doubt about the events is perhaps the first indication that he is being manipulated--and is followed shortly by, "Novelists don't usually have it so good, do they, when something real happens (something unified, dramatic and pretty saleable), and they just write it down?" (1).³ Similar comments, such as "I can't make anything up. It just isn't

in me. Man, am I a reliable narrator" (78) and "Boy, am I a reliable narrator" (162) are dispersed throughout the novel. More extensive claims to veracity include, "I'm not one of those excitable types who get caught making things up. Who get caught improving on reality. I can embellish, I can take certain liberties. Yet to invent the bald facts of a life (for example) would be quite beyond my powers" (39) and "I'm not getting something and what I'm not getting has to do with the truth and it so happens that I'm well-placed to take a crack at it--the truth, I mean--because this story is true" (240). His claims to truth are too insistent, too often an issue. He is frantic about convincing the reader of his truthfulness and reliability, and his erratic reassurances indicate that an element of distress constitutes part of his character. This distress appears clear when his assurances of reliability contrast with glaring errors in his prose, leaving "no ambiguity about the fictive nature of the proceedings" (Stuewe).

Young leaves both small and large faux pas to implicate himself (or the author controlling him). On at least two occasions, he refers to London Fields as a novel. On one he writes, "Sometimes I wonder whether I can keep the world situation out of the novel" (64),⁴ and on another, "I lay down my life or what's left of it for this lousy novel and do I get any thanks?" (137). He slips by calling London Fields a novel and reveals its fictive nature, as does the comment, "It would be nice to expatiate on how good it feels, after all these years, to sit down and actually start writing fiction. But let's not get any big ideas. This is actually happening" (10). If London Fields is fiction, then Young is as much a literary device as any other character in that

fiction, a status he denies by claiming he simply observes and records. More important, Young, as implied author, is a "metafictional device" that allows "Amis to pose questions about the status and purpose of fiction" (Diedrick 160). He illustrates his metafictional status by his odd inability to edit: "Apart from the fact that on account of the political situation they and their loved ones might all disappear at any moment (this sentence needs recasting but it's too late now), my protagonists are in good shape and reasonable spirits" (238). It may be argued that Young's inability to edit results from his attempts to write to the moment, a strategy employed in epistolary novels of the eighteenth-century, such as Clarissa. However, considering Young's unreliable nature, it serves more like an example of his metafictional status, an signal that he fits as a part of the text as much as any other character even though he is both the implied author and third-person narrator of the chapters proper. He straddles points of view, but this flexibility does not help him remove himself from the fiction any more than the narrator Bertie Wooster displaces his textual counterpart. In making Young so flexible and obvious yet so integral to the text, Amis creates a signal example of the loose, deteriorating unstable selfhood confronting the contemporary age.

Challenges to reliability lie subtly, sometimes deeply, buried in the text of London Fields: Young misleads his reader through false juxtaposition, one of his more subtle methods. For instance, London Fields' first numbered chapter is entitled, "Chapter 1: The Murderer." The first line of text to follow this heading is "Keith Talent was a bad guy" (4). Juxtaposing Keith's name with the epithet "murderer" intimates Keith is

the murderer. However, Young never actually says he is even though the novel's plot ostensibly rides on that precept. In another instance of coercive juxtaposition at the end of chapter 2, Nicola, the "murderer," enters the Black Cross pub and sees her murderer whom she instinctively knows. The currently omniscient Young leaps into her head and offers the following account, "She walked straight to the bar, lifted her veil with both hands, like a bride, surveyed the main actors of the scene, and immediately she knew, with pain, with gravid arrest, with intense recognition, that she had found him, her murderer" (22). In the first-person sub-chapter immediately following chapter 2, Young writes, "The moment that Keith Talent saw Nicola Six--he dropped his third dart. And swore" (23). A few lines later, Young adds, "It wasn't desire that Nicola Six aroused in Keith Talent. Not primarily. I would say that greed and fear came first. Going for broke at the pinball table, Guy Clinch froze in mid-flail: you could hear the ball scuttling into the gutter. Then silence" (23). Young deftly juxtaposes Nicola's first sight of her murderer with the effect she has upon Keith Talent, the "designated" murderer. Further, Young adds that Keith felt both the dark emotion of greed and the primal emotion of fear, making his psychological makeup seem more like that of a murderer. To all of this he adds Guy Clinch's reaction, an important addition since Guy acts as the novel's designated "foil," the character who will commit the murder if, for some reason, Keith fails. The entire scheme, one of contrived ambiguity, intends that the reader be confused and baffled. The true mark of London Fields as a postmodern text lies in its ability to keep the reader off-balance, ever reconsidering the words on the page. The reader must shift suspicions

from Keith to Guy to any other possible suspects.

To help achieve this necessary degree of uncertainty, Young drops several hints throughout the text that Keith may not be the murderer. For instance, in the beginning of chapter 2, Young foreshadows the novel's climactic murder scene: "She [Nicola, the murderess] will lean forward. 'You,' she will say, in intense recognition: 'Always you'" (15). Nicola's tone in this foreshadowing indicates surprise, as if her murderer is someone she did not expect. Such ambiguity leaves the possibility that Guy, the foil, or someone else actually will murder her. In fact, if the reader carefully peruses the end of chapter 2, the scene in which Nicola spots her murderer in the Black Cross pub, he will see three rather than two primary candidates: Keith Talent, Guy Clinch and Young himself. In the sub-chapter following chapter 2, the same sub-chapter in which Young uses juxtaposition to make Keith seem like the murderer, Young writes, "While the scene developed [in the Black Cross] I melted, as they say, into the background. Of course I had no idea what was taking shape in front of me. No idea? Well, an inkling, maybe" (23). Young was present in the pub when Nicola spotted her future murderer, but suspicions naturally fall away from him because, in the chapters proper, he narrates in third-person, seemingly uninvolved in the text. But how uninvolved is he? Can he have either no idea or only an inkling of "what was taking shape" when, a few pages earlier, he has given the reader a word-for-word account of the oncoming murder scene? Young wants the reader to believe he writes to the moment, records the events that precede an actual murder, that he has simply fallen into a position to do so. But details, if spotted by the reader, undo him.

Style, again, supersedes plot and story.

Two telling details, buried deeply within the work and not easily spotted, demonstrate the strength of style. The first involves a simple telephone call Nicola is slated to receive from Guy, whom she asked to ring her "at six o'clock, at six o'clock precisely" (154). When the call is narrated through Keith's eyes (in his guise as all-seeing intrusive third-person narrator, Young sees through the eyes of Keith, Nicola and Guy), Young writes, "As a talking point, the part played by lager in the working life of a top darter seemed to be close to exhaustion. But then the telephone rang. Nicola looked at her watch and said, 'Excuse me for a moment, Keith'" (174). There is no mention of the time of the phone call. Shortly after, when the scene is recounted from Nicola's point of view, Young writes, "It was six o'clock precisely, though, and the telephone rang, right on the button, and Nicola smiled" (190). In this instance, the phone call arrives on time, but this account has the reader leafing back through the book, for in Guy's earlier account, Young had already written, "On the stroke of seven Guy called Nicola from a booth in the lobby of a hotel for the homeless in Ilchester Gardens" (156). The details of this telephone call, spread out over nearly forty pages, make the discrepancy easy to miss. If spotted, it evidences that Young is not the reliable, omniscient narrator he claims to be. If he cannot make anything up, then at least one version of the phone conversation must be a fabrication.

The second detail concerns Young's use of the term "murderee." In Chapter 2, entitled, "The Murderee," Young asks, "What is this destiny or condition (and perhaps, like the look of the word's ending, it tends

toward the feminine: a feminine ending), what is it, what does it mean, to be a murderee?" (15). The term "murderee," used to describe Nicola throughout the novel, tells the reader of her status as self-designated victim of Keith Talent or whoever takes his place as "murderer." In the sub-chapter that follows chapter 12, Young, who again writes to the moment, says he has "Thrufaxed all twelve chapters off to Hornig Ultrason, where, it seems, my stock is already rising high" (231). Bearing in mind that Young has already completed twelve chapters employing "murderee," a strange conversation occurs between Young and Nicola in the sub-chapter immediately following chapter 13: Young categorizes Nicola as "a Sack Artist. And a Mata Hari too. And a Vamp. And a Ballbreaker. In the end, though, I'm fingering you for a femme fatale. I like it. Nice play on words. Semi-exotic. No, I like it. It's cute" (260). Nicola responds by saying, "A Femme Fatale? I'm not a Femme Fatale. Listen, mister: Femmes Fatales are ten a penny compared to what I am" (260). She continues by chastising him, saying, "Christ, you still don't get it, do you," and adds, "I'm a Murderee" (260). Although Young has already used the term "murderee" in chapter 2, which he claims to have sent to his publisher, ten chapters afterward he attempts to label Nicola a "Femme Fatale." Even Nicola says that Young still does not "get it," but if Young does not "get it," how was he able to use and understand the term "murderee" in chapter 2, and why does he label Nicola a femme fatale instead of a "murderee" here? He is lying. His first-person sub-chapters and third-person chapters do not jibe and, in fact, exist as parts of two different novels that do not coalesce until the end. The supposed "plot" of London Fields, the murder, is as uncertain as any other aspect, and

its looseness lends credence to the notion that London Fields "is not a safe book; it is controlled and moved not by plot but by the density of its language" (Pesetsky 42). Young's gaffe over the term "murderee" indicates his lack of authority. He allegorizes style as much as Nicola; there is little substance to Young, save that, as the book progresses, he, like John Self in Money, slowly becomes aware that, somehow, the written word manipulates him.

The book's end calls language and meaning into question most effectively when the farce of the plot becomes fully apparent. Keith is not the murderer. Guy is not the murderer. Samson Young, the impartial, third-person narrator, is the murderer. He claims Nicola, in the end, "outwrote" him and relinquishes the power of the author (a power he never truly possessed), admitting his status, after hundreds of pages of prose, as "hardly a shadow, less than a figment" (Bernard 125):

I've just taken a glance at the beginning--who knows, with a little work, it might somehow accommodate a new ending. And what do I see? Chapter 1: The Murderer. 'Keith Talent was a bad guy...You might even say that he was the worst guy.' No. I was the worst guy. I was the worst and last beast. Nicola destroyed my book. She must have felt a vandal's pleasure. Of course, I could have let Guy go ahead and settled for the 'surprise' ending. But she knew I wouldn't. Flatteringly, she knew I wasn't quite unregenerate. She knew I wouldn't find it worth saving, this wicked thing, this wicked book I tried to write, plagiarized from real life. (466-467)

Paradoxically, Young still insists on the truthfulness of his account,

but he has admitted to losing control and being manipulated by Nicola and, consequently, Mark Asprey, who, near the end, chides Young's belief that "truth" in any way matters:

You don't understand, do you, my talentless friend? Even as you die and rot with envy. It doesn't matter what anyone writes any more. The time for it mattering has passed. The truth doesn't matter any more and is not wanted. (452)

Young has become, in the grandest irony, a fictional subject in a fictional work he claimed as non-fiction transcribed from "reality." More important, the hundreds of pages used to create a story of murder, to develop a plot by building up motives for Keith Talent and Guy Clinch, have come to nought. London Fields turns in on itself as first-person and third-person accounts, thanks to the machinations of Nicola and the dramatic arts of Asprey, come together, their inconsistencies forming a postmodern partnership and pointing at the novel self-reflexively: "The more intrusive the authorial conscription of the text becomes, the closer the text moves towards an exploitation of the self-referent and the self-reflexive" (Todd 124). Young is as intrusive as possible--a third-person narrator who intrudes on his story and completely subsumes the plot, becoming its main subject. Much of the murder mystery aspects of London Fields, extraneous disinformation fed to the reader through a naive narrator, have no purpose other than confusion and deception. Young's ending "is less a part of the narrative than about it, less a surprise than a trick" (Imlah).

The anti-novel alternative ending offered by London Fields leaves the reader questioning the status of fiction. Young's turnabout, his

admission in an end letter to Kim Talent that "It was me. Always me. It was me. It was me" (470) is perhaps the most significant set of words in the novel, the most self-revealing. In a flight of fancy, the reader can imagine Amis planting those very words in the mouth of the book itself.

The lesson of London Fields is fiction for fiction's sake:

The book counts on the postmodern assumption that the walls of fiction are never solid; that various characters can become surrogates of the author, that the relation of author to characters, narrator to action, preplanned plot outcome, can all be kept negotiable. Stories can break loose from their frames, and "time's arrow"—this was one of several possible titles Amis had for the book—can be fired in several directions. (Bradbury 429)

In true postmodern fashion, London Fields distorts time, from untimely telephone calls to an ending that betrays the whole sequence of events (at least as Forster would argue for the definition of a "sequence of events"). How can Young, in chapter 2, for instance, offer the reader a glimpse of an ending while not knowing its true? If he were writing to the moment, it would have been impossible for him to foreshadow the end. If London Fields is "far less bound by the conventions of realism" (Bradbury 389) than predecessors, including the anti-modern works of Kingsley Amis (though like Amis' other novels it does contain inflections of anti-modernism, from the blunt sexuality of Nicola to Young's frank editorial comments⁵), its most important violation is the conflation of first-person and third-person narration. Without complex narration and the disunion of the various narratives (Asprey's, Nicola's and

Young's), the novel would devolve into an exercise in semi-modern prose. The anti-novel ending would remain, but the overall effect of the work, the looseness of structure combined with the density of language that makes it a postmodern challenge to form, would be lost with the novel's complex web of unreliability, which reveals competing yet ultimately gelling interior narratives.

III. The Rachel Papers: "Self" Parody

Amis conflated first-person and third-person narration long before he wrote London Fields, but he did so in a far less complex fashion, as if he were mildly experimenting with the two points of view. Like Young of London Fields, the narrator of The Rachel Papers, in his ability to alter his perspective, is relatively unreliable. What is more important, however, is that Charles Highway alters himself. His character is not fixed: it is a collection of caricatures he employs as necessary. His entire "self" is a parody of reality, or, rather, a travesty of his perspective of it. Highway paradoxically seeks to define himself, to clarify his relationship with the world, but he does so in ways that affect rather than employ reality.

As Martin Amis' first novel, The Rachel Papers could not avoid comparison with Kingsley Amis' first novel, Lucky Jim. Although basic similarities cannot be ignored, the comparison is dubious.⁶ As Diedrick notes, "Both are first novels by gifted comic writers, and bear many family resemblances, from mastery of dialect and dialogue to delight in comic incongruities" (27). But is Charles Highway the "Angry Young

Man" of the 1970s? He is misanthropic, but his arrogance and affectation are misdirected, fired in wayward shots at whomever happens to be nearest. The Rachel Papers does satirize society but in a way that is not refined or mature: "If the Angry Young Man had come back, it was as a disturbed and perhaps malevolent child, a troubled and extravagant fantasist" (Bradbury 389). This narrative lacks trustworthiness because of immaturity and constant affectation. Charles attempts to blueprint his life, to design it in accordance with his ever-changing reality when in fact the narrative structure grows from notes and journals he has compiled on various people and events, the most formative being "The Rachel Papers," which recount his affair with the novel's anti-heroine.

Charles depends on language, these journals, files and notes, to help him clarify his identity (he is attempting to do so before his twentieth birthday, a landmark he will achieve five hours after the start of his story). The first sentences of the novel, as Diedrick notes, illustrate his dependence on words, denoting "the presence of a distinctive voice—sly, inventive, brash, and self-deprecating by turns, in love with words and their power to shape experience" (21):

My name is Charles Highway, though you wouldn't think it to look at me. It's such a rangy, well-travelled, big-cocked name and, to look at me, I am none of these. I wear glasses for a start, have done since I was nine. And my medium-length, arseless, waistless figure, corrugated ribcage and bandy legs gang up to dispel any hint of aplomb. (3)

At first, Charles may seem self-deprecating, but "in its preoccupation with physical surface details" (Powell 42), the passage sets the tone of

the book. He is superficial, perhaps "a narcissistic bastard" (Glueck), and his penchant for analyzing things superficially, ironically avoiding meanings even as he uses words and adopting a superficiality in his own makeup makes him an unreliable, unfocused self.

Depending on his situation, Charles alters his self and creates a disposition. For his friend Geoffrey, he is the stereotypical drug user, and for Rachel, he employs any number of caricatures in his attempt to "pull" or seduce her. When smoking marijuana with Geoffrey, for example, he writes, "The joint came my way; I drew on it, swallowing rather than inhaling the smoke, and in the high hippie manner, as if it were a normal cigarette. (Ostentatious and/or noisy intake is considered vulgar.)" (53). He paradoxically claims to avoid ostentation while smoking ostentatiously, affecting the "high hippie manner." He cannot act without analysis, creating the very artificiality he believes he avoids through stereotypical behavior. He cannot see past linguistic symbols; all he does he diagrams in his diaries, but they contain only words, and he cannot see meanings behind words. He fails even as he believes he is succeeding. Consider, for example, an early, unplanned encounter with Rachel. Charles says the meeting "couldn't have been more spontaneous if I had planned it" (63). "I was quite unprepared," he adds, "caught completely on the hop. ...Didn't have a single note-pad on me. So I ad-libbed" (64). Having been just about to read a book on "Criticism and Linguistics," he quickly becomes a young academic wholly involved with the topic when Rachel asks what he is reading:

'Oh, you know, some tired old hack reproducing boiled-up earlier articles and pretending they form a unity.' I paused

and made (three) impatient gestures with my hand. 'He says they're all about "the problem of words".' I pointed to the subtitle on the cover, rich in adrenalin as a phrase from a novel took shape at the back of my mind. 'But what they're really about is him--his taste, his poise, and how much he likes money. Just look at the price.' (64)

Charles grabs whatever material is at hand to create a persona to impress Rachel. In this example, the parody concerns a study of language, and Charles is involved, even if unwittingly, in a study of language and meaning. Speakers struggle to couple the two while Charles struggles to separate them, abusing words for selfish purposes. His idiolect consists of metafictional self-aggrandizement (commenting on the success of the above ad-lib, he writes, "Posturing, wordy, inept, if you like--but not bad for a viva" [64]). He layers fiction after fiction on his true self, which becomes so deeply buried that he cannot (or will not) plumb it.

His sexual conquest of Rachel best illustrates Charles' inability to couple language and meaning, his shallowness. Looking back at his relationship with her before his sexual conquest, he writes that her character "was about as high-powered as her syntax. Where had I got the idea she was clever?" (70). Based on their later physical experiences, he retroactively assassinates her character. For instance, during his initial sexual encounter with her, Charles insists that he tried to employ emotions and failed:

At that point--I swear--I honestly did try to get lost in her responses, to engage her motions, to crawl under the blanket of deliberateness between our bodies. No good. It's far, far

too sexy. Real sexual abandonment, for the male, equals orgasm, and therefore he is never allowed to feel it except at the end. It exists, for him, only in indolence or in rape. (If this is so, then, surely, I'm in the clear.) (160)

He cannot feel emotion because the sexual encounter, a planned, plotted, blueprinted affair, has him executing maneuvers in textbook fashion. He will never feel anything while he is too busy calculating his next move; he "finds more abandonment in language than in sex" (Glueck). But this "abandonment" is merely a fascination with language as style, the way words can be manipulated to corrupt meaning. When placed in a sexual situation, Charles becomes robotic, solving the sexual equation with a personal algorithm. Based on such accounts, the reader cannot obtain from him an accurate portrait of Rachel, or anyone else, or any event in The Rachel Papers because he is too busy sifting life through a words-without-meaning dictionary.

It is because of this "anti-reality" mindset that Charles, when firmly confronted with Rachel's corporeality, her human substance (she becomes more than another folder for his files), cannot deal with it. His first clue arrives one morning when he picks up a pair of Rachel's underwear from the floor and sees they are stained. He realizes Rachel defecates, and this proves a difficult concept for him: "With a ridiculous sense of grief and loss did I drop them into the laundry basket, and with what morose reluctance did I meet her eye when she returned that afternoon" (181). Later, when she wets the bed and has a pimple, both events contribute, in the end, to the dissolution of their relationship.

A caricature as much as any of his other personas, Charles the first-person narrator affects a command of language and a haughtiness to talk down to the reader. This trait appears clearly when he lapses, briefly, into third-person. At the beginning of the chapter entitled, "Quarter to eight: the Costa Brava," he writes, "But now I glance down the closely written columns and I smile, dear Charles, at your past holidays" (23). His narrative distorts time, letting him narrate his past from the present and even relate events more deeply buried in the past from his immediate past. Besides being a vehicle for humorous reflection, this distortion also provides the basis of Charles' affectation. He looks back condescendingly at his past self, as if being on the verge of twenty confers on him some maturity or discretion he somehow lacked three months earlier. He speaks with the tone of someone suddenly mature, but, ironically, he is as immature and uncertain of himself as ever. In a second example of his movement from first-person to third-person (similar in tone), Charles starts out in first-person and quickly shifts:

Who can say how I got through the weekend? My heart really goes out to me there.

Charles listened to the car drive away and walked up the stairs like a senile heavyweight. 'Seven o'clock,' his watch told him. In the master bedroom he rifled through drawers, examining bottles of pills. Back in the sitting-room, he washed down a fistful of hypnotics with a quarter of lukewarm vodka. He complained to the mirror that this only made him feel worse. (134)

The scene comes on the heels of Rachel having left with her former boyfriend, DeForest, and ends, "Let us leave him, then, as the scene fades: upright in the armchair, comatose; naked except for watchstrap, a single sock, and a scarlet cushion nestling on his thighs" (135). As in the beginning of the novel, Charles concerns himself with surface details and (especially in the above example) with melodrama. He begins with the condescending sentence, "My heart really goes out to me there," but, ironically, he has no heart. He merely knows such a word can be used in a cliché to elicit a sense of empathy from an undiscerning reader. His arrogant and self-pitying tone throughout this third-person account attempts to create a sad scene in a film fading to black: "Let us leave him then, as the scene fades," but such affectation makes him a less-than-reliable narrator. His abuse of language exposes an account based on his need for instantaneous effect as opposed to one with meaning deeply rooted in his psyche.

Likewise, Charles cannot confront his father, a man whose lifestyle and treatment of his wife he disparages. He truly desires the confrontation, however; it represents a fragment of his true self trying to break through his shell of triviality. During an evening at his sister's home, Charles still cannot approach his father, who has his mistress in tow. When he actually needs words to reach down into himself and latch on to emotion, they are missing:

I turned away and then back again. He was managing to look quite elegant and plausible, there on the stairs. I nodded.

'Charles, you're such a...' he laughed, 'you're such a prude.'

I felt ashamed. All worked up and nowhere to go. I looked down at the telephone, breathing deeply.

'Come back upstairs.'

I went. (109)

His relationship with his father is the one catalyst that may make Charles drop parodies in favor of reality. But he is unable to form sentences in which words are coupled with emotion because of his past abuse of language. Another attempt at this coupling comes in the form of a letter Charles writes to his father. It keeps growing longer and longer and purports to tell the elder Highway how his son feels. It is not surprising, in the end, to find the letter consigned to oblivion with the torn and mascara-stained tissue Rachel threw into the wastepaper basket during her last talk with Charles: "I return to the wastepaper basket and find Rachel's mascara-ed ball beneath the layers of tissue steeped in my own snot and tears. I examine it, then let it fall noiselessly from my hand. I cover it now with the Letter to My Father" (222-223). Charles has, ironically, reconciled with his father, who sympathizes with the manner in which the son lost interest in Rachel. He now sympathizes with his father's loss of interest in his mother (even though he still does not understand why he himself lost interest in Rachel). The elder Highway, in fact, tells his son that a breakup is "always a shame, of course, but don't be got down by it. These things come and go. It's all experience" (221). In his father, Charles discovers the same superficiality that makes him a non-entity, and it forms a strange bond comprised of a shared belief in the overriding importance of style.

There is, however, a last possible corrective to Charles' inability to feel that may turn him from being an unreliable abuser of the written word. When taking his entrance exams for Oxford, Charles, true to form, becomes a parody of the eager young academic and writes what he believes his tutor will want to read:

I took a chance on the general English Literature paper, writing for three hours on Blake alone in an attempt to get the erratic-but-oh-so-brilliant ticket. Risky, I know; but my reading was there in bold parentheses: the almost unread Prophetic Books, Milton, Dante, Spenser, Wordsworth, Yeats, Eliot, and, yes, Kafka. 'I like it, I like it,' the dons whispered in my ear. (185)

His prospective tutor, Dr. Charles Knowd, at first seems to be a free-thinking hippy, "but Knowd, despite his appearance, turns out to be the necessary corrective to the prevailing narrative viewpoint. He begins, 'Mr. Highway....do you like literature?' and goes on to analyse, concisely and ruthlessly, the faults of Charles's essays--which are, naturally, the faults of his first-person narrative" (Powell 43). In addition to other charges, Knowd criticizes Charles' examination argument that Donne "is okay one minute because of his 'emotional courage', the way he seems to 'stretch out his emotions in the very fabric of the verse', and not okay the next because you detect...what is it you detect?--ah, yes, a 'meretricious exaltation of verbal play over real feeling, tailoring his emotions to suit his metrics'. Now which is it to be?" (215). Paradoxically, Charles' charge about Donne's overriding concern for verbal play indicts him. In attempting to sound clever and

learned, his two separate points about Donne cancelled each other out. In this instance, his concern for verbal play over real feeling was clearly detectable. This realization leads Knowd to say, "Literature has a kind of life of its own, you know. You can't just use it...ruthlessly, for your own ends" (215). His first-person narrative has been one of linguistic legerdemain, with Charles posturing throughout his monologue, losing himself in narcissistic love of cleverly-worded prose. After Knowd's chastisement, he may reinvent himself, but the ending is not at all clear. On the one hand, referring to the letter to his father, he writes, "What a remarkable document it is. Lucid yet subtle, persistent without being querulous, sensible but not unimaginative, elegant? yes, florid? no. Ah, if Knowd-all could have read this. The only question is: what do I do with it?" (219). The letter is, presumably, the kind of meaningful piece that Knowd wants Charles to write to prove he can. But his reference to Knowd as "Knowd-all" and the "florid" vocabulary used to describe the letter indicate his arrogance and love of verbal sound and rhythm prevail. Whether or not Charles will eventually become a reliable writer (or a reliable self) who uses rather than abuses words for his own ends, who possesses more than a superficial outlook, at least he has the chance for some form of salvation.

IV. Dead Babies: Terminal Decay

In Amis' second novel, Dead Babies, there is, ultimately, no chance for salvation, no way for morality to win out over immorality, and the narrator's place in this losing battle puzzles the reader. Like Charles

Highway, the narrator of Dead Babies occasionally switches his point of view. However, in this novel the narrator primarily speaks in the third-person, whereas Highway's account was primarily in first-person. In Dead Babies, the narrator's apparent foreknowledge of events, combined with his attempts at first-person communion with the reader (trying to draw him into the dark goings-on) and his reluctance to identify himself, create a disconcerting vision.

The novel itself surprises readers with its bleakness, and this aspect has been discussed reviewers. It purports to be a Menippean satire, a type of satire that employs debate and dialogue "to ridicule different intellectual attitudes and philosophical postures" (Cuddon 540) and is inferred through a quote from Menippus at the beginning: "...and so even when [the satirist] presents a vision of the future, his business is not prophecy; just as his subject is not tomorrow...it is today" (vii). The time of the novel is the near future, indicated by references to drinks called "Whiskis" and "I-type" Jaguars. It is a nightmarish and "perverse variant on the British genre of the country house weekend novel made popular by P.G. Wodehouse" (Diedrick 32-33), filled with references to drug and alcohol use, sexual intercourse and bodily fluids. As Margaret Drabble writes, "This is not a book for the squeamish. It aims to shock and disgust, and it certainly succeeds." The least detestable of the characters, Giles Coldstream, as Drabble notes, merely possesses a mania about losing his teeth. In short, the novel is a "savage and disturbing portrait of intelligent young people engaged in a self-destructive orgy of drugs and sex" (Bradbury 389). This sense of self-destruction creates the foundation for the Menippean satire, and yet the novel's satiric

qualities turn in on themselves by the work's end because of the post-modern characterization of Quentin.

In its discussion of bodily functions, used in combination with blunt language to "shock and disgust," the novel recalls Amis' debt to anti-modernism. The influence of Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin is clear on several occasions, as noted by Michael Mason: "there are several passages about what certain characters endure before, during and after sex and drugs that recall Jim Dixon's [of Kingsley Amis' Lucky Jim] crapulence." For instance, after Roxeanne attempts sex with Keith, she comes down and tells the others, "He couldn't get a hard-on. And he threw up. It's not girls he likes" (170). In addition, after watching a pornographic film, Andy decides to go outside and "have a wank. This is too good to waste. Awww, my snake" (167). Andy's need reminds readers of Larkin's poem "Love Again," "Love again: wanking at ten past three / (Surely he's taken her home by now?)" (Collected Poems 215). Yet Larkin reveals a poetic narrator's emptiness and sense of loss while Andy merely searches for gratuitous sex. However, Amis satirizes Andy's sexual emptiness throughout the novel, showing him as a character who cannot connect emotion with the physical act. Both authors combine the notions of emotional emptiness and physical pleasure in their blunt style.

The manner of relating the novel's unpleasantness, the forceful language with its descriptions of bodily functions and the unpleasantness of the book's bloody end, come from the strangely uninvolved yet knowledgeable narrator, the nameless figure who relates the story of Dead Babies and behaves more as a puppeteer than someone with a third-

person point of view. In fact, he reverts to first-person narration on several occasions in a manner geared towards gaining the reader's complicity in the events. For instance, at the beginning of chapter 5, "Appleseed Rectory," he asks, "Are we presenting characters and scenes that are somehow fanciful, tendentious, supererogatory? Not at all. Quite the contrary. The reverse is the case" (16). He uses the first-person plural "we" to make it sound as if the reader is somehow an accomplice in the amoral happenings and tawdry events of the novel whether he desires it or not, giving him an active role in the construction of the fiction. He also gives the work a postmodern self-reflexivity by referring to "characters and scenes," revealing its fictional status. He continues by noting the characters' temporal displacement, "For we have gone on ahead a small distance in time. Our subjects are now mere adolescents, quite unaware of the shape their lives have begun to take" (17). And again, after a cursory description of the main characters, he writes, "These are the six that answer to our purposes" (19). He implies the truth of his story through irony, initially denying any "fanciful" aspects to its characters, while (like Samson Young of London Fields) describing them like characters in a drama rather than people and subsequently admitting that events relayed in the book have not yet occurred (but will).

A more potent example of the narrator's strategic position in and around the text occurs near the end in two exquisite paragraphs:

Yes, it was seven o'clock and a pall of thunder hung above the Rectory rose gardens. The formerly active air was now so weighed down that it seeped like heavy water over the roof.

Darkness flowed in the distance, and the dusk raked like a black searchlight across the hills toward them.

But pity the dead babies. Now, before it starts. They couldn't know what was behind them nor what was to come. The past? They had none. Like children after a long day's journey, their lives arranged themselves in a patchwork of vanished mornings, lost afternoons, and probable yesterdays. (164)

Neil Powell refers to these paragraphs as "stunningly effective" because "they occur abruptly in the harshest section of the book" (44). They mix the apocalyptic and the sympathetic. The first paragraph foreshadows oncoming doom, with the heavy air likened to heavy water, an element used in making nuclear weapons (and an indication of Amis' anti-Enlightenment philosophy, which would flourish more completely in Einstein's Monsters and Time's Arrow). The darkness flows towards the unsuspecting, drug-deadened characters. For them, destruction is unavoidable because their world being one of disintegration, decay and mindless chaos. The narrator then reverts to sympathy, displaying the only philosophy able to effectively interpret events, and he asks the reader to let his guard down, to pity the characters and empathize with their pathetic and soon-to-be foreshortened lives. It is the novel's finest example of "direct address from self-conscious author to self-conscious reader" (Bradbury 390). However, the author's verbal manipulations coerce the reader's self-consciousness. His stylistic sympathy attempts to elicit pity despite the fact that the characters (merely phantasms created by the narrator) act out of free will (within their fictional construct) and owe their demolition only to themselves.

Dead Babies' "Author's Note" clearly anticipates its narrative self-consciousness and its fictional nature:

Not only are all characters and scenes in this book entirely fictitious; most of the technical, medical, and psychological data are too. My working maxim here has been as follows: I may not know much about science but I know what I like. (xii)

His involvement with reader and text makes the narrator/implicit author a pseudo-dramatic character moving in and out of the play observing and directing, one who in "his control over the other eleven, constitutes a shadowy twelfth character" (Diedrick 33). The conflation of first-person and third-person in Dead Babies, especially the use of first-person plural, further emphasizes the way the novel becomes a drama with one of the characters occasionally stepping out of the scene in order to bring the viewer up to date or provide background information. This technique, combined with the narrator's puppeteer-references and control over the "purposes" of the text, leaves the reader uncertain if he hears an unreliable character, narrator or author/director. He actually hears a postmodern combination of all of these.

Dead Babies combines forms that reflect the dramatic and biographical faces of the narrator. At the front of the novel, a list of "Main Characters" describes each character as if in a playbill. For example, Quentin is listed as "The Hon. Quentin Villiers: tall, blond, elegant, urbane"; and Marvell as "Marvell Buzhardt: small, hairy, authoritative, Jewish" (xii). The opening chapter extends this structure by describing the initial action completely in italics:

In the master suite, on knees and elbows, Giles Coldstream

was crawling around the floor in search of the telephone, both hands cupped tightly over his mouth. The curling green cord eventually led him to a heap of spent gin bottles beneath his desk. With his left palm still flat over his lips Giles tugged at the wire, hobbled into a crouch, and dialed two digits. (3)

Admittedly, the action described is in past tense, but opening the novel with a physical description and rendering the text in italics underlines Amis' playfully dramatic intentions. He uses italics throughout the book to "set scenes" or to set off brief instances of interior monologue from the text proper:

She swiveled to meet it but her mind kept slipping back to...
to I do beach him straightaway but didn't get free used up The Mandarin best to be good friends told her grapefruit what money could do and their bodies with bastards pricks shits eat a lot be alone and you're Celia" (172-173).

A more unqualified example of drama occurs in the middle of the novel: the characters see a performance called "The Psychologic Revue," "held fortnightly at a semiderelict 1920s cinema" (86). On the night of their attendance, the group sits and watches a "stand in" performer, Acey-Deecey (a pun on the hard rock band AC/DC), a substitute for the "anticipated artistes, Neural Lobe." Acey-Deecey turns out to be "fat, ill-rehearsed, drunk, and entirely lacking in all the attributes of showmanship" (90-91). But an even more disturbing occurrence mars Acey's terrible act:

Then it happened. The two tall men from the front row had

leaped the orchestra pit and were on the stage. Almost before his last words were out, Acey was on his knees with his hair pulled back--and the man had smacked him in the throat with the iron glove. A rope of blood jumped from his mouth. Then he eye-forked him with a popping sound and dug his boot into Acey's groin, making his legs spring up and flutter. The man wrenched his head from behind until a long sick crack folded out onto the stunned air. (91)

The two men, whom Andy had labelled "Conceptualists" (creative artists who, with "precision and arbitrariness," commit artistic "Gestures," such as scalping civil servants and cutting the achilles tendons of doctors and social workers), turn out to be part of the act, a truth which, when revealed, leaves the audience in various states: "Some whimpered, some emitted quiet, retrospective screams, some cried with relief, everyone gasped, and a few applauded" (92).

The most important aspect of this "play" turns on two people believed to be part of the audience, mere observers, becoming part of the drama. Amis demonstrates the weakness of the barriers separating the audience of a fictional event from the event itself. In much the same way, Tom Stoppard, in The Real Inspector Hound, has two critics, Moon and Birdboot, slowly sucked into a play's action until they finally switch places with two of the main characters. Both, in the end, die, with Moon wondering shortly before, "I'm not mad...I'm almost sure I'm not mad" (43). Stoppard himself said that the play was not about "anything grander than itself" (viii), and the same idea applies to Dead Babies (as it does to London Fields, which also toys with mixing drama

and the novel). The novel attempts to draw the reading audience into the work just as the supposed audience at "The Psychologic Revue" were drawn into the play. Their participation and complicity in the events provide meaning, as the reader's complicity in the happenings of Dead Babies gives it meaning, providing a basis for its Menippean look at youth, innocence and unconcern for reality. Inattentive readers of Dead Babies suffer the consequences of complicity, becoming the narrator's partners in witnessing the dissolution of society despite repeated warnings and hints from the narrator that all is not as it seems.⁷

In addition to drama, Amis incorporates elements of biography in Dead Babies. Each of the six main characters, Quentin, Diana, Giles, Keith, Celia and Andy, has a brief biography that includes sexual history. Celia's biography, for instance, begins, "When Celia Evanston was seventeen her stepmother, Lady Aramintha Leitch, drew her into a frescoed alcove of her Roman apartment and offered her stepdaughter a new Jaguar, a flat in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, and 10,000k. per annum on the condition that Celia didn't make a pass at the water ski instructor Lady Leitch was currently drunkening on the patio sundeck" (155). Her early history is sketched as two years of decadent parties, drugs and gratuitous sex, an existence that belies her true nature: "How foreign this was to her compliant and shockable nature Celia never realized until Quentin swept into her life" (156).

The combination of biography and fiction is employed more fully by Amis' fellow writer, Julian Barnes, in Flaubert's Parrot. Described as "a biography with the dull bits left out" (Walsh 20), Flaubert's

Parrot is narrated by an amateur biographer and Flaubert enthusiast, Geoffrey Braithwaite, who sets out to write a revealing literary history. In building his work to true postmodern specifications, Braithwaite proffers chapters structured as a chronology, "Braithwaite's Dictionary of Accepted Ideas" (a parody of Flaubert's Dictionnaire des idées reçues) and an examination paper. One chapter is narrated by Flaubert's long-dead mistress, Louise Colet. By asking, "Why does the writing make us chase the writer? Why can't we leave well alone? Why aren't books enough?" (12), Braithwaite himself attempts to understand this combination of forms. Flaubert, he recounts, believed books should be enough, but the self-consciousness of the postmodern era cannot allow the objectivity of the written word to go unchallenged:

All postmodern fiction foregrounds this dimension of critical self-reflexivity in a highly self-conscious fashion. A novel like Julian Barnes' Flaubert's Parrot (1984) utterly collapses the distinction between novel, criticism and autobiography, revealing that in the condition of language, however obsessively we search for "truth," all must be fictional.

(P. Waugh 51)

In Dead Babies, Amis attempts, in a more satiric way, to collapse these distinctions between drama, biography and novel, his narrator simultaneously admitting the work's status as fiction and implicating the reader.

And events in Dead Babies constantly reprove the hopelessness, the terminal decay, of the sick world. Consider, for instance, Skip's dull-witted murder of a heifer that chases the Appleseeders out of a field:

As the animal frowned, dipped its head and moved forward,

Skip brought the brick down on its pate with a long-armed swing. There was a dull crunch.

The heifer remained motionless, then jerked backward. It turned, skipped into the field, ran about in untidy decreasing circles, and keeled over into the grass. (62)

(Amis' devotion to style is illustrated in the verb "skipped," a play on the name of the heifer's killer, and the stilted adjective "untidy.") Skip's crime is one of selfishness, of amoral disconcern for any aspect of the world that does not affect his immediate existence. In fact, when his small world is invaded, he destroys whatever aggresses. Instead of feeling remorse for what he has done to the heifer, he quips, "I'm gonna go kick it some" (63). Skip can only define himself in terms of destruction, so it is not surprising when he finally destroys himself and several of the Appleseeders.

Another example, Keith Whitehead, is defined by pornography. Sex for its own sake is his main concern, and when the infamous "Johnny" destroys his pornographic pictures, Whitehead is duly upset:

With agitated but determined movements Keith gathered the remains into a large pile. He turned, deciding to get a sack from the garage. He hardly registered the crude poster bearing the legend JOHNNY tacked to his door. He wondered how the photographs could most unobtrusively be destroyed. He started to cry. A whole way of life was going to an end for Keith Whitehead. (129)

Keith feels he is virtually "self"-less because he has no sex life; the only self that matters to him is a sexual one, and when his last, most

tenuous connection to sex, his pornography, is destroyed, Keith feels that he himself has been destroyed. Each of the Appleseeders has some destructive way to define himself: from Giles' alcoholism and tooth-mania to Andy's drug addiction and overconfidence to Roxeanne's perversion (she humiliates a "lugubrious boogie" by publicly wrenching his penis from his pants, after which "She smiled" [95]). The only character seemingly capable of redemption in this delinquent group is Quentin who, when the heifer is murdered, "restrained Skip considerably [from kicking it] in the spirit of a wise man preventing a fellow Jew from attacking a platoon of Nazis" (63).

Throughout the novel, any hope of relative normality (not morality) rests on Quentin Villiers, lord of Appleseed Rectory. His biography says that he runs "more or less singlehandedly" the university newspaper of London University, a "satirico-politico-literary magazine called Yes" (38), his editorship obtained through a series of forged articles and reference letters. And as editor, he often plagiarizes reviews. Despite this amorality, however, Quentin is the most refined of the Appleseed residents:

Quentin is a superman. The versatility of the fellow! He can talk all day to a butcher about the longevity of imported meats, to an airhostess about safety regulations in the de Gaulle hangars, to an insurance salesman about postdated transferable policies, to a poet about nontypographical means of distinguishing six-syllable three-line stanzas and nine-syllable two-line ones, to an economist about prewar counter-inflationary theory, to a zoologist about the compensatory

eye movements of the iguana. (41)

He is, as Powell writes, "a kind of Everyman" (43) whose learning and refinement, it is hoped, will overcome the baseness of the novel's other characters. The least perverted of the characters, Quentin counteracts the perversion of Marvell, who insists "perversion is justified--no, demanded--by an environment that is now totally manmade, totally without a biology" (154). If there is salvation for any of the Appleseeders, it will come through Quentin.

But Quentin is, in fact, the antithesis of a savior, a postmodern monster who turns out to be the most depraved of all the characters in Dead Babies. As Diedrick notes, Villiers (whose "name evokes the word 'villain' and anagrammatically contains the word 'evil'" [35-36]) is finally revealed as "the Antichrist," the villainous and murderous "Johnny" who has taunted and prodded the Appleseeders throughout the novel, for instance, leaving on the bed for Celia's benefit a note saying, "Johnny's left it all down there" (173). Under the quilt is human excrement, which Quentin hypocritically calls "unutterably squalid" (176). In the end, Johnny murders Marvell, Celia and Diana and arranges the deaths of Roxeanne, Skip, Andy, Giles and Lucy. The only other character left, except Johnny (who has also "murdered" the character Quentin) is Keith, whose death is assured by the narrator's italicized ending paragraph (describing the set for a play):

The Appleseed kitchen: the suitcase, the car keys, the bag of drugs, the roll of notes, the burnished ax. On the wall, the (decoy) excremental G of the Conceptualist Gesture. Johnny was there. He leaned forward eagerly by the window. As he watched

Keith move up the drive, his green eyes flashed into the dawn
like wild, dying suns. (206)

If Quentin, as Powell suggests, is an "Everyman," then, metaphorically, every man bears the ignominy of his final heinous actions. Johnny makes sure that the decay is ultimately terminal.

Amis' Menippean satire, an exercise in unreliability, accesses the reader's mind through the use of first-person and third-person points of view, as well as by the techniques of drama and biography. The fiction involves the reader in Johnny's game, just as audience members are part of "The Psychologic Revue" or The Real Inspector Hound. But there were warnings as to Quentin's true nature (in his biography, for instance, the narrator writes, "Watch Quentin closely. Everyone else does" [41], and he refers to Quentin as a "farcically beautiful Hamlet," recalling Shakespeare's play of madness and murder [172]), hints offered by the narrator like Samson Young later offers hints in London Fields. However, complexity of the novel, the combination of forms and its self-reflexivity, work against reader comprehension. Dead Babies exists "in a world constituted through multiple kinds of discourse or language games that contradict and contest each other even as they complement and are constructed out of each other" (P. Waugh 50). If anything is successfully satirized (as opposed to deconstructed) in Dead Babies, it is language and its relationship to meaning, for even the reader "is obliged to ask himself what it was all about" (Drabble).

V. Success: First Person Plural

Language and meaning are again critiqued in Amis' third novel, Success, which offers not a plural "we," as did Dead Babies, but two "I's" that leave the reader with contradictions. The two narrators' claims of veracity, despite the conflicts in their accounts, provide the narrative gamesmanship of Success. In this sense, Success represents a shift in Amis' technique: the novel concentrates on first-person perspectives but in a way that causes the reader to doubt authorial intent. Narrative doubling and lack of clarity create ambiguity about meaning, especially of the title. The unreliability of Charles Highway, based on parody, is exceeded in Success by the more focused accounts of Terence Service and Gregory Riding.

"Success" is loosely associated with style, but "the reader learns neither what success is nor whether it has been achieved" (Dodsworth 333). This uncertainty foreshadows London Fields, whose title remains hopelessly ambiguous even while "M.A." insists upon its importance and centrality to the text's symbolism. A similar, though less developed, title-irony is found in Success, whose name is "ironically Thatcherite" (Bradbury 402). It satirizes the greed of the oncoming 1980s (in this sense it prefigures Money) by demonstrating that the pursuit of this ill-defined, ambiguous term is enough to make one character a hopeless liar and turn another from sympathetic job to manipulative accessory in an empty, needless death whose gloom mirrors Dead Babies' waste of lives. If, in the end, Terence Service is a "success" (and that is not at all certain), he has become one at too high a cost.

Success, in fact, reflects Dead Babies in several ways, including character doubling. As James Diedrick notes, Keith Whitehead and Quentin Villiers of Dead Babies reappear as Terence Service and Gregory Riding:

Terry--a short, balding, unsuccessful but ambitious salesman-- is a distant literary cousin of Little Keith in Dead Babies. Greg constantly refers to him as a "yob," a British slang term for members of the urban working class. Greg--a tall, attractive, decadent, seemingly successful art gallery manager-- bears a similar familial resemblance to Quentin Villiers. (43)

And like Quentin Villiers, Gregory lives a lie in his narrative. He exists as a double, just as Quentin has a double in Johnny, but, in the end, his position is pathetic rather than wicked. Gregory's fall in the world (as the foul-mouthed Terence rises) elicits compassion. Even his solipsistic orientation and utter lack of concern for Greg is far from the madness that possesses Quentin/Johnny. Although all still is not well, Success does not repeat the hopelessness of Dead Babies.

However, Success gives the same attention to bodily functions that characterized both The Rachel Papers and Dead Babies. It stems, as one critic notes, from Amis' "old fashioned Swiftian disgust for the human body" (B. Morrison, "nastiness"). In discussing sex, for example, Greg describes the post-coital bed: "There will of course be the usual grim femininia--a dollop of make-up on the pillowslips, the school of pubic hairs on the sheets, that patch of hell somewhere further down" (17). Shortly after, Greg, taking a cue from Charles Highway, admits his recent discovery that women have biological functions: "Did you know, for instance, that girls now go to the lavatory? Shaking news, I agree, but

they do. Oh yes. And not just to pee, either" (17). Amis' infatuation with defecation and other bodily functions, whether Charles Highway's blackened stools, the bed-staining putrescence of Quentin/Johnny or the sexual leftovers of Greg's lovers, indicates a debt to anti-modernism that is clearer in Success through the character Terence Service (who claims to be allowed to go on about his traumatic childhood "on account of it fucking me up" [25])⁸ than in any other Amis novel. While it arguably illustrates an anti-beauty strain running through his work, it is not anti-humanistic. In fact, Amis' use of anti-modern language in dialogue and descriptions focuses the reader's attention more on the reality of the human condition than the stilted language of academics, whom anti-modernists like Larkin revile for taking literature away from the common person (who wants straightforwardness and simplicity).

Anti-modernism is present in varying degrees in every Amis novel, as is experimentation with narrative point of view, but the latter is infinitely more important to Amis' work. Inflections of anti-modernism or modernism serve mainly as postmodern backdrops (because of the way Amis combines and recombines them) to the postmodern trickery that is Amis' narration. Anti-modernists, seeking candidness, play very few narrative games: narrators are usually reliable and easily followed. Modernists may experiment, but their experiments solidify and become accepted techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness writing. Post-modern style never solidifies, and Success illustrates Amis' shifting technique. Involving the reader through the deft interplay of first-person and third-person narration, as in The Rachel Papers and Dead Babies, becomes less important than the focused study of first-person

narration, how disparate narratives of the same events affect the reading process and create unreliability. Each point of view presents "a critical portrait of the solipsistic, narcissistic self" (Bradbury 390), with each narrator intent (for most of the novel) on the truth of his own account. Although Terry's voice initially sounds more sympathetic, and Greg's more so at the end, the tones of both are meant, through different styles, to gain the reader's trust:

For a time, then, and to differing degrees, the reader feels close to the two narrators, and implicated in their stories, almost as a relative would. Indeed, each speaks to the reader with the intimacy and special pleading that a sibling might, seeking an ally. Amis wants the reader to experience the way these two men think, and what they represent, from the inside, and the hothouse atmosphere induced by their narratives achieves this. (Diedrick 44)

The monologues begin, respectively, with the words "Terry speaking" and "Gregory speaking" (both characters have just answered the telephone in their initial accounts, an example of Amis' adept wordplay noted by Diedrick [42]), and Terry almost immediately begins to self-reflexively question his role in the novel: "What am I doing here? My job, I think, is to make you hate him [Greg] also. It shouldn't be difficult. All I've got to do is keep my eyes open. So long as you keep yours open too" (12). Terry's words not only attempt to sway the reader in his favor, saying that if the reader keeps his eyes open he will simply see and dislike the real Greg, but they also strike at the fictional nature of the proceedings. His query, "What am I doing here?" and his notion that

he has a "job" are indicative of a power outside monologue that has mysteriously put him in the position of narrating a series of events in contrast to a similarly placed Greg. That power can only be an implied author.

Greg begins his narrative by attacking Terence, attempting to make him seem insignificant: "That fool Terence was in the kitchen when I got home from work. He isn't really allowed in this part of my flat--hence his furtive air, his look of hunted gratitude when I asked him to stay upstairs and talk" (16). Greg's tone is superior and condescending, but, ironically, he attempts the same thing as Terence: relaying his sense of superiority, he hopes to convince the reader Terence is truly a "fool," an insignificant, pathetic figure who lives in Greg's flat only through Greg's pity. He (Terence) is too inconsequential to be believed.

Shortly thereafter, to confirm his superiority, Greg undertakes a momentary leap from first-person to third-person. When discussing the bits and pieces of themselves women leave in his bed, he, like Charles Highway, characteristically uses hyperbole: "I can see it now: Gregory stands in the middle of the floor, the room still shimmering with the girl's demented exit; gingerly he approaches, face half-averted, gathers the heavy quilt in a muscular fist, breathes deeply, throws back the blankets--and finds an entire leg marooned on the sheets!" (17). Greg not only changes his perspective, a move symbolic of his superiority, but he also declaims his discourse as if he were a stage director or playwright setting a darkly comic tone. Genres merge as well as points of view. The reader should be warned, however, that Greg's dramatic ability indicates his narrative, unlike Terry's, may be wrought more

of imagination and drama than truth, if, in fact, from such contrast, any truth (or truths) can be retrieved.

Throughout the novel, both narrators confirm their awareness of the other, although somehow they are prevented from knowing exactly what is said. When discussing Terry's dalliance and failure with one of Greg's throwaway girls, Greg writes, "Perhaps Miranda really wasn't within his range. Perhaps, like so much else, it's all a question of class. Has he said anything to you about it?" (45). Terry in turn cautions the reader about Greg's prevarication using direct address to Greg himself:

Look at you, cocksucker, scum, with your bloody stupid twee old heap of a car, your laughingstock poof clothes, your worthless layabout job, your cretinous faggot friends, your sullen and ravening money worries, your pathetic outdated swank, your endless lies. Gregory is a liar. Don't believe a word he says. He is the author of lies. (88)

As Diedrick notes, "The foster brothers' narratives are dialogic: each speaker is intensely aware of the other speaker and of the reader" (43). Terry's passage indicates just such an awareness, for he addresses his words, at first, to Greg, and then suddenly to the reader, mildly commanding as he declares, "Don't believe a word he says." Shortly thereafter, Greg admits his "love of fabrication," his "unquenchable thirst for falsehood" (97), unwittingly supporting Terry's warning. The contrasts plague the reader throughout the novel until the end offers a somewhat clearer portrait of the two "I's."

One example of the remarkable disjunction of the narrators' accounts concerns Gregory's lunch with his sister, Ursula. In this ac-

count, Greg writes glowingly of the posh event:

Now for Ursula, of course, everything has to be just so—
and I, of course, infallibly ensure that it is. My usual
table has been reserved at Le Coq d'Or, and good Emil is
on hand as ever when Ursula and I surge through the great
double doors. (Ursula and I love grand restaurants.) (69-
70)

The name of Greg's restaurant alone ("The Gold Cock") indicates his
version may not be trustworthy. Nonetheless, he claims to have taken his
sister to the swank eatery and stayed until four o'clock, long after he
was supposed to return to his position at a chic London art gallery. In
his later account, Terry paints a much less pretentious portrait of the
outing:

The other week, apparently, they [Greg and Ursula] had a very
depressing half-hour together in some sandwich bar near the
gallery--he wasn't meant to stay out any longer, he said, and
he even had to borrow 60p off Ursula to help pay for the
lunch. Most heartening. Ought to find out the truth about that
job of his. (83)

Greg's account is so exaggerated that the reader cannot but suspect his
narrative, even more so as the novel develops: "We have no omniscient
authorial voice here, only the testimonies of Terry and Gregory them-
selves. And once we are warned by Terry that Gregory is 'a liar...the
author of lies' we begin to suspect that 'the horror of being ordinary'
has driven him to desperate invention" (B. Morrison, "nastiness"). Terry
becomes more reliable as the text progresses because, unlike Greg, he is

far less given to hyperbole, and, predictably, Greg eventually collapses beneath the weight of his lies.

As the novel nears its end, Greg becomes more and more like Terry, more worried about who he is and what he will become. As Greg declines, Terry ascends: he begins to make money and gains self-confidence. Greg's decline (more a realization of his true self than an actual decline) is revealed by a sudden and inexplicable inability to travel on the Underground, an event he deems "a sad and irretrievable thing" (166). He experiences an anxiety attack, a loss of control, a loss of his sense of place in the world that should not surprise the reader as much as move him to a sense of pity. Just before he relays the unfortunate event, Greg confronts the reader and asks him to quickly evaluate all he himself has said:

Now--say quickly: What do you think of me? What do you think of me, Gregory, Gregory Riding, the being I am? Let's hear it--haughty, vain, florid, contemptuous, lordly, superficial, corrupt, conceited, queer--and insensitive, above all insensitive (look how he gives himself away). Actually I'm extremely self-aware. You fool, do you think I don't know all that, all that? You fool, I know it, I know it all, you fool.
(166)

Greg has always been self-aware, has always known his station in life was pitiful, but he could not bring himself to admit reality to a third party--thus his extensively fabricated narrative.

More important, Greg's admission of self-awareness poses an interesting question about language and meaning in a fictional text. Diedrick

sees the progress of the two narratives as akin to an X, a cross-section over which Greg and Terry travel as one ascends and the other descends (40). However, Greg was never "high" enough to descend. He was pitiable from the beginning since he actually started at the bottom. His tale of descent was a falsehood--a fiction within a fiction or meta-fiction (as in London Fields). After his Underground-psychosis sets in, Greg alters his style of narration into one forthright and believable: "I tell lies. I'm a liar. I always have been. I'm sorry. Here come the secrets" (181). When he admits his life--job, car, great friends--is far less impressive than initially related, the style of the narrative itself changes (but nothing else), and reveals second level of fiction. Although Greg does not actually switch social stations with Terry, he does stylistically, as Samson Young, a subject of fiction rather than an author of it, does with his intended "murderer."

As Greg becomes more sympathetic and more believable, Terry becomes less so. His narrative remains believable, and the two accounts finally merge, but Terry displaces Greg in the life of Ursula. Whereas Greg once committed incest with her, Terry now begins to do so, becoming the cool, calculating egotist Greg presented himself as early on. Terry seduces Ursula, taking advantage of her vulnerability, her need to have someone take care of her. On one occasion, as Terry tries to convince his step-sister to go further (sexually) than she wants, he claims, "There are people who will look after you, and I am one of them, but if you go on behaving like this we will all go away. We will all go away because you are behaving unnaturally, because you are tonto" (180). He says what he knows will have a deep and lasting effect on Ursula (he also speaks

ironically, for it is he who is acts "unnaturally"). He plays on her fears in order to satisfy his lust. This manipulation, combined with Greg's past abuse of her, leads to her suicide. Greg recounts her death in horrible detail: "Then all at once: the clout of cold air through the shattered glass, the men churning at the jaws of the ambulance, the snapped figure in the white nightdress" (203). Terry's next words, conversely, are: "Big deal. Do you want to know how my sister died?" (204).

Because the reader initially felt more sympathy for Terry than Greg, this callousness implicates him in Ursula's suicide. The two first-person narratives, each wanting the reader as an ally against the other, attempted to create an intimacy early in the text. As the incest between Terry and Ursula increases and the previous incestuous relationship of Greg and Ursula is more fully revealed, however, this intimacy creates a sense of disquiet:

There is in fact something uncomfortably close about the intimate relationship initially established among foster brothers and reader in Success, and the reader's recognition of this coincides with consecutive revelations of the literal incest that exists at the corrosive center of the novel.

(Diedrick 45)

Both narrators draw the reader into their realms, but if he sympathizes with either, he is forced to deal with the moral crime of incest. Terry compounds the reader's guilt by transforming from sympathetic yob to arrogant egotist: "I feel posh here," he says at an upscale restaurant (recalling the fabricated poshness of Greg's lunch with Ursula), "I am posh here, now I come to mention it" (194).

Unreliability becomes a slave to form in Success, a novel that presents a "totally jaundiced, jaded view of life and art" (Hill 9). No matter which point of view the reader initially accepts, he will be forced to reverse it. No matter which choice is made, Success's design lulls the reader into an acceptance of the self-destructive forces at work in the novel, at work in prose in the postmodern world. No self can survive without changing: in the end, Terry may survive because he is reinventing his self, but Greg has given up reinvention and will not survive. He is a static figure in a dynamic world.

The end of Success feels gloomy: Greg is left to stand against the forces of change with which he can no longer contend:

I stand behind the row of birches. I'm cold--I want to shiver and sob. I look up. Something's coming. Oh, go away. Against the hell of sunset the branches bend and break. The wind will never cease to craze the frightening leaves. (224).

The semi-apocalyptic situation suggests a new force, the same one that causes terminal decay in Dead Babies, will forever "craze" the world. It makes Greg fear for his identity, so he retreats from society: "I'm not going back. I'm going to stay out here, where nothing is frightening" (224). Even Terry senses the decay: "We are getting nastier. We don't put up with things. We do as we want now" (194-195). The reader, finally disconcerted by the fact that the force destroys Greg while invigorating Terry--who has learned to live with it by becoming "nastier" himself--wonders if the decay can ever spread further.

However, it is still not as hopelessly and murderously bleak an ending as that of Dead Babies. As Powell contends, the ending suggests

"that the terrors and comforts of the rural world may be bleak but at least they have depth and reality. Here, at least, the future of Dead Babies seems avoidable" (44). Greg has finally denied fabrication and returned to the frightening "real" world, cause for some little hope.

VI. Other People: Temporal Loop

In Other People, first-person and third-person points of view conflat to a degree surpassed only by London Fields. The novel further confuses the reader by employing both time distortions and an uncertain and malleable main character. The nondescript Mary Lamb/Amy Hide ("Perhaps every girl was really two girls..." [80]), foreshadows Nicola Six (and Mark Apsrey: the initials of her first names are M.A.⁹), but she also exemplifies the anti-novel trait of minimal character development. Her thinness is consistent with the book's tone: Other People "powerfully deals with displaced identity, and follows the course of a girl's breakdown in which the gap between herself and other people becomes obscured" (Bradbury 390). In this respect, Mary resembles Greg from Success. He lost--in fact never attained--the self-identity he ardently desired and desperately attempted to convince the reader he possessed. His real identity overcomes his image, and, to his horror, he discovers that, like most other people, he is not a success. Mary also joins society, making a surreal journey through the streets of London, more and more a part of the same world Greg holds in so much disdain but cannot escape. An authorial presence manipulates both characters but much more overtly in Mary's case. Throughout Success, Greg temporarily usurps

authorial status, whereas Mary's is powerless as the author moves in and out of the narrative, arbitrarily usurping and denying authority. At the start of Other People, Mary is the same kind of helpless character into which Greg (in terms of narrative movement) devolves.

Critics argue that Russ and Alan, Mary's coworkers at a cafe, are reworked examples of Greg and Terry from Success:

Russ is slim, loose, sidling and in some of the novel's funniest scenes fantasizes about his peremptory treatment of famous film actresses ("Guess whose turn it was for the chop this time? Ekberg"). Alan is pale, frightened and prone to wrench fistfuls of hair from his scalp, thus adding to an already serious baldness problem. Here are the classic dualities of Martin Amis's fiction: buoyant self-assurance as against self-loathing, preening, arching, craning and gliding as against whining, whinging, fawning and breaking down. (B. Morrison, "astronomical")

The contention that Russ and Alan recreate Greg and Terry suggests their interrelatedness, as one looks back through Amis' catalogue, to Quentin and Keith from Dead Babies. Amis uses the same dichotomy, that of "self-assurance as against self-loathing," in Dead Babies, Success and Other People. In short, he clearly does for his novels what Madonna does for herself--recreating fiction by redrawing both the characters and the dichotomy. By placing the same dichotomy in different settings and in different narrative schemes, he reinvents his schema and his work, reiterating that fiction is exhausted in the late twentieth century. The same extreme characters (or types) come again and again, and in

Other People, they come with a surreal or "Martian" perspective.

Despite its subtitle, "A Mystery Story," Amis intends Other People as "a surrealistic novel that defies characterization" with Mary Lamb "an alien among the rather grotty types with whom she drifts."¹⁰ More precisely, Mary impersonates a "Martian." As James Diedrick and Blake Morrison (in "astronomical") both note, poetry, especially Amis' "Point of View" (quoted at the beginning of this section) and "The Martian School of Poetry," influences Other People. An important concept in all of Amis' novels, differences in "Point of View" are even more integral to Other People. The reader must constantly reinterpret Mary Lamb's viewpoint, especially in the early stages of the novel. For instance, at the beginning of the book, she finds that "heavy curved extensions had been attached to her feet" (14). As she journeys outside, she notices "extravagantly lovely white creatures" and "slow-moving crucifixes" in the sky (17-18). These simple objects are shoes, clouds and airplanes rendered from Mary's distinct, outsider's point of view with no help from the omniscient narrator. As Amis wrote in his poem, "Everything depends on your point of view," and Mary's, a "Martian's," calls into question "normal" perception. Amis further underscores the importance of "Point of View" in the novel by paraphrasing the poem in prose (186-187) and foreshadowing it at the beginning as Mary goes to sleep after her first day out of the hospital: "At the last moment the air seemed to hum with iron and flame as one by one, above the vampiric sky, the points of life went out" (20). The use of "vampiric," an adjective denotative of Mary's transfer from the world of the living (where she was Amy Hide) to the world of the dead (where she is Mary Lamb), a

quasi-sacrifice made without apparent motivation, prefigures the passage, "Some people look at the sunset and can see only blood in the vampiric sky" (187)

"The Martian School of Poetry" includes poets such as Christopher Reid, David Sweetman and Craig Raine. The latter poet gave the name to the school with his poem "A Martian Sends a Postcard Home," which, as Diedrick writes, focuses on the Martian's alien perceptions. His ability to see things in unique ways (or inability to see things as they "are") characterize this school's reliance on metaphor (55-56): "Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings / and some are treasured for their markings-- / they cause the eyes to melt / or the body to shriek without pain. / I have never seen one fly, but / sometimes they perch on the hand. / Mist is when the sky is tired of flight / and rests its soft machine on the ground: / then the world is dim and bookish / like engravings under tissue paper" (Raine 1). These lines, beginning with a discussion of books and their effects on people, illustrate this "Martian" perception. The latter lines recall Mary's own unique perspective of the sky: "an imperial backdrop of calm blue distance, in which extravagantly lovely white creatures--fat, sleepy things--hovered, cruised and basked" (17). In both instances, the sky's elements are transformed in the eyes of the viewer; both the Martian and Mary view the sky uniquely.¹¹ In the case of Mary, this perspective results from what Blake Morrison calls "nominal aphasia" (as opposed to amnesia)--a condition that also affects, as Morrison notes, a character in Kingsley Amis' novel Ending Up ("astronomical").¹² As "aphasia" implies, Mary has difficulty connecting language and meaning (a very

postmodern ailment). But because she is, in general, "quietly serene and contented,"¹³ she does not resemble "the miserable amnesiacs of psychopathology."

The main "Point of View" issues in Other People really concern the narration, which, like the novel's predecessors, blends first-person and third-person. Other People begins with a brief prologue:

This is a confession, but a brief one.

I didn't want to have to do it to her. I would have infinitely preferred some other solution. Still, there we are. It makes sense, really, given the rules of life on earth; and she asked for it. I just wish there was another way, something more self-contained, economical, and shapely. But there isn't. That's life, as I say, and my most sacred duty is to make it lifelike. Oh, hell. Let's get it over with. (9)

This prologue, the first of many direct addresses the narrator makes to the reader, seemingly separates the voice from or qualifies the novel's events. In this respect, Other People is an antecedent of London Fields' more fully developed narrator, Samson Young, who uses the same tactic as he moves back and forth between first-person and third-person points of view. Young's opening line, "This is a true story..." recalls the above line, "This is a confession...." At the beginning of chapter 2, the narrator again appears in first-person, "pleased" to see Mary has survived the events of the opening chapter "quite creditably" and drawing the reader still further into his confidence: "Between ourselves, this isn't my style at all really. The choice wasn't truly mine, although I naturally exercise a degree of control. It had to be like this. As I

said earlier, she asked for it" (21). He uses a familiar tone in order to create a participatory bond, a technique Amis effectively employs in Dead Babies and Success. Admitting that the "choice" of what is being presented is not really his, the voice in Other People reveals he is a proxy, an implied author. However, his motivation for controlling Mary's life in the position of surrogate author stays hidden (and is destined to remain so).

As the novel proceeds, the tone of the first-person addresses moves from self-assurance to confession. At the end of chapter 11, the narrator says "The breaking line is where I walk," and continues, "I've done things to her, I know, I admit it. But look what she's done to me" (106). His part in the novel is larger than he initially admits (again anticipating Samson Young). Since he does not divulge exactly what Mary has done or why she deserves to be put into an aphasic mental state, the reader cannot fully trust his judgement or account. The novel's lack of information allows it to form a temporal loop based not only on circular time but contingent on the deprivation of factors that would help a time line exist, such as identities traceable from birth to death. Since for Mary death means "rebirth" as someone new--and for the narrator a continuation of misery: "Time...I feel as though I've done these things before, and am glazedly compelled to do them again" (224)--neither Mary nor the narrator is affected by such considerations.

Does the narrator have two identities like Mary Lamb/Amy Hide? He possibly reveals his dual nature to the reader but in a very ambiguous manner:

At times it [the narrator's voice] seems to be an authorial

voice exulting, in self-conscious post-modernist fashion, in its own omniscience and control. At other times we suspect that it must belong to the person at the heart of the novel's crime mystery. (B. Morrison, "astronomical")

Martin Dodsworth makes the point more succinctly when he asks, "Is Mary Lamb's policeman/protector also her creator/author?" (334). Her policeman and protector, John Prince, may be the voice of the narrator as well as the mysterious authorial voice that presses her to start her life anew. At the beginning of chapter 1, a mysterious voice asks Mary, just awakened in the hospital and at her most aphasic, if she is all right. When she responds in the affirmative, the voice says, "I'll leave you then. You're on your own now. Take care. Be good" (13). Later, at the end of Part One, a nameless policeman, who is almost certainly Prince, confronts Mary, chides her for having been with a group of ruffians and lets her go. As she leaves, she realizes she has smelled his breath before: "Its smell chimed with her earliest memory—two days ago, waking in that white room. She remembered now. Someone had been with her when she woke up; someone had asked if she was all right and told her to be good" (48). As the novel progresses, Prince comes and goes in Mary's life, always seeming to know where to find her. In the end, he is the last person to see her before she is again reborn either as Mary Lamb or someone new. After driving her through "black empty London" (219), Prince leaves her at a door in an abandoned factory or warehouse: "He kissed her forehead. Moving behind her, he turned the handle and urged her forward through the door" (221). Even if he acts as a respondent-within-the-text¹⁴ and not the narrator himself, the relationship be-

tween Prince and narrative is at once symbiotic and existential. As he says, "The policeman, the murderer. We're both--outside" (220). Prince exists "outside" the narrative Mary/Amy is living, in either a meta-narrative or an authorial position (which is another metanarrative due to the muddled relationship between story and characters). He possesses the power of a third-person narrator, knowing all about Mary and seemingly finding her at will, a godlike presence from the very beginning as he leans over her and tells her to "Be good," a command perhaps meant to countermand in Mary Lamb the errant behavior of Amy Hide (her evil, darker self reminiscent of Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr. Hyde). In the end, he arranges or authors yet another rebirth, using time in an unnatural, circuitous fashion in an attempt to stave off her normal development as a human character. The characters remain two-dimensional, existing in their circular, non-continuing world with no need to become anything more than types, and render motivation unnecessary. As Amis himself argues, motivation is "depleted, a shagged-out force in modern life" (Haffenden 5).

Its anti-novel open-endedness, as obscure as the rest of the work, marks the end of Other People. Prince again disrupts Mary's existence, perhaps not for the last time:

The Prince character, the narrator, has total power over her, as a narrator would, and also as a demon-lover would. At the very end of the novel, she starts her life again, the idea being that life and death will alternate until she gets it right: she will go through life again. (Haffenden 17-18)

This explanation, that of Amis himself, reiterates the book's tone in

its sense of an ongoing struggle that, as he goes on to say, Mary will eventually win. Yet its life-renewing time-warp clouds meaning (and foreshadows Time's Arrow), making the end of Other People less clear than this explanation suggests. Amy enters the room to which she is led by Prince and meets a man whose demeanor resembles the guilt-ridden narrator's: "Look what you've done to me. Look what I've done to you..." (221). (The narrator, in a first-person complaint at the end of chapter 13, had said, "Look what she's done to me.") The man restarts her life again, possibly by murdering her in a manner that resembles Prince, who is "no longer there" (221). However, the man's repetition of Prince's words points to a symbiotic relationship: "I am the policeman, I am the murderer. Try again, take care, be good. Your life was too poor not to last for ever [sic]. Get it right this time. Come, I'll be very quick" (222). Amy has again reached a reckoning in her existence, whose tension and humiliation were reflected around her as she and Prince drove to the fateful meeting:

The mist cleared briefly at the open vault of the river. The water was stretched and taut, as if being tugged from either end. It shone like scratched armour. She glimpsed the plumed factory, sensed the aloof mass of the warehouses, saw black grass and its elliptical pond. (220)

Her existence, thus far, has been degrading and purposeless as "a loss of motivation seizes both the world and its representation, the disorganization of which paradoxically and ironically redefines new organic links between fiction and the world" (Bernard 123).

Amy slips into nothingness before her rebirth: "Her first feeling,

as she smelled the air, was one of intense and helpless gratitude. I'm all right, she thought with a gasp. Time--it's starting again" (222). The presence of Amy's mother, whose voice is the first she hears, reinforces the idea of being born again, more spiritual than simply starting again as in a time warp. More important, the entire sequence paraphrases the book's beginning when Mary comes alive in the hospital. The opening lines appear again word for word as Amy's mother takes up the questioning that was initially done by the narrator. Other People turns reflexively back on itself and lends credence to the notion that the rebirth of Amy/Mary will continue for an undetermined period of time:

In a characteristic surprise ending Amis makes it uncertain as to whether what we have experienced in Other People is an afterlife so much as a time-warp, reversal or simply hiccup, during which Amy has lost her reason and identity, and after which life begins as normal again. (Todd 132)

As Bernard suggests, however, Other People redefines "new organic links between fiction and the world" by demonstrating that time itself, like all elements associated with humankind, has lost motivation, no longer continuing in a straight line and relegated to, at best, an elliptical orbit around human affairs. Amy's life cannot continue "as normal again" until time is "normal."

Although superficial evidence suggests Amy's life will be "normal again," it is not compelling enough to overcome the idea that fiction has corrupted linear progression. When Amy comes down from her room at the end, her father says, "Back in the land of the living, are you?" (223).

He then forgives her for an unnamed offense, and she steps out the door into the afternoon, seemingly ready to start life pure. However, in an epilogue, the narrator, who sees her because he is "standing in the deep shade on the other side of the street" (224), complains he is no longer in control of events, that instead he feels, despite previously having a pseudo-third-person incarnation, manipulated: "I'm not in control any more, not this time. Oh hell. Let's get it over with" (224). The narrator's resignation leads the reader to believe some new trouble awaits Amy, for he even says, "Any moment now I'll step out into the street" (224). His earlier profession that he "won't do anything to her if she doesn't want me to" (224) is overshadowed by his apparent agency in spite of his alleged lack of control as he steps into the street.

It is not certain Amy will succeed in her trial on this occasion (or will ever succeed) because the narrator's agenda is ambiguous. She lacks control of her destiny, the ability to determine the life-repetitions and what they entail, and if the narrator possesses this knowledge, he refuses to divulge it or assist her: "I can see her coming to the end of the path and hesitating as she reaches the road, looking this way and that, wondering which way to go" (224). If he now does lack control (although any control on his part is as arguable as his place in the text), the unreliability of the narrative, already enhanced by its purposeless temporal loop, causes readers to re-question not only the narrative account itself but also the identities of key characters who were at least two-dimensionally established (Are Prince and the narrator still symbiotic? Has the reborn Amy become Mary again? Someone new?) and makes Other People Amis' most blatantly unreliable work preceding London

Fields.

Other People, with its Martian perspective and abundant mixing of first-person and third-person points of view, constitutes a break from Amis' previous work, delving more deeply into the relation of language to meaning and, especially, the relation of fiction to reality. Other People's Martian perspective, with Mary's exotic descriptions of mundane things, causes the reader to re-evaluate his own language, allowing a reinterpretation and reinvention of everyday objects.

The study of fiction and reality is undertaken via a narrator unable to keep himself in a third-person, omniscient position. He invades the text in the first-person and through his comments reveals he is more involved with the events of the novel than a third-person narrator traditionally has been (Samson Young later becomes even more involved in the text). In this way, the novel revels in its own status as fiction, a creation of an author who allows his narrator a greater role than that allotted by realists. More important, these techniques appear in more highly developed works, including Money, London Fields and Time's Arrow. The ability to constantly reinterpret Other People's lack of clarity is critical to Amis' future style: "There is in the end no single answer to this novel's mystery, but if there were it might be simply: literature" (B. Morrison, "astronomical"). The best (albeit paradoxical) interpretation of Other People or Amis' future work simply says that his study is literature and interpretation itself, a study that, to maintain newness and effect, requires Amis to increase complexity.

VII. Money: The Author in the Text

In Money, Amis briefly abandons the notion of mixing of first-person and third-person to the point of reader confusion. Instead, he relies on an apparently semi-traditional first-person narrator. Money initially appears to be about little more than "John Self's pitiable, headlong picture of his obsession with money: how he loves it, how he squanders it, how it almost destroys him" (Balliett 136). However, the novel moves Amis into another postmodern phase, for the first-person narrator, Self, not only proves unreliable, but also becomes acquainted with a writer named Martin Amis, who likes to self-reflexively discuss various aspects of narrative structure. He helps Money establish its own combination of conventions in the anti-novel tradition, including anti-plot, minimal character development, diffused episode and an alternative ending. Like Amis' previous novels, critic Gene Lyon notes that Money is "short on plot" but "long on verbal energy and an almost exuberant misanthropy."

In his novel The Green Man, Kinglsey Amis employs a first-person unreliable narrator in the tradition of Poe. The owner of an inn called "The Green Man" and a hopeless drunkard, Maurice Allington's alcoholism casts doubt on the veracity of his account of a battle with the supernatural Dr. Thomas Underhill over Allington's daughter. Allington himself admits, "The only time I can be reasonably sure of not feeling bloody awful is a couple of hours or so at the end of a day's drinking" (14). Like Henry James' The Turn of the Screw, The Green Man can be interpreted either as a series of supernatural events or the creation

of an ill mind, as can Poe's stories "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," although the narrator's mental illness is more pronounced in the latter. In each of these stories, the narrators' unreliability is not really puzzling because the reader is given a reason for it.

However, in Money, narrator John Self is as duped as the reader through the insertion of the character Martin Amis, who, as a surrogate for the flesh and blood Amis, wields a strange power over events. This character was enough to make Kingsley Amis throw his son's book across the room, saying writers ought not to play with readers in that way.¹⁵ The father's response can be interpreted as an anti-modern/realist reaction to a postmodern reading experience. Martin Amis collapses the boundaries between fiction and reality that his father believes should remain for the reader to suspend at his leisure. He also eliminates the respectful "distance" that an author should keep from his work.

Self's unreliability stems in part from the conflation of his own voice with that of the author Amis. This combination manifests itself through brief but effective instances of an overt Martian perspective. Used throughout Other People to highlight Mary Lamb's aphasic viewpoint, the Martian perspective in Money allows a glimpse of the author behind the text, the omniscient power speaking through a very limited first-person narrator. Shortly after stating, "I disclaim responsibility for many of my thoughts" (247), Self describes the inhabitants of his mind:

The people in here, with me among them, no better and no worse and with complete equality of powerlessness, are like sick bats or threadbare monkeys wearing hippie loons and jaded T-shirts with three buttons up the throat. There's nothing I

can do about them, these unknown Earthlings. (248)

Later in the book, as Self cruises toward the realization that he is, in fact, a fictional pawn, he claims that he is a robot, an android, a cyborg, a "skinjob," and he again argues that some power maneuvers both himself and others:

...a high proportion of Earthlings, one in five, or one in three, or maybe even two in one, is under the impression that all their thoughts and actions are determined by creatures from another world. And these people aren't just mixed-up berks and babbling bagladies: they are haunted tinnitic taxmen, bug-eyed barristers and smart-bombed bureaucrats.

(304)

Self's acknowledgement of a controlling force acknowledges an authorial presence as creator and character. Indeed, when Self quips that "maybe even two in one" Earthlings (instead of one in two) feel controlled, it is Amis inserting himself even further into the novel than his namesake character permits, for the two in one are Amis and Self, creator and created. Self's speech demonstrates this dualism since he claims to be illiterate: "I can't read because it hurts my eyes. I can't wear glasses because it hurts my nose. I can't wear contacts because it hurts my nerves. So you see, it all came down to a choice between pain and not reading. I chose not reading" (44). However, as Eric Korn asks, "Would an illiterate describe the experience of being 'bopped by a mad guy' as 'qualitatively different, full of an atrocious, a limitless rectitude', a Jamesian or Borgosian cadence?" Sebastian Faulks argues that Money's style "is too intrusive for a third-person narrator; the reader would

always be wondering about the author." But Amis provides so many indications of his presence that the reader is always wondering about the author. Self is the mouthpiece, possessing no power of his own save the illusory power that comes with ignorance. He realizes he is being manipulated ("I sometimes think I am being controlled by someone. Some space invader is invading my inner space, some fucking joker. But he's not from out there. He's from in here" [305]), but he does not realize the full scope of the control, so he functions with a pseudo-free will:

Self may be the victim of his author's postmodern assumptions about fiction, but he never surrenders his fundamental autonomy within these constraints, nor the freedom of his elemental responses. He retains what the Amis character calls a fictional character's "double innocence" (241)--ignorance of his role in a fiction, ignorance of the reasons why things are happening to him in a particular way. (Diedrick 97)

Self's self-awareness is clear in his recognition of his own unreliability, a recognition he makes for reasons that remain hidden beneath his veil of ignorance. For example, when he receives his first telephone call from an accusatory voice (later dubbed "Frank the Phone"), he cannot recall whether he has informed the reader:

Oh yeah, and while I remember--I haven't briefed you about that mystery caller of mine yet, have I? Or have I? Oh that's right, I filled you in on the whole thing. That's right. Some whacko. No big deal... Wait a minute, I tell a lie. I haven't briefed you about it. I would have remembered. (31)

Like Maurice Allington, Self suffers from alcoholism (and assorted other addictions), but his unreliability is not easily explained away. Shortly after this incident, he relates what may be either a memory or a dream:

Someone had come to the end of the long passage outside Room 101, once, twice, perhaps many more times, someone had come and mightily shaken the door, and not with the need for entry but in simple rage and warning. Did it happen, or was it just a new kind of dream? (44)

His questioning (followed by a postmodern list of potential dream types, "sadness dreams, drunk dreams, boredom dreams...", recalling Amis' idea that, like car alarms in The Information, contemporary society finds meaning in compounds and merged elements) shows his ignorance as his author makes himself known. His room is "Room 101," the same number as Winston Smith's room in Orwell's 1984, where he was finally beaten by Big Brother; here Smith's self-awareness was used against him. In order to preserve himself, Smith denied his lover and handed control of his destiny over to the state. John Self, like Smith, is in constant danger of losing control of his own destiny and can retain an illusory autonomy as long as he continues to believe in free will through the only weapon he possesses: ignorance.

Coincidentally, the situations of both Smith and Self are summed up by the character Martin Amis as he discourses, ironically, to Self on the author/narrator relationship. The distance between author and narrator corresponds, says the Amis character, "to the degree to which the author finds the narrator wicked, deluded, pitiful or ridiculous"

And he adds shortly thereafter, "The further down the scale he is, the more liberties you can take with him" (229). His self-analytic speech is at once pedantic and ironic, and, because he is unlearned and, especially, unliterary, Self is bored by it and views it as a waste of time, but he is nonetheless its subject. He is "a version of the fragmenting contemporary self" (Bradbury, 402) to which the Amis character refers and through whom he, in a second irony, confronts Amis the author. The Amis character later states that creations in fiction "don't know why they're living through what they're living through. They don't even know they're alive" (241). Both Winston Smith and John Self spend their fictional lives discovering, either by their own investigation or through fate (the ultimate power in both novels), they are constituted through manipulation: "Like Winston Smith, the doomed hero of 1984, Self spends most of his narrative discovering that he is trapped—not by a totalitarian state, but in the prison of a debased private culture" (Diedrick 100).

Throughout Money, the fictional Self plays against the fictional, totalitarian worlds of Orwell. For instance, when he first reads Animal Farm, his commentary takes the form of a Self-revealing juxtaposition: "At the animals' meeting, they sing a song. Beasts of England. It was oppressive, it was very oppressive, the heat up here in my room" (191). Part of "Beasts of England" reads, "Soon or late the day is coming, / Tyrant Man shall be o'erthrown, / And the fruitful fields of England / Shall be trod by beasts alone" (Animal Farm 22-23). Like the beasts, Amis the author clarifies Self's oppression when he has Self juxtapose the clause "it was oppressive" (twice) immediately after Self reads the

words to "Beasts of England." Self himself is unaware of the import of his words and merely refers to the heat in his room. Of course, without ignorance, the novel ceases; it continues simply because he is unaware of the machinations occurring around him. He is, for example, astounded that Orwell chooses pigs to lead the other animals: "I mean, how come the pigs were meant to be so smart, so civilized and urbane?" (191).¹⁶ He calls observing pigs "a fucking disgusting experience" and adds "yet Orwell here figures them for the brains behind the farm. He just can't have seen any pigs in action. Either that, or I'm missing something" (191). He is, in fact, "missing something": irony. He processes infor- crudely, expecting plain-speaking and having patience for even simple metaphor. Indeed, after starting to read Orwell's 1984 and finding it enjoyable, he reflects, "Perhaps there are other bits of my life that would take on content, take on shadow, if only I read more and thought less about money" (207). But his desire and need for realism is contra- dicted by the Amis character's observation that "the twentieth century is an ironic age--downward-looking. Even realism, rockbottom realism, is considered a bit grand for the twentieth century" (231).

As an ironic, twentieth-century creation, Self, too, is allowed to let go of realism, despite the fact that his character craves it. The most potent example of this release concerns his attempt to write "to the moment," a device found in English novels of the eighteenth century (most notably Samuel Richardson's Clarissa) where implied authors record events as nearly as possible to the actual time they occur. In Clarissa, for example, the title character records events literally moments after they occur. However, Self uses this literary device mockingly when he

claims to be recording a sexual encounter with a young actress named Butch Beausoleil:

I'm giving Butch Beausoleil one. You don't believe me? But I am! Round from the back, what's more. You get the picture: she's on all fours and clutching the headpiece of her neighing brass bed. If I glance downwards, like so, and retract my gut, I can see her valentine card and the mysterious trail of her cleft, like the inside of a halved apple. Now do you believe me. Wait: here comes her hand, idling slantways down her rump, ten bucks of manicure on each fingertip. Why, she seems to be... Wow. (255)

Self is not describing events just after they happened; his present tense verbs and assorted emphases indicate he wants the reader to believe he is somehow recording events as they occur. Since postmodern literature freely uses aspects of other literary styles, Amis, through Self, mimics writing "to the moment" while simultaneously altering the technique through exaggeration so that its impossible relationship to time makes it part of an anti-novel, straining the reader's credulity. More important, Self develops into more than an ignorant and deluded stronghold of realism--his character is mutable and divisible, neither whole nor grounded:

The novel, Amis explains, is in essence an intense character study of John Self, but the text is in many ways less concerned with Self--and his quest for financial gain--than with the encoding of the life-controlling power systems in discourse that determine the possibilities and constraints

of "Self-control." (Doan 71)

Self admits his lack of wholeness, his incompleteness, but his manner belies its significance. His inability to comprehend postmodern fragmentation, his yearning for realism and, especially, his single-mindedness of purpose characterize later Amis anti-heroes such as Keith Talent and Richard Tull. The plurality of "voices" within him, however, overwhelms these qualities; he says there are "at the latest count, four distinct voices in my head" (104)--first "the jabber of money, which might be represented as the blur on the top rung of a typewriter"; second the "voice of pornography," which sounds "like the rap of a demented DJ"; third "the voice of ageing and weather, of time travel through days and days"; and fourth "the real intruder," "the most recent," with "the unwelcome lilt of paranoia, of rage and weepiness made articulate in spasms of vividness: drunk talk played back sober" (104).

Of all the voices, Self claims that, "As with vampires, you have to ask them in" (105), but this sentiment is merely a vain attempt at autonomy. Even though he cannot rid himself of them, he believes the voices are in his head at his own request. But autonomy and a single "self" do not exist for him: "Taken together, all four voices constitute a fragmented, decentered Self" (Diedrick 73). He is a paradoxical creation who, if he cannot be the product of classical realism, at least wants to be modern, to retain some vestige of authority over himself and be recognized as an individual even if he is, like Winston Smith, part of an experiment. The fourth voice, however, is Self's creator, Martin Amis, who ultimately denies Self's individuality. The qualities Self attributes to the fourth voice indicate an author, from emotions of

paranoia, rage and "weepiness" to the "spasms of vividness" that come with imagination (which he lacks). The description is more reminiscent of Amis than Self; he speaks through self while the latter remains ignorant: "Amis satirizes Self by 'doubling' Self's voice with his own throughout the novel, composing an artful counterpoint that resonates with implications beyond the range of his narrator's hearing" (Diedrick 77).

Such self-reflexivity is made more abundantly clear through the use of the authorial characters Martin Amis and Martina Twain. It has been argued that Amis uses the character Martin Amis solely to differentiate author from narrator:

Amis takes exceptional care to ensure that the narrator-protagonist, so disgusting in his values and lifestyle, cannot be mistaken for the writer by literally putting himself into the text. Martin Amis, the character, is a suave, intelligent, highly educated, comfortably middle-class writer who quite obviously finds Self, and what he represents, unsavory. (Doan 73)

But the character Martin Amis is as much a postmodern separation of the authorial self as the author who makes himself known through the diction of Self. The Amis character is, as Diedrick says, a "counterpoint" like the authorial presence indicated through Self. Further, the novel suggests it may be Martin Amis the character, and not Fielding Goodney, the so-called producer of Self's film, behind the machinations that deceive Self.¹⁷ At their second meeting, Self tells Amis that he (Self) is in films, and Amis asks, "Then why aren't you having lunch with Lorne Guy-

land?" (164). (Guyland is one of the stars of Self's to-be-made film, alternatively titled Good Money, Bad Money and Money.) Though the Amis character supposedly knows nothing about Self, he asks about Guyland. His knowledge parallels the author's, and Self subconsciously indicates as much in his response: "'What made you say Lorne Guyland?' Perhaps he'd recognized me--or recognized me" (164). Martin Amis the author, the true manipulator, transmits his knowledge to Amis the character, the surrogate: "Amis manipulates Amis" (Korn).

The chess game played at the end of Money between Self and the Amis character furnishes a metaphor for the novel. The postmodern Amis character outmaneuvers the modern or realist Self, an uncharacteristically talented chess player. At first, Self believes he will handily defeat Amis, who seemingly lacks knowledge of the game. For instance, he pulls a piece from the chess box and asks, "What's this? A king or a queen?" (343). The piece is, of course, a pawn, and as he holds the pawn in his hand, Amis metaphorically holds Self. Self is quickly disconcerted by Amis' unorthodox chess style: at the fifth move, "little Martin here drove right out of the lane. He went on a meaningless sortie with his knight, prancing around the centre of the board while I jabbed him with my evolving front line" (344). Self cannot comprehend Amis' stylistic unorthodoxy, and in the end he is brought to a "zugzwang":

Despite Self 's having used the word earlier in his narrative [115], he now, at the end of their game, has to ask Amis for a definition of it ("What the fuck does that mean?"); Martin Amis replies, "Literally, forced to move. It means that whoever has to move has to lose." (Todd 134)

Self's inability to define "zugzwang," a word he has used (a technique that appears later in London Fields, when narrator Samson Young cannot define "muderee," a word he previously used), stems from the fact that Amis the author spoke through his pawn, having forced him to participate in his own Self-destruction throughout the novel. Self finally realizes he lacks autonomy--his moment of enlightenment coming as he screams at Amis, "I'm the joke. I'm it! It was you. It was you" (349).¹⁸ The Amis character, a persona of the author, is the puppeteer who deceives Self into believing he has some measure of self-awareness. The authorial Amis even admits, "every character in this book dupes the narrator, and yet I am the one who has actually done it all to him" (Haffenden 11). Initially, Self did not employ any form of the word "zugzwang" in his text. It was used by the authorial Amis, albeit through Self, and later given to the Amis character. The ubiquity of the Amis persona in Self's existence is ironically underscored by the fact that, at one point, Self pretends to be a writer named Martin. The postmodern conflation of the characters, ultimately "a deliberate choice that illustrates a self-conscious confrontation of the problem of solipsistic 'closure'" (Todd 135), is not, as Doan argues, an attempt by Amis to differentiate himself from Self. Clearly, Self contains too much of Amis to make such an argument.

Another of Amis' noteworthy personas in Money is Martina Twain, whose name signifies a female doppelganger or twin of the Martin Amis character. However, Martina represents Self's only chance at Self-preservation: she is intelligent, thoughtful, rational and not at all deceptive. Ironically, she attempts to warn Self about his place in

the fiction around him, about his lack of autonomy:

She talked about perception, representation and truth. She talked about the vulnerability of a figure unknowingly watched--the difference between a portrait and an unposed study. The analogous distinction in fiction would be that between the conscious and the reluctant narrator--the sad, the unwitting narrator. (126)

Self's summary of Martina's speech, clearly beyond his linguistic capacity, shows the voice of Amis the author coming through. Interestingly, this Amis speaks through all the main characters: Self, Martin Amis and Martina Twain--the first manipulated by the second while the third attempts, vainly, to warn the first, yet all receiving knowledge reflexively. In light of this paradoxical relationship, it may seem Money displays little besides self-reflexivity, the stretching of fiction's boundaries, as Catherine Bernard argues:

The presence of Amis's persona[s] in Money not simply as a Hitchcockian silhouette but as the ultimate cynical and Faustian puppet-master is...but another mystification which blurs the limits between reality and fiction. (124)

The function of narrators like Self and Robert Beech in Graham Swift's Out of this World, as Bernard contends, is "clearly, from the start, to problematize the uncertain relations between the world and representation, be it visual or linguistic" (124). The same can be said of the gender-less narrator in Jeanette Winterson's Written on the Body and the multiple narrators of Michael Frayn's Now You Know. David Lodge argues that "the simplest way of telling a story is in the voice of a

storyteller" (Art, 10), and, if writers follow Forsterian structure, the storyteller's autonomy is relatively straightforward even if consigned to the fiction itself. In Money, however, the source and validity of the story remain so unclear and muddled that readers cannot confirm the origin of the narrative or its status as a narrative. Storyteller and author vie in an ultimately futile struggle for autonomy that leaves the narrative self-negating.

Yet an undeniable and fulfilling aesthetic pleasure arises from seeing Self have at least a chance at redemption, despite the fact that it does not actually exist (since the authorial presence plotting his demise is also presenting the chance at redemption that both Amis the author and Amis the character prevent him from accepting: "The reader is virtually invited to consider Self, Amis, and Martina as aspects of a single consciousness" [Diedrick 92]). Money presents a postmodern paradox, employing realist conventions for purposes of satire. Self's chance at redemption, his chance to choose to stay with Martina, consists of no more than the realist desire, once and for all, to define the self: "The evenings are uniform now, and tonight was as uniform as any" (295). Of Martina herself, Self says, "Even the bolts of sweat on the twin cusps of her blue T-shirt are prettily semicircular. Even sweat seeks its patterns and its forms" (296). Referring to types of flowers outside her apartment, he adds, "Now I'm surer of my ground" (296). While with Martina, Self begins to read and listen to jazz, opera and classical music. But ultimately he is a postmodern refutation not of the desire for self-awareness per se, but of an individual's ability to attain it. His belief that he is "surer" of his ground flirts with

the belief that he can define himself, make sense of his existence, a delusion in Money:

"The self is not a steady voice that has needs for itself any more," Amis said, explaining the complex frame of Money, in which "John Self" encounters in the text not only his own author Martin Amis but also the author's female double, Martina Twain. "It's a babble, various gibbering needs and envies." (Bradbury 407)

Self's babble of his need for surer ground, for uniformity with Martina, lasts only briefly, until he reverts to pornographic pursuits with his former lover, Selina.

Money complexly mixes characters' voices and a ubiquitous authorial presence, leaving readers to sort out the implications. It also combines elements from other styles such as Russian skaz and Dickensian settings: "[Money's] settings often seem more animated than [its] characters, as if the life has been drained out of people to reemerge in a demonic, destructive form in things" (Lodge, Art 58).¹⁹ It also can be read as possessing "the grander aim of unmasking the ideological underpinnings of Thatcherism" (Doan 79), taking aim at the bloated and greedy state of Western society. Lyotard himself insists that capitalism is based in myth, is anti-real like Self's existence:

Capitalism inherently possesses the power to derealize familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-called realistic representations can no longer evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery, as an occasion for suffering rather than satisfaction. (74)

Like the capitalistic forces that spawned him, John Self is an exercise in derealization. The reality he seeks proves nothing more than a baseless phantasm induced by greed.

These elements are all contained in Money; their combination, in addition to the multitude of reflexive voices through which the author's presence emerges, inculcates the reader with form-awareness. Money, as Amis' most experimental work before London Fields, stretches fictional boundaries by both revealing and obscuring the author's presence in the text. While the characters Martin Amis and Martina Twain are clear indications of authorial reification, the extent to which the author Amis acts and speaks through Self remains debatable. As a narrator who does not realize his post-modernity, Self acts both as unreliable storyteller and pawn of Amis' dynamic fictional experimentation. Through him, formlessness takes on greater viability.

VIII. Short Stories: Testing the Heavy Water

A. Einstein's Monsters: Thinking the Unthinkable

Einstein's Monsters is a collection of five short stories and an anti-nuclear essay entitled "Thinkability." British fiction, especially in the later 1970s and early 1980s, still shows a keen awareness of the nuclear threat hovering over the world: "Forty-five years of cold peace had done nothing to drive away the nuclear horrors, which cast their disturbing shadow over much of this fiction" (Bradbury 410), including Empire of the Sun by J.G. Ballard,²⁰ Maggie Gee's The Burning Book and

Einstein's Monsters. In an "Author's Note" to the collection, Amis says, "the stories that follow were written with the usual purpose in mind: that is to say, with no purpose at all--except, I suppose, to give pleasure, various kinds of complicated pleasure" (xi). Later, he noticed the stories share a similar theme in their relationship to the horror of nuclear weapons. Yet they also concern "the horrors of the twentieth century and the dilemma of the writer attempting to confront them" (Diedrick 131). As the narrator of the story "The Immortals" says, "Just as I was thinking that no century could possibly be dumber than the nineteenth, along comes the twentieth. I swear, the entire planet seemed to be staging some kind of stupidity contest" (142-143). An anti-modern, anti-Enlightenment theme connects the stories, for Amis poses nuclear weapons and the Holocaust (as treated in Time's Arrow) as the Enlightenment's two greatest failures, convinced that "between the sociopathic right wing and the softhearted left, 99 percent of the human race has been playing dumb at the most profound level" (See).

"Thinkability" treats Amis' nuclear age concerns in non-fiction form, providing the stories' thematic connections. They "are unmistakably shaped by the ideas in the Introduction; they are all about 'the deformations and perversities of the modern setting' caused by the omnipresent nuclear threat" (Diedrick 133). Pondering the possibility of a nuclear attack, Amis considers his course of action were he to survive:

Suppose I survive. Suppose my eyes aren't pouring down my face, suppose I am untouched by the hurricane of secondary missiles that all mortar, metal, and glass has abruptly become: suppose all this. I shall be obliged (and it's the

last thing I'll feel like doing) to retrace that long mile home, through the firestorm, the remains of the thousand-mile an hour winds, the warped atoms, the groveling dead. Then, God-willing, if I still have the strength, and, of course, if they are still alive—I must find my wife and children and I must kill them. (4)²¹

The horror of a nuclear war will be such that surviving it will be a worse sentence than dying (the theme presented, with a twist, in "The Time Disease"). Amis would be required to kill his wife and children to save their humanity, for, from a postmodern perspective, what would survive in the post-nuclear era would be the anti-human result of the Enlightenment. For Amis, to even consider nuclear war seems "subhuman":

The unthinkable is unthinkable; the unthinkable is not thinkable, not by human beings, because the eventuality it posits is one in which all human contexts would have already vanished. SDI can never be tested, and neither can the actors. How they would respond at such a time is anyone's guess. But they would no longer be human beings. In a sense, nobody would be. That status does not exist on the other side of the fire-break. (10)

Those who believe in nuclear deterrence and contemplate the possibility of the human race's survival following such a holocaust resemble the "reptilian" Nazis in the afterword to Time's Arrow. The world before a nuclear war exists because of an insane sense of balance upon which so many people have been deluded into relying, while the post-war world would merely represent a sham of what humanity could have been had they

dealt with the insanity.

Interestingly, one of those who can think about a nuclear war is Kingsley Amis, about whom the son writes, "I argue with my father about nuclear weapons. In this debate, we are all arguing with our fathers. They emplaced or maintained the status quo. They got it hugely wrong" (13). In his son's eyes, the former "angry young man" accepts, indeed supports, nuclear weapons as a necessary deterrent: "My father regards nuclear weapons as an unbudgeable given. They will always be necessary because the Soviets will always have them and the Soviets will always want to enslave the West" (14). Kingsley sees the world as divided into teams and is behind the West, the home team: "Nuclear weapons give men teams to root for and celebrities to talk about" (See). Amis records that his father (certainly to goad his son) suggests closing down the Arts Council and using the money for nuclear purposes, and he, in sharp response to his father's seemingly intractable nature, retorts, "we'll just have to wait until you old bastards die off one by one" (15).

Perhaps Amis' emotional take on the subject causes him to contradict himself in "Thinkability," a point noted by both Mars-Jones and Diedrick. Amis says, "We are slowly learning to write about" nuclear weapons (4) but later decides the "senior generation of writers has remained silent," that even though the "evolutionary firebreak of 1945" was part of their lives, the subject did not suggest itself to them (23). He includes Graham Greene in this generation of silent writers, and one must assume he includes his father. But if writing about nuclear weapons occurs only in the mid-1980s, how could "senior" writers have been able to write about the phenomenon? Language, cur-

iously, presents a problem for Amis in Einsteins's Monsters, for as early as the first story, "Bujak and the Strong Force," narrative technique and the written word overshadow the theme of nuclear horror or at least merge with it to such an extent that the stories can be read as both treatises on the nuclear age and exercises on the importance of style (or anti-style). Learning to write about nuclear weapons, then, involves learning to subordinate language to theme.

"Thinkability" unites the stories, two set in the pre-nuclear war age and three afterward. As an essay, it is a combination of nuclear-related themes blended with an exercise in style (as are the stories):

"Thinkability" is several things at once: a polemical attack on the notion of nuclear deterrence (combined with a call for phased nuclear disarmament); an attack on his father and his father's generation for ignoring the nuclear threat; and an attempt to measure its human toll. (Diedrick 134)

The stories dramatize these concerns, for Amis hopes that literary images of the nuclear threat will cause people to reflect on the insanity they have been resigned to as a normal part of life, that could suddenly translate into instantaneous annihilation. As Adam Mars-Jones writes, "Nuclear issues resist dramatization, but unless the attempt is made, nuclear war may become a physical reality without ever being an emotional, or even an intellectual reality" ("Fireworks").

Amis echoes the need for people to see nuclear weapons as real in an essay entitled, "Nuclear City: The Megadeath Intellectuals." He writes that "when nuclear weapons become real to you, when they stop buzzing around your ears and actually move into your head, hardly an

hour passes without some throb or flash, some heavy pulse of imagined supercatastrophe" (Amis, Mrs. Nabokov, 13). He asserts that "They are everything, because they can destroy everything" (Amis, Mrs. Nabokov, 15). The hybrid word "supercatastrophe," with its hyperbole and dark humor, illustrates Amis' use of language to address and undercut one of the Enlightenment's greatest failures.

i. "Bujak and the Strong Force"

"Bujak and the Strong Force" presents a clear message about nuclear deterrence. But, relative to Amis' body of work as a whole, it is "about the horrors of the twentieth century and the dilemma of the writer attempting to confront them" (Diedrick 131). It is also an exercise in first-person narration that prefigures two of Amis' best works, London Fields and Time's Arrow. In "Bujak," Amis tests ideas that will appear in the later works, cloaking them beneath the theme of deterrence.

The title character, Bujak, is a formidable person described as "hugely slabbed and seized with muscle and tendon." The narrator adds that "You slept a lot sounder knowing that Bujak was on your street" (33). He demonstrates his remarkable physical prowess by lifting the narrator's car to change a flat tire and by routinely dispatching of street thugs. He also "upended a truck after a row about a generator with some local building contractors" (39). Most important, however, "The Bujak women could walk the All Saints Road at any hour and expect no bother. And Bujak himself could silence a pub just by walking past it" (39-40). If Bujak has tremendous physical force, he also has emo-

tional power, inspiring dread lest his power is someday misused, very much like a nuclear weapon. He "personifies nuclear deterrence: he is a human Minuteman missile" (Diedrick 138). This power frightens and deters merely because it exists; it need not be used frequently to be effective. Just as nations believe the Cold War stockpile of nuclear weapons keeps peace merely because it exists (or so the theory goes), so too does Bujak's mere existence tranquilize his home and environment.

Bujak also personifies the mindset of the twentieth century. He is modern and enlightened, believing fully in his ability to solve problems and sustain himself by being aware of the self and how it interacts with the world. For instance, he uses "the postnuclear calendar," making 1980 the year "PN 35" (a disconcerting literary technique reminiscent of the opening line of 1984: "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen" [5]). The use of "PN 35" reveals Bujak's super-awareness of an age, in existence for only 35 years, in which total destruction is only a moment away. The date "PN 35" disconcerts the reader because it changes the focus of time. Suddenly, the Gregorian calendar is supplanted by one that began when the power to destroy the world was unleashed. The reader re-evaluates his existence, his understanding of himself in relation to the world. Both the reader and Bujak live in a time of technological enlightenment and self-awareness, but enlightenment and self-awareness prove, at least for Bujak, useless in a post-modern reality: "And then, one day, the twentieth century, a century like no other, came calling on him" (35).

Through the agency of his daughter, Leokadia, the postmodern world

gains a foothold in Bujak's life: "She was the unstable element in Bujak's nucleus. She had, I noticed, two voices, one for truth, and one for nonsense, one for lies" (43). Leokadia's duality endangers Bujak's deterrence factor, which is based on the condition that opposing sides are equal, or at least close enough in strength to show how detrimental a confrontation would be. Although Bujak initially keeps the thugs of his London neighborhood at bay, Leokadia complicates the simple deterrence equation with her immoral ways and her attraction to an abusive thug named Pat, bringing an element of uncertainty into Bujak's sphere and creating imbalance in deterrence's delicate scheme. Bujak's own holocaust descends on his return home from a trip when he finds his family, mother, daughter and grandchild, beaten to death. The two men he captures claim to have been invited home by Leokadia to have sex, and they contend that someone else came in and murdered the family while they slept off their alcohol-induced stupor. Bujak admits their story, at least the part about being invited to have sex, could be true.

But the most telling aspect of the incident occurs when Bujak finds the men in the house and does nothing. Deterrence theory has proven to be a sham, useless when human factors such as Leokadia's behavior enter the equation. Bujak himself maintains that it is "not just a bad theory. It's not even a theory. It's an insanity" (48). He contributes "all peculiarly modern ills" to "Einsteinian knowledge, knowledge of the strong force" (46), and when this force affects his life, he realizes the meaninglessness of any retaliation to maintain deterrence. Deterrence functions only as long as the individual can be sure of and control himself and others around him, but in an evolving world, the dynamic self, com-

posed of different voices and, quite often, motivated by nothing, makes deterrence moot.

The narrator of "Bujak and the Strong Force" becomes as important as Bujak in recognizing the effects of postmodernism, for he is, among other things, the model for one of Amis' most effective literary creations: Samson Young of London Fields. An American named Samson, like his namesake in London Fields, he intends to tell the reader a true story ("This is the only story I'll ever tell, and this story is true" [38]) because, like Young, he cannot bring himself to write anything else. Both are failed writers unable to harness words because of the "millennial malaise" overtaking the latter twentieth century (Diedrick 138). Only one truth, Bujak's truth, breaks through Samson's apathy, making him put pen to paper, perhaps because Bujak's truth is the only tenable answer to the quandary of modernity and the twentieth century: "This narrator takes a crash course in World War II, the Nazi Holocaust, the nuclear threat, and the unstable Einsteinian universe which has played host to these plagues" (Diedrick 131). Both Samson, a Jew, and his wife, Michiko, a Japanese, faced holocausts during World War II--genocide and nuclear annihilation. Samson is beholden to nothing in the modern world until Bujak exits from it into the postmodern.

Interestingly, through Samson's narrative, Bujak foreshadows another of Amis' forthcoming works: Time's Arrow. He believes enough matter exists in the universe to cause the Big Bang, via gravity, to reverse itself, and he relays this belief to Samson, who informs the reader: "At that moment, with the cosmos turning on its hinges, light would begin to travel backward, received by the stars and pouring from

our human eyes" (58). He also records Bujak's belief that, in concordance with light, other matter would move in reverse. It is a curious postmodern scenario that a character in a short story tests the idea for a forthcoming novel through a narrator who is the prototype for the narrator of another forthcoming novel. It is also ironic that by reversing time in Time's Arrow, Amis seeks to correct not only the wrongs of the Holocaust, which hardened Bujak, but, by logical association, the murder of Bujak's family. Amis, then, uses "Bujak and the Strong Force" as a bridge to continue the self-reflexivity of Money, revealing himself in Time's Arrow by foreshadowing its theme through Bujak and Samson while muddying fictional connections between later works and himself.

ii. "Insight at Flame Lake"

"Insight at Flame Lake" employs a narrative structure identical to the one used in Success: it positions the reader between two competing first-person narrators, Ned and his nephew Dan, a schizophrenic youth whose father, a nuclear physicist, has recently killed himself. Ned's narrative is, initially, dull and unimaginative. In this respect, it seems the more believable, simply relaying events and basic emotion rather than couching meaning in metaphor. For instance, Ned describes Dan as "So brilliant, and so troubled, like his father, God rest his soul. I am grieving too" (60). His account, the more rational of the two, the more modern, the more pragmatic, grounds the reader. His patient approach to the problems of his nephew allows Dan to work out his own troubles.

siphoned through his nuclear-warped psyche, Dan's narrative pushes the envelope of believability. Consider his opening line: "The lake is like an explosion" (61). The "explosion" motif pervades this narrative through the metaphor of Dan himself, an explosion waiting to occur. The son of a nuclear physicist, he sees the world solely in nuclear terms:

Dad was one of the fathers of the nuclear age. Then, when the thing was born, he became its son, along with everybody else. So Dad really threw an odd curve on that whole deal about fathers and sons. First he was the thing's father, then he was the thing's son. Great distortions and malformations should clearly be expected to follow on from such a reversal. (68)

Dan cannot cope with the nuclear age. Nuclear worries filter and distort everything he perceives. For instance, he believes Ned's wife, Fran, is sexually attracted to him and, most important, believes his baby cousin, Hattie, is schizophrenic and taunts him, driving him to misdeeds. At first, she grows to huge size right before his eyes. Eventually, she begins to "visit" him at night as he tries to sleep: "And when at last I return to bed she comes creeping in immediately. The baby is trying to make me do something that I will never do" (74). The baby intends, Dan finally reveals, to drive him into killing both himself and her: "She wants me to take her out into the sleeping warhead of Flame Lake, and so foreclose the great suspense" (77). The reader fears that, in his nuclear-based delusion, Dan will harm Hattie: "Mentally poisoned by his father's 'technophilia,' he now seems poised to infect the next generation" (Diedrick 141).

He does not harm the child (although he does kill himself), and the

"insight" gained at Flame Lake is really Ned's. As the story progresses, Ned's matter-of-fact tone and diction change, Diedrick notes, to a voice more like John Self from Money: "At times Ned comes off sounding like Martin Amis by way of Money's John Self. Worrying about his daughter, he writes, 'she's safe here of course, but then there's the crib-death gimmick, dreamed up to ensure that parents get no peace of mind at all'" (140). Ned admits at the beginning of the story that "to a culpable extent I lacked--I lacked insight" (79). He emerges from the complacency of modernism like Bujak, but Ned's last words indicate an anti-modernist turn, a realization that self-reliance is a myth and that one simply needs to live and not attempt to examine all the facets of the complex modern world that made Dan schizophrenic. The last thing Ned remembers Dan doing was reading the back of a cereal box, and as Ned reads the box he understands how modern worries can overwhelm a person. His reaction is Larkinesque:

On the back of the high-fiber bran package there are dietary tips for avoiding cancer. On the back of the half-gallon carton of homogenized, pasteurized, vitamin D-fortified milk there are two mugshots of smiling children, gone, missing. (Have You Seen Them?). Date of birth, 7/7/79. Height, 3'6''. Hair, brown. Eyes, blue. Missing, and missed, too, I'll bet-- oh most certainly. Done away with, probably, fucked and thrown over a wall somewhere, fucked and murdered, yeah, that's the most likely thing. I don't know what is wrong. (79)

iii. "The Time Disease"

"The Time Disease" is appropriately called "a glib, flashy post-modernist exercise" by one critic²² because the narrator, Lou Goldfader, discusses the time problem that infects his world in a manner worthy, again, of John Self. Consider the story's opening paragraph:

Twenty-twenty, and the time disease is epidemic. In my credit group, anyway. And yours too, friend, unless I miss my guess. Nobody thinks about anything else anymore. Nobody even pretends to think about anything else anymore. Oh yeah, except the sky, of course. The poor sky....It's a thing. It's a situation. We all think about time, catching time, coming down with time. I'm still okay, I think, for the time being.

(80)

"The Time Disease," as the first post-apocalyptic story in Einstein's Monsters, addresses, in ironically light and satiric fashion, the world left by the sham of deterrence Bujak disdained. The main concern of this world is "time," and its irony is not that one can have too little of it but too much: "Whatever its sources, it reverses the aging process, restoring energy and vitality. In the inverted world created by an endless nuclear winter, feeling of any kind causes pain. It is the enemy. Thus a condition that constitutes a fountain of youth is considered a disease" (Diedrick 142). The sky, the only other thing people think about in this world, has "spillages," "running colors" and "great chemical betrayals" (87) symptomatic of post-holocaust existence, the result of the failure of deterrence. To spend any more time there than necessary is considered

suffering, is "unthinkable."

The first nuclear conflicts, Goldfader contends, "helped fuck the sky and create "time," but other causes were "the saturation TV coverage that followed" showing writhing flesh in "a queer state of age" (81-82). Still other causes might be "humankind's ventures into space," food, pornography and "the cancer cure" (82). Goldfader himself, however, sees the twentieth century as the cause of "time": "The twentieth century was all it took" (82). All of the potential causes share a lack of humanity, dehumanizing individuals through technology, causing emotion to become an alien to the human equation. The twentieth century sums up all these potential causes, and its theme of a violent breakdown of the human recurs throughout Amis' work. "The Time Disease" offers a microcosmic view of this theme, which Amis addresses more fully in London Fields, Time's Arrow and The Information. In the first, the world and the sky resemble descriptions in "The Time Disease"; time itself is ill and distorted in the second; and the characters in The Information, especially the narrator, Richard Tull, suffer from too much time. Like "Bujak and the Strong Force," the story prefigures ideas and concerns in succeeding Amis novels.

Goldfader comes face to face with "time" when he is contacted by "an ex-wife," one of his "biggest clients" (the monetary factor seems to outweigh the personal: Goldfader is a TV producer). Happy Farraday, the ex-wife, begs him to come to her, refusing to see him over video communication. Goldfader believes she is crying wolf, as TV stars do, but when he does see her, his opinion changes: "She stood there as vivid as health itself, as graphic as youth, with her own light sources, the

eyes, the mouth, the hair, the dips and curves of the flaring throat" (93). Goldfader stays with Happy, makes love to her, and shortly after believes he is coming down with time, but he defeats it, gets himself back to the point where he breaks teeth on toast and loathes the thought of bending or using the stairs: "It's a big relief, and I'm grateful. I'm okay. I'm good, good" (97). In a post-apocalyptic world, health is bad, time is bad, but Amis seems to revel in the paradoxical language game, ironically allowing Goldfader's wordplay to dehumanize him. His selfish concern for his "health" supersedes a human concern for others: "The whole thing is behind me now, and I think (knock on wood) that I'm more or less my old self again" (97). Language inversion (good=bad) illustrates the post-apocalyptic world's disconnection of words, meanings and even emotion.

iv. "The Little Puppy That Could"

The opening line of "The Little Puppy That Could" recalls a children's story: "The little puppy came bounding and tumbling over the fallow fields" (98). In title and tone, it parodies, as Diedrick mentions (144), "The Little Engine That Could," but it is also a retelling of the Greek myth of Andromeda:

He [Amis] rewrites the Greek myth of Andromeda, who was about to be sacrificed to a prodigious sea monster when Perseus killed the beast. The main (human) character in "The Little Puppy That Could" is a young girl who embraces the Greek heroic past, in part by rejecting her given name ("Briana")

and adopting "Andromeda." (Diedrick 143)

Diedrick points out that the characters in the story are riddled with mutation, from the little puppy, whom Keithette, Andromeda's mom, does not recognize as a "puppy"; to the humans, who were "traveling backward down their evolutionary flarepaths," into some "uncharted humiliation of webs and pouches, of trotters and beaks" (109-110); to the monster of the story, the dog, who is "eight feet long and four feet high, very lumpily put together," has a tail of "bare tibia, tendon and talon" and a "loud crimson, venomous and also acidic" saliva "capable of entirely dissolving human bones" (110).

Not only the physical world mutates in "The Little Puppy That Could," but also gender roles, making women, with names like Keithette and Kevinia, "the natural leaders," especially when they possess "the loudest voices and the strongest personalities" (118). Men, with names like Tom or Tim, serve the women and sprint from hut to hut with messages. Another group is the Queers, the most "malevolved" of people, "the beakmen and wing-women, the furred or shelled or slippery beings" (118). The Queers suffer most in this inverted society, for they are fed to the ravenous dog to keep him at bay and away from the other villagers.

Curiously, "The Little Puppy That Could," with its diverse and fantastic elements, is the only one of the five stories in Einstein's Monsters told in the third person. This change in viewpoint allows Amis to speak from outside the world of nuclear blight (Diedrick 144), giving the story a paternalistic slant, a benevolent despotism absent from the other stories. Diedrick calls this tone "discordantly anachronistic"

(144), but the story, in its attempt to be a fairy tale for the post-apocalyptic age, arguably should sound no other way. A fairy tale could not be narrated by the inverted members of the post-apocalyptic society, for they are completely detached from the reality that spawned fairy tales. Only an omniscient third person familiar with both worlds can make the tale work.

Amis takes this distorted world and attempts to correct the gender inversion, the social turnabout, by usurping the fairy tale genre and inserting a post-apocalyptic situation. Because the author, as textual executant, wants to return to a modern reality, he needs the fairy tale genre, where the unbelievable regularly occurs. As Carolyn See argues, the ending is an uncharacteristically happy one: "the author pulls every string, turns evolution upside down to think up a happy ending for our beleaguered species."

No other story in Einstein's Monsters infers that the human race will return to normal. As the story unfolds, the dog's predation becomes more and more of a threat; it has raided "the spare husband compound" and virtually wiped out the supply of spare husbands. The women begin to worry about "the child pool" and hold a lottery to determine who will be sacrificed to the dog. Of course, Andromeda is chosen, but she survives thanks to the little puppy, Jackajack, who tricks the dog into jumping into the fire-pit adjacent to where Andromeda stands tied to a stake. The puppy dies in the process, but as Andromeda tries to sleep, a boy, "his body still marked by the claws and flames" (133-134) appears at her window. Unlike the other men, his arms are "strong and warlike." He and the most beautiful of the villagers, Andromeda, "stood together on the

hilltop and gazed down at their new world" (134).

The narrator claims that the women's dominance was not "a reaction to the deep past" (118), and so it seems ironic that the fairy tale's moral should be about the restoration of the deep past, the modern dominance of males supplanting (or re-supplanting) the postmodern dominance of females. Diedrick calls such "implicitly reactionary sexual politics" annoying (143). If the modern theme of "The Little Puppy That Could" is not annoying, it is at least disconcerting when juxtaposed to the other themes in Einstein's Monsters. This one story in the collection caters to mankind's hope for survival in the post-apocalyptic era, and not just survival, but life in a manner similar to the present. In "The Little Puppy That Could," Amis' emotions overcome his technical prowess, and he unintentionally recalls the "Megadeath Intellectuals" who talk about humanity surviving a nuclear conflict. In this sense, "The Little Puppy That Could" feels "discordantly anachronistic" compared to the rest of the collection.

v. "The Immortals"

"The Immortals" features the most unreliable of all the narrators in Einstein's Monsters, a human who cannot die no matter how badly he would like to, "the most grandly deluded character in the collection" (Diedrick 144), his story the most fantastic. In the year 2045, the narrator claims to have come to New Zealand to be with the last human beings on Earth, all of whom are dying because of post-apocalyptic radiation. He provides a very brief autobiography, saying he "materialized

or beamed down, near the city of Kampala, Uganda, in Africa. Of course, Kampala wasn't there yet, and neither was Uganda" (136). As the only being on the planet, he was "terribly lonely. And hungry" (137). His life is "largely feckless" (136), and he has a love/hate relationship with the world. He begins to try to commit suicide at about the Middle Ages, and "From 1945 to 2039," he is "smashed" with alcohol (143). It is in 2045 that the Immortal attempts to commit suicide for the last time, trying to escape the twentieth century, during which (as mentioned above), "the entire planet seemed to be staging some kind of stupidity contest." He plants himself in Tokyo and awaits an oncoming nuclear strike. Of course, the Immortal survives the bombing.

But he is not immortal. The narrator is delusional like Dan from "Insight at Flame Lake." The wordplay of the title is the first clue: he claims to be "the" one and only Immortal, but the title is plural. He even admits there are others who suffer from a "mass delusion," all believing they are immortal. At times he also believes he is "just a second-rate New Zealand schoolmaster who never did anything or went anywhere and is now painfully and noisily dying of solar radiation along with everybody else" (148). He also thinks of "a woman, and a child. One woman. One child" (148). The Immortal is mortal and suffers the same fate as the rest of humanity, but, like Andromeda and the boy in "The Little Puppy That Could," he yearns for continuance. However, he can only attain continuance (because "The Immortals" is not a fairy tale that can end happily in spite of the apocalypse) through imagination, which will last only as long as he does.

But his tone belies the seriousness of humanity's situation, his

super-irradiated mind allowing him to speak with a sang-froid starkly contrasting his words' import, although, as Diedrick notes, his style seems flippant: "His language, like that of Ned in 'Insight at Flame Lake,' is structured like a shield, though in this case one built by a stand-up comic monologist" (144). Like Goldfader, he also has a penchant for coining words and phrases that echo John Self, such as when he describes the plight of the last human beings: "Now they're being renuked, doublenuked--by the slow reactor of the sun" (139). And he writes in the end, as he describes his days with the last humans, "We crackle with cancers, we fizz with synergisms, under the furious and birdless sky" (149).

The Immortal represents the imagination, that last aspect of human beings, in its struggle against reality, a position that helps maintain nuclear weapons. In "Nuclear City," Amis argues that if weapons of mass destruction were sentient, they would fear "what they most threaten, ordinary people, people who have felt their mortal insult, people who have grasped a simple truth: that there is something wrong with the planet" (Amis, Mrs. Nabokov, 31-32), which the Immortal realizes but does not, or will not, admit. Ironically, for the Immortal cannot fictionalize his own existence, he remains forever modern, convinced his self will survive, unaware that it no longer exists. His account is wholly unreliable because it is a fiction within a fiction. Instead of seeking truth, literature becomes its own subject, removing ever further from reality.

The issue of nuclear weapons is, for Amis, personal, as he feels it must be for all people. The reality of nuclear weapons, their anti-life nature, affects all creatures. People who remove themselves from

reality and fictionalize them typify, Diedrick notes, the postmodern formlessness of life and Einstein's Monsters: "Though its ostensible subject is the omnipresent nuclear threat, and the distinctive ways this has (mis)shaped postmodern life, the book's emotional core can be found at a more traditional site of fission: the family fireside" (145).

On the surface, the stories resound with the nuclear threat and at the core the threat to family or personal life. Amis argues in "Nuclear City" and "Thinkability" that personal life and nuclear weapons are inseparable. It can be maintained that "In only the final two apocalyptic stories does the nuclear theme function as more than a distraction" (Koger), but it is and should be a distraction to everyone's personal existence because it exists. Amis worries that, at most, it will be treated as an undercurrent, marginalized, until it flares and explodes into reality to rupture the flow of life. The "distraction" of nuclear weapons in the first three stories establishes the undercurrent that "explodes" in the final two, thematically binding them all.

Einstein's Monsters may, as Diedrick argues (146), sacrifice the nuclear theme to fictional technique: "Most of the ideas in the collection receive richer, less simplifying treatment in London Fields and Time's Arrow" (Diedrick 147). While stories in Einstein's Monsters, especially "Bujak and the Strong Force," prefigure the later, longer works in narration and themes, Amis, as a postmodern writer, always treats technique and form: "I would certainly sacrifice any psychological or realistic truth for a phrase, for a paragraph that has a spin on it: that sounds whorish, but I think it's the higher consideration" (Haffenden 16). The fact that he returns to ideas from

Einstein's Monsters in later works represents part of his cannibalization of himself rather than other sources such as James Joyce, his father or Philip Larkin.

B. Miscellaneous Stories: Form-Awareness

The three uncollected stories, "Denton's Death," "Let Me Count the Times" and "Career Move," all written in the third person, suggest (like the stories in Einstein's Monsters) themes that appear in Amis' future work. He continuously tests literary elements in shorter works seemingly to determine their viability for longer pieces.

i. "Denton's Death"

"Denton's Death" (1976), for instance, is perhaps Amis' first venture into anti- or circular time. The first sentences of the first and last paragraphs are identical: "Suddenly Denton realised that there would be three of them, that they would come after dark, that their leader would have his own key, and that they would be calm and deliberate, confident that they had all the time they needed to do what had to be done" (3). Circular time, the fact that Denton's death scene will be repeated over and over, resonates in the novel Other People, where Mary Lamb/Amy Hide suffers the same fate.

Denton's death occurs via the agency of "a machine" reminiscent of the torture device in Kafka's "In the Penal Colony,"²³ but unlike Kafka, who uniquely joins crime and punishment in the method of torture, Amis'

piece offers no motivation for Denton's murder. Denton himself "could muster no strong views on the subject; it was all done now, anyway" (3). Like John Self from Money, he sees no reason or motivation behind the actions of those aligned against him. "Denton's Death" is possibly Amis' first inkling that "motivation is pretty well shagged out by now. It hasn't got what it takes to motivate people any more" (Money 331). The story offers some of the first signs that Amis is considering which aspects of contemporary fiction are worn out and which must be submersed or re-imagined.

ii. "Let Me Count the Times"

"Let Me Count the Times" follows the obsession of a man named Vernon who insists on keeping exact count of the type of sex he and his wife enact. He is proud, for instance, that he makes love to his wife "three and a half times a week" (369). More important, "fellatio was performed by Vernon's wife every third coupling, or 60.8333 times a year, or 1.1698717 times a week" (369). Vernon's obsession to keep such an exact count of all of his and his wife's sexual transactions does not, at first, adversely affect him, his wife or their marriage. But when he rediscovers masturbation, his obsession turns and twists. He begins to average "3.4 times a day, or 23.8 times a week, or an insane 1,241 times a year. And his wife never suspected a thing" (373). His imaginary "sessions" begin to include a multitude of lovers, from women in pornographic magazines to movie stars to women in literature. He loses touch with reality, unable to discern the demarcation where

reality ends and fantasy begins. For instance, he imagines his wife with another man:

He swung open the door and stared. At what? At his wife sweatily grappling with a huge bronzed gypsy, who turned incuriously towards Vernon and then back again to the hysteria of volition splayed out on the bed before him. Vernon ejaculated immediately. His wife returned home within a few minutes. She kissed him on the forehead. He felt very strange. (374).

Vernon's obsession with make-believe and his eventual "impotence" make him, in conjunction with the narrator, a vague, comic forerunner of Samson Young, who also spins a web of fantasy. Indeed, the third-person narrator's tone in "Let Me Count the Times" could be that of Young describing, for example, London Fields' Guy Clinch after his failed sexual encounter with Nicola Six: "For an instant [Guy] knew beyond doubt that he would now have to murder [Nicola] and then commit suicide—or kill her and leave the country under an assumed name" (381). In "Let Me Count the Times," Amis experiments with an intrusive third-person narrator who becomes involved with his own fiction. Like Young and the narrators of Time's Arrow and The Information, he discerns the first-person goings-on of the story he is telling, deftly hiding reality from the reader while at the same time maintaining "third-person" distance.

The narrator is most noticeable in his subtle humor, which is concealed in Amis' style: "Vernon woke up before his wife did. It took him thirty-five minutes to get out of bed, so keen was he to accomplish this feat without waking her" (380) and "When Vernon looked up his wife was

sitting opposite him. She looked utterly normal" (381) are examples of the narrator's voice. The satiric words "so keen was he" and the hyperbolized adverb "utterly" indicate Amis' stylistic devotion, his willingness to sacrifice realism for a well-turned phrase, especially a humorous one: "I hope that I'm on the humorous wing of postmodernism" (Haffenden 19).

iii. "Career Move"

Both "Let Me Count the Times" and "Career Move" possess a sense of lightheartedness, of humorous Juvenalian satire. The former makes light of sex in the computer age, mocking a man's sense of "manliness" by having it contingent in the character's mind on the quantity of his sexual encounters. Because of his obsession with quantity, the character quickly develops Freudian sexual problems, another symptom of personal and social breakdown. In the latter story, Amis wryly compares and contrasts the relative value of screenwriting (with which he had experience when he wrote Saturn 3²⁴) and poetry.

When Alistair completes a screenplay, such as his "Offensive from Quasar 13," he submits it not to an agent or producer, but to a journal called the Little Magazine (the same name as the journal for which the struggling Richard Tull of The Information is "literary editor"). Hardworking Alistair idolizes the Little Magazine's screenplay editor, Hugh Sixsmith. Meanwhile, Luke's finished poems, like "Sonnet," his latest, go not to literary journals but to powerful agents and producers. Amis inverts the plights of screenwriter and poet, reversing expectations.

For instance, Alistair eventually meets Hugh Sixsmith in a luncheonette, and the two, over a never-ending lunch, discuss the editor's "one tiny suggestion about 'Offensive from Quasar 13'" (36). The "tiny" suggestion concerns a character's motivation, a trivial topic that still takes two hours.

Meanwhile, Luke's agents and producers cannot "produce" a theme for "Sonnet":

"Let's face it," said Jeff. "Sonnets are essentially hieratic. They're strictly period. They answer to a formalized consciousness. Today, we're talking consciousnesses that are in search of form."

"Plus," said Jack, "the lyric has always been the natural medium for the untrammelled expression of feeling."

"Yeah," said Jeff. "With the sonnet you're stuck in this thesis-antithesis-synthesis routine." (33)

Not only has poetry assumed the social position formerly held by screenplays, but the agents recognize that postmodern readers have "consciousnesses that are in search of form." More important, the agents and studio representatives talk so much about the state of contemporary poetry, its marketing and the poems that are doing well (such as "'Tis he whose yester-evening's high disdain," called "'Tis" for short) that they are not capable of coming to conclusions or taking action. They dissect the idea of what motivates a reading public or a poem, but they themselves actually lack any motivation whatsoever. In "Let Me Count the Times," an obsession with quantity helps fiction displace reality; in "Career Move," rhetoric accomplishes this displacement: "'On "Sonnet"? Well,

the only thing we have a problem on "Sonnet" with, Luke, so far as I can see, anyway, and I know Jeff agrees with me on this—right, Jeff?—and so does Jim, incidentally, Luke,' said Joe, 'is the form'" (32). The producers cannot agree on a "form" for "Sonnet," and the drivel they speak highlights their diction's lack of meaning. The overabundance of rhetoric in "Career Move" inhibits truth as much as numerical quantity in "Let Me Count the Times."

Alistair eventually receives 12.50 pounds when "Offensive from Quasar 13" is published in the Little Magazine, and he finds out the dying Sixsmith no longer edits that journal. He feels grateful, however, for the boost Sixsmith gave his career, as he tells him on his deathbed: "Goodbye. And thank you. Thank you. Thank you" (38). On the other hand, Luke, who had recently "done some lines at the office," is "a little fucked up" and is told by the agents that "Sonnet" could be as big as "--" (38). The malaise that guides Luke's career triumphs over hard work and attempts at self-sufficiency. The twentieth century defeats itself and those who try to live it as opposed to those who just let it carry them along.

IX. Time's Arrow: Going Backwards, Looking Forwards

Considering its overt experimentation with time, syntax, minimal character development and diffused episode, Time's Arrow is Amis' most blatant anti-novel.²⁵ Amis (or rather Bujak) first pondered the notion of time-reversal in the short story "Bujak and the Strong Force." Other time-reversal antecedents include An Age by Brian Aldiss; "Mr F is Mr

F" by J.G. Ballard; Counter-Clock World by Philip Dick; and, in drama, Harold Pinter's Betrayal.²⁶ But one of the most influential reverse-time sequences can be found in Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse Five (Amis, in the "Afterword" to Time's Arrow, thanks Vonnegut), which Amis claims "expressed the absurdist tenor of the modern revulsion" (Inferno 135). The Dresden fire-bombing sequence in Slaughterhouse Five is surely the section Amis refers to in the "Afterword"--it satisfies Vonnegut's need for "'Tralfamadorian novels' where the laws of cause and effect are reversed; bombs do not fall to earth but rise back into their bomb-bays, and modern destruction is eliminated" (Bradbury 429):²⁷

The formation flew backwards over a German city that was in flames. The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires, gathered them into cylindrical steel containers, and lifted the containers into the bellies of the planes. The containers were stored neatly in racks. The Germans below had miraculous devices of their own, which were long steel tubes. They used them to suck more fragments from the crewmen and planes. But there were still a few wounded Americans, though, and some of the bombers were in bad repair. Over France, though, German fighters came up again, made everything and everybody as good as new. (74)

As Bradbury indicates (429), Time's Arrow is Amis' Tralfamadorian novel, for the entire story, every facet of human life, is rendered in reverse. As M. John Harrison notes, "Games are necessary to make this work. The 'I' of the novel cannot precisely 'live' his life backwards

in front of the reader. Instead, it is described by a passenger in Odilo Unverdorben's head--perhaps his soul, his own wounded psyche." At first, the time-warp disconcerts readers: "Disorientation is one's initial response to a world in which time moves in reverse and effect always precedes cause" (Diedrick 163). Consider, for instance, one of the narrator's early presentations of the speech of those around him:

"Dug. Dug," says the lady in the pharmacy.

"Dug," I join in. "Oo y'rrah?"

"Aid ut oo y'rrah?"

"Mh-mm," she'll say, as she unwraps my hair lotion. (7)

The translation of this conversation is, "Good. Good; Good. How are you? How are you today? Mm-hm."²⁸ Not only is the speech rendered in reverse phonetically, but the conversation itself also occurs backwards and must be read from bottom to top in order to be understood. Luckily, the narrator phonetically translates the speech for the reader in later conversations, but the conversations themselves continue to occur in reverse, from bottom to top. Every other facet of human life occurs in reverse as well, from eating ("Various items get gulped up into my mouth, and after skillful massage with the tongue and teeth I transfer them to the plate for additional sculpture with knife and fork and spoon" [11]) to defecation ("At the end of the day, before my coffee, in I go. And there it is already: that humiliating warm smell. I lower my pants and make with the magic handle. Suddenly it's all there, complete with toilet paper, which you use and then deftly wind back on the roll" [11]) to sex ("After a while Irene quenched her cigarette of its fire and restored it to the pack. She turned toward us meaning-

fully. There followed about ten minutes of what I guess you'd call foreplay" [37]).

The physical reversal of action leaves room for lightness, humor and satire, and Amis, through his unwitting narrator, takes advantage of this potential. Consider the process of reading:

Another thing that seriously disappoints me about this life I'm living through: the reading. I drag myself out of bed each night to start the day--and with what? Not with a book. Not even with the Gazette. No. Two or three hours with a yelping tabloid. I begin at the foot of the column and toil my way up the page to find each story unedifyingly summarized in inch-high type. MAN GIVES BIRTH TO DOG. Or STARLET RAPED BY PTERODACTYL. Greta Garbo, I read, has been reborn as a cat. (11-12)

The narrator lives in a world of illogic (anti-logic), but he is also a product of the reader's and author's world where thought processes follow the direction of language in the forward motion of solar time. Because of his lack of comprehension of reverse-time, the anti-logic occurring around him, the narrator peers at events in Time's Arrow as if viewing them from the far side of a chasm, and the width of that chasm and its lack of light make it nearly impossible for him to correctly interpret events. However, the reader's complicity with the author, their shared lack of innocence, allows him to gauge not only the narrator but also the reverse-logic underlying events on the far side of the chasm: "The negative logic of the events described forces the reader to concentrate on interpretation itself, on the reflexes

entailed in any exegesis, in any process of identification" (Bernard 133-134). Although he is the author's executant, the narrator is not the author's literary double or the author recreating himself in the text. The subsequent distance between them allows for both humor and reader participation. For example, the narrator accuses Tod (the name of the person in whom he exists) of taking toys from children:

He takes toys from children, on the street. He does. The kid will be standing there, with flustered mother, with big dad. Tod'll come on up. The toy, the squeaky duck or whatever, will be offered to him by the smiling child. Tod takes it. And backs away, with what I believe is called a shit-eating grin. The child's face turns blank, or closes. Both toy and smile are gone: he takes both toy and smile. Then he heads for the store, to cash it in. For what? A couple of bucks. Can you believe this guy? (14-15)

In the backwards world, the narrator's value judgements are ironically the same as the reader's. Taking a toy from a child is wrong; taking a large note from the collection plate at church is wrong; and Tod, as far as the narrator is concerned, does both. Because he "tells the story in forward or biological time," his displacement appears "innocent" and "quizzical" (Buchan 37). However, at this stage of his life (the end), Tod actually does good deeds whose generosity belies his past horrific deeds (his name means "death" in German).

The reader quickly adapts to the novel's anti-logic, which becomes more and more intelligible because the reverse-world employs it consistently:

Before long, this inverted world becomes comprehensible, because it follows predictable rules. In adapting to its crazy logic, the reader is also preparing to confront another inverted world: Auschwitz and its obscene logic. (Diedrick 164)

As with the works of P.G. Wodehouse, the reader becomes used to the fact that characters will not necessarily think and act like people outside the fiction. However, choices and value judgements are made in accord with the logic of the fictional world and, when done consistently, are easy to comprehend.

If the style of this anti-novel becomes more comprehensible as the work proceeds, the identity of the narrator does not necessarily do the same. His origin is uncertain; he simply appears at the moment of Tod Friendly's rebirth (death): "I moved forward, out of the blackest sleep, to find myself surrounded by doctors...American doctors" (3). Diedrick interprets the narrator's rebirth as that of a double to the anti-hero: "At the moment of his death in an American hospital, onetime Nazi doctor Odilo Unverdorben [Friendly's original name] 'gives birth' to a doppelganger [sic] (literally 'double-goer'), a childlike innocent who relives Unverdorben's life--in reverse" (162). Other critics, including John Updike, James Buchan and M. John Harrison, consider him Unverdorben's soul,²⁹ although if he is Unverdorben's spiritual/mystical self, he is equipped with a consciousness the physical Friendly lacks. At first, Updike argues, "the alleged soul sounds quite jaunty and detached (and English): 'Life is no bowl of cherries. It's swings and roundabouts. You win some, you lose some. It evens out. It measures up'" (88). He con-

siders himself "powerless," saying, "Still, I'm powerless, and can do nothing about anything" (8), and shortly after, in seeming support of his state as pure observer, he says he is "equipped with a fair amount of value-free information, or general knowledge, if you prefer" (8). But because he is a fictional creation and not truly a soul caught in a physical world where conscience is unnecessary, he possesses a power in innocence, in being unable to fully divine the import of the events occurring around him. Through the medium of irony, he communicates to the reader many "value-filled" judgements--he is, for instance, "awash" in Tod Friendly's emotions (7) but is not always comfortable with what he feels. He divulges Tod is "known and mocked and otherwise celebrated" for squeamishness, but he admits that Tod, when it comes to doctoring, is far from squeamish:

I'm squeamish. I'm the squeamish one. Oh, Tod can hack it. His feeling tone--aweless, distant--is quite secure against the daily round in here, the stares of vigil, the smell of altered human flesh. Tod can take all this--whereas I'm harrowed by it. (26)

The Nazi doctor Odilo Unverdorben who worked at Auschwitz (and Tod as his later self in America at the end of the twentieth century) cannot be horrified by anything he sees. But his soul, conscience or doppelganger is not so fortunate; it maintains a distance, a separateness from Tod that even the soul readily admits: "I don't see eye to eye with Tod on all issues. Far from it" (31). Tod is "very down" on pimps, whereas the narrator feels they do great things for women, showering money on them and asking "for nothing in return" (31). In this instance, the narrator

speaks ironically (and with humor) because of his innocence, because he does not possess the ability to translate value judgements from the reverse world into value judgements for the reader's world. Nonetheless, he indicates through irony that Tod's value judgements have changed: the former Nazi doctor, in the early stages of the book (the latter part of his life), recognizes evil. Unfortunately, as the work progresses (and Tod Friendly becomes younger), the physical self commits more and more evil. For example, womanizing is a problem, and the narrator yearns for Tod to choose a different path: "Tod, I wanted to say: don't do this. The voice of conscience. It speaks in a whisper. Nobody hears it" (47). At about the book's midpoint, Tod (now become John Young) is caught in the middle of an adulterous act:

We hopped straight into this apartment, straight into the bright bedroom--and turned. I have to say that the situation didn't look very promising. There was a woman in the bed, right enough. But there was a man there to. Fully clothed, enormous in midnight-blue serge suit and peaked cap, he knelt above her, rhythmically slapping her face with a pendulum action of his heavy-gloved hand. No, this didn't look like our kind of thing at all. (79)

While it is not the narrator's "kind of thing," it is, increasingly, John Young's "kind of thing."

The most important distinction to be made between the narrator and Odilo Unverdorben is that the narrator likes Jews: "My position on the Jews has always been without ambiguity. I like them. I am, I would say, one of nature's philo-Semites" (152). In The Nazi Doctors (which Amis

says in the "Afterword" Time's Arrow "would not and could not have been written without" [167]), Robert Jay Lifton maintains that "What was involved psychologically for Nazi doctors was their intense effort to reconnect with the Hippocratic sphere as a way of claiming they had never left it" (456). Applying Lifton's argument, Diedrick states that Odilo Unverdorben "follows the path of many of the doctors Lifton interviewed, reconnecting with the Hippocratic sphere and attempting to reclaim his pre-Nazi self" (167). In short, Diedrick argues that the narrator represents Unverdorben's pre-Nazi self, the self that wanted to do no harm, to help others. But Hippocratic and Nazi selves separated, allowing the latter to commit the unparalleled atrocities of the Holocaust.³⁰ Unverdorben completes the "strange three-part odyssey from pre-Nazi physician-healer, to Nazi physician-killer, to post-Nazi physician-healer" (Lifton 457). The narrator, if it represents the Hippocratic, pre-Nazi self, is dormant, or rather "powerless" (to use his own word) in the latter half of Unverdorben's life. As a conscience, his whisper goes unheard; as a soul, he has been sacrificed by the atrocities Unverdorben committed. The narrator suffers from a postmodern relationship with his Nazi self: he cannot connect with it throughout Unverdorben's postwar life because by then the self has already been splintered. His value judgements, his sense of ethics, have been sundered from the Nazi self to the extent that he cannot even intuit his place in post-war society: "When viewed in relation to Lifton's theory of psychological 'doubling,' the narrator of Time's Arrow can be seen as that part of Unverdorben that Unverdorben disavowed at the moment he began performing euthanasia at Schloss Hartheim [his first Nazi post]" (Diedrick 167).

Joining bodies and souls back together is the purpose of inverted time in Time's Arrow--"undoing" the Holocaust is the only way to "correct" it. The amorality of German atrocities is the book's central, albeit underlying, theme: "Time's Arrow, predicated less on its own central notion than on the moral rage of its author, has more in common with the stark unprincipled conceits of Swift, Orwell or Huxley" (Harrison). Diedrick compares it to Swift's "A Modest Proposal," saying "the narrator never registers horror at the systematic human cruelty occurring around him--which increases the reader's horror" (163). The same argument may be made for Orwell's Animal Farm or 1984: narrators report but do not editorialize crimes against the innocent. A particular passage from Time's Arrow registers the horror of Auschwitz and exposes the narrator's lack of horror (because of his lack of knowledge): "Here there is no why. Here there is no when, no how, no where. Our preternatural purpose? To dream a race. To make a people from the weather. From thunder and from lightning. With gas, with electricity, with shit, with fire" (120). Diedrick rightly refers to these words as providing a sense of poetic justice to the recreation of human beings. But this poetic justice is also fantastic and unbelievable:

In his descriptions of breathing life back into the victims of Nazi genocide the narrator effects a poetic undoing of the Holocaust, all the more poignant for the reader's knowledge that it never can be undone. (Diedrick 163)

However, Time's Arrow confronts more than just physical horror: it questions, again through the narrator's naivete, how human beings can perpetrate monstrous evils upon one another. John Updike asserts that

the twentieth century stands as a particularly troubling example of this phenomenon:

That the German people, whose arts and sciences and industry stood in the forefront of what was proudly called European civilization, could be led into the commission of a crime so massive and wanton, so savage and yet so conscientiously executed, presents a monstrous riddle in the center of the twentieth century. (86)

Through the eyes of Tod Friendly, the narrator witnesses the horrors of everyday life. In describing a crisis center for battered women, for instance, he says, "If you want a crisis, just check in. The welts, the abrasions and the black eyes get starker, more livid, until it is time for the women to return, in an ecstasy of distress, to the men who will suddenly heal them" (31). Although he misconstrues commonplace events, the narrator is still able, ironically, to predict that the women will return to their abusers "in an ecstasy of distress," just as they do in the world of forwards time. Every day, people do the unthinkable; in World War II Germany, average people did more of the unthinkable than ever before. Odilo Unverdorben is a model of one. The narrator concludes that "Odilo Unverdorben, as a moral being, is absolutely unexceptional, liable to do what everybody else does, good or bad, with no limit, once under the cover of numbers" (157).

In this reverse biography (Bernard 122), three of Unverdorben's names add to the irony of his "commonplace" existence: "Unverdorben" is German for "unspoiled"; John Young is perhaps as routine a name as is possible for an American; and, to reiterate, "Tod" of "Tod Friendly"

means "death" in German. Except for the fact that his name changes, Unverdorben is very much like anyone else, possessing an underlying ability, an inner irony, that allows him to perpetrate horrors. "No individual self," Lifton maintains, "is inherently evil, murderous, genocidal. Yet under certain conditions virtually any self is capable of becoming all of these" (497). Self-response depends on collectivity, on "shared mentality" rather than on an "isolated self" (Lifton 498), and fascist ideology is particularly alluring with its "promise of unity, oneness, fusion" (Lifton 499). Conscience is somehow muted by these factors, allowing the separation of Hippocratic and Nazi selves. Tod Friendly possesses a conscience (perhaps the narrator), for under the name Hamilton de Souza in Portugal, he dreams of excreting human bones, and as Tod Friendly sees "The enormous figure in the white coat, his black boots straddling many acres. Somewhere down there, between his legs, the line of souls" (39). The narrator refers to the figure as "Uncle Pepi," but he is Dr. Mengele, with whom Tod will work (has worked) at Auschwitz. Odilo/Hamilton/John/Tod is a bifurcated self, unable to come to terms with a past that nevertheless affects his future. He could never find peace in any identity; his life-choices have shattered his ego.

Critics such as Malcolm Bradbury maintain that the moral center of Time's Arrow, its underlying theme of splintered selves choosing paths that unified selves would never consider, is overpowered by the technical feat of writing the story in reverse:

The moral passion is plain, and the desire to reverse guilt and restore innocence is evident; in this the book has the

power of a moral satire. But it does remain an exercise, a virtuoso enterprise in postmodern technical skills. (429)

Similarly, James Buchan argues that events in the novel "happen because they have happened, not from cause or motive" (37), thereby negating the novel's moral purpose of "undoing" the Holocaust. There is no argument that Time's Arrow is a postmodern exercise in re-evaluating the effect of time on fiction (with respect to E.M. Forster), that it employs an anti-novel inversion of time while simultaneously using that inversion to correct one of humankind's greatest failures. The narrator, with his forward-fixed mind and innate lack of logical judgement, cannot control the movement of events, but he can, with the "author," control how the reader's perception. At the end of the first chapter, for example, he feels a special kinship with the moon: "Its face, at this time of the month, is especially craven and chinless, like the earth's exiled or demoted soul" (16). The metaphor to his own existence is clear, yet he also imparts that, in the twentieth century, a century of unparalleled destruction, it seems as if earth's soul, humanity's soul, has been banished. Similarly, at the end of the novel, he questions the timing of his existence, whether he came "too soon, or after it was all too late" (165). The answer depends on whether the story is considered in forward or reverse time—but the message is that the soul or other self the narrator represents should never have been displaced since it "invalidates" the "logic of similitude on which mimetic illusion is based" (Bernard 134) and causes the reader to question his own interpretive skills. The sequence of events in Time's Arrow tampers with truth; Tod takes toys from children, so he is amoral to the nar-

rator, but he is moral (in that instance) to the reader, who simply reverses the sequence. Even though the uniqueness of inverted time initially overwhelms the subtle irony inherent in the narrator's account, Diedrick maintains (164) that Time's Arrow is syllogistic and soon becomes easier to follow, preparing the reader to face the illogic of his own century.

X. The Information: Twentieth-Century Angst

The Information's title is as amorphous as London Fields', leading the reader to expect clarification sooner or later. Like London Fields, however, the reader cannot be certain what "information" is intended: there is no "Meaning," only "meanings." The word "information" couples with various notions, such as the question, "Why do the men cry?" After discoursing on this query in a moderately developed paragraph, the narrator ends the section with a one-sentence paragraph: "And then there is the information, which comes at night" (25). The juxtaposition of the paragraph on crying and the sentence on "the information," added to the fact that, at the beginning of the novel, "Richard Tull was crying in his sleep" (3), connotes that "the information" concerns sorrow.

However, given the postmodern nature of the term "information," its infelicitous connotations only momentarily apply. Adam Mars-Jones, for example, argues that "'The information' in The Information is knowledge of death" ("blight side"), and there is evidence to support his interpretation:

The information is nothing. Nothing: the answer is so many of

our questions. What will happen to me when I die? What is death anyway? Is there anything I can do about that? Of what does the universe primarily consist? What is the measure of our influence within it? What is our span, in cosmic time? What will our world eventually become? What mark will we leave--to remember us by? (341)

"The information," then, somehow contains, or represents, or transmits, the nothingness of death, and not just physical death, but spiritual death, mental death. Richard himself reasons earlier that "Literature wasn't about living. Literature was about not dying" (337). Thus, "the information" is the nothingness that will become of Richard and so many others who are not able to "not die" through the agency of literary immortality.

But "the information" is defined in other ways. For instance, "the information is advertising a symposium of pain. Pains of all faiths and all denominations. These are your little ones, these are your pretty ones. Become accustomed to their voices" (340). Additionally, when Gwyn informs Richard of the results of a sexual encounter with a prostitute (which Richard arranged as part of his plan to "hurt" Gwyn), he does so with "the face of a man keen to transmit information clearly" (358). The title-word is employed on myriad occasions, its implications changing each time. Its indefiniteness plays havoc with expectations, "leading the reader to expect some specific, ultimately clarifying revelation which never in fact materializes" (Diedrick 179).

What does materialize in The Information is a story of envy and jealousy. The antagonists are Richard Tull and Gwyn Barry, the former

envious of the latter's literary success. The story follows Richard as he vainly attempts to "hurt" Gwyn: "As the plot impinges on the reader, it can be summarized like this: things can't get any worse, and then they do" (Mars-Jones, "blight side"). Richard's plans backfire with a sense of justice and, admittedly, pathos, for he is a dark character, at once selfish and pathetic, able to access the reptilian part of the soul that fuels characters like Samson Young and John Self:

That Amis should write about envy is no surprise. In his previous novels, like "London Fields" and "Money," he has staked his territory: the reptilian corner of the soul where lust, avarice, jealousy and other kinds of invidiousness arouse animosity and ill will. (Farr)

Richard fixates on "hurting Gwyn," seeing the attempt as if it were the act of creating great literature: "Then and there it crystallized: the task. A literary endeavor, a quest, an exaltation--one to which he could sternly commit all his passion and his power. He was going to fuck Gwyn up" (25). (The contrast of his literary aloofness and the baseness of thinking he is "going to fuck Gwyn up" highlight the humor of Richard's predicament.) Gwyn "needs to be stopped before he writes again. In order to strip Barry of his happiness, his health and, most important, his career, Tull will use whatever means necessary, from slander to hiring local ex-cons" (Zeidner).

Gwyn's novel, Amelior (the root of "ameliorate") is a vapid, flat attempt at producing literature, far less sophisticated than Richard's own latest work, Untitled, a complex book in the modernist tradition. He sees Amelior, which concerns a group of young people who establish a

rural paradise in an unnamed location, as a failure waiting to happen:

He cackled and yodeled his way through Amelior: its cuteness, its blandness, its naively pompous semicolons, its freedom from humor and incident, its hand-me-down imagery, the almost endearing transparency of its little color schemes, its Tinkertoy symmetries" (28).

However, Amelior is far from a failure—it is an overwhelming success, and it makes Gwyn Barry, who eventually publishes the sequel, Amelior Regained, a very wealthy man. Gwyn's success, combined with Richard's failure—his meager income as a book reviewer, his editorial position at The Little Magazine and his job as fiction and poetry editor at the Tantalus Press, a vanity publisher—cause Richard to nurture his envy, to want "to do to Gwyn what Gwyn has done to him. He wants to assassinate his sleep. He wants to inform the sleeping man; an I for an I" (64). The situation is exacerbated first by Richard's difficulty in finishing Untitled, his salute to Joyce and modernism, then by the difficulty he encounters in getting the book published. Gwyn's agent, Gal Aplanalp (with whom Gwyn is sleeping) accepts Untitled and finally has it taken on by an American publisher, Bold Agenda. Critics who try to read Untitled, however, cannot finish more than a dozen pages before serious migraines set in: "If you had to settle on a one-word description of his stuff, then you would almost certainly make do with unreadable. Untitled, for instance, remained unread, but no one had ever willingly finished its predecessors" (125).³¹ By the end of the novel, one person reads Tull's works: Steve Cousins, "Scozzy," a thug whom Richard hired to execute various plans to injure his rival, owns the complete

works of Richard Tull (his other works are Aforethought and Dreams Don't Mean Anything).

Although he may initially seem like a counterpoint, Scozzy is a surrogate for Richard's slowly-evolving traits, including inner decay and a lack of focus. He has "dyed hair, worn spiky--the color of syrup or even treacle; but the roots were black (sedimentary dye from a slightly earlier phase)" (14), and his face is "'pixelated' for the TV screen: smeared, and done in squares; blurred, and done in boxes" (14). He is a product of modern technology, of dyes and electronics, but he, like technology and Richard, is putrefying and needs "information" to refocus, restore himself. His self-justification in this pursuit mirrors Richard's. For example, when an associate named "13" keeps Scozzy waiting in his parked car, he, on driving off, changes "from first to second and with a flick of the wrist [gives] his passenger four knuckles right across the cheekbone" (69). The violence is gratuitous and ironic because Scozzy is worried about being ticketed, having parked illegally. Like Richard, he considers himself fundamentally decent and at the same time justified in his violence. In fact, when the two meet at the Canal Creperie (Scozzy is reading Dreams Don't Mean Anything and Tull thinks, "That proved it. It was clinically impossible that this guy was playing with a full deck. Richard knew very well that nobody found him readable" [113]), Richard himself becomes "'pixelated,' and thoroughly, in the old sense" (116). Scozzy sees Richard as "an artistic two-dimensionalization of himself, hollow, wavery, approximate and rendered with minimum talent" (116). "Nobody" finds Tull readable but Scozzy; Scozzy is nobody, and if Richard is a portrait of Scozzy (116), then Richard is as base

and shallow as the thug himself. But because he is also pitiable, it takes the reader time to conclude he is the failure he portrays.

Like Richard, Scozzy seeks "information," and he seeks it in both violence and pornography: "Pornography was the story of his life" (309). Ultimately, his quest is as fruitless as Tull's: "Although he believed it contained the information he sought, Steve hadn't found it in pornography" (360). In the end, the violence in pornography and his life has to do more with hurting himself than hurting others. It is violence unleashed against failure, as is Richard's. Both realize the "information" has to do with tears and inner hurt, but their realizations are inconsequential to their lives. Scozzy will not let himself cry, and Richard, whose struggle is more complex because his quest to hurt Gwyn appears attainable, cannot admit inadequacy. The quest is merely a placebo that humors him, temporarily keeping truth away, just as Scozzy holds off tears in order to hold off "the information": "He raised a hand to his eyes. 'They're doing me all over the gaff,' he said, just to delay it a moment or two. 'They're doing me all over the gaff,' he said, just to buy a little time" (361).

At the suggestion of Gal Aplanalp, Richard accompanies Gwyn on an American book tour to promote Amelior Regained, and on tour Richard reaches his wit's end. He decides to write a terrible profile of Gwyn (other attempts to injure Gwyn include physical violence, via Scozzy; seducing Demeter, Gwyn's wife; and, lastly, accusing Gwyn of plagiarizing Amelior), to portray the cause of his misery as the poor, witless excuse for an author he believes Gwyn to be. The tour climaxes at a disastrous book signing/reading, at which Gwyn completely outshines

Richard. (He previously obtained eighteen copies of Untitled in a sack from his publisher, who told him to promote and sell them himself: "What could he do? Untitled was his youngest, and probably his last born. The sack looked ragged, frayed, at the end of its tether. But Richard swung it up on to his shoulder" [225]). Gwyn's reading theater is an example of "human congestion on a scale no longer imaginable in the civilized world" (276), while Richard's, which seats 725, has an audience of four. In typical Amis fashion, however, Richard's audience consists of one female, one black, one Native American and one fat man, "fabulously fat-- how his folds seemed to slur and slobber over two seats, over three!" (276-277). The humor derived from the political correctness of the audience, the most fascinating aspect of his book-reading, accents the low to which Richard has sunk. Consequently, it is not surprising he has a near-death-experience on a subsequent flight from Boston to New York. It is an appropriate metaphor; in America, he dies a slow, spiritual death: "Here in America he had noticed how much less he cared, every time, whether the plane he was in stayed up. There was so much less, every time, to come down to" (284). "Death is good" (284), he repeats to himself as it appears imminent.

Richard's life seems banal, useless, a failed novel unto itself. However, as base as Richard's behavior may be, Gwyn proves more base. The seemingly naive, lucky Barry is an envious blackguard who, though he has beaten Richard in a contest of success, will not rest until he beats Richard at every other contest, from chess to tennis. He trains solely to defeat Richard and subsequently pushes Richard deeper into ignominy, vowing never to compete with him again now that he (Gwyn)

is on top: "I think there just won't be a next time. I think we've got to the end of one another. This'll do me. It's a wrap" (358). Gwyn, an adulterer many times over, even proudly admits Richard's wife, Gina, services him sexually every week for money. Shortly after Richard discovers his wife and Gwyn, the narrator states, "The English language offered him no help--offered him nothing" (371). If literature is about not dying, then the ultimate failure of English to help Richard express himself truly represents his death as a literary person, a death Gwyn helped arrange.

Some critics see the revelation of Gwyn's poor character so late in the novel as a flaw:

The most puzzling flaw of The Information is that Barry's own thoughts and motivations are introduced into the novel very late, almost as an afterthought. Only then do readers discover that he is just as venal and narcissistic as Tull believes him to be. (Zeidner)

Although it concerns literary envy (which necessitates two writers), The Information is centered around Richard, not Gwyn, and is primarily seen through his eyes. It may, in fact, disconcert readers when they discover the depths of Gwyn's villainy, but surprise at Gwyn's wickedness, especially his adultery with Richard's wife, is surely part of the novel's plan. Richard is destined to become a non-entity, to suffer the effects of the unfair, unreasonable, declining twentieth century. Gina's guile is the last necessary ingredient.

At the end of The Information, Richard is "working on a way of forgiving Gina" (373) because if he forgives her infidelity she will be

forced to stay with him. And he is left with his twin boys, Marco and Marius, the most "realistically compelling" of all Richard's relationships (Diedrick 187) and the source of any salvation for which he can possibly hope. But "The gods of contemporary culture in The Information embrace Gwyn's imagined new world order and reject Richard's vision of difficulty and asceticism" (Diedrick 189). Gwyn, it turns out, is left considering yet another change of agents, and he also is the winner of an exorbitant literary prize called the "Profundity Requit." "

If The Information mirrors London Fields in its attempt to cast light on the reptilian corner of the human soul, it also mirrors the earlier work in its combination of first-person and third-person narration. The omniscient third-person narrator uses Richard as his main respondent-within-the-text:

The strangest pairing...is of hero and narrative voice. In Amis's last novel, Time's Arrow (1991), the disjunction between the describing presence and the experience described was the whole subject and method of the book, but when your hero is a literary man, there seems no reason to double the point of view. (Mars-Jones, "blight side")

In other words, Richard, despite his foray into iniquity, is more intelligent than Gwyn Barry. He is erudite enough to carry the novel, unlike the innocent narrator of Time's Arrow whose narrative gained meaning only through the disunion of his perception and the reader's. There is no real disunion between Richard and the reader; his predicament is basic and his emotions relatively clear, especially since the omniscient third-person reads his mind. However, this narrative third-

person does not like to keep his place:

Richard is rendered in the third person, where traditionally there can be free play and fertile overlap between creature and creator, but here the distinction is strongly defended, and a first person keeps butting in. (Mars-Jones, "blight side")

For instance, the very first line of The Information reads, "Cities at night, I feel, contain men who cry in their sleep and then say Nothing" (3). The simple personal pronoun "I" sets the stage for first-person narrative intrusion by the third-person narrator for the rest of the novel. In fact, within the first fifty pages, the narrator engages in a monologue on the condition of playground air in the twentieth century:

I was there in the fog. The fog was sorry about it--the fog was wretched about the whole thing. Like the fathers the fog had nowhere else to go. Ancient and stupid, but equipped with new chemical elements and contributions, the fog loomed and idled, hoping it wasn't in the way. (43)

The discourse does not cease with the personification of the chemical-laden fog (an excellent example of Amis' dry wit), but continues as the narrator, trying to comprehend a signed message from a little boy at the playground, says he needs to know what the little boy means "Because I need information from any source" (43). The little boy, as it turns out, is signing his name, "Tom," and the narrator responds in kind:

And I made the signs--the M, the A--with my strange and twisted fingers, thinking: how can I ever play the omniscient, the all-knowing, when I don't know anything? When I can't read

childish capitals in the apologetic fog. (43)

As in London Fields, the initials MA, which may have stood for Martin Amis, Mark Asprey or both, are employed. Mars-Jones writes, "In The Information, Richard Tull is in the third person, and 'Martin Amis' occupies the first" ("blight side"). In other words, the third-person Amis uses Tull as the respondent through whom the story is narrated, while another Amis comments in first-person. This mixture of first-person and third-person, and Amis' ability to effectively reapply it in The Information after having used it in London Fields, is an instance of style over story--narrative layering is more important than narrative itself.

The first-person discourse in the park ends with MA telling the reader how insignificant people actually are in the grand scheme:

When we die, our bodies will eventually go back where they came from: to a dying star, our own, five billion years from now, some time around the year 5,000,001,995. (46)

His last question is, "And what are we?" The intimation is that we are nothing, which is, according to one possible interpretation, also how "the information" is defined. People, however, realize the import of "the information" only at night, when it comes to disturb their sleep, as it does Richard's. It is no surprise that when he details Richard's decline, the narrator switches to a first-person plural address: "Every morning we leave more in the bed, more of ourselves, as our bodies make their own preparations for reunion with the cosmos" (373). Story is related through third-person narration, through Richard, while meanings, or inflections of meanings, are deciphered in bits throughout the novel

by Mars-Jones' "Martin Amis."

The narrator returns to his discourse on the workings of space a quarter of the way through the novel, noting that, when measured in kilometers instead of miles, the distances are much rounder numbers. He notes, for example, that the speed of light is 186,282 mps but "very close" to 300,000 kps, while one light hour is 670,000,000 miles (a relatively round number) but "very close" to 1,000,000,000 kilometers. He wonders, "Is this arbitrary anyway? Is this anthropic? In a million millennia, the sun will be bigger. It will feel nearer. In a million millennia, if you are still reading me, you can check these words against personal experience" (81). The narrator/author, Mars-Jones' "Martin Amis," believes in literary immortality, the possibility that he himself may not die, which Richard figured as the purpose of literature. The second-person address, the "you" of the passage, even offers some hope of literary immortality for the reader. In short, the reader shares literature with the author as part of the creative, meaning-making process. The author relies on reader participation so the novel may express meanings (as opposed to Meaning): "Like Richard himself, this narrator views individual miseries as chapters in a much longer story of cosmic abasement" (Diedrick 174). The themes of pain and sadness and the worry that all people will return to nothingness are particularly "anthropic," valid for all human history, past and present, offering a potential link for humans of all eras. Ironically, when the narrator discusses the "boiling" oceans of the future and the end of "the terrestrial story," he admits, "I don't honestly expect you to be reading me then" (81). His pessimism is based on fact but also on

his feelings about the twentieth century. The reading process provides the possibility for human continuance, but it does not guarantee eternity for any author, be it Gwyn Barry, Richard Tull, "Martin Amis" or Martin Amis.

Herein lies the inherent paradox of The Information: authors need to transmit information to achieve immortality, but if readership is decaying, then authorship is also doomed. Having plagiarized Amelior, Richard wonders, "Had he become Gwyn Barry? Was this the information?" (327). Barry is a literary non-entity, having sacrificed both identity and meaning in his books: "There was no sex in Amelior, and there was no gender either. Gwyn didn't write like a man. Gwyn didn't write like a woman. He wrote like something in between" (327). When Amis asks of the astronomical information, "Is this anthropic?" the answer is yes. It is human because humanity is devolving into something less exact, less specific than even basic gender. Like the stellar distances, Barry rounds-off humanity, and those who cling to a notion of self-identity are doomed to failure. Richard's greatest failure is to deny himself and "become" like Gwyn by plagiarizing Amelior--he destroys the little literary self he retains. Ironically, Martin Amis contributes to this process by muddying the relationship between himself and his executant so that authorship, like the stellar figures, is inexact. Recognizing postmodern human approximation, Terry Eagleton writes, "for pre-modern societies, who you are is where you come from; for modern cultures, who you are is where you are going; whereas in a postmodern world, who you are is nobody in particular." Richard Tull is nobody in particular, but he erroneously thinks he is defined by where he is going.

Amis' use of a first-person/third-person omniscient narrator can be seen either as a reiteration of an earlier technique now matured or simply as "old tricks." The former view is propounded by Diedrick, who sees the voice as a seasoned, mid-life Amis:

As in Dead Babies and Other People, Martin Amis appears throughout the novel as an omniscient but personalized narrator, presiding over what he calls an "anti-comedy" of rancor and thwarted revenge. He speaks in a voice of male mid-life angst, brooding on innocence lost, dreams deferred, fears unallayed. (174)

In the narrative duality, Diedrick sees the first-person's concerns coinciding with Richard Tull's. There is a bond between respondent (Tull), author and reader, all of whom live the twentieth century, including its breakdown of the human being--it is a world where the shallow Barry succeeds and the semi-shallow but pitiable Richard Tull does not.

Other critics, namely R.Z. Sheppard, see Amis' "Postmodern interjections from the author" as part of his "old tricks." But as a postmodern novelist, Amis makes authorial interjections requisite, a necessary part of the work used to help create and sustain the partnership between author and reader: postmodern literature depends more on the author/reader compound than on suspension of disbelief. Amis reveals both himself and his concerns in these interjections, paralleling them in Richard. He is an "author" but does not possess the answers, which must be provided by individuals. This reasoning means the novel must not only be open-ended, but must also end (as it does) in first-person, allowing the "author" final contact with his "reader" (just as the "I"

had initial contact). The partnership between author and reader is now inexact, changeable and more tenuous than ever before. The reader has greater "freedom" of interpretation, creating his own meanings, and the "postmodern interjections" are more individualized conduits than "old tricks."

Initially, the first-person parts of the narrative may strike some as nearly modern, giving the author special privilege. Mars-Jones argues that "The attraction of the [first-person] astronomical digressions in The Information is presumably their distance from the human, but they are given explicitly to the author himself" ("blight side"). However, as Mars-Jones later writes, "In any case, the strategy doesn't work. The separation of 'Martin Amis', with his astronomy and his literary theory, from the world he describes breaks down before too long." Forms break down in the postmodern world, so it is only proper that the distance between author, creation and reader should also implode. What begins as a hint of modernism quickly disintegrates into postmodernism--the futility of modernism being one of the novel's themes.

The anti-hero Richard Tull is modern in a postmodern world. He continually fails and evokes humor, with the added mockery that he does not learn from his failures. In the following passage, for instance, he attempts to take a vacuum cleaner to be repaired:

By the time he got the vacuum cleaner out of the apartment and onto the stairs Richard was wondering if he had ever suffered so. This, surely, is how we account for the darkness and the helpless melancholy of twentieth century literature. These writers, these dreamers and seekers, stood huddled like

shivering foundlings on the cliffs of a strange new world:
one with no servants in it. On the stairs and landings there
were bikes leaning everywhere, and also shackled to the
walls--and to the ceilings. He lived in a beehive of bikers.

(31)

The "strange new world" (which echoes Huxley's Brave New World) is one wherein a writer can discuss an eclectic assortment of subjects ranging from vacuum cleaners to literature to bikes all in one breath. Richard's world is postmodern, but Richard is modern, and so he suffers when confronted by the former's meaninglessness. In fact, as he tows the vacuum to the hall, he feels certain that "Samuel Beckett, at some vulnerable time in his life, had been obliged to take a vacuum cleaner in. Celine, too, and perhaps Kafka--if they had vacuum cleaners then" (31). Though he searches for solace in the thought that other modernists suffered from confrontations with the mundane, he continues to suffer because of the elitist notion that he is someone who should not have to deal with mundane things like vacuum cleaners or making money. He sees in himself a Leavisite who is above daily concerns.

Amis discourses on Richard's predicament, his modernism, which separates him from the world of readers. It is a matter of difficulty, of the reading public's desire to be pleased, not challenged:

Essentially Richard was a marooned modernist. If prompted, Gwyn Barry would probably agree with Herman Melville: that the art lay in pleasing the readers. Modernism was a brief divagation into difficulty; but Richard was still out there, in difficulty. He didn't want to please the readers. (125)

Richard's Untitled possesses "an octuple time scheme" and an incredible "rotating crew of sixteen unreliable narrators," which is why it induces actual physical distress in anyone (other than Scozzy) who attempts to read it. The irony of Richard's predicament is that he is a character in a novel that is not easy to read, not to be read simply for pleasure. In this sense, Tull is a parody of Amis himself. The Information, like all of Amis' novels, especially the later ones (Money, London Fields, Time's Arrow), challenges the reader. It is not easy to conclude what "Martin Amis" or Martin Amis is saying in a given passage. The astronomical digressions and the vacuum cleaner passage prove that postmodern prose can be difficult because of its greater separation from meaning than realist prose. For example, when Richard tries to explain what is wrong with the vacuum, the attendant, under "TYPE OF MALFUNCTION," finally writes "NOT WORKING," and Richard replies, "That ought to cover it" (33). Marooned modernists cannot relay information in the postmodern world--Richard ultimately stops trying because his structuralism is not understood or wanted.

Perhaps because of The Information's lack of structure, Richard's craving for form seems not only displaced, but also comical, such as when he receives the sack-full of copies of Untitled: "Richard drags this sack all across America: he is a comic Ancient Mariner condemned to suffer repeated humiliations for committing the sin of literary Modernism" (Diedrick 181). Amis' work, like Tull's, is connected to modernism in its digressions and intermixing of narrative voices. It is comprised of elements usurped from other modes and genres and re-packed with meanings. By employing shades of modernism in this mix,

Amis makes his work comical, like Tull, because he disunites it from the world-at-large, making it, unlike Tull, amorphous in the eyes of the reader. Readers laugh at Tull and what he represents: authorship. "Martin Amis," Tull's third-person storyteller who does not know how to keep his place in the fiction, parodies the postmodern author while manipulating a parody of a modernist, burying the notion of authorial privilege.

Gwyn Barry is the most postmodern character in The Information. His life lacks the structure Richard craves and believes Gwyn possesses. But Gwyn's marriage is a farce, his character amoral and his writing vapid. It is not surprising, though, that he ultimately goes on much as before, with his spiritually-void success. Gwyn is at home, indeed, could only survive in, an amoral world of disconnection and discontinuity. On the other hand, Richard, a "marooned modernist," finally claws to hold on to the last structure his life possesses: his wife and family, a structure he comes close to losing in a dark turnabout when Scozzy, Tull's inner double, nearly kills Richard's son Marco. There is reason for hope in the survival of the family, a seemingly insignificant example of form: "Soon the apple blossoms were everywhere, as an element"; they "flew in festive and hysterical profusion, as if all the trees were suddenly getting married" (373).

XI. Summation

Martin Amis' works speak for themselves: "All novelists in every book are looking for a voice--the right voice in the right place at the

right time" (Inferno 125); if voice is dynamic and used according to the needs of time and place, then Amis is successful. Like Madonna's selves, his novels change, reflecting the time in which they were written and the literary condition or "place"; but Amis characteristically argues that "place" is vague: "There are no rules for the novel, and I keep on being reminded of what a wonderfully lax and capacious form the novel is" (Haffenden 15). Literary "place" is almost a misnomer for Amis--one aspect of postmodernism can be said to be the dissolution of literary "place" (though at least a vague sense of "place" or condition must exist or even the loosest conception of the "novel" could not).

Nonetheless, certain general conditions do appear in the works. The first two novels, The Rachel Papers and Dead Babies, address two important facets of Amis' young life: his relationship with his father and his disaffection with the counterculture of the 1960s. Success and Other People answer the need for growth as a writer, for as decades change and Amis grows, these works advance experimentation with narrative voice, as illustrated by the "Martian" viewpoint in Other People (which Amis says he began "a year before Craig Raine's Martian poem appeared" [Haffenden 18]). His literary maturation is readily apparent: Success employs dual first-person narration and Other People's third-person is interrupted by an intrusive first-person. The effect is somewhat schizophrenic (on the part of the narrator/implian author) and sets the stage for more complex treatments of voice. Additionally, Other People is Amis' first serious experiment with altered temporality.

Money is best labelled (non-pejoratively) the first mature work in the Amis canon. It reverses the technique of Other People by using a

first-person narrator who is dogged by an implied author, who also has inserted himself in the text. The character "Martin Amis" goes so far as to tell the first-person narrator, John Self, that Self is a fiction and the former his creator: "Money. I'm in the book. Call me when you know" (218). The Amis character is ostensibly talking about payment for work on Self's script, but the irony is that as he creates Money he is scripting Self, who is unreliable because he is unwitting.

London Fields, Amis' most complex combination of first-person and third-person voice, is, curiously, the closest thing by him to Richard Tull's Untitled. The narrative is divided into two parts, ostensibly "non-fiction" halves of a whole; one of the halves employs three very unreliable respondents. London Fields also mocks the realist novel by using proper chapters with titles and balancing them with untitled sub-chapters containing first-person diatribes by the "author," the semi-omniscient Samson Young. In the end, the involvement of Young himself, who is and always was the killer, negates both plot and character development. At least half the "novel" turns out to be superfluous, a "novel-within-a-novel."

Time's Arrow is Amis' grandest experiment with temporality; the first-person narrator reads events as if occurring in solar time when they actually happen in reverse. Meaning is gained through the reader's knowledge of the disunion between narrative perception and the novel's events. In short, the narrator is most revealing in the way he errs. He is not, strictly speaking, an unreliable narrator, simply naive. Time's Arrow takes on added dimension by indicting the twentieth century (the failure of structures and disconcert for the human person), zeroing in

on humanity's and the Enlightenment's greatest failure: the Holocaust.

The Information revisits the first-person/third-person dichotomy of Other People, using a third-person point of view with first-person interruptions. Unlike Other People, The Information displays an acute awareness of modernity and post-modernity. Juxtaposing the pitiable Richard Tull and the contemptible Gwyn Barry personifies the twentieth century: two competing conditions (as they affect literary expression) both seem to be lacking, the former in purpose and the latter in depth.

Einstein's Monsters and the uncollected stories ("Denton's Death," "Let Me Count the Times" and "Career Move") function as testing grounds for literary techniques appearing in later novels. Einstein's Monsters also details Amis' arguments on what happens when people stop thinking, not technologically but humanly; his indictment of twentieth-century life rests on its paradoxical inhumanity. Interestingly, he admits in the introductory essay, "Thinkability," that he and his father butted heads over the (il)logic of nuclear weapons. The fact that the elder Amis argues their necessity, that there is a real, logical need for them, is a case in point of a neo-realist versus a postmodernist, who sees the argument as lacking purpose. It is a miniature of the literary debate they personify. David Lodge sums up the contrast through Philip Swallow, a character in Changing Places:

All I'm saying is that there is a generation gap, and I think it revolves around this public/private thing. Our generation--we subscribe to the old liberal doctrine of the inviolate self. It's the great tradition of realistic fiction, it's what novels are all about. The private life in

the foreground, history a distant rumble of gunfire, some-
where offstage. In Jane Austen not even a rumble. Well, the
novel is dying, and us with it. (250)

Notes

¹ New Statesman 14 Dec. 1979: 954.

² Amis cites Wodehouse as an influence. See S. Morrison 97.

³ Amis' notion that literature is exhausted is personified in Samson Young, who is suffering from twenty years of writer's block. See Diedrick 159.

⁴ As discussed in Part 1, the world of London Fields is in a state of terminal decay; it is a world of "aesthetic disillusion and cultural chaos" (Bernard 121).

⁵ Samson Young's doctor, Slizard (anagrammatically "Lizards"), tells Young that science "is getting very good at explaining how it killed you. How it killed things" (345). The reptilian physician is part of Amis' anti-science, anti-Enlightenment message.

⁶ See Part 1, section III for a contrast between Lucky Jim and The Rachel Papers.

⁷ The mixture of psychology and sexuality in Dead Babies recalls the plays of Joe Orton. For instance, Orton wrote in his Diaries that "The whole trouble with Western society today is the lack of anything worth concealing," immediately after which, as if in support, he recounts the following exchange between himself and another homosexual: "Labri made his exit into the bedroom with Kenneth, saying to me, 'After, I fuck you, yes?' 'You and whose army?' I said. 'Yes, good,' he said. 'There's a lack of understanding between the East and the West which is truly frightening,' I said. 'You frightened,' he said, 'I take it with vaseline [sic]. Very good for you.' 'Piss off,' I said." Using one's imagination, the conversation could almost be attributed to Dead

Babies' Marvell and Andy.

Orton mixes the psychological and the sexual in his plays, blending them with farce, as when Dr. Prentice, from What the Butler Saw, tries to convince a young girl to take her stockings off: "...kindly remove your stockings. I wish to see what effect your step-mother's death had upon your legs." The play ends with a Freudian comment by Dr. Rance: "How much more inspiring if, in those dark days, we'd seen what we see now. Instead, we had to be content with a cigar--the symbol falling far short, as we all realize, of the object itself."

See The Orton Diaries, ed. John Lahr (London: Minerva, 1989) 219 and Joe Orton, The Complete Plays, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1976) 366, 448.

⁸ See Part 1, section IV.

⁹ As Diedrick notes (164), "M.A." also stands for "Martin Amis."

¹⁰ Rev. of Other People, Publishers Weekly 24 April 1981: 70.

¹¹ See Diedrick 56-57 for more on this argument.

¹² See B. Morrison for more on poetic influences in Other People.

¹³ Rev. of Other People, New Yorker 10 Aug. 1981: 106-107.

¹⁴ Walter Nash calls the author of a text its "executant" and the reader a "respondent." He adds that "the executant-within-the-text" is the "persona who speaks for the author" and that the "respondent-within-the-text" is the "person controlled by the executant-within-the-text." See Nash 19.

¹⁵ From remarks made by Amis at a reading of The Information at Borders Book Shop, Philadelphia, on 5 May 1995.

¹⁶ Self's use of the word "urbane" is an example of the authorial

Amis showing through him.

¹⁷ Fielding Goodney, with his added personas as Frank the Phone and a woman, is postmodern in his lack of a static identity.

¹⁸ Self's accusation "It was you. It was you" parallels Sam's (or M.A.'s) admission in London Fields: "It was me. It was me" (470).

¹⁹ See Lodge, Art 17-20 for a discussion of "Teenage Skaz."

²⁰ Amis calls J.G. Ballard "England's least conventional writer" and a "glazed SF stylist, the counter-cultural adventurer, the poet-technologist of our modern setting." See Mrs. Nabokov 76.

²¹ Diedrick calls Amis' contention that he (Amis) will have to kill his wife and children after a nuclear attack "rigidly patriarchal," and he adds, "The reader is moved to ask: shouldn't his wife have some say in this?" (146).

²² Rev. of Einstein's Monsters, Publishers Weekly 3 April 1987: 66.

²³ Kafka's "machine," for maximum self-consciousness, carves the prisoner's crime into his flesh: "Whatever commandment the prisoner has disobeyed is written upon his body by the Harrow. This prisoner, for instance...will have written on his body: HONOR THY SUPERIORS!" See Franz Kafka, The Complete Stories, ed. Nahum M. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1971) 144.

²⁴ See Diedrick 192.

²⁵ As defined by Cuddon (48).

²⁶ See Harrison.

²⁷ Vonnegut's character, Billy Pilgrim, claims that the Tralfamadorians (aliens he says he has visited) see time laterally: "The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just the way we can look

at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever." He adds, "When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in bad condition in that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments." Cause and effect are effectively eliminated in the Tralfamadorian viewpoint. See Slaughterhouse-Five 27.

28 The word "Good" ("Dug") in the narrator's response should succeed not precede "How are you?" ("Oo y'rrah?") if the exchange is to sound correctly in reverse. It is an example, as Updike notes, of when Amis "appears to slip." See Updike 86.

29 Buchan writes that "The only character drawn is the soul"; Harrison says the story is "described by a passenger in Odilo Unverdorben's head—perhaps his soul, his own wounded psyche"; and Updike wonders why "this ousted soul has been directed and empowered to traverse Unverdorben's life backward..." (86).

30 For a more complete analysis of Lifton's influence on Time's Arrow, see Diedrick 165-170.

31 At the reading of The Information in Philadelphia, Amis noted that his father found his son's books "unreadable," making the word a pun when applied to Richard Tull.

Part 3: Critics

"I think there are a lot of people who think that my work is just a stew of used condoms. I'm a bit more interested now in feeling that I am a middle-aged writer with a body of work."

-Martin Amis, as quoted by
Susan Morrison in "The Wit
and the Fury of Martin Amis" 1

I. Kingsley Amis

"He is Kingsley Amis's Son." The preceding quote is followed by two sentences that make Martin Amis' parentage seem less than an asset:

This last fact is a boon to the Amis bashers. The idea that "success" is something inherited and not earned abounds in this green and not always pleasant land. Amis is deemed to have been "launched" on his father's cottomails. (Michener 109)

Kingsley Amis was "at the time of Martin's birth an unknown Assistant Lecturer at a provincial university in a provincial country [Wales]" (Hawkes 1). In other words, he was self-made, a mere university lecturer with an unknown name who went on to play a significant role in shaping the attitudes of post-war British fiction. Martin was perhaps unknown as a young man, but his name was not, and the import of the critics of whom Michener speaks is that he rode the Amis name to fame. He knew his first book would see print because he was Kingsley's son: "It wasn't tough. It was nice--it increased your confidence. It meant that your first novel would be published, out of mercenary curiosity if nothing else" (Wilson 106).² By way of anecdote, he also notes, "there was once a gentle joke about me in a New Statesman competition to think up unlikely book titles for unlikely writers and one of the winners was 'My Struggle,' by Martin Amis" (Wilson 106).

Even if it was virtually certain Amis' first novel would see print, his literary relationship with his father belies any notion that it was easy, at least emotionally, for him to become a successful author. During their first conversation in Money, John Self asks the Amis character

Amis about his father:

"Hey," I said. "Your dad, he's a writer too, isn't he? Bet that made it easier."

"Oh, sure. It's just like taking over the family pub." (86)

This exchange intimates that taking over the family pub (Self's father owns a very un-literary pub named for Shakespeare) is much easier than following in the footsteps of a famous literary father. Two of the most important considerations would naturally be criticism from one's father and dealing with the eventual, indeed, inevitable, comparisons of one's work to one's father's.

Beginning a literary career under the eye of Kingsley Amis is not a pleasant prospect. As Martin's career evolved, the former "angry young man" proved a harsh critic. Martin seemingly was aware of this even at an early stage:

Kingsley Amis reports that when his son was still living at home, "whenever I walked into a room where he was writing, he immediately put his hand over the paper in the typewriter." This account implies a father's interest turned back by a son's suspicion, but the son's way of representing the situation shifts the emphasis radically: "My father, I think, aided by a natural indolence, didn't really take much notice of my early efforts to write until I plonked the proof of my first novel on his desk." (Diedrick 5)

But Amis did become a writer, a famous or infamous one depending upon the critic, creating a singular literary situation: "Kingsley and Martin Amis are virtually unique as a father and son who were successful and

popular novelists at the same time, for over twenty years, until Kingsley's death in 1995" (Hawkes 1). Amis agrees with this assessment:

My position is unique, I think. My father and I both have a corpus of work out there at the same time: that's never happened before. John Updike's son writes some stories, Trollope's mum wrote a novel, Updike's mum wrote a novel, Auberon Waugh used to write novels, but no pair has stuck with it quite the way we have. (Wilson 106)

The coexistence of the two bodies of work troubles the younger Amis less than his father. Indeed, Martin enjoys his father's work,³ but Kingsley has not been forthcoming with literary praise. He finds his son's novels largely unreadable:

I really don't know what the subject matter is. It's his style. I can't get to the end of a paragraph. It's too ornate. It reminds me of what someone said about Kipling--"bombarded with felicities." It's very important to write a dull phrase from time to time--such as, "She felt so weary she lay down and fell asleep on the spot." You don't want to bombard the reader with felicities. It goes back to one of Martin's heroes--Nabokov. I lay it all at his door--that constant demonstrating of his command of English. Martin can be the funniest writer, and I admire his intelligence and discipline, but there's a terrible compulsive vividness in his style. (Michener 110)

Kingsley's reaction, especially his insistence that an author must insert "a dull phrase from time to time," reflects a Larkinesque need for

realism, an anti-modern approach. Kingsley believes literature should be accessible rather than metafictionally layered: "Amis's deceptively casual approach...express[es] his conviction that language loses its responsive energy and observant value when it becomes overjewelled and forcibly sublime" (Wolcott 53).

Yet the younger Amis' approach relies on metafictional layering to create new meanings for individual readers. He hopes his style, which unnerves his father, will call them back to his books at least twice:

Martin's fallen into bad company. He once remarked to me, "Motivation in the novel has more or less had its day." I said, "Oh, really." It's all those ideas about fiction--they're fatal to a novel. Fortunately, modernism's never really caught on here. Unlike in Paris or New York, we're not bursting with new ideas, thank God. Martin says, "I want people to read me twice." Well, it's got to be able to be understood for its significance the first time around, as it stands. (Michener 110)

Like Gwyn Barry, Martin is an omnivore of contemporary culture who regurgitates what he learns, but like Richard Tull, he is "difficult." Unlike his father, he does not believe in character motivation or the suspension of disbelief. Instead, the novel has become a showcase for literay prowess based on contemporary formlessness--all other considerations are secondary. He filters contemporary culture back to the reader through a sieve that separates rather than combines meanings.

Critics Martin Dodsworth and Jeff Giles regard technique, particularly metafictional layering, as problematic for Amis. Dodsworth calls

his attention to detail, his "compulsive vividness," distracting, saying it detracts from plots and character development: "The novels constantly refer to an idea of what they are (Jonsonian, Swiftian, even, in a morbid way, Dickensian), but an elaboration of immediate sensation diminishes the idea's importance" (334). Like Kingsley Amis, he reacts to the postmodern from a realist, anti-modern standpoint. Immediate sensation and the need to capture the moment before it swiftly expires are key elements in postmodern literature, having displaced plot and character development. If there is any import at all, it can only be found in the collective consideration of various "immediate" sensations. Even then, meaning remains a very subjective connotation. Writing on The Information, Giles criticizes what Kingsley Amis calls his son's "very highly wrought" (Kroll) sentences. To reiterate, Giles claims they are either "impossibly short or impossibly long" and adds that grammatical devices "crawl all over the page like flesh-eating microbes."⁴ (Ironically, Giles himself uses a very Amis-like simile in his description, something John Self or Samson Young might do.)

It can be argued that both critics and Amis senior are reacting adversely to the evolution of literature, specifically the novel—especially as defined in the conservative, anti-modern terms of Forster (Kingsley Amis, "always an antimodernist," rebels "against the role of the artist as deep-sea diver of the inner universe" [Wolcott 53]). The reader is now more important to textual meaning because it depends upon continuous re-definition to remain dynamic. Martin Amis' desire to be read more than once contains this notion of literary flux, as does Kingsley Amis' conclusion that readers receive an unpleasant

mental workout from his son: "The reader can't relax for a moment. It's so literary there isn't, to me, much room for feeling" (Kroll).

A difference in political outlook also plays a role in widening the literary gap. At first, Kingsley Amis appeared to adopt a liberal role, but that soon changed: "Amis pere...soon wearied of the role of 'Angry Young Man' to which his rebellious first novel had consigned him, and by early middle age he was, along with friends like the poet Philip Larkin, settling into the irascible, Blimpish persona of the 'Little Englander'" (Hawkes 9-10). Although best described as a centrist, Martin Amis leans more to the left than the right, and he claims he will never, like his father, switch sides:

He was a Communist, which I never have been; he was a member of the party. But the key thing about him and his contemporaries--these former Angry Young Men, all of whom tend to be right-wing now--is that while they weren't born into poverty, they didn't have much money. Then they made some money, and they wanted to hang on to it. And they lived through a time when the left was very aggressive and when union power made life unpleasant. There are many aspects of the left that I find unappealing, but what I am never going to be is right-wing in my heart. (S. Morrison 102)

Amis' disdain for the liberals-turned-conservatives of his father's generation is clear in an essay on one of his father's contemporaries, John Braine. He includes his father in a comment that portrays the full extent of Braine's defection:

One-time charter member of the Committee of 100, Labour

Party proselytiser, apologist for the USSR and (so it's said) darling of the working-class literati, Braine is now established as the most wild-eyed and querulous champion of the literary Right, a more colourful turncoat by far than either Conquest, Osborne or Amis. (Mrs. Nabokov 231)

After the publication of Room at the Top, Braine turned to "writing" and "polemicising" full time (232), and, like Amis' father, discovered the joy of having money. His sudden, paradoxical shift to the right, around 1966, was so complete that he pursued his conservatism with the same zeal as his liberalism, calling Martin Luther King "a trouble-maker and a very stupid man" and welcoming "the pope's encyclical on contraception" (235). In a final irony, Braine ended up poverty-stricken: "On his last Christmas Day, Braine ate lunch at a Community Centre, in the company of indigents" (237)—amongst the working poor, the lower class he first embraced then disdained. Amis dryly states that Braine "shows us, with exuberance and candour, how to get both ideologies wrong" (231-232).

Money, Amis notes in Money, corrupts. He dislikes Thatcher/Reagan policies of unbridled capitalism ("Thatcher is madder than Reagan, but I wouldn't want to live in America" [Michener 110]), nuclear weapons and the nuclear state of mind—all of which separate him from the conservatism of his father and Braine: "Before I was even the slightest bit politicized, it was always the poor I looked at. That seemed to be the basic fact about society—that there are poor people, the plagued, the unadvantaged" (S. Morrison 102). Concern for the disadvantaged often vanishes when success arrives, outshone by the glitter of finance and

issues of seemingly greater import.

Prose style and ideology separate Kingsley and Martin Amis. The former, who believes in an "Everyman approach to writing" (Wolcott 53), cannot even finish his son's work: "My father has read my first, third, and seventh novels, and none of the others. He can't get through them. He sends them windmilling through the air after twenty or thirty pages" (Amis, "Buy my Book," 97). There is, of course, the generation gap and even the older writer's envy of the younger: "Older writers should find younger writers inimical, because younger writers are sending them an unwelcome message. They are saying, 'It's not like that anymore. It's like this'" (Amis, "Buy my Book," 97). Discussing Somerset Maugham's reaction to his father's first novel, Lucky Jim, Amis recalls that Maugham commented, "the young men he so brilliantly describes truly represent the class with which his novel is concerned." It is an oft-quoted line, says Amis, but the final tag is often left out: "They are scum" (Amis, "Buy My Book," 97). No one likes to be replaced, and it is to be expected that older writers, seeing a succeeding generation undermine their ideas, would find the transition difficult. It is, perhaps, even more difficult when the person replacing you in the public eye is your liberal son: "Kingsley, who has an excellent sense of humor, did not find it very funny when a girl to whom he was introduced at a party some time ago said, 'Are you related to Martin Amis?'" (Michener 110).

II. Trial by Fire

Martin Amis is no stranger to harsh criticism. At the beginning of Charles Michener's "Britain's Brat of Letters," for instance, he is referred to as "a little shit" by an anonymous novelist, an anonymous literary agent and an anonymous English television producer (108). Critic Bruce Bawer attacks Amis personally, maintaining that style overshadows both his literature and personality:

On the whole, perhaps one of the best things that can be said about the style of The Moronic Inferno is that, being as short as they are, Amis's pieces don't have the opportunity to rise to the heights of windiness attained in his novels. (21)

Bawer also contends that Amis regards "seriousness as a sort of intellectual version of a dinner jacket—a style he wears when the occasion calls for it" (20).

Amis also receives criticism for being sexually explicit (pornographic). For example, in reviewing Dead Babies, Michael Page argues that the book contains "rather a detached voyeurism which makes it disturbing more for what it says about Amis than for what he says about his world."⁵ Additionally, Neil Powell, discussing The Rachel Papers, Dead Babies and Success, asserts that a "slippery" problem "involves the distinction between pornography and literature":

It seems to me that in all three novels—but most noticeably in Dead Babies—there are passages where the ironist's or satirist's distancing fails entirely. This is an aspect of the uncertainty of tone which so often weakens Amis's writing.

Pornography fulfils a simple and perhaps necessary purpose;
whereas literature is altogether more complicated. (44)

Amis, Powell contends, does not make the distinction clear enough, that "a confusion happens too often in [his] novels" (44). Indeed, as Amis develops, his works develop literary exhibitionism/pornography: sodomy occurs in Other People; Money "contains some of the most unflinching, appalling accounts of drunkenness and pornography in Western literature" (Hawkes 27); and London Fields exhibits the super-sexual Nicola Six (whose name is nearly homophonic for "sex"). In short, Amis has been "long hailed--and heckled--as the enfant terrible of English fiction" (S. Morrison 95).

However, there is no precedent for the criticism Amis received on the publication of The Information. Even before the firestorm of controversy erupted over the novel, "It already had a gossip-driven reputation as a roman a clef. Julian Barnes, Amis's close friend and the acclaimed author of 'Flaubert's Parrot' and 'A History of the World in 10½ Chapters,' was rumored to be the 'original' of the character Gwyn Barry, the successful author" (Wilson 96), a claim Diedrick rightly calls "misleadingly reductive" (185). Still, critics suspected that a novel about literary envy must derive its theme from real life.

Amis received an \$800,000 advance for The Information, considered "high by the standards of what the British call 'literary novels' but not when compared to the money paid to such mass-market novelists as Jeffrey Archer, John Grisham, and Barbara Taylor Bradford" (Diedrick 175). Nonetheless, Amis was vilified in the British press by critics who "thought it implausible that a literary author like Amis could

earn out a five-hundred-thousand-pound advance" (Wilson 96). The controversy was aggravated by the fact that, in order to obtain the advance, Amis dumped his long-time agent Pat Kavanagh (wife of Julian Barnes) and signed with American agent Andrew Wylie, whom the British press christened "The Jackal" with headlines such as "AMIS GOES THE WAY OF THE JACKAL."⁶ Moreover, Amis left his wife for an American heiress, and he spent 20,000 pounds to have his teeth repaired in America. The controversy was capped in 1996 when "it was announced that during a brief affair in the '70's, Amis had sired an illegitimate daughter, now twenty years old and a student at Oxford, and for two decades unaware of her true father's identity" (Hawkes 5).

Peers such as novelist A.S. Byatt (Possession) "seemed intent on turning Amis into his fictional creation John Self, the vulgar, promiscuous, superficial, and unscrupulous entrepreneur of Money" (Diedrick 175). Some criticism, such as that of Amis' dental work, is merely nonsensical. As Jonathan Wilson notes, British teeth "are well known to be crooked, tea-stained, and loosely held in place by gums ridden with periodontal disease" (96). Other criticism, however, is perhaps more deeply rooted in contemporary British literary life. Amis (it is argued) violated the unwritten rules followed by "literary" writers: "In London, where most writers of literary novels have struggled along on advances that bear some resemblance to what they earn publishers, Amis had the gall to ask for--and get--the moon" (Farr). In addition, the troubles, especially the rift between Amis and Barnes, may have shattered the "Boys' Club," a "loose affiliation" of friendly writers including Amis, Barnes, Salman Rushdie, Ian McEwan and travel author

Redmond O'Hanlon (Wilson 98). They may also be indicative of a grass-roots feeling among native British authors that newcomers from former colonies are infringing on British literary culture. Wilson quotes novelist Pat Barker (Regeneration, The Eye in the Door) saying, "I think that there is a certain amount of unacknowledged resentment among, to put it bluntly, white native British writers, on the ground that the additional tinge of exoticism when it comes to the Booker Prize does a writer no harm at all" (98).⁷ Amis, Wilson argues, was made the whipping-boy for disgruntled British authors, especially because he left his wife for an American and dumped Pat Kavanagh for an American: "He had become a dangerous mid-Atlantic hybrid--the papers had him shooting 'pool' in London pubs rather than playing snooker" (99). Paradoxically, Amis' first wife was also an American.

However, the harshest criticism with Byatt and grew. Wilson quotes her saying, "I always earn out my advances and I don't see why I should subsidize his greed, simply because he has a divorce to pay for and has just had all his teeth redone." Amis was guilty of "male turkey cocking" (99), she added. Developing the anti-foreigner thesis, Wilson contends that "All the anger at foreigners seemed to have been displaced onto Amis: he was the blond as black, the Brit as American, the Englishman as Asian" (101). Furthermore, the trouble soon included Kingsley Amis, said to be pitted against his son "in an Oedipal struggle over hard cash and reputation," a theory Wilson says champions "the conservative, insular, Little Englander, Larkinesque views associated...with Amis Senior's novels" (101).

This divisiveness exemplifies the postmodern condition. The theory

that Kingsley Amis was irate with his son indicates anti-modernism (antagonistic to both postmodernism and modernism) is still socially relevant; postmodernism does not dominate but shares space with modernism and anti-modernism. Nonetheless, postmodernism paradoxically indicates the lack of consensus characteristic of The Information controversy, indicating its preeminence.

Despite rumors of disunion amongst the "Boys' Club," one of Amis' staunchest supporters was member Salman Rushdie. Rushdie's predicament is a force for solidarity among British authors: "the reason there's a strong feeling of solidarity among writers of [Amis'] generation is Salman Rushdie, still facing an Islamic fatwah" (Farr). Saying Byatt behaved "disgracefully badly in the matter of Martin," Rushdie asserts that the media frenzy "was an attempt to murder a writer, and Antonia Byatt, in my view, became an accessory to that crime" (Wilson 102). Rushdie himself is, if one interprets Amis' words, a mixture of the forces that fueled The Information controversy: "He is caught up in a trap or a travesty; he is condemned to enact his own fictional themes of exile, ostracism, disjuncture, personal reinvention; he occupies a kind of shadowland; but he is formidably alive" (Mrs. Nabokov, 170). Rushdie has been forced to live out his fiction, abandoning his life for a metalife. But he is still "formidably alive" in the modern sense. Curiously, Rushdie's paradoxical existence mirrors Amis' paradoxical controversy: "There are times when Rushdie's predicament feels like a meaningless divagation, a chaotic accident; there are other times when it feels rivetingly central and exemplary" (Mrs. Nabokov, 171).

The ultimate irony is that The Information, a novel about literary

envy, spawned literary envy, an unplanned coincidence: "The book was always going to be about envy.... Because people doing each other down, competing, their savagery--that's my patch" (Farr). The irony, and all of its levels in this story, is very English, as Amis recognizes: "It's a very English story, I believe. There's a tremendous ambivalence here about worldly success" (Wilson 106). The British press and other critics succeeded in making life imitate art by making The Information (at least its theme) come to life. They enhanced the postmodernism of a postmodern literary work by merging a fictional story and a supposed reality, much in the way Salman Rushdie's life and fiction merged.

III. Martin Amis: Critic

Martin Amis has extensive experience as a social and literary critic. Upon graduating from Oxford, he became an editorial assistant at the Times Literary Supplement and later became fiction and poetry editor. In 1977, he became literary editor at the New Statesman, and he has done occasional journalism for myriad publications including the Observer, the London Review of Books, the Independent, the New Yorker, the New York Times Book Review, Atlantic, Esquire and Vanity Fair. His critical persona is, interestingly, very modern:

He used the occasion of his first review, published nearly two years before The Rachel Papers appeared, to think out loud about a literary form he would soon adapt to his own fiction: "satire nearly always employs at least a token fantasy.... Satire, as such, is not answerable to truth

but to literature, which ought not to be directly confused with life, let alone with politics." As this and his other literary pronouncements reveal, Amis is a modernist in his attitude toward art, despite his postmodern view of the world and the self. (Diedrick 106)

Amis himself claims the book review is both "the lowest and noblest literary form" (Mrs. Nabokov ix), recognizing the derision directed at and the importance of what he calls "far more clearly an art form (however minor) than any of the excursions of the New Journalism, some of which are as long as Middlemarch" (Inferno 10). Literary hackwork is necessarily derided, but the true book review is an example of erudite writing, translating the kernel of a piece of literature in less than a thousand words, helping the reader to grasp the germ of an idea and want to discover more. The reviewer is, then, akin to a messenger who brings the message of literature from its privileged place as art to the reader, who ascends to meet it.

Amis' critical canon consists of three collections, Invasion of the Space Invaders, The Moronic Inferno and Visiting Mrs. Nabokov. Much of his collected criticism has already been used here to support his views on postmodernism and the state of literature in general, but a brief survey of his critical essays illustrates the critical Martin Amis is driven by wit, candor and a literary incisiveness that sheds light on his own fiction.

The Invasion of the Space Invaders is the least important of Amis' book-length criticism. It is "a record of the time Amis spent in post-adolescent pursuit of onanistic pleasure, video-arcade style," a piece

whose graphics, format and "journalistic hackwork" are "designed for wide popular appeal" (Diedrick 110). His other criticism derives much of its impact from his English sense of humor, his wit. He is not afraid to procure humor from any source, including himself. For instance, after seeing a popular movie with Salman Rushdie, he writes, "About eighteen months ago, I went to see 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' at a North London cineplex. Very soon I was filled with a yearning to be doing something else (standing at a bus stop in the rain, for example)" ("Jane's World" 31). In an essay entitled "The New Evangelists," a piece on fundamentalism in America, Amis is accosted by "the young man on my left, who had kindly shared his Bible with me during the readings." The man turns and asks, "'You wanna pray together?'--and I, for some reason, said, 'Surely'" (Inferno 116-117). His self-abasement and inability to explain his own actions while trying to decipher the meaning behind the actions of others give his pieces a human feel. He informs the reader that the human animal and the world he inhabits are based on perspectives. It often seems easier to see inward than outward, but the task is no less difficult. Still, Amis' wit softens both inward and outward images. For instance, while writing about the film festival at Cannes, he describes his view:

By late afternoon, spidery transvestites--who look remarkably like the Platonic ideal of a British tart--flit among the tables, chatting to the Japanese nabobs and bejeaned Swedish pornographers who slump grumbling there. Minor thespians sometimes join us. A pretty French actress sat down next to me one evening. I wasn't very excited. I had already seen what

her breasts looked like the day before, in La Dentelliere.

(Mrs. Nabokov 210-211)

Amis, unafraid to insult British sensibility and violate decorum, also is not afraid to confront a popular British pastime—darts. In "Darts: Gutted for Keith," he writes, "an atmosphere of piss-taking one-upmanship is the natural background of darts" (Mrs. Nabokov 225), a satiric comment foreshadowing his conclusion: "All sports are eventually confining, and there is no cave deeper or darker than darts" (230). (The essay's subject, Keith Deller, "shock winner of the 1983 World Championship" [227], certainly helped Amis create London Fields' dart ace, Keith Talent.) Amis delights in irony, in stratifying meanings, and it is a quality he admires in others, especially when found in unexpected locations such as Gore Vidal's wit: "I have never met an American so English in his irony. No issue is serious enough for him to resist its satirical possibilities" (Inferno 104).

Mixed with Amis' wit is candor. Especially as a critic, he possesses anti-modern honesty and frankness. For instance, in describing his country's reaction to a BBC production of Pride and Prejudice, he focuses on the heart of the program—its portrayal of past greatness: "Much of this enthusiasm is, of course, collateral enthusiasm, or Heritage enthusiasm: a blend of disembodied snobbery and vague postimperial tristesse" ("Jane's World" 32). He is unafraid of admitting that, in the postmodern era, British colonial greatness has disintegrated, leaving only the yearning for greatness the twentieth century bred but cannot sustain. Similarly, he writes of collapsing morality in America brought on by Reaganism: "The Republican Convention [1988] is history now, and

history didn't look too good down in New Orleans, sapped and battered by eight years of Ronald Reagan" (Mrs. Nabokov 99). Of Reagan himself, he later writes, "One of Dickens's hypocrites has a facial paralysis that gives him a profile of noble immobility; this is the side he presents to his clients, while the hidden half snickers and gloats" (104). His most candid moment, however, like some of his most witty, comes as he discusses himself in a wrenching essay on AIDS entitled, "Making sense of AIDS." While discussing the disease's social ramifications, he admits he ignorantly used "jargon" language in a previous short story ("Bujak and the Strong Force"): "To my horror (and the shock was physical, dizzying, armpit-igniting) I saw that I--or my Jewish-American narrator--had used the word 'faggots'!" (Inferno 197).⁸ He then admits, seemingly descending from a critical ivory tower, that he began to "understand the American tendency to euphemise with jargon, and its misplaced homage to the power of the word" (197). His candor leads him to add to this same essay a description of how the rectum deals with bodily fluids so that readers might better understand the way AIDS is primarily transmitted in the homosexual community. In his postscript, he says the description caused "resistance to corporeal truth" at the Observer, which published the essay, leading him to reason that even at so-called enlightened institutions there is "a reluctance to know" (197). The AIDS essay is innovative not only for this description, but also for its sympathetic tone and genuine concern:

It stands as a reminder that behind the frenzied, cruel, hard-edged self-obsessed characters that populate his fiction is

an author possessing a fully human, and humane, range of emotional and moral responses. The entire essay is an example of sustained imaginative sympathy. (Diedrick 112)

Sympathy is generally lacking in Amis' prose, whether fiction or non-fiction. He is often more intent on words, on the turn of a phrase or employing a witticism. Characters in his novels, from the diabolical Quentin/Johnny to John Self to Gwyn Barry, lack empathy and symbolize worlds that fall victim to that same lack--one reason his worlds are in a permanent state of decay.

Amis' strength, however, is literature, and his literary voice and incisiveness surface most often in his criticism. In spite of his modern leanings when it comes to criticism as an art form, he retains the view that twentieth-century literature has been humbled--it no longer resides with the Leavisites: "Literature is, among other things, a talent contest, and every reader must find his personal great tradition" ("Before Taste" 114). He adds that those who study literature venture, vainly, to keep it a subject only for the erudite and away from the "commoner" through new approaches such as "hermeneutics" and "syntagmatics": "One could attribute these fragmentations to the rise of the universities and their attempt to make the study of literature, if not as hard as philosophy or physics, certainly a lot harder than geography" (112).

The paradox, then, is that Amis the modernist critic defends the anti-modern/postmodern conditions into which literature has [de]volved. It is a signal example of his own fragmented, postmodern mindset: his ability to hold both positions simultaneously (and parody them in his fiction) and to find not only meanings but also applications for them

indicates his own semi-conscious postmodern state.

As a literary critic, Amis replicates the sentiments of his father, noting unabashedly that he views younger writers as artists infringing on his generation's territory. For instance, in an essay on Vox author Nicholson Baker, he says (with an ironic overtone) he is "very hurt that Vox was doing quite so well," that Baker himself is "inadmissably young (thirty-six), and never before had I interviewed a literary junior" (Mrs. Nabokov 190). Candor and wit combine with linguistic savvy to produce his unique critical style. He is just as witty, and just as revealing, upon meeting Will Self and Lawrence Norfolk in Boston and Chicago, respectively: "These younger writers cause me to defy my own literary law: I like them. They aren't scum" ("Buy My Book" 97). The epithet "scum" recalls Somerset Maugham's comment about Kingsley Amis' generation: Maugham disdained his juniors; Kingsley Amis disdained his juniors; and Martin Amis wants to disdain his juniors but finds it difficult.

Amis' incongruities also include his penchant for criticizing in others' work what he freely employs in his own. While reviewing Joan Didion's A Book of Common Prayer, for example, he finds in it an ineffective anti-style:

Towards the end, such is the indirection on display, Miss Didion seems incapable of starting a new subordinate clause without splintering off into a new paragraph.

In fact she had.

Told Leonard what she was going to do.

She was going to stay.

Not 'stay' precisely.

'Not leave' is more like it.

and

I am told, and so she said.

I heard later.

According to her passport. It was reported.

Apparently.

are examples. I find this kind of writing as resonant as a pop-gun. The most poetic thing about Miss Didion's prose in this novel is that it doesn't go all the way across the page.

(Inferno 167)

Amis himself employs fragmented prose that travels diagonally across the page in The Information (44), and the thought processes of the writer in Didion's work are no less fragmentary than those of London Fields' Samson Young, who establishes an undertone of incoherence at the outset: "I must remain calm. I'm on deadline too here, don't forget. Oh, the pregnant agitation. Someone is tickling my heart with delicate fingers. Death is much on people's minds" (1). Who else is on deadline, as the "too" of the first sentence implies? And what does "death" have to do with the rest of this short paragraph? It seems as if Amis criticizes his own techniques, which simply adds to the paradoxical views of Amis the critic as opposed to Amis the author of fiction. In accordance with his own understanding of contemporary society, however, he can wear many faces and not be concerned with their cumulative effect since the moment is all that matters.

Other essays reveal still more aspects of Amis' literary psyche,

such as why he chooses to employ certain techniques. "Joseph Heller, *Giantslayer*," for example, begins with a discussion of novel titles:

A good title isn't exactly a seal of approval, but a bad one will seriously detract from a novel's aura. Increasingly, a 'brilliant' title, like Hangover Square or Ballad of the Sad Cafe, is almost a guarantor of a very minor work. It appears that the classic titles give substance to an idea that, when it comes, seems to have been there all along: Pride and Prejudice, Hard Times, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Lolita. (Inferno 125)

Amis himself follows this advice at times and ignores it at others. Novels such as Success, Money and Time's Arrow have succinct titles that, when the novel is read, point to at least a semi-fixed notion running throughout the work, mostly as a current of anti-modernism. Other titles, like Other People, London Fields and The Information, are less fixed, leaving the reader wondering at the end which of the many themes the title signifies. The answer is, of course, none and all. These are Amis' most postmodern titles: they do not "give substance to an idea that...seems to have been there all along."

As his critical essays reveal, Amis' influences are myriad. His father and Philip Larkin are important factors in his development, and Kurt Vonnegut, to name just one American, provides singular motivation for Time's Arrow. In fact, Vonnegut can also be said to have influenced Amis' "Martian" perspective for novels such as Other People and Money: "In his fiction Vonnegut's most crucial imaginative habit is to gaze down at humanity as if from another world, fascinated by Earthling

mores yet baffled by our convulsive quests for order, certainty and justice" (Inferno 134). However, with the exceptions of Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin, no two influences turn out to be as important and revealing as Vladimir Nabokov and Saul Bellow.

A. Vladimir Nabokov

Above all, Martin Amis feels a genuine affection for the Nabokov family and the literary tradition the name represents. On the death of Vera Nabokov, whom he interviewed in 1981, these feelings were clear: "I valued the memory of my visit because it provided a living link with her husband, whom I have always idolised; in her, it seemed, he lived on" (Mrs. Nabokov 119-120). Nabokov's literary technique, his mastery of words and languages, inspires Amis:

Amis's choice of word is just as exuberantly eccentric—he often tries to distance the reader from his or her everyday surroundings, to make his audience perceive the world anew by describing it from an alien perspective, in the "Martian" style made fashionable in the '80's by poets like Craig Raine. (Hawkes 6).

Kingsley Amis acknowledged the literary kinship between Nabokov and his son when he laid the blame for Amis' style on Nabokov's doorstep.

Nabokov is interesting, too, because he resides on the cusp of the postmodern, employing many of the techniques postmodernists use but also retaining the modern notion that literature is its own end, an art that should be perceived as art—a point Amis himself argues: "Nabokov...has

a distinctive modernity in that all his books are to some extent 'about art' ("Black Farces" 73). However, the postmodern Amis adds, "one can quickly reassure sceptical readers that the theme is carried by Nabokov with unique sympathy and lightness--and, besides, art is no longer quite the subject it once was" (74). Because of twentieth-century decay, particularly of literature, Amis looks to the late modern/early postmodern Nabokov as someone who will soon seem "exemplary" in style (74). It is a style he tries to adopt, but he again finds himself in a paradox: how can he, trapped in postmodernism in a century approaching terminal intellectual decay, recapture the style Nabokov created amidst altering conditions? If "Thunderheads, bad eyesight, nausea, migraine, false dusks, unseasonal weather, states of waking and half-sleep, carrion, coincidence, inventions [and] mirrors" are "subliminal watermarks" of Nabokov's work ("Black Farces" 75), then crapulence, sex, sodomy, pornography, prevarication, dwarfism, ugliness, money, greed and lust, apocalyptic skies, drugs, self-love, self-loss, self-sickness and the reptilian are watermarks of Amis' work. Although neither is flowering, his world is by far the more decayed. Nevertheless, Amis maintains Nabokov must be seen as sublime:

The sublime directed at our fallen world of squalor, absurdity and talentlessness. Sublimity replaces the ideas of motivation and plot with those of obsession and destiny. It suspends moral judgements in favour of remorselessness, a helter-skelter intensity. It does not proceed to a conclusion so much as accumulate possibilities of pain and danger. ("Black Farces" 76).

The idea that sublimity can be found in the ugliest and most decrepit areas of the human arena closes the gap between Amis and Nabokov. Both worlds are sick, in need of a rejuvenation that will never arrive.

Similarities abound between the two authors' works, the influence of the older clear in the work of the younger. As David Hawkes notes, for instance, Nabokov's Pale Fire studies literary jealousy and competition, as does The Information (7). Amis, too, discusses points about Nabokov's fiction that could easily be made about his own. For example, while writing on King, Queen, Knave, he cites an extensive passage, part of which reads, "His hairbrush was packed but he had a pocket comb. His scalp felt scaly and itched. He buttoned up his wrinkled shirt. Never mind. Nothing mattered. Trying to ignore loathsome contacts, he attached his soft collar, which immediately grasped him round the neck like a cold compress" ("Black Farces" 79). Amis argues that the passage (which contains examples of stream-of-consciousness writing) "combines horror with grotesque humour, showing Nabokov's quirky love for the duplicity of everyday objects when perceived through mutinous senses" (79). Amis also combines horror and the grotesque while presenting the mundane, as this passage from Money illustrates:

My head is a city, and various pains have now taken up residence in various parts of my face. A gum-and-bone ache has launched a cooperative on my upper west side. Across the park, neuralgia has rented a duplex in my fashionable east seventies. Downtown, my chin throbs with lofts of jaw-loss. As for my brain, my hundreds, it's Harlem up there, expanding in the summer fires. It boils and swells. One day soon it is

going to burst. (30)

John Self's description of his physical state is humorously grotesque: this passage presents Self's senses and his physical body as "mutinous," the former using the metaphor of a city to illustrate the latter's collapse.

Ultimately, Amis' debt to Nabokov is best described in Nabokov's signal work, Lolita. In an essay entitled, "On a Book Entitled Lolita," which is appended to the novel, Nabokov makes three points that help put the book in perspective. The first is the modernist notion that the book is its own end: "I happen to be the kind of author who in starting to work on a book has no other purpose than to get rid of that book" (311); the second concerns a definition of pornography, which "connotes mediocrity, commercialism, and certain strict rules of narration" (313); the third concerns his own humility towards his use of English (his native tongue is Russian), a language which for him lacks "the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions-- which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way" (317). Although his sensibility is postmodern, Amis theorizes about the novel in Nabokovian fashion, saying, "In art, in a sense, nothing really matters; no one gets hurt; it is only a game" ("Lolita Reconsidered" 118). The purpose of a book is the book; the purpose of the author is the book. More important, Amis, who has himself been dubbed a pornographer, argues that "Lolita is a cruel book about cruelty" ("Lolita Reconsidered" 110), that the despicable narrator Humbert Humbert's "sin is biological, a sin against the ordinary. He has made ordinary biology impossible: marriage, child-

birth, a daughter, ordinary happiness, ordinary health" ("Lolita Reconsidered" 118). Art, pornography and language go hand in hand (in hand) for both Nabokov and Amis. The first is corrupted by the second, and both are presented through the third. Both believe society is decaying. For Amis, art is not what it once was because the subject matter has markedly decayed in the late twentieth century, leaving the ideas of language and art in a state of limbo, afloat with few anchors except stylists like Nabokov. Any sense of how the modern and postmodern coincide in Amis' work can be seen earlier in Lolita.

The opening paragraph of Lolita contains a line that could be spoken by Samson Young: "You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" (9). The narrator, Humbert Humbert, "without question an honest-to-God, open-and-shut sexual deviant" ("Lolita Reconsidered" 109), is a proponent of determinism. He blames his love for younger girls, or "nymphets," on his failure to consummate a childhood union with his Poe-esque nymphet Annabel. Humbert considers her "the initial fateful elf in my life," adding that "the poison was in the wound, and the wound remained ever open" (18). Discussing himself in the third-person, he also claims, "Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good. Really and truly, he did" (19). His self-love and verbal affectation are later found in Amis' characters Gregory Riding and Gwyn Barry, both loathsome for their lack of humanity and overriding self-assurance.

Humbert, however, is also insane in much the same way as the narrators of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat." When, for instance, Lolita extends her legs across his lap early in the novel, Humbert writes, "By this time I was in a state of ex-

citement bordering on insanity; but I also had the cunning of the insane" (58). His insanity and his propensity for addressing the reader ("But every once in a while I have to remind the reader of my appearance much as a professional novelist" [104] and "The reader may well imagine what I answered my pet when...she would ask me if she could go with Carl and Al here to the roller-skating rink" [160]) make the reader question the veracity of events, just as a reader questions the stories told by the narrator of Other People (Prince?), John Self, Samson Young and M.A. of The Information. The character Lolita is, Amis argues, "a creation of Humbert Humbert's. We have only Humbert's word for her. And whatever it is that is wrong with Humbert, not even his short-lived mother...would claim that her son was playing with a full deck" ("Lolita Reconsidered" 110). Amis goes on to note that Nabokov wrote entire novels (Despair, The Eye, Pale Fire) in which "the narrators have no idea what is going on at all" (110), and it is the simple fact that Humbert can feign a sort of sanity, a learnedness, a command of thought via a command of language, that makes him a precursor for Amis' narratives. Consider the manipulative narrator of Other People, who mentally (and arguably physically) abuses Mary Lamb, as opposed to Humbert and his overt physical and mental hold on the adolescent Lolita:

Of course, the initial stage [of Lamb's narrator-induced aphasia] is always the most difficult in a case like this. I'm pleased, actually. No, I am. We've got phase one over with, and she has survived quite creditably. Between ourselves, this isn't my style at all really. The choice wasn't truly mine, although I naturally exercise a degree of control.

It had to be like this. As I said earlier, she asked for it.⁹

For all intents and purposes, the above passage could be from Lolita, with the narrator at once claiming and disdaining responsibility for what is happening to the main female character. Like Humbert Humbert, the narrator of Other People realizes he is acting but also claims his actions are not entirely under his control. More important, both narrators indicate, subconsciously at least, they are playing roles in a fiction.

Like Amis' narrators, Humbert toys with the fiction/reality dichotomy. Near the novel's end, for instance, he rediscovers Lolita and asks if she will, someday, return to him:

"No," she said smiling, "no."

"It would have made all the difference," said Humbert Humbert.

Then I pulled out my automatic—I mean this is the kind of fool thing a reader might suppose I did. It never even occurred to me to do it. (280)

Humbert plays with the dramatic expectations of his reader, just as Samson Young does in continually building a scenario of betrayal and murder in London Fields. Since he labeled himself a murderer at the beginning of the novel, Humbert realizes the reader expects a murder, and who better to be the subject of the murder than (in Humbert's eyes) the traitorous Lolita? Like Young, he defies the reader's expectations. Indeed, he mocks them. He creates a metafictional scenario in which, if only for a moment, he allows the reader to believe he will finally kill

Lolita. Young's entire narrative turns out to be metafictional, a story created to cover his own involvement with the fiction.

At the end of Lolita, Humbert again refers to his narrative in a metafictional way, adding to his self-realization a recognition of an oncoming postmodern condition:

This then is my story. I have reread it. It has bits of marrow sticking to it, and blood, and beautiful bright-green flies. At this or that twist of it I feel my slippery self eluding me, gliding into deeper and darker waters than I care to probe. (308)

Both Humbert's physical (marrow, blood) and mental selves are part of the narrative he wrought. He ultimately dissolves, an author, a character, a fornicator, a deviant and a pedophile, all of which spill, in the end, over his manuscript in the form of blood, marrow, flies and slippery selves. However, he had to disintegrate, if only from a sense of rectitude: "We are moved by the ending of Lolita, by its finality and justice, because--perhaps only subliminally--we have seen it coming" ("Lolita Reconsidered" 115). The reader foresees Humbert's unstoppable decay and final dissolution. By his own admission, his lust for Lolita could not continue. She has to grow up and pass out of the state of "nymphet," leaving Humbert purposeless.

Amis' works portray the world in a state of decay suspended only because fiction holds it fast. As literature progresses, however, from the modern/postmodern Lolita to the postmodern The Information, decay becomes worse and worse. Nabokov uses verbal artifice (style) to bridge the gap between the reader and the art of decay, and Amis uses the same

technique in an attempt to bridge an ever-widening gap.

B. Saul Bellow

"He looks like an omniscient tortoise"¹⁰

Like Nabokov, Saul Bellow writes on the cusp of the modern and postmodern, even showing signs of anti-modernism. His work influences Amis in ways both tangible and intangible. David Hawkes, for instance, notes that Nabokov, Bellow and Amis all use characters that are "contradictory and yet complementary":

The relationship in Humboldt's Gift [Bellow] between Humboldt and Citrine, for example, parallels the one between Shade and Kinbote in Pale Fire, and Amis uses the same technique in works like Success, London Fields and The Information. (7)

More important, Bellow sees the twentieth century as problematic, as does Amis, but Bellow witnesses the decay from its beginnings, from a World War II vantage point when it is clear the modern social ideal is collapsing. Amis writes about the literary aspects of this decline and Bellow's answer to it in the opening essay of The Moronic Inferno, "Saul Bellow":

The heroes of Saul Bellow's major novels are intellectuals; they are also (if you follow me) heroes, which makes Bellow doubly remarkable. In thumbnail terms, the original protagonists of literature were gods; later, they were demigods; later still, they were kings, generals, fabulous lovers, at once superhuman, human and all too human; eventually, they

turned into ordinary people. The twentieth century has been called an ironic age, as opposed to a heroic, tragic or romantic one; even realism, rock-bottom realism, is felt to be a bit grand for the twentieth century. Nowadays, our protagonists are a good deal lower down the human scale than their creators: they are anti-heroes, non-heroes, sub-heroes.

(17)

In other words, Bellow combats "the myth of decline," which "has never looked less like a myth and more like a reality" ("Saul Bellow" 22). His unique standpoint lets him philosophize through his characters about mankind's place in the changing world. For example, Joseph, the first-person narrator of Dangling Man (his first novel) is trapped in limbo, able to see part of himself slipping away but unable to do anything about it:

For legal purposes, I am that older self, and if a question of my identity were to arise I could do nothing but point to my attributes of yesterday. I have not tried to bring myself up to date, either from indifference or from fear. Very little about the Joseph of a year ago pleases me. I cannot help laughing at him, at some of his traits and sayings. (26)

Joseph's former traits include being a steadily employed college graduate, married, studious in his choice of clothes, a Communist, a student of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. All of these modern notions have been discarded, or, rather, have fallen away from him. He is living the transformation from modernity to postmodernity and reacting with anti-modern discontent.

Bellow redefines modernity, perhaps unknowingly giving an opening to postmodernism. Amis perceives this phenomenon in his review of More Die of Heartbreak: "It is a love story, but a modern one. 'Modern': what has Bellow done to that word? In Bellow, modern now comes with its own special static, its own humiliating helplessness, its own unbearable agitation" (Mrs. Nabokov 135). "Modern" continues to sound more like a postmodern hybrid. For example, Amis declares that the character Benn Crader "has innocence, and we all know what modernity will do with that. Innocence is a claim to immunity, and there is no immunity any more; modernity makes no exceptions" (137). Crader forcibly recalls Terry Eagleton's idea that "in a postmodern world, who you are is nobody in particular": having no immunity means one is subject to social forces, to the splintering effects of the twentieth century—no one is special, no one unique. Benn Crader, like Eagleton's postmodernist, is nobody in particular.

Bellow's fiction is fraught with elements that prefigure the oncoming postmodern era, but it is never fully accepted. Even in the case of Dangling Man, it is hoped that, despite his claims, Joseph will have a future, as his brother Amos claims to have:

"Well, who the devil has one?"

"Everybody," Amos said. "I have."

"Well, you're in luck. I'd think about it a little if I were you. There are many of people, hundreds of thousands, who have had to give up all thought of future. There is no personal future any more." (65)

The same antithetical forces that fuel this exchange are at work in

Amis' fiction. For instance, in Money (subtitled A Suicide Note) John Self is to be killed off through the machinations of author/character Martin Amis. Self's death would mean a victory for the postmodern: the destruction of the static self. However, he does not die. He continues to live in spite of Martin Amis. Similarly, Richard Tull, the battered modernist of The Information, is seemingly nullified at the end of the novel, but he still continues to live in spite of the forces against him. At the end of these works, modernity may be a meager force, but it exists. A struggle is necessary to retain the human:

Many times in Bellow's novels we are reminded that 'being human' isn't the automatic condition of every human being. Like freedom or sanity, it is not a given but a gift, a talent, an accomplishment, an objective. In achieving it, some will need more time or thought or help. And, put that way, it doesn't sound too hard a lesson to learn. (Inferno 208)

Just as Joseph in Dangling Man struggles to recapture the human in himself, so do John Self and Richard Tull struggle to retain it in a world that fights them at every turn. It is true Amis' characters lose the battle, but they live through it (except in Dead Babies), offering the slightest glimmer of hope.

Interestingly, Bellow also identifies anti-modernism in his works, such as More Die of Heartbreak:

Bellow quotes Larkin as follows: 'In everyone there sleeps a sense of life according to love.' 'He also says that people dream "of all they might have done had they been loved.

Nothing cures that". And nothing—i.e. death—did cure that.

(Mrs. Nabokov 134)

Larkin, Amis continues, never had heartbreak because "death crowded love out" (134). Love, he concludes, is key to the novel: "Perhaps one of the many, many things the new novel has to say is that you need heartbreak, to keep you human" (134). In Dangling Man, the modern is seen as sometimes anti-human (recalling Amis' chief criticism) and viewed from an anti-modern perspective, albeit a humorous one:

Finally she [Minna] stopped before George Hayza. We heard them arguing. It turned out that she wanted him to record on the machine a poem he had made popular years ago when he had played at being a surrealist. To his credit, he refused. That is, he tried to refuse, reddening and smiling anxiously. He wanted to live it down. Everybody was tired of it, he most of all. (42-43)

Bellow's reaction to the modern-era surrealist movement is satiric; he treats it as if it breeds malaise rather than intellectual stimulation. The humanity seems to drain from the party-goers in the scene when the surrealist poem is mentioned. Their energy and their attempt to remain human are threatened by the past, whose inertia keeps it alive despite attempts to ignore or disdain it, just as in the cases of John Self and Richard Tull. The above quote, as well as Amis' reading of More Die of Heartbreak, displays a comprehension of the various forces at work on humanity; from love and death to the surrealist understanding of the world, myriad forces attack the human more than ever before. There is fragmentation of individual as well as art, and Bellow's recognition

of it prefigures Amis' own.

Bellow's fiction can be summarized as a study of the soul. David Hawkes notes, "his novels remark upon and protest against the soul's disappearance under the materialist conditions of the twentieth century" (7). Especially in Money, Amis also speaks out against the rampant materialism of the present. Bellow foreshadows Amis' view that humanity, as Larkin recognized, is fighting a never-ending battle against nothingness, be it the nothingness of death (of the soul) or the nothingness of materialism:

We know we are sought and expect to be found. How many forms he takes, the murderer. Frank, or simple, or a man of depth and cultivation, or perhaps prosaic, without distinction. Yet he is the murderer, the stranger who, one day, will drop the smile of courtesy or custom to show you the weapon in his hand, the means of your death. (122)

The previous quote is from Dangling Man, but it might just as easily have been from London Fields.

IV. Conclusion

This treatise began with a discussion of Amis' views on Madonna. Her dynamism, her ability to change, redefine herself and remain in a state of flux, signify postmodernism for Martin Amis. In keeping with the popular culture, it is only fitting that the treatise should end with Amis' views on RoboCop. In an essay entitled "RoboCop II," he is taken aback by the technology (its lack of humanity) and the violence

that fills the human vacuum it creates, exemplified by the "affect" of the movies' star, Peter Weller.

The technology in RoboCop banishes the human. Amis writes that RoboCop is "doubly futuristic," that art combines with science in a unique, postmodern hybrid:

When you see its twirling rivets and burnished heat-exchangers, when you hear its venomous shunts and succulent fizzes, you suspect that the future really might feel like this—that it will act this way on your nerve-ends. Technology is god in RoboCop, but it is also the villain, with its triumphant humourlessness, its puerile ingenuity, its dumb glamour. (Mrs. Nabokov 164)

Technology overcomes the human in RoboCop, its victory clear not only in the character RoboCop, but also in the way viewers respond to the violence. Amis says that the hoods in the movie laugh as they kill and rape because of their "anti-ethics," but "We laugh at the violence in RoboCop, even though we really should know better. We laugh because we have no response to it. We laugh to fill the silence, to fill the vacuum, like embarrassed Japanese" (Mrs. Nabokov 165).

Saul Bellow struggled against the loss of the human soul, against its death, yet RoboCop symbolizes this death, making it paradoxically disturbing for Amis. He focuses on decay, on the dark or reptilian side of humanity. In RoboCop, the human disappears, is overcome, as it was during the Holocaust. His view of RoboCop, then, seems paradoxical because he propounds the same phenomenon, writing about the decay towards which humanity is heading as the twentieth century closes. But it is

perhaps a mark of the human in him that, when viewing the phenomenon objectively (outside of his literature), he finds it so disconcerting.

Like Madonna, Peter Weller, the star of RoboCop, is many people, or, as Amis puts it, "all affect." Being with Weller is "like being in a room, or a trailer, with about fifty different people" (Mrs. Nabokov 167). Weller, too, symbolizes the dynamism Amis sees as characteristic of the postmodern, but after an examination of his work, it is clear late twentieth century malaise, discontent and human devaluation must also be considered. As Diedrick notes, "Both the RoboCop films and the Madonna phenomenon speak directly to the postmodern condition as Amis conceives it, in which the self is part product, part victim of the technologies that increasingly structure life and consciousness" (120).

As a novelist and critic, Amis is unafraid of confronting the postmodern condition head-on, of ruffling feathers of older writers or literary peers and critics. He is frank (like Philip Larkin) and wittily cool (like his father); he is a wordsmith (like Nabokov) and terribly worried about humanity (like Bellow). In short, he represents "a member of an endangered species, once thought extinct: he is a genuinely popular writer who makes no compromises with or concessions to accessibility. In true postmodern style, his work evades the distinction between highbrow art and mass culture" (Hawkes 5). He is a harbinger of things to come if the postmodern condition continues, if the subjects for art and literature continue to degrade, if excessive attention to detail continues to supersede plot and motivation and the grotesque continues to supplant the beautiful. The novel, his primary form, is itself becoming a grotesque:

When I asked why he had made himself a character in Money, he replied: "To show someone who got the joke--the joke of writing a novel."

For Martin Amis, the novel is precisely that--a joke both passive and aggressive, a refuge and a weapon. (Michener 111)

Notes

¹ See S. Morrison 102.

² Amis' use of the word "mercenary" is a typical satiric jab at publishers.

³ From remarks made at a reading of The Information at Borders Book Shop in Philadelphia on May 5, 1995.

⁴ See Part 1, section I.

⁵ In a review of Albert Goldman's Elvis, Amis, commenting on the author's invective towards the star, writes that "In biography, displays of such inordinate aggression leave one wondering about the personal problems of the author rather than the subject" (Inferno 52). It is an ironically similar comment to that made by Page about Dead Babies.

⁶ See Farr.

⁷ The Booker is Britain's most prestigious literary award.

⁸ "With the faggots, Bujak saw their plight, and their profusion, as an Einsteinian matter also." See Einstein's Monsters 41.

⁹ Partially quoted in Part 2, section VI. Also, see Other People 21.

¹⁰ Amis, Inferno 201.

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Doctor of Philosophy in English in the College of Arts and Sciences at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA, Fall 1993/Present. Overall G.P.A. 3.96/4.00. (Degree expected in January, 1998.)

Master of Liberal Arts in Literary Studies, 1992, College of Arts and Sciences, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. Overall G.P.A. 3.81/4.00

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Bachelor of Arts in English Cum Laude, 1988, College of Arts and Sciences, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. Overall G.P.A. 3.38/4.00

Academic Awards

Scholarships covering full tuition for the 1994/95, 1995/96 and 1996/97 academic years awarded jointly by the English Department and the College of Arts and Sciences at Lehigh University.

Dean's List: Spring 1986, Fall 1986, Spring 1987, Fall 1987. Also, named to permanent roster of students with distinguished performance in Temple University's College of Arts and Sciences.

Teaching

Lecturer in English, Division of Arts and Humanities, Penn State University, Abington College, Abington, PA. Fall semester 1997/present.

Instructor of Composition, College of Arts and Sciences, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. Fall semester 1991/Spring semester 1994 and Fall semester 1996.

Writing Tutor, Temple University, Ambler Campus Writing Center, Ambler, PA. Fall Semester 1993.

Publications

"Is the purity of English flawed by 'gaudy' newcomers?" Bucks

County Courier Times [Levittown, PA] 24 February 1997: A6.
(Subject of essay: the evolution of English)

"Defining Dark Farce," Literary Sketches 36.9 (1996): 5. (Subject of essay: Farce and Black Humor)

"The Monk Turns 200," Literary Sketches 35.10 (1995): 1. (Subject of essay: Matthew Lewis' The Monk)

"Newspeak: When television corrupts literature." Bucks County Courier Times [Levittown, PA] 23 June 1993: A6. (Subject of essay: television presentations of literature)

"What about that day at the dog races?" Plum Lines 14.1 (1993): 12.
(Subject of essay: P.G. Wodehouse)

"A Moment of Prayer." The Baker Street Journal ns 42 (1992): 231-232. (Subject of essay: A. Conan Doyle)

"Students: Don't neglect 'product' during 'process' writing." Times Chronicle [Jenkintown, PA] 13 May 1992: 7. (Subject of essay: teaching composition)

"The Lodger: A Bit of the Ripper, A Bit of Holmes." Wheelwrightings September 1991: 30-33. (Subject of essay: Hitchcock's The Lodger)

Journalism

Business Writer, Bucks County Courier Times, Levittown, PA. January 1989/December 1990.

Correspondent, Montgomery County Record, Horsham, PA. July 1988/January 1989.

Employment

School Bus Driver, Laidlaw Transit, Wyncote, PA. March 1985/Present.

Professional Awards

February 1997: **Recognized** by Laidlaw Transit for twelve years of accident-free driving.

September 1996: **Driver of the Month**, Laidlaw Transit.

Laidlaw Honor Roll, 1994/95 school year, for safe driving and attendance.

Safe Driving Award presented in April 1994 by the Pennsylvania School Bus Association for five years of safe driving.

Laidlaw Transit **Driver of the Year** for the 1993/94 school year.

March 1993: **Driver of the Month**, Laidlaw Transit.

1990/91 School Year: **Exceptional Achievement and Performance Award**, Laidlaw Transit.

May 1988: **Driver of the Month**, Laidlaw Transit.

Other Activities

Member of the Wodehouse Society, an association dedicated to studying the works of P.G. Wodehouse.

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