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J O N B E G L E Y

Satirizing the Carnival of Postmodern Capitalism: The Transatlantic and Dialogic Structure of Martin Amis's *Money*

In light of its oscillating structure and distinctive idiom, it is hardly surprising that Martin Amis's *Money* has acquired a critical reputation for its Anglo-American style and transatlantic cultural diagnosis. For many British critics, *Money*'s biculturalism and formal hybridity offered a riposte to the accusations of parochialism that dominated the "state of the novel" debates of the 1970s and early 1980s.¹ Whether connected to Amis's cultural affinity with the "North Atlantic" ("Martin Amis" [Bigsby] 182) or transposed into demarcations between realism and experimentalism (Elias, Bernard), *Money*'s experimental narrative was widely upheld as exemplifying both the diversification of "English" fiction and the revitalizing emergence of a home-grown tradition of postmodern writing. While the fervor of this narratological debate has largely abated, delineations of the novel's cultural and literary accent have persisted in relation to the objectives of its transatlantic satire. For those who locate the novel in a "space between" national cultures, *Money* remains a satire of unstable cultural dichotomies (Brown 101), bearing witness to the birth of an "Anglo-American" society (Taylor 131) or capturing the acquisitiveness of the "Reagan-Thatcher era" (Head 30). However, such encompassing

1. For example, Bernard Bergonzi viewed the novel as challenging a "literary critical myth" that contrasted the provincialism of English fiction with the ambition of the American novel: "... Martin Amis's *Money* seems to me a most brilliant novel which has a great deal of American writing in it—Mailer, Burroughs and so on—but which is also a painfully sharply observed work of English social comedy: he's got them both going at the same time" (102).

designations often belie a significant divergence of opinion regarding the satiric function of national difference within the novel. For some critics, *Money* involves a deliberate effacement of national boundaries, the excesses of Self's "private culture" offering a dystopian representation of a collective postmodern condition or predicament (Diedrick 75, Edmondson 146). Alternatively, there are critical readings that assert the condition of England as the novel's principal focus, apprehending its satiric framework as either preoccupied with the contradictions of Britain's postwar liberal-capitalist culture (Waugh 24) or attempting to unmask "the ideological underpinnings of Thatcherism" (Doan 79).

Although inevitably signaling a preference, these perspectives can be partially accommodated within Steven Connor's conception of *Money* as a state-of-the-nation narrative that addresses its subject via a "flagrant violation of every requirement of the condition of England novel" (92). In terms of the genre's postwar development, *Money* exemplifies a growing concern about the validity of traditional narrative structures, their capacity to account for the increasingly complex determinants that operate upon, and within, modern nation-states. While this apprehension led some 1980s novelists toward modes of ironic or intertextual recuperation (Lodge, *Nice Work*; Drabble, *The Radiant Way*), Amis's departure from generic convention implies an acute recognition of the contemporary inadequacy of narratives premised upon national circumscription and social organicism. Thus rather than delineating the sociopolitical tensions of a divided but essentially "knowable community" (Williams 14), Amis opts for a comparative examination of Britain's position within the international matrices of economic and cultural power. Focalized through the symbolically "mid-Atlantic" John Self, *Money* maintains the genre's traditional preoccupation with, in the phrasing of David Lodge, the conflicting values of humanism and materialism (*Language* 217), while expanding the scope of its diagnosis to include both national and transnational permutations. In essence, Amis situates his protagonist at the intersection of two distinct, but interrelated, narratives of historical transition, registering the condition of a declining, postimperial Britain within an international framework of deregulated finance capitalism, economic globalization, and cultural democratization.

The first of these narratives, as James Diedrick has noted, involves Self as a representative of the conditions of postmodernity—the effects of David Harvey’s “time-space compression” (240) manifested in the ephemerality of his consumer culture and “symptoms” of global tinnitus, temporal disorientation, and psychic fragmentation. In addition to Self’s decentered inner culture, Amis also signals a broader transition from the sovereign nation-state toward the strategic alignments of late capitalism, the emergence of what Kevin Robins labels “a new *global-local nexus*” (25). This is primarily achieved by Amis’s use of direct correlations between the circumstances of individuals and the macroeconomics of the “money conspiracy.” Thus New Yorkers appear defined by their capacity to stimulate or suffer “money-hate,” located within an economic topography that separates the wealth of Manhattan from the “medium-poor” district of lower Eighth Avenue and the “no-money country” of the inner city. This pattern of “global-local” interactions is reinforced by a deliberate marginalization of national governance, the scarcity of references to Reagan and Thatcher affirming the subordination of political power to the exigencies of global economic conditions. As Will Hutton has argued with regard to Thatcher’s belligerent political rhetoric: “The lady, as she famously opined, was not for turning—a statement she made, safe in the knowledge that the world economy was pushing all states in the direction in which she wanted to travel” (62). Having said this, it is important to recognize that *Money*’s depiction of postmodernity is premised upon a specific socioeconomic thesis rather than a generalized conception of diffused authority and cultural eclecticism. As Self’s early meditation upon the “big blond screamer” illustrates, Amis apprehends the emerging culture of the 1980s as predicated upon the OPEC crisis and the recessionary cycles and economic reorganization that followed in its wake:

I read in a magazine somewhere that they’re chronics from the municipal madhouses. They got let out when money went wrong ten years ago . . . Now there’s a good joke, a global one, cracked by money. An Arab hikes his zipper in the sheep-pen, gazes contentedly across the stall and says, “Hey, Basim. Let’s hike oil.” Ten years later a big whiteman windmills his arms on Broadway, for all to see.

(6–7)

As Harvey has outlined, the events of 1973 were pivotal to the creation of a new global finance system of flexible accumulation and rapid capital flows that appeared “almost oblivious of the constraints of time and space that normally pin down material activities of production and consumption” (164). Money “went wrong” as the institutions of international finance embraced a paper entrepreneurialism to exploit “a whole new geography of haves and have-nots” (Hutton 59), and national currency mechanisms proved ineffective within a floating exchange-rate system, thereby exacerbating recessionary pressures upon Western social-democratic regimes. It is this economic and political instability that underpins Amis’s vision of money as an arbitrary and inexplicable global “god,” an impervious and self-sustaining agency responsible for fracturing the consensual bonds of urban communities and capable of “pussy whipping” both individuals and nation-states.

In addition to Self’s exemplary progress through the decentered workings of the “money conspiracy,” his oscillations also invoke a second narrative through which the condition-of-England is registered against the backdrop of a transatlantic shift in cultural and economic influence. Against a “watery and sparse” London retarded by “jet-lag” and “culture-shock” (118), there exists the variety and dynamism of New York, an urban culture that epitomizes a nation with “success in its ozone” (207). In contrast to the despairing indictments of Thatcherism offered by the majority of 1980s condition-of-England novels, Amis elucidates Britain’s disintegration and national shame within a more intractable process of historical decline and economic relegation. In one respect, this disparity can be attributed to *Money*’s immediate cultural context, the “tumult and mutiny” of England’s “social crack-up” (66) concomitant with that precarious interlude between the collapse of consensus politics and the “high noon” of Thatcherism in the mid-1980s. Contrary to Laura L. Doan’s assertion that Self operates (unsuccessfully) as a metonym for Thatcherite ideology (79), Amis’s protagonist is better understood as a transitional figure, a harbinger for an emerging culture that remained incipient in Britain during the early 1980s. In addition to these contemporary influences, *Money*’s diagnostic mode is also conditioned by Amis’s broader thesis of national retrogression, his juxtaposition of America’s cultural

ascendancy with Britain's twentieth-century experience of imperial abatement. Amis noted in an interview: "Nineteenth century England is the time of our big novels, our centre-of-the-world novels. That imperial confidence has now shifted to America and you think quite coldbloodedly, quite selfishly, I want some of that. I want that amplitude that is no longer appropriate to England" ("Martin Amis" [Bigsby] 182). It is this desire for "amplitude," coupled with an awareness of Britain's "uniquely interesting" position at "the forefront of decline" (183), that prompts Amis's transatlantic variation upon the condition-of-England novel. In seeking to render this state of postimperial contraction, Amis utilizes *Money's* comparative structure to represent a nation increasingly excluded from the determining forces of the zeitgeist. While still able to invoke Britain's social disintegration, Amis can also envision a nation that is incapable of self-determination, vulnerable to the capricious workings of finance capitalism and seemingly destined to adopt the commodified culture emanating from America's frontier of global consumerism.

As a focalizer for these broad thematic frameworks, Self operates as a conduit for Amis's satiric "amplitude"—the dissection of his "private culture" illustrating both the national and global repercussions of market deregulation and economic individualism. Adhering to the dominant critique of the 1980s, *Money* indicts this emergent ideology for exacerbating social discordance through its validation of unbridled avarice, materialistic gratification, and ruthless self-advancement. More specifically, Amis invokes a classic humanist opposition through the contradictory voices of Self's consciousness, the intellectual and moral desensitization that ensues from his debased lifestyle construed as suppressing, but not extinguishing, an antithetical propensity for contemplation and solicitude. In common with other 1980s satires, this evaluative premise is accompanied by a profound skepticism about the possibilities of locating a critical position that would permit an assured repudiation of this ascendant culture. While in anti-Thatcherite novels this uncertainty often derives from an absence of political alternatives, the ambivalence of Amis's fiction responds to the implications of a postmodern culture that is, according to Andrew Milner, distinguished by the integration of adversarial art within the aesthetic

market place of late capitalism: "The more commodified that culture has become, the less plausible the intelligentsia's erstwhile pretensions to legislative cultural authority have appeared, both to themselves and their prospective audiences" (146–47). Although this diminution of cultural authority informs all postmodern fiction, *Money* remains an exceptional engagement with its discursive repercussions, integrating and elucidating the problems of satiric assurance within its narrative structure. In essence, Self's fragmented consciousness and dialogic interactions create a polyphonic narrative that is overlaid by both classic and postmodern modes of irony, a configuration that allows Amis to maintain a precarious balance between satiric authority and a self-reflexive recognition of authorial and cultural complicity.

As the terminology of this outline reveals, my reading of Amis's satiric methods is indebted to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and the parallels already drawn by both Lodge (*After Bakhtin* 24) and Diedrick (70) between *Money* and Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*. This association is primarily based upon both novels being "Ich-Erzählung forms of the confessional type" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 197): narratives dominated by voice and self-consciousness rather than visualization and objectivity. As in Dostoyevsky, what is important for Amis is "not how his hero appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 47). However, while *Notes from Underground* contains a single narrative voice, the "conflicting ideological positions" (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 86) of *Money*'s polyphonism emerge from three separate levels of dialogue which, although interrelated, remain distinctive in terms of their orientation and discursive function. The most obvious is Self's internal dialogue, the "four voices" of his consciousness representing the pursuit of a secure selfhood within the atomizing dynamics of consumer culture. This instability of identity is reinforced by Self's interactions with other "speaking subjects," caricatures that embody the contradictory prescriptions of his dialogue rather than operating as the "fully valid voices" of Bakhtin's polyphonism (*Problems* 6). In addition, Self is satirized through a technique that Diedrick has described as "double-voicing," the surreptitious introduction of Amis's authorial voice and understanding within the

verbal texture of Self's narration "composing an artful counterpoint that resonates with implications beyond the range of his narrator's hearing" (77). Initially, this technique appears to support the judgments of Amis's cultural critique by infusing Self's internal dialogue with elements of dramatic and cosmic irony, overtones of a predetermined satiric downfall. However, Self's designation as the victim of what Linda Hutcheon classifies as an exclusionary and elitist ironic mode (54) becomes increasingly problematic as the character of Martin Amis (the author figure) acquires greater prominence. The relationship between author figure and character provides a second level of dialogue through which the moral basis of Self's satiric victimization is questioned by the disclosure of Martin Amis's cynical plot machinations and cultural complicity. While the full significance of this relationship will be discussed later, the effectiveness of this dialogue rests upon the fact that Self is not a "mute, voiceless object of the author's words," for as Lodge humorously notes, he "not only answers the author back, as Bakhtin said of Dostoevsky's heroes, but actually throws a punch at him" (*After Bakhtin* 24). Beyond this final reckoning between character and author figure there exists a third level of dialogism premised upon the oral nature of Self's *Ich-Erzählung* narrative and its capacity for hidden dialogicality. Defined by Bakhtin as a particular type of double-edged discourse, hidden dialogicality occurs when there is "a dialogue of two persons in which the statements of the second speaker are omitted": "We sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fibre to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person" (*Problems* 197). In the case of *Money*, the invisible speaker can be viewed as the reader, or rather an implied reader, utilized by Amis to both reinforce the pessimism of his cultural diagnosis and preserve the evaluative equipoise and ambivalence of a narrative that consistently plays upon the "edges" of satiric irony.²

2. My use of "edges" relates to the intrinsic ambivalence of irony as discussed by Hutcheon.

Amis uses the “four distinct voices” of Self’s internal dialogue (money, pornography, aging and weather, thought and fascination) to encapsulate both the enticements and the destructive effects of his character’s immersion within a commodified and consumerist culture. Amis, as Bakhtin said of Dostoyevsky, seeks to render “his epoch as a great dialogue” (*Problems* 90), an intersection of competing ideological and ethical viewpoints manifested within, and between, individual speaking subjects. The diversity of voices that characterized Dostoyevsky’s “great” dialogue, however, are not apparent in Amis’s diagnosis of an epoch dominated by the “jabber” of money. Self is primarily a figure “consumed by consumerism” (“Martin Amis” [Haffenden] 7), an exemplary product of a culture in which money is “the only gauge of anything, the only measure” (*Money* 124). As Patricia Waugh has noted, it is significant that the origins of Self’s addictions and attitudes are located in the iconoclastic sixties, an association that tacitly recognizes the extent to which the New Right (on both sides of the Atlantic) appropriated a preexisting “rhetoric of libertarianism” while transferring the emphasis from “counterculturalist critique” to “monetarist *realpolitik*” (17). Following the success of his nihilistic and semipornographic commercials for “smoking, drinking, junk food and nude magazines” (78), Self aspires to the transformative opportunities exhibited by his cultural idols—the “health and colour” of Fielding’s “Californian, peanut-butter body-tone” (20) and the fiscal purity of Ossie Twain: “Sitting in his spectral towers on Sixth Avenue and Cheapside, blond Ossie uses money to buy and sell money. . . . For these services he is rewarded with money. Lots of it. It is beautiful, and so is he” (120).

For the majority of the novel, Self’s hedonistic cycle of accumulation, consumption, and gratification exists as a grotesque celebration of a proliferating commodity culture. He embraces the social and individuating power of the marketplace, “semaphoring his credit card” (130) as guaranty of status and reveling in the expense of his addictions, associations, possessions, and sexual encounters. In tune with the macroeconomics of the “money conspiracy,” Self articulates the growing versatility and signifying power of money, its emergence as a homogenizing metalanguage capable of transgressing the demarcations of nationality and cultural tradition. The

advancing influence of money is graphically illustrated by the changing face of “historic” London, its contemporary transition from the pursuits of “high” culture toward the gratifications of Self’s physical and visual “junk” lifestyle:

There used to be a bookshop here, with the merchandise ranked in alphabetical order and subject sections. No longer. The place didn’t have what it took: market forces. It is now a striplite boutique, and three tough tanned chicks run it with their needly smiles. There used to be a music shop (flutes, guitars, scores). This has become a souvenir hypermarket. There used to be an auction room: now a video club. A kosher delicatessen—a massage parlour. You get the idea? My way is coming up in the world. I’m pleased . . . the other stuff was never much use to me and I’m glad it’s all gone.

(71)

Conditioned by an inferiority ascribed to his working-class background and “blackballing genes” (182), Self champions the arrival of a culture indifferent to the gradations of class, taste, and educational achievement. Indeed, the preeminence of money encourages his active hostility toward learning and the educated (Alec, Doris Arthur, Amis) for their failure to acknowledge the dissolution of their elite status and the assimilation of their cultural artifacts within consumer capitalism. The obsolescence of such hierarchies is epitomized by the converse fortunes of Self and Alec Llewellyn, the former’s ascent from the Shakespeare pub mirrored by the latter’s fall from privilege to Pentonville: “Me going up, him going down. Perhaps this was what I was paying for” (56). With “heroic consumers” (326) now invading the citadels of high culture, and class deference confined to the British prison system, Self extols the egalitarianism of money’s indiscrimination: “You’re so democratic: you’ve got no favourites. You even things out for me and my kind” (238).

Self’s anti-intellectualism, as Diedrick has noted, can be traced back to Amis’s discussion of Chicagoan attitudes in *The Moronic Inferno*: “‘If you’re so smart, how come you ain’t rich?’: Such distortions, which include an aggressive, even a disgusted philistinism, provide the writer with a wonderfully graphic reversal of human values” (21). In addition to forming the basis of Self’s parodic inversions of traditional social rituals, such “reversals” also illuminate the underlying source of Amis’s satiric disdain. Contrary to

Doan's criticism of *Money* for "rightfully" arresting the pretensions of a "working-class *parvenu*" (73), Amis's quarrel with the "forces of democratization" (Amis, *War* xii) is premised upon a cultural rather than a social conservatism: "Money is a more democratic medium than blood, but money as a cultural banner—you can feel the whole of society deteriorating around you because of that" (qtd. in Stout 136). While this association between "culture" and social cohesion may exhibit the residual influence of a romantic or postromantic culturalism, Amis's awareness of the contemporary crisis of this tradition leads him toward a more circumscribed espousal of its attendant literary humanism.³ In effect, the "graphic reversals" of Self's "junk" culture illuminate the contending claims of distraction and contemplation: the shallow gratifications of "[f]ast food, sex shows, space games, slot machines, video nasties, nude mags, drink, pubs, fighting, television, handjobs" (67) are juxtaposed against his inability to comprehend the financial and intertextual intrigues that surround him. Although "high" culture may not be presented as a "sufficient inoculation" (Diedrick 93) against the debasements of commodity culture, its absence undoubtedly epitomizes the lack of "sustenance" ("Martin Amis" [Haffenden] 22) that renders Self vulnerable to the stupefactions of money and mass media-entertainment.

This combination of consumer democracy and the diminishment of cultural "resistance" is also evident in Self's second voice of pornography. Replicating the economic individualism and global reach of the "money conspiracy," pornography is construed as an expanding and diversifying service industry, aggressively responsive to the fetishistic demands of the international market-place: "... Fielding explained to me about the lucrative contingencies of pornography ... the soft proliferations of soft core in worldwide cable and network and its careful codes of airbrush and dick-wipe,

3. The ambivalent status of high culture in *Money* reflects Amis's disquiet toward a postmodern capitalism that, in the phrasing of Andrew Milner, rejects romantic or postromantic conceptions of culture as "the central source of social cohesion" in favor of a "peculiarly normless and peculiarly hedonistic" intellectual culture (147). For further evidence of this disquiet in relation to the practices of literary criticism, see Amis, *War* xi–xv.

the stupendous aberrations of Germany and Japan, the perversion-targeting in video mail-order, the mob snuff-movie operation conceived in Mexico City and dying in the Five Boroughs" (94). Replete with Amis's idiosyncratic hyperbole, this representation mirrors a significant revolution in the availability of pornography following the introduction of video technology. As Lisa Palac has stated from within the industry, "the video revolution of the early 1980s turned video porn into a mainstream entertainment product" (qtd. in Russell 15). As with Self's "junk" culture as a whole, Amis's concern is not with the mechanics of the industry's expansion but with its position within a period of cultural realignment. Following an antithetical path to that of "high" culture, pornography emerges from within an ethically disinterested consumerism with a new "mainstream" respectability. In this instance, Amis's technique of "graphic reversal" ironically juxtaposes the material products of pornography with the industry's appropriation of high-street retail and marketing strategies. As cultural democratization progressively negates the codes of social stigma, porno "emporiums" unashamedly advertise "[g]rannies, kids, excreta, dungeons, pigs and dogs" to cater for the "wants and likes" of their "brisk lunchtime shoppers" (323–24).

Although unable to define pornography, Self's recognition that "money is in the picture somewhere" (315) leads to his acceptance of its reductive definitions of sexuality and gender relations. Women are classified by their "aesthetic" qualities as sexual performers, or "sack artists," either by men or, in the cases of Vron and Butch, by themselves, recurrently construed as commodities to be onanistically evaluated and consumed: "you can tell pretty well all you need to know about a woman by the amount of time, thought and money she puts into her pants [underwear]" (8). Self can only comprehend sexual desire and personal intimacy through the conceptual framework of a pornography-money nexus, a limitation epitomized by the fiscal negotiations that dominate his relationship with Selina Street. She, like Fielding, is a "ghostwriter" (346) of Self's consciousness, validating his pornographic "voice" as a performer and personification of male sexual fantasies. Trading upon her "High Street eyes" and "brothelly knowhow," the couple's

grotesque distortions of romantic convention reveal them to be equally versed in the values of the "twentieth century" and equally corrupted by its "necessary commerce" (345). It is significant, however, that the "democratic" opportunities afforded to Self are not extended to women, Selina's eventual success constituting little more than a transferral of patriarchal possession from Self to Ossie. The passivity of Selina and Martina has led Doan to criticize *Money*, in comparison with Caryl Churchill's *Serious Money*, for electing to "stay within the patriarchal gender boundaries by upholding the pattern of dominance and submission" (78). From this perspective, Amis's representation of a culture in which "money is the only measure" fails, unlike Churchill's, to acknowledge an implicit potential for the transgression of gender roles determined by economic hierarchies. Furthermore, Self's casual rationalizations of rape and physical violence reveal a gender identity not merely asserted through financial power but underpinned by base domination, the exploitation of Selina's fearful realization "that half the members of the planet, one on one, can do what the hell they like with you" (14). However, the source and cultural significance of this aggressive misogyny ultimately remains ambiguous, constituting either a desperate reaction to established social shifts or an internalization of the pornographic analogies ("pussy-whipping," "gang-banging") attributed to money. Self's gender identity vacillates between the residual sexism of a "cave-man spirit" (202) inherited from the Shakespeare pub and an emergent misogyny derived from the competitive culture of "masculine Madison": "In the cabled tunnels beneath the street and in the abstract airpaths of the sky, how much violence was crackling through New York? . . . Every line that linked two lovers would be flexed and snarled between a hundred more whose only terms were obscenity and threat . . . I've hit women" (19).

The cumulative impact of the "voices" of money and pornography has prompted Lodge to describe *Money* as a "demonic carnival, a suicide note from a character who indulges in every excess of the lower body, sexual and gastronomic, that the modern urban culture can provide" (*After Bakhtin* 24). From this perspective, Self's experience of consumer democracy can be allied to the liberating "spirit" of carnival—"the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges,

norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10). Furthermore, Self is a figure of carnivalesque exaggerations, vilifying the normative codes of class and tradition through his modern, transatlantic billingsgate, and embodying the degradation and "material bodily principle" of grotesque realism (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 18). He is enlarged by the "heavy fuel" of alcohol, drugs, and fast food; obsessed with the "lower stratum" pleasures of sex and masturbation; and troubled by "compound hangovers" and the gastric conditions of a "human hovercraft" (36). This is accompanied by a Falstaffian disconnection from the conventions of regulated time, his transatlantic lifestyle conditioned by the blackouts and reversals of "time lag, culture shock, zone shift" (264). These cultural, physical, and temporal inversions are nourished by the exuberance, diversity, and hybridity of New York—a modern carnival setting that encapsulates the freedom of Self's emergent culture, a site of "contention" and "democracy" that grants him a "holiday from the nine-to-five of my social shame" (31).

In spite of these comic reversals and challenges to official culture, Self's carnival remains demonic in its negation of the universalism and utopianism that traditionally accompanies the "bodily principle" of grotesque realism. In Bakhtin's words, "It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. . . . [it] is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed" (*Rabelais* 19). By contrast, Self's carnival of money is premised upon individualistic consumption, the isolated "economic man" gratifying his physical addictions and egotistic desires without reference to a wider community. It is inimical to the "free and familiar contact" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 19) of the carnival community by virtue of its reliance upon consumer power and social demarcation: "Money. It's either that or fear or shame. It's all I've got to use against people who might hate me" (335). As this implies, Self's carnival involves neither a suspension of, nor liberation from, hierarchy; rather it is a transition from the subtle gradations of class and taste to the conspicuous markers of entrepreneurial advancement. As encapsulated by his maxim that "money is freedom . . . [b]ut freedom is money" (270), Self recognizes that, in the phrasing of Sylvia

Harvey and John Corner, the sovereignty of the consumer is ultimately dependent upon a converse "'slavery' and indignity of poverty" (11). Thus Self's carnival is not characterized by "becoming" and "renewal"; instead it comprises, as Waugh has argued, a desperate cycle of accumulation and gratification designed to assuage the inherent anxieties of consumer identity: "The market is seen to depend on the stimulation of feelings of personal inadequacy in consumers who then pursue its chimerical material satisfactions, believing that in the disease itself may be discovered its homeopathic cure" (31).

This "disease," and the physically damaging cycle it initiates, provides the basis for Self's third voice of "aging and weather," a voice that further negates carnival traditions by offering "images of bodily life" characterized by decay and disintegration rather than "fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 19). At variance with his 1960s doctrine of youth, the leitmotifs of dental decay, hair loss, and tinnitus drive Self toward the "homeopathic cure" promised by the topography of New York, the body itself becoming a site for refurbishment and gentrification. Following Fielding and the "dazzlingly metallic" (18) television veterans, Self aspires to the transformative cosmetic surgery and designer transplants proffered by the "DNA programmers," "engineers," and "fine-tuners" of Silicon Valley (170–71). Although often utilized to establish transatlantic difference, the weather is also implicated as a source of implacable anxiety, united with aging and money as one of those "things that move past us uncontrollably while we just stay the same" (316). Ultimately, the voice of "aging and weather" displays the consequences and limitations of Self's carnival, his "futile protest" against the physical and elemental forces that money can mollify but not reverse: "With money, double-dazzle New York is a crystal conservatory. Take money away, and you're naked and shielding your Johnson in a cataract of breaking glass" (354).

If the third voice indicts the ephemerality of Self's "private culture" by raising the specter of decline and mortality, the fourth confronts him with the prospect of alteration and moral introspection—of "quitting work and needing to think about things I never used to think about" (108). This voice is the "real intruder,"

threatening the dominance of money and pornography by revealing the “human values” that are debased within Self’s adopted culture. In the novel’s early sections, the presence of these values is restricted to isolated moments of self-awareness, glimpsed revelations of an alternate identity that Self’s narrative seeks to rationalize, diminish, or suppress. He experiences guilt toward his treatment of women; shows an admiration for Prince Charles’s self-discipline; becomes sentimental during the Royal Wedding; and dissimulates a moral lecture that he delivers to a pregnant prostitute. Yet the most significant expression of this voice comes with the abiding sense of exclusion that accompanies his mother’s death and his subsequent upheaval to America: “I am a dog at the seaside tethered to a fence while my master and mistress romp on the sands. I am bouncing, twisting, weeping, consuming myself. . . . imagine the grief, tethered to a fence when there is activity—and play, and thought and fascination—just beyond the holding rope” (207). It is this desire for “thought and fascination” that epitomizes Self’s fourth voice and the “turnaround” he experiences during his relationship with Martina Twain. Like Fielding and Selina, Martina is another “ghostwriter” of Self’s consciousness, a function indicated by his inability to find a “voice to summon her with”: “The voices of money, weather and pornography . . . just aren’t up to the job when it comes to Martina” (119). This period of reversal, Self’s “new-deal me” (293), signals the replacement of his “junk” addictions and entertainments with a burgeoning appreciation of high culture, twentieth-century history, and the classical foundations of the “money conspiracy.” In spite of this regenerative progression from distraction to contemplation, the imminent collapse of this process is signaled by Self’s symbolic associations with Martina’s dog. Like Shadow, Self is instinctively drawn toward the “sin and death” of the “world’s end, where everything was unleashed, unmuzzled” (289). Inevitably, Shadow’s escape from domestication is accompanied by Self’s return to Selina Street and the cultural framework of the money-pornography nexus. In one respect, this interlude appears to provide a criterion for satiric judgment by establishing a polarity between Martina’s cultural nourishment and Self’s animalistic depravity. However, this binary cannot function as a moral gauge because Self’s metamorphosis is not genetically

unattainable, but arrested by the fact that Martina's admirable qualities are themselves predicated upon money:

Money is carelessly present in the cut and texture of her clothes, her leathery accoutrements, in rug-brilliance and mouth tone. . . . money makes you innocent when it's been there all along. How else can you hang out on this planet for thirty years while still remaining free? Martina is not a woman of the world. She is a woman of somewhere else.

(134)

The values represented by Martina do not amount to a dissident ideology within Amis's critique because they are derived from an independence that remains contingent upon the economic parameters of the dominant culture. In a similar fashion, Self is unable to achieve autonomy or a univocal resolution of his internal dialogue because he remains synonymous with a commodity culture in which you "cannot beat the money conspiracy. You can only join it" (288).

In effect, the template for ethical judgment established by Self's internal dialogue is abrogated by an acknowledgment of inescapable complicity, a narrative pattern that typifies *Money's* prevailing mode of satiric irresolution. Indeed, Amis has repeatedly questioned his designation as a satirist, maintaining that his fiction lacks the unambiguous disapproval that sustains the corrective function of the genre. As he stated with regard to *Money*, "My hatred for it [money] does look as though I'm underwriting a certain asceticism, but it isn't really that way: I don't offer alternatives to what I deplore" ("Martin Amis" [Haffenden] 14). In terms of its transnational themes, this absence of alternatives links Amis's novel with the black humor of American fiction in the 1960s, the hegemony of money functioning, like the military-industrial bureaucracies of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon, as an impervious and self-perpetuating conspiracy in which all participate but which requires no guiding human agency or institutional fulcrum. Through the implied futility of any political or ideological resistance to this decentered system, Amis appears to subscribe to an absurdist response to the evils of modern life: "The comic novelist . . . doesn't reward and punish and convert; all he can do with these evils is laugh them off the stage" ("Martin Amis" [Bigsby] 172).

However, the ironic discourse that surrounds and permeates Self's narrative does invoke a diagnosis of ethical laxity, his failed transformation indicative of Amis's belief that contemporary culture engenders individuals that possess "moral unease without moral energy" ("Martin Amis" [Haffenden] 14):

She was like me, myself. She knew she shouldn't do it . . . But she went on doing it anyway. Me, I couldn't even blame money. What is this state, seeing the difference between good and bad and choosing bad—or consenting to bad, okaying bad?

(26)

Rather than fully adopting black humor's stoical detachment and eschewal of "moral abstractions," Amis inscribes his satiric ambivalence within the novel's narrative and metafictional structure, inciting ethical imperatives through the "graphic reversals" of Self's consumerism while concurrently undermining any position of unequivocal condemnation or authorial closure. Reflecting the "disappointed moralism" that Malcolm Bradbury detects throughout Amis's fiction (402), *Money* retains an acute awareness of both the moral indiscretions of its protagonist and the potential hypocrisy of any perspective that claims to be beyond, or immune to, the socio-economic forces that condition Self's consciousness. Indeed, Amis does not merely forgo the punishment of his satiric victim but self-referentially questions the validity of such generic conventions within a postmodern culture of capricious trajectories and profound moral skepticism.

This issue of satiric capacity is primarily explored through the complex and often ambiguous relationship between Self and the author figure, a second level of dialogue that circles the elaborate confidence trick that superficially functions as a narrative plot. In essence, Self's "lack of sustenance" results in his exploitation by three artist figures: Fielding the con artist, Selina the sack artist and Ossie the money artist. As Self's ontological paranoia reveals, however, these figures are merely fictional surrogates for the manipulations of the author artist:

I think I must have some new cow disease that makes you wonder whether you're real all the time, that makes your life feel like a trick, an

act, a joke. I feel, I feel dead. There's a guy who lives round my way who really gives me the fucking creeps. He's a *writer*, too . . .

(60).

Beginning with an authorial preface that alerts the reader to be "on the lookout for clues and give-aways," *Money's* narrative foregrounds an authorial presence through a carefully constructed web of intertextual allusions, parodic nomenclature, involution, and metafictional commentary. Dismissed by some critics as "decorative rather than structural: lip-service gestures towards post-modernist orthodoxy" (Lasdun 47), these devices are actually crucial to a dialogic arrangement that reinforces, then subsequently revokes, an anticipated progression toward retribution and satiric closure.

In one respect, this intertextual structure marks a return to the opposition between distraction and contemplation, Self's philistinism ironically exposed by the author figure's interlaced pattern of "high" cultural allusions. In particular, Amis utilizes Shakespeare as a "sort of writer-god," the playwright's unrivaled literary status providing "the model or taunting embodiment of what [Self is] excluded from" ("Martin Amis" [Haffenden] 23). With its corresponding themes of deceit and sexual betrayal, *Othello* becomes the most frequent source of intertextual parallels, operating as a form of ironic master narrative in relation to Self's exploitation.⁴ Although he is eventually reduced to a suicidal breakdown, Self's true dramatic counterpart is not Othello but Roderigo, the ignorant gull who remains blind to the manipulations, fraud, and mockery perpetrated upon him by the artist figure (Iago/Fielding/Martin Amis). When Self encounters the play in operatic form, his illiteracy (he believes Desdemona has been unfaithful) renders him incapable of apprehending the quotations and puns that foreshadow his downfall. The comic exposure of Self's ignorance continues with a number of Orwellian allusions that range from his literal interpretation of *Animal Farm* to an assertion that Airstrip One is "my kind of town" (223). Self's inability to assimilate these references is made more significant by the fact that it is the artist figure's double or

4. Diedrick has also pointed to an additional parallel between *Hamlet* and the oedipal subtext of Self's screenplay (83).

alter ego (Martina Twain) who directs him toward this potentially revelatory material. As Emma Tennant has argued, Martina operates as a “cultural advisor” to Self (44), providing a “how-to kit for the twentieth-century” (*Money* 334) by introducing him to the works of Freud, Marx, Darwin, Hitler, and *Money*. Ultimately, Self’s failure to decipher these intertextual codes precludes him from an early awareness of his fictional existence and thereby perpetuates his subordination amidst the machinations of the artist figure: “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” (132).

A second metafictional pattern emerges from the doubling of the narrative with Self’s screenplay and its attendant problems with heroes, motivation, fights, and realism. Through his involvement with the second draft, the artist figure shifts from being a shadowy neighbor with a “smirk of collusion” (71) into the center of his protagonist’s narrative. Once again, Self remains oblivious to the surreptitious plot explications and enigmatic puns of the author figure, taunting references to the principals being “all actors” and a reminder that “[n]ames are awfully important” (359–60). The author figure completes a double plot resolution through the redrafted screenplay, pandering to the egotism of the performers while ironically reworking the synopsis to prefigure Self’s sordid encounter with Vron and the denouement of his familial plot. In effect, Self becomes entwined in a “rockbottom realism” (248) variant of his own script, receiving a cursory punishment beating from his father that parodies the screenplay’s melodramatic climax. Furthermore, these script consultations permit the artist figure to muse directly upon his authorial position and the “double innocence” of characters, the problems of endings, and the accountability of the novelist within a “moral philosophy of fiction” (260).

Replete with a self-reflexive cosmic irony, these discussions culminate in a chess game that encapsulates the relationship between author figure and character while drawing Self toward the satiric comeuppance of a preordained suicide. As Self continues to be mystified by his opponent’s strategy, the artist figure self-consciously prefigures his character’s death through its chess equivalent (the

zugzwang conclusion). However, Self's immanent destruction cannot be construed as an act of retribution because, like Fielding/Iago, the author figure is also impelled by a "motiveless malignity," remaining "too deep into his themes and forms, his own artwork" (376). Thus in spite of a belated apology, authorial guilt and moral accountability remain negligible facets of a relationship that highlights Amis's penchant for Nabokovian games that are primarily aesthetic and comic in orientation. The key similarity is that the artist figure operates not as an author-god within a framework of morality and justice but as just "some fucking joker" (330). According to both Amis and his fictional double, such "sadistic impulses" are a by-product of literary heroes' decline from the status of "gods" and "demi-gods" to contemporary "anti-heroes, non-heroes, sub-heroes" (*Moronic Inferno* 17): "The further down the scale he is, the more liberties you can take with him. You can do what you like to him, really" (247). The growing prominence of such cynical self-reflexivity within a predominantly satirical novel has prompted Victoria N. Alexander to question "why Amis, after offering Answers to big social problems, later rescinds them by stressing the fact of fiction" (581). However, to view the novel as switching between two incompatible aesthetic modes underestimates the significance of the dialogue between the artist figure and Self. Rather than merely stressing Self's fictionality, Amis uses this dialogue to undermine the status of the authorial presence and his narrative designs, thereby reaffirming the premise of his cultural critique by implicating both figures within an economic system that resists the imposition of any encompassing "Answers."

The establishment of this complicity is dependent upon the fact that the artist figure does not function as a monological author-god, the exteriority of his metafictional control permitting Self, as Diedrick argues, the "relative autonomy" of an independent voice and consciousness (97). Throughout their dialogic interactions, the artist figure is answered, criticized, and mocked by his protagonist. On one level, Amis's use of this dialogism appears to be merely comic, a means of parodying his own literary career through allusions to his father's influence, an accusation of plagiarism, poor sales, and charges of obscenity. Yet as Diedrick has noted, these biographical asides are implicated within a more important comic

discourse regarding the author figure's position as a "serious writer in a commodity culture" (98). Contrary to Self's junk culture, the author-figure seeks to avoid "the whole money conspiracy" (262) through his monastic dedication to a Franklinesque timetable of self-improvement:

I get up at seven and write straight through till twelve. Twelve to one I read Russian poetry—in translation, alas. A quick lunch, then art history until three. After that it's philosophy for an hour—nothing technical, nothing *hard*. Four to five: European history, 1848 and all that. Five to six: I improve my German. And from then until dinner, well, I just relax and read whatever the hell I like. Usually Shakespeare.

(236)

While this immersion in thought and high culture appears to position the author figure as an antithesis to Self and the voice of money, the context of this passage actually typifies the critical capacity of their dialogic interactions. Directed toward the inattentive and uncultured Self, the author figure's remarks are imbued with a tone of pompous superiority rather than detached wisdom. This dialogic effect is replicated throughout the author figure's aesthetic commentary and reinforced by Self's debunking mockery of his student existence, book habit, and hand-rolled cigarettes: "You haven't got shit, have you, and how much do you earn? It's immoral. Push out some cash. Buy stuff. Consume, for Christ's sake" (262). Acquiescing to the "tumbling zeros" (239) of Self's screenplay offer, the artist-figure's claim to an existence beyond money is exposed as an act of self-deception, the "false consciousness . . . [of] a naive literary modernist clinging to the fiction that he can protect his art from the influence of the marketplace" (Diedrick 98). Even his metafictional influence over Fielding's elaborate confidence trick affirms the complicity of his literary craft because, as Amis has stated, the novel's capricious plot is analogous to the inexplicable, arbitrary, and brutal mechanics of the money conspiracy ("Martin Amis" [Haffenden] 6).

By revealing the pretensions and limitations of the authorial presence in relation to contemporary culture, Amis prepares the ground for Self's incarnation as an escape artist—his acquisition of a new (*italicized*) voice denoting a liberation from the allusions, doubles,

and prescribed suicidal denouement of the author figure. Self's immunity and independence from these "pentagrams of shape and purpose" (384) is confirmed by a final meeting at which the author figure is astonished by the fact that his character is not "out of the picture" (389). For many critics, Self's monologue from "outside" the novel points toward a regeneration of his character, a hesitant step into the world of "thought and fascination." Having acquired a belated grasp of the intrigues that surrounded him, Self begins to comprehend his age problem, paternity mix-up, and the "psychopathic state" of money confidence. He attacks television and advertising for their exploitation of "the mystical part of ordinary minds" (384) and enters into a relationship that is not wholly permeated by the commodifying logic of the money-pornography nexus. Perhaps most significantly, Self's carnivalesque lifestyle is slowed into a "continuous present," enforcing an engagement with the mundane realities of urban existence. Beyond his suicidal collapse, Self emerges from his egocentric individualism with a new respect for the vulnerability and resilience of humanity in the face of weather, aging, and mortality: "The people hurry from the underground, very mortal, the young half healthy, the old half shrewd—quarter beautiful, quarter wise. Humans, I honour you" (394).

However, Self's escape from the novel and progression toward the values of his fourth voice does not constitute an uncomplicated liberation from the money conspiracy. Conversely illustrating the precept behind Martina's tainted innocence, Self's empathetic awakening is enforced by the removal of money's protective screen, his fiscal collapse rendering him naked, "one day old and one inch tall" (383). In spite of being cited as the great conspiracy, fiction, and addiction of the twentieth century, money continues to determine the parameters of Self's lifestyle and consciousness. Painfully conscious of the imposed limitations of his destitution, Self yearns for a revival of his consumer identity and the power to exchange Georgina for "Selina or some other Tina or Lina or Nina" (393). In effect, Amis invalidates the monologue as a didactic or satiric reversal by revealing Self's enlightenment as unsupported by any ethical or ideological alternative to commodity culture. Indeed, Self's contradictory demonstration of money's hegemony completes a fundamental configuration within the novel—a structural progression

through which the potential for a monological resolution, the possession of the final word or judgment, is established, then deferred. An impending resolution of Self's zeitgeist fragmentation is transferred from Fielding and Martina through to author figure and character, each unable to cast Self as satiric victim or redemptive archetype and thereby adopt a vantage point from which the "central deformity in life" ("Martin Amis" [Haffenden] 13) could be neutralized, circumvented, or morally repudiated.

This final reaffirmation of money's dominance raises an important question regarding the novel's continuing absence of a satiric "alternative": how is it possible to maintain the ambivalence of a "disappointed moralism" without succumbing to a position of mere quietism or connivance? The answer, according to Amis, lies in the evaluative capabilities of fictional style: "... I would argue that style *is* morality: morality detailed, configured, intensified. It's not in the mere narrative arrangement of good and bad that morality makes itself felt. It can be there in every sentence" (*Experience* 121). In the case of *Money*, this moral omnipresence derives from the *Ich-Erzählung* mode of Self's narrative and its dialogic construction of an implied readership. Foregrounded by the prologue's assertion that the "suicide note" is "meant for you out there, the dear, the gentle," Self's confession remains acutely aware of the existence and potential criticism of an external audience. On one level, this awareness is revealed through what Bakhtin classifies as internal polemic discourse, "the word with a sideward glance at someone else's hostile word": "[H]ere . . . belongs all self-deprecating overblown speech that repudiates itself in advance, speech with a thousand reservations, concessions, loopholes and the like. Such speech literally cringes in the presence or the anticipation of someone else's word, reply, objection" (*Problems* 196). As a protagonist self-consciously introducing us to his "private culture," Self's narrative is pervaded by anticipatory asides, calculated manipulations of the *fabula*, and a question-answer method of justification that assumes our consent regarding any given observation or moral dilemma. Although superficially designed to deflect the potential criticism of another's words, these devices also tend toward the "vicious circle" that Bakhtin associates with Dostoyevsky's "Underground Man"—that in striving for the independence of "the

final word," Self conversely "demonstrates his own dependence on the other's consciousness, his own inability to be at peace with his own definition of self" (*Problems* 229). Replicating the structure of his internal dialogue, Self's proselytizing introduction to consumer culture exhibits the terms of its own critique, the vehemence with which he claims self-evidence obversely proportionate to his anxious yearning for external validation and ethical appeasement. Self's reliance upon an external audience becomes more transparent when the passive mode of the internal polemic is replaced by an active hidden dialogicity in which the "traces" of words delivered by an invisible second speaker "have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker" (*Problems* 197):

Hey, if you were here now, sister mother daughter lover (niece, auntie, granny), maybe we could talk a bit and cuddle down together—nothing dirty. Only spoons. Maybe you'd let me rest my great face in the gentle bracket between the wings of your shoulderblades. That's all I have in mind, believe me. I know you for a pure creature. You don't drink or smoke or screw around that much, I'll bet. Am I wrong? That is what I love in you . . .

(111)

By conferring an empathetic humanity upon the reader that is notably absent from Self's "private culture," such passages offer the alluring prospect of a hidden repository of antithetical values, a potential site for the displacement of a satiric alternative. This prospect is bolstered by an implied change of allegiance at the end of the novel, the reader's collusion with the literary and cosmic ironies of the author figure replaced by a humane collaboration with Self to ensure his deliverance from a prescribed fate. It is significant that Self can only sustain the independent voice of his monologue through the imaginative faith of the reader: "[R]eaders are natural believers. They too have something of the authorial power to create life" (260). However, while elevating the reader beyond the "sadistic impulses" of the author figure, this source of empathy cannot be readily extrapolated into an adjudication upon Self's culture as a whole. What prevents the reader from functioning as a moral conscience is his or her implication within the world of money, aging, and weather—the reader's dialogic interpolation as a secret sharer of Self's conflicting voices. As Kiernan Ryan has

argued, Amis's narrative compels our identification with the ostensible normality of Self's perspective, leaving "honest readers little choice but to come clean about the scale of their own capitulation" (207). Furthermore, the reader's assistance in Self's escape could be dismissed as merely another metafictional ruse, an illustration of the literary indiscipline that follows from what Amis calls the "human fallacy"—our "understandable" tendency to be consumed by "human interest" and the idea "that people have to be cared for and protected and given full justice in the novel" ("Martin Amis" [Haffenden] 18–19).

The ambivalence of the reader's position within this final dialogue completes a narrative structure that recurrently questions the possibility of cultural and moral authority, a fiction that invokes "complicity not merely as a theme, but as a condition of writing and a consequence of reading" (Ryan 212). While such complicity precludes a stabilization of Amis's satiric intent, it cannot entirely efface the moral directions that are inherent within the novel. Throughout the transferrals of narrative ascendancy from Self to the author figure to the reader, *Money* maintains a precarious satiric balance by subtly manipulating the conventions of both classic and postmodern modes of irony. In Self's internal dialogue, the assumed moral consensus of classic ironic discourse is assembled around the "graphic reversals" and dramatic irony of Self's victimization, the author figure inviting the superior reader to laugh at a negative exemplar of consumer culture. However, the exteriority upon which this moral hierarchy depends is subsequently rescinded by a postmodern ironic mode that implicates the reader within the author figure's amoral self-reflexivity. Significantly, Amis uses this postmodern irony in a manner that conflates a refusal of narrative authority with an affirmation of the cultural complicity of both author figure and reader. Thus rather than undermining the premise of its cultural critique, *Money's* collapsing hierarchies render all participants in the narrative subject to the unassailable hegemony of the money conspiracy. Aware of the moral boundaries established by Self's internal dialogue but denied a fulcrum for their enactment, the reader is impelled toward a position of affinity, an enforced recognition that we, like Self, participate in a carnival culture of indiscriminate and uncircumscribed

liberation. Through the broken promises of its satiric masterplot, *Money* offers a disquieting recognition that the cultural democracy proffered by postmodern capitalism necessitates a diminution of collective or consensual authority—that in the absence of normative frameworks, moral arbitration may ultimately be consigned to the inhumane and capricious jurisdiction of the market.

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