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Satire Bust: The Wagers of *Money*

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Abstract. According to critical tradition, satire relies on a normative background to do its work of correction and moral retribution. What happens when those norms are fraying, or absent altogether? Martin Amis's *Money* (1984), a key text of the Reagan-Thatcher years, stages this aesthetic and political aporia with coruscating wit and an apocalyptic atmosphere. The relations between satire and value, text and norm, enter a crisis that is morally alarming but artistically productive.

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Unfortunately, it has a dehumanized look. But that is not the satirist's fault.

Walter Benjamin

All of us are excited by what we most deplore.

Martin Amis

SUPERACTIVE, JOHN

Satire, like many cultural categories, blurs and wavers when you try to look straight at it. To reflect on the concept and review the critical literature lately dedicated to it is to find uncertainty about its boundaries and definition; its function and effect; its major instances; and, as we shall see, its historical conditions of possibility. But if satire is a diffuse concept it also remains a widely diffused practice. Modern satire has occupied diverse genres and locations: theatre, cinema, television, cartoons and text in the press. But it is to a prose fiction that this essay will dedicate its attention.¹ In any attempt to theorize the fate of satire in contemporary fiction, Martin Amis's 1984 novel

Money is essential evidence. One of the most influential English novels of the last few decades, it appears to show a modern satirist at the height of his powers. Yet its fascination derives partly from its refusal to confirm an existing template or obey a given generic law. While it is one of its era's major satirical fictions, it is also a place where satire seems to come unstuck. The novel is at once the height of modern satire and its downfall: and it is that liminal, double role that gives it a special interest for our exploration of the mode.

We shall turn shortly to critical and historical definitions. But I want to start closer in, with those textual nudges that tune us in to the waveband of the satirical. Even when a mode is hard precisely to define, we can intuitively read clues to its presence. In the case of satire, one clue is whether anybody is laughing. Even if it is inward and silent, the agitation of the comic radar is a sign that helps to locate us in generic space. The bleeping is clear in a scene early in Amis's novel, which is worth reading at some length. The London film producer John Self has landed in New York to negotiate a forthcoming motion picture: he is in his hotel room, recovering from the excesses of the night before, when the telephone rings. It's one of the proposed stars of the picture, a veteran actor.

"John? Lorne Guyland."

"Lorne!" I said. Christ, what a croak it was. "How are you?"

"Good", he said. "I'm good, John. How are you?"

"I'm fine, fine."

"That's good, John. John?"

"Lorne?"

"There are things that worry me, John."

"Tell me about them, Lorne."

"I don't happen to me an old man, John."

"I know that, Lorne."

"I'm in great shape. Never better."

"I'm glad, Lorne."

"That's why I don't like it that you say I'm an old man, John."

"But I don't say that, Lorne."

"Well okay. You *imply* it, John, and that's, it's, that's about the same thing. In my book. You also *imply* that I'm not very sexually active and can't satisfy my women. That's just not true, John."

"I'm sure it's not true, Lorne."

"Then why imply it? John, I think we should meet and talk about these things. I hate to talk on the telephone."

"Absolutely. When?"

"I'm a very busy man, John."

"I respect that, Lorne."

"You can't expect me to just drop everything, just to, just to meet with you, John."

"Of course not, Lorne."

"I lead a full life, John. Full and active. Superactive, John. Six o'clock I'm at the health club. When my programme's done I hit the mat with my judo instructor. Afternoons I work out with the weights. When I'm at the house, it's golf, tennis, water-skiing, scuba-diving, racket-ball and polo. You know, John, sometimes I just get out on that beach and run like a kid. The girls, these chicks I have at the house, when I run in late they scold me, John, like I was a little boy. Then I'm up half the night screwing. Take yesterday..."

It went on like this, I swear to God, for an hour and a half. After a while I fell silent. This had no effect on anything. So in the end I just sat through it, smoking cigarettes and having a really bad time.

When it was over, I took a pull of scotch, dabbed the tears away with a paper tissue, and rang down to room service.²

Actors often say that comedy is tougher to play than tragedy; critics likewise know that comedy is hard to analyze. But let us track some of comedy's triggers here. There is the rhythm of conversation: as the names are knocked back and forth (*John, Lorne, John?, Lorne?*), their recurrence becomes a Beckettian reduction, a foregrounding of sounds that start to shed sense. There is the imbalance in the conversation, between Guyland's insistence and Self's defensive manoeuvres. Self seems to be speaking Lorne's language, but this is a kind of polite mimicry: he subtly adopts Guyland's own rhythm merely as a way of meeting his torrent of complaint, which he hears out but does not for a moment take seriously.

A comedy of incipient semiosis, and a comedy of ironic discrepancy. Add to these a comedy of recognition. One reason that the men's insistent use of each other's names is funny is that it triggers the thought of men who really do that. The implied English reader of the mid-1980s is not really used to men

who answer the question “How are you?” with the words “I’m good,” let alone the pacy inflection of “That’s good, John. John?”. Lorne’s idiom should sound slightly foreign – but recognizable, triggering our picture of a type, the Hollywood ego. The implied reader doesn’t know anyone who would say “You know, John, sometimes I just get out on that beach and run like a kid.” Yet we know the sort of person who might say it: in today’s terms, if not the book’s, a phantasmal variant on William Shatner or Adam West would be close.³ The character’s naturalistic stumbles further fill him out, and make him the funnier, as his whole discourse asserts puissance, health, a sure-footedness which his speech inconveniently belies.

Recognition and familiarity are crucial to the passage’s success – but they are sublated by the contrary forces of excess and exaggeration. We have to know Lorne’s type, so that Amis can blow that type beyond plausibility, as the scale of its features breaks from the realm of the real. Lorne’s boastful account of his sporting day is a case in point. Here, of course, is a major comic vein: the gap between what he says and what we guess about him. His narratives of vigour sound like strategies of desperation: he protests too much. But to put the reading that way is excessively to humanize it, and to miss the unrealist extravagance of Amis’s comedy. This is apparent in the book’s most flagrant source of incredibility, evident from any character’s first appearance: namely, the names. “John Self” carries its own heavy freight of meanings; but “Lorne Guyland” too is laden with intent. I hear an echo of the *Bonanza* star Lorne Green, perhaps because of Guyland’s history as a cowboy hack (22). “Guyland” announces the masculinity of which the priapic actor is proud (183), sounding a long way from Herland.⁴ But beyond these nuances, the biggest joke is simply *Long Island*: in a cheaply amusing gesture, Amis has given his character a name almost phonetically identical to that of the place. Such a character is that much harder to take seriously. Nor is he alone in this. Other characters include the agent Herrick Shnexnayder, the actors Spunk Davis, Nub Forker⁵ and Cash Jones, the actress Butch Beausoleil, Self’s film-crew members Kevin Skuse and Des Blackadder, his dentist Roger Frift, and his moneyman Fielding Goodney – a figure with a veneer of “feeling good,” and maybe an echo of Henry Fielding also.⁶ Three more moneymen, as Amis lets fly with cheeky jests, are called Tab Penman, Bill Levy and Gresham Tanner (124).

This is part of the Nabokovian legacy that Amis is keen to claim: the crazy names honour the linguistic fancy of the man who invented Humbert

Humbert, John Shade, Dolores Haze and Clare Quilty. The principle applies not just to characters, but to the whole world of objects. Consumer goods, firms, outlets and items are known in *Money's* world by names absent from ours, though often directly recalling real-life equivalents. Self's stuttering car is a Fiasco (echoing the Ford Fiesta). His colleagues drive Tomahawks, Farragos, Boomerangs (79); Fielding Goodney is chauffeured in an Autocrat. When Self has a headache he takes Serafim. The brands bear their local jokes, but collectively they alter our sense of the story's status. They signal that the modality of the novel's world, even if it points to known phenomena, is not a matter of verisimilitude. We are in a different mode, another register. And indeed the combination we saw in Guyland's dialogue with Self – the recognition of a loosely-defined real-world model, and the exaggeration of that model to a ridiculous scale – suggests that we have found a live specimen not only of comedy, but of satire. If that is in doubt in Guyland's early telephone appearance, it is less mistakable by the time Self has visited him in his penthouse apartment, in a scene of hair-raising preposterousness (182-187). Now "Lorne surged across a cloud of carpet, seventh heaven, dressed in a white robe and extending a broad-sleeved arm through the conditioned air. With silent urgency he swivelled, and gestured towards the bank of window – this was his balcony, his private box, over sweating Manhattan. He poured me a drink. I was surprised to taste whisky, rather than ambrosia, in the frosted glass" (183). Some of the scene's grandeur, with Guyland transfigured into an Olympic god, is the product of Self's perception. But Lorne himself now urges Self to expand and enhance his role in the film ("Gary," a London publican and small-time crook), in a diatribe which grows more hyperbolic by the paragraph.

"I see this Garfield as a man of some considerable culture.... Lover, father, husband, athlete, millionaire – but also a man of reading, of wide... culture, John. A poet. A seeker. He has the world in his hands, women, money, success – but this man probes deeper. As an Englishman, John, you'll know what I'm saying.... He's a professor of art someplace. He writes scholarly articles in the, in, in the scholarly magazines, John.... In the opening shot I see Garfield at a lectern reading aloud from a Shakespeare first edition, bound in unborn calf...." (184)

Within two pages, Gary has become Sir Garfield, then, in a climactic echo of the actor's own name, Lord Garfield. As Self prepares to leave, Guyland shrugs off his robe and asks, tears in his eyes, "Is this the body of an old man?". The answer, Self confides to us, is affirmative. Self calls the scene "numb, flushed, unanswerable... pornographic" (187): for him it has been an ordeal, a heightened version of the earlier telephone call. But for us its excess is not toxic but comic; it is among the funniest scenes in a book of such stand-up routines. In the passage above a number of local pleasures are visible. Guyland's inability, after a frustrated ellipsis, to find a synonym for the word "culture" echoes the fumbles of his telephone talk and is still more amusingly echoed by his failure to think of the names of any "scholarly magazines"; all these instances undermine Guyland's claim to possess the qualities he wants his screen character to gain. His assumption that "an Englishman" will understand the meaning of culture voices a loose transatlantic perception with spectacular inappropriateness: part of Self's distinction, as the reader knows by now, is his utter lack of interest in that kind of "culture." And again, in this canny book, words nudge in the direction of self-reference: of "women, money, success" only the first title is not a novel by Martin Amis. Here, surely, is satire: garish, parodic, eye-poppingly implausible, and plain silly.

But if *Money* is satire, what is the significance of this, and what is it really satirizing? Let us now take a step back and consider the concept itself, with the aim of working out its implications for *Money*, and vice versa.

THE AMENDMENT OF VICIES

Satire is closely involved with comedy. No doubt it can be shown that not all satire is comic: Orwell, after all, insisted that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was a satire⁷, but fear trumps laughter as the overriding reaction to that book. For that matter not all comedy is comic, for any given reader. But satire habitually seeks laughter. The satire that produces no comic reaction may turn out to be an accidental tragedy. What, then, separates satire from the comic in general? A plausible answer, based in part on the post-war critical tradition, could run as follows.

What distinguishes satire amid comedy's broad remit is the intensity of its attention to a subject, and the sense that something is at stake beyond sheer

laughter. Perhaps comedy can have its own practical aims: one can construct instrumental views of the genre, in which laughter is good for spiritual or even physical health, or confirms the benign spread of a comic world-view. With memorable materialism Walter Benjamin proposed that “there is no better starting point for thought than laughter; speaking more precisely, spasms of the diaphragm generally offer better chances for thought than spasms of the soul.”⁸ But the stakes in satire are defined with particular determination: satire appears to have an instrumental dimension besides which other comedy seems comparatively autotelic, a matter of laughter as a good in itself. We say that comedy has targets: we may add that satire tracks them more relentlessly and uses more dangerous bullets. Northrop Frye, one of literature’s lawmakers, plausibly claimed that satire had two defining features: “one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque and absurd, the other is an object of attack.”⁹ Satire is an aggressive comedy, a polemical practice in which laughter signifies that damage has been done. The mockery of satire aims to diminish its object, lowering the target’s status in the estimation of a laughing audience. “It is a convenient device”, writes Terry Eagleton, “if you want to savage an opponent without granting him too much status.”¹⁰ A basic underlying assumption of satire is that that which has been laughed at is less respected, less valued, or less feared; and thus that laughter may well be a more effective weapon against an authoritative target than solemn critique would be. Historically, indeed, satire is sometimes seen to play a role in changing perceptions. In Britain the “satire boom” of the 1960s, in the magazine *Private Eye* and the sketch show *That Was The Week That Was*, is associated with a decline of deference and a less respectful attitude to politicians and officialdom.¹¹

It is clear enough that satire can have a negative agenda: a mission to diminish, a programme of damaged perceptions. Perhaps this also implies positive aims. If targets are worthy of attack, maybe that is because their rivals are judged to be superior. If satirists expend their energies to make a corrosive laughter happen, perhaps they hope that their corroded foes will be replaced by a better order. The satirist seems to be on the side of change, of progress – or at least of *correction*. Samuel Johnson considered a satirical poem one “in which wickedness or folly is censured.”¹² For John Dryden, satire aimed at “the amendment of vices”; the animating spirit of satiric poetry, he asserted, was “the scourging of Vice and Exhortation to Virtue.”¹³ Daniel Defoe considered it a means of “reformation.”¹⁴ For these figures, from what

is commonly considered the golden age of the mode in English writing, satire is ultimately a matter of moral rectitude. The distortions of satire inflect and exaggerate distortions in real social life, so that these can be more readily perceived – and remedied, that equilibrium be restored. Satire, on this view, is profoundly normative. It not only implies norms, it seeks indirectly to enforce them. Here is the most significant connection between the theory of satire and the idea of law. Normative satire requires that laws of right conduct be understood, not merely by the lone satirist, but by the work's audience. It implies consensus around shared values, and implicit agreement that transgression of those values should be pointed out and punished at the level of representation.

THE NEW KIND

If *Money* is a satire, it ought to be following some of these rules: showing us vices and follies, whose pertinence to our world we can discern despite the element of burlesque. Where, then, is *Money's* satire directed? In Elaine Showalter's account of the book, one level of the book is a "comic dystopian satire of London, New York, and Los Angeles."¹⁵ Lorne Guyland is a case in point. The passages we have already examined inflate Guyland, or show his desperate attempt to inflate himself. The process can be usefully contrasted with Amis's later short story, "Career Move," in which poems ("Sonnet", "Eclogue By A Five-Barred Gate") are given multi-million-dollar studio treatment, while screenplays (*Offensive from Quasar 13*, *Valley of the Stratocasters*) surface in penniless little magazines and drab readings.¹⁶ Among the story's effects is a satire founded on inversion. That is not the case in *Money*, where the movie business still makes titles like *Prehistoric* and *Down on the Funny Farm*: here satire's motor is exaggeration. Recognizable traits are gradually ratcheted up to lunatic levels, in a form of what James Joyce called "gigantism."¹⁷ The primary effect is comic, but the comedy is critical, insofar as it implies a norm from which Guyland has long departed. The ageing idol is grotesque; the film industry has made its members blind to reality, prone to a solipsistic spiral of self-congratulation. Amis's writing is not solemn enough to be saying this directly; in a sense it is a by-product of his comic instinct. But the passages are still implicitly powered by the debunking mockery of a foolish, over-indulged tranche of society.

Exaggeration, excess, the grotesque, are constants of the novel, as it trawls what Eric Korn, boarding Amis's rhythmic locomotive, called "midtown, fastfood, fastbuck, fastfuck Manhattan [and]... the sleaze and grate of *louche* London on the make."¹⁸ But it is not Lorne Guyland, for all his comic worth, who exemplifies these milieux: it is John Self who voices and traverses them, exploiting and being exploited by the world he ceaselessly depicts for us, and it is around him that satire would seem compelled to work. It is important here to perceive the extra-literary dimension to this very literary novel. In the case of *Money* an unusually insistent homology suggests itself between the central character, the novel's world, and the real world refracted by the book. "Twentieth century" may be the book's own recurring self-description – and a phrase whose pertinence to theories of satire we shall consider later – but *Money* is not in fact a portrait on the scale that that implies, and does not seek to be another *Dance To The Music of Time*. *Money* is a novel of the *late* twentieth century, indeed of the 1980s. Amis has spoken of his deliberate decision to place the action in 1981, at the time of riots in Brixton and Liverpool on one hand, and the Royal Wedding of Charles and Diana on the other: an emblematic contrast between rich and poor, violence and pomp, that was unmistakable at the time. John Self, who likes a punch-up, condones London's young and violent by historicizing them:

I came of age in the sixties, when there were chances, when it was all there waiting. Now they seep out of school – to what? To nothing, to fuck-all. The young (you can see it in their faces), the stegosaurus-rugged no-hopers, the parrot-crested blankies – they've come up with an appropriate response to this, which is: nothing. Which is nothing, which is fuck-all. The dole queue starts at the exit to the playground. Riots are their rumpus-room, sombre London their jungle-gym. Life is hoarded elsewhere by others. Money is so near you can almost touch it, but it is all on the other side – you can only press your face up against the glass. In my day, if you wanted, you could just drop out. You can't drop out any more. Money has seen to that (153).

Self points quite precisely to the moment of the novel, naming a new social situation. He thus partly confirms that the book is specifically delineating the world of Thatcherism – or more broadly, since the novel's remit is trans-Atlantic, the world of the New Right, of the Thatcher-Reagan alliance. It has

become a critical commonplace that *Money* is about that world – that even its other notable themes (masculinity, America, the idea of culture) are secondary to, or crucially conditioned by, a conjuring of the zeitgeist. Elaine Showalter reckons it “the most paradigmatic British novel of the fast-track greedy 1980s.”¹⁹ Nicolas Tredell avers that John Self “could be seen to embody the acquisitiveness of the 1980s in the era of Thatcher and Reagan, the desire, above all, for money.”²⁰ Laura L. Doan, while ultimately critical of the novel, goes further, asserting that it aims at “unmasking the ideological underpinnings of Thatcherism,” and that it “ostensibly exposes the false tenets of the new Toryism and impugns the greed of Thatcherite England in order to call for the transformation of the existing capitalist system.”²¹

This claim needs a little hedging. For one thing, with his characteristic strain for global significance, Amis repeatedly claims to be taking a longer view; at the end of the book, in a final disquisition on money, Self admits that “There’s not even anything very twentieth-century about it, except the disposition” (384). For another, we cannot pin the culture described by the book too rigidly on to the 1980s: a slightly longer development is clearly in question, of post-war or post-sixties society. Both the haircuts and the no-future vision that Self outlines in the passage above sound like legacies of 1970s punk. And in any case, Thatcherism was not fully operational by 1981.²² Commentators had only begun to work out what her governance would mean, not to mention whether it could last. The image of the 1980s that has passed into the popular repertoire – of wealth, conspicuous consumption, the new visibility of the financial professions – is really, in Britain at least, a product of the decade’s second half. In this sense Amis’s book is prescient, not merely imitative: rather than slavishly reporting a zeitgeist, it manages to observe and name a nascent process of social change, which would only later seem self-evident.²³

The book is not, then, programmatically about the new world of the New Right. But it is deliberately historically located, peppered with real-life news items that Self reads in his tabloid – including the odd reference to the new leaders of the 51 states: “The Western Alliance is in poor shape, I’m told. Well, what do you expect? They’ve got an actor, and we’ve got a chick. More riots in Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, the inner cities left to rot or burn. Sorry, boys, but the PM has PMT” (155). Among the novel’s most telling descriptions of social change in Britain is Self’s description of his film production company, Carburton, Linex & Self. In this black-comic vignette we

see what would come to be known as Thatcherism already down and running. Linex and Carburton, let alone Self, are besuited thugs, new rich rather than old school. They explicitly represent a class fraction which has only just claimed its fortune. Their philistinism and lack of social grace define them as much as their wealth: commandeering an elderly man's table in a restaurant, they launch into yobbish behaviour and "a few choruses of 'We Are The Champions'" (81-2). Self's analysis, as he considers the middle-aged couple at the next table, is telling: "No, the rest of the meal isn't going to be much fun for those two, I'm afraid. I suppose it must have been cool for people like them in places like this before people like us started coming here also. But we're here to stay. *You* try getting us out..." (82). The point is broadly generational and social, as Self elsewhere makes clear in addressing an implied middle-class reader: "[Y]ou hate me, don't you... I'm the new kind, the kind who has money but can never use it for anything but ugliness.... You never let us in, not really" (58).

It is these characters and attitudes – Self's people, rather than the movie stars – who form the moral mine from which *Money's* narrator pulls his nuggets of opinion. Literary fiction, Amis has remarked, is "'about the near future'. It is about the *Zeitgeist* and human evolution.... It's how the typical rhythms of the thought of human beings are developing."²⁴ The arrival on the scene of Carburton, Linex and Self is the news that he has to deliver in *Money*. But to consider the purchase of satire on this development, we must look closely at the presentation of the narrator himself, and consider whether a normative mockery is at work upon him.

IT FEELS LIKE SLAPSTICK

In two important senses, Self is indeed a fall-guy. For one thing, he is a figure of fun, his excesses comic. His burger-joint breakfast of "four Wallies, three Blastfurters, and an American Way, plus a nine-pack of beer" (29) is unlike the restaurant scene cited above: the effect is not threat but folly. Less than twenty pages later, he heads for "the House of the Big One, where I ate seven Fastfurters. They were so delicious that tears filled my eyes as I bolted them down" (46). As with Lorne Guyland, exaggeration is pivotal: Self can do nothing by half measures, cannot consume at any ordinary human rate. The

extremity of Self's consumption is inversely matched by his paucity of healthy action, as in this virtuoso morning:

For over a minute I jogged on the spot. Now this is what waking up is *supposed* to be like. Was it my fancy, or had I lost a little bit of weight?... I did a press-up....

Half way through the first pint of coffee I torched a cigarette, Mmm, tasted good.... During my sickness, I realized, I had maintained my snout-count by sheer willpower. There was a slight downcurve or shortfall on the second carton, but nothing I couldn't fix if I smoked two-handed.

I touched my toes. I poured more coffee and unpeeled the fifth carton of sticky half-and-half. I yawned contentedly. Well then, I asked myself – how about a handjob? (41)

The comedy of excess – the pint of coffee, the fifth pack of cigarettes, the lone press-up – is bolstered here by the principle of inversion that Amis will deploy in “Career Move”: it takes will power to keep smoking, but Self has doggedly managed it. Lurid implausibility surfaces again when he lists the books on his London shelf, including *Treasure Island*, *Timon of Athens* and *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* along with *Buy Buy Buy* and (that self-referential joke again) *Success!* (66-7). The sheer silliness of such burlesque is arresting. Here the decade's coming man is a locus of laughter. At times he becomes still more plainly a victim, dealing himself farcical mishaps:

I yawned and stretched – and nearly spilt the coffee. Reaching to steady the cup, I unbalanced the ashtray. Reaching to steady the ashtray, I spilt the coffee, and also hooked my elbow in the telephone's lone dreadlock – so that when, with a final heroic convulsion, I burst out of the bed, the swinging casket somehow smashed into my shin and then dropped like a bomb on to the bare mound of my foot (98).

Moments like this seem important to Amis's conception of the character, as a kind of innocent “spendthrift and gull,” the easy target for others' schemes.²⁵ Later in the book Self will wonder, “What am I starring in? It feels like slapstick to me,” before taking out his frustration on a telephone box and his Fiasco (257). He is right to be paranoid: at the novel's climax he realizes that

he has been strung along by Goodney, and winds up scraping by in London, mistaken for a beggar by a passer-by (394).

In this sense too, Self is ultimately a victim; and here, perhaps, is the normative structure of satire at work. The moral law has been re-enforced by the motion of narrative: vice has been first parodied, then punished by the fable's final descent. To phrase it thus is to read generic mechanism into a dynamic piece of literature, and to make a dazzling text sound functional; but it is a plausible view of the book's overall arc. Plausible enough, anyway, to disturb Laura L. Doan, who objects that "Self's quest for status in an upper-middle-class society that excludes members of the working class is doomed to fail from the start.... In the end, Self's entrapment in the working class marks a return to the familiar stereotype of the working-class *parvenu* who, predictably enough, is punished... for assuming he could move into this elite club."²⁶ Doan is unnecessarily solicitous for the fallen anti-hero, who can be relied on to look after himself. Her claim that Self is excluded from high society because of his lack of refinement misrepresents the plot. It is specifically Goodney's machinations that both bring Self to the heights he reaches in *Money* and dash him down again at the end. The culture of class is not implicated in his final fate: on the contrary, what Self finds at the height of his success is that as long as he has enough money he can go anywhere (opera, art galleries) with anyone (movie stars, or the cultured Martina Twain).

Doan is right to be dubious about Amis's relation to his working-class characters; but his position in relation to this generation of new money without old culture is more ambiguous than she grants. With his urban pulse and itchy neologisms, he appears to dog the steps of the contemporary, boldly participating in the changing world he describes. In a 1980 review of Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Amis fancifully pictures himself as a Captain Hooper, a voice of classlessness and democracy who would be unwelcome to Waugh.²⁷ At the same time his fastidious, mandarin stance, whose literary fruit is his neo-Nabokovian aestheticism, places him in a role of rhetorical superiority, from which satire can be launched.²⁸ This can stray beyond political critique and become mere class snobbery, as when John Self, presenting a pub colleague, announces "You could never do that voice justice, but here goes," and produces an oddly unconvincing phonetic cockney (146). Amis is indeed keen to laugh at the *parvenu*; but he is also imaginatively in thrall to him.²⁹ He comments that John Self is "stupefied by having watched too much television

– his life is without sustenance of any kind... he never knows what is going on.”³⁰ But it is really only at *Money’s* denouement that this undermines Self. For someone who doesn’t know what is going on, he has managed pretty well for the previous 350 pages. Indeed, his account of his own career – each of his adverts enlivened by a “big bim in cool pants and bra” (70) – shows that he has prospered without needing to know very much. It is not by underestimating anyone’s taste that he finally goes broke.

OKAYING BAD

It can hardly be said that Self’s values are shattered by his fall. He does imagine a world that stops believing in money, but adds “We never will, of course.... We’re all addicted and we can’t break the habit now” (384). He has taken up with a “fat nurse” with a “big heart,” but continues to write to his former lovers and keenly awaits their replies: “I won’t get a glimpse... until I’m back at the money” (387). If he has indeed been gulled by money, he has made the most of his own deception. Self’s conduct has been immoderate, sometimes immoral; it is less clear that it has all been unenjoyable. The novel’s close seems a pyrrhic victory for norms and moderation, after a text which has so spectacularly pursued excess. Amis is careful to distance himself from Self – not least via the inclusion of a “Martin Amis” so different from the protagonist. But Self’s sins are also guilty pleasures: the writing of this figure and his desires is undertaken with glee. The literary quality of Self’s narrative is crucial in complicating his relation to us, and making him problematic as a mere object for satire. Take Self’s description of the firm’s actual business activities, in a passage which builds its own momentum:

You should see how much money we pay each other, how little work we do, and how thick and talentless many of us are.... We all seem to make lots of money. Man, do we seem to be coining it here. Even the chicks live like kings. The car is free. The car is on the house. The house is on the mortgage. The mortgage is on the firm – without interest. The interesting thing is: how long can this last? For me, that question carries an awful lot of anxiety – compound interest. It can’t be legal, surely. You can’t legally treat money in such a way. But we do. Are we greedy! Are we shameless!... What did I ever do with it, the money?

Pissed it away, I just pissed it away. And somehow I still have lots of money (78-9).

Even as he sketches a new style of business, Amis is toying with words: mixing the financial and psychological idioms around the word “interest,” finding a rhythm (“The car is on the house. The house is on the firm”) whose sudden emergence is droll. Ventriloquizing Self with consciously inappropriate eloquence, he does an alarmingly effective job: he gives this dissolute, violent character a more compelling voice than anyone else in the book, or for that matter anyone else’s book at this time.³¹

Here is a crux of *Money*: in its very hyperbole, it makes the seeming object of satire into a subject whose interest and language transcend the attack. Amis’s satirical idiom, its black-comic rhythm and gross invention, risks becoming a celebration of its target. Indeed, to speak of “risk” is to overstate the force of the initial polemic: the text gladly hands Self a vibrancy and power of his own, in what is more a strategy than an accident. “The foreigners round here,” Self demands: “I know they don’t speak English – okay, but do they even speak Earthling? They speak stereo, radio crackle, interference. They speak sonar, bat-chirrup, pterodactylese, fish purr” (87). The complaint starts out looking ignorant, even bigoted: but it slips into a fluency that puts the speaker out ahead, on his own high frequency within the tongue he shares with us. Self’s impossible voice – a job who thinks the way Martin Amis writes – is a conceit, a kind of vast fast-running joke; but it also mitigates mockery’s purchase on him.

Satire in *Money* thus plays with its own subversion, its complicity with the world under scrutiny. And complicity is among this book’s central projects: it is the effect for which Self’s first-person address to the reader strives throughout. “I wish you were here,” he confesses while donning a new suit, “I wish you were here to tell me it looked okay” (195). Sometimes an imaginary dialogue takes place: “Memory’s a funny thing, isn’t it. You don’t agree? I don’t agree either” (26). The reader is not so much implied as required, a necessary function of Self’s discourse, and becomes a confessor. “Ah, I’m sorry,” Self implores, “I didn’t dare tell you earlier in case you stopped liking me, in case I lost your sympathy altogether – and I do need it, your sympathy” (211). He may not get it, of course, from the real-world reader. But the book does not cease to strain toward such a pact. “Well, I’d like to sign off with some words of wisdom,” Self announces in the closing

pages. "I'm closer to you, I hope, than *he'll* ever be" (392). Narrator separates himself out from author (an author whose avatar walks the pages), and protests his intimacy with us.

Money plunges cheerfully into the morass of its own making. "The humourless," Amis comments in a review, "have no idea what is going on and can't make sense of anything at all."³² It is thus those with the strongest sense of humour who will inherit the stricken earth, and Self's comic riffs are too strong to resist. "I must face up to something," he announces: "however painful the realization may seem at first, I must accept that I'm not an alcoholic" (269). Comedy, Amis repeatedly finds, is too potent to be diluted by anything as moral critique. Indeed the comic itself is the temptation that the moralist cannot resist. "I sit around," Self informs us, "trying to teach myself self-discipline. I can't be doing with it, though (it just isn't enough fun, self-discipline), and I always end up going out for a good time instead" (73).

One running gag is emblematic of the book's refusal to refuse. Struggling to get through Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Self reports: "After a while I thought of ringing down and having Felix [the bellhop] bring me up some beers. I resisted the temptation, but it took a long time too. Then I rang down and had Felix bring me up some beers" (204). We think that "resisting" means that a temptation has been vanquished: the joke is that "resisting," for Self, is the name for a temporary effort, and once it's over, the temptation is indulged. Earlier in the book Self is bored in his hotel room: "Now the way I figured it I had six realistic options. I could sack out right away, with some scotch and a few Serafim. I could go back to [the brothel] the Happy Isles and see what little Moby was up to. I could call Doris Arthur. I could catch a live sex show around the corner, in bleeding Seventh Avenue. I could go out and get drunk. I could stay in and get drunk." New paragraph, for emphasis: "In the end I stayed in and got drunk. The trouble was, I did all the other things first" (111-2). One more, wilfully offensive example: when Self's girlfriend Selina refuses to have sex with him, his first impulse is to demand: "Then what do you think is the *point* of you?": "But I didn't", he tells us,

I resisted the temptation. I looked into the proud drama of her face, the valves and orbits of her throat, the wetlook runnels of her hair, the breasts, heavier than ever, solidly mounted on the ribcage, the naked slopes of the belly, the sudden flaring of the hips, a smell of sleep.

"Then what do you think is the *point* of you?" (244).

The repeated comic structure describes a loss of moderation, of standards, of law-abiding responsibility – but it also relies on that loss, naughtily rejoices in the absence of a functioning moral code. The joke indulges indulgence. In the third example the move is specifically gendered, as the desirous but contemptuous truth of masculinity is first dutifully suppressed, then blithely blurted out anyway: a move that would be paradigmatic for Britain’s cheekily retrograde “lad culture” a decade later.³³ In these jests, what looks like satire is swept away by the energies that seemed to be satirized: for those desires, the book’s black humour confides and asks us to admit, are more powerful than the impulse to form a norm and stand by it. It is not vice but virtue that is the joke’s butt. The law is broken so many times that it almost ceases to exist. We might say that satire needed everyone to respect the law – and that once it is so routinely and flagrantly broken, no more satire is possible. The book does not so much lament a loss of values, or bid for a Nietzschean transvaluation of value, as it rhetorically stages a systematic *falling below* value. “What is this state”, Self asks early on, “seeing the difference between good and bad and choosing bad – or consenting to bad, okaying bad?” (26).

DOWNWARD-LOOKING

Amis himself has returned to this line when quizzed about the place of value in the novel. “Do you recognize in yourself a puritanical streak?,” John Haffenden asks: Amis insists that he has “strong moral views... very much directed at things like money and acquisition. I think money is the central deformity in life.” This sounds like the standpoint of the satirist as Johnson or Pope would have understood it: from a normative base, “deformity” can be perceived and lampooned. Yet Amis goes on to consider that while his own view of his characters’ moral failings and successes is clear, he never feels “the need to point them out”: “I may just be a victim of what I take to be the nature of moral thinking in our time, which is actually lazy.” He cites Self’s self-interrogation as his exemplification of this malaise: “A certain sort of perverse laxity about oneself, moral unease without moral energy.”³⁴

If the contemporary is weak in its insistence on norms, this will have implications for satire. Here we can return to the critical history we consulted

earlier. The pre-eminence of the 18th century in English satirical history is often partially explained by the claim that the period was characterized by stable norms. This “greatest period of satire,” avers Chris Baldick, was one in which “writers could appeal to a shared sense of normal conduct from which vice and folly were seen to stray.”³⁵ The claim that the 18th century was English literature’s high satirical season thus implies that satire not only has, but exists in, a history. Among critics of satire, the description of the 18th century as normative finds its negative corollary in the 20th century. The recurrent claim is that the last century has been incapable of great satire because the values on which that depends have been eroded. P. K. Elkin, an enthusiast for Augustan satire, insists that

The twentieth-century satirist sees himself as completely alienated from society and for this and other reasons, he is fundamentally unsure of himself and his standards – less reasonable and judicial than Dryden or Johnson, more pessimistic than Juvenal or Swift. His tone may be cynical, or hysterical, but it is unlikely to be hortatory, and for *saeva indignatio* he may substitute a desperate nihilism.³⁶

James Sutherland likewise asserts that the nihilism of the 20th century makes satire almost impossible in the English novel.³⁷ If satire depends on norms, then the eclipse of norms will threaten satire. The hypothetical situation contains its irony. Moral and social decline prompts the chiding corrective response of satire; but it simultaneously undermines satire, which is shorn of the implicit values with which to contrast a degraded contemporary scene.

The evident differences between Augustan and modern literature grant theorists of the decline of satire a superficial plausibility. Yet these arguments should not be given much reverence. They make for a poor description of such twentieth-century satirists as Myles na gCopaleen and George Orwell, and they omit to mention the limited social range of the supposedly vanished consensus. It is arguable that the decayed norms in question were never universally accepted; and in any case, one historian’s cracked consensus may be another’s surge of dissent and liberty. Yet the *idea* of a decline, a corrosion of shared norms, is powerful, and it is a rhetoric on which Martin Amis extensively plays. In a piece on Saul Bellow published the same year as *Money*, Amis ambivalently muses that “the myth of decline – the elegiac vision, which insists that all the good has gone and only the worst remains –

has never looked less like a myth and more like a reality”, discrediting and relegitimizing the “myth” in quick succession.³⁸ Myth or reality, *Money’s* vision of the 1980s is in part a performance of that idea’s implications. Self’s voice is a staging of the failure of moral law, and its portrait of a decayed world is that monologue’s necessary setting. Examples are legion of this entropic vision. “The birds of New York have more or less given up the ghost,” Self muses, “and who can blame them? They have been processed by Manhattan and the twentieth century” (213).³⁹ Self looks at the author’s namesake as they watch the Royal Wedding together: “If I stare into his face I can make out the areas of waste and fatigue, the moonspots and boneshadow you’re bound to get if you hang out in the twentieth century” (262-3). Time itself is value-laden, historically specific in its effects on the people who inhabit it: his century, Self asserts, does human beings a physical damage that is also (“waste and fatigue”) implicitly moral. The fact that Self is attracted to the damage only confirms its low moral standing. Reading his newspaper, the *Morning Line*, Self recites stories of violence, concluding with the oddest of all: “Here’s a piece about that chick who’s dying in her teens because, according to the *Line*, she’s allergic to the twentieth century. Poor kid... Well I have my problems too, sister, but I don’t have yours. I’m not allergic to the twentieth century. I am addicted to the twentieth century” (91). Modernity, Amis’s rhetoric avers, is a toxic tale of declension. The 1980s, for John Self and perhaps his creator, are the apotheosis of “the twentieth century.” In this book, that is to say that they are the climax of decline.

Cities also suffer in this wasted age. “London,” we learn, “has jet-lag. London has culture-shock. It’s doing everything the wrong way round at the wrong time” (150). New York is specked with suffering madmen, “full of these guys, these guys and dolls who bawl and holler and weep about bad luck all the hours there are” (6). “New York”, Self explains in a riff of stunning banality, “is a jungle, they tell you. You could go further, and say that New York is a jungle. New York *is a jungle*” (193). Travelling between the two is an ordeal: “I am a thing made up of time lag, culture shock, zone shift. Human beings simply weren’t meant to fly around like this” (264). If the working classes and urban poor are in trouble, then, so are the high rollers: monied luxury is part of the disease, not a protection from it. “[T]his is a tough planet,” Self tells us at the book’s close, “and don’t you tell me any different. In the best, the freest, the richest latitudes, it’s still a tough globe. If you ever go to Earth – *watch out*” (391). Life on this poisoned globe is a kind of

death: "Really living is what I'm doing," Self announces, "and it's killing me" (270). And if the present is bad, "The future's futures have never looked so rocky. Don't put money on it" (208). Characteristically, Amis is reaching for a grand vision of decay, ecological and planetary as well as merely human.⁴⁰ Literature, his fictional namesake tells us, has long observed the world's downhill slope: "[W]e're pretty much agreed that the twentieth century us an ironic age – downward-looking. Even realism, rockbottom realism, is considered a bit grand for the twentieth century" (248). We are beyond "the epic or heroic frame," in which "[t]he hero is a god or has godlike powers or virtues" (246); beyond the tragic, delving lower even than the realistic.⁴¹ Perhaps we have reached the satiric – and the book's author may indeed find the narrator, in Amis's metafictional description, "wicked, deluded, pitiful or ridiculous" (246).

Yet the book's apocalyptic rhetoric implies another conclusion: that Earthlings have now plumbed to a level below the redeeming possibility of satire. The slow death of the globe bleaches its inhabitants of the values with which they could assail their condition. *Money's* position in relation to satire might thus be that which George Steiner once gave Brecht's *Mother Courage* in relation to tragedy: a last liminal glimmering which attends the mode's exhaustion.⁴² The implication is that modernity is beyond satire: that history has outstripped its mockers. The most familiar version of this claim is Tom Lehrer's quip that satire died the day Henry Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Lehrer's remark has perhaps two subtly different meanings. One is that the folly of the world has outgrown the capacity of the satirist to capture it. A piece of unreason, of looking-glass logic, has been enshrined in the annals, and crimes have been rewarded at the highest level: the satirist is dwarfed by enormity. The remark also implies that the award of the prize is itself a satirical act, or a grisly parody – a satire? – of one: a rhetorical action that outguns satire by actualizing what could only have been a joke.⁴³ In any case, anything satire can do, reality can outdo: the world is more farcical than any comic representation of it can achieve. It was one of Amis's touchstones, Philip Roth, who made a related claim for the novel, declaring in 1961 that modern American reality had come to exceed the capacities of the American writer.⁴⁴ It is this sense of excess that Amis builds in *Money*, where degradation and the possibility of satirizing it are set racing frantically against each other.

It is a race, in this novel, that satire cannot win. No wonder that when asked about the tension between “writerly relish” and “the indignation usually expected of the satirist,” Amis replies, “I’m never sure that what I’ve been writing is satire.”⁴⁵ Amis may lay claim to “strong moral views,” but *Money* refuses to enforce them. On the contrary, as we have seen, it delights in flouting them. Amis aligns this with “moral thinking in our time” – and he is clearly reluctant to write a work that becomes out of time by arraiging its time. A writer who insists on fiction’s capacity to track and pre-empt the contemporary, he will not be outmanoeuvred by the present; and to write a moralistic work would be to lose purchase on the volatile real in the very act of haranguing it. So it is that *Money*, borrowing the energy and excess of the emergent social world of the 1980s, becomes exemplification as much as critique.⁴⁶ *Money*’s implicit message about its moment might be transcribed thus: when excess becomes the norm, norms can no longer be invoked against excess. Like Amis, we cannot be sure that what he has produced is satire. It looks and sounds a lot like satire, with its garish burlesques and its vista of vice. But it is not finally content with that role, which would see it left behind by (a persistent image) the speeding train of its era. Not content with beating them, Amis joins them; the book is determined to have its Blastfurter and eat it. *Money*, the emblematic English novel of the Thatcher years, appears to be staging a one-book satire boom; but its ultimate effect is to break the bank of value upon which satire draws.

Notes

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¹ On the particular issues raised by satire in the novel genre, see one of the major recent works in the field, Charles A. Knight’s *The Literature of Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch 6.

² Martin Amis, *Money* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp.11-12. Subsequent references to this novel are by in-text citation.

³ One more name: Elaine Showalter suggests that Guyland’s role in Self’s film corresponds to that of Kirk Douglas in a picture authored by Amis, *Saturn 3: ‘Ladlit’*, in Zachary Leader (ed), *On Modern British Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.60-76 (p.69).

⁴ ‘Lone Guy-Land’, suggests Showalter: *Id.*, at 68 (my italics).

⁵ It is at least hinted (219) that Nub’s surname is really ‘Faulkner’, misrendered for the reader by Self’s ignorance.

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- ⁶ Amis at any rate borrows the name of Fielding's creation Joseph Andrews in his later novel *Yellow Dog* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003).
- ⁷ George Orwell, 'Letter to Francis A. Henson (extract)', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters: Volume 4* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.564. The insistent presence of both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* in the pages of *Money* is wry confirmation that Amis wants his novel to be viewed as a member of the same tradition.
- ⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* trans. Anna Bostock (London: verso, 1988 [1973]), p.101.
- ⁹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p.224.
- ¹⁰ Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.221.
- ¹¹ See for instance Patricia Waugh, *Harvest of the Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.25.
- ¹² Johnson's *Dictionary* quoted in J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p.598.
- ¹³ John Dryden, quoted in Cuddon, *Id.*, at 598; and John Dryden, 'Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire', *The Works of John Dryden*, A.B. Chambers, William Frost, and Vinton Dearing (eds), 20 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), vol. iv, p.55, quoted in Knight, *supra* note 1 at 5.
- ¹⁴ Defoe quoted in Cuddon, *supra* note 12 at p.598.
- ¹⁵ Showalter, *supra* note 3 at 66.
- ¹⁶ See Martin Amis, *'Heavy Water' and Other Stories* (London: Vintage, 1999 [1998]), pp.1-27.
- ¹⁷ Joyce applied the word to the 'technic' of the twelfth chapter of *Ulysses*, one of the book's most satirical: see Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's 'Ulysses': A Study* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1963), pp.226, 239.
- ¹⁸ Eric Korn, 'Frazzled Yob-Gene Lag-Jag', *Times Literary Supplement* 4253 (5 October 1984), 1119, partially reprinted in Nicolas Tredell (ed), *The Fiction of Martin Amis* (Cambridge: Icon, 2000), p.55.
- ¹⁹ Showalter, *supra* note 3 at 66.
- ²⁰ Tredell, *supra* note 18 at 55.
- ²¹ Doan, Laura L. 'Sexy Greedy Is The Late Eighties: Power Systems in Amis's *Money* and Churchill's *Serious Money*', *Minnesota Review* 34-5 (Spring / Fall 1990), pp.69-80, extracted and reprinted in Tredell, *supra* note 18 at 79.
- ²² Some commentators continued to maintain that no such thing as Thatcherism existed. See for instance T.E. Utey, 'Thatcherism: A Monstrous Invention', *Spectator*, 9 August 1986, reprinted in *Britain in the Eighties: The Spectator's View of the Thatcher Decade* (London: Grafton, 1989), pp.146-149. One of the most important early defiances of this view, from a rightly worried left, was Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds), *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983).
- ²³ It is retrospective too, set three years before it was published: Amis 'thought it amusing to write an historical novel about something which actually happened only the other day' – in interview with John Haffenden (1985), reprinted in Tredell, *supra* note 18 at 61.
- ²⁴ Martin Amis interviewed on 10 July 2002, in Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes, *Martin Amis: The Essential Guide* (London: Vintage, 2003), p.17.
- ²⁵ Martin Amis in interview with John Haffenden, reprinted in Tredell, *supra* note 18 at 65.
- ²⁶ Doan, *supra* note 21 at 77.
- ²⁷ Martin Amis, *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews, 1971-2000* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), p.204.

²⁸ In *Money* he also has the nous to mock himself: the figure of 'Martin Amis', who to Self's dismay 'lives like a student' (237), announces a daily programme of erudition that is so extreme as to be absurd (236), and is given to pontifications on the nature of fiction (246, 260).

²⁹ This point applies broadly, not to *Money* alone. Repeatedly Amis has returned to plebeian characters – some of whom, like *London Fields'* Keith Talent, make John Self look positively virtuous – with the same double movement. The educated writer shows his scorn for the grunting, semi-literate prole; yet the latter is consistently a focus of Amis's fiction, an object of fascination in his linguistic and social difference. What Amis's imagination – verbally matchless, yet humanly straitened – cannot seem to manage for long is the working-class character who is not grasping yob or exploitative thug: the gentler complexities of ordinary life.

³⁰ Amis quoted in Tredell, *supra* note 18 at 63.

³¹ 'The reader has never met John Self (no great loss, perhaps) or anyone like him', opined D.J. Taylor, 'but nobody could doubt that he actually exists': *A Vain Conceit: British Fiction of the 1980s* (London: Bloomsbury, 1989), p.104. Elaine Showalter considers Self 'immensely likeable', his voice 'an irresistible bombardment of inventive and hyperactive language' (*supra* note 3 at 67). Eric Korn, in his perceptive early review, found that 'the nastiness is sympathetic, the vice enticing': *supra* note 18 at 58. Amis's own descriptions of the book's paradoxical voice have been rather disappointingly complacent. When in his memoir *Experience* (New York: Talk Miramax, 2000), he declares that 'it is the novel that John Self, the narrator, had in him but would never write' (p.6, n.2), the cliché ('everyone has a novel in them') obscures the more intricate mixture of impersonation, imagination, flagrant artifice and authorial invasion that composes the novel.

³² Amis, *supra* note 27 at 363.

³³ Elaine Showalter's proposal that *Money* is a major precursor of 'ladlit' is thus astute. For a subtle inquest into masculinity that would make a good companion for *Money*, see Steven Connor, 'The Shame of Being A Man', *Textual Practice* 15 (2001), 211-230.

³⁴ Amis in interview with John Haffenden, in Tredell *supra* note 18 at 63.

³⁵ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.198.

³⁶ P.K. Elkin, *The Augustan Defence of Satire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p.198.

³⁷ James Sutherland, *English Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.132, cited in Peter Pedro, *Modern Satire* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), p.2.

³⁸ Martin Amis, "*The Moronic Inferno*", and other Visits to America (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), p.22.

³⁹ For a still more extended catalogue of nature transformed by urban life, see *Money*, p.266: a wasp that's lost its sting, a pigeon eating a chip, robin redbreasts with 'psychosomatic ulcers and cholesterol overload'.

⁴⁰ 'Amis's fiction', concurs D.J. Taylor, 'is built on the assumption of impending social and ethical collapse': *After The War: The Novel and England since 1945* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p.190.

⁴¹ The decline of literature's purview is a remarkably, almost embarrassingly, recurring trope in Amis. 'If art has an arrow', he has asserted, 'then that is the way it points: straight downwards, from demigod to demirep': *supra* note 27 at 15. See also Martin Amis, *supra* note 38 at 17, and *The Information* (London: Flamingo, 1995), p.129.

⁴² See George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber, 1961), pp.344-349.

⁴³ Terry Eagleton glosses the incident as 'an event so outrageously surreal that no self-respecting realist novelist would have thought it up, other perhaps than as a piece of black humour' – *The English Novel: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.10.

⁴⁴ 'It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist' – Philip Roth, 'Writing American Fiction', in *The Commentary Reader* ed. Norman Podhoretz (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), pp.595-609 (p.597).

⁴⁵ Amis in interview with John Haffenden, in Tredell, *supra* note 18 at 62.

⁴⁶ Caryl Churchill's play *Serious Money* (1987) is a notable comparison here: an analysis of the stock market written by a socialist playwright, it famously attracted gaggles of champagne-swilling City traders delighted at their stage portrayal. Laura L. Doan was thus astute in reading the texts together at an early stage. On Churchill's play see Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack, *English Drama: a Cultural History* (London: Blackwell, 1996), pp.336-7.