

## THE SATIRICAL ART IN KINGSLEY AMIS'S *LUCKY JIM*

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### ABSTRACT

Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* is a satirical novel attacking individuals from across Britain's cultural, social and political spectrums. It is both uproariously funny and deadly serious, both academic satire and comic romance; it directs its spleen both at what remained of England's traditional class structure and the new Welfare State and the educational reforms that followed in the wake of the Second World War.

This study exposes the satirical art in *Lucky Jim* in which scholars, such as Professor Welch, are mocked and learning is called into question. The university setting functions as the epitome of a stuffy bourgeois world and as a focus for Amis's wider satire of contemporary life and society.

### الفن الساخر في رواية جم المحفوظ لكنكسي آيمس

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### خلاصة

تعد رواية جيم المحفوظ للكاتب البريطاني كنكسلي آيمس من الروايات الساخرة التي يوجه فيها الكاتب سخريته للطبقات الثقافية والاجتماعية والسياسية. اذ يتسم هذا النوع من الرواية بهزليتها الصاخبة و جديتها المفرطة، وسخريتها من المؤسسات الأكاديمية تثير الضحك.

توجه الرواية غضبها الساخر على ما تبقى من تركيبة الطبقة الاجتماعية التقليدية في انكلترا فضلا عن مستويات الرفاهية والاصلاحات التعليمية والتربوية في أعقاب الحرب العالمية الثانية.

تحاول هذه الدراسة تسليط الضوء على الفن الساخر في الرواية مدار البحث والتهكم من العلماء الذين يدعون الاعلامية و ثقيلي الظل غير فاعلين مثل الأستاذ ويلش، أضف إلى ذلك السخرية من التربية والتعليم المثيرة للريبة، في حين نلاحظ المشهد الزمكاني في الرواية يمثل صورة مصغرة لعالم البرجوازية الضيقة الأفق، وكمساحة واسعة للسخرية يستخدمها الكاتب أيمن إلى حد بعيد للحياة المعاصرة والمجتمع.

It was luck you needed all along; with just a little more luck [Jim would] have been able to switch his life on to a momentarily adjoining track, a track destined to swing aside at once away from his own.

(Kingsley Amis, 1991: 204)

The real revolution represented by *Lucky Jim* was primarily a cultural one; it represented a significant alteration in the register of fiction, a paradigm shift of clear importance.

(Malcolm Bradbury, 1993: 324)

## I

The objective of the present study is to pinpoint the salient features of Amis's satire. It mainly concentrates on the satirical element in his novel *Lucky Jim*. It also deals with satire as a genre, which seems to be a unique combination of stylistic structure and mode. Therefore, the individuals' moral lapses and their social background are thematically portrayed to show the flaws in each one of them, and to some extent the imperfections of the society they present.

Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* signaled a new direction for the English novel. Deemed "a classic comic novel," the "seminal campus novel," (Lodge, 1992: v) and "one of the key books of the English 1950s," (Moseley, 1993: 18-19)

Amis's debut work, set in the years following the Second World War, "captured a powerful contemporary mood" and came "to seem the exemplary Fifties" (Bradbury, 320) novel. As Malcolm Bradbury (1988, 207, 204) puts it, *Lucky Jim* "became a summative work of the new spirit in fiction much as John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* did in Drama"; and its author's "impact on the 1950s came to rival that of [Evelyn] Waugh on the 1920s."

Amis wrote on subjects ranging from education and politics to literature and film, in which the author demonstrated his acerbic wit and attacked pretentiousness in any form. As Amis himself affirmed,

I'm not exactly an entertainer pure and simple, not exactly an artist pure and simple, certainly not an incisive critic of society, and certainly not a political figure though I'm interested in politics.... I'm just a combination of some of those things.

(Salwak, 1975: 18)

To say that Amis was a successful writer with a wide following is not to suggest that he was uncontroversial. The controversy stems from the fact that his works attacked individuals from across Britain's cultural, social, and political spectrums. Indeed, Amis, who was sharply critical of both the Left and the Right, has "been described as a proletarian boor and an elitist dandy, both Philistine and University wit" (Moseley: 1). In this same vein, *Lucky Jim* is both uproariously funny and deadly serious containing both academic satire and comic romance; it directs its spleen both at the what remained of England's traditional class structure and the new Welfare State and the educational reforms that followed in the wake of the Second World War. In this respect, his fictional writing is similar to his contemporary novelist, Angus

Wilson, whose short stories and novels diagnose his razor-sharp and savagely witty examinations of British manners, characters and social conflicts. Both writers satirically present the snobbery, artificiality and hypocrisy of the middle class as Jane Austen does in her writing.

*Lucky Jim* was anti-modernist to the extent that it challenged, at least implicitly, the legitimacy and worth of the “experimental novel” of a literary generation earlier. Yet the novel represented far more than a conservative or traditional backlash; it was also innovative in many ways. As David Lodge observes, *Lucky Jim* was the first British campus novel ... to take as its central character a lecturer at a provincial university, and to find a rich seam of comic and narrative material in that small world” (vii). *Lucky Jim*, Lodge continues, was a

distinctly British version of a kind of novel that hitherto been a peculiarly American phenomenon. My own novels of university life and those of Malcolm Bradbury, Howard Jacobson, Andrew Davis et al., are deeply indebted to its example. Jim Dixon’s anxiety about professional future, his dependence on the patronage of a senior colleague whom he despises, is a recurrent feature of the genre. (vii-viii)

Put simply, *Lucky Jim* almost single-handedly launched an important British novelistic subgenre of the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, this novel is worthy reading for it defines academia in the eyes of much of the world as does no other book. It shifts the ridicule from the students to the faculty.

*Lucky Jim* is driven by a particularly “epic disdain for the idiocies, pedantries, mindless rules and unpleasant personal habits with which humanity is curse .....Remarkable for its skewing of artifice and pretension” (Laing, 2010).

## II

According to Amis, the original inspiration for *Lucky Jim* was the visit he paid to his friend, the poet Philip Larkin, in the mid-1940s, when the latter was employed at the university in Leicester. Amis notes in his *Memoirs* that Jim Dixon's name derived from "Dixon Drive," Larkin's address in Leicester; and that his poet-friend helped him thoroughly revise an early draft of the manuscript.

Amis in general and *Lucky Jim* in particular are commonly associated with the "Angry Young Men" of the British 1950s, a politico-literary "movement" that was understood to embrace a political and artistic agenda. As David Lodge sums up this cultural phenomenon, "'The Angry Young Men' was a journalistic term, originally put into circulation by a leading article in the *Spectator*, to group together a number of authors and/or their fictional heroes, who appeared on the literary and theoretical scenes in the mid-to-late 1950s, vigorously expressing their discontent with life in contemporary Britain" (ix). The roster of the angry young male protagonists of the time includes Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956), Arthur Seaton in Alan Sillitoe's novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), Joe Lampton in John Braine's novel *Room at the Top* (1957), Charles Lumley in John Wain's novel *Hurry on Down* (1953), and of course Dixon in Amis's debut novel. As disparate in disposition and situation as these male protagonists may be, they represent an emergent meritocracy, share an anti-establishment agenda, and "fulminate against the society in which they find themselves, criticizing its politics, morality, jobs, women, and the widespread, complacency they perceive" (Kalliney, 2001: 93). The new Welfare State and

the democratized educational system are targeted by many of these lower-middle class or working-class protagonists, who combine progressive social protest with cultural conservatism, skepticism about the emergent Welfare State with a concern about “the continuing impregnability of the ostensibly rich” (Blamires, 1982: 222).

Despite the social and intellectual common ground shared by these works and authors, Amis from the start questioned the very existence of such a “movement.” While the above works collectively seemed to signal a trend – “people could be forgiven,” Amis wrote, “for mistaking this for a sort of minor revolution or turning point in English writing” (Salwak: 2-3) – the author was nevertheless displeased with being “lumped together with some very strange people” in a “non-existent movement,” (Barber, 1975: 46) and viewed this school as a little more than “a phantom creation of literary journalists” (Amis, 1968: 95). As Bradbury explains, many of the authors in this movement “were not young, and a lot of them were women” (318).

By the time *Lucky Jim* emerged, however,

Six costly years of war had been followed by seven or eight costly years of peace. The Labour Party’s burst of postwar idealism was spent; an empire had been lost; the bill for it all lay on [Britain] like a plight. Cities were still bomb-shattered, landlords rapacious, railways and transport grimly run down, commuting an expensive horror, rationing still in effect.

(Paul, 1965: 318)

Amis’s first novel registers – explicitly or implicitly, humorously or not – many of these discontents.

Politically, Amis moved from the Left to the Right over the course of his long career. In the early 1950s, for example, at the time of writing *Luck Jim*,

Amis was avowedly left-wing in orientation. Indeed, during the 1950s Amis “was announcing himself a probable lifetime Labour voter, and explored his Fabian allegiances” in 1957 pamphlet, *Socialism and the Intellectuals*. By the 1960s, however, Amis’s rightward drift became noticeable, and by the 1980s Amis viewed himself a thoroughgoing Tory with a few “liberal” holdovers in the area of “hanging, homosexuality, [and] abortion” (Rabinovitz, 1967: 61)

Amis’s drift to the right represents a less dramatic political shift than meets the eye, however. After all, as one critic explains, “In reality, Amis was only very hesitantly committed to the Left” (61), even in the 1960s.

Indeed, Amis’s professed apathy in the pamphlet for politics in general and for Labour in particular, and his attack on intellectuals for not knowing much about politics and for caring too much about principles, roused a furor even in liberal journals.

Amis was particularly skeptical about the democratization of education – “more will mean worse,” he famously wrote (Moseley: 3) – that was occurring in the British university system after World War II. He even penned some “Black Papers” on education, “manifestos designed to counter the official government ‘White Papers’ by pointing up a general decline in educational standards”(3). Interestingly, the author’s worries regarding this system came to light in novelist W. Somerset Maugham’s praise for *Lucky Jim*. Maugham noted the novel’s “significance as a social document” yet regarded this significance as “ominous”:

I am told that today ... more than sixty per cent of the men who go to the universities [in Britain] go on a Government grant. This is a new class that has entered upon the scene. It is the white-collar proletariat. ... They do not

go to the university to acquire culture, but to get a job, and when they have got one, scamp it. They have no manners Their idea of a celebration is to go They are scum. They will in due course leave the university. Some will doubtless sink back, perhaps with relief, into the modest class from which they emerged...

(Wilson, 1966: 276)

Although different in tone from the critique of the educational system leveled by *Lucky Jim*, Maugham's words capture the novel's sense that academic standards after the war were much diminished from what they had been in the days prior to the push to bring university education to the masses.

An anti-modernist, anti-Romantic, anti-elitist aesthetic agenda accompanied the postwar sociopolitical agenda of many "Angries."\* As Bradbury observes, the new tone seemed determined "to dispense with the experimentalism of the 1920s and 1930s, with the romanticism and apocalypticism of the 1940s" (particularly that of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas), and with "the Beckettian despairs emanating from Paris" (Bradbury, 1988: 207). Speaking of such "so-called Angries" as Wain, Braine, and himself, Amis affirms that they wrote their fiction in a traditional style, that they were "reactionaries rather than rebels. We were trying to get back, let's say, to the pre-Joycean tradition" (Barber, 1977: 66). As one critic writes, "In their concern not to be associated in any way with genteel Bloomsbury traditions of fine writing," many of "these writers cultivated a deliberately slapdash, honest Jack style of writing, while loose, picaresque structure often adopted was symptomatic of an emphatic rejection of the ... Jamesian concept of form in the novel" (Phelps, 1983: 431).

Amis's antipathy to experimental prose, which he deemed arcane, obscure, precious, and rarified, was openly expressed and thoroughgoing: "I can't bear

it. I dislike it, as I think most readers dislike, being in the slightest doubt about what is taking place, what is meant. I dislike mystification” (Barber: 47). Amis attacks another idea that is often associated with Bloomsbury literary culture: that “style is a self-sufficient entity to be separated at will from qualities of subject matter and capable of exhibiting a ‘charm’ or ‘iridescence’ of its own” (Rabinovitz, 39).

Amis is at his most strident and outspoken in taking on modernist literary aesthetics in a 1958 piece in the *Spectator*. There he writes:

The idea about experiment being the life-blood of the English novel is one that dies hard. “Experiment,” in this context, boils down pretty regularly to “obtruded oddity,” whether in construction – multiple viewpoints and such – or in style ... Shift from one scene to the next in midsentence, cut down on verbs or definite articles, and you are putting yourself right up in the forefront, at any rate in the eyes of those who were reared on Joyce and Virginia Woolf ...

(40-1)

What Bradbury says of Jim Dixon, then – that he is an intellectual rebel “against genteel high culture, aestheticism and bohemianism, the hangover of Bloomsbury” (Bradbury, 1993: 321) – is equally true of Jim’s creator.

Lodge is correct to place Amis’s fiction within the tradition of British comic writing that stretches from “Waugh, Wodehouse, Dickens and Fielding to Restoration and Elizabethan comedy” (vi); and Bradbury is right to speak of Amis as having inherited “the role of the Comic Bad Man of English Letters which Waugh had so powerfully sustained a generation earlier” (Bradbury, 1988: 206). Indeed, Amis describes himself as “writing novels within the main English-language tradition” about “understandable characters in a straight-forward style” (Bradbury, 1993: 322). His novels borrow from the

comic satire devices of the eighteenth-century British novel in general and of the works of Henry Fielding, the author of *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*, in particular. As Walter Allen observes, “the Amis hero can be described as Fielding does in *Tom Jones*: Though he did not always act rightly, yet he never did otherwise without feeling and suffering for it; and like *Tom Jones*’s, his life is ‘a constant struggle between honour and inclination’” (1964: 281-2). One imagines that Amis agrees with the protagonist of his third novel, *I Like It Here*, who lauds Fielding as the only non-contemporary novelist who could be read with unaffected and whole-hearted interest, “the only one who never had to be apologized for or excused on the grounds of changing taste” (Moseley: 12). And Aims in a 1957 essay praises Fielding for his “wit,” “irony,” and concern “not to bore the reader, to keep the narrative going along, and affirms that, even after two hundred years, Fielding’s realism has “not dimmed” and his humor “is closer to our own than that of any writer before the present century” (Aims, 1957: 1).

### III

Amis’s scabrous debut leads the reader through “a gallery of emphatically English bores, cranks, frauds, and neurotic with whom Dixon must be content in one way or another in order to hold on his cushy academic perch and with the girl of his fancy” (Gessen, 2012).

Amis refers to himself as “a writer of serio-comedies,” (Salwak: 7) and *Lucky Jim*, a romantic comedy with picaresque elements, fits this mold. A curious mixture of realism and fairy tale, *Lucky Jim* retells the Cinderella story, this time with a deserving male (rather than female) protagonist, who eventually triumphs over characters in superior positions of power who conspire against

him. Jim is “unjustly doomed to low status and to enduring his own servility towards unworthy and even evil people,” until such time, that is, “luck,” his inherent goodness, and poetic justice secure his reversal of fortune” (Lodge: xiii).

The deceptively simple plot of *Lucky Jim* is easily summarized. When we first encounter Jim Dixon, the novel’s protagonist, he is a recently hired Medievalist in the history department of a provincial British University. His head of department, Professor Welch, is a pretentious and ineffectual bore that Jim must impress in order to keep his job and who holds his superior rank over Jim’s head in an attempt to get Jim to do his bidding. Also contributing to Jim’s misery is Margaret Peel, a neurotic, controlling female colleague of his with whom he is repeatedly thrown together and with whom he appears destined unhappily to be romantically involved. In contrast to Margaret is the novel’s other major character, the 19-year-old Christine Callaghan, the girlfriend of one of Welch’s two sons, Bertrand, a painter. Jim skirmishes, verbally or physically, with this arrogant and pretentious artist at many points. The crisis of the plot occurs at Jim’s public lecture, on “Merrie England,” which Welch coerces him into delivering and which he delivers drunk and as a means of protest. After the lecture Jim “departs for comedy’s literary reward of a good job and the nicest girl, out there in the ordinary commonsense working world” (Bradbury, 1993: 321). That is to say, being fired for his disastrous lecture enables Jim to shake off Margaret, his low-paying academic job, and the provinces in one fell swoop. Thanks to a dream-job offer from Christine’s Scottish uncle, the philanthropist Julius Gore-Urquhart, Jim leaves for London with Christine, who at last has seen through Bertrand. In structure, then, this third-person perspective novel is comic, with the promise of happiness,

financial success, and marriage arising out of the ashes of the protagonist's self-doubt, humiliation and bad luck.

One of the major tensions upon which the novel and Jim's fortune hinge is that between Margaret Peel and Christine Callaghan, two female characters who are not as they first appear (Margaret initially appears to be sympathetic and down- to-earth but is not; Christine appears to be snobby and duplicitous, but is later revealed to be admirable). We first encounter the "the small, thin, and bespectacled" (*Lucky Jim*: 18) Margaret convalescing at the Welchs, having recently "cracked up" (10) and attempted suicide by sleeping pills as a result of being jilted by her boyfriend Catchpole. (We later learn that this jilting is completely fabricated by Margaret in order to gain sympathy. Although Catchpole, who is in any case her acquaintance not her boyfriend, does leave town for Wales, he does so on purposes of business, not romance. He is correct to deem Margaret one of those people "who feed on emotional tension" [235].) Catchpole's departure leaves Jim, by default, in charge of this "neurotic who'd recently taken a bad beating" (77). Carol, the wife of Jim's history colleague Cecil Goldsmith, concludes of Margaret to Jim: "Throw her a lifebelt and she'll pull you under" (121).

Christine is everything that Margaret is not. In contrast to Margaret's "minimal prettiness" (195), false refinement, "decidedly ill-judged . . . royal-blue taffeta" gown (106), and "bright make-up" (18), Christine sports "fair hair . . . brown eyes and no lipstick . . . the premeditated simplicity of the . . . unornamented white linen blouse" (39). Just as the beautiful Christine's "plain" dress shows up Margaret's failed attempts at beauty, so Margaret's "silver-bells" (that is, affected female) laugh is shown up by Christine's more

genuine if cacophonous “non-silver bells sort”(95) of laugh. While the delicate and indirect Margaret embraces social conventions, the bolder and less formal Christine flouts them. Unlike the socially correct yet artificial Margaret, Christine stands in an “awkward” “uncomfortable” and “ungrateful” fashion. For Jim, however, “there could be no more beautiful way for a woman to stand” (214). Also in contrast to Margaret, Christine’s “absence of conventional [female] sensitivity” (198) strikes Jim as refreshing. At one point Margaret is even depicted as “actress” playing a role rather than as a woman feeling an emotion (111). The contrast between Margaret’s and Christine’s treatment of Jim is also of relevance. Not only does Christine pay her own way when she goes out with Jim while Margaret lets the ill-paid and impecunious Jim pick up the tab, but Christine’s unselfconscious sexuality contrasts sharply with Margaret’s attempt to make Jim feel guilty for his advances, which in any case she has encouraged.

If Margaret proves to be an imprisoning force in Jim’s life, Christine sets him free. She gives Jim both the confidence to tell Margaret to “stop depending” on him “emotionally” (158) and the necessary help in overcoming his adolescent sexual anxiety and repression. Moreover, Jim and Christine operate on a similar moral level. In contrast to Bertrand’s and to Margaret’s duplicity (Margaret fabricates a relationship with Catchpole and feigns a suicide attempt; Bertrand conceals an adulterous affair with Carol Goldsmith), Jim (even in his clownish shenanigans) and Christine act honorably and with integrity, even when it costs them. For example, as expedient as it would be for Jim, in the midst of his “Bertrand-war” (142), to divulge to Christine the fact

that Bertrand is betraying her in his affair with Carol, he remains quiet. Neither does Christine betray Bertrand when she has an easy opportunity to do so.

Through Christine Jim also meets Gore-Urquhart, Christine's uncle and Jim's eventual savior and benefactor. A comic-grotesque character who is described as middle aged and oddly shaped, with the look "of a drunken sage trying to collect his wits, a look intensified by slightly protruding lips and a single black eyebrow running from temple to temple" (109), Gore-Urquhart is "a rich devotee of the arts who made occasional contributions to the arts sections of the weekly reviews" (47) and who shares Jim's antipathy for academic and artistic cant or pretension of any kind. Although Bertrand wishes to be the one to fill Gore-Urquhart's vacant "private secretaryship" (48) in London, assuming that the position will enhance his career as a painter, it is Jim, appropriately, who ultimately gets the job. Gore-Urquhart, Jim's "fairy godfather" (Gindin, 1962: 49) and "fellow sufferer" (215), is something of a Prospero figure who both sees what will happen and brings it about. The novel's *deus ex machine*, Gore-Urquhart manages to make things end comically when otherwise they would not.

*Lucky Jim* is a well-made novel; there is a careful rhythm and intricate structure to the work and to the individual chapters therein, which are tightly self-contained. As one critic observes, "The twenty-five chapters are structured around three major events . . . the evening musicale at [Welch's] house, the Summer Ball, and the disastrous public lecture" (Fallis, 1977: 68) on the theme of Merrie England. Another indication of the novel's deliberate structuring is the fact that the first chapter ends with a reference to this lecture (*Lucky Jim*:17), the event that precipitates the crisis that in turn alters the course of

Jim's life from a self-destructive and pathetic to a comic and redemptive one. Appropriately, this carefully structured comic novel ends with "laughter" (251) and with the union of hero and heroine. For Jim Dixon, at least, the world has been put in order and justice prevails.

One other example of *Lucky Jim*'s solid architecture is the analogy the novel constructs between the Jim-Margaret and the Jim-university relationship. Just as being freed from academic life gives Jim a new sense of energy (when he is fired Jim feels "almost free of care" (232) and thinks "how nice it was to have nothing he must do" (233), so looking at Margaret causes "an intolerable weight" to fall "upon him" (185), and being free of her gives Jim a sense of newfound euphoria. As Lodge (xiii) observes of Jim, "Just as he goes through the motions of being a university teacher, knowing he is in bad faith, but unable to do anything about it, so he feels bound to go through the motions of being Margaret's partner, even though he has no desire, and hardly any affection, for her." Jim is freed from this prison-house of his own making by two interrelated in the novel: he is liberated from an unsatisfying career in education by Gore-Urquhart's offer of a post in London and he is redeemed from his emotional thralldom to Margaret.

To assert that *Lucky Jim* is a comic, and indeed sublimely funny, work is not rule out its serious side, however. The novel's comic and farcical dimensions work well with its psychological and social criticism to the extent that the novel is a satire, a literary genre, according to a standard definition, that "blends a critical attitude with humor and wit to the end that human institutions or humanity may be improved." The satirist "is conscious of the frailty" of the institutions of human "devising and attempts through laughter" less to tear

such institutions down than “to inspire a remodeling” (Holman, 1972: 473). In a similar vein, Amis comments that Dixon “certainly didn’t want to *destroy* the system” and should not be thought of as a “rebel” (Barber: 45). And in a 1957 essay on the post-war satiric novel, “Laughter’s to be taken seriously,” Amis affirms the importance of the satiric mode to the Britain of his day:

We are in for a golden age of satire, in my opinion, and if this is so we will be fortunate indeed. Satire offers a social and moral contribution. A culture without satire is a culture without self-criticism and thus, ultimately, without humanity. A society such as ours, in which the forms of power are changing and multiplying, needs above all the retaining influences of savage laughter (O’Connor, 1963: 76).

Significantly, *Lucky Jim* ends on a note of healing and cathartic (if not actually “savage”) laughter.

The particular butt of the novel’s satire, of course, is academic life. Although academic satire, in which scholars are mocked and learning is called into question, is as old as Plato’s *Republic* (Book IV) and *Symposium*, Amis’s university setting functions somewhat more widely, “as the epitome of a stuffy, provincial bourgeois world and as a focus for his wider satire of contemporary life and society” (Stevenson, 1993: 121).

A look at the way in which *Lucky Jim* exposes “the academic racket, and the pseudo-culture and social pretensions that so often accompany it” (Phelps: 430), is of course essential in any reading of the novel. Amis’s most thoroughgoing assault on the academic personality – and certainly one of the most devastating satiric portraits of an academic in any novel – is found in his portrait of Professor “Neddy” Welch. Upon first meeting Welch we learn that “No other Professor” in all Britain “set such store by being called Professor” (*Lucky Jim*: 7).

Depicted as pretentious and pedantic, slow-witted and inarticulate (frequently not finishing sentences at all, many of which trail off in ellipses), solipsistic and boring, exploitative and eccentric, Welch is the stuff of academic caricature. At one point, touching upon Welch's self-absorption, Jim imagines that even if he went on a drunken rampage in the Common Room in Welch's presence, "screeching obscenities, punching out the window-panes, fouling the periodicals, [this] would escape Welch's notice altogether, provided his own person remained inviolate" (63). At another point we learn of Dixon's pleasure in seeing "evidence that Welch's mind could still be reached from the outside" (86). At still another, Jim, when driving with Welch, addresses his Professor's dullness by thinking, "Welch's driving seemed to have improved slightly; at any rate, the only death Dixon felt himself threatened by was death from exposure to boredom" (178). Merely being spoken to by Welch, as by Margaret, makes Dixon "feel heavy and immovable" (218).

Welch's exploitative attitude toward Jim stems from the "decisive power" the former has over the latter's academic future (8). Welch employs his "evasion technique" (86) in order to keep Jim guessing about where he stands, professionally speaking. By keeping Jim in the dark as to whether his teaching contract will be renewed in the coming academic year, Welch keeps Jim beholden to him, and therefore willing to do his bidding. None of this is lost on Jim, who correctly views Welch's requests of him to do his superior's research and to deliver the public lecture as forms of blackmail (82). That Welch frequently calls Dixon "Faulkner," Jim's doomed predecessor, underscores both the Professor's encroaching senility and his implicit threat not to rehire his underlying. Surely Amis intended for readers to significance in the

Professor's name: to "welch" (sometimes spelled "welsh") means to fail to fulfill a promised obligation. In any case, in *Welch*, as Lodge (viii) concludes, Amis drew "an immortal portrait of the absent-mindedness, vanity, eccentricity and practical incompetence that academic institutions seem to tolerate and even to encourage".

Welch may be the primary target of Amis's academic satire, but Jim himself is a close second, Jim is depicted as far more interested in the trappings of academic life than in the work – the teaching and scholarship – of such a life. When walking with Welch one day on campus, for example,

Dixon realized that their progress, deliberate and to all appearances thoughtful, must seem rather donnish to passing students. He and Welch might well be talking about history, and in the way history might be talked about in Oxford and Cambridge quadrangles. At moments like this Dixon came near to wishing that they really were.

*(Lucky Jim :8)*

Threatened by what his better students know about his subject (do they know and care more about his field than he does?), Jim competes with his male students for the attention of the attractive female students rather than attempting to improve his own inadequate grasp of medieval history. At one point, for example, we read that "Dixon's efforts on behalf of his special [academic] subject, apart from thinking how much he hated it, had been confined to aiming to secure for it the three prettiest girls in the class" (28). At another, Jim sums up his relationship with history students at large: "They waste my time and I waste theirs" (214).

If Jim has little real interest in teaching his academic field (the sight of the department timetable listing teaching assignments, for example, leads him to feel "over-mastering, orgiastic boredom, and its companion, real hatred" (85),

he has still less interest in researching it. His sole (and as yet unpublished) scholarly essay, “The economic influence of the developments in shipbuilding techniques, 1450 to 1485,” is a case in point. To the extent that writing the article involved much “frenzied fact-grubbing and fanatical boredom” (15), Jim’s title for the essay is “perfect”:

[I]t crystalized the article’s niggling mindlessness, its funereal parade of yawn-enforcing facts, the pseudo-light it threw upon non-problems, Dixon had read, or begun to read, dozens like it, but his own seemed worse than most in its air of being convinced of its own usefulness and significance . . . His thinking all this without having defiled and set fire to the type-script only made him appear to himself as more of a hypocrite and fool.  
(14-15)

Under pressure from Welch to make sure that his article is published if he wishes to be re-employed in the coming academic year, Dixon endeavours, at many points in the novel, to secure a home for it. When Dixon learns that the article will be published after all, he can only think, “Welch would find it harder to sack him now” (30). Jim’s luck runs out once more, however, when he learns that the editor of the journal in which his essay was to appear has translated his piece into Italian and has published it under the editor’s own name. He also learns that the thieving editor is shortly to become the “Chair of History of Commerce” in a regional university in Argentina (171) and that the journal in which his essay was to appear was likely fold. Like university teaching, then, academic scholarship in the world of *Lucky Jim* is both intellectually insubstantial and professionally corrupt.

Jim’s reason for becoming a medievalist – he has no particular interest in the Middle Ages – is also revealing. As he explains to a colleague in the English

Department, “the medieval papers were a soft option in the Leicester course, so I specialized in them. Then when I applied for the job here, I naturally made a big point of that, because it looked better to seem interested in something specific” (33). This explains why Jim has such a difficult time writing his one-hour “Merrie England” lecture, which is wholly derivative (he hopes to “construct” his lecture largely “out of others’ efforts” (169), toadying (he plans to play up to Professor Welch in a bid to have his contract renewed), and vacuous (he desperately searches for a way to fill his hour-long talk and can only reach for platitude after platitude). Jim likens the experience of writing this lecture to that of traveling “along the knife-edge dividing the conceivably-just-about-relevant from the irreducibly, immitigably irrelevant” (195). After adding “a presumably rather extensive conclusion” of fifteen minutes’ duration, Dixon flirts with (but then abandons) the idea of closing his talk with the line, “Finally, thank God for the twentieth century” (195).

The lecture scene itself, one of the funniest episodes in modern fiction, is the riotous climax of *Lucky Jim*. Upon entering the lecture arena Jim notes that it appears “to contain everybody he knew or had ever known, apart from his parents” (213). This leads him to feel “like going round and notifying each person individually of his preference that they should leave” (213). So alienated is Jim from his own speech and so out of control does he become owing to severe intoxication that at one point, before his outright collapse that comprises his lecture’s grand finale, he imagines himself to sound “like an unusually fanatical Nazi trooper in charge of a book-burning reading out to the crowd excerpts from a pamphlet written by a pacifist, Jewish, literate

Communist” (226). Needless to say, for “wrecking a public lecture” (228) Jim is dropped from half the staff of the university.

Amis’s academic satire, then, cuts in two directions. On the one hand, Jim is “ill-at-ease and out of place in the university because he does not at heart subscribe to its social and cultural values, preferring pop music to Mozart, pubs to drawing rooms, non-academic company to academic” (Lodge: xi). On the other hand, Jim’s academic pretense, indolence, and fraudulence, while perhaps more pronounced than those of his colleagues, is revealed to be endemic to the academic culture at large. The academy, *Lucky Jim* suggests, by no means, lives up to its own professed idea of itself.

The novel satirizes the artistic life as much as it does the domestic one, however. The writer uses ironic satire as “a weapon to reveal and correct social injustice and hypocrisy” (Chakhachiro, 2011: 6). In *Lucky Jim* both the academic and artistic worlds – linked here by Welch blood – are stocked with elitist and pretentious phonies who are eager to victimize Jim. Early in the novel Welch invites Jim to his “arty get-together” (*Lucky Jim*: 23) in order (Jim imagines) to test his “reactions to culture” and to determine whether he is “a fit person to teach in the university” (24). Later in the novel Jim is greeted by a painting in the hall of the Welch home that appears to be “The work of some kindergarten oaf,” recalling “in its technique the sort of drawing found in male lavatories, though its subject, an assortment of barrel-bodied animals debouching from the Ark, was of narrower appeal” (180).

Worse still than Welch himself in this regard are his two sons – “the effeminate writing Michel and the bearded pacifist painting Bertrand” (13) – whose political sensitivities and French names suggest a certain aesthetic

pretension. Even Bertrand's diction and style of speech, with its double negatives and convoluted syntax, further this suggestion. For example, Bertrand at one point says, "Upon consideration I feel it incumbent upon me to doubt it" (40), and at another remarks, "I remember being not unentertained" (48). Bertrand's speech and demeanor inspire Dixon to fantasize devoting "the next ten years to working his way to a position as art critic on purpose to review Bertrand's work unfavourably" (50). Carol Goldsmith's assessment of Bertrand's thinking – that "Great artists always have a lot of women, so if he can have a lot of women that makes him a great artist, never mind what his pictures are like" (120-1) – underscores the novel's linking of artistic phoniness and romantic duplicity. As with academic life, Jim finds the trappings of artistic life, if not art itself, to be of some appeal: "Dixon himself had sometimes wished he wrote poetry or something as a claim to developed character" (140). That the Welch family is implicated in both academic and artistic pretentiousness and narcissism – "Bertrand's bore, he's like his dad, the only thing that interests him is him" (143), Jim observes – further links the two institutions that are the special targets of the novel's satire.

Bradbury holds that Aims's novel turns from "political matters to commonsense moral vision" (1988: 208), but this should not be taken to suggest that the novel lacks a politics. Aims has made clear his affinity for "the tradition of Tory satire" (Fallis: 65), yet *Lucky Jim*, for all of its attacks on progressive educational reforms, also attacks the stubbornly class-bound, conservative orientation of English society. In other words, the politics of *Lucky Jim*, like the politics of the "Angries," is a curious mixture of right-wing and left-wing proclivities.

That said, the novel more often than not associates conservatism and elitism with the scoundrels (Margaret, the Welchs), and progressive and democratic ideas with the heroes (Gore-Urquhart, Christine, Jim). Jim argues, in a socialist vein, “If one man’s got ten buns and another’s got two, and a bun has got to be given up by one of them, then surely you take it from the man with ten buns” (*Lucky Jim* :51). That is to say, commonsense justice rather than ideological principle drives *Lucky Jim*’s political orientation. As Lodge puts it, the left-wing stance of *Lucky Jim* “is an emotional, intuitive matter, more concerned with class and manners than with politics as such” ( xi).

Unsurprisingly, Jim argues the above point to his rival, the artist Bertrand, who takes up the elitist position that “the rich play an essential role in modern society,” having “kept the arts going”( *Lucky Jim* :51). Bertrand admires the rich, he continues somewhat circularly, “Because they’re charming, because they’re generous, because they’ve learnt to appreciate the things I happen to like myself, because their houses are full of beautiful things” (52). It is also implied that Mrs Welch, Bertrand’s mother, possesses political views that incline to the right. Believing that the “Welfare State” and “so-called freedom in education” will lead to increased dependence on the government, her attitude toward the two is said to be negative (176). Margaret’s political sympathies are more subtly suggested: she “turns out to sing for a local Conservative club” ( Hitchens, 2002: 106).

Essential to an understanding of *Lucky Jim* is an understanding of the mechanics of the novel’s comic satire: the novel’s humorous descriptions and wordplay, verbal jokes, and ironic or incongruous images. Much of the novel’s humor rests on its situation and style, both of which rely on “Amis’s flawless

sense of timing: the way he controls the development of an action, or a sentence, to create that combination of surprise and logic that is the heart of comedy” (Lodge: vi).

Humorous and appositive similes abound in Amis’s novel: in response to a question from Dixon, for example, Welch’s “clay-like features changed indefinitely as his attention, like a squadron of slow old battleships, began wheeling to face this new phenomenon” (*Lucky Jim* :9). Later, “Welch’s head lifted slowly, like the muzzle of some obsolete howitzer” (84). Figurative language is also employed at Jim’s expense. For example, at one point we read that “Fury flared up in [Jim’s] mind like forgotten toast under a grill” (28); at another we learn that “A sudden douche of terror . . . squirted itself all over Dixon” (127); at yet another, upon his awakening one morning, we understand that Jim’s “mouth had been used as a latrine by some small creature of the night, and then as its mausoleum” (61).

In addition to its ingenious use of figurative language for descriptive purposes, the novel also generates its humor by detailing a series of absurd yet familiar events in Jim’s life. In particular Amis focuses on Jim’s elaborate yet futile attempts to limit his smoking (Dixon lit “the cigarette which, according to his schedule, he ought to be lighting after breakfast on the next day but one” (128) and on his equally elaborate and futile attempts to conserve money, largely by cutting down on his beer consumption (“he’d spent more than he could afford and drunk more than he ought, and yet he felt nothing but satisfaction and peace” (54). Dixon even vows to “review his financial position” to see “if he could somehow restore it from complete impossibility to its usual level of merely imminent disaster” (153).

Dixon’s honest self-criticism and keen powers of observation also help power the novel’s comedy. For example, we read that “As soon as Dixon recognized the mental envelope containing this [uncomfortable] question he thrust away from him unopened” (60). At another point we view Jim’s thoughts of Bertrand and Christine (before he comes to know the latter): “He disliked this girl and her boy-friend so much that he couldn’t understand why they didn’t

dislike each other” (69). At still another Jim thinks, “Bertrand must not be a good painter; he, Dixon, would not permit it” (112).

As important to the novel’s comedy as such moments of Jim’s awareness may be, the main source of humor in the novel, as Lodge observes, is “the contrast between Jim’s outer world and his inner world.” While Jim tries, not very successfully, “to show the outer world the image of an industrious, respectable well-mannered young man, his mind seethes with caustic sarcasm directed against himself and others, with fantasies of violence done to enemies, of triumph for himself” (Shaffer, 2006: 51). Examples of this contrast abound. At one point, for example, as Welch speaks, Jim’s face becomes “the perfect audience for his talk, laughing at its jokes, reflecting its puzzlement or earnestness” (*Lucky Jim*: 178). At another, when speaking with Welch, Jim maintains a perfectly collected demeanor that pretends to himself “that he’d picked up his professor around the waist, squeeze the furry . . . waistcoat against him to expel the breath, run heavily with him up the steps, along the corridor to the Staff Cloak-room, and plunge the too-small feet . . . into a lavatory basin, pulling the plug once, twice, and again, stuffing the mouth with toilet-paper” (9-10). Slightly later Jim catches “sight of his own face in the wall-mirror and was surprised to see that it wore an expression of eager friendliness” (12).

Two more examples of this comic contrast between Jim’s inner and outer worlds merit our attention. In one, when forced to speak with Welch during a car voyage, Jim must control his face “with the strain of making it smile and show interest and speak its few permitted words, of steering it between a collapse into helpless fatigue and a tautening with anarchic fury” (13). In the

second, while at Neddy's musicale, "Dixon kept his head down" and "moved his mouth as little as possible consistent with being unmistakably move it"(37).

That said, Jim is "aware of the hypocrisy involved in preserving the discrepancy" between his inner and outer worlds; indeed, his frequent glances at himself in mirrors underscore this point. Seen in this light, Jim's "face-pulling, rude gesturing, and practical joking" are attempts "to give some physical expression to his inner life of protest" (Lodge: 251). Jim's menagerie of faces – these include his "tragic-mask face" (*Lucky Jim* :55), "crazy-peasant face" (74), "Martian-invader face" (91), "Eskimo face" (97), "lemon-sucking face" (141), "Evelyn Waugh face" (220), and "Sex Life in Ancient Rome face" (250) – are made in such a way that other characters cannot see them; they enable Jim to mock and vent his anger at those around him without causing offence.

Lodge is also correct to that "The issues of the novel can only be resolved when Jim wills his inner life to coincide with his outer life" (255); this, more securing a London job or the love of Christine, constitutes the real victory that he must achieve if he hopes to escape from the imprisoning situation in which he finds himself. The closing of this gap occurs, tellingly, after Jim's fist-fight with Bertrand. Immediately after flooring Bertrand Jim thinks, "The bloody old towser-faced boot-faced totem-pole on a crap reservation." He then tells Bertrand directly, "You bloody towser-faced boot-faced totem-pole on a crap reservation" (*Lucky Jim*: 209). This is the first of a series of events, which includes his drunken lecture and his escape to London with Christine that anticipates Jim's mental (and also physical) liberation. At last "thought and speech, the inner and the outer worlds coincide," Lodge argues; "Jim ceases to be a guilty hypocrite and reaps his reward" (255).

*Lucky Jim* sews up neatly and comically: Jim must race the clock, on public bus, to meet up with Christine at her London-bound train if he hopes to set things right between them. Unluckily, the bus he is on seems to crawl with comically absurd slowness; the very cosmos seems to be conspiring against his attempt to reach the station and Christine in time. When the bus at one point inexplicably stops altogether Jim imagines that the driver was perhaps “slumped in his seat, the victim of syncope,” or had suddenly “got an idea for a poem” (243). Soon another vehicle on the road slows the bus down once again, and

Dixon thought he really would have to run downstairs and knife the drivers of both vehicles; what next? What next? What actually would be next: a masked holdup, a smash, floods, a burst tyre, an electric storm with falling trees and meteorites, a diversion, a low-level attack by communist aircraft . . .?

(245)

When Jim finally makes it to the station and meets Christine he learn that she has “finished with Bertrand” (248) and knows about the artist’s affair with Carol, who also has dumped him. Jim informs Christine that he has broken off with Margaret for good and that he has gotten the job, from her “Uncle Julius” (250), that Bertrand had sought. The novel thus ends comically, pointing toward the union of two deserving people.

Importantly, Amis ends his work with laughter that is neither savage nor splenetic but cathartic and healing. Amis’s debut novel, like his essay on postwar British satire, might well have been titled “Laughter’s to be taken seriously.” In the novel’s closing scene at the train station, Jim and Christine run into the entire Welch family. Jim approaches Neddy and Bertrand to have it out. Rather than spewing verbal violence, however, Jim can only laugh: “Dixon drew in breath to denounce them both, then blew it all out again in a howl of laughter” (251). Amis leaves Jim an angry young man no longer and ends his scrupulous satire on a note of forgiveness and reconciliation.

## IV

To sum up this study, it is essential to infer that satire, as a literary genre, is one of the influential devices that a literary writing is used to uncover the drawbacks of predetermined absolutes and theories of existence which individuals often resort to in order to preserve the illusion and self-deception that enable them to stay within their protective shells. All mean people, especially academic ones, make use of in their attempts to escape reality should be attacked. Literary writers should require of their characters that they take into account the brutal facts of our modern existence: the power of evil, the agony and hardship, the inhumanity and the failure to find or believe in any absolute. In a constantly changing world the characters are also required to adapt themselves to their new circumstances and to come to terms with these new situations.

Iraqi writers of short stories, novels, drama and poetry have to bear in mind in their writings the burdens and ordeals which afflict people living in our present time. They have to be aware to record failings and weaknesses in man, which have a wider significance and go beyond the particular class or society they depict in their writings. Hidden egotistic motives are to be satirized so as to reform societies. Patricia Spacks (1968: 15) believes that a writer who has "satiric emotion" should be able to generate uneasiness in the reader. Amis is able to generate this feeling by his depiction of man's cruelty, hypocrisy and self-deception. His use of violent images which reveal man's brutal nature and his shocking of the over-enthusiastic reader into the realization that what he is reading is fiction and not real life also work very effectively to create this feeling.

Satire is most effective and most moral when it attacks stereo-types, hypocrisies, illusions, deceptions, strict dogmatism, manifestations of evil, and corruption of any kind. It is born to scourge the persistent and every recurrent follies of the human condition.

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