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**„Narrative and Narrated Homicide”: The Vision of Contemporary
Civilisation in Martin Amis’s Postmodern Crime Fiction**

Supervisor: Prof. dr hab. Zbigniew Białas

Katowice 2011

Uniwersytet Śląski
Wydział Filologiczny
Instytut Kultury i Literatury Brytyjskiej i Amerykańskiej

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„Narratorska i narracyjna zbrodnia: Wizja współczesnej cywilizacji w postmodernistycznych powieściach detektywistycznych Martina Amisa

Promotor: Prof. dr hab. Zbigniew Białas

Katowice 2011

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List of abbreviations (works by Martin Amis)

- DB* *Dead Babies*. New York: Vintage International, 1991.
- E* *Experience*. New York: Vintage International, 2001.
- EM* *Einstein's Monsters*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1987.
- HM* *House of Meetings*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2006.
- I* *The Information*. London: Flamingo, 1995.
- KD* *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million*. New York: Vintage International, 2002.
- LF* *London Fields*. London, New York: Penguin Books, 1990.
- M* *Money: A Suicide Note*. London: Penguin Books, 1985.
- MI* *The Moronic Inferno and Other Visits to America*. London: Penguin Books, 1987.
- NT* *Night Train*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1997.
- OP* *Other People: A Mystery Story*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- SP* *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom*. New York: Vintage International, 2008.
- S* *Success*. London: Penguin Books, 1987.
- TA* *Time's Arrow, or, The Nature of the Offense*. London, New York: Penguin Books, 1992.
- VMN* *Visiting Mrs Nabokov and Other Excursions*. New York: Vintage, 1995.
- WAC* *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews*. New York: Vintage, 2002.
- YD* *Yellow Dog*. London: Vintage, 2004.

Introduction

The present doctoral dissertation undertakes to scrutinise the literary output of Martin Amis, a special emphasis being placed on the author's redefinition and reevaluation of British and American detective literary tradition together with his concerns over social, cultural and political menaces in the second half of the 20th century and at the threshold of the third millennium. While exploring and analysing the works of the British writer one cannot fail to identify and situate his fiction within postmodern literary and cultural trends and tendencies and therefore his oeuvre requires miscellaneous intertextual interpretations and involved reading. Martin Amis is widely known for his nonconformist, even provocative writing, linguistic experimentation, stylistic innovation and equivocal attitude towards his characters, narrators and the reading public. As regards the themes and issues raised in his oeuvre, the novelist distinguishes himself by delineating the atrocious, villainous, degenerate sides of human nature and of the homicidal facet of contemporary civilisation. Such a dismal vision of mankind transpires from his sundry novels, non-fictional works and various literary articles, yet in the interview with the author of the dissertation Martin Amis expressed his profound belief in humankind (Amis, 6 December, 2010) and in people's perpetual struggle with the wickedness and heinousness of the contemporary world. The British writer invariably outlines tense, stormy male-female relations and exhibits his highly ambiguous attitude towards women as well as foregrounds controversial subjects related, among others, to genocide, Soviet dictatorship, and currently, to Islamic fundamentalism, and therefore he provokes ceaseless acrimonious discussions and polemics in manifold literary, cultural and political circles.

Amis's oeuvre comprises his novels, collections of short stories, literary essays, political and philosophical discussions as well as numerous interviews with prominent contemporary critics and theorists. As for the novels, the aim of this dissertation is to scrutinise the following ones: *Dead Babies* (1975), *Success* (1978), *Other People: A Mystery Story* (1981), *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984), *London Fields* (1989), *Time's Arrow, or, The Nature of the Offense* (1991), *The Information* (1995), *Night Train* (1997) and *House of Meetings* (2006). Taking into consideration his fiction, collections of stories, political-philosophical texts and literary essays, I am going to make the

analysis of *Einstein's Monsters* (1987) comprising five stories and a polemical introduction, *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million* (2002), *Yellow Dog* (2003), as well as to refer to *Visiting Mrs Nabokov and Other Excursions* (1993) which is a collection of occasional journalism, *Experience: A Memoir* (2000), *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews* (2001) and a collection of stories *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom* (2008). Apart from these works, Amis is famous for having written and published: *The Rachel Papers* (1973), his first novel, non-fiction books, such as *Invasion of the Space Invaders: An Addict's Guide* (1982), *The Moronic Inferno and Other Visits to America* (1986) which constitute a collection of twenty seven essays and reviews on American subjects, *Heavy Water and Other Stories* (1998), a collection of stories dating from the 1970s to the 1990s and *Vintage Amis* (2004), a selection from his fiction and nonfiction.

Owing to huge popularity Martin Amis has acquired, mainly in Western literary world, numerous books, essays and articles have been devoted to the life and literary output of the British writer. Among miscellaneous critical works that have been published in the last two decades suffice it to mention Gavin Keulks's (ed.) *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond* (2006), Brian Finney's *Martin Amis* (2008), James Diedrick's *Understanding Martin Amis* (2004), John Dern's *Martians, Monsters and Madonna. Fiction and Form in the World of Martin Amis* (2000) or Gavin Keulks's *Father & Son. Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis and the British Novel Since 1950* (2006). In addition, one may encounter critical articles, essays and interviews with Martin Amis in his web pages: <http://www.martinamisweb.com> or <http://amisdiscussion.albion.edu>. When set aside his fiction from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, a considerable number of reviews and articles have been written about the novelist's current socio-political works, such as *The Pregnant Widow* (about 20 reviews), *The Second Plane* (more than 20), largely on account of the contentious and polemical themes in his recent fiction, pre-eminently those concerning islamic terrorism and the reassessment of Stalinist totalitarianism.

In comparison with the international acclaim and broad spread of Amis's oeuvre, in Poland relatively little has been written and published about the British novelist. Polish critics and reviewers seemingly devote little attention to his fiction whereas the majority of the readers in our country still associate his surname with his prominent father, Kingsley. With reference to Polish translations of his books and essays, suffice it to mention Aleksandra Ambros's *Doświadczenie* (2006), Krzysztof Zabłocki's *Forsa*

(1995) and *Informacja* (2000), Przemysław Znaniecki's *Strzała czasu albo natura występku* (1997), Anna Kołyszko's *Pola Londynu* (1995), Dariusz Wojtczak's *Sukces* (1994) or S. Kowalski's 2006 translation of Amis's essay "Wiek horroryzmu" published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, dated to 2-4.03.2007 and 10-11.03.2007. Moreover, Martin Amis's oeuvre became analysed by the English teacher and translator, Magda Heydel whose article "Jeszcze nie w Polsce! Przemiany ciała. Martin Amis, *The Pregnant Widow*. Inside History" has been published in *Textualia* literary magazine in 2010. As regards Amis's earlier works, one may benefit from Beata Piątek's 2004 article "Bullshit TV Conversations or Intertextuality in *Night Train*" (in Mazur and Utz 157-173) and from Magdalena Maczyńska's 2004 article "Writing the Writer: The Question of Authorship in the Novels of Martin Amis," in Michael J. Meyer (ed.), *Literature and the Writer*, Amsterdam and Atlanta, Ga.:Rodopi, pp.191-207.

With regard to the motif of crime and detection, numerous critics emphasise the presence of murder and violence in Amis's fiction, yet they simultaneously remain cautious in interpreting his oeuvre exclusively or predominantly in terms of a detective story tradition. It is, in fact, a few of his novels which undergo an in-depth analysis with reference to the crime genre: *Other People: A Mystery Story*, *London Fields* and *Night Train*. The analysts and literary theorists, such as Brian Finney, assert that although it is hard to label the British author as a crime writer, his oeuvre is saturated with homicide, victimisation and ferocity (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). The American critic draws the attention to the so-called narrative and narrated homicide in Amis's novels, the motif or aspect that governs almost every work of the novelist, not only his books dealing with crime, murder and violence. In his sundry books, articles and essays devoted to Martin Amis, among others "Narrative and narrated homicide in Martin Amis's *Other People* and *London Fields*," "What's Amis in Contemporary British Fiction? Martin Amis's *Money* and *Time's Arrow*" (<http://www.csulb.edu/~bfinney/MartinAmis.html>) or *Martin Amis* (2008), Finney presents the author's linguistic and stylistic mechanisms as the forms of manipulation of the characters, narrators and the reading public. The critic stresses the equivocal relationship that pertains between the writer and the characters whom he torments and persecutes and at the same time encourages his readers to share with him his anxiety at the role he is requested to play as novelist (Finney 1995). Victoria Alexander, analogously to Brian Finney in "Martin Amis. Interview" (<http://www.dactyl.org/amis.html/>), examines Amis's attitude towards his narratees by referring to his viewpoint on the role and function of a contemporary writer that he

expressed in an interview with Ian McEwan on “Writers in Conversation”: “[Life] is all too random. [I have] the desire to give shape to things and make sense of things...I have a god-like relationship [with] the world I’ve created. It is exactly analogous. There is creation and resolution, and it’s all up to [me]” (“Writers”).

The authorial sadism and inclination to torment and humiliate his narratees, probably best conspicuous in *Money*, *Dead Babies*, *Other People*, *Success*, *London Fields*, *The Information* or *Night Train*, come to the fore in Brian Finney’s afore-said articles and book as well as in Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas’s conference paper “Lessons in humiliation in three mystery novels: Martin Amis’s *Money*, *The Information* and *Night Train*” (2008), James Diedrick’s *Understanding Martin Amis* (2004), John A. Dern’s *Martians, Monsters and Madonna* (2000) and *The Fiction of Martin Amis* edited by Nicolas Tredell, to name but a few.

With reference to *Money* the analysts highlight a literary duel between the Amis character playing the role of the author’s alter-ego and the main character and simultaneously narrator, John Self, during which the former persecutes the latter, encouraging to ruin and mercilessly degrade him and lead him to commit suicide using Self’s most avowed cunning enemy, Fielding Goodney. Interestingly enough, the author-narrator’s struggle constitutes a prelude to Amis’s discussion on the function and condition of art and literature in the contemporaneous era, prevailingly the question concerning the role of a postmodern writer and fiction in the face of cultural debasement and degeneration of contemporary society.

Success and *The Information*, the works apparently dissimilar and not classified as detective novels, although the second one is called by Simões Lucas Freitas a mystery story, nonetheless picture the main characters’ humiliation and debacles, predominantly in the context of their vying with other protagonists. In these two books the author employs the motif of doubles and doubling – the exposition of two pairs of contrastive characters embodying two opposing aspects of reality where one of the protagonists gains success exclusively at the expense of another. In other words, the novelist strives to prove that in contemporary world humiliation and failure of the other is crucial for the other part to ascend in a social, cultural or political ladder. Such a premiss seemingly governs the two above-mentioned novels even though they reflect different realities and distinct literary realms. In the first one a personal rivalry of the two feuding foster brothers, situated, as Diedrick remarks, within the context of social and political tensions in England in the late 1970s, symbolises a parody England’s class war, in

particular “the spiritual decay of the landed gentry and the greedy self-betterment of the ‘yobs’” (Fuller 66) as well as the increasingly intertwined, hostile relationship between the monied classes and their resentful, entrepreneurial adversaries (Diedrick 54). *The Information*, on the other hand, foregrounds a ruthless, unscrupulous facet of literary rivalry in the light of mass culture and media technology, and simultaneously broods on the metaphysical dimension of human existence.

It is undoubtedly *Dead Babies*, *Other People*, *London Fields* and *Night Train* in which the motifs of homicide, victimisation and detective investigation, together with the author’s manipulation and torturing of his characters come to the fore, yet the interpretation of these works in terms of a detective story tradition considerably varies or remains explored to a larger or lesser degree. Taking into account the first aforementioned book, one can hardly detect any well-known critical examination of this text in the context of crime literature, though the omnipresence of violence, murder and a final revelation of the criminal figure as well as the elements of the carnival saturating the story and evoking Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque, the phenomenon linked by some contemporary critics, most visibly by Christiana Gregoriou, to the theory of social deviance, invite the critics, reviewers and theoreticians to look into the book from the perspective of crime literature. *Dead Babies* are examined largely in view of its satirical and philosophical side, especially in terms of its allusions to the Menippean Satire, Denis Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew* or Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal*.

As a contrast, the remaining three novels are much more frequently scrutinised in the context of crime fiction. In *Other People*, for instance, the critics invariably detect the syndrome of Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde with reference to the main female character and the traces of the gothic tradition. However, they simultaneously perceive other motifs in the text, principally the influence of “Martian School” on the language of Amis’s story as well as the impact of Jean-Paul Sartre’s play *No Exit* with its well-known phrase “hell is –other people.” On account of the author-narrator-characters relations and the aspect of narrative homicide, one could draw the analogy between *Other People* and *London Fields*, the novels in which the two female protagonists, being at the same time narrators or co-narrators, perform the roles of murderesses, yet their oppressors feel unceasingly persecuted and finally overwhelmed by their victims. It is worth noticing that the author’s sadism, aggressive tone and inclination to torture and denigrate his protagonists become assuaged in these two stories and even effaced in *Night Train*.

The last of the afore-said Amis's books has frequently undergone the analysis with reference to detective literature. *Night Train*, regarded by some reviewers, such as Allen Barra, as an ambitious postmodern crime story and by the others as an entertaining holiday crime novella, is the writer's best known pastiche on hard-boiled crime fiction, a dismal Chandleresque anti-detective novel or *neo-noir* novella. Such a viewpoint is expressed by numerous reviewers, among others James Diedrick, Brian Finney, Nicolas Tredell, Gavin Keulks, to name but a few, whereas others, like John A. Dern situate the novel within a larger realm of postmodern literature which exceeds the boundaries of crime fiction. In *Martians, Monsters and Madonna* the critic emphasises Amis's redefinition of traditional fictional constituents, such as time, voice and, above all, motive which plays a decisive role in a detective story as well as ruminates on the author's ceaseless altering form or genre of this novella which shifts from a "whodunnit" into a "whydoit" or rather a "whynotdoit" and concludingly becomes 'a psychological thrill ride to the depths of gratuitous violence' (Dern 141).

When examining Martin Amis's oeuvre one cannot fail to notice their ironical tenor. All his novels and non-fiction works are saturated with lampoon, yet it is a 'black sense of quixotic humour' (Finney, "Narrative": 1995), a farce, sarcasm mingled with a striking caricature which the author employs when delineating the fictitious reality and the characters. The writer's preference for treating his protagonists with scathing, pugnacious satire and his predilection for ridiculing and mocking them and contemporary world constitute his response to the amoral, corrupted picture of modern civilisation. Martin Amis, finding himself unable as a postmodern novelist to depict the heinousness of today's reality in a traditional realistic manner and rearrange life's haphazard nature to fit a fixed moral order, resorts to black humour and caricature which are, in his view, the most forceful and effective means of reflecting the world's vileness. In this respect he sharply differs from his father whom he continually contests. Numerous critics, most notably Gavin Keulks, Brian Finney or James Diedrick, accentuate Martin's gallows humour which greatly differs from Kingsley's much milder, more humanistic parody, yet at the same time the analysts stress the two novelists' altering styles. In *Father and Son. Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis and the British Novel Since 1950* Keulks draws the attention to The Amises' intense rivalry, largely in the field of satire, in particular to Martin's yearning to compete with or challenge Kingsley's comedy techniques, and simultaneously illustrates a gradual process of the writers' changing forms and styles from more moderate, 'pacific'

comedies in their early novels, like Kingsley's *Lucky Jim* and Martin's *Rachel Papers* towards much more scathing satires, most notably Kingsley's *Jake's Thing* and *Ending Up* and Martin's *Money* and *Dead Babies*. As a matter of fact Amis the Son always spoke highly of his father's impact on his literary output which becomes visible in almost all his novels, though he unceasingly expressed in miscellaneous interviews, essays and memoirs, such as the most well-known *Experience: A Memoir*, his resentment to Kingsley's indifference, all the more hostility towards his son's oeuvre, principally his inability to accept Martin's gradual literary ascent and his own eclipse.

Regardless of The Amises' artistic duel, Martin frequently accentuated his father's shaping and affecting his works and therefore his works, despite their exhibiting contrastive literary assumptions and philosophical standpoints, have always directed or constituted a response to Kingsley's texts. Amis the Son's interaction or dialogue with his father is often compared to Harold Bloom's Freudian concept of writers' "anxiety of influence" (Finney, 2008: 87), the term which becomes thoroughly examined in the fourth chapter of the dissertation. Nevertheless, The Amises' genealogical dissent, the novelists' opposing approaches to satire, comedy, literary styles, techniques and themes, especially their divergent depiction of death, crime and human depravation as well as their discrepant philosophical, cultural and political worldviews, lead us to other literary influences on Martin's fiction, mostly to the impact of Vladimir Nabokov and Saul Bellow on the British author as well as to Philip Roth, J. G. Ballard, Ian McEwan or Norman Mailer. It was the first of the above-mentioned American novelists who shaped to the greatest extent Martin Amis's works, his literary style, technique and narrative structure. Nabokov's was the contribution to the British novelist's definition of the role of the author, his god-like relationship with the narratees and the created world, and the most prominent statement of the American novelist, "style is morality," comes to the fore in all Amis's fiction and non-fiction. As regards Bellow, the author of *Money*, *London Fields* and *Night Train* derived the inspiration from the writer's preoccupation with the decline of social values, the meaninglessness and directionlessness of modern life and the rise of gratuitous violence. Analogously to the American novelist, Amis expressed his deep concern with the existential angst of a contemporary man, yet, contrary to his prominent forerunner's perception of the writer as a prophet, visionary, a medium who interprets the world, the British author views the writer as an artist-creator of this fictional world. Furthermore, the British author speaks highly of Bellow's profound belief in human decency, in people's "struggle to retain a semblance of

[humanity] in a world that fights them at every turn” (Dern 168). The critics underline the fact that similarly to Bellow’s characters, Amis’s protagonists, particularly those portrayed in his later works (*The Information*, *Night Train* and to some extent *Money*) endure everything the deteriorating world throws at them and that they testify to their realisation that “being human [...] is not a given but a gift, a talent, an accomplishment, an objective (Amis, *MI*: 2008).

Apart from Nabokov’s and Bellow’s immense impact on Amis’s novels, prevailingly on those dealing with murder, victimisation and human degeneration, one ought to mention J. G. Ballard and Philip Roth. The influence of these writers becomes irrefutably visible in the novelist’s exhibition of controversial, taboo issues, such as eroticism, sexual deviation, tempestuous male-female relations, domestic violence or drug abuse. Together with these contentious themes, Amis models on these writers’ postmodern literary assumptions, particularly on Ballard’s notion of the death of effect defined by the critic as the contemporary decline in the ability to feel deeply which leads to the depthlessness of postmodern art as well as on his divagation on blurring the boundary between fiction and reality and on the reversed roles of the external world which represents reality and the inner world of our minds and dreams (Ballard 5). As far as other writers are concerned, Amis analyses their literary output in his critical works, largely in *The Moronic Inferno* and *The War Against Cliché*. While assessing their works, Amis simultaneously discloses the anxieties about his own fiction. In the case of Burroughs the British writer, known and frequently criticised for paying insufficient attention to plot in his novels, contrasts the American author’s surplus of action or its extreme proportions. Norman Mailer’s works are juxtaposed by Amis in *Observer* and in *The Moronic Inferno*, mirroring the novelist’s evaluation of the American writer’s fiction which is, in view of the author of *The War Against Cliché*, at once comical, critical and self-reflexively admiring (Diedrick 203). Taking into account Amis’s critical examination of John Updike, pre-eminently his essay on *Rabbit* trilogy written two years prior to the publication of *Money*, one may notice that the British author exposes both the advantages and difficulties inherent in the type of comedy Amis himself repeatedly practises and his assessment of Updike’s style likewise mirrors the acute cognizance of his own tendencies: “in every sense it constitutes an embarrassment of riches-alert, funny and sensuous, yet also garrulous, mawkish and cranky. Updike often seems wantonly, uncontrollably fertile, like a polygamous Mormon” (Amis, *MI*: 157). With regard to Philip Roth, Martin Amis exhibits his fascination with the

American writer, prevailingly his literary vigour, fearlessness, “novelistic ear” (Amis, *MI*: 45) and nonconformist treatment of contentious issues, such as eroticism, and the ironic and exhibitivistic portrayal of highly ambiguous male-female relations. In terms of social concerns, prevailingly a depiction of the atrocious, debased side of modern civilisation along with innovatory narratives and techniques, the novelist owes much debt to Kurt Vonnegut, which becomes visible in Amis’s use of a time-reversed structure in *Time’s Arrow* as a partial modeling on the bombing scene’s temporal reversal in *Slaughterhouse Five*.

When referring to a crime story tradition, a redefinition and reassessment of the genre’s thematic and narrative principles, Martin Amis’s writing echoes the fiction of Paul Auster or Elmore Leonard as well as the novels of sundry European and South American writers, most notably Alain Robbe-Grillet, Umberto Eco, Jorge Luis Borges or Jose Carlos Somoza. Although critics rarely perceive a generic parallelism between Amis’s and Auster’s novels and the British writer does not or seldom stresses his affinity with the author of *The New York Trilogy* or *Moon Palace*, the impact of Auster’s fiction on his works and the intertextual link between his texts and the fiction of the American writer, though the British author expresses his great admiration and passion for Auster (Amis, 6th December, 2010), one may draw some analogy between certain Amis’s and Auster’s stories. Despite the fact that the former and the latter are barely regarded as emblematic crime story writers, the themes of homicide, victimisation and detection repeatedly occur in their works, and their propensity for a merciless manipulation of their characters and a shrewd, deceitful hide-and-cheek game with the reader betoken their similar postmodern approach to literature and art. It is undoubtedly Amis’s *London Fields*, *Other People* and *Night Train* and Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*, *Travels in the Scriptorium* and, to some extent, *Squeeze Play* which best illustrate the authors’ manipulative tendencies and outline, above all, redefinition and playing with classical crime literature, prevailingly with the Chandleresque hard-boiled detective fiction. Amis’s and Auster’s reassessment and subversion of the American crime story tradition, their evoking or references to metaphysical detective fiction or hard-boiled metaphysics with its foregrounding a textual labyrinth, the existential angst of the protagonists, quest for identities and a parallel between a detection and the process of reading constitute a considerable part of the present dissertation, especially the sections devoted to the analysis of the acts of creation and annihilation in Amis’s fiction.

When reading the British novelist in the light of a metaphysical crime story tradition as well as of his postmodern philosophical worldviews, one can easily link his novels to the works of the afore-mentioned French, Spanish and South American novelists and theorists. Amis frequently speaks highly of Alain Robbe-Grillet, prevailingy of his immense contribution to the theory of metaphysical crime fiction as well as of his innovative writing, and analogically, extols the linguistic complexity and textual maze of Jorge Luis Borges's prose to which he often alludes, among others, in *The Information*. Jose Carlos Somoza's texts, primarily *The Anthenian Murders*, though barely mentioned in the interviews and essays of the British artist, seemingly echo Amis's literary concepts, themes and concerns, most notably the author's astute metafictional game with the reader and characters, a nebulous distinction between a detective and a criminal, author and narrator, a maze-like aspect of the text, blurring the boundary between fiction and reality, and a cosmological dimension of human life.

When examining Amis's oeuvre, one cannot fail to notice the author's awe for some classic novelists and artists, mainly for Charles Dickens, Jonathan Swift, Jane Austen, Robert Louis Stevenson, Robert Browning, John Milton, François Rabelais, Charles Baudelaire, and, with respect to the 20th century, to Franz Kafka. Amis undeniably feels attracted to the first of the above-said British writers with regard to his depiction of physical and mental defects of his protagonists, a caricatural portrayal of social corruption, degeneration and the discrepancy between the affluent and the destitute. Analogously to Dickens, the author of *Success*, *Money* and *London Fields* exposes moral debasement of the contemporary society by means of satire and irony. By the same token Amis models on Swiftian mocking exhibition of social and political decadence of the 18th century, prevailingy when referring in his atrocious, barbaric mass-murder carnage of *Dead Babies* to the tortured nightmare in *The Modest Proposal*. It is the impact of Swift on Martin Amis's literary output which distinguishes and contradicts his satire from that of his father. Taking into account a moral aspect of Amis's oeuvre, one may perceive other clasical authors' impact on shaping the novelist's texts, most prominently John Milton to whom he alludes, among others, in *The Information*.

Amis's esteem of the classics and his references to their texts seem valuable especially in the light of the novelist's crime stories. Apart from his focusing on the American crime story tradition, in particular his reevaluation of the hard-boiled fiction and modeling on postmodern American representatives of this genre, Amis's novels

remain under a lasting influence of British classical mystery writers, such as Robert Louis Stevenson as well as of British and French poets, novelists and playwrights whose works abound with violence, vengeance, persecution, obsession and death, most notably in William Shakespeare, Robert Browning and Charles Baudelaire. Stevenson's legacy saturates almost every work of Martin Amis, principally Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde motif. Although the critics and the majority of his readers relate this illustrious theme largely or exclusively to *Other People*, there is no denying that the motifs of split personality, double and doubling feature in almost all of his novels, both those which deal directly or indirectly with homicide. As for William Shakespeare, the British artist recurrently alludes to his tragedies and tragicomedies, mostly in the context of his own satirical works. Amis's evoking Shakespeare's plays in his well-known satirico-comedy, *Money*, endeavours to deepen his satirical themes on the one hand and to create and augment the atmosphere of fright and menace on the other hand. Analogously to the depiction of human malevolence and obsession with regard to Shakespeare's plays, the British novelist foregrounds dark sides of his protagonists frequently employing Robert Browning's dramatic monologue. The influence of the Victorian poet becomes visible not only in Amis's revealing human wickedness, quiescent maniac and the psychopathic inclination but, first and foremost, in his ironic distance from the narrators and characters, and in simultaneously building the intimate relationship with the reader. In terms of the exorbitant delineation of crime and violence, Amis's fiction, mirroring Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, parallel Rabelais's exposition of a man's carnality and Baudelaire's suggestive description of bodily decay and of the aura of oncoming death.

Martin Amis's prose is frequently associated with Kafkaesque writing, mostly with respect to his outlining of the distorted world and reality, and of the employment of disorientating narrative techniques. Kafka's legacy apparently saturates the fiction of the British writer, chiefly when considering his preoccupation with social and political issues. Among miscellaneous subjects the novelist undertakes to analyse, one may find his debate on the 20th century totalitarian regimes, pre-eminently Nazi ideology and Soviet dictatorship, nuclear cataclysm, and currently, the anxiety about Islamic fundamentalism. The majority of the themes Amis raises in his fictional works, essays or interviews generate lively controversies and polemics, most notably over the subject of genocide and Islamism. *Time's Arrow*, the novel devoted to Jews' extermination, remains puzzling and contentious on account of its experimental time-reversed

structure, a narrative perspective (splitting the protagonist and narrator), and the irony that produces black humour. As a response to the criticism, accusations of antisemitism and the unethical treatment of the genocide subject matter, Amis underlines a highly moralistic facet of his irony and temporal reversal by means of which he endeavours to expose an ideological perversion of the Nazis and a historical nescience of Western society. The writer, referring particularly to Robert Jay Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (1986), foregrounds a history of "medicalized killing" during Hitler's regime and a linguistic deviation of the Nazis. The controversies aroused over Amis's ironic and equivocal treatment of the history of genocide become aggravated with regard to his handling the theme of Islamic terrorism. *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom* as well as *Yellow Dog* mirror the writer's deep concern with the Islamic militant ideology and their terror, yet they simultaneously bring into light the novelist's biased attitude towards the terrorists' culture and their religion. Nevertheless, the writer, having encountered adverse, even hostile reactions to his contentious depiction of the Islamic world, maintains that his criticism is aimed not at Islamic culture but at deriding the manic polarity between Islamic and Western civilisation and at terrorism which undermines rationality and ethnical distinctions.

When set beside the above matters, Amis's delineation of Soviet dictatorship appears less disputable and more sanitised. However, *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million* and *House of Meetings* which portray the Stalinist Russia reflect two divergent aspects of this issue. Generically and linguistically dissimilar, these two works outline, on the one hand, the Soviet realia during and after World War II and bring into prominence, on the other hand, the artist's polemics with prominent Western thinkers on the assessment of the Stalinist regime and the communist system. *Koba the Dread*, constituting partly "a political memoir" and partly "a site memoir" (Richards 2000) which grotesquely pictures the Soviet dictator is at variance with a tragic or melancholic account of the lives of Russian camp prisoners recounted in *House of Meetings*. It is the latter work in which the critics emphasise Amis's departure from the use of the comic genre in favour of tragedy (Finney, 2008: 65).

Apart from the theme of Soviet totalitarianism, Martin Amis expresses his concern with nuclear and ecological threats, the issue to which he devotes *London Fields*, *Einstein's Monsters*, *Visiting Mrs Nabokov and Other Excursions* and *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews, 1971-2000*. In his fiction and non-fiction the author

outlines the atmosphere of the oncoming planetary disaster and creates a bleak vision of the world after a nuclear cataclysm. While picturing the pre- and post-nuclear reality, the novelist mingles the economical disquiet with existential and cosmological angst, as well as provokes a lengthy discussion about the future of the earth in the face of the nuclear arms race.

The exploration and estimation of Amis's oeuvre seems patchy when we fail to analyse the artist's contentious, highly ambiguous portraits of female protagonists pervading his prose. It is Amis's suggestive language, provocative erotic subject matter and delineation of equivocal men-women relations which have recurrently undergone sweeping criticism in feminist circles. The core of the charges and controversies lies in the artist's objectionable picturing of female characters who assume largely the roles of *femmes fatales*, victims or male sexual fantasies. Such a viewpoint on Amis's women characterisation are expressed by the critics like Laura L. Doan, Maggie Gee, Helen McNeil, Gloria Steinem, Penny Smith or Sara Mills. Feminist scathing attacks mounted on the novelist concern mostly *Money*, *Dead Babies*, *Yellow Dog*, *Einstein's Monsters* and *London Fields*. Due to the supposed sexist offensiveness of the last mentioned novel Amis was excluded from the Booker shortlist in 1989. Nevertheless, certain reviewers, like James Miracky or Eric Korn stress the writer's ironic distance from his misogynist male protagonists who become the chief target of his satire and argue that the novelist, by focusing on his male characters, their obsessions, pre-eminently their sexual and professional quandaries, while placing their female counterparts in the shadow, attempt to reveal the crisis of masculinity in the light of a gradual social and cultural feminist dominance. Furthermore, the analysts and attentive readers may easily observe Amis's steady attenuation of a male-female conflict, chiefly in his late literary phase, which coincides with the artist's greater exhibition and more profound examination of women characters whose most illustrative example is *Night Train*. Needless to say, with regard to both feminist critics' charges and other analysts' enthusiastic response to Martin Amis's prose, there is no denying that the novelist's portrayal of women has invariably fueled controversies and polemics, particularly in view of the influence of his father's disputed, allegedly misogynist writing.

The aim of the dissertation is to explore Martin Amis's literary output with respect to British and American crime story tradition. I attempt to prove to what extent his fiction conforms to the classical, modern and postmodern models of this genre and likewise to brood on the writer's postmodern literary techniques which reflect contemporary trends

reevaluating and questioning the convention of a novel. The phenomenon of Martin Amis's prose lies, as the critics, such as John Dern assert, in his ability to discover an art form in the literature of decay, where traditional fictional constituents, like time, voice and motivation, have been corrupted by the 20th century and the re-vitalised anti-novel and where style and language have surmounted story. Regardless of the fact that the British novelist is barely regarded as the forerunner or originator of postmodern experimental fiction but, instead, the follower of miscellaneous widely known trends and approaches to art his innovative prose, pre-eminently the contingency and forcefulness of his innovative, intriguing yet provocative language, gallows humour, controversial themes and non-conformist, disputable treatment of current thorny literary, cultural and social issues, make an invaluable contribution to present-day literature, mostly to the reassessment of *noir* fiction. The thesis entitled "Narrative and Narrated Homicide': The Vision of Contemporary Civilisation in Martin Amis's Postmodern Crime Fiction" is organised around multifarious subjects and diverse facets of Martin Amis's oeuvre. The beginning of the title which contains a quote from Brian Finney's article devoted to the British Author (Finney, "Narrative": 1995) constitutes the first part of the dissertation comprising its initial three chapters, embraces various references to a crime story convention preceded by the theoretical framework of the genre whilst chapter four illustrates the author's apparent divergence from the tradition of detective fiction in favour of illuminating 20th century civilisational menaces, pre-eminently socio-cultural, political and ecological conflicts as well as gender troubled relations. This thematic diversity or polarity of the thesis further mirrors different stages in Martin Amis's literary output and simultaneously the author's non-conformist writing and his incessant experimentation with any literary canon and genre, including a crime story tradition.

Chapter 1: "Various trends and tendencies in 20th century detective fiction criticism" deploys classical, modern and postmodern theories of crime writing, most notably Tzvetan Todorov's structural approach to detective fiction, the crucial aspects and constituents of hard-boiled literature and ultimately contemporary literary assumptions on the genre, prevailing a metaphysical approach to crime fiction and deviance theory. At the outset of this part I endeavour to delineate the critics' perennial speculation over a bipolar status of a detective story, the accent being placed on Christiana Gregoriou's examination of its 'serious' and 'popular' or entertaining function. The scrutiny of the twofold facet of the genre is protracted in the succeeding subchapter in the context of

Tzvetan Todorov's categorisation of crime fiction and the investigation of its key constituents. The critics' structural approach, preceded by a historical-cultural introduction into the British detective story, becomes juxtaposed by the analysis of post-war, predominantly American crime fiction, largely in view of hard-boiled literature. The ultimate sections are devoted to the outline of the theoretical grounding of selected postmodern detective fiction, prevailing a metaphysical approach presented by Patricia Merivale and Susan Elisabeth Sweeney and the theory of deviance delineated by Christiana Gregoriou. The entire chapter aimed at foregrounding a theoretical framework for selected divergent approaches to detective literature constitutes a prelude to Martin Amis's crime prose. In the ensuing three chapters, mainly in part two and three, I attempt to demonstrate to what extent the author's oeuvre reflects the above theories and whether it conforms to or remains within the convention of the genre in question or whether it exceeds its boundaries heading for uncharted literary territories.

Chapter 2: "Metaphysics, cosmology, existentialism and ethical philosophy in Martin Amis's fiction" incorporates the examination of Amis's three diverse novels in terms of several preferred theories on this genre outlined in the preceding chapter. On the outset I am going to scrutinise *London Fields*, its structural and thematic components referring primarily to Todorov's *The Typology of Detective Fiction* and partly alluding to the metaphysical facet of the book. The two following sections of the chapter comprising overlapping theoretical assumptions bring into prominence *Night Train* and collate it with Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*. The former part undertakes to interpret Amis's text as the coalescence of a hard-boiled crime story and metaphysical thriller whilst the latter foregrounds a comparative reading of *Night Train* and *The New York Trilogy* with regard to a metaphysical approach to detective literature and likewise to their existential dimension. While scrutinising these two works, I brood on a structural boundary between postmodern detective and non-detective fiction. In the final section in which *Time's Arrow* comes to the fore I prolong the debate over a crime story convention. Needless to say, due to the contentious theme of genocide this part oversteps the bounds of the crime genre rendition and aspires to explore a psychological, philosophical and metaphysical dimension of World War II mass killing.

Chapter 3: "Acts of narration or annihilation? – authorial murder and narratees' victimisation in Martin Amis's fiction" undertakes to examine the parallel between fictive crime, detection and victimisation and the process of writing and reading of a detective text. In the initial section the accent is put on the homicidal facet of writing,

the exposition of a double role of the author and murderer and on the ambivalent relations between the writer, narrator and narratees. Here, I am going to focus on *Other People*, on the link between writing as an act of crime and the process of alienation, estrangement and double identity referring to other prominent works, most noticeably to Jean-Paul Sartre's *No-Exit*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and, above all, to Paul Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium*. In the subsequent part which undertakes to examine *Dead Babies*, *Success* and *Money* the aspect of violence, authorial sadism, manipulation, dominance and likewise reader's and characters' autonomy come to the fore. Analogously to the prior section, the emphasis here will be placed on the writer's equivocal attitude towards his narratees and the reading public, yet the discussion of the issue will be extended into the rendition and collation of Amis's oeuvre with certain postmodern and classical British and American texts. The illustrative examples of this juxtaposition are the interpretation of *Dead Babies* with reference to Ballard's fiction and Kingsley Amis's *Ending Up*, the impact of Robert Browning's dramatic monologue and of Charles Dickens's social concerns on *Success*, and finally, Shakespearian and Orwellian motifs in *Money*. The concluding section centres on the scrutiny of the investigation and detection in the process of storytelling and the confinement of the protagonists by the author in Martin Amis's prose with reference to Somoza's, Borges's and Nabokov's fiction. I attempt to exhibit the defeat of narrators playing the roles of detectives and simultaneously artists in the works which could constitute, in my view, the intertextual parallelism, such as Amis's *London Fields* and Somoza's *The Athenian Murders* and Borges's *Death and the Compass*, likewise the correlation between *Money* and Nabokov's *Despair*. My twofold categorisation of the novels is due to the thematic duality of the section whose first part explores a detective-artistic facet of homicide whereas the second one examines the process of literary imprisonment of Amis's characters. Needless to say, the boundary between these two themes is not fixed and therefore it could be negotiated among the critics and the audience.

Chapter 4: "Power relations in Martin Amis's fiction" is organised around multifaceted issues which mirror the menaces and atrocities of the contemporary civilisation. When set beside the former chapters delineating literary crime inside a story as well as a homicidal facet of storytelling, this part aims at foregrounding the amplified political and socio-cultural dimension of villainy which constitutes a crucial element of Amis's oeuvre. It incorporates polemical historical and current political and social issues, like

20th century totalitarian regimes, Islamic fundamentalism, nuclear cataclysm, eroticism, pornography and male violence in the face of the increased status and gradual ascendancy of feminist culture as well as Martin Amis's literary, philosophical and ideological struggle with his father, concerning predominantly satire and humour. The initial part of the chapter handles a political, social and cultural dimension of totalitarianism in Martin Amis's prose, the accent being placed on the illustration of Stalin's dictatorship, Hitler's genocidal politics and Islamic militancy. At the outset I draw the analogy and collation between *House of Meetings* and *Time's Arrow*, the novels outlining the two totalitarian systems and ideologies, and likewise *House of Meetings* and *Koba the Dread*, the books structurally and stylistically dissimilar mirroring divergent sides and outlooks on the Soviet regime. The motif of totalitarianism becomes protracted in the ensuing part and mingled with the threat of the invasion of personal autonomy and curtailment of freedom in a democratic society at the examples of the three intertextually parallel novels: *Money*, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Furthermore, Amis's work, analysed in the context of violence, personal humiliation, groundless jealousy and virulent hatred, is juxtaposed with classical works, pre-eminently with *Othello* and *Hamlet*. The ultimate aspect scrutinised with reference to political and socio-cultural totalitarianism brings into light a contemporary polarity between Islamic and Western world delineated in *Yellow Dog* and *The Second Plane*. The following part of the chapter devoted to nuclear angst and cosmic oppression foregrounds the ecological, cosmological and metaphysical dimension of *Einstein's Monsters* and partly *London Fields*. Analogously, cosmic and existential anguish intertwined with cultural consumerism and postmodern literary contest constitute the crucial motifs of *The Information*, the book laced with numerous allusions to mythology, astronomy, classical and metaphysical literature. In the subsequent section the attention is drawn to Amis's portraiture of women characters and the ambiguous male-female relations in his oeuvre. While bringing out a gender issue, I aspire to put forth feminist viewpoints and other, mainly male theorists' and reviewers' assessment of the British novelist's fiction. The closing section of the fourth chapter exploring Martin and Kingsley Amis's genealogical dissent is divided into two parts, the former one handling chauvinism, feminism and paternal-filial conflict, and the latter, raising The Amises' contrastive outlook on satire. The works to be investigated with reference to a gender issue comprise *Money*, *Stanley and the Women* and *Jake's Thing* whilst those centering on The Amises' père-et-fils's antithetical approaches to satire include

Dead Babies with its allusions to Jonathan Swift's prose and to Denis Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* and Kingsley Amis's *Ending Up*.

The entire dissertation attempts therefore to outline multifarious facets of Martin Amis's fiction with respect to a crime story tradition. It simultaneously aims at demonstrating how the novelist oversteps the boundary between postmodern detective fiction and non or anti-detective fiction in pursuit of new literary territories.

Chapter 1: Various trends and tendencies in 20th century detective fiction criticism

In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant... The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the centre of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The centre, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end.

(Paul Auster: *The New York Trilogy*)

As a literary form, the detective story has constituted a crucial part of the 20th century British literature. Dating back to the 18th century and flourishing after World War I it became one of the most popular genres of English literary fiction as well as a determinant of social relations in the first half of the 20th century. The underlying pattern of a classical detective story with its murder, culprit and detective reflected the thirst of the middle and upper classes in British society for a firm, practically hierarchical social order, and for a competent, well-organised police force (Symons 9). From a literary standpoint, this genre, despite the heterogeneity of its forms, has frequently conformed to the realm of popular literature. Nevertheless, contemporary critics highlight a miscellaneous quality of detective fiction and therefore make the distinction between the “serious” novel, the examples of which are the works of Wilkie Collins, Agatha Christie, G. K. Chesterton and others, and the detective story which is regarded, according to Howard Haycraft: “as a frankly non-serious, entertainment form of literature” (Symons 13).

1.1 Crime fiction as genre and as popular literature

Taking into consideration the very genre of detective fiction, the critics, such as Christiana Gregoriou who refers to Priestman’s classification of crime literature, stresses that it has been frequently succumbed to ‘ghettoisation’ from ‘serious’ fiction (Gregoriou 13). In other words, the genre to be examined has fallen into the category of

popular fiction, which is interpreted and kept apart from other kinds of fiction according to miscellaneous criteria, such as the ones adopted by Bönneberg:

1. its audience, as popular literature is supposed to be read by masses,
2. the conditions of its production and distribution, as popular fiction is supposed to be geared to mass publication and distribution outside the ordinary channels of the book market,
3. its aims, which are supposed to be primarily entertainment and relaxation,
4. a particular type of reading; a reading of *plaisir* in contrast to a reading of *jouissance*,
5. its simplicity, of language as well of structure,
6. its internal norms, as popular literature is inherently inferior, either aesthetically and/or morally, and
7. external norms (according to the sociology of taste, in Böethius's terms), as popular literature is defined as having a large audience, and as being considered inferior by critics according to moral and/or aesthetic norms.

(Bönneberg 13)

Gregoriou asserts that in this classification where the two criteria relate to internal textual factors (criterion 5) and to external facets of production and distribution (criterion 7), a large number of the remaining ones renders, in fact, a discrimination between popular fiction and non-popular literature difficult and confounding. As a confirmation of her doubts on this matter, Gregoriou refers to Pepper's argumentation that assessing whether something is popular or not is vague and that crime writers 'inevitably steer their work into the realm of the 'unpopular fiction', and in doing so suggest that the appeal of certain kinds of popular culture relates to its utopian *and* dystopian impulses' (quoted in Gregoriou 14).

Despite the above unsettled classification of the standard of detective fiction, Gregoriou draws the attention to Bönneberg's differentiation between *category literature* and *genre fiction* as a resolution of the question. According to the latter 'category literature' is defined as a prototype for other less readily classified works, as a literature that adheres to a specific format and satisfies particular needs of the reading public. The critic further argues that such literature is marked by its simple, unsophisticated language, the depiction of realism, psychological characterisation, complication and originality and by the fact that it is produced in long series at a low price (Bönneberg 13). As for its audience and literary evaluation, Bönneberg states that 'category literature' is read mostly by a heterogenous public, becomes usually unreviewed by critics, its authors remain frequently unacknowledged and low-paid, and

its main goal is entertainment. As a conclusion, the critic asserts that the prototypical detective story does not conform to the rules of category literature but rather to 'genre fiction' which is often called a 'non-literature' (subdivided into the categories like science fiction, fantasy or romance), and is defined according to particular narrative procedures, character and situation types, and finally, target audience demands. Nevertheless, Gregoriou views such a discrimination as incomplete and vague. What is more, she remarks that in her scrutiny of the external factors referring to popular fiction Bönne-mark accentuates the impossibility of classifying detective stories exclusively in terms of popular literature and perceives this genre simultaneously as popular and serious literature:

[m]ost factors of production and distribution used to distinguish popular fiction from other fiction are not relevant to detective fiction: there are detective works that can be categorised as popular fiction and produced and sold under mass circumstances whereas other works are produced and sold as serious literature (Bönne-mark 15)

As an illustration of detective fiction's pervading both popular and serious literature, Gregoriou points out that its vast reading public establishes the genre as 'popular' whilst some of its works, among others those written by Poe, Christie or Chandler, have received the status of classic literature (Gregoriou 15). Needless to say, the analyst returns to Bönne-mark's argumentation that even though crime stories satisfy essential needs of the audience seen, for instance, as a potential flight from the reality in which those felt mistreated and undervalued by society find compensation, an outlet for their wrath and protests, they are viewed in addition as encouraging a relatively passive reading, since they manipulate or control the readers in the process of reading lacking in genuine examination of the events and insight into characters.

Taking into account the internal constituents of crime literature, Gregoriou points to plot, schematisation and simplicity. As for the first two elements, she refers to Bönne-mark who asserts that the prescriptive character of crime writing, here, the lack of originality in the characteristics of the generic plot, places the genre into the category of popular fiction. Regarding the issue of simplicity, Gregoriou notices that crime stories, similarly to popular works, are to be marked by simple, unrefined language, numerous clichés, trivial, insignificant descriptions and dearth of informativeness. However, such a classification echoing Nash's (1990) inspection of the nature of

popular fiction has subjected to Talbot's criticism for its 'cline of quality' since Nash places "pop fiction" at one end and "classics" at the other end of the spectrum, yet, other theoreticians have also employed analogous qualitative norms to discriminate between literature, in this case considered mainly in terms of an art form, and popular texts. Moreover, literature is frequently debated in view of aesthetic value or influence, whilst popular fiction repeatedly remains defined as aesthetically inferior to literature. Gregoriou asserts that, on the one hand, the question about 'literariness' seems pertinent in deliberating whether crime fiction conforms to the rules of popular literature or not. On the other hand, however, having scrutinised miscellaneous deviations or violations of linguistic norms, like the theory of linguistic literary estrangement formulated by Russian Formalists, Roman Jakobson's thesis on a self-referential aspect of poetic language as well as Carter and Nash's postulation of the features of linguistic use with literary contexts, the analyst perceives complexity of language and 'literariness' as incomplete and insignificant elements in defining crime writing as 'popular' or not. Bearing in mind Carter and Nash's arguments that a key factor in a text's literariness is whether the reading public prefers to read the text in a literary manner, Gregoriou claims that the extent to which crime writing is viewed according to the criteria of popular literature or not ought to be further assessed by the reader (Gregoriou 17).

Christiana Gregoriou's profound analysis of the nature of detective fiction, its definition and her delineation of a problematic classification of the status of this genre opens a spirited debate on the character, mechanisms and the future of this kind of literature, as well as helps to understand, revise or reformulate certain tendencies or critical approaches to crime stories formulated in the 20th century.

1.2 A structural approach to detective fiction

Throughout the history of detective fiction in Britain one may trace its literary ascent which manifested itself in the rise of the great detective novel between World War I and World War II as well as its gradual descent after 1945. There is no denying that the weakening form of this genre since the late 1940s was mostly due to the shift of public interest from the strict rules and an out-of-date pattern of the classical detective story onto crime fiction as well as the change of people's attitude towards life, world and literature. As a result of the traumatic experiences of World War II, many a reader was

no longer keen on the literature which invariably offered them a deep-rooted belief that human conflicts could be solved by reason and intellect and that virtue and righteousness must triumph in the end. A classical model of detective story did not cater for the expectations of the new generation of readers. Thus, the postwar writers resolved to transform certain rules of the genre and add new elements, such as the aspect of the motive of the crime, a new status of a criminal, detective and a victim, so that they would suit the tastes of the new reading public.

Together with various alterations within detective fiction, one may witness critics' growing interest in this genre. In the 1950s and 1960s detective stories and crime novels became the subject of a meticulous examination for such prominent writers and theorists as Julian Symons, Hammond Innes, and above all, Tzvetan Todorov. The last of the above-mentioned critics is well-known for his contribution to the literary assessment and classification of detective fiction according to the criteria based on the structural approach to literature. In his work, *The Typology of Detective Fiction*, published in 1966, Todorov scrutinises selected novels and stories, dividing them into three genres: the whodunit, the thriller and the suspense novel (Todorov 159). He takes as a point of departure the classical detective fiction which thrived in Great Britain in the interwar years (Todorov 162). The writer examines step by step each kind of detective fiction, focusing on their theme and, above all their internal structure. At this point, he refers to the model of detective fiction laid down by the literary theorist and the author of various murder mysteries, George Burton. According to the latter "all detective fiction is based on two murders of which the first, committed by the murderer, is merely the occasion for the second, in which he is the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective" and "the narrative...superimposes two temporal series: the days of the investigation which begin with the crime, and the days of the drama which lead up to it" (quoted in Todorov 159). Taking into account Burton's analysis of detective fiction, Todorov comes to the conclusion that its first genre, the whodunit, which corresponds to the classical model of a detective story, is built upon a narrative duality, that is, it comprises two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation (Todorov 159). At this point, Tzvetan Todorov, referring to the terminology of Russian Formalists, *fabula* and *sjuzet*, makes a distinction between the story, in which the reader gets to know "what happened" and the plot, which explains "how the reader (or narrator) has come to know about it" (Todorov 160). The story and the plot or "the discourse" have disparate status; the former is important, since the characters really act

in it, whereas the latter consists in a mere investigation and revelation of the murderer. According to Todorov the plot is of minor importance, as it displays no genuine action and nothing happens to the main protagonists: a rule of the genre assumes the detective's immunity (Todorov 160). Needless to say, the story of the investigation is crucial by virtue of the narrative voice, as it is usually told by a friend of the detective who admits straightforwardly that he/she is writing a book. In view of this, the linguistic style of the plot must remain neutral, plain and transparent. Here, the author refers to such examples of detective novels as *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie or *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* by James Hadley Chase.

Another genre examined by Tzvetan Todorov is the thriller. This kind of detective fiction, created in the United States before and after World War II, contains, similarly to the whodunit, the two stories. However, it brings into prominence the second story and suppresses the first one, which was not the case in the whodunit. Furthermore, we are made to believe that in the thriller the narrative coincides with the action, which means that the crime becomes committed during the act of reading, not anterior to it. Hence, retrospection is substituted by prospection. The mystery, an indispensable element of the whodunit, is absent in the thriller, but our interest is not diminished, rather, it takes the form of a twofold curiosity: the reader is willing to get to know the motive of the crime and he/she waits for the outcome of the story. It is worth noticing that in the thriller the life of the detective and the narrator, often being one person, is put in jeopardy and till the final chapter of the book we are not certain whether he/she will be alive or dead. As far as the linguistic aspect is concerned, this genre distinguishes itself by a crude descriptive style, devoid of any rhetoric and pathos. This is the case of the thrillers written by such prominent writers as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler or Horace McCoy (Todorov 163).

Finally, Tzvetan Todorov focuses on the third kind of detective fiction, the suspense, which has developed on the basis of the combined properties applied to the whodunit and to the thriller. As the author points out, the suspense keeps the mystery of the whodunit and contains the two stories, the *fabula* and *sjuzet*, but, similarly to the thriller, the discourse constitutes a pivotal part of the book. In view of this, the reader's attention is focused not only on the past but, first and foremost, on the forthcoming events, especially on the future of the characters. Taking into account the miscellaneous components and themes of the suspense, Todorov divides the genre into two subtypes. The first one, called "the story of the vulnerable detective," delineates the

figure of the detective as its main character who many a time risks his life and therefore becomes integrated into the universe of other characters. The second type, described as “the story of the suspect-as-detective,” illustrates a personal aspect of the crime in which the main character, inequitably suspected for and charged with murder, seeks to find out a real culprit and becomes a potential victim of the murderer.

Tzvetan Todorov, underlying the same structural pattern of the whodunit, the thriller and the suspense, refers to the rules of the classical detective fiction formulated by S. S. Van Dine in 1928. Among Van Dine’s twenty principles, Todorov focuses on the following elements: the double narrative, the presence of the detective, the criminal and at least one victim, the presentation of the culprit as a professional criminal and as one of the main characters of the story and the avoidance of the fantastic and banal situations (quoted in Todorov 163). He states that according to such a model of detective stories which made a profound impact upon sundry theories of detective and crime fiction in the following years, the differences among the genres are mostly determined by thematic nuances, like the milieu, which distinguishes the whodunit from the thriller, the aspect of the mystery, professional crime in the whodunit versus personal crime in some thrillers or suspense novels, etc.

All things considered, *The Typology of Detective Fiction* by Tzvetan Todorov constitutes an invaluable contribution to the structural studies and criticism on detective literature. Such an in-depth examination of detective and crime stories has been a point of departure for postmodern writers and critics working on this type of fiction. By the same token Todorov adopts his detailed yet rigid classification of the norms of popular literature. He emphasises that, contrary to the literary masterpiece which “does not enter any genre save perhaps its own” (Todorov 159), it is easy to categorise the books of popular literature to specific genres. Hence, the author makes the division of detective fiction into the whodunit, the thriller and the suspense, referring to such writers as Agatha Christie, Hadley Chase or Raymond Chandler.

1.3. Traditional and modern aspects of crime literature in hard-boiled detective fiction

In the 20th century detective stories and crime novels aroused a widespread interest and became the subject of a lively discussion among various critics and writers. The works of such well-known authors as Agatha Christie, G. K. Chesterton and Dorothy Sayers helped to constitute the canon of British crime literature and reflected the established social and cultural norms in this country before and shortly after World War II. These writers set up a fixed pattern of the detective novel which mirrored certain values, standards and cultural conventions typical of the middle-class British society, such as respect for law and justice, a public agreement to impose severe punishments for criminals, the need of order and safety. Nevertheless, the classical model of this genre, deeply rooted in the European literary tradition, mostly in Great Britain and France (Émile Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge*, Fortuné du Boisgobey's *Le Crime de L'Opéra*, Gaston Leroux's *Le Mystère de la Chambre Jeune*), despite their ascents and triumphs at the turn and in the first half of the 20th century, soon became questioned, revealing structural and thematic weaknesses. First and foremost, the classic Golden Age novels used to be perceived as hermetically sealed stories, typically by location in a country house which represented an isolated setting as well as by their 'artificial' structural pattern, most notably, by their insertion of seemingly 'unreal' elements, such as the amateur status of the detective and the omission of any forensic and scientific police investigation (Abrams 194).

Together with the public's gradual tiredness and diminishing interest in the traditional model of this genre, a new kind of detective literature began to flourish, shortly overwhelming the previous one. The so-called hard-boiled fiction, with its origins in the early 20th century American crime literature, constituted a strong reaction against highly artificial classical detective stories of the interwar period, mostly in Britain. Contrary to its former subgenre, this type of crime literature reflected the norms and standards of popular culture and social relations in the USA before and after World War II, such as the interest in police and detectives' work, their background, the quest for sensational subject-matter and the engrossment in the psychological aspect of crimes. Although it is generally assumed that hard-boiled detective fiction refers chiefly to the realms of the American popular culture of the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s,

some of its aspects, for instance the urban concerns of modernism, could be seen in the works of some prominent British writers, such as Agatha Christie. Taking into account the pattern and major constituents of hard-boiled detective novels, among others the presence of the detective, the criminal and the motive of the homicide, one is prepared to concede that this type of crime literature, despite its modified structure and subject-matter, indubitably conformed to the rules and conventions of the classical detective fiction. It was not until the late 1960s and 1970s than there appeared new tendencies in this field of literature which reflected broader alterations and modifications in art and culture. Nonetheless, in order to assess this literary subgenre, in particular its impact upon some prominent postmodern detective story writers, among others Martin Amis, Paul Auster, P. D. James, Umberto Eco or Eduardo Mendoza, I'm going to scrutinise its salient features.

At the outset one ought to refer to the definition of the above-mentioned subgenre of detective fiction. According to the *New Encyclopedia Britannica* hard-boiled fiction is “a tough unsentimental style of American crime writing that brought a new tone of earthy realism or naturalism to the field of detective fiction and that uses graphic sex and violence, vivid but often sordid urban backgrounds, and fast-paced, slangy dialogue” (quoted in Willett 1992). From this citation one may distinguish the crucial elements of the hard-boiled detective stories, that is a sensational and violent aspect of crime, the urban setting, a neutral and plain style, a colloquial, straightforward language devoid of rhetoric and pathos, and a graphic, true-to-life depiction of events and characters. However, after inspecting this subgenre more closely, one ought to refer to its other components and features, such as a personal and psychological dimension of crime, a detective (or a gumshoe) presented as a professional, the procedural side of the police investigation and, last but not least, the dominance of male protagonists in the narrative fiction. Apparently, the pattern and major components of the hard-boiled fiction reflect the structure and thematic constituents of two other subgenres of detective literature, namely the thriller and the suspense. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis of the crucial elements of the subgenre examined above will enable us to see and evaluate its status in terms of its adherence to and deviation from the classical model of the genre.

When reading attentively the novels of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler or James M. Cain, it becomes apparent that both the story, that is the actual events in the book and the plot which centres upon the way in which the author presents them, are of equal importance. For this reason, such novels may fall into the category of the

suspense, in particular into one of its two subtypes, namely 'the story of the vulnerable detective' (Todorov 164). One cannot fail to notice that in the works of Hammett, Chandler or Leonard the detectives lose their immunity and their lives are constantly put at stake. On the other hand, the circumstances of the homicide are shrouded in mystery, especially those concerning the identity of the culprit, thus the reader's curiosity is aroused till the final pages of the book.

As for the main characters of the hard-boiled fiction (the detective, the murderer and the victim), they assume similar roles to those played in the classical detective story, though their status is quite different. The first of them, the detective, is a professional gumshoe who endeavours to solve a criminal riddle and find a culprit on his own. Unlike the sleuth in the traditional detective novel, he is portrayed as a sophisticated hero, a tragic figure, a sensitive decent individual who operates in a world full of violence and corruption, and who is frequently confronted with the brutality and amorality of the police (Willett 1992). Taking into consideration the profession of the detective in the hard-boiled fiction, often called the 'tough school' of writing, he may be neither a private eye nor a police officer but instead he could be a journalist who solitarily investigates criminal cases and who invariably brings into light the corruption of the police system. From the above statement it transpires that this type of crime literature places the emphasis not exclusively on the discovery of the identity of the murderer and finding a solution to a criminal puzzle but also on the depiction of the police work and the exposition of the evil, wicked side of some high-rank police officers (Willett 1992). In this regard the hard-boiled story reflects the themes characteristic of the police procedural rather than a pure crime novel. This is the case of Raymond Chandler's *Good-bye My Lovely*, *Killer in the Rain*, Elmore Leonard's *Glitz* or Paul Auster's *Squeeze Play*. It is interesting to observe that the representatives of the above-mentioned tough school recurrently depict hostile, all the greater war-like relations between the main protagonist and one of the police officers, which evokes the struggle between the detective and the culprit. It seems from the above that the figure of the policeman and the murderer are frequently merged. Needless to say, unlike in the classical detective story, particularly in the whodunit, the positions of the detective and the criminal cannot correspond to those of the pursuer and the pursued. In the hard-boiled fiction it is rather the reversal of the roles: on account of his high position the murderer (the policeman) chases the pursued (the main character who plays the role of the detective). However, such model is one of a few possible scenarios written by many

prominent authors of the hard-boiled detective literature who many a time yet not always portray policemen as culprits. In doing so they strive to draw the readers' attention to the amorality and ruthlessness of the legal system in the USA, therefore their works have visible didactic and moralistic tones.

Another crucial element of the hard-boiled fiction is the setting or the milieu. It is the city, its lifestyle and culture which permeates the works of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, Elmore Leonard, Julian Barnes or Paul Auster, and that gives a meaning and shape to their novels. Regarding the milieu described in the fiction of the above-mentioned writers, Tzvetan Todorov classifies these hard-boiled novels as thrillers, though their composition brings them closer to suspense (Todorov 164). Apart from that, some theoreticians and literary critics, among others Cynthia Hamilton or Emony Elliott, refer to the hard-boiled detective stories as the successors of the 'city novels' since they epitomise the roots of crime and detection (Hamilton 321). Throughout the history of the hard-boiled detective fiction and crime literature in general the city has constituted a pivotal part of any detective story. First of all, the city reflects social and cultural relations among its main characters, in this case the tensions and clashes between the police and the criminals as well as the conflicts between the ordinary citizens and local authorities. Historically, this kind of fiction focused on the abuses of power within the city and gave graphic representation to the hardship and anguish of its impoverished citizens. The city novels, the predecessors of the hard-boiled detective stories, shortly acquired great popularity in the United States due to its exposition of sensational crime, violence and frictions, the delineation of social tensions in the lawless world in which an individualist hero is forced to live and survive (Willett 1992).

Some critics claim that cities, in particular the metropolises, graphically illustrated in Eugene Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris*, George Lippard's *The Quaker City*, James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* or Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, are frequently criticised owing to the fact that they represent the basest instincts of human society. Since they are built versions of Leviathan and Mammon, they map the power and domination of the bureaucratic machine of the social pressures of money (Zukin 1). Accordingly, the urban realism which mirrors predominantly the US tradition and culture and which thus has become synonymous with American detective fiction betokens chaos, disruption and unflinching resolute criminality. Such bleak reality which indubitably casts a shadow over the American dream and which epitomises social

dislocation, abuse of power and affluence, and the so-called diffused violence of late capitalism fits the pattern of the hard-boiled fiction, specifically its radical mode (Willett 1992).

The hard-boiled fiction is closely related to gender roles, another crucial element of this subgenre. One is prepared to concede that the core of this kind of literature lies in the exposition of male toughness, their power and dominance. The world delineated in such novels revolves around 'tough guys' in which there is little space for women. Female characters appear in the hard-boiled fiction exclusively as male sexual fantasies who "threaten the very life of the hero" (Elliott 371). It is a woman who brings about chaos and puts the detective's life in jeopardy, like Ellen Wade in Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, Velma Valento/Helen Grayle in *Farewell, My Lovely* or Judith Chapman in Auster's *Squeeze Play*. The above-mentioned characters embody sexy *femmes fatales*, they are represented as deviant, provocative in their female sexuality on the one hand and erratic in their "unfeminine" rejection of male supremacy on the other hand (Willett 1992). Contrary to the classical detective story, especially to a whodunit which focuses predominantly on the confrontation between a sleuth and a murderer, and on a detective's endeavour to solve a criminal riddle, the hard-boiled fiction places the emphasis on a gender conflict in which the "innocent" and naive gumshoe falls prey to a woman's wiliness and manipulation. It is female sexuality which generates peripeteia, distracting the protagonist's attention from the crux of the criminal matter and thus retarding the process of detection. Only the renunciation of this sexuality by the hero can guarantee the restoration of the stability and order, and may prompt a satisfactory denouement (Elliott 372). In the hard-boiled detective stories female protagonists who frequently play the roles of murderesses and seductresses epitomise chaos and disorder of modern cities and the corruption of capitalist societies. Accordingly, their luxurious lifestyle, ostentatious display of wealth, power and provocative behaviour reflect social and cultural crisis of contemporary metropolises and threaten the dominant position of men. Hence, contemporary critics of the hard-boiled fiction many a time call it a misogynist type of detective literature due to the specifically ironic, all the more cynical way in which the authors of this kind of crime fiction depict female characters (Mickey Spillane *I, the Jury*, Raymond Chandler *The Lady in the Lake*, Paul Auster *Squeeze Play*).

One cannot fail to notice that, structurally, the hard-boiled literature mirrors accurately the thoughts and beliefs of their male protagonists. The novels of Hammett,

Chandler, Leonard or Spillane are written from the perspectives of 'tough guys', the sleuths who attempt to solve criminal enigmas and face the corruption and decadence of modern concrete jungles. For that matter the language of the hard-boiled detective stories is marked by realism and plausibility, the style is plain and transparent, devoid of grandiloquence and pomposity. It is the concoction of linguistic rationalism, harshness, sensuality, laconic wit, a graphic, all the greater gruesome detail which pervade the works of Chandler, one of the icons of this subgenre:

Mr Lance Goodwin still sat negligently in the chair, with his left hand on the wide brocaded arm and his right trailing to the smell gun on the floor. The last blood drop had frozen on his chin. It looked back and hard and permanent. His face had a waxy look now. (Chandler 356-357)

The pug didn't move. He probably knew there wasn't enough speed in his arm. Slade grabbed his Luger up and started to whirl. I took a step and slammed him behind the ear. He sprawled forward over the desk and the Luger shot against a row of books. (Chandler 45)

This typically unsentimental, unemotional and even ironic description of homicide and the victims embodies the quintessence of this type of crime literature whose goal is to illustrate graphically the course of events and not to focus on the feelings and emotions of its protagonists. The linguistic 'toughness' of such fiction refers to frontier literature which centred on the adventures and experiences of American settlers and their ceaseless struggles with numerous enemies and miscellaneous perils. In view of this, a tough, at times even crude language, and a neutral, impersonal style of both of these subgenres reflect a sense of the diminishing power and significance of the individual (Hamilton 325).

It should be also pointed out that the hard-boiled stories are marked by a street-corner style, they are at times pervaded by vulgar, crude language and a plain, colloquial style, and therefore go beyond the classical model of this genre. This fiction refers to and closely reflects the realms and standards of popular culture, and lives up to the tastes and expectations of its readers. Nevertheless, according to postmodern critics the hard-boiled detective literature is equipped with various linguistic deconstructive procedures and mechanisms by means of which the narrator endeavours to establish the meaning and to re-order the "real" world. Deconstruction in which the language constitutes the play of signs challenges traditional concepts of truth, certainty and

reality. Once the hard-boiled novels are read and analysed in terms of linguistic deconstruction these texts become discussive, therefore their meaning dissolves. The hard-boiled texts, mirroring popular culture, constitute a blend of struggle and negotiation. According to Edward Said there is “no possibility of a textual universe with its connection to actuality” (quoted in Willett 1992). In this regard part of the battle derives from the status of the crime novel as mimesis- that is, as registering a definite sense of the American urban setting, the salient examples of which are *Butter Medicine*, *Day of Wrath* and *LaBrava* (Willett 1992).

Ultimately, it may be stated that the hard-boiled fiction has indubitably become one of the most popular subgenres of detective literature in the interwar years and shortly after World War II. Having its roots in the episodic city novel and referring to the tradition of the frontier written works, this type of crime fiction soon commenced touching upon social, political and cultural issues in the interwar and postwar America, and thus became the icon of popular culture. Despite the fact that the hard-boiled novels were by and large regarded as parts of ‘tabloid’ or popular literature, some critics, among others Howard Haycraft, William Marling and Steven Marcus, place this kind of crime fiction in one of the categories of belles lettres. What currently remains disputable in the works of Hammett, Chandler or Leonard is the stereotyped depiction of male and female protagonists and the authors’ biased attitude towards women characters. The reaction against the denigrated position and marginality of women outlined in the subgenre has recently been the spread of the feminist crime writing and literary criticism which has frequently contained an entry on contemporary female sleuths. The most impressive works could be found in Anne Cranny Francis’s *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* and Marilyn Stasio’s “Lady Gumshoes: Boiled Less Hard” (Willett 1992).

1.4. Contemporary approaches to detective literature

1.4.1. A metaphysical approach to crime fiction

In the second half of the 20th century, in particular in its last decades, various critical essays have been written with reference to the detective story. Among the most prominent theoreticians of the “classical” type of this genre, such as Tzvetan Todorov, Julian Symons, George Burton or Howard Haycraft one cannot fail to notice the opinions of other critics, such like Patricia Merivale or Susan Elisabeth Sweeney, who marked a new direction in analysing detective fiction. The voices of this new wave of literary theoreticians substantially contributed to the alternative perception of the detective story as a genre. Following this new tendency in detective genre, some artists focused on experimenting with the classical model of detective fiction (Paul Auster, Martin Amis, Jorge Luis Borges) on the one hand, and on scrutinising the genre, taking into account its structure, historical modifications and the contemporary dimension on the other hand (Merivale, Sweeney 1). The attitude of these writers towards generally accepted norms and principles of detective and crime stories formulated by their forerunners reflected inevitable alterations in contemporary crime fiction and the need for new trends in this genre. Such an innovative approach to detective fiction which marked postmodern tendencies in this literary field has exerted a powerful influence on present-day writers.

The works of well-known contemporary crime novelists, such as Martin Amis’s *Night Train*, Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*, Ian McEwan’s *A Child In Time* as well as the novels of prominent Spanish and Latin American writers, among others Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Eduardo Mendoza, Arturo Perez-Reverte or Jose Carlos Somoza, reflect miscellaneous postmodern tendencies in detective literature. Among recent currents and movements in experimental crime fiction, contemporary critics distinguish the metaphysical detective story whose most popular type is the “hard-boiling metaphysics” constituting a melange of the traditional hard-boiled novel and metaphysical detective fiction, the “anti-detective story,” the “post-*nouveau roman*” (Merivale, Sweeney 3, 11) and pastiche (Jameson 17). These terms, coined by present-day theoreticians and writers, have been widely known all over the world, flourishing, among others, in British, American and Latin-American literatures.

The works of the above-mentioned artists, especially the novel to be scrutinised, Martin Amis's *Night Train*, are saturated with the postmodern uncertainty, subjectivity, intertextuality, ambiguous meanings of a literary text and a fragmentary narration, and therefore testify to the shift yet not the suppression of the traditional crime literature, the evidence of which are the novels of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Ross Thomas, Michael Kenyon and Jessica Mann. Thus, one may notice the coexistence of the two contradictory trends of this genre. It is the interrelation of the traditional and contemporary elements of crime fiction which governs the writing of Martin Amis, the novelist to whom is devoted this dissertation. As Alain Robbe-Grillet points out: "The writer himself, despite his desire for independence, is situated within an intellectual culture and a literature which can only be those of the past. It is impossible for him to escape altogether from this tradition of which he is the product" (Robbe-Grillet, 1972: 468). In view of that, the novels of the British writer, particularly *Night Train* and *London Fields* which are analysed extensively in the subsequent chapter, are marked both by the author's reference to the classical model of this genre, predominantly to the standards of hard-boiled detective stories and to the postmodern conventions of crime fiction.

As far as multifarious contemporary approaches to detective and crime fiction are concerned, some prominent critics, such as Patricia Merivale, Susan Elisabeth Sweeney or Alain Robbe-Grillet, have drawn the reader's attention to the so-called "metaphysical detective story." This genre, referring to 17th century British literature and American Romanticism, especially to Edgar Allan Poe, has been considered as the product of 20th century experimental fiction. It is distinguished by its analytic and self-reflexive nature, enigmatic theme and perplexing structure as well as by the questions it raises about the narrative, narrator, interpretation, subjectivity, relativism and the limits of human knowledge (Merivale, Sweeney 8).

When defining and scrutinising the metaphysical detective story one ought to take into account its departure from, or, more specifically, its subversion of the traditional conventions of the detective fiction, the most significant of which are the role of the detective as the omniscient narrator and surrogate reader, the criminal whose identity is recalled and who always becomes punished for his/her misdeeds and a rational explanation of the crime and narrative closure. Contrary to the classical detective and crime stories which end with a sense of completion or resolution and in which every motive and criminal act becomes logically elucidated, a metaphysical detective story

abounds with secrets, riddles and philosophical questions about mysteries of life and death, being and knowing which transcend the plot of a literary work (Merivale, Sweeney 2, 4). In keeping with that, this genre requires from its readers the involvement and active participation rather than the consumption of the text. As Kevin J. H. Dettmar puts it, a metaphysical detective story prompts the audience to read “like a detective tale which cautions against reading like a detective” (quoted in Merivale, Sweeney 2). This seems to confirm a postmodern theory of the multiplicity of meanings of a detective story, its intertextuality and, above all, the unreliability and limited knowledge of the detective and narrator, which makes a crime riddle impossible to solve. Alain Robbe-Grillet examines closely the notion of the detective’s limited role in unraveling a murder mystery and, above all, the decreasing power of the narrator, his lack of domination and control of the events and characters (Robbe-Grillet, 1972: 471).

Various critics have endeavoured to examine the crucial features of the metaphysical detective fiction, adopting other names for this genre, such as an “anti-detective story” (William V. Spanos), a “deconstructive mystery” (Patrick Brantlinger), a “postmodern mystery” (Kevin Dettmar) or a “post-*nouveau roman*” (Michael Sirvent). The critics, such as Patricia Merivale and Susan Elisabeth Sweeney, trace the origins of this genre in American Romanticism, in particular, in the works of Edgar Allan Poe. The author of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* is not only regarded as the father of the detective story whose successors are indubitably Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Anthony Berkeley or Dorothy Sayers, considered nowadays the classical representatives of crime fiction, but also as the one who greatly contributed to the rise of a specific kind of this genre. As a matter of fact, the American writer who is regarded as the inventor of the modern detective story and whose stories are philosophical, self-reflexive and mysterious, also laid the foundations for the contemporary extravagant, innovatory crime fiction. The novels and stories of such writers as Julio Cortazar, Jorge Luis Borges, Paul Auster, Peter Ackroyd, Martin Amis, Italo Calvino or Jose Carlos Somoza testify to the renewal or even renaissance of the metaphysical detective story launched by Poe.

Furthermore, the American writer’s innovatory texts have played a crucial role in the history of literary theory. In the second half of the 20th century various critics and theoreticians commenced analysing this kind of fiction according to some postmodern approaches, such as deconstruction, intertextuality and psychoanalytic criticism (Merivale, Sweeney 6). The representatives of these literary trends endeavoured to

reveal some new aspects of detective fiction which would correspond to modern and postmodern literary reality. The examples of these new artistic currents could be found in Roger Caillois's formalist study of the detective story as game, Geraldine Pederson-Krag's Freudian reading of it as repetition of the primal scene, Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic interpretation of Poe's story *The Purloined Letter*, Jacques Derrida's, Barbara Johnson's and John Irwin's critical examinations of this genre as well as Slavoy Žižek's critical analysis of Freudian theory, his deconstructive approach to the idea of form and the advocacy of the multitude of narratives in crime fiction and film noir. Needless to say, certain works, such as William Most and Glenn Stowe's collection *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory* as well as Ronald G. Walker and June M. Frazer's *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory*, testify to the coexistence of the traditional and modern literary theories.

One cannot fail to notice that the appearance of the metaphysical detective story is closely linked to the discussion about postmodernism both in terms of the literary theory and culture. According to Holquist detective fiction plays a crucial role in postmodern literature and constitutes its recurrent narrative subtext, similarly to mythology which occupies a prominent place in literary modernism. Concomitantly, many a writer that could be identified with postmodern fiction, such as Auster, McEwan, Barnes, Ackroyd or Amis, to a large extent shaped the metaphysical detective story, the genre which expresses a typical postmodernist concern with intertextuality, metafiction, pop-culture, pastiche, parody, irony or self-analysis. Some contemporary critics, among whom are Barthes, Spanos or Tani, call metaphysical detective fiction "the literature of exhaustion" which "frustrates the expectations of the reader, transforms a mass-media genre into a sophisticated expression of avant-garde sensibility" (quoted in Merivale, Sweeney 8). Needless to say, they argue that this genre employs mystery and imagination instead of rationality and positivistic interpretation which perfectly fits postmodernism (Merivale, Sweeney 8)

Among diverse features and themes of the metaphysical detective story, Patricia Merivale, Susan Elisabeth Sweeney and Alain Robbe-Grillet focus on the pivotal ones, such as: the defeat of the detective or "sleuth," the presentation of the place (world, city or town) as labyrinth, the enigmatic form of the text, the embedded text, "mise en abyme" and text as an object, the equivocal and obscure meaning of clues and evidence,

the missing person, “the double,” the lost and stolen identity, the ambivalent ending, no genuine solution to the crime and the absence of “closure” to the investigation.

With reference to the first constituent, one may notice that in Poe’s various metaphysical detective stories, such as *The Man of the Crowd* as well as in modern literature of this genre, for example in Borges’s *Death and the Compass*, Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*, McEwan’s *The Child in Time* or Amis’s *Night Train*, the detective by and large becomes helpless and incapable of finding the key to the crime. This is true both for an armchair detective or a private eye (Merivale, Sweeney 8) in the classical “soft-boiled” metaphysical fiction (Merivale, Sweeney 12), such as Poe’s, as well as in modern detective stories, for example in Cortazar’s *Continuity of Parks*, or a gumshoe in the so-called “hard-boiled” detective story, initiated by the American Romantic writer and popularised predominantly in the United States in the second half of the 20th century (Marling 2001).

The subsequent significant element of the metaphysical fiction is the depiction of the world or city and a text itself as a maze. This is particularly true to the works of Umberto Eco (*The Name of the Rose*), Jorge Luis Borges (*Death and the Compass*), Edgar Allan Poe (*The Purloined Letter*), Ian McEwan (*The Child in Time*) and Martin Amis (*London Fields*). In these stories one may encounter the urban labyrinth, the mazelike confusion and chaos of the city delineated by the writers but, above all, the entangled, distorted structure of the text confronted both by the reading public and by the detective. This leads inevitably to the detective’s inability to solve a crime puzzle and to a reader’s frequent incomprehension of the book and a concomitant personal frustration.

As for clues and evidence, they are of no genuine value. In the metaphysical detective story documents or papers no longer stand for the objects they are supposed to represent. Rather, they epitomise impenetrable entities in their own right, meaningless physical artifacts which bring no genuine solution to a mystery. Such materials no longer cater for the expectations of the readers accustomed to the classical detective story in which any evidence, such as fingerprints, photographs or tags, are of vital importance in detecting crime. As Alain Robbe-Grillet points out, the world delineated in the metaphysical fiction reminds us of a detective story in which “you have to keep coming back to the recorded evidence: the exact position of a piece of furniture, the shape and frequency of a fingerprint, a word written in a message. The impression grows on you that nothing else is *true*. Whether they conceal or reveal a mystery,

these elements that defy all systems have only one serious, obvious quality – that of being *there* “(Robbe-Grillet, 1965: 56).

Other significant components of the metaphysical detective story are the position of the missing person and the problem of identity. In fact, it is next to impossible to trace a singular identity in postmodern fiction reflecting contemporary reality permeated with forged papers, meaningless names, in general, ‘images without originals’ or simulacra (Pope 132). In such a world it is hard to observe and judge anything objectively. Subjectivity, which dominates any book of this kind, becomes problematic for its protagonists, that is for its detectives or sleuths (Merivale, Sweeney 10). While striving to find and identify the missing persons, usually criminals but sometimes victims, detectives soon realise that their search for another is nothing but the quest for themselves. To take the analogy further, it is the detective whose identity the reader actually seeks. As a result, we come across the lost and exchanged identity and the double self of one person.

Finally, metaphysical detective fiction distinguishes itself by the lack of closure, a final resolution or logical conclusion. In this kind of literature the detective generally fails to solve a criminal puzzle or find a criminal. What is crucial, however, is the fact that the protagonist’s debacle also means the incompleteness of the text, the continuity of the very process of reading which does not exclude any alternative interpretations of the story (Baldick 38).

In the light of the above facts one may state that the metaphysical detective story is one of the most innovative and experimental genres of crime fiction which led the way into the new critical approaches to this genre. It indubitably shaped the works of numerous postmodern writers, such as Martin Amis, Paul Auster, Jorge Luis Borges, Umberto Eco, Jose Carlos Somoza or Eduardo Mendoza. Nevertheless, despite the significance and spread of this genre both in American and Latin American literature as well as Grillet’s, Sweeney’s and Merivale’s invaluable contribution to the studies and investigation of postmodern crime fiction, one cannot fail to notice other manifold approaches to and examinations of this genre, such as feminist theories on crime literature (Merja Makinen *Agatha Christie. Investigating Femininity*, Susan Rowland *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendel. British Women Writers in Detective and Crime Fiction*), feminist detective writing, the inspection of post-colonial detective fiction (Ed Christian’s *The Post-Colonial Detective*) or film and cinema criticism (Fran Mason’s *American Gangster Cinema*, Lee Horsley *The Noir Thriller*). As regards Martin Amis’s

writing, the author's linguistic innovation, experimentation on the genre, together with his foregrounding social and cultural deviation of the contemporary civilisation, one may benefit from scrutinising Christiana Gregoriou's theory on deviance in present-day literature.

1.4.2. Deviance in contemporary crime fiction

The notion of deviance was mentioned at the outset of this chapter in the context of Gregoriou's definition of the genre and its literary status. Here, it is worth providing the scrutiny of this concept with reference to its linguistic, social and generic framework. These three theoretical disciplines or models relevant to the investigation of deviance serve both as a graphic illustration of the structure and narrative tendencies in contemporary crime writing and as a reflection of strained, at times aberrant social and cultural relations saturating sundry postmodern works.

Linguistic deviance

While examining linguistic deviance in crime stories Gregoriou postulates three stylistic models: the type of narration chosen, the viewpoint and mind style conveyed and the figurative language employed (Gregoriou 19). In the delineation of the three categories the critic highlights their internal complexity and ambivalence, and thus this interpretation stands in contrast to the traditional analysis of these types.

As for the first model, the analyst draws a distinction between the first person, *homodiegetic* and the third-person, *heterodiegetic* narration which indicates divergent author-narrator relations. She asserts that although the border between these two types of narration is clear-cut – in a homodiegetic narration we are made to view the events through the eyes of the narrator who is also the main character in the story whilst in a heterodiegetic one the author and the narrator merge, many a crime writer, such as James Patterson's Alex Cross series or Raymond Chandler's novels, employ the third-person narration when addressing the criminal consciousness whereas they prefer the first-person narration when addressing the detective's consciousness. Hence, the novelists' subjective, arbitrary selection and combination of the two kinds of narration

violates the above distinction. The same holds true for the discrimination between the author-reader and narrator-narratee levels which involves an *implied author* and an *implied reader*. Here, the critic again points out that contrary to a seemingly synonymous status of an implied author and an implied reader, these two terms bear, in fact, slightly different meanings and reflect diverse realms. She stresses that whereas the former concept refers to the author implied by our comprehension of the text, the latter one is the reader which we are made to become so as to read and react receptively to the text. Hence, an *implied* or *mock reader* is led to particular beliefs and estimation of characters and events. In the process of reading crime fiction the implied reader shares some background knowledge as to the characters in the book and some cognizance as to the generic nature of the story (Gregoriou 20). Regarding reader-characters relations and the process of readers' manipulation, Gregoriou additionally points to the distinction between the *internal* and *external* narrative events, indicating that in the case of the former narration foregrounding the subjective standpoint of a particular character's consciousness, usually a detective's, readers, having access to the thoughts and feelings of the protagonists, and therefore seeing the reality through the characters' eyes, become guided and controlled by the *omniscient* narrators since they take on unlimited knowledge on the narration of the events (Gregoriou 20).

The ultimately mentioned narration type leads us to another model of linguistic deviance, namely the *point of view* and *mind style*. Gregoriou distinguishes three kinds of viewpoint: spacio-temporal which 'refers to the impression which a reader gains of events moving rapidly or slowly, in a continuous chain or isolated segments' (Fowler 127), *psychological* or perceptual which alludes to the manner in which narrative events are presented or reflected through the consciousness of the 'teller' of the story and, concludingly, *ideological* viewpoint or worldview which mirrors a particular system of values, beliefs and judgements transmitted by the language of the text and shared by people coming from parallel backgrounds to the reading public. The critic draws analogies between worldview and the concept of *mind style* elaborated by Fowler to refer to 'cumulatively, consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world to one pattern or another', engendering 'an impression of a world-view' (Gregoriou 21). The analyst asserts that mind style, constituting a mirroring of narrative viewpoint that contradicts or *deviates* from a sound, common-sensical facet of reality, becomes a significant factor in the examination of the stories which give access to the criminal consciousness since the writer, despite not being constrained to single out a

particular character's viewpoint, unsolicitedly 'restricts' or *focalises* his omniscience to those things which pertain to a criminal's worldview.

Last but not least, the distinction between *literal* and *figurative* language becomes the subject of Gregoriou's investigation of linguistic deviance. The critic draws a special attention to the use of figurative language in crime texts, particularly to the employment of metaphors and the process of defamiliarisation, the operation of dead metaphors, metonymies, idioms, proverbial phrases, clichés and slang. Referring to miscellaneous, frequently contrastive approaches to and linguistic theories on figurative language and its meanings, such as those postulated by Sprat, Lakoff, Johnson or Gibbs, she points out that figurative words, often regarded as parts of *deviant* linguistic structures, probably best portray the criminal psyche, illustrate their ambience as well as grant readers access to the perpetrator's perception of reality. As criminality is currently mystified and regarded as abnormal, antisocial, weird and unforeseen one is prepared to concede that detective writers endeavour to demystify it via *linguistic deviation* which reflects a divergence from the standards of ordinary language and therefore they offer the audience the poetics of the culprit mind which gives them entry to the criminal's world where their misdeeds and iniquity are exonerated (Gregoriou 79). Hence, the readers being to some extent placed in a position where they understand the perpetrators, perceive the reality from their perspective and share their standpoint, and all the more are made to commiserate with their comportment. As an exemplification of the figurative language used in crime stories, Gregoriou provides extended metaphors or megametaphors (for instance, KILLERS ARE SPIDERS metaphor from the novels of the Patterson series, KILLERS ARE ANIMALS/ INSECTS TO BE FED, CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR IS PLAY-ACTING), metonymies (from Patterson's *Cat and Mouse*: 'Soneji picked up a small reindeer sweater...He held it to his face and tried to smell the girl.') (Patterson, 1997: 5), literalised metaphors (from *Cat and Mouse*: 'This afternoon Mr Smith was operating in the wealthy, fashionable Knightsbridge district. He was there to study the human race') (1997: 7), creative metaphors (from Patterson's *Along Came a Spider*: 'He felt the different textures of darkness as they blanketed the farm') (1993: 51), linguistic combinations altered and others.

Social deviance

In the analysis of the criminal world and the psyche of the perpetrator linguistic deviance is inextricably linked with social and cultural aberrations, a violation of established norms and eccentric behavioural patterns. *Abnormals*, here, the term equivalent to criminals, are presumed to conceptualise the world *abnormally* or inside out and, in reality, this criminal labeling may give rise to their course of actions and demeanour (Gregoriou 25). The critic claims that readers are inclined to countenance the detective's social idiosyncrasies or aberrations solely due to the fact that these are attributed to individuals we consider them as *normal*. In view of that, in the discussion of deviance the analyst finds it essential to scrutinise the social manifestations of the concept.

A substantial part of Gregoriou's in-depth examination of social deviance is devoted to the notion of the carnivalesque, a term promulgated through the writing of Mikhail Bakhtin on Rabelais. In his texts, primarily in *Speech-Act theory*, the Russian theorist stressed a social and intertextual aspect of language, the idea of a continual 'dialogue' between the text given and other texts existing outside it, both literary and non-literary. As for dialogic/textual relationships, Bakhtin emphasises an unceasing struggle between centripetal forces which aspire to restore a standard, unitary language, an official canon, and therefore contribute to and reinforce the process of social, cultural and historical coalescence whilst centrifugal forces aim at diversity, resistance and disintegration (Gregoriou 27). These two struggling energies epitomise the essence of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, a term indicating 'any demotic heteroglossic or "multi-voiced" counter-culture in comic or exuberant opposition to a hegemonic official culture: a kind of subversive anti-culture, often with its own anti-language' (Wales, 2001:48). It should be pointed out that in the 'carnavalesque' ambience, the notion Bakhtin applies not only to carnival in its narrow meaning but first and foremost to plenty of popular, festive customs cultivated and practised during the Middle Ages, the whole structure of society becomes, temporarily, reversed, upended, subject to ridicule and laughter.

According to the critic's theory carnivalesque imagery proffers an alternative to the official one, yet by inverting social hierarchies carnival provides a divergent construction of social-cultural relations (Gregoriou 27). In view of that, Gregoriou remarks that since carnival offers a dialogic reaction to the official structures of fright,

pressure and prohibition, one could parallel it with Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia because analogously, the critic states, to the existence of continual struggles in carnival, one may observe the ongoing tensions at the linguistic level between the centripetal and centrifugal forces.

As for physical manifestations of this phenomenon, Gregoriou, following Bakhtin's description, remarks that carnivalesque practices were saturated with images of excess, overabundance, hyperbolism and first and foremost of the grotesque body which concurrently epitomised birth and demise, celebration and excretion. Accordingly, they constituted an alternative to the symbolism and dogma of the official system. Lastly, Gregoriou observes that grotesque imagery stood for an 'alternative to the fear inspired by official imagery' (Taylor, 1995: 2); whilst official imagery presented to the citizens the cosmic menaces of potential cataclysm, starvation, drought, inundations and various deadly diseases to instill in people a sense of fright, grotesque imagery 'overcame this sense of fear assimilating humans with the cosmic elements' (Taylor, 1995: 12).

The critic highlights the link or parallel between the phenomenon of carnivalesque and detective literature, arguing that the reading of crime stories could be regarded as an expression of the concept of carnival in itself since this kind of fiction, analogously to the notion of carnival, provide a field in which enjoyment and gratification, such as taking delight in reading or seeing crime scenes, can be exploited to the utmost limits. To take the analogy further, in the process of reading such novels the audience celebrate the access to censured kinds of pleasure and simultaneously this process enacts a critique of the system and structures which officially hampered such pleasures (Gregoriou 28). The same holds true for pornography due to the fact that porn, a genre exhibiting the body, profanity and perversion, offends and disrespects political and religious authorities and additionally offers deliverance from social restraints. Gregoriou stresses that both porn and crime literature finally aim at restoring social hierarchies instead of inverting or overthrowing them – in porn this concerns male-female relations in which men eventually reassert their supremacy over women and in crime stories the detective ultimately dominates the perpetrator. In the examination of the carnivalesque and its analogy to crime stories, the critic refers mainly to the Connelly series as well as to Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, yet one may also find its manifestation in Martin Amis's books. In fact, the novels, such as *Money* or *London Fields* which exhibit the problem of sexual gratification and highly controversial, ambivalent male-female relations or *Night Train* and first and foremost *Dead Babies* which probably most

overtly and satirically depicts the imageries of grotesque, exaggeration and excessiveness, provide a graphic illustration of Bakhtin's idea.

When drawing the above analogies the critic broods on the function or premise of both genres. She wonders whether crime literature and pornography, seen as an exhibition of carnivalesque practices could be categorised as cathartic or purgative, discouraging effectively readers and viewers from committing crimes and offences, or rather it provides the audience a stimulus to perform such acts. As an answer, Gregoriou points at the interaction or dialogue between text and reader for which the reader has to be accountable. She stresses that whether detective stories and pornography have a corruptive, pernicious or cleansing role is entirely up to our perception of reality underlined in the fiction, here, up to our experience in the mediation with the carnivalesque material rather than to the nature of the fictional worlds pictured in crime novels.

When set beside the notion of the carnivalesque, Gregoriou draws the attention to *archetypes* as another literary exemplification or model of the social deviance in the detective genre. Referring to Jung's definition of archetypes and his *schema theory*, particularly to his thesis on the primordial types, universal images as well as types of human behaviour and their social conditioning and experiences, the analyst distinguishes three kinds of criminal characters: the so-called 'Born Evil' criminal figures, the 'Made Evil' types and the 'Born and Made Evil' figures. Gregoriou states that the first models of fictional personas, frequently described as THE MONSTERS, are portrayed as having been deviant or abnormal since birth both in the psychological sense of the term and in the physical one, the examples of which are the types delineated in Patricia Cornwell's *Black Notice*. The subsequent kinds of criminal archetypes postulated by the critic are the criminal figures, presented as conditioned or justified, for example, on account of their childhood traumatic experiences. Such personas, exemplified by the characters in James Patterson's *Violets are Blue* (2001), are invariably referred to as VAMPIRES since their criminal conduct was provoked when they bore pain and maltreatment in infancy. Lastly, 'Born and Made' criminal figures, classified as an amalgamation of the first two archetypes are pictured as both conditioned and justified, for instance by means of their childhood or adolescence trauma, and as inborn. Gregoriou labels this type as a SPOILT CHILD indicating that such personas frequently fail to take any accountability for their actions and become attracted to the criminal world only on account of the fact that they are made known that

society does not permit them to. As an example of this archetype, the analyst provides the figure of Casanova, a criminal that features in Patterson's *Kiss the Girls* (1995) (Gregoriou 117).

As we can observe, both Bakhtin's carnivalesque and Jungian archetypes, the principal models or manifestations of Gregoriou's scrutiny of the social deviance, indubitably provide a deep insight into the investigation of the criminal literary world, prevailingly by offering a theoretical framework of the eccentric world delineated in detective stories, allowing the reader to mediate or interact with the text and by making a psychological analysis of the criminal's mind.

Generic deviance

In the concluding part of the examination of deviance in detective fiction Gregoriou focuses on its generic aspect, mostly in the context of folklore and literary studies and offers some background on three concepts which she finds vital to her debate over the above type of deviance: Wittgenstein's *Family Resemblance* theory, *prototype* and *defamiliarisation*.

Regarding the first thesis, the critic notices that Wittgenstein's idea that members of a particular family share similarities rather than defining individual features and that family is easily identified regardless of the fact that all characteristics are revealed by any single member is applicable to novels which, similarly, are put into the same generic category (for instance, detective fiction) and do not share any single characteristic but are instead linked to each other in various ways; they share family resemblances (Gregoriou 31). Therefore, she claims, referring to Swales's assumption that 'Wittgenstein's discussion of family resemblances and subsequent comment have given rise to a "prototype" or cluster category designed to account for our capacity to recognise instances of categories' (Swales, 1990: 51). Bearing in mind the concept of *prototypes*, the critic also points to Saeed's theory according to which a prototype 'is a model of concepts which views them as structured so that there are central or typical members of a category such as BIRD and FURNITURE, but then a shading off into less typical or peripheral members' (Saeed, 1998: 37). As an example of the second part of the definition, she juxtaposes 'chair' with 'lamp', illustrating that the former is a more

central member of the category FURNITURE whereas the latter is a more peripheral one.

Taking into account the above approach with reference to literature, Gregoriou stresses that the extent to which a certain novel or a story is classified in terms of a certain genre depends on its resemblance to typical members of the generic category. As an exemplification of this thesis, she refers to Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1924), asserting that when one regards this detective novel as prototypical of crime literature, then the degree to which they group other novels under the same generic category will depend on their resemblances to the former one (Gregoriou 32). Evoking the stories of the British novelist leads us, in turn, to the debate over the generic nature of detective fiction whose prototype is to be seen in a 'golden age' novel which evolved and thrived in the 1920s and 1930s when the traditional English whodunit involved practitioners, such as the above-mentioned Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers or Arthur Conan Doyle, to name but a few most prominent writers. Gregoriou adds that in view of the fact that the successive interwar and postwar crime works could be considered as a continuum of category membership, grounded on discerned features, stretching from the most representative (close to the prototype) to the least representative of the crime fiction category. This statement indicates that not all seen characteristics of the prototypical crime story are equally significant whilst such a characterisation implies difficulties since for miscellaneous readers there are divergent ways of categorising a set of references and a particular novel's prototypicality depends on the public's knowledge of or familiarity with the genre available, and thus with the kind of generic conventions that they are cognizant of (Gregoriou 134). Needless to say, the critic highlights that since contemporary crime fiction does no longer conform to the principles or generic features of the prototypical crime novel, the prototype theory appears insufficient or inadequate and although prior prototypical genres function as influential constraining paragons the works written as a rebellion against the prototypical novels of the genre are equally forceful. As an illustration of this process, Gregoriou points out that the crime novel, both British and American one, has been viewed as a basically conservative form, the detective writing school has produced numerous parodies, pastiches and experimental variations upon or modifications of the classic detective story, such as Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* or Martin Amis's *Night Train*.

Ultimately, the analyst refers to the notion of *defamiliarisation* or *de-automatisation* employed by the Russian Formalists and Prague School linguistics in debates on literary (principally poetic) and non-literary language. According to their assumption poetry, in contrast to everyday communication, de-automises language itself whereas literary language from all genres not solely accentuates or *foregrounds* but, above all, alienates, desorientates or estranges the world of everyday perception and renews the readers' lost capacity for fresh sensation (Abrams 127). Moreover, in the delineation of the notion of defamiliarisation Gregoriou points to Cook's definition of the concept in terms of literature's *schema-refreshing* property forming part of his *schema theory* which alludes to the confusion of our traditional ways of perceiving the world. Cook highlights the fact that schema-refreshment that reflects defamiliarisation is reader-orientated and reader-dependent, a relationship between the audience and an object of perception, even provided that this object constitutes another text or the language itself (Gregoriou 33). With regard to genre theory, defamiliarisation gives rise to the disruption, subversion and alteration of conventional forms, and thus makes audience be cognizant of and ruminate first and foremost on the nature of the genre. To illustrate this process the critic once again refers to Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, citing Chapman and Routledge's analysis of a defamiliarising reading of the text: '[t]he difficulties experienced by the reader of Auster's novel are compounded by the extent to which it appropriates and subsequently dismembers the conventions of the detective fiction genre' (Chapman and Routledge, 1999: 244). Gregoriou remarks that although the theorists admit that the genre has been perceived and identified as the one which strongly relies on its formal structures, this story of Auster dismembers the rules and conventions, forces readers to be aware of these conventions and at the same time defamiliarises the genre itself (Gregoriou 135).

Overall, Christiana Gregoriou's examination of crime fiction in terms of the linguistic, social and generic deviance model brings a new light on the perception of this genre and helps to understand and assess its various facets, such as its historical background, the structural pattern and its modifications, the relations between the author, narrator and reader, social and cultural aspects of crime and a philosophical-psychological portrait of a criminal as well as its generic variations and innovations.

From the above facts it can be estimated that in the 20th century a detective story has been the subject of spirited discussions and has undergone an in-depth analysis of literary critics, theorists, psychologists, philosophers as well as film makers and cinema

critics. It ought to be emphasised, however, that the form of this genre and its perception have altered throughout the last century – in place of its popular, non-serious, entertaining facet in the early decades, mainly in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and shortly after World War II, this type of fiction gradually entered the canon of serious literature and became more and more meticulously scrutinised by prominent critics, reviewers and literary analysts. Among innumerable theories and approaches to a crime novel, particularly those raised contemporaneously, I focused on the ones which constitute, in my view, points of departure for the analysis of Martin Amis's fiction, prevaillingly his writing examined in the second and partially fourth chapter of the dissertation. The aim of this chapter was to scrutinise those theories on crime literature, classic, modern and postmodern ones which help to illustrate structural and stylistic mechanisms that govern the writng of the British author, as well as to delineate the impact of certain well-known novelists on Amis's literary output.

Chapter 2: Metaphysics, cosmology, existentialism and ethical philosophy in Martin Amis's fiction

2.1. A crime story or metaphysical game? – a definition and redefinition of the status of the detective novel in Martin Amis's *London Fields* and Tzvetan Todorov's *The Typology of Detective Fiction*

I know the murderer, I know the murderee. I know the time, I know the place. I know the motive (*her* motive) and I know the means. I know who will be the foil, the fool, the poor foal, also utterly destroyed. And I couldn't stop them, I don't think, even if I wanted to. The girl will die. It's what she always wanted. You can't stop people, once they *start*. You can't stop people, once they *start creating*.

(Martin Amis: *London Fields*)

Since the late 1960s and 1970s one may observe numerous alterations and modifications of a detective story as genre, its pattern and crucial components, such as the presence of the detective, the criminal and the motive of the homicide. This is indubitably connected with many new tendencies and trends in this field of literature which reflected significant changes in art and culture. In contemporary literature various attempts have been made to transform and redefine a classical model of detective stories. Several British and American writers and literary critics have experimented with this genre, endeavouring to adapt the rules of the classical detective to the norms and realities of postmodern fiction. Among the most outstanding novelists, short-story writers and critics, one ought to mention Paul Auster, Vladimir Nabokov, Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Alain Robbe-Grillet, as well as prominent critics, such as Slavoy Žižek, Brian McHale and Hans Bertens. The works of the above-mentioned writers testify to a grand shift from the canon of detective fiction laid down by S. S. Van Dine and Tzvetan Todorov.

Martin Amis, whose novel *London Fields* is going to be scrutinised, has made a substantial contribution to the modification of a classical pattern of detective and crime

fiction. Like many other artists of his generation, the author of *Money*, *London Fields* and *Night Train* has attempted to be in tune with his times, so his works touch upon the issues of the contemporary world, especially on the role of the writer at the end of the 20th century. The leading themes which run through Amis's books are crime, violence and power. However, they are closely connected with the existential anxiety and philosophical questions concerning the sense of life, the motives of human behaviour as well as the relation between the existence on the earth and the mystery of the universe. On this score Martin Amis's novels, which represent postmodern detective fiction illustrate the transformation of interests in crime literature, namely the shift from epistemological questions of the accessibility and reliability of knowledge, in other words, "*what we know and how we know it*" to ontological questions of *being* rather than *knowing* (McHale 2007). Postmodern crime fiction delineates the proliferation of worlds rather than quests for knowledge which is typical of modernist detective literature and endeavours to answer the questions of ontology: "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (McHale 2007).

Such concerns are fully developed in *London Fields*. Being aware of this I still believe that when scrutinising this book, in particular its narrative structure and thematic components, one benefits from taking as a point of departure Tzvetan Todorov's typology of detective fiction and Van Dine's classical model of this genre.

The form of *London Fields* differs considerably from a traditional pattern of the whodunit and strays into the thriller, or, as some critics claim, such as Brian Finney, into a "whydoit." The use of such a term is justified by the fact that the main female protagonist, being simultaneously a victim and one of the narrators of the book, can tell, thanks to her prophetic abilities, the exact time of her death and the manner in which she will be killed. What remains unknown to her and to the readers is the identity of the murderer (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). Here, it is worth mentioning that Martin Amis is not the forerunner of a new kind or a melange of various modern and postmodern subtypes of crime fiction. Since the 1960s one may witness visible transformations and experimentations with this literary genre in the works of Tom Stoppard, Ira Levin and Anthony Shaffer. The lastly mentioned playwright, similarly to Amis, worked on the idea of a whodunit, yet he deviated from its traditional form, creating instead a "whodunwhat," probably the first of its kind, and misappropriated the mechanics of the classic murder mystery. Needless to say, when we inspect more closely Amis's novel, it becomes visible that although most of the elements of his work are apparently different

from the classical whodunit and oscillate between a traditional detective story and postmodern metaphysical and metafictional thriller, some of them correspond to its rules.

At this point, perhaps, one ought to analyse *London Fields* step by step in terms of its genre, structure and theme, referring at first to the salient principles of the classical detective fiction formulated by S. S. Van Dine in 1928. Amis's book indubitably conforms to the first rule, according to which "the novel must have at most one detective and one criminal, and at least one victim (a corpse)" (quoted in Todorov 162). However, his novel does not accord with the second one, which refers to the culprit and the detective as two different characters. It also stresses a non-personal motive of the homicide. Contrary to this rule, in *London Fields* the detective is simultaneously a professional killer and he commits the crime for personal reasons. Such a deviation from one of the fundamental principles of the classical crime story testifies to the innovation and unconventionality of the author. Yet, it does not constitute the novelty in postmodern detective literature since similar themes concerning the ambiguous role of the detective as well as the position of the culprit and the victim could be found in the works written prior to the novel of Martin Amis, such as *Death and the Compass* by Jorge Louis Borges or *The Erasers* by Alain Robbe-Grillet. With this respect it is tempting to suggest that the British writer follows rather than creates the patterns of his postmodern predecessors. The next principle says that "love has no place in detective fiction" (quoted in Todorov 163). It is not the case in Amis's book. Here, the main plot, which centers around the crime, murderer and murdered, is closely connected with love and passion. As the author highlights in the preface: "This is a true story but I can't believe it's really happening. It's a murder story, (I think), of all strange things, so late in the century, so late in the goddamned day" (Amis, *LF*: 1). Nevertheless, Amis's novel conforms to the fourth principle of the classical detective story, which stresses a significant position of the culprit. Analogously to it, Samson Young, a criminal and a detective at the same time, is one of the main characters of the book.

Having examined *London Fields* with reference to the above-mentioned points of Van Dine's theory of the classical detective fiction, one may easily come to the conclusion that this postmodern novel cannot be classified as a whodunit. As it was previously pointed out, this is the example of a readymade thriller, though this notion does not precisely apply to this book, or of a whydunit (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). The final term, being the subtype of the thriller, sounds enigmatic and does not correspond

to any genres of detective fiction classified by Todorov. Yet, it seems to elucidate a mystifying structure and a perplexing language of the novel. In view of this, the leading theme of the book seems to be the motive of the homicide, though the author also attracts the reader's attention to the search for and discovery of the identity of the murderer. The remaining elements of the story, such as the time of the crime and the way in which the woman will be killed, are unknown both to the victim and to the detective.

Nonetheless, with reference to Todorov's typology of detective fiction, one is prepared to concede that *London Fields* is also equipped with certain features typical of the thriller. To begin with, in a dual narrative structure the discourse dominates the story. Yet, the story is not suppressed by the plot. Rather, it performs the function of the prologue and the epilogue in which the narrator endeavours to present to the readers the arcanae of the crime. Unlike a typical thriller which "does not reserve its surprises for the last lines of the chapter" (Todorov 163) Amis's book offers its readers an unpredictable ending, a bewildering solution, similarly to the whodunit (e.g. in Agatha Christie's story *Murder of Roger Ackroyd*). Notwithstanding this, a stunning revelation at the final pages of this novel is radically different from the one we may find in the traditional detective. First of all, in *London Fields* Samson Young, a narrator and a detective at the same time, turns out to be a culprit. Furthermore, having killed Nicola Six, the main female protagonist, he commits suicide. Such an unconventional ending hardly fits the classical genre of this fiction.

Taking into consideration the role of "the detective's immunity" (Todorov 160), it is hard to say whether the figure of Samson Young could be placed among the characters of the whodunit or the thriller since he is neither a mere observer of events nor he falls prey to an imaginary killer. What also remains puzzling is the fact that together with the death of Sam Young his narration draws to its close but not the book itself. At this point we realise that we have just read a crime story written by a person who attempted to resolve a detective puzzle and who endeavoured to create an impressive novel. The end of the book shows, however, that he failed as a detective and a murderer on the one hand, and as an artist on the other hand: "That's what murderer feels like. I failed, in art and love" (Amis, *LF*: 467).

As a writer, Samson Young appears to have no godlike control over the actions occurring within the narrative (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). His constant doubts as to the credibility of this story testifies to his unreliability as a narrator: "This is a true story but

I can't believe it's really happening. It's a murder story, too...I can't believe my luck. And a love story...this is the story of a murder. It hasn't happened yet. But it will. (It had better.)" (Amis, *LF*: 1).

Like other protagonists of the book, Samson Young's life lies in the hands of his author, Martin Amis whose fictional alter ego could be found in the figure of a playwright, Mark Asprey, also known as Marius Appleby. The initials of the latter which evoke those of the writer are introduced by Amis as a part of his artistic strategy. By means of this linguistic game the author makes the readers be aware of his presence in the novel. This quintessentially postmodern device draws attention to a highly ambiguous role played by the narrator; on the one hand, he appears in the book as one of the characters of the story, and, on the other hand, he is the author and narrator of the novel who creates and annihilates the protagonists (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). Amis plays a game with the readers and treats his characters like puppets in a theatrical show. Being also a literary murderer, he condemns the main narrator, Sam Young to death, who, in turn, kills the second narrator, Nicola Six. To take the analogy further, the writer takes control over Sam's and Nicola's narratives who are aware of the power writing can exercise over their lives (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). In this view Martin Amis's novel corresponds to George Burton's statement according to which "all detective fiction is based on two murders of which the first, committed by the murderer, is merely the occasion for the second, in which he becomes the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective" (quoted in Todorov 159). In *London Fields* the author is simultaneously a detective and a killer. In addition, he performs the role of a professional playwright who, thanks to his developed narrative style and all the linguistic sophistication, plays games with his naive narrator and the readers, making us be aware that the book we are studying cannot be limited solely to the narrative of Samson Young. He suggests that we should keep a distance between a fictional narrative style and its creator who "is himself locked in his solipsistic state of non-narrative being" (Finney, "Narrative": 1995).

There is no denying that the enigmatic role of the author of *London Fields* as well as his metafictional endeavours and games concerning the proliferation of worlds and the multilayered narrative structure evoke analogous writing techniques used by the detective story writers from the late 1950s and 1960s, such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Flan O'Brien, Jorge Luis Borges or Jose Carlos Somoza. The works of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Jorge Luis Borges influenced to a great extent Amis's novel, in particular the motif

of the labyrinth and the idea of 'being locked in the hermetic world' as well as the fascination for interpretations inside interpretations. The same holds true for the position of the narrator and the importance of the plot. Apparently, in *The Erasers* and *The Death and the Compass*, similarly to *London Fields*, the world is entirely subjective, the plot is reduced to minimum and the nonexistent role of the narrator is developed to the utmost limits. As Alain Robbe-Grillet once stated: "The true writer has nothing to say. What counts is the way he says it". For that matter Martin Amis, following the examples of his contemporaries, violates other classical rules of detective fiction which emphasise the importance of the plot, the objectivity of the narration and the omniscient role of the narrator.

Another issue discussed by Tzvetan Todorov with reference to all the three genres of detective fiction, that is the whodunit, the thriller and the suspense, is the aspect of the mystery. In *London Fields* we encounter its two kinds, the first one is a pure curiosity (we wish to find out the identity of a murderer), the second one is a suspense (our interest is sustained by the expectation of what will happen). For this reason Amis's novel bears a closer resemblance to the suspense in which our attention is focused both on the explanation of past happenings and on the future of the characters rather than to the thriller which centers around the events.

Taking into account the setting, a social and cultural background of the novel, *London Fields* conforms to the standards of a typical thriller. As Todorov states: "Indeed it is around these few constants that the thriller is constituted: violence, generally sordid crime, the amorality of the characters" (Todorov 162). In keeping with this, Amis's book is also equipped with various features which could be incorporated into a typical crime 'milieu', such as: a delineation of the criminal underworld, a description of domestic violence, the lack of ethics and moral standards, a spread of pornography etc. Needless to say, the author's intention is not merely to exhibit the problem of crime, sex and homicide, but first and foremost to expose a wicked, corruptive side of human nature. Such a highly moralistic and philosophical book displays the caricatures of contemporary British society, referring to the figures of a working class petty criminal, a woman of ill repute, a romantic intellectual and a frustrated writer. Furthermore, this postmodern novel constitutes the apocalyptic vision of the earth and humankind at the threshold of the new millennium. Even a pastoral title of Amis's story, which seems inadequate to its inner-city setting, symbolises sinister, menacing energies spreading over contemporary world.

As far as the very subject matter is concerned, *London Fields* evokes other well-known thrillers and crime stories which fall into the category of the so-called hard-boiled detective fiction, indubitably one of the most popular subgenres of the American crime literature established and popularised by such prominent writers as Raymond Chandler (*Farewell, My Lovely*), Dashiell Hammett, John Bringham (*My Name Is Michael Sibley*) or Mickey Spillane. At first glance, Amis's novel bears a close resemblance to this type of fiction in terms of its seeming realism and plausibility. It appears to represent a standard crime story in which the behaviour of the characters, their motives and actions as well as all the events have their rational, lucid explanation. Moreover, the implicit moralistic and didactic premise of the book as well as the writer's reproof of the corruptive nature of his protagonists, especially the behaviour of the detective and simultaneously the culprit, indicate close links with the authors' comment on the background and morality of the detectives in hard-boiled fiction, most notably in the works of Raymond Chandler. Nonetheless, with reference to the apparent graphic description of the events and characters, on closer inspection, one may notice that *London Fields* only partially echoes the realistic model of narration employed by hard-boiled detective story writers. In fact, the so-called true-to-life aspect of the book constitutes one of the two worlds, or realities, depicted by the author. Apart from this physical reality exists another, internal one in which are locked the main figures of the drama. Each of them leads their own lives and acts according to their own rules. Paradoxically enough, they all exist in virtual reality, hyper-reality or in the surrealistic world. This is true especially to Keith Talent whose life is thoroughly absorbed by modern communications and media, in particular by porno movies and reality shows. He becomes thrown by the author into a Baudrillardian world where "images without originals," or simulacra (Pope 132), no longer represent anything beyond themselves (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). In view of this Keith Talent symbolises a contemporary human puppet that is easily manipulated by mass media and global communication. As for Nicola Six, her life and identity are very problematic. This puzzling female protagonist is portrayed as the incarnation of male sexual fantasies:

Nicola, I'm worried about you, as usual...I'm worried they're going to say you're a male fantasy figure.

I *am* a male fantasy figure. I've been one for fifteen years. It really takes it out of a girl.

(Amis, *LF*: 260)

From the above quotation it transpires that Nicola Six is devoid of her true identity and exists only as the figment of the imagination of the protagonists. In this respect she may be regarded as the embodiment of sexual energy which lures men and then leads to their downfall. On the other hand, being one of the main characters of the thriller, she falls victim to Young's artistic frustration and professional discontent.

The remaining protagonists of the drama, Guy Clinch and Samson Young, are also locked in their own hermetic worlds. The former, being one of the potential suspects of Nicola's murder, perceives the reality from the perspective of a romantic idealist and therefore it is difficult for him to come to terms with a corruptive, amoral picture of the contemporary society. The world he endeavours to build is not authentic. Similarly, Samson Young is locked in his fictional world. Being involved in writing a crime novel, he strives to keep life and fiction separate from each other (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). In order to do that, Sam is forced to exclude some important materials from the book, for instance, the figure of his American girlfriend, Missy. As he says: "Missy had to go. For reasons of balance. Reasons of space" (Amis, *LF*: 435). However, Sam soon points out that his theory is unfeasible, seeing that: "In fiction (rightly so called), people become coherent and intelligible – and aren't like that. We all know they aren't. We all know it from personal experience" (Amis, *LF*: 240).

In view of this philosophical and metaphysical aspect of milieu depicted by Amis in his postmodern novel, one may examine the issue of the motive and the mystery of the crime, referring to Todorov's typology of detective fiction and Van Dine's classical rules. According to the traditional model of detective stories, which comprises the whodunit, the thriller and the suspense novel: "everything must be explained rationally; the fantastic is not admitted" (quoted in Todorov 163). As for Martin Amis's book, the homicide of the main female protagonist ought to be examined in at least three dimensions: literary, psychological and philosophical. On the one hand, Nicola Six's death could be regarded as a result of a mounting tension between her and Sam and as a sign of Young's seething anger brought about by his unfulfilled artistic ambition. In this respect Martin Amis's postmodern novel conforms to the principles of a classical thriller owing to the fact that Sam Young's decision to commit crime on someone who hurt his feelings as a writer may have a rational elucidation. On the other hand, the suicide of the murderer and simultaneously the narrator of the story could be considered as a rare feature of a classical detective fiction. Nevertheless, coming back to the crime,

it is tempting to suggest that Sam's murderous act was carefully planned according to the pattern of the thriller: he endeavoured to write a perfect crime story or drama. Despite the narrator's emotional involvement in the creation of the novel, Sam's suicide betokens his loss of control of the writing material. Paradoxically enough, he feels as if he were defeated by his victim when he writes in the final chapter of the book: "She outwrote me. Her story worked. And mine didn't." (Amis, *LF*: 466). In fact, Sam Young's life and narrative are skilfully manipulated by the author who uses him and other protagonists of the novel to play the game with the readers whose aim is to make them study the book thoroughly in order to solve the criminal puzzle on their own. On this score *London Fields* could be called a metafictional thriller. Last but not least, the murder of the female protagonist which constitutes the main plot of Amis's book, could be understood in a metaphysical sense. In view of this, Nicola Six stands for our planet which becomes devastated by a nuclear war at the turn of the 21st century (Head 212). Needless to say, Amis uses the imagery of "mother earth" with reference to his (anti)-heroine and concomitantly cultivates her role as "male fantasy figure" (Amis, *LF*: 260) in order to underline his satirical point. As contemporary critics state: "Nicola's status as male fantasy figure is thus indicative that the planet is in terminal decline, since the destructive subversion and manipulation of woman/planet is identified as the disastrous impulse of self-destruction" (Head 212).

Ultimately, when examining the language of Amis's book, one ought to take as a point of departure Todorov's rules concerning a narrative style of the thriller. In *The Typology of Detective Fiction* we read that in the crime novel: "descriptions are without rhetoric, coldly, even if dreadful things are being described; one might say 'cynically' (Todorov 163). In this respect *London Fields* bears a close resemblance to the classical thriller. Amis uses a plain, lucid, colloquial language devoid of any turgidity or pomposity, in particular with reference to the plot (discourse). The narrator strives to reconstruct faithfully all the events and the behaviour of the main characters of the drama employing a plain, transparent style, typical of the thriller. Needless to say, one cannot fail to notice that in the prologue and epilogue his language becomes considerably different, more personal and emotional – Sam Young expresses his uncertainty and doubts as to the credibility of the story he is about to present. On that score he transmits the conventions of the thriller. Furthermore, the suicide of the narrator and simultaneously the murderer, again, casts a shadow on *London Fields*, classified as the thriller. Finally, the act of homicide is not depicted to the reader,

contrary to the traditional crime story which places the emphasis on the ruthless manner in which the murder was committed (Todorov 163).

As was previously pointed out, Martin Amis invariably plays metafictional games with the reader as well as he makes implicit jokes on the narrator (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). In doing so, he constantly attempts to make us read closely the text, to force us to be not mere observers but active participants of the events described in the book. The author's intellectual game with the readers echoes similar artistic techniques employed by Tom Stoppard, Ira Levin or Alain Robbe-Grillet. The works of these artists reflect the lack of an autonomous identity of the supposed author, the absence of an omniscient creator of the play, the awareness of the presence of the audience (Tom Stoppard) (Beachcroft 12, 13), the author's torturing and teasing game with the audience, the enigmatic closure and unsolved criminal puzzle (Alain Robbe-Grillet) as well as the readers' feeling of being lured into an intellectual trap set by its writer (Ira Levin *The Deathtrap*). As far as *London Fields* are concerned, Amis deploys additionally miscellaneous postmodern linguistic strategies in order to promote an aesthetic effect, such as pastiche, multiple viewpoint, reflexivity and open intertextuality. All these literary devices reflect postmodern discourses, like advertising, game and chat shows, magazines, TV and tabloid news, interactive video or computer games (Pope 128). The writer strives to incorporate this genre and to caricature its figures, following the examples of Charles Dickens and Jonathan Swift.

In conclusion, Martin Amis's *London Fields* constitutes an interesting illustration of contemporary detective fiction. Such an intellectually riveting novel attests the reader's unabated interest in this literary genre on the one hand and reflects marked alterations that detective and crime stories have undergone in the course of the 20th century on the other hand. Martin Amis and other postmodern writers, among others Paul Auster, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Ian McEwan, and playwrights, such as Tom Stoppard, Anthony Shaffer and Ira Levin, have demonstrated that at the turn of the 21st century it has been no longer possible to adhere to the classical standards of detective fiction laid down by S. S. Van Dine in 1928 and Tzvetan Todorov in 1966. Postmodern literature and art have demanded of their writers a new look at the literary world and artistic realia. Thus, together with the pivotal constituents of detective fiction, such as the presence of the detective, the criminal, the victim, the existence of mystery, suspense and, finally, a dual character of a narrative text, postmodern novelists, among whom Amis is very well-known, have frequently incorporated in their books the elements of surrealism,

hyper-reality, pastiche as well as metafictional linguistic games and subjective narratives.

2.2. Martin Amis's *Night Train* as a melange of a hard-boiled crime story and metaphysical thriller

Suicide is a mind-body problem that ends violently and without any winter
(Martin Amis: *Night Train*)

Night Train is a contemporary crime story which closely reflects miscellaneous trends and tendencies in present-day detective literature. Thematically and structurally the book constitutes a melange of various genres related to current crime literature as well as to other types of postmodern fiction which go beyond the canon of the detective novel. On this score *Night Train* can be scrutinised, on the one hand, according to the criteria of contemporary detective fiction. Needless to say, on the other hand, it does not fit the pattern of 'pure' crime literature and reflects the features typical of the existential novel.

Taking into account the standards of detective literature, one is prepared to concede that Amis's story indubitably conforms to the criteria of this kind of fiction, especially to the rules of its postmodern types. In keeping with this, the book is frequently called "anti-police procedural" or "anti-detective story" owing to the fact that at the outset it follows the principles of a typical crime story but finally it blows them away in order to reach for something different and bewildering (Hoffert 2007). Furthermore, *Night Train* could be also classified as the "post-*nouveau roman* detective novel" (Merivale, Sweeney 3). Despite the fact that this term mostly applies to contemporary French novels, one cannot fail to notice also its link with Amis's novel. First of all, in this book the author rejects many of the traditional elements of detective story writing, such as the sequential plot and the analysis of characters' motives (Baldick 151). According to some critics, "Amis has never been much interested in character, motivation and plot, which aren't considered major virtues in an era when technique holds court, but at the kid's table of crime fiction, they're essential" (Barra 1998). The British writer seems to confirm this statement claiming that he "always rather despised plot" and that his chief

aim was to “entertain” the audience (Amis, “Night”: 1998) by means of innovative diction, gripping linguistic games rather than to present the events and examine the characters.

However, taking into account miscellaneous names of the novel, such as the above-mentioned anti-detective story, post-*nouveau roman* as well as a mystery story or a postmodern novel, it is tempting to suggest that none of them entirely reflect the theme, structure and essence of Amis’s book. One may state that all of these terms refer to certain aspects of the novel and yet they do not illustrate all the nuances of Amis’s story.

The subject of our examination lies in the interpretation of *Night Train* in terms of its correspondence to the hard-boiled detective story tradition and to the metaphysical approach to crime literature. For that matter one ought to refer to the literary theories advanced by such critics as Hilliard, Marling, Merivale and Sweeney who have endeavoured to attract the readers’ attention to numerous features of the novel which conform to the so-called hard-boiled metaphysical detective story. This enigmatic literary genre comprises two designations: a hard-boiled crime story and a metaphysical detective novel both of which refer to the salient yet different traditions of British and American fiction. The former one is associated predominantly with crime literature which reflects the postwar social and cultural reality in the United States. Among innumerable constituents of the genre recurrently regarded as popular crime fiction, one may detect realism and plausibility, moral and social aspects of the crime as well as a specific personality and language of the protagonists (Marling 2001). The latter term, on the other hand, embodies postmodern tendencies in British and American detective literature which were thoroughly examined in the preceding chapters. In order to classify *Night Train* as a hard-boiled metaphysical detective story or hardboiling metaphysics, one ought to scrutinise, step by step, these elements of Amis’s novel which comply with the principles of the two above-mentioned traditions of detective fiction and to focus on those which largely reflect the features of one of the sub-genres.

At first sight, *Night Train* seems to adhere to the conventions of a hard-boiled novel owing to the fact that it refers to the tastes and standards of American popular crime literature, in particular to the traditions of a police procedural depicted by such writers as Howard Haycraft, Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler as well as by various prominent US film directors, among others Peter Rabinowitz and Michael Stephens (Marling 2001). First and foremost, the British author introduces a female character, a

police officer, Mike Hoolihan, who appears to echo the figure of Philip Marlowe. Similarly to a legendary American detective, Mike embodies an experienced, tough, reticent gumshoe who has invariably done her best in the investigation of the crimes, identification and punishment of the culprits. Nonetheless, in contrast to Philip Marlowe and other detectives of the archetypal hard-boiled fiction, Amis's protagonist fails to succeed in solving the criminal puzzle on account of the absence of crime and a murderer. The main plot of the novel centres round the inscrutable suicide of Jennifer Rockwell and the police's inability to find a key to and justification of her decease.

One cannot fail to notice that the leading motif of *Night Train* constitutes an apparent contradiction not only to the standards of the hard-boiled novel but to the principles of a classical crime story inaugurated by S. S. Van Dine as well. The fact that the homicide becomes substituted by the suicide and the deceased takes a double role of a victim and a culprit testifies to Amis's book's departure from the hard-boiled fiction towards a metaphysical detective story. At the outset it seems to stand for a typical crime story, yet it shortly turns into a kind of meditation on the mystery of life and death. As was previously remarked, the postmodern novel delineates the debacle of the police investigation into Jennifer Rockwell's death, in particular Mike Hoolihan's desperate yet failed attempts to find a genuine murderer and concomitantly elucidate the arcanae of the case. The picture of Mike's professional and personal defeat does not fit the features of the archetypal detective, such as Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot or Philip Marlowe who by and large succeeds in unraveling a crime mystery.

Mike Hoolihan, "the defeated sleuth" (Merivale, Sweeney 8) could be regarded as the quintessential character of the metaphysical detective story. Furthermore, by virtue of her inability to find a sound motive and justification of Jennifer's suicide the protagonist embodies a gumshoe on the one hand and a victim on the other hand. As we may observe, Mike searches relentlessly for some significant clues or evidence thanks to which she could elucidate the secret of Rockwell's death. However, it shortly turns out that all the objects, documents or information, such as Jennifer's farewell letter, rifle-shot wounds or drugs are not any feasible proofs and key to the mystery. As the following three quotations suggest, the protagonist goes to great lengths to prove, initially, that Ms Rockwell was murdered but then to provide a lucid explanation and justification of her suicide:

I lit a cigarette and said, "Colonel Tom has it playing to homicide." He lit a cigarette

and said, “Because that’s all he’s got. You shoot yourself once in the mouth. That’s life. You shoot yourself twice. Hey. Accidents happen. You shoot yourself three times. You got to really want to go.” (Amis, *NT*: 27)

When I got back home I dug out the list I’d compiled on my return from the funeral. Briskly, boldly, this list is headed, Stressors and Precipitants. But what follows now seems vague as rain:

1. Significant Other? Trader. Things he didn’t see?
2. Money?
3. Job?
4. Physical Health?
5. Mental Health? Nature of disorder:
 - a. psychological
 - b. ideational/ organic
 - c. metaphysical
6. *Deep Secret*? Trauma? Childhood?
7. *Other* Significant Other? (Amis, *NT*: 76)

Today in the *Times* there’s a piece about a recently recognized mental disorder called the Paradise Syndrome. I thought: Look no further. That was what Jennifer had. Turns out it’s just this thing where ignorant billionaires – stars of soap and rock and ballpark – succeed in rigging up some worries for themselves. Some booby traps - pitfalls in paradise. (Amis, *NT*: 144)

Despite Mike Hoolihan’s painstaking investigation, Jennifer Rockwell’s demise remains unsolved mostly on account of inconclusive evidence and meaningless clues. This leads us to another crucial constituent of the metaphysical detective story, that is “the ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence” (Merivale, Sweeney 8). In *Night Train* testimonies of witnesses and interrogations of suspects do not cast any light on the crime. By the same token letters, documents or fingerprints do not stand for the objects they are supposed to represent but rather constitute impenetrable autonomous items. On this score Amis’s book bears a striking resemblance to other metaphysical detective novels, such as Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*.

Taking into account the two female protagonists, one cannot fail to notice strong spiritual bonds between them. It is interesting to examine the relationship between Mike and Jennifer as well as to compare them both as female characters of the story and as

the representative types of detective fiction. In the interview with Allen Barra Martin Amis refers to the two protagonists as extreme opposites: “I usually write about extremes of fortune and talent. There are usually two characters: one who has everything, one who has nothing. A sort of savage disparity between two people” (Amis, “Night”: 1998).

From the above quotation it transpires that Mike Hoolihan and Jennifer Rockwell are depicted not only as the elements of a classical detective novel but first and foremost in terms of human relations. Taking as an example the figures of the two women, the author does not merely juxtapose them as a gumshoe and a victim but also endeavours to depict two dissimilar aspects of life. However, with reference to the theory of the metaphysical detective fiction, one is tempted to suggest that Mike and Jennifer constitute one human being having a double identity. In this case “the missing person” is on the one hand the victim Jennifer Rockwell but on the other hand “the lost, stolen or exchanged identity” (Merivale, Sweeney 8) of the detective Hoolihan.

Another significant aspect of the novel is the setting. At the outset the writer paints a realistic yet bleak picture of life in the unnamed contemporary American city. Needless to say, Amis’s description differs substantially from the illustration of the city and social life in Hammett’s and Chandler’s novels. The works of the above-mentioned American novelists, considered the paradigms of the hard-boiled fiction, are characterised by a graphic depiction of the milieu whereas *Night Train* presents the oddities of the unnamed American city at the turn of the millennium (Helfand 1997). When set beside Hammett’s and Chandler’s books, for instance *The Maltese Falcon* or *Farewell, My Lovely*, which are saturated with realism and plausibility (Marling 2001) and in which the readers may easily identify themselves with the place, Amis’s book constitutes a textual labyrinth, the embodiment of human misery and frustration, especially the female protagonists’ mental problems. The illustration of the place as a thematic and emotional maze is another “metaphysical” element of this postmodern detective novel (Merivale, Sweeney 8).

Taking into consideration the very ending of *Night Train*, the audience could be deeply disappointed, particularly those accustomed to the conventional denouement of the detective story. Martin Amis skilfully manipulates and plays with his readers, coming up with no clear solution but instead with an unambiguous answer to the criminal riddle. It finally turns out that Jennifer had no apparent reason for “taking the night train,” which is a slang expression for suicide (Helfand 1997). For that matter her

case looks odd and the ending is very ambivalent. Contrary to the hard-boiled fiction whose distinguishing feature is evident closure to the investigation, this postmodern story is not reduced to a single and complete sense and one final resolution but constitutes an open text which permits miscellaneous interpretations. This very postmodern feature of the novel renders the book parallel to the metaphysical detective story. Although the case becomes closed, Mike Hoolihan doubts as to Jennifer's death and is filled with apprehension about her future:

It's down.

There – finished. All gone. Now me I'm heading off to Battery and its long string of dives. I want to call Trader Faulkner and say goodbye but the phone's ringing again and the night train's coming and I can hear that dickless sack of shit bending the stairs out of joint and let him see what happens if he tries to stand in my way or just gives me that look or opens his mouth and says so much as *one single word*. (Amis, *NT*: 149)

In comparison with typical detective fiction or a thriller which usually ends with solving a crime mystery and punishing a culprit, Amis concludes his work with the protagonist's meditation on life, human existence, fear of death and loss.

Owing to such an untypical ending of the story as well as the inscrutable circumstances of the death of Jennifer Rockwell, the book appears to shift slightly away from a detective novel onto an existential story. The suicide of the astrophysicist could be regarded, in this case, as an independent act of individual human will, the woman's responsibility for her own actions and experiences. Thus, the title and demise of Jennifer Rockwell reflects, according to Jean Paul Sartre, "the subjectivity and the consequences of the individual will," "the freedom of the individual subject" and that "man is responsible for what he is" (Sartre 587, 588, 589). Needless to say, the suicide of the female protagonist, the grotesque figure of Mike Hoolihan and the very ending of the novel reflects more visibly the contemporary philosophy of being and nothingness, in particular Jacques Lacan's "existential negativity" (Lacan 612), the anguish of the individual who confronts the concentrational form of the social bond, the subjective dilemmas which give rise to the freedom that becomes authentic only within the walls of a prison, the demand for commitment, expressing the impotence of a pure consciousness to master any situation, or the personality which only realises itself in suicide (Lacan 613).

As regards the role of the writer, Martin Amis plays devil's advocate in his novel (Barra 1998). He apparently has the influence on and control over the course of events, and skilfully manipulates his characters, all the more "tortures" them in order to provoke the readers into pondering about the issues delineated in the book. When set beside the hard-boiled literature in which the author is regarded as a craftsman or documentarist rather than an artist (Marling 2001) and his/her works do not arouse any controversies or acrimonious discussions among the public, in *Night Train* the writer plays a psychological and metafictional game with his readers, thus making them actively participate in the process of reading. Furthermore, he assumes the role of a comedian and by means of jocular linguistic expressions and various diverting situations he makes the crime story into a black comedy.

Last but not least, one of the pivotal constituents of Amis's postmodern novel is the relationship between cosmology and metaphysics. It is *Night Train* in which the reference to the universe is that much accentuated. By means of his characters, in particular Jennifer Rockwell, Mike Hoolihan and Bax Denziger, the author endeavours to scrutinise the nature of truth, reality, the secret of life and death, referring recurrently to the examination of the origin and structure of the universe. In the conversation with the narrator Denziger touches upon astronomy, religion, and speaks of cosmology in terms of science, materiality and mysticism:

I asked if she had an unorthodox side, a mystical side. I said, You guys are scientists but some of you end up getting religion, right? There's something in that. Knowing the mind of God, and so on. You're certainly affected by the incredible grandeur and complexity of revealed creation. But don't lose sight of the fact that it's *reality* we're investigating here. These things we're studying are very strange and very distant, but they're as real as the ground beneath your feet. The universe is everything religions are supposed to be, and then some, weird, beautiful, terrifying, but the universe *is the case*. Now, there are people around here who pride themselves on saying, "All this is just a physics problem. That's all." But Jennifer was more romantic than that. She was grander than that. (Amis, *NT*: 92)

From the above citation it emerges that the key to understanding the mystery of human existence and terrestrial reality lies in exploring the universe. According to Bax Denziger the universe stands both for science and religion and thus it mirrors our spirit. Treating cosmology in connection with or as a part of metaphysics constitutes a guiding motif of Amis's novel.

From the above facts it can be deduced that *Night Train* is a story which cannot be classified as pure crime fiction by virtue of its complex structure and heterogeneous subject matter. Here, the author uses the police procedural novel by and large as a framework for an in-depth examination of innocence and guilt, power and responsibility (McRae, Carter 130). In this respect Amis's novel, similarly to other postmodern works, is a melange of sundry literary genres, such as an existential novel, a psychological book, black comedy, a noir police procedural, dark romantic fiction (McGrath 1998), and above all the pastiche of various prominent crime stories. Nonetheless, taking into account the leading motifs of *Night Train*, that is cosmology and metaphysics, as well as its structural resemblance to classical American literature from the 1960s and 1970s, the novel may be regarded chiefly yet not exclusively as hardboiling metaphysics.

2.3. Between hardboiling metaphysics and existential fiction in Martin Amis's *Night Train* and Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*

Like most people, Quinn knew almost nothing about crime. He had never murdered anyone, had never stolen anything, and he did not know anyone who had. He had never been inside a police station, had never met a private detective, had never spoken to a criminal. Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films and newspapers.

(Paul Auster: *The New York Trilogy*)

Among celebrated postmodern detective story writers, such as Peter Ackroyd, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Umberto Eco, Jorge Luis Borges or Julio Cortazar, it is Martin Amis and Paul Auster who made a substantial contribution to the innovation and revitalisation of the crime story tradition in Anglo-American literature. The works of these novelists apparently redefine, or even undermine the status and pattern of this genre, most notably its classical model. Furthermore, their books cannot be scrutinised exclusively in terms of their affinity with detective fiction. When inspecting closely *London Fields*, *Night Train*, *Money: A Suicide Note* or *The Information* on the one hand and *Moon Palace*,

The Music of Chance, *Mr Vertigo*, *The New York Trilogy* or *Travels in the Scriptorium* on the other hand, one cannot fail to notice their strong link with various postmodern non-detective literary genres, among others an existential novel, a pastiche, a post-*nouveau roman* or an anti-detective story. In view of this it is next to impossible to put Amis's and Auster's books into one literary category. Instead, one ought to search for some recurrent themes and leading motifs of their works which will enable us to find a key to the essence of their writing.

The aim of this section is to scrutinise the two novels, *Night Train* and *The New York Trilogy* by drawing the analogy to the hardboiled metaphysical detective fiction on the one hand and existential literature on the other hand. At first glance, both the works seem quite dissimilar, all the more discrepant in various respects, mostly in terms of linguistic structure, style, narrative voice or theme, to mention but a few. Nevertheless, some of their common significant elements, such as the figure of the detective, his/her lonely investigation of the crime and criminal, the lack of genuine homicide, search for self-identity, the 'double' characters, the delineation of the city as a maze, and last but not least, the absence of final closure, closely reflect the pattern of the two aforementioned literary genres. The question to be posed is to what extent Amis's and Auster's books conform to the rules of the hard-boiled metaphysical crime fiction and at which moment and how they transgress the boundary of detective literature. The key to this issue lies in an in-depth analysis of the salient constituents of the novels.

At the outset one may examine the figure of the detective and the milieu depicted in *Night Train* and in *The New York Trilogy* according to the criteria of the hard-boiled metaphysics. Both the former and the latter underscore the protagonists' solitude and futile attempts at finding and identifying a culprit, and at comprehending the conundrums of the crime. In the case of Amis's story it is a female detective or a gumshoe, Mike Hoolihan, who endeavours to elucidate the motives of a celebrated astrophysicist's suicide whereas in Auster's novel each narrator focuses either on tracing the alleged or unknown offender ("City of Glass," "Ghosts") or on exploring the inscrutable disappearance of one of the main characters ("The Locked Room"). Regardless of gender differences and a dissimilar status of the protagonists in the two literary works, both the stories expose the "dark, lonely world of the postmodernist private investigator" (Merivale, Sweeney 12), a detective's solitary journey to unveil crime enigmas and the voyage of self-discovery.

In a classical ratiocinative detective text, such as the works of Arthur C. Doyle or Agatha Christie as well as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler's hard-boiled fiction, a detective is viewed as a professional who can successfully unravel any crime mystery by means of logic and common sense. When set beside the traditional model of crime literature, in a metaphysical detective story the protagonist, being either a private eye (*The New York Trilogy*) or a police investigator (*Night Train*), fruitlessly strives to identify a culprit and rationally explain a criminal riddle. Taking into consideration Martin Amis's novel, one may indubitably state that it is not a run-of-the-mill mystery owing to the lack of genuine homicide and a suspect as well as the inscrutability of the death of Jennifer Rockwell. It is Mike Hoolihan, the tough, masculine woman detective, considered a specialist in the reading and interpretation of crime scenes (Freitas 2008), who is unceasingly misled into believing in any rational justification of Rockwell's suicide. In view of that, she gets shortly frustrated and disillusioned with her work. Added to that, her status of a professional tough, intrepid gumshoe is bound to be questioned. This becomes evident when juxtaposing the defeated police officer, a "semi-burned-out-recovering alcoholic" (Miller 2006) with a self-confident and morally impeccable Chandler's Marlowe, an archetypal American detective. In this respect Amis subverts a hard-boiled literary convention by giving voice to a female protagonist and showing deference to her work despite her flaws and defects:

I respect her efforts to be good at her job and a straight person. I was frequently moved by her, and that is why the ending felt so terrible. It is an odd thing: once a novel ends, you could ask me about any of my characters and I'd give you my guess about what they are up to now, but I can't say for sure. The same with Mike. I hope that she pulled herself out. (Amis, "Night": 1998)

The author's departure from a quintessentially masculine genre written from a male perspective and marked by a patriarchal order may be regarded as one of the hallmarks in the history of crime literature, in particular its hard-boiled convention. As Natasha Walter remarks: "Amis turns a corner; for the first time he has created heroines who are defined not by their underwear and the size of their breasts, but by their work and relations and human disappointments" (Walter 1997). The term "heroines" refers both to Mike Hoolihan and to Jennifer Rockwell. By introducing the figure of Mike, a controversial detective from the standpoint of traditional American crime fiction, the

British writer creates a pastiche of the hard-boiled literature and simultaneously turns into an existential novel (Miller 2006).

The deconstruction of the Chandleresque detective narrative is further reinforced in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*. In this triad of detective stories encompassing the peripeteia of the three protagonists the author explores the trope of the missing person, a standard theme in countless gumshoe gothics (Merivale, Sweeney 12). The novel, invariably labelled a "metaphysical mystery tour" (Holmes 2005), foregrounds strenuous yet vain efforts of the protagonists (a detective-fiction writer-cum-private investigator, a private eye and a fiction writer) to investigate enigmatic criminal cases and to elucidate incomprehensible vanishing of the characters. Having become embroiled in unresolved cases and experienced personal and professional trauma, they gradually descend into madness. In this respect Auster follows the pattern of Edgar A. Poe's "hard-boiled" detective stories, specifically his tale "The Man of the Crowd" in which the protagonist and simultaneously narrator, shadowing the enigmatic eponymous hero, endeavours to penetrate the man's mysterious nature and the motives of his bizarre demeanour. Nonetheless, his efforts shortly prove of no avail due to the discovery of the fact that the chased man "is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow, for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is a grosser book than the '*Hortulus Animae* at perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that *es laesst sich nicht lesen*" (Poe 245).

By the same token in *The New York Trilogy* the protagonits go to great lenglths to unravel the identity of a missing person only to realise the utter futility of their attempts. In this respect Paul Auster, similarly to Martin Amis, skilfully plays with the convention of the hard-boiled genre represented by Hammett, Chandler or Spillane. It is only at first glance when the figure of Quinn or Blue echo the features of Marlowe, a leading 20th century American private eye. One may perceive some superficial similarities between Auster's and Chandler's detectives, among others the fact that they epitomise white American sleuths who are entirely engrossed in their jobs and who, at times work for affluent families and become involved in various essential family disputes, such as in "City of Glass" (Quinn and the Stillmans), *The Long Goodbye* (Marlowe and the Lennoxes) and *The Big Sleep* (Marlowe and the Sternwoods) (Holmes 2005). Needless to say, the parallelism between this archetypal hard-boiled gumshoe and a post-modern

sleuth is far outweighed by their apparently dissimilar status and the role they assume in the novels.

In the light of what was remarked in the previous chapter concerning the hard-boiled crime story, Philip Marlowe is equipped with the features that could be attributed to a classical detective, that is professionalism, reliability, self-confidence, predictability, distance and impartiality. He is undoubtedly a lone figure, living and working on his own. However, his neurotic alienation, fears about loss of agency and violations of self reflect a wider socio-political disorder and corruption (Holmes 2005). When set beside the position and characteristically modernist anxieties of Chandler's protagonist, Auster's characters, such as Quinn in "City of Glass" and the narrator of "The Locked Room," seemingly embody the figures of detectives and assume their roles. Both the former and the latter indisputably feel disorientated and unfamiliar with the work of a private eye. Their failure to resolve the inscrutable disappearance of the characters ("The Locked Room"), to search for and to discover the identity of genuine culprits ("City of Glass") betoken the author's subversion of the hard-boiled detective fiction and a progression from the modernist influenced literature of Chandler (Holmes 2005) towards a postmodern metaphysical and metafictional crime story:

This is not a story, after all. It is a fact, something happening in the world, and I'm supposed to do a job, one little thing, and I have said yes to it. If all goes well, it should even be quite simple. I have not been hired to understand - merely to act. This is something new. To keep it in mind, at all costs.

(Auster, 1999: 40)

I read steadily for almost an hour, flipping back and forth among the pages, trying to get a sense of what Fanshawe had written. If I say nothing about what I found there, it is because I understood very little. All the words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out. I can think of no other way to express it. Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph impossible. It is odd then, that the feeling that survives from this notebook is one of great lucidity. It is as if Fanshawe knew his final work had to subvert every expectation I had for it.

(Auster, 1999: 313, 314)

There is no escaping the fact that Amis's and Auster's protagonists do not live up to the expectations of the readers accustomed to analysing detective fiction in a traditional sense where reason and order triumph over bedlam and contingency. Both Mike

Hoolihan from *Night Train* and the main characters from *The New York Trilogy* fail as detectives since they do not succeed in discovering the truth in criminal puzzles as well as narrators on account of their unreliability, subjectivism and lack of impartiality. Unlike Marlowe, considered a trustworthy and unbiased raconteur who gives a fair account of events, Amis's and Auster's narrators are incrementally disjointed through the novels and seemingly lose touch with reality (Daniel Quinn), they appear to forfeit the control and authorial power and become overwhelmed by the exacerbating tension brought about by an unfathomable demise of one of the protagonists (Mike Hoolihan). In this regard these two novels, despite their evident links with the hard-boiled detective fiction undercut the convention of the genre evolving into postmodern hardboiling metaphysics on the one hand and existential books on the other hand.

The afore-said metaphysical and existential aspect of both the novels comes to the fore when scrutinising the personages of the protagonists and their relations, particularly the functions they perform in these stories. One cannot fail to notice that instead of classical roles of a detective, a victim and a culprit we come across the play of exchanged and lost identities, the doubling and disguise of characters. As far as *Night Train* goes, it is only at the outset when the standards of crime literature concerning the personages of the characters are maintained. Nevertheless, it shortly turns out that in this sombre Chandleresque anti-detective novel there is no clear-cut boundary between a genuine detective (Mike Hoolihan), a victim (Jennifer Rockwell) and presumed suspects (Trader Faulkner and Bax Denziger). Taking into account the first two aforementioned protagonists, one may notice that in spite of the fact they represent utterly dissimilar characters and symbolise 'extremes of fortune and talent' (Amis, "Night": 1998), Mike, being 'a semi-burned-out recovering alcoholic, the total opposite of the victim Jennifer' (Miller 2006), they both appear to complement each other. From the point of view of the norms of classical crime fiction, in this case a hard-boiled detective story, the personages of the two female protagonists, one embodying a police investigator and another a victim, are finally merged. Mike Hoolihan, having failed to resolve the circumstances of Jennifer Rockwell's suicide, falls prey to her own obsession and gets gradually tormented by unremitting anxiety and fears. Strange as it may seem, she turns out to be a victim of the demised astrophysicist who seems to oppress and torture her.

In suicide studies there used to be a rough rule that went: The more violent the means, the louder the snarl at the living. The louder they said, *Look what you made me do...* But yet, three bullets, like the opposite of three cheers. What a judgement. What...highness. What ice. She hurt the living, and that's another reason to hate her. And she didn't even care that everyone would remember her as just another mad bitch. Everyone except me. (Amis, *NT*: 145)

While reading the story one cannot fail to notice that Mike and Jennifer epitomise 'extremes of fortune and talent,' a 'savage disparity between two people' (Miller 2006). At the outset there is the apparent polarity between this masculine woman detective, a defeated, unattractive, middle-aged gumshoe and the ravishing, bright and promising young scientist. Needless to say, after the inscrutable suicide of the astrophysicist the roles of the protagonists are reversed and their identities get exchanged. Since Jennifer's mystifying death it is Mike who endeavours to lead the life of the demised protagonist and assume her identity in order to scrutinise the impenetrable circumstances of her suicide whereas she, in turn, becoming utterly overwhelmed by the astrophysicist's spiritual omnipresence, commences to lose her own self. As we can observe, the play of lost or 'stolen' and exchanged identities is ubiquitous in Amis's work. In this respect *Night Train* could not be regarded exclusively as a deconstruction or subversion of a traditional detective story, here, its hard-boiled subgenre, since it transgresses the boundaries of crime fiction and oscillates between hardboiling metaphysics and an existential novel.

From the literary standpoint, Mike Hoolihan and Jennifer Rockwell are the artists who shape, or rather strive to shape the story, using their creative power. Mike embodies a detective and simultaneously a prolific writer, a specialist in reading and analysing crime scenes. In her work she gets engrossed in investigating the death of an outstanding scientist and concomitantly a gifted artist, yet she finds herself unceasingly following deceptive leads and therefore all her efforts to uncover a clue to Jennifer's suicide fall through. Finally, Rockwell appears to be a creative artist when staging her own death having previously planted all the decoys (Freitas 2008). Moreover, Amis claims that the act of Jennifer's suicide reflects her ignorance or despise of all other characters of the story (Amis, 6th December, 2010). Hoolihan soon painstakingly realises that despite her experience and professionalism, she is unable to decipher the meaning of the criminal puzzle and thus becomes aware of the fact that the solution to this chronic case can never be closed. In this regard it is Jennifer, the creative artist, who

utterly wields power over her life. Her act of committing suicide constitutes the affirmation of a desperate sense of agency the world has denied it and her humiliation becomes therefore her victory (Freitas 2008).

This artistic interpretation of the protagonist's unraveling mystery entails its metaphysical elucidation. After a close inspection of the novel, it turns out that both Hoolihan and Rockwell fall prey to existential angst that haunt them in a generic American city (Finney, 2008: 60). Mike who lives on the edge of domestic and personal entropy and who epitomises an anonymous citizen of the sinister lawless city is shortly made to confront further mounting frustration engendered by the astrophysicist's chronic case. Jennifer's demise is viewed by the detective as her professional and personal debacle, the utter negation of the rational unraveling of the motives of the suicide. The gumshoe, being incessantly provided with the plethora of false clues and trapped in various pitfalls soon realises not only the abortiveness of her work, since she remarks that Jennifer's suicide is a case in which the solution "only points toward further complexity" (Amis, *NT*: 164), but the futility of her existence as well.

As for the second, indubitably one of Amis's most enigmatic female characters, the author does not offer the readers any lucid, satisfactory explanation of the woman's suicide. It is Jennifer's sensitivity, empathy yet emotional instability which renders her a very humane character. Needless to say, these attributes of the protagonist as well as her weird behaviour lead to her tragedy. Adam Phillips suggests that Rockwell's feelings and sensitivity give rise to her death, "as though she is committing suicide whether she likes it or not" (quoted in Diedrick 166). Taking into consideration the above citation as well as the very subject matter of Amis's neo-noir detective novella, one cannot escape the impression that the author puts masks on his female protagonists who seemingly assume the roles of a police woman and a victim in order to disorientate the audience, all the greater to vex and frustrate the expectations of the classical thrillers' devotees. In fact, Mike Hoolihan and Jennifer Rockwell represent disillusioned dwellers of the anonymous American city. The astrophysicist's suicidal inclination and the grotesque, caricatural portrait of the police inspector reflect the auto-destructive, calamitous character of the society at the turn of the new millennium.

The literary facet of detective fiction is also foregrounded in *The New York Trilogy*. In this novel Paul Auster draws the analogy between the act of committing and detecting crime and the process of reading and interpreting a mystery story. According to Patrick Brantlinger: "the detective expresses a wish fulfilment shared by all of us, to

be able to know or to read just a few things very well, like clues, but through reading them very well to penetrate the deepest mysteries of life” (Brantlinger 17). In view of that, the protagonists of each part of the trilogy assume double, or rather triple roles – they all stand for detectives, writers and attentive readers. Nevertheless, their work and the methods they use in deciphering mysterious deaths and disappearances fall through. Daniel Quinn, a detective-fiction writer-cum-private investigator makes an in-depth examination of every single evidence and trace in a vain attempt to solve a criminal puzzle and to discover the truth about human existence and motivation. He is led to believe that “the key to good detective work is a close observation of details... The implication is that human behaviour could be understood, that beneath the infinite facade of gestures, tics and silences, there is finally a coherence, an order, a source of motivation” (Auster, *NYT*: 138). However, Quinn soon realises the futility of his trust in any plausible interpretation of the detective conundrum. It is also true for Blue, the protagonist of “Ghosts” who steadily becomes vexed and disorientated when working as a private eye and who, additionally, loses his agency and credibility as the narrator and writer of this part of the novel. By the same token the main character of “The Locked Room” shares Quinn’s and Blue’s lack of confidence and thus seems gifted neither as a writer nor a private investigator. His endeavour to elucidate the arcana of Fanshawe’s inscrutable disappearance and the motive of his friend’s purposeful seclusion fall through. Furthermore, the abortiveness and amateurishness of the protagonist’s work as a detective undermine his writerly talent and betoken his lack of poise as a narrator.

Amis and Auster masterly combine the elements of hard-boiled metaphysics and metafiction in their works. The artistic, self-referential dimension of these neo-noir detective novels testify to their postmodern status. However, in *Night Train* Martin Amis covertly depicts a metafictional facet of his book whereas Paul Auster overtly demonstrates a self-referential and intertextual aspect of *The New York Trilogy*, the evidence of which is the writer’s appearance in the story as one of its characters or the author’s recurrent references to the protagonists of other literary masterpieces, among others Miguel de Cervantes’s Don Quixote or Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Fanshawe (Holmes 2005).

Ultimately, both in *Night Train* and in *The New York Trilogy* one could barely detect a definite closure or any satisfactory ending. Instead, the readers are left with the feeling of a vague unease, a thwarted expectation, an existential desire for a “sense of ending” since they are unceasingly faced with the narrators’ miscellaneous personal dilemmas or

even frustrations (Diedrick 162). It is due to the fact that contrary to classical detective fiction which focuses on the search for truth, Amis's and Auster's metaphysical thrillers foreground an exploration of the lack of 'universal' truth in the postmodern world (Holmes 2005).

In the case of the British novel the writer employs the detective genre in order to produce a haunting rumination on the conundrum of our purpose on earth, and above all on the mystery of human motive. As for the reading public, they become gradually perplexed with the ubiquitous existential void and unresolved criminal riddle. Nevertheless, some critics, among others Brian Finney, strive to come up with some hypothetical explication of the book's impenetrable ending, attributing the "whirlpool suicide" (Diedrick 161) of the astrophysicist to metaphysical and existential angst. He indicates that the key to the arcana of the protagonist's demise which constitutes the crux of *Night Train* could be scrutinised exclusively by those who "stare at death all their lives, like Hawking" (Amis, *NT*: 114). Here, Finney refers to cosmology and metaphysics and thus follows Amis's thoughts, pointing out that the conundrum of our purpose on earth lies in seeing human life in a larger perspective – "from big bang to big crunch" (Amis, *NT*: 108), which, in turn, may contribute to "a revolution of consciousness" (Amis, *NT*: 108).

In keeping with this, in *The New York Trilogy*, the work recurrently analysed in terms of its metaphysical and metafictional appeal, the ambivalent aspect of closure comes to the fore. The more we get engrossed in the novel the more convoluted the plot appears. What is more, the narrators seem utterly baffled when each of the story draws to its close. As the author remarks in "City of Glass":

Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning and so far before the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine. (Auster, 1999: 104)

One is tempted to suggest that both the narrators and the readers of *The New York Trilogy* assume equivalent roles since they quest for clues and leads to some pattern of meaning, although the text under the scrutiny fails to provide any marked elucidation (Bernstein 136). Such textual inscrutability and a concomitant frustration of the reading public mirror a postmodern facet of the detective story. The staple of this metaphysical thriller constitutes either a missing person or putative culprit, nonetheless it shortly

becomes apparent that Auster's narrators and detectives "do not discover very much, except how little they know about themselves" (Auster, 1999: 176). In view of that some critics refer to the novel of the American writer as an "errant version" or "the bastard child of detective fiction and postmodernism," the work that does not tally with one category (Holmes 2005).

From the above facts it can be inferred that *Night Train* and *The New York Trilogy* constitute the subversion of a classical detective story and vacillate between hardboiling metaphysics and postmodern existentialism. This heterogenous, multilayered facet of the two books is evident in prototypical crime subject matter, the main characters as gumshoes, private eyes, police investigators, the American urban setting on the one hand, and the equivocal status of detectives, culprits, meaningless clues and a convoluted plot leading to no genuine resolution or closure to the investigation, and above all the intertextual aspect of the book and the unreliability of the narrative voice on the other hand. Such a multidimensional perception of the two thrillers is entirely confirmed by Tzvetan Todorov who claims that "at a certain point detective fiction experiences as an unjustified burden the constraints of this or that genre and gets rid of them in order to constitute a new code" (quoted in Bernstein 134). This statement is, in turn, upheld by Fredric Jameson who refers to postmodernist crime fiction as paraliterature, the *mélange* of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and science-fiction or fantasy (Jameson, 1984: 55). The readers are irrefutably to gauge how and to what extent Amis's and Auster's novels conform to the definitions delineated by the above critics. There is no escaping the fact that these books transgress the borders of classical and modern detective fiction, and hence leading the way to an ultimately new insight into the genre on the threshold of the second millennium.

2.4. Killing for the sake of healing? – a psychological, philosophical and metaphysical dimension of genocide in Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow*

There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.

(Walter Benjamin: *Illuminations*)

Some writers regard *Time’s Arrow*, *Einstein’s Monsters* and *London Fields* as an “informal trilogy” since all these works refer to the menace of a terrestrial cataclysm and the annihilation of humankind. When set beside the second and third novel which focus on a nuclear holocaust that threatens postmodern civilisation, the first one returns to the Holocaust, which casts its shadow over the rest of the 20th century (Finney, 2006: 101). Out of these three works *Time’s Arrow* could be considered the most controversial and experimental in terms of linguistic structure and narrative construction. Moreover, the writer, bringing up the issue of genocide and its postwar reverberations, scrutinises a psychological facet of crime, in particular the psyche of the oppressor and his ‘double’ identity on the one hand, and a philosophical, historical and metaphysical dimension of human extermination on the other hand. In terms of language and style, Amis’s work attracts the readers’ attention due to its disorientated narrative technique which evokes ‘defamiliarising’ literary devices advocated by Victor Shklovsky and Walter Benjamin. Subsequently, *Time’s Arrow* is the book which stands out by its deeply ironic style by means of which the author genuinely endeavours to communicate with the audience and to transmit the crucial premiss of his work. It is hard to scrutinise Martin Amis’s novel not taking into consideration all the above-mentioned aspects.

As was previously pointed out, at the core of Amis’s novel lies a psychological analysis of homicide and search for the roots of evil. Here, one may refer to the metaphysical detective story, specifically to the correlation between crime fiction and Lacan’s linguistic psychoanalysis which, in my view, may provide some new insights into the interpretation and fuller understanding of the scale of genocide in *Time’s Arrow*. At the outset I would like to scrutinise the role of the detective, the criminal and the acts of homicide in terms of postmodern psychological criticism. As Hanjo Berressem remarks, the metaphysical detective story is a fascinating genre for

psychoanalysis. Following Lacanian philosophy which is based on the fact that similarly to the criminal case, the psychological one is a knotty problem with death at its centre, the critic draws the analogy between the three afore-said constituents of crime fiction and their three linguistic –psychological stages. According to the French theoretician the detective is related to the symbolic, that is he/she stands for the realm of language, ratiocination and logic; the criminal is associated with the imaginary which constitutes the realm of visual identification and desire, whereas the evidence (the act of crime and the victim) could be attributed to the real which is neither symbolic nor imaginary (Berressem 232). To take the analogy further, the author emphasises that the first two elements, the detective and the evidence (the real), are unequivocal and unproblematic owing to that the former is related to observation, search for clues, and the latter to logical reasoning whilst the criminal (the imaginary) poses difficulties since he/she interferes in each of these three realms in order to cover up his/her crime either by concealing his/her motive, by engineering a fake alibi or by destroying or falsifying the evidence (Berressem 232).

The above classification could be attributed either to a classical crime story or to metaphysical detective fiction in which all the three components are conspicuous. In this regard Martin Amis's work appears genuinely problematic apparently due to the absence of the detective and the unconventional narrative structure. Needless to say, after a thorough examination one may trace some correlation between the novel's structural elements and Lacan's categorisation. Above all, *Time's Arrow* seemingly presents only the figure of the murderer, the Nazi doctor, Odilo Unverdorben and the victims, the Jewish nation. The missing element is the detective. On closer inspection, however, we are led to believe that his role is performed by Odilo's doppelgaenger, his childlike innocent double who acts like an independent character in the novel and is given a narrative voice. Notwithstanding this, from a detective story standpoint, the war criminal double-goer cannot function as a distinct figure but rather as the murderer's second half and as part of his split personality. In keeping with this, the duality of Unverdorben's psyche betokens his double function in the novel, namely that of the detective and the culprit. In terms of psychoanalytical criticism, the symbolic and the imaginary are merged since the figure of the detective and the murderer are closely intertwined. Rationality and impeccable logic become unceasingly superseded by his murderous instincts and irrational behaviour which leads him to commit mass killing

and justify genocide. The extermination of Jews constitutes the evidence and is equivalent to the real, the third element in Lacan's categorisation.

Taking into account all the three constituents of detective fiction and postmodern psychoanalysis of *Time's Arrow*, it is the figure of the criminal who occupies a central place in the novel and who generates a fierce controversy. As Martin Amis asserts in the interview with Eleanor Wachtel: "I'm writing not about the Jews, I'm writing about the perpetrators" (quoted in Tredell 126). In this respect the book is mostly devoted to a penetrating analysis of the culprit's psyche whereas the figure of the victim stays in the background. The duality of the murderer, Unverdorben's link with his double, the relationship between his two "halves" and simultaneously the two parts of *Time's Arrow* – the Auschwitz and pre-Auschwitz sections - are highly problematic, mystifying and uncanny. At this point some critics, among others Nicolas Tredell or James Diedrick, refer to Freud's psychoanalysis, specifically to his elucidation of the uncanny as "a return of the repressed, a moment when something in the individual's psychic past emerges unbidden, and the familiar suddenly turns strange" (quoted in Diedrick 139). In order to understand more completely a Freudian interpretation of the uncanny, one ought to analyse the portrait of the murderer and his doppelgaenger which is inextricably linked with time-reversed structure of Amis's novel.

As mentioned before, the relationship between the Nazi criminal and his double remains enigmatic and inscrutable, reflecting not only the internal conflict and neurosis of the protagonist but also a philosophical and moral paradox. At the outset of the novel the author depicts Odilo Unverdorben at the moment of his death and at the same time presents the birth of his doppelgaenger, the doctor's soul, innocent because of having been kept separate from his mind and body throughout his life. Odilo's "double-goer" or alter-ego functions as a "passenger or parasite" (Amis, *TA*: 8) lacking access to his host's thoughts and being "awashed with his emotions" (Amis, *TA*: 7). While relieving Unverdorben's life in reverse, he is unaware that his backward trajectory through time violates ordinary chronology (Diedrick 133). From the psychoanalytical viewpoint, Odilo's double embodies the doctor's second half, that part of his split personality which he ceaselessly endeavours to repress or discard. Moreover, the protagonist's alter-ego, being simultaneously the narrator of the story, strives to revise and examine his host's war criminal activity. By his time-reversed observations of postwar American hospitals, doctors and doctoring he fearfully anticipates his host's involvement in Auschwitz and announces a terrifying secret of his past. For Unverdorben's double this

period constitutes the moment of precognition, being the equivalent of memory in his time-backward world, and forecasts the harrowing future revealed by his narrative (Diedrick 139). On the other hand, however, the author's use of psychic time mirrors a Freudian *Nachtraeglichkeit*, "the revisionary retroactivity of the present" (Tredell 139). It is rereading and reexamination of the past, here, war events, which structures 'primary revision' in the return of the repressed, in other words, *Nachtraeglichkeit* shapes a kind of revisionary history whose aim is to obscure or negate the Holocaust. Nicolas Tredell additionally accentuates the ethical and moral aspect of the narration and time-reversed structure of the novel. The critic asserts that the narrator, being omnipresent but nowhere visible, allegorises a Jewish double as he literally reads backward. According to him this self-reflexive textuality epitomises the utter incapability of the Nazis to regard the Other as another Self in the mutual relation of intersubjectivity which is called by Emmanuel Lévinas 'being-for-the-other'. This denial is visible throughout the story and commences with Tod Friendly's declining to look in the mirror (Tredell 140).

Taking into account the psychoanalysis of *Time's Arrow*, especially the relationship between the protagonist and his alter-ego, one ought to refer to Jay Lifton's idea of 'psychological doubling' which constitutes a crucial motif in Amis's book. When viewed in relation to Lifton's theory, the narrator of the British novel could be perceived as that side of Unverdorben that the doctor renounced when he started performing euthanasia at Schloss Hartheim. In this respect James Diedrick draws the readers' attention to the significance of the protagonist's name, referring to the definitions of 'verdorben' which in German comprises "tainted," "rotten," "depraved," and "corrupt," whereas "unverdorben" denotes their opposite and additionally "innocent" and "unsophisticated." Hence, his surname includes both himself and his double. Diedrick, basing on Lifton's theory points out that "doubling" entails the creation of a "second self" that exists alongside the original self and that in extreme circumstances this second self "can become the usurper from within and replace the original self until it 'speaks' for the entire person" (Lifton 420). The American critic keeps analysing the Nazi doctor's split personality, indicating that he struck a Faustian bargain with Auschwitz and the regime: "to do the killing he offered an opposing self – a self that, in violating his own prior moral standards, met with no effective resistance and in fact made use of his original skills (in this case, medical-scientific)" (quoted in Diedrick 139). From his immense, elaborate use of Lifton's historical and psychological

descriptions, Amis creates a grotesque paradox based on the fact that the very techniques of the self that enable doctors to become healers could be developed and expanded in the service of genocide. One may confirm such a statement, attributing it to the narrator who views standard medical treatment as merciless whilst the work of the concentration camp as lifegiving (Tredell 146). Amis's presentation of a backward-time-world leads the narrator to perceive the protagonist's medical practice in New York appalling and incomprehensible since he sees a man who "comes into the emergency room with a bandage which is removed, has a rusty nail driven into his head, and is led back to the waiting room to holler with pain" (Amis, *TA*: 76). On the other hand, the chapter devoted to Auschwitz provides the justification both for temporal inversion and doubling, and since everything in the novel is viewed backwards in time the only rational thing that remains is Auschwitz and this is a sort of tribute to its perverted perfection (Finney, 2008: 55).

Martin Amis's antichronology corresponds to the protagonist's reversal of morality. His mind and personality is shaped by Nazi propaganda which justifies ferocious homicide and violence when committed for the sake of "higher" civilisation and "better" race. In this respect Odilo regards genocide as genesis and as a doctor he is led to believe that the entire medical profession in Germany goes from healing to killing in the name of healing (quoted in Finney, 2008: 56). Paradoxically enough, such a viewpoint is upheld by the narrator who, being deluded, disorientated and imprisoned by the backward-time-world, is made to perceive the Holocaust reality from the opposite angle and therefore he reverses time's arrow. As for the Nazi criminal, he is mentally programmed to carry out countless appalling, inhuman experiments in order to oppress and subordinate his victims. It is power and dominance which constitutes one of the novel's recurrent motifs associated predominantly with doctors and sex (Finney, 2008: 56). Furthermore, this issue indubitably helps to understand gender roles, men and women relations in Nazi Germany as well as to visualise the tangibility of human extermination. As the writer points out, surgical operations and a sexual intercourse enable the war criminal to invade and master his lordship over a human body. The protagonist's lust for power that he shares with his fellow Nazi (embodied by Uncle Pepi) additionally mirrors the troubled relations with his wife, Herta, and vicious erotic experiments the doctor conducted on his spouse. Odilo strives to subjugate Herta entirely and turn her into an acquiescent recipient of his desire to wield power over another person in revenge for his physical defect. This illustrates a bitter fate of women

in crisis centres and conflicting situations. Strange as it may seem, in time-reversed world bullied and maltreated females continuously return to their oppressors, regarding them as their saviours, and it is only the reader who realises the source of their anguish – the assumption of dominance over their bodies by men: “the women at the crisis centres and the refuges are all hiding from their redeemers...The welts, the abrasions and the black eyes get starker, more livid, until it is time for the women to return, in an ecstasy of distress, to the men who will suddenly heal them. Some require more specialised treatment. They stagger off and go and lie in a park or a basement or wherever, until men come along and rape them, and then they’re okey again” (Amis, *TA*: 31).

Unverdorben’s physical and mental subduing of his wife is inextricably linked with his ruthless tyranny over the Jews. Nevertheless, the moment he acquires power rounding up Jewish prisoners for the Waffen-SS unit he joins he turns out to be impotent. Paradoxically enough, the protagonist’s omnipotence contributes to his sexual and political impotence. By the same token Odilo’s alter-ego, though omnipresent in the book, is unreliable as a narrator due to his entire ignorance of history, ethics and morality. His strenuous yet vain efforts to narrate the history of Holocaust and post-war reality betokens his intellectual and artistic impotence. Taking into account the detective story convention, Unverdorben’s double stands for the detective who fails to understand the psyche of the Nazi doctor and the motives of his murderous acts. As a result, he becomes overwhelmed by the criminal and by the preposterous world to which he is condemned.

As far as the narration is concerned, Amis’s book stands in a startling contrast to the narrative scheme of a classical crime story. Referring to Russian Formalists’ *fabula* and *sujet* as well as to Tzvetan Todorov’s distinction between the story and the plot, one may notice that in *Time’s Arrow* there is an apparent contradiction between these two elements. The reader becomes utterly confused on account of the fact that the time of the story in which we get to know what actually happened is told and explained backwards, thus the concepts of showing and telling oppose each other. The author purposefully uses such narrative technique in order to estrange or disorientate the audience. Following the examples of Victor Shklovsky’s, Walter Benjamin’s and Roman Jakobson’s formulas of estrangement or defamiliarisation, he employs a backward-time structure which “disrupts the modes of ordinary linguistic discourse, ‘makes strange’ the world of everyday perception and renews the reader’s lost capacity

for fresh sensation” (Abrams 127). To take the analogy further, the observing “I” visibly distances himself from the narratee, here, Odilo Unverdorben’s doppelgänger, and therefore cannot serve as his conscience since the Nazi doctor is devoid of human feelings and instincts. The aloofness and reticence of the narrator-witness creates doubling readers’ experience and involvement in the story. Quoting Martin Amis, Neil Easterbrook asserts that Odilo is: “as estranged from himself as from all humanity, his ‘search for invisibility’ (Amis, *TA*: 71) is ‘evasive action fight’ (Amis, *TA*: 78), rendering him more ‘like a brilliant robot’ (Amis, *TA*: 127) than human being” (Easterbrook 55). Such kind of narration could be attributed to the heterodiegetic defamiliarisation which follows the conventions of the central narrative trope and identifies the Nazi rationalisation for and justification of genocide (Tredell 136, 137).

This defamiliarising technique and experimentation with narration in *Time’s Arrow* violates the rules of the traditional detective fiction in which time sequence, its linearity and narrative cohesion come to the fore. Moreover, the role of the reader is emphasised in Amis’s work. Contrary to the conventional crime story, the British novel demands unsparing intellectual effort from its audience and their active participation in the course of events. Thanks to the distance of the narrator-witness who hovers above the events instead of genuinely experiencing them the readers are invited to play their own role in the novel. Their function could be attributed to that of the detective whose presence is an indispensable component of every crime story. Furthermore, the audience constitutes the moral voice of the book, they are the ones who observe, judge and give their own verdict. Nonetheless, Amis’s novel is an ingenuinely written novel whose aim is to purposefully entrap and disorientate the audience, and consequently to test their intelligence, wisdom and factual knowledge. As a cunning, experienced player and a gifted artist, the British writer provokes his readers to take part in a serious discussion about the Holocaust and its repercussions, and by means of reversed chronology to make them comprehend the lunacy of Nazi criminals and the preposterousness of their ideology. On this score *Time’s Arrow* constitutes a constructive dialogue with the audience as well as a challenging intellectual game between two players, the author and a selected group of readers. On the other hand, Martin Amis addresses his novel also, or maybe predominantly to that part of his reading public who still remains ignorant of Nazis’ atrocities and their criminal involvement in the Holocaust. Brian Finney confirms this fact in his essay “Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* and the Postmodern Sublime,” referring to Amis’s *Experience* where the British novelist recounts his 1995

visit to Auschwitz, quoting his guide's remark: "We now have people coming here [...] who think that all this has been constructed to deceive them. [...] They believe that nothing happened here and the Holocaust is a myth" (Amis, *E*: 72). More importantly, the author of *Time's Arrow* draws a parallel between some group of readers, in particular those born since World War II who remain unfamiliar with 20th century genocide and the narrator's ignorance of Unverdorben's criminal involvement in Jews' extermination. Thus, the heterodiegetic defamiliarisation employed by the author by means of time reversal and once total speech reversal make the audience understand and realise the ludicrousness of Nazi medical experiments carried out for the sake of "higher," "more advanced" civilisation.

Apart from the two narrative techniques employed by Martin Amis, namely a narrative form (time reversal) and a narrative perspective (splitting the protagonist and the narrator), some critics highlight the role of the third one, a narrative mode (irony). As Brian Finney points out, the ironic tone of *Time's Arrow* constitutes the essence of the novel in many respects. First of all, it allows an attentive reader to recognise the narrator's entire misapprehension and misinterpretation of his narration. Consequently, they reconstruct the opposite meaning of the story delineated by the protagonist's double. This seems valuable, especially in the face of scathing attacks launched on the novelist accused of antisemitism and the unethical depiction of genocide. Needless to say, Amis assures the critics that the ironic mode reflects a paradox of Nazi ideology and their perverted morality, asserting that: "Nazism was a biomedical vision to excise the cancer of Jewry. To turn it into something that creates Jewry is a respectable irony" (quoted in Finney, 2006: 113). His statement is upheld by Robert Jay Lifton who refers to Nazis' misuse of language and a creation of a specific discourse in which killing was attributed to healing. His work, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* constitutes a vivid illustration of German doctors' linguistic deviation established in Auschwitz where "Outpatient centers were a 'place for selections' before death (Lifton 186). Following Lifton's line of thinking, Amis efficaciously subverts Nazis' misuse of language to rationalise and justify mass murder by means of irony in order to affirm a contrary ethic (Finney, 2006: 113).

From the above statements it emerges that irony is inextricably connected with morality and linguistic duality. One may observe the process of reinforcing morality and ethics through irony with reference to the protagonist's miscellaneous name-alterations. At the moment in which the book's chronology is reversed, Tod Friendly turns into

John Young and although Tod means death (in German), he becomes Jack-of-all-trades. Subsequently, John transforms into the gold-rich Hamilton de Souza who assumes his birth name of Odilo Unverdorben. Since his last name signifies “un-depraved” or “un-corrupt” in German language, the protagonist’s consecutive name-shifts parallel his travel from death to innocence, or from grave to cradle. Paradoxically enough, Odilo who is the bearer of death ultimately becomes associated with purity and chastity. Amis highlights this change of Unverdorben’s ideology by using irony which implies, on the one hand, a literal fantasy (a nostalgic journey to the Arcadian world) and, on the other hand, a figurative rejection of that fantasy (an impossible coming back to innocence or to the pre-Holocaust reality). Hence, the linguistic duality corresponds both to the duality of time structure as well as to the duality of codes of ethics.

Martin Amis’s irony is also attributed to black humour. In *Time’s Arrow* the author deliberately creates such effect in order to show the impossibility of post-modern literature to present a coherent, plausible story of genocide, bearing in mind the fact that a considerable part of Western society remains ignorant of the history of the Holocaust, perceiving it fictitious, confabulated or even jocular. On the other hand, he makes his readers realise that some generations go to great lengths to expunge from their memory the heinous and disgraceful acts of terror during World War II. The narrative of the novel simultaneously epitomises the delight of coming back to a less ghastly phase of modernity and the excruciating recollection of Western civilisation’s fall from innocence (Finney, 2006: 104). This downfall Lyotard attributes to those pre-war grand narratives of rationalist progress that were called for by Holocaust perpetrators. It appears that Amis, confirming the viewpoint of the afore-mentioned critic, expresses his disbelief in the utility of modern literature with its reflection on reason, intellect and improvement.

As for the crime story convention, *Time’s Arrow* violates its classical norms both in terms of a narrative form and a narrative perspective. Instead of chronological events, the interconnection between the plot and the story in Amis’s novel, we are offered the experimentation with time and a total discrepancy between what is shown and what is told. Taking into consideration the characters, in *Time’s Arrow* there is no apparent division into a detective, a culprit and a victim since none of them are homogenous and, instead, complement one another. At first glance, it appears that the figure of the criminal and the victim are clearly recognisable whilst the detective remains erased from the book. However, as was mentioned previously, his role could be attributed

either to the narrator or to the reader, the latter being considered the missing third entity of the novel (Finney, 2006: 111). This is one of a few interpretations of the book. As a post-modern novelist, Amis invites the audience to actively participate in his story, to form their own opinions and make painstaking analyses, contrary to his predecessors whose detective texts are based on the narrative stability, coherence and therefore are mostly addressed to those who prefer smooth reading. From a didactic viewpoint, Martin Amis's novel bears some resemblance to the works of modern crime story writers, such as Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, Dorothy Sayers or G. K. Chesterton. Both the post-modern British novelist and the classical detective story writers depict murderers and their vile acts of crime whose sources undeniably lie in the corrupt, depraved industrialised urban society, yet in the novels of modern, pre-war crime fiction writers culprits are sooner or later punished, hence the righteousness eventually triumphs over the evil, whereas in *Time's Arrow* the Nazi perpetrator is never to expiate his villainy and to be penalised, even though his crimes and acts of terror are evident. In contrast to the assumptions of classical detective stories based on social order, public demand for justice, scientific advancement and nostalgia for homogenous society, Amis's novel reflects the overthrow of pre-war civilisation and its foundations which contributed to xenophobia, racial and ethnic discrimination, disregard for the Other and a concomitant moral degradation of post-war generations, their spiritual insensibility, ignorance and intellectual decline.

As I previously mentioned, the narration plays a pivotal role in *Time's Arrow* and highlights a moral or didactic premiss of Amis's book, thus constituting a startling contrast to such classical detective texts as *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* or *The Innocence of Father Brown*. When set beside the omniscience and reliability of the narrator in the afore-mentioned works, in *Time's Arrow* we encounter a story narrated by somebody who is entirely detached from his narration or even overwhelmed by it and imprisoned in it; concomitantly, he loses his poise and credibility. On this score the author's irony remains the only sound constituent of the novel which guarantees the sense of balance, as well as leads its readers to miscellaneous interpretations. The author, modeling on the stylistic conventions of his praised writers, Saul Bellow and Vladimir Nabokov, strives to prove that in post-war literature the only way to depict the disorders and distortions of the contemporary world, in the case of *Time's Arrow*, mental disturbances, degeneration and human degradation, is to employ irony, sarcasm and farce. In *The Moronic Inferno and Other*

Visits to America Martin Amis remarks that: “The twentieth century has been called an ironic age, as opposed to a heroic, tragic or romantic one; even realism, rock-bottom realism, is felt to be a bit grand for the twentieth century. Nowadays, our protagonists are a good deal lower down the human scale than their creators: they are anti-heroes, non-heroes, sub-heroes” (Amis, *MI*: 17). One can attribute this statement to the second half of the century, in particular to postmodern fiction. As regards a detective story genre, in classical crime fiction the authors use a binary opposition, a hierarchical division between the heroes (detectives) and villains (culprits) who carry on a fierce, at times life-and-death struggle as a result of which the former usually gains the victory over the latter. In *Time’s Arrow* one can barely notice such a differentiation but rather an internal conflict of the murderer whereas his double and simultaneously the narrator whose function could be attributed to the detective is merely a passive witness to the protagonists’s misdeeds.

We may notice that the novel’s time-reversed structure reflects the duality of narration which entails the two opposing aspects of reality depicted in the book. These two contrastive facets present the ameliorative and degenerative versions of modernity illustrated by the protagonist’s two incarnations. Here, one can refer to Lyotard’s differentiation between two modes of (post)-modernity – the melancholic and the jubilatory which encompass an aesthetics of the sublime. According to the critic the sublime involves a “combination of pleasure and pain, the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept” (Lyotard, 1984: 81). This is exemplified in postmodern art which searches for the experience of freedom by staging a crisis of representation. Lyotard claims that if such art is singled out by its presentation of “the unrepresentable in presentation itself” (81), then the postmodern mode is distinguished, leaving its jubilatory connotation, by its “invention of new rules” (Lyotard, 1984: 80), of “allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented” (Lyotard, 1984:81). Regarding Lyotard’s division, *Time’s Arrow* represent the mode of the postmodern. These two facets of modernity serve as critiques of representation – what is called by Lyotard “the ‘lack of reality’ of reality” (Lyotard, 1984: 77) – and “they often exist in the same piece, are almost indistinguishable; and yet they testify to a difference (différend) on which the fate of thought depends ...between regret and assay” (Lyotard, 1984: 80). The two versions of modernity are apparent in Amis’s book; the first one, outlining the chronological relation of Odilo Unverdorben’s life, evokes feelings of regret, whilst the second one, mirroring the

account of the protagonist's life backwards in order, induces feelings of jubilation which stem from the critique of conventional representation inherent in the postmodern sublime. These two modes are separated by a *différend*, defined by the critic "a case of conflict...that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a common rule of judgement" (Lyotard, 1991: 75). At this point, Amis draws the analogy between Lyotard's concept of the sublime and Vladimir Nabokov's *Black Farces*, pointing to: "the sublime directed at our fallen world of squalor, absurdity and talentlessness" (Amis, 1980: 76). Furthermore, the British author asserts that sublimity substitutes the notions of motivation and plot for those of obsession and destiny, and that it suspends moral judgement in favour of remorselessness. The paramount aspect of the sublime is the lack of any conclusion and rather it offers possibilities of pain and precariousness. Finally, Amis remarks that: "The sublime is a perverse mode, by definition. But there's art in its madness" (Amis, 1980: 77). All the facets of the sublime are clearly visible in *Time's Arrow*, out of which the replacement of plot and motivation with obsession and destiny, as well as pain and danger instead of a final resolution, which illustrate a marked departure from a classical detective story into a postmodern psychological novel.

Taking into consideration the Christian-philosophical facet of *Time's Arrow* one may draw the analogy between Amis's novel and Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*. Although these works are apparently dissimilar, the problem of guilt, atonement and ethical judgement remain the common themes of both the works. It is the motif of the recurring crime which permeates Amis's and O'Brien's novels. In the case of *The Third Policeman* we come across a singular murder committed by the protagonist and his accomplice and concomitantly the process of the victim's haunting the soul of the culprit. Contrary to it, in *Time's Arrow* one witnesses mass killing perpetrated by the Nazi war criminal whose doppelgänger, though being spiritually detached from the protagonist, constituting a separate self, enters Unverdorben's life and evokes poignant memories from his nefarious past that Odilo endeavours to erase. Both O'Brien's and Amis's works deal with the aspect of guilt, remorse and atonement. The former depicts the protagonist undertaking his journey from life to death and in his posthumous lifetime he becomes persecuted by his resurrected victim, suffers pangs of remorse, anxiety, agony, is shortly subjected to psychological tortures and undergoes existential and metaphysical torments at the police station, and finally returns to life to haunt his murderer and simultaneously accomplice. Contrastingly, Martin Amis delineates the

roots of evil, the criminal life of the Nazi doctor viewed antichronologically by his double who narrates the events, starting from Odilo's demise, following his war murderous experiments and concluding with his birth. Despite the fact that Unverdorben's doppelgaenger is mentally and emotionally detached from the protagonist, he actually persecutes the war murderer by going back to his past and by recounting Odilo's heinous crime activity. The author purposefully employs time-reversed structure which reflects the paradox of Holocaust and the absurd reality in order to stress on the one hand, the ludicrousness of the Nazi ideology, the social consent for mass murder and the ignorance, all the more disrespect for the extermination of Jews expressed by a considerable part of post-war society. The atrocity of homicide, the inhumane treatment of victims, their humiliation and the problem of guilt and penance constitute common motifs in Amis's and O'Brien's works.

Besides a philosophical side of *Time's Arrow* and *The Third Policeman*, one ought to take into account their metaphysical and ontological dimension. In Flan O'Brien's work human existence epitomises bedlam, delusion and "an hallucination containing in itself the secondary hallucinations of day and night" (O'Brien 5). Life as delirium and illusion is compared to death which is called "the supreme hallucination" (O'Brien 5). While reading the text we cannot see the border between life and after-life. In fact, the main character makes a perilous journey from earthly life through death which stands for a raging inferno and where there are no rules and restraints towards his prior lifetime in order to come back again to hell with his accomplice. In comparison with O'Brien's book *Time's Arrow* presents the protagonist's life-span from death to birth and instead of the vision of inferno after life we witness the hellish facet of mankind. What unites both the novels is the question concerning the sense of human existence and the purpose of life on earth.

Lastly, the metaphysical reading of *Time's Arrow* is closely linked with its cosmological aspect in which the relation between time and space come to the fore. In order to understand fully the significance of the very title of Amis's book one should scrutinise the scientific and philosophical aspect of the universe with reference to A. S. Eddington's interpretation of the second law of thermodynamics. The British astrophysicist employs the phrase 'time's arrow' "to express this one-way property of time which has no analogy in space. It is a singularly interesting property from a philosophical standpoint; We must note that - ...(1) it is vividly recognised by consciousness...(2) It is equally insisted on by our reasoning faculty, which tells us that

a reversal of the arrow would render the external world nonsensical... (quoted in Tredell 149). Eddington asserts that the directionality of time which stems from the rise of entropy, that is the energy which is scattered and not recoverable for use, is inextricably linked with our awareness of ourselves in the world verified by human reason and based upon the fact that there are manifold parts to be organised or disordered (Tredell 149). The intimate relation between time and consciousness and the assumption that our knowledge of the external world is indirect mirror the philosophical and psychological dimension of physics. When set beside our erroneous perception of space as stable and solid, our internal, personal experience with time renders it essentially inscrutable and impenetrable.

Taking 'time's arrow' as a point of departure, Martin Amis's work appears to confirm Brian McHale's hypothesis that the shift from modernist to postmodernist literature epitomises the alteration from an epistemological dominant to an ontological one. According to Eddington questions of space (How can we know about the universe when our knowledge of it is rudimentary and uncertain?) concerns epistemology whilst questions of time (What is the nature of our sense of endurance in time?) are purely ontological. 'Time's arrow' constitutes the link between temporality and subjectivity, physics and consciousness. As Amis indicates: "time is the human dimension, which makes us everything we are"(quoted in Tredell 150). In his work the author delineates time's arrow which moves in the opposite direction; in this respect he sanctions the connection between time and awareness even as he reverses the arrow. The crucial factor of *Time's Arrow* is the rebellion of the narrator's consciousness and his reason against the nonsense of the world perceived antichronologically.

In conclusion, Martin Amis's novel constitutes a thought-provoking work illustrating the roots of evil, the demise of modern civilisation and the preposterous reality by means of the experimental narrative technique. Despite the fact that *Time's Arrow* contains the elements of detective fiction, such as the acts of homicide, the figure of a criminal and victims, the book is hardly to be classified as a typical crime story. Rather, it represents a psychological, philosophical and metaphysical dimension of mass murder, the nature of the offence, the life, in particular, the psyche of the perpetrator viewed chronologically backward by his double-goer. In the conversation with the author of the present thesis on 6th December, 2010, Amis claimed that he purposefully employs the time-reversed narrative structure not merely as a form of his literary experimentation and linguistic innovation through which his work is perceived by some

critics and theorists but above all as a way of exhibiting Nazi's perverse ideology. Moreover, *Time's Arrow* is a postmodern intertextual novel made up of a mosaic of references to such literary works as Robert Jay Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* or Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* – here the British author employs time-reversed narration partially modeling on the fragment of Vonnegut's book which depicts the scene during which the protagonist watches backwards a movie of American bombers recovering their bombs from a German city in flames. Martin Amis acknowledges also his debt to Vladimir Nabokov and Saul Bellow, mostly in terms of the ironic mode, emphasising that it is thanks to this style that readers are able to make a complete critical assessment of the novel. Paralleling these two American writers, the British author points out that the ironic narrative mode, not the narrative form or perspective, stands for judgement, ethics and morality. Finally, *Time's Arrow* could be regarded as postmodern historical fiction which declines perceptions of history as deterministic and stable in favour of interpretations of history as equivocal and aleatory.

The four parts of the chapter have outlined manifold interpretations and approaches to Amis's three novels, prevailingly with reference to metaphysical detective fiction, existential and philosophical literature. In the initial section the attention was focused on *London Fields*, largely on its confrontation with a classical detective story, the redefinition and reassessment of Todorov's *The Typology of Detective Fiction*; the ensuing two parts were devoted to the scrutiny of *Night Train* juxtaposed with Auster's *The New York Trilogy* taking into consideration the aspects of cosmology, metaphysics and metafictionality; finally, I examined *Time's Arrow* on account of its artistic innovation, the author's experimentation with a narrative form, perspective and mode as well as with respect to a philosophical and existential dimension of the novel. Regardless of miscellaneous facets of Amis's three works, the emphasis was placed on the depiction of the writer's experimentation with traditional crime fiction and on the demonstration of the affinity between his books and a metaphysical detective story on the one hand, and an existential and philosophical-historical novel on the other hand.

Chapter 3: Acts of creation or annihilation? – authorial murder and narratees’ victimisation in Martin Amis’s fiction

Although according to some critics, most notably Brian Finney, Martin Amis is not regarded as a crime writer, death, torture and victimisation are recurrent themes in his fiction. It happens not only owing to the ruthless, inhuman facet of contemporary civilisation but largely on account of the nature of the narrative act (Finney, “Narrative”: 1995). In the majority of his novels, mainly *Dead Babies*, *London Fields*, *Time’s Arrow*, *Other People* and *Night Train*, the use of violence against one or some of the characters is inextricably linked with the appearance in the narrative of the narrator in person. This characteristically postmodern literary device betokens the ambivalent role played by any narrator, since the one who narrates a story creates and simultaneously annihilates characters. Amis refers to his books as “playful literature” (Neustatter 71) and considers himself “a comic writer interested in painful matters” (Smith 79). The writer’s predilection for homicide and brutality could be attributed to his being brought up during the Cold War with its perennial threat of nuclear disaster. When finding himself in a world on the brink of ecological catastrophe, Amis asserts that “it isn’t a set purpose to make this life look frightful. It is, to the writer, self-evidently frightful” (Haffenden 7). The author points out that in the postmodern world the novelist can no longer be preoccupied with penalising bad characters and rewarding good ones. At the same time, he maintains that the writer is not devoid of sadistic impulses, yet he does not mean genuine sadism as he does not treat his characters in the same way as real people. Nevertheless, according to Amis the author, in ruthlessly manipulating his characters in order to achieve his aims, indirectly takes part in the ferocity of the age in which he lives (Finney, “Narrative”: 1995).

It stems from the above that Martin Amis examines in his novels the equivocal relationship between a writer and the characters whom he tortures and humiliates. As a typical postmodern writer he is incapable of putting in order life’s random nature to fit an established moral order and instead presents his characters with black sense of humour. He points out that “the writer is in a god-like relation to what he creates”

(quoted in Finney, “Narrative”: 1995) and thus he introduces his substitute self, the narrator, into the action thanks to which he enables his readers to participate in the process of narrative creation and to share with him the role he is supposed to play as a novelist. As a result, we are encouraged to perform the part of god and to murder the writer’s protagonists for his and our pleasure. Amis induces his reading public, similarly to a theatre audience, to recognise their concurrent engrossment in and exteriority in the action. It is worth noticing that the writer’s belief in the hegemonic position of the author-creator and in his/her narrative omnipotence contradicts the standpoints of other postmodern novelists, pre-eminently Julian Barnes. Unlike Amis’s view on the writer’s supremacy over their creative act, Barnes highlights in *Flaubert’s Parrot* the essence of the very process of writing which renders the author insignificant and obsolete: “Why does the writing make us chase the writer? Why can’t we leave well alone? Why aren’t the books enough?” (Barnes 12). Referring to Gustave Flaubert’s works, the British writer asserts that: “...his books naturally had their own life – responses to them weren’t responses to him” (Barnes 16). Amis’s novels, mainly those written in his initial and middle literary phases (*Dead Babies, Success, Other People, Money*), exhibit a striking contrast to Barnes’s approach to literature and his perception of an artist and a creative act.

When set beside classic realist novels which make their readers aware of the artificiality of the fictional world, Amis, as a metafictional postmodernist, encourages us to maintain an equilibrium or dialogue between the two perspectives – that of the character(s), and that of the godlike author’s fictional embodiment, the narrator (Finney, “Narrative”: 1995).

3.1. Writing as an act of crime: hell, alienation, estrangement and double identity in Martin Amis’s *Other People*

Life is hell, life is murder, but then death is very lifelike. Death is terribly easy to believe.
(Martin Amis: *Other People: A Mystery Story*)

The leading themes of Martin Amis’s fourth novel are the depiction of the protagonist’s descent into hell and the exploration of her double identity. The book

delineates existential riddles of time, memory, sexual identity, evil and death. The first part of the title alludes to Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No-Exit*, with its well-known expression "hell is other people." *Other People: A Mystery Story* depicts a modern inferno, a moral degradation of contemporary society to which the female character is condemned and in which she is gradually forced to rediscover her debased earlier self (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). The novel reflects the protagonist's inscrutable journey from the innocent Mary Lamb towards the diabolical Amy Hide, which outlines the process of her transformation from innocence to experience. Mary Lamb regards Amy Hide as a separate self, as another person, and hence her travel to hell constitutes her encounter with a stranger. The protagonist feels deranged and disorientated when descending into her internal inferno in which she is coerced into exploring her dark secret and this is highlighted by her inertia, in particular her linguistic amnesia and deviation. Mary views the world and people from an alien standpoint and her language is at variance with logic and rational thinking.

Martin Amis purposefully presents the protagonist's deformed speech employing a special technique known as the "Martian School of Poetry" by means of which he experiments with language, imagery and point of view. In order to fully understand the enigmatic narrative structure of *Other People* one ought to refer to Amis's poem "Point of View" that underscores the impact of the "Martian School" upon the subject matter and the techniques of the author's fourth novel. The poem, published a year prior to the appearance of the book, reappears in prose form in his work:

If you don't feel a little mad sometimes
Then I think you must be out of mind.
No one knows what to do. Clichés are true.
Everything depends on your point of view. (Amis, "Point": 954)

The poem, in particular its above-quoted final stanza heralds blurring the boundaries between "normal" and "deviant," as well as denaturalises or defamiliarises a conventional interpretation of the novel. When set beside Amis's "Point of View," Christopher Reid's poem "A Martian Sends a Postcard Home" illustrates the process of estrangement and furtherly emphasises the importance of a free contemplation devoid of ulterior motive and yearning for the most implausible revelations:

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
and rests its soft machine on ground:
then the world is dim and bookish
like engravings under tissue paper.
Rain is when the earth is television.
It has the property of making colours darker.

In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
that snores when you pick it up.
If the ghost cries, they carry it
to their lips and soothe it to sleep
with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
deliberately, by tickling with a finger. (quoted in Diedrick 60)

The two above citations of early weather patterns viewed by the alien and the Martian's encounter with the telephone mirror Mary Lamb/ Amy Hide's weird subjective observation of the world. Martin Amis delineates the protagonist's amnesia and lethargy accentuating individual consciousness on the one hand and calling the readers' attention to the process of the narrative control and subjugation of the female character on the other hand.

Taking into account the former aspect, one should refer to the narrator's depiction of Mary, the person who is "Not yet stretched by time, her perceptions are without seriality: they are multiform, instantaneous and random, like the present itself. She can do some things that you can't do. Glance sideways down an unknown street and what you see: an aggregate of shapes, figures and light, and the presence of movement? Mary sees a window and a face behind it, the greed of the paving-stones and the rake of the drainpipes, the way the distribution of the shadows answers to the skyscape above" (Amis, *OP*: 56). As the critic observes, Mary/Amy's perception of the world from an alien standpoint parallels not only her Martian predecessor but also evokes British Romantic poetic tradition to which Amis has acknowledged his indebtedness, specifically to Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. Diedrick draws the analogy between miscellaneous excerpts from *Other People* and Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. He refers to Coleridge's description of the afore-mentioned Romantic poet as the one who largely contributed to their collaborative volume of poetry and who sought

to: “give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand” (quoted in Diedrick 61).

The American critic juxtaposes Wordsworth’s poetic theory, in particular the combination of the customary and extraordinary, and Martin Amis’s delineation of Mary Lamb’s mental state at the outset of the novel in which the protagonist leaves the hospital and instantly confronts her internal anxiety created by her encounter with the urban mystery of London, which results in removing the above-mentioned film of the familiar:

Not too far above the steep canyons there had hung an imperial backdrop of calm and blue distance, in which extravagantly lovely white creatures – fat, sleepy things – hovered, cruised and basked. Carelessly and painlessly lanced by the slow-moving crucifixes of the sky, they moreover owed allegiance to a stormy yellow core of energy, so irresistible that it had the power to hurt your eyes if you dared to look its way. (Amis, *OP*: 18-19)

The above citation illustrates Mary’s stupefied amazement with ordinary things associated with urban landscape and nature, such as skyscrapers, clouds, jet planes or the sun. When set beside average people who take these objects for granted, Amis’s character sees them as if for the first time. Due to her loss of memory Mary’s mind turns into the state of *tabula rasa* and hence she attributes unique and peculiar qualities to the objects and phenomena of everyday life. The same holds true for the woman’s astonishment at the human body. However, the moment when the protagonist recognises her physique she turns from Mary into Amy and this reflects her transformation from innocence into experience. As regards “free contemplation” of Mary Lamb’s perceptions of the customary things, one may draw some parallel between *Other People* and William Wordsworth’s philosophical premiss in the *Lyrical Ballads* in which the artist accentuates the inner, subjective pondering on the real world and the primacy of the intuition over the mind and intellect. Nonetheless, since the poet’s direct contemplation of everyday and mystical experience with quotidian objects and events largely attributes to nature and reveals his artistic creation and inspiration, Mary’s

amnesiac observation of the world, her emotional inertia and insecurity reveal the derangement and moral decay of contemporary society and urban culture. Added to that, the protagonist's life is unremittingly controlled by the narrator who plays the role of her lover and concomitantly her murderer. Hence, the affinity between *Other People*, particularly the issues of estrangement, individual consciousness and subjective perception of the world which parallel Wordsworth's poems and "Martian School of Poetry" seem, however, an unsatisfying criterion in full understanding of Amis's novel. Above all, one may benefit from scrutinising the protagonist's double identity, the existential mystery outlined in the novel, the weird relations between Mary/Amy and other characters, especially those between Amy and John Prince and the very notions of "otherness," internal inferno and narrative supervision.

Duality, doubleness and split personality remain recurrent motifs in Martin Amis's fiction. In the case of *Other People* the dichotomy between two dissimilar sides of human nature incarnated by Mary Lamb and Amy Hide is a crucial factor of the novel revealing the protagonist's personal hell, her perpetual journey from life to death, or rather life-after-death, and simultaneously mirroring the woman's subjugation and victimisation by the narrator and the author. At first sight, Mary/Amy's double identity, the interplay of good and evil recalls Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, yet contrary to the male Victorian character who voluntarily and purposefully carries out a perilous scientific experiment on himself, Amis's protagonist is unceasingly subjected to the sadistic drives of her demon-lover, John Prince, as well as of her creator, the author of the book. Accordingly, the woman epitomises the object of the writer's creative act rather than an individual autonomous character of the story. Martin Amis relentlessly implies via his language and style that Mary/Amy's life is almost entirely shaped, constructed and manipulated by the narrator. Paradoxically enough, the protagonist appears to acquiesce in her fate, all the greater to get attracted to and mesmerised by her oppressor. As Amy Hide, she is bound to fall prey to her lover of her own volition, which is confirmed by her sister: "You said you loved him so much you wouldn't mind if he killed you" (Amis, *OP*: 172). As the novel unfolds, we witness the character's demise and it becomes apparent that John contributed to her death. Amis frequently provides significant clues to the illustration of the dual role of Amy's murderer who simultaneously embodies Prince Charming and the Prince of Darkness and who participates in the story and at the same time flees from the confines of the text in order to torture and eventually kill his character. The protagonist is entirely defenceless and

reliant on her persecutor. As Amy, she feels an irresistible attraction to John and concomitantly becomes his victim whilst in her life-after-death as Mary she is detached from her dismal past on account of having lost her memory as a result of which she gets awed and dazed by her perceptions of the moment. Mary Lamb's mind is blank, devoid of any recollections from her prior lifetime, especially those concerning her relations with Mr Prince which contributes to her inertia, lifelessness and mental derangement. Doomed to live after death or in death, she soon becomes a natural victim of Trev's sadistic sexual proclivities. Together with the sex scene, Amy Hide's experience is concurrently evoked by the narrator who is held accountable for exposing Mary to pain and suffering she undergoes from Trev's ruthless sexual exploitation of her physique. What seems crucial, however, is the narrator's unwillingness to intervene in the action and his involvement in the sadistic treatment of the protagonist (Finney, "Narrative": 1995).

It stems from the above that Mary/Amy's split personality constitutes a frame of reference for an astute observation of gender relations in crime literature on the one hand and of an in-depth analysis of the role of the narrator and the narrative act in a literary text on the other hand. Bearing in mind the former aspect of *Other People*, it is hard not to notice Amis's work's affinity with the British gothic literary tradition, in particular with the late 18th century horrors and 19th century mystery stories. In terms of the classical mystery stories' opposition between male and female characters, the former being associated with villainy and ferocity, whereas the latter with innocence, fragility and subjugation, *Other People* bears some resemblance to such novels as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, M. G. Lewis's *The Monk*, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* or Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre*, to name but a few.

Needless to say, Amis's portrayal of Mary Lamb/Amy Hide, her complex personality and double identity, exceeds the confines of the classical depiction of female characters in the afore-mentioned Romantic and Victorian detective and mystery stories and so the relationship between Amy and Prince do not closely mirror a binary opposition between male and female figures in the 18th and 19th century crime novels. As was previously indicated Mary/Amy's split personality evokes the duality of human nature depicted by Robert Louis Stevenson in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The innocent Mary is stoically brought by the narrator to recognise and rediscover within her self the diabolical Amy Hide concealing herself there. Mary, embodying the Dr Jekyll figure of this book, notices Amy, her demonic alter-ego, Mr Hyde, sneaking in her reflection in the mirror.

“She is afraid that her life has in some crucial sense already run its course, that the life she moves through now is nothing more than another life’s reflection, its mirror, its shadow” (Amis, *OP*: 90). The protagonist has had to pass through the looking glass of death in order to confront her life in reverse. It takes her virtually the whole of the book to experience “the power to make feel bad” (Amis, *OP*: 109), the sensation of mastery and dominance over the others, the power that led Prince to murder her in life and that she eventually exercises over Jamie with such deleterious effect that she breaks through the mirror to her old self: “She was herself at last” (Amis, *OP*: 185). Mary/Amy’s duality could be interpreted from two angles. On a textual level, the female character is an independent person capable of moral choice and free will to discriminate good from evil, therefore her internal transformation, the oscillation between innocence and corruption reflects the woman’s individual choice. In an extratextual level, however, it is John the narrator who shapes and deliberately transforms the protagonist’s identity. As a skilful magician, manipulative psychologist, scientist and a gifted artist, he alternately creates and annihilates the protagonist and in this sense he himself, playing the role of Prince Charming and the Prince of Darkness, symbolises Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. In view of this, *Other People* constitutes a literary legacy of the doppelgänger fiction.

As was formerly remarked, the very title of the book brings into prominence the facet of otherness closely linked with the notion of inferno, both in its internal and external dimension. At this point, one may refer once more to Jean-Paul Sartre’s *No Exit* by juxtaposing and drawing a parallel between the French play and the British novel. In Sartre’s work “hell is other people,” which signifies that the characters are condemned to live after-life close together and their confinement to a tiny room constitutes their punishment in hell. It appears that the protagonists’ fiendish, tempestuous relationships betoken the hellish atmosphere of the play. This could be the primary reading of inferno of the French work. Needless to say, on closer inspection, one is prepared to concede that the image of Hell is a metaphor of the chronic suffering of individuals in quest for their identity and meaning in the eyes of others. Thus, people seem to be so reliant on one another that their existence is inextricably connected with and conditioned by the others. Such a viewpoint is upheld by Sartre himself who argues that people are too dependent on other people’s opinions of them. In the case of Garcin, Estelle and Inez it is the impossibility of forcing the truth about themselves, primarily of coming to terms with their cowardice, which constitutes their agony. What they expect from the others is

the negation of their misdeeds and their spiritual consolation. The characters' mutual interdependence is illustrated by Garcin's seeking in Inez the consolation or denial of that he is a coward, Estelle's yearning for Garcin's company and Inez's search for somebody who may participate in her sado-masochistic games. Strange as it may seem, Sartre's protagonists, doomed to lead their perpetual existence in hell close to one another, feeling apparently a deep-rooted mutual aversion and distrust, are incapable of liberating themselves from others' presence. Once they are given a chance of freeing themselves from their imprisonment, they cannot decide on leaving their confinement since they seem to get too afraid to face the unknown. They are prepared to acquiesce to their fiendish reciprocal relationship in hell rather than to experience freedom in isolation. Each of the characters staying in a hellish confined room realise that they can accept the truth about themselves exclusively with each other, thus their fates are intertwined. On account of the lack of mirrors in which to see themselves Garcin, Estelle and Inez are able to perceive themselves through the eyes of another person. Such self-realisation mingled with exacerbated tension are to haunt them enduringly since they can do nothing to expiate their crimes. In this regard the protagonists' penalty is to see their lives and their wickedness judged eternally by the others for all time.

When set beside Sartre's concept of hell, the ambiguity of its meaning, the emphasis being placed on Garcin's, Estelle's and Inez's ambivalent relations, the fact they are condemned to live together and tolerate one another on the one hand and their mutual interdependence on the other hand, in *Other People* we witness the protagonists' similar dilemma, though here, the inferno has its internal and external dimension. As Brian Finney remarks, Mary and Amy are two incarnations of one person, even though they are entirely different, therefore for the innocent Mary Lamb the demonic Amy Hide stands for the eponymous other people and vice versa. Not being conscious of the existence of her other self due to her amnesia, apathy and spiritual inertia, Mary regards Amy's world, her life, customs, and primarily her relations with men as anomalous and deviant, associating them with the contemporary inferno. Nevertheless, the lifetime of the former is conditioned by the existence of the latter – Mary is doomed to lead a sluggish, lethargic life after death as a form of atonement for the sins and misdeeds committed by Amy during her time on earth, and what is more, the process of dying, redemption and rebirth is to reiteratively affect them both till the final pages of the novel. Mary Lamb and Amy Hide make one person and their fates are intertwined despite that both of them remain unaware of their separate existence. This internal

aspect of inferno constitutes a frame of reference for the exploration of its external side. The protagonist's inner crisis and tribulation, seemingly brought about by splitting her personality reflect, in fact, her weird, tempestuous relationship with Jamie and, above all, with John Prince. Following Sartre's concept of hell, one may draw some parallel between *No Exit* and *Other People*. We can easily notice that Mary inflicts intense suffering on Alan which consequently contributes to his suicide. Likewise, Amy uses her devastating power on Jamie. In both of the cases the protagonist consciously or subconsciously tortures her male companions as if being driven by the unknown external force. In this regard she is hell to others. Nonetheless, Mary/Amy is not an entirely autonomous character. On the one hand, her destiny lies in the hands of Mr Prince, being, by turn, her saviour and tyrant. Here, she falls prey to John's sadistic inclinations. On the other hand, as a fictional character, the woman is expertly manoeuvred by Prince the narrator who casts the protagonist into hell that the book's title alludes to and subsequently transforms Mary into Amy for the second time as a form of artistic experimentation and demonstration of his detective story writer skills. After a more in-depth examination of these male-female relations, it is tempting to suggest that Mary/Amy's apparent subjection to John Prince, her incessant submission, indignity, recurrent death, rebirth and atonement turn out to be her persecutor's imprisonment and a hidden pitfall. In matter of fact, Prince, being both the protagonist and the narrator, gets unintentionally caught in his own web, entangled in the stormy relationship with the woman whose behaviour turns out to be utterly erratic to him. In consequence, the more control and power he strives to exert on his lover-victim the more powerless he becomes himself and the more reliant on her he remains. This holds true particularly for the closing pages of the novel in which we are left with the early image of the protagonist as an innocent yet triumphant Mary who has overcome her succeeding demise, overwhelmed her oppressor and thus extricated herself from her infamous past. As Brian Finney observes, as a narrator, Mr Prince falls prey to his art, becomes locked up in his own fiction and confined in the hellish world to which he condemned his female character. According to the critic the narrator's destiny lies in the hands of a reformed Mary who can liberate him from his guilt at having terminated her life. Nevertheless, Mary's final appearance in *Other People* symbolises an unpredictable ending and heralds "a refusal of narrative closure with a vengeance" (Finney, "Narrative": 1995).

The act of violence, victimisation, the character's imprisonment and the attempt of artistic homicide are omnipresent in Amis's novel but such elements also permeate Paul Auster's books, in particular *The New York Trilogy* and *Travels in the Scriptorium*. Taking into account the artistic aspect of murder, the equivocal relations between the protagonist, the narrator and the author as well as the role and involvement of the reader in the text, one could notice some parallel between *Other People* and *Travels in the Scriptorium*. What may strike the reader's attention at first glance is Auster's and Amis's characters' displacement and disorientation. Both Mr Blank and Mary Lamb are totally unaware of their nefarious past and thus become oblivious to their double identity. As the stories unfold, more and more startling and frightful facts about the protagonists are revealed. Needless to say, on following the plots and vicissitudes of both Mr Blank and Mary, one cannot fail to notice that they become adroitly manipulated by the narrator and the author. In *Travels in the Scriptorium* Mr Blank is locked up in a tiny room and his life is confined to nourishing food and liquids, taking pills and writing a diary. Apart from the last activity which seemingly gives the protagonist the illusion of freedom the rest indicate his subjugation to some recondite medical and scientific experiments. As a character, he is the prisoner of some unknown person or people and remains gradually obedient to the instructions issued by the people who regularly visit him: a nurse, an ex-cop and a doctor. All of them relentlessly interrupt the protagonist in perusing the diary of the former detainee by keeping asking the man about his "operatives." It shortly turns out that both the visitors and operatives are all characters from Auster's previous novels.

It stems from the above that there are two kinds of imprisonment displayed in *Travels in the Scriptorium*. On the one hand, the protagonist becomes adeptly manipulated, even mesmerised by other characters of the story and concurrently tortured by the author and subjected to his sophisticated artistic experiments. It is the writer who wields absolute power over the man and shapes his destiny: "Mr Blank may have acted cruelly toward some of his charges over the years, but not one of us thinks he hasn't done everything in his power to serve us well. That is why I plan to keep him where he is. The room is his world now, and the longer the treatment goes on, the more he will come to accept the generosity of what has been done for him. Mr Blank is ill and enfeebled, but as long as he remains in the room with the shuttered and the locked door, he can never die, never disappear, never be anything but the words I am writing on this page" (Auster, 2007: 118).

From the above citation it emerges that Mr Blank is merely a tool in the author's and simultaneously narrator's creative process, and as long as the story is being recounted his presence is indispensable whilst the moment the novel draws to its close his role becomes diminished and his days are numbered. On the other hand, it is hard not to notice that the protagonist incarnates a creator and liquidator himself, he embodies Auster's alter-ego who sees but does not recognise in his deluded nightmarish world people from the past – the characters who are brought to life, shaped and ultimately executed for art's sake and for the audience's pleasure. All the personas resent him and therefore haunt him despite his efforts to deracinate them from his memory. His surname and lack of the first name suggest that the protagonist's brain is bereft of any recollections from his past due to his inability or refusal to recognise the identity of the visitors and operatives.

There is no denying that both Mary Lamb and Mr Blank play ambivalent roles in Amis's and Auster's novels. Being interminably chased and persecuted by their narrator and author-oppressors, they apparently exercise control over the remaining characters who fall prey to their tyranny. More importantly, in the case of *Other People* it remains an open question whether Mary constitutes a genuine victim to John Prince or rather his persecutor. At the end of the Epilogue the Prince figure and simultaneously narrator is taken by surprise when encountering Mary since he is convinced he entirely dominated the woman's life. Some critics, among others John Haffenden, remark that the narrator ceased to regard Mary Lamb as a human being but rather as an "automaton-like" creature who did not realise what was happening round her (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). In keeping with this, we are led to believe that by the end of the narrative the near omniscient narrator remains as much in the power of the female character he has been so far tyrannising as she was under his dominance earlier. This assumption is confirmed by Prince himself who states, "I'm not in control any more, not this time" (Amis, *OP*: 207). Mary's fortuitous appearance in the concluding chapter is tantamount to her liberation from the confines of the narrative text and her unacceptance to perform a passive role in Prince's scenario. Such an unforeseen denouement of the story in which the protagonist manages to get out of the narrative control and in which the narrator turns out to be a prisoner of his own fiction could be visible in Amis's other novels, most notably in *Money*. This is not the case, however, of *Travel in the Scriptorium* where the author makes it evident that he controls every move of the protagonist who is a mere puppet in his hands. Mr Blank performs the role of a writer in the novel but his

writing process is apparently supervised by the remaining characters of the story on the one hand and he, as a character figure, is unsolicitedly or unwillingly subjected to the dictates of a genuine author of the book. In this respect one may pose a few crucial questions: Who is truly in charge of the creative process: the artist or the art? Is writing a captivity (Mr Blank appears entrapped in his room) or is it a paradise (he is nourished, dressed-up and sexually serviced by one of his nurses)? Does truth really exist, or are there only the fabrications of imprudent writers?

The above questions lead us succeedingly to another one concerning the position of the reader in the process of storytelling. As for *Other People*, the author overtly invites the readers to participate in his intellectual game and to share with him his apprehension at the role he is expected to play as novelist. When scrutinising Amis's book we come across the writer's direct references to the audience, primarily noticeable in every chapter except the first and the final four making up Part Three in which the narrator addresses the reader in the second person (Finney, "Narrative": 1995). These sections indubitably make readers ponder about any theme that has governed the anterior action and to acknowledge their own complicity in it. Consequently, his readers are recurrently withdrawn from the text by a meditative narrator only for him to take them back to the action by compelling them to recognise the correspondence between whatever action the narrator has been recounting and their own experiences (Finney, "Narrative": 1995).

Such an analogy is illustrated in chapter seven in which Mary enters a Church-Army Hostel for Young Women where everybody has taken a smash to be there and simultaneously the narrator asks us: "Have you ever taken a smash in your time?" (Amis, *OP*: 66) and instantly offers advice which minutely adds to our knowledge about him: "If you see a smash coming and can't keep out of the way – don't break. Because if you do, nothing will ever put you back together again. I've taken a big one and I know. Nothing. Ever" (*OP*: 66). In depicting his own descent into hell Prince the narrator is additionally sending us back to the action of which he constitutes a mystical part. It is the readers who are forced back into the narration to ascertain whether John Prince's fall is engaged in Mary's fall preceding her loss of memory. Thanks to such metafictional recesses we are not alienated from the story but instead constitute a fundamental ingredient of narration (Finney, "Narrative": 1995).

As far as *Travels in the Scriptorium* is concerned, the role of the reader is by and large vital, constituting the third element of the story and an intermediary between the author and the protagonists, yet it is not as visible at first glance as in *Other People*. In

fact, the audience of Auster's work could be divided into two categories identified with two reading experiences. The first group constitute regular readers of all Auster's previous novels, his narrative technique and style, whilst the second one consist of those who are not thoroughly acquainted with all his oeuvre. *Travels in the Scriptorium*, analogously to the writer's prior works, principally to *The New York Trilogy*, is a metafictional game between the author and the readers which is satiated with metaphysical riddles, booby traps or mystical clues, whose aim is to seemingly disorientate the reader but also to compel him/her to actively participate in a narrative text and to decode the hidden meaning of certain objects, phenomena and characters' names that recurrently appear in the majority of works of the American novelist. Correspondingly, people unfamiliar with Auster's oeuvre are not invited to the intellectual feast arranged by the artist since without the recognition of such telling names as Fanshawe and the incapability to recollect the relationships between characters, they are devoid of genuine reading entertainment and cannot derive great pleasure from taking part, together with the author, in the process of manipulating and torturing the narratee.

Highlighting the role of the reading public in the narrative acts of the hitherto-mentioned Amis's and Auster's novels, one should anew turn to the analysis of the narrative process of storytelling, taking *Other People* as a point of departure. As was stated before, homicide and victimisation are omnipresent in Amis's oeuvre largely on account of the very nature of the narrative act. In *Other People* the prevalence of violence against one or a few characters is accompanied by the introduction into the narrative of the intradiegetic narrator who offers his observations to the audience on the action and plot as well as at times gives metafictional remarks on the narrative act in which he is involved (Finney 2008: 124). Amis's employment of a narrator in this novel and authorial stand-ins in his other works create manifold levels of narrative. John Prince occupies the privileged position in the narrative when confronted with other characters of the story, yet he stands beneath the author-characters who appear in *Rachel Papers*, *Dead Babies* or *Money*. Being associated with the so-called metadiegetic level of narration (Finney 2008: 124), Prince the narrator is set in his own narrative whereas the rest of the protagonists with Mary Lamb in the forefront produce their own written narrative text that provide a fourth level of narration. Amis plays ceaseless sophisticated games the manner in which these miscellaneous levels of narration are related to one another and so he interacts with the reader, allowing him/her

to recognise his/her role in the narrative act and to share with him the controlling power of storytelling.

As the British writer asserted in one of the interviews, “I’m all for this intense relationship with the reader. I really want the reader in there [...] I really want him close” (Morrison 98). All the same, in *Other People* the audience is implicated in a more sinister and malevolent way. Here, the narrator is fully aware of his guilt and concomitantly endeavours to spread his culpability to the female protagonist. By doing so, he implies that we, the readers, are so much accountable for violence and savagery as the narrator since we witness and simultaneously participate in Mary Lamb/Amy Hide’s literary murder, thus becoming “both spectators of the action and aiders and abettors of the murdering author/narrator” (Finney, “Narrative”: 1995). The readers’ dual role closely reflects the equivocal function of Prince the narrator who once plays the role of Mary/Amy’s policeman-lover, her Prince Charming, embodying the woman’s saviour, and some other time he epitomises Prince of Darkness, acting as her destroyer and her reiterate killer. As Brian Finney observes, John Prince, being an ambiguous narrator and participant in the story, continually lectures the reader, addressing him/her in the second person:

Alan and Mary...’Alan and Mary’. *Alan and Mary* – as a team. Well, how would *you* rate their chances?
(Amis, *OP*: 70)

Alan thinks that other stuff was bad. He thinks that other stuff was bad as stuff could get. He’s wrong. You wait.
(Amis, *OP*: 128)

The two above citations suggest that in his narration Amis appeals to the reader, noticeably by italicizing “*you*,” but additionally he engages the audience in the narrative by determining their role and the position of superior knowledge to that of the characters except for Prince as narrator who claims to be in entire control of everyone’s destiny and can speculate about future events. Nonetheless, as was formerly remarked, John Prince fails to retain his leading position and controlling power as the story draws to its close, and reverts to his prior role as the policeman figure who simply participates in the plot and no longer narrates the story. This shift of Prince’s position finally leads us to the issue concerning the very function of the storyteller in postmodern fiction and

to the question whether at the metafictional level the narrator gets inexorably restrained by the dictates of his own narration.

In view of the above it can be inferred that *Other People* mirrors, on the one hand, the ferocious, malevolent nature of present-day civilisation and a dismal existential vision of the society at the turn of the third millennium but, on the other hand, it raises a puzzling question about the quintessence of the narrative act in postmodern detective fiction. Speaking of the former facet, the novel gradually explores varieties of “otherness” which is frequently related to the protagonist’s literal estrangement, disorientation and personal hell whilst in a metaphysical sense it stands for that of Amis’s generation (Diedrick 66). Mary/Amy’s emotional and moral “downward mobility” influences the most privileged and affluent groups of people aged roughly between 20 and 30. The author apparently draws the analogy between his own generation and Mary/Amy who seemed to have lost touch with the past and whose life revolves round the seven deadly sins listed by the author: “venality, paranoia, insecurity, excess, carnality, contempt, boredom” (Amis, *OP*: 195). Furthermore, the very title of the book may refer to a woman and thus mirrors gender relations, the male/female dichotomy (Amy Hide vs Martin Hiding) and a male perception of a woman. Martin Amis depicts in *Other People* the dilemmas of alienation, dislocation, mutual callousness and a highly subjective seeing of the reality, referring to or quoting other literary texts, among others, the afore-mentioned Jean Paul-Sartre’s *No Exit*, William Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* and, above all, Craig Raine’s and Christopher Reid’s poems representing the “Martian School of Poetry.” As for the latter, metafictional side of *Other People*, Martin Amis excels at manipulating his protagonists, narrator, and simultaneously masterly implicates the reader in the process of storytelling, making him/her become the participant in, all the more the accomplice of his literary homicide, violence towards and victimisation of the narratees and of the narrator.

3.2. Violence, manipulation, sadism and autonomy in the process of writing and reading of *Dead Babies*, *Success* and *Money*

What the reader should do is identify with the writer. You try and see what the writer is up to, what the writer is arranging, and what the writer's point is. Identify with the art, not the people.

(Martin Amis: "The Wit and the Fury of Martin Amis" by Susan Morrison)

As a typical postmodern writer, Martin Amis has redefined and subverted traditional fictional elements, such as time, voice, characterisation and motivation, which have been corrupted by the twentieth century. He has reevaluated the novel as a form and has discovered an art form in the literature of decay and the revitalised anti-novel. This could be applicable especially to the detective fiction in which the British author focuses on the exploration of the highly ambiguous relationship between the writer and the characters whom he repeatedly manipulates, tortures, humiliates and finally executes, inviting simultaneously the readers to participate in and take pleasure from his murderous game. Furthermore, Amis communicates with his audience not through the plot and characterisation but via his style which constitutes the key to understanding the essence of his works.

In the three novels to be scrutinised in this section, *Dead Babies*, *Success* and *Money*, death, homicide, violence and victimisation are omnipresent, yet not all of them fall into the category of crime fiction. In *Dead Babies* the author depicts most explicitly and vividly crime, violence, the process of juvenile degeneration and moral decay. Contrastingly, in *Success* death and murder lie in the background whereas the authorial manipulation of the characters and the reader come to the fore. Last but not least, *Money* reflects an adroit yet uneven duel between an author and a narrator on the one hand, and a cunning metafictional game between a writer and a reader on the other hand. Despite these thematic and structural dissimilarities, all the three books mirror acts of crime, humiliation and manipulation inside and outside the multilayered, poliphonic narrative texts.

Dead Babies, originally titled *Dark Secrets*, constitutes Amis's aspiring experiment with two literary genres - crime fiction and satire - as well as his inventive operation of point of view and voice. At the core of this riveting generic medley lie the equivocal relationship between the author, narrator and characters, which helps us to understand a significant role of the reader in the process of creating the narrative text and bearing responsibility for the protagonists' fate on the one hand and the artist's linguistic acuteness and superfluity that illustrate precisely the country-house carnage on the other hand. Regarding the second aspect of the novel, one cannot fail to notice Ballard's and Burroughs's influence on Amis, prevailing on his depiction of the visionary nightmarish post-humanist world saturated with "spectral rhetoric, drug withdrawal, urban breakdown and rampant vandalism" (Amis, *WAC*: 301). Likewise, Amis's protagonists bear close resemblance to the characters in Ballard's works, primarily in his short-story collection, *Vermillion Sands*, in their "directionless, futile with the sullen corruption of boredom and affluence" (quoted in Finney, 2008: 39). Amis's affinity with Burroughs and especially with Ballard is highly visible in his crude, brutish, salacious portrayal of juvenile hedonists addicted to drugs, obscene rage, ferocity, inflicting pain and humiliating others. Paradoxically enough, Quentin Villiers, one of the main characters of the story, initially associated with rationality, intellect, cultural refinement, ethics and morality conclusively turns out to incarnate the worst human instincts; he becomes a genuine monster of perversion and rapacity (Tredell 33). Villiers's concoction of reasonable and instinctual, stability and bedlam, morality and debauchery do not only mirror the dualism of human nature identified prevailing with Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde but first and foremost symbolise the nightmarish chaos of the contemporary world. *Dead Babies* to a large extent reflects Ballardian vision of the hallucinatory postmodern world:

The marriage of reason and nightmare that has dominated the 20th century has given birth to an ever more ambiguous novel. Across the communications landscape move the spectres of sinister technologies and the dreams that money can buy. Thermo-nuclear weapon systems and soft-drink commercials coexist in an overlit realm ruled by advertising and pseudo-events, science and pornography. Over our lives preside the great twin leitmotifs of the 20th century – sex and paranoia. (Ballard 4)

In matter of fact, sex, pornography, menacing technology, overwhelming mass-media and consumerism became dominant themes in Martin Amis's subsequent novels, primarily in *Money* and *Information*, yet Ballardian gruesome, macabresque depiction of the contemporary reality probably best illustrates the atmosphere of *Dead Babies*. Taking into consideration the very subject matter of Amis's work, some critics, among others Gavin Keulks and Brien Finney, endeavour to trace the analogy between *Dead Babies* and Kingsley Amis's *Ending Up*. The most recognisable parallel between Martin and Kingsley Amis is their experimentation with the country house novel and its parodic intertextual revaluation (Keulks, 2003: 134). In terms of humour, these two novels are rather contradictory, the former marking the features of the Menippean satire, whilst the latter remaining under the influence of the Horatian one. Apart from the afore-mentioned dissimilarity, both *Dead Babies* and *Ending Up* disclose the Amises' attraction to death subject matter. It is the demise of Martin's and Kingsley's protagonists which constitutes the crux of their works. Martin Amis models on his father's novel which recounts the story of "crappy old people living in a house in the country, slightly secluded, ending up getting on their nerves and killing each other too" (quoted in Keulks, 2003: 134). In fact, both *Ending Up* and *Dead Babies* present bedevilled characters incapable of severing themselves from their crises of solitariness and trapped in calamitous microcosms of wretchedness and decay. As a result, they find exclusively egotism and anguish, waiting stoically at life's end and inflicting excruciating pain on the others (Keulks, 2003: 135).

Nevertheless, the process, the very form and dimension of death and crime outlined by Amis the Son vary considerably from that presented by his father. When set beside the pitying yet humouristic and parodic aspect of the riot of senile delinquency terminated by the protagonists' mutual killing in *Ending Up*, the author of *Dead Babies* presents the psychopathic, perverse, vicious facet of homicide, at times referred to as the Mansonian mayhem during which the characters' lives are vilely cancelled (Tredell 23). Furthermore, Kingsley's and Martin's attitude towards their narratees are apparently unlike. As Gavin Keulks points out, the former seems to express, behind a moderate Horatian-like satire and humour, some degree of sympathy and compassion towards his protagonists, whereas the latter strives to expose solely the redemptive qualities of his characters. Martin Amis, contrary to his father's moralistic, didactic, social undertone, calls the readers' attention to the personal, solipsistic facet of reality, to agonizingly solitary existence of characters who find no solace in the use of sex and drugs and who

therefore mirror the author's deterministic views about the lack of ethics and incoherence of postmodern life (Keulks, 2003: 142).

Taking into account the style and narration of *Dead Babies*, one can notice the writer's highly ambivalent attitude towards his characters and the reader. As was previously mentioned, one of the critics asserted that Martin Amis strips his protagonists of any virtuous qualities and morality, exposing their degeneration, emotional void and hollowness and therefore instilling in the reading public the feeling of abhorrence and antipathy. This seems to hold true, pre-eminently when comparing his characters to the protagonists of *Ending Up*. However, one can perceive some sort of subtlety or 'wry gentleness' (Tredell 28) towards his protagonists facing their ineluctable kismet. It becomes apparent prevailingly near the end of the novel where the writer abandons a detached, reticent point of view in favour of bathos:

But pity the dead babies. Now, before it starts. They couldn't know what was behind them, nor what was to come. The past? They had none. Like children after a long day's journey, their lives arranged themselves in a patchwork of vanished mornings, lost afternoons and probable yesterdays. (Amis, *DB*: 180)

The author's soft, commiserating tone heralds the forthcoming doom of the protagonists as well as the fortuitous, shocking disclosure for the reader. By revealing the identity of a genuine culprit the author callously lures us into his trap, he tests and examines closely our reading awareness and manipulates us into adopting at times an alternative perception of the narrated world. Quentin Villiers represents a pitfall, an artistic trick, a misleading alternative to the excesses of the others. In fact, at first glance, the readers who search for some neatness, coherence and sanity in the world of violence, perversity and paranoia are led to believe that they can find harbour with Quentin, apparently associated with civility, ethics and stability. Yet, they become shortly entrapped and feel secluded and unprotected in the final storm (Diedrick 45) having discovered a dual nature and a double game of the main character. At some point, the readers are given prior notice to examine thoroughly this protagonist:

Watch Quentin closely. Everyone else does. Stunned by his good looks, proportionately taken aback by his friendliness and successability, flattered by his interest, struck by the intimacy of his manner and lulled by the hypnotic sonority of his voice – it is impossible to meet Quentin without falling a little bit in love. (Amis, *DB*: 53)

Quentin Villiers is undoubtedly the most complex and ambivalent figure in *Dead Babies*. When set beside the remaining protagonists of the novel who could be considered types or flat characters owing to their steadiness, predictability and prevalence of one trait, Quentin is given the status of a round character who overshadows and adroitly manipulates the others. Moreover, some critics attribute his qualities to the features of his author. As James Diedrick maintains, both Quentin Villiers and Martin Amis are refined men of letters, artistic manipulators, satirists and masters of pastiche. Quentin whose work involves editing a “satirico-politico-literary magazine” at London University and who presides over the meetings at Appleseed Rectory, combining the role of a celebrator and tyrannical ringmaster, reflects partially the portrait of the artist as a young Martin Amis. The attitude of Quentin/Johny towards his victims parallels the relation between the author of *Dead Babies* and his audience. Amis unceasingly torments the reading public during the process of storytelling, forcing them to realise the credulity, a passive absorption of the text, inappropriate decoding of hidden messages, signs, authorial remarks, as well as their inexperience in postmodern way of reading and analysing literature, in particular a crime novel. The British writer has recurrently emphasised the fact that the crux of contemporary reading lies in the audience’s identification with the author, not with the characters and narrator. This statement could be applicable to *Dead Babies* as well as to *Money* and *Information*. In matter of fact, the author yearns for the confrontation with his readers but in order to single out those who would actively cooperate with him in shaping the story, and above all to complicit in the process of manipulation, sadistic coercion and extermination of the characters. Amis seemingly makes us realise that those incapable of deciphering the author’s genuine intentions and premises are condemned to fall victims to his cunning, sophisticated metafictional game.

With regard to the conventions of a detective story, the British writer strives to give a reader the status of a detective and a murderer, in particular an accomplice in his crime. As detectives, we are forced to observe and thoroughly examine his characters, the world in which they live, from the authorial perspective, and to interpret properly any clues, hints and leads provided by the writer in order to be able to discover a true identity of the killer. On the other hand, treating the reader as an abettor Amis endeavours to expose the vicious, malevolent side of manhood and the murderous nature of contemporary civilisation. The author who is not devoid of sadistic impulses and

manipulative penchant expects from his audience to share with him the amusement in witnessing the torments and in executing the protagonists. Such writerly-readerly sadism is largely rationalised due to the abhorrence and repulsion of the degenerated youths, of their obsessions, phobias and licentiousness. The relationship between the writer and the reader could be analogous to a spiritual bond between a playwright and a theatre audience. In addition, the carnivalesque and macabresque aspect of the story, a limited setting and time duration as well as the very intense, dynamic, histrionic speech and demeanour of each character parallel a theatrical performance. To take the analogy further, when reading *Dead Babies* we encounter the phenomenon of ‘art in art’ or theatre within a theatre intensified by introducing into the action the scene with the Conceptualists’ performance. In the moment when this “guerilla theater group” performs their ominous act we become immersed in the story more intensely and experience the intimate contact with the characters on and outside the stage. The writer purposefully inserts in his work the morbid, macabre spectacle in order to bring into prominence a pervasive sense of dread and to blur the boundaries between the novel and the play, fiction and reality.

Dead Babies contains numerous symbols and intertextual references, mostly to classical texts, such as Menippean satire, Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal* or Denis Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew*. As far as violence, terror, debauchery and crime are concerned, some critics, among others Nicolas Tredell and James Diedrick, perceive certain allusions to Iris Murdoch’s *The Black Prince* with its enclosed country-house plot constituting a development or a perversion of the quintessentially Murdochian world, a previously mentioned J. G. Ballard’s *Crash*, *Vermillion Sands* or William Burroughs’s *The Wild Boys*. However, it seems that one of the most striking symbols of Amis’s work is the artist’s depiction of the weekend of orgy of sex, drugs and depravity constituting the action of *Dead Babies* as a sort of infernal parody of the Last Supper presided by host Quentin Villiers who becomes finally disclosed as the Antichrist since his last name evokes the word ‘villain’ and anagrammatically comprises the term ‘evil’ (Tredell 32). Added to that, Martin Amis makes a parody of the crucifixion the moment when the long-suffering dwarf Keith Whitehead is roped to the blossoming apple tree in the rectory garden, where ‘two grimed hypodermics hung from his bloated arms’ (Amis, *DB*: 205). This cruel, insensitive treatment of the crippled protagonist by the remaining dwellers of the Appleseed estate combined with their ecstatic comportment and intoxication, mirror the post-humanist values of contemporary society and betoken the

appearance of counter-cultural liberation theology in which the sacraments of drugs and sex replace emotional or spiritual ones. The eponymous dead babies, exhibiting a miscellany of humanist beliefs that the majority of the group have renounced, best illustrate the process of dehumanisation and the augmenting ecstatic materialism.

The theme of consumption and spiritual social decay saturate Amis's subsequent novel, *Success*. Here, materialism, cult of money and social callousness are closely linked with personal crisis and moral degradation exemplified by Gregory Riding and Terrence Service. The writer employs the narrative "doubling" comprising collateral dramatic monologues spoken by the two feuding foster brothers (Diedrick 47). While reading interchangeably the diaries of Gregory and Terry, we steadily explore the mysteries of the protagonists' lives, their ups and downs, and above all the hostile relations and antagonism between the two men.

Although the dominant subjects of the novel are the crisis of the contemporary British society, the ambivalent meaning and understanding of success as well as an unethical, insidious way of getting at the top of the social ladder, death, homicide and sadism constitute the book's pivotal motifs. The accounts of the two brothers reveal to the reader the vicious, hostile world in which they live, their mutual abhorrence and despise, and also the arcana of domestic violence, incest, sexual abuse and murder. Speaking of the figures of the culprit and the victim, Amis makes the polarity between men who play the roles of tyrants, murderers and rapists and women who are given the statuses of innocent victims. It is Gregory and Terry who largely contribute to the suicide of their cousin, Ursula as a result of their incestuous relationship. Embodying the pathological narcissism, materialism and expressing solely sexual gratification, they are unable to offer her any spiritual comfort and compassion, which bring about her tragical demise. The fate of Terry's sister is another, much more glaring example of a woman's maltreatment. Men's dominance and mercilessness versus women's subordination and victimisation are the quintessential ingredients of the criminal facet of the story. In this regard violence, death and homicide, though not being the leading themes of the novel, help to illustrate the protagonists' tempestuous relationships, their iniquitous nature, condescending, defiant attitude towards females, and reflect the ubiquity of malevolence and bestiality in the contemporary world.

Gregory's and Terrence's monologues offer a vivid yet perfunctory illustration of their lives, family background and professional career. More interestingly, they provide a startling, in-depth analysis of their personality, specifically the reciprocal enmity and

distrust. Accordingly, they seem to be very subjective, inconsistent, contradictory, and therefore the reader is left to construct the truth and bring the meaning to the text from the unspoken gaps in and between each narrative. Thanks to the dramatic monologues the writer creates an intimate relation between the protagonists and the reading public. He encourages us to experience and analyse the way these two men think, what they represent, from the inside, and the hothouse, family atmosphere induced by their narratives retains our attention. However, Amis constantly warns us not to entirely trust the narrators because then we are likely to fall victims to their manipulation. As an example, in chapter four Terry makes us realise that “Gregory is a liar. Don’t believe a word he says. He is the author of lies” (Amis, *S*: 88). This sentence is not solely the accusation of one character against another or the expression of his hostility towards his foster-brother. It betokens above all one several author’s warnings voiced through his protagonists that his two narrators are untrustworthy, and therefore we should withdraw our sympathy and empathy both from Terry and Greg and to assess the underlying social and familial grounds of their respective pathologies (Diedrick 52). The novelist expects from the audience an active participation in the process of storytelling, their cooperation in shaping the meaning of the story. The artist makes us recognise the boundary between the author’s and narrators’ texts. Gregory Riding and Terry Service are fully aware of each other’s presence and of the existence of the reader, hence they fight with each other for attracting our attention. Their voices initially engage us with their immediacy and professional intimacy. Needless to say, they are merely the characters, constructs of the fiction, thus the writer convinces us not to identify with the narrators but with the author.

Martin Amis stresses the significance of the authorial distance, of the writer’s presence behind the narrative text in the dramatic monologue, yet he is cognizant of the reader’s difficulty in distinguishing the voice of a genuine creator of the novel from the voices of the narrators who noticeably dominate the text. By employing in *Success* such intricate technique he pays tribute to Robert Browning’s rigorous dramatic monologue which involves the audience in deciphering the concealed meanings of the text and in building the truth from the empty lines and unwritten sentences. The afore-said authorial distance, poise and level-headedness, the writer’s refraining from displaying judgements or making critical comments on the protagonists’ demeanour are the pivotal constituents of Amis’s fiction which reflect the artist’s indebtedness to Browning’s poetic technique and to Nabokov’s literary mode. It is the American writer’s style,

frequently referred to as the “sublime” which Martin Amis numerously models on and to which he alludes when examining his novels. As the author of *Success* asserts, “‘sublime’ is focused not on some ideal world but “directed at our fallen world of squalor, absurdity and talentedness. Sublimity replaces the ideas of motivation and plot with those of obsession and destiny. It suspends moral judgements in favour of remorselessness, a helter-skelter intensity” (Amis, *WAC*: 471-90). Vladimir Nabokov is present though marginally in Amis’s work whose title alludes to the title of the novel by the fictional author featured in Nabokov’s book *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. The American writer’s novel is narrated by Sebastian Knight’s half-brother who is fruitlessly in pursuit of the ultimate truth about a person he believes he is virtually becoming at the culmination of his quest – a doubling echoed in a different register in the final pages of *Success*.

In Martin Amis’ book one can trace references to other works, among others to Philip Larkin’s *Jill* or Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (Tredell 30). Analogously to the above-mentioned men of letters the author of *Dead Babies*, *Money* or *London Fields* frequently brings up the theme of doubleness, prevailingly linked with the double yet dissimilar pairs of characters or with the protagonist’s split personality. The aspect of doubling which by and large entails characters’ mutual hostility and envy mirror their pathological upbringing and the decadent, corrupted side of class system in Britain in the second half of the 20th century. In *Success* the tempestuous, inimical personal and social relations incite violence, homicide, sexual abuse and in this regard the book can be considered the concoction of a sociopolitical novel, though its tone is reflexive, not moralistic or didactic, and of a crime story. James Diedrick accentuates the correlation between Larkin’s *Jill* and Amis’s novel in that both of them rivet on a working-class youth in awe and resentment of his self-indulgent, degenerate, aristocratic, Oxford roommate. Furthermore, Amis’s treatment of the damage Terry suffers at the hands of his father, and the boy’s own reiterative wailing that he is “fucked up,” echo a narrative expedition into the nihilistic terrain Larkin explored in his 1971 poem “This Be the Verse,” with its dismal opening stanza:

They fuck you up, your mum and dad
They may not want to, but they do
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you. (Larkin 180)

On close inspection, one may notice that in his narration Terry implicitly doubles himself and identifies with Oliver Twist, underscoring the Dickensian attributes of his orphaned childhood, beginning with the sombre, fierce squalor of his early years and finishing with his fabulous ascension into privilege when he becomes adopted by Gregory's affluent family (Diedrick 48). Needless to say, at the end of the novel Terry undergoes an immense metamorphosis – he changes from being a downcast, pitiable, poverty-stricken lad into a patronizing, conceited, mercenary upstart. In this respect he comes to resemble the Artful Dodger more than Oliver Twist (Diedrick 48).

One is prepared to concede that Amis excels at manipulating the readers by means of his dramatic monologues spoken by the two unreliable narrators and thus he falls short of the expectations of those accustomed to the traditional understanding and interpretation of the story with its plot, motivation, particularly with the black-and-white portrayal of the protagonists. What is more, the British novelist intentionally highlights the inconsistency, incredibility and disparity of the two brothers' narratives to draw our attention to the complex process of storytelling, the competitive, even warlike face of writing and antagonistic, spiteful relations among contemporary artists.

The motif of writing, art, the role of a writer, narrator and reader come to the fore in *Money*. In this book Amis conspicuously blurs the boundary between art and life, fiction and reality, and stresses the descending position of a narrator and characters with respect to the classical stories. The metafictional facet of *Money* highly accentuated by the British author echoes J. G. Ballard's assumption of a postmodern, surfictional, anti-realistic character of contemporary fiction:

I feel that the balance between fiction and reality has changed significantly in the past decades. Increasingly their roles are reversed. We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind –mass-merchandizing, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the pre-empting of any original response to experience by the television screen. We live inside an enormous novel. It is now less and less necessary for the writer to invent the fictional content of his novel. The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent the reality. (Ballard 4)

John Self, the narrator and simultaneously main character of *Money*, embodies and confirms Ballard's viewpoint on the metafictional, anti-realistic, fictitious nature of the postmodern novel and likewise falls victim to Amis's narrative experimentation.

Amis's vision of contemporary Britain and America, his exaggerated, hyperbolised portrait of society ruled by mass media, pop culture and advertisement, whose glaring example is John Self, as well as his incessant references and allusions to other texts and miscellaneous metafictional tricks confirm Ballard's theory on the fictitious dimension of the present-day novel on the one hand and generates perennial polemics concerning the relationship between the writer, narrator and characters on the other hand. John Self is a typical anti-hero, a flat or paper character whose life and personality are created by mass culture and advertising. John's addiction to pornography, drugs and money pictures the extent to which his subjectivity has been formed by the mass media and global communication. The protagonist epitomises the victim and the product of contemporary civilisation in which people's perception of reality is conditioned and manipulated by the concoction and proliferation of images in the modern media. Due to the incredibly enhanced editing techniques of the computer-assisted multi-media we have reached a point when it becomes increasingly hard to be certain that the image is a copy of anything in the rest of the world, or that there is an 'original' version of the image itself (Pope 217). Doomed to live in such a world, John Self, analogously to Keith Talent from *London Fields*, is incapable of discriminating reality from illusion, fact from fiction, original from copy. John's imprisonment in his pseudo-real or hyper-real microworld renders him unattainable to discern the alternative sides of life which leads to his failed suicide attempt. Furthermore, Self could be regarded as a literary descendant of Fyodor Dostoevsky's protagonist of *Notes from Underground* in that he shares with the narrator of the Russian novella the Underground Man's vicious, seamy candidness and his alienation from the society and its most cherished beliefs render him a waywardly astute observer and critic of that society. John Self's similarity to Dostoevsky's character also reflects *Money's* affinity with *Notes from Underground* in terms of narrative technique constituting a vernacular monologue written in the Russian *skaz* tradition (Diedrick 73).

More importantly, the protagonist's confinement betokens the key part of Martin Amis's literary game by means of which the author endeavours to depict his entire control and authority over the main character and simultaneously the narrator, and thus he underscores his god-like status as a writer and is in god-like relation with his narratees. Analogously to the protagonists of his former works, in particular *Dead Babies* and *Other People*, John Self seemingly falls prey to the novelist's sadistic proclivity, he becomes recurrently humiliated and subjected to various intellectual tests

and is gradually forced to realise the futility and purposelessness of his existence. Being degenerated through sex, alcohol and power, remaining totally ignorant of literature and history, Self epitomises an anti-hero, a caricature of both the character and narrator. Owing to his apparent lack of knowledge, sophistication, inexperience in film and book industry, show business and mass media John becomes the butt of other characters' jokes and falls victim to the manipulation of his cunning enemy Fielding Goodney and a writer Martin Amis –the character of *Money* and simultaneously the author's alter-ego. The British novelist purposefully denigrates and lampoons the protagonist-narrator of *Money* in order to make the readers be cognizant of the character's fictional status and to present his utter subordination to the writer's narrative dictum, and lastly, to make us realise the very fictitious aspect of the work. John Self encapsulates the writer's premiss concerning the attitude of the character towards his author: "I sometimes think I am controlled by someone. Some space invader is invading my inner space, some fucking joker. But he's not from out there. He's from in here" (Amis, *M*: 330).

In addition, Amis sets Self against more educated, refined, smart characters, such as Martina Twain, Martin Amis and Fielding Goodney in order to underline his unreliability as a narrator and the protagonist's highly subjective perception of reality. By showing the weakness, imperfection or even deformity of John's narration the writer warns the audience, parallelingly to Nabokov, not to identify with the narrator but with the author. In *Money* Amis confronts the voice of John Self with the voices of the three above-mentioned characters who serve as his mouthpieces or alter-egos. Martina Twain and Martin Amis play the role of teachers and literary experts - they frequently endeavour to educate Self, to explain to him aspects of the experience of literature (Tredell 72) by examining the selected elements of fiction, its genres and literary trends and by making references to various texts, predominantly to Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Hamlet* and to Orwell's *Animal Farm* or *Nineteen Eighty Four*. Contrary to Martina's amicable, cordial, motherly attitude towards the narrator, Amis derives pleasure from manipulating and humiliating the protagonist, from exposing to view his ignorance, professional inexperience and uncouthness. The former aims at reforming John Self whilst the latter focuses on unmasking his flaws and weak spots. The last of the afore-said characters, Fielding Goodney constitutes the protagonist's fierce enemy, he is a sort of an artist, a handsome liar, a golden mythomaniac, somebody who cheats and lies for no apparent reason and without any motivation. Nicolas Tredell points out that Goodney epitomises Iago and O'Brien since he torments and persecutes John Self, the victim of

modern society. In fact, both Fielding Goodney and the character Martin Amis embody oppressors and tyrants who strive to demean the protagonist and subsequently to annihilate him.

Power, manipulation and sadism are not only the leading leitmotifs of *Money* but also the essential parts of the narrative mode and the elements of the author's metafictional strategy. Amis often interweaves the action of the novel with his remarks concerning the role of the character, narrator, the writer's attitude towards his work and the process of storytelling. The above citation from the conversation between John Self and the character Martin Amis reflects the quintessence of the author's literary premiss:

'The distance between author and narrator corresponds to the degree to which the author finds the narrator wicked, deluded, pitiful or ridiculous. I'm sorry, am I boring you?'

'-Uh?'

'This distance is partly determined by convention. In the epic or heroic frame, the author gives the protagonist everything he has, and more. The hero is god, or has god-like powers or virtues. In the tragic...Are you all right?'

'Uh?' I repeated. I had just stabbed a pretzel into my dodgy upper tooth. Rescreening this little mishap in my head, I suppose I must have winced pretty graphically and then given a sluggish, tramplike twitch...

'The further down the scale [the hero] is, the more liberties you can take with him. You can do what the hell you like to him, really. This creates an appetite for punishment. The author is not free of sadistic impulses.'

(Amis, *M*: 229)

The extract from the Amis character's dialogue with Self mirror the role of protagonists in modern fiction and explain why heroes are so scarce in contemporary literature. In the conversation with John Amis deliberately delineates the process of lessening the importance of the protagonist in the narrative act in order to make Self realise his own inferior, servile position both as a character and narrator with respect to that of the author. Apart from the very content of Amis's analysis, the dialogue illustrates John's attitude towards his interlocutor's literary theory. As Diedrick pertinently remarks, the protagonist's grouse about his tooth during the discussion comically accentuates his status of an antihero subject to his author's sadistic impulses, yet it has a supplementary, countervailing effect. By heckling the Amis character's would-be monologue, Self claims his autonomy, his disavowal to be a mere authorial artifice and a trifling part of his metafictional game. This thought is reinforced in

another conversation between the two protagonists where the Amis character asserts that: “the twentieth century is an ironic age – downward-looking. Even realism, rockbottom realism, is considered a bit grand for the twentieth century” and to which Self insuppressibly, sceptically responds: “‘Really,’ I said, and felt that tooth with my tongue’ (Amis, *M*: 231). This excerpt emphasises that Self and realism alike triumph over Amis’s literary oppression.

From the above citation it transpires that the protagonist and narrator of *Money* falls prey to the writer’s postmodern theory about fiction, however, he never surrenders his principal autonomy within these restraints, nor the freedom of his elemental responses (Diedrick 99). Self manages to retain, as a fictional character, a “double innocence” (Amis, *M*: 41), that is the ignorance of his role in a narrative text and the unawareness of the reasons why things are happening to him in a particular way. In the concluding chapter we witness Self’s release from his author’s surveillance and dominance – having survived suicide, the protagonist even endures his author’s withdrawal of authorship (Diedrick 99). In an interview after *Money* was published Martin Amis elucidated the reasons for such an untypical, unanticipated ending of the novel: “I learned very early on that no matter how much you do to forestall it, the reader will believe in the characters and feel concern for them“ (Morrison 98). Such an assertion, encapsulating the major premiss of the novel is in a marked contrast to Amis’s prior works, primarily to *Dead Babies* or *Other People* in which the characters are helpless against the ubiquitous power of the author who treats them like marionettes in a theatrical show, juggling their lives and shaping their destiny for his own pleasure and for the audience’s entertainment. Added to that, the protagonist’s final liberation from his persecutor- a writer and indirectly a reader as well as his disclosure of a human face which ultimately stirs up our sympathy contradict Nabokovian assumption on the relation between the writer, the reader and characters. The author of *Lolita*, *Pnin* or *Ada* constantly warns us not to trust the narrator and not to identify with the protagonists because we may get easily imprisoned, disorientated or even mesmerised in the hallucinatory text recounted by the unreliable, inexperienced narrator whose most illustrative examples are *Pnin* or *Despair*.

All told, the scrutiny of the three above-mentioned novels outline miscellaneous, at times disparate narrative techniques and mechanisms by means of which the writer manipulates, persecutes and victimises his characters. He invariably employs black humour and irony in depicting painful, harrowing themes since he asserts that in

postmodern literary condition it is possible to delineate the decay and atrocity of the contemporary civilisation only from the comical and satirical standpoint. Amis always invites his readers to take part in his stories constituting satirical spectacles where the protagonists and narrators are subjected to the author's ruthless, sadistic experiments. Their fate are doomed, which is the case of the protagonists of *Dead Babies*, *Success* or *Other People*. Nevertheless, *Money* shows that the process of the character's perpetual humiliation and victimisation becomes hampered and this gives rise to his autonomy and gradual liberation from the authorial hegemony.

3.3. Defeat of detectives-artists in the process of storytelling and the imprisonment of the narratees by the author in Martin Amis's selected novels with reference to Somoza's, Borges's and Nabokov's fiction

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

(Martin Amis: *London Fields*)

As was underscored in the foregoing sections, the works of Martin Amis exhibit the author's patronizing, condescending attitude towards his protagonists whom he interminably controls, manipulates, torments and ultimately executes for his artistic pleasure. On this score the British writer models on Vladimir Nabokov who asserts that a novelist challenges and vies with the "Almighty" and that he/she "must possess the inborn capacity not only of recombining but of re-creating the given world" (Nabokov, 1990: 32). Analogously to the American artist, Amis displays certain arrogance and presumptuousness, likening himself to god. As a proud, preeminent writer, he stresses the infinity of his ego and adequately exhibits his artistic prowess (Alexander 1994). Amis, modeling on his American mentor, highlights the fact of fiction via involution. It is *Money* in which the novelist includes himself as a character, yet the authorial voice is also given to the characters of his other works, such as *Rachel Papers*, *London Fields*, *Information* or *Night Train*. Both Amis's personal involvement and the use of his alter-

egos have a baneful influence on his narratees and contribute to the characters' downfall or even annihilation. Homicide, victimisation and sadism do not constitute merely the ingredients of his books but mirror above all the author's voice, tone and attitude towards his creation.

With reference to *Money*, *London Fields*, *Night Train* and to some extent *Information*, the novels illustrating a detective story pattern, we encounter a two-fold crime: the first one committed within the boundaries of the narrative text and the second one perpetrated by the writer who purposefully inflicts pang and throbbing on his characters. One may observe that in Amis's fictional world detectives, culprits and murderers are doomed to defeat and their status is tantamount to the position of victims since they are all subject to the author's destructive power, yet his omnipotence and dominant voice varies and gradually lessens, particularly in *Night Train*.

In *London Fields* the narrative and narrated homicide parallel the question about agency and authorship. Taking into account the criminal facet of the book, Sam Young, the narrator and main character of the story, epitomises a failed, disheartened murderer and simultaneously detective who is unendingly manipulated by his victim. As Martin Amis explains in one of the interviews, his initial aim was to write a standard mystery story, a novella called "The Murderee" in which the Keith Figure played the role of the murderer and the Nicola figure is his victim. Although the plot of the book became ultimately augmented by other characters, such as Guy Clinch, acting as one of Nicola's would-be killers and Samson Young, playing the role of her genuine assassin and at the same time the narrator of the story, it is the woman, apparently a victim, not her perpetrator who truly triumphs in the book and who wields power over Sam's narration. As Nicolas Tredell states, Nicola's status as a murderee is higher than Sam as a culprit, it is she who singles out and pursues her killer. The critic, referring to D. H. Lawrence's concepts of a criminal and a victim, claims that a murderee is always a murderee whilst a murderer has yet to be made (Tredell 101). Strange as it may seem, Nicola lures Sam into murdering her and consequently contributes to his demise. On this score she embodies a genuine killer. This reversal of the roles of a victim and a culprit mocks and lampoons the convention of a crime story. Furthermore, Samson Young endeavours to play both the role of a murderer and a detective. It is at the end of the novel that he emerges as a killer whilst throughout the whole story he observes and meticulously examines other characters, particularly Guy Clinch and Keith Talent, in order to discover a culprit. Sam's suicide betokens the protagonist's and narrator's sense of

failure, frustration, professional defeat and the awareness of feeling conquered by his victim.

There is no denying that the crime subject matter of *London Fields* is directly linked with the aspect of writing and reading of the text, and concomitantly with the question about the agency, the function and the very existence of the author in a narrative text. In the novel the tempestuous relationships among the protagonists, prevaillingly those between Sam Young, Mark Asprey, Nicola Six, Keith Talent and Guy Clinch, reflect their artistic rivalry, seeking writing recognition and reader's attention. *London Fields* seemingly consists of several texts recounted mostly by Sam Young, Mark Asprey and Nicola Six. This multilayered, polyphonic aspect of the novel testifies to a belittling position of one omniscient narrator whom the majority of the readers identify with Sam Young and subsequently undermines the credibility of his narration. One cannot fail to notice that Sam goes to great lengths to relate the events of the story and present the characters in an objective, reliable, journalist-like manner, though Asprey's, Nicola's and Talent's diaries betoken the erroneousness and implausibility of Young's narration. In matter of fact, Sam steadily loses the agency and becomes utterly incapable of controlling the characters' lives and the events that constitute the integral elements of his novel.

When scrutinising Amis's work in terms of the narrative conventions of classical detective fiction, prevaillingly taking into account its two principal constituents, *fabula* and *sujet*, one may notice that unlike a traditional crime story in which both these elements are presented by one person, an omniscient narrator, in *London Fields* the story is outlined by Nicola whereas the plot lies in the hands of Sam. Contrary to Todorov's assumption according to which, 'story' and 'plot' or 'discourse' constitute two facets of one and the same work, or are two points of view about the same thing (Todorov 160), Amis's novel comprises two works. The authorial duality of the narrative indubitably calls into question the stability, coherence and credibility of the story, the reliability of the narrator and, above all it undermines the status of realist fiction, in this case, classical detective literature.

When reading *London Fields* we are never certain whether the two narrators faithfully present the course of events or confabulate their texts. Both Sam's and Nicola's narratives are incomplete and fragmentary, and the protagonists, being simultaneously the narrators of their mini-texts apparently compete with each other in an attempt to capture and retain the readers' attention. More significantly, however, the

discontinuity or even incoherence of their narration gives evidence to the artificiality and fictitiousness of the novel itself. *London Fields*, frequently regarded as a metaphysical thriller, a postmodern *whydoinit* or an existential *mystery* novel, focuses neither on elucidation of the arcanae of the homicide nor on the revelation of the murderer's identity and motivation but rather illustrates the process of writing and reading of a crime story. Martin Amis draws a parallel between the process of committing and detecting crime and the act of creating and interpreting a murder story. As in *London Fields* the protagonists' roles are unequivocal and manifold, it is hard to make a clear-cut boundary between a detective and a victim. On an extra-diegetic level the role of a criminal could be attributed to the author who has unhindered power to both "create and annihilate" (Finney, "Narrative": 1995) his characters whilst to the reader is ascribed the dual function of a detective and a victim – on the one hand we are to decipher any hidden clues and messages left by the author-murderer, yet on the other hand, when reading passively the novel and being incapable of decoding the writer's premiss, we fall prey to his manipulation and authorial sadism. On an intra-diegetic level we are disorientated as to the genuine identity of a murderer and a murderee. Initially, it becomes apparent that Nicola is the sole victim, and, as the novel unfolds, Samson Young turns out to be a criminal. It is not until Sam's demise when we are to believe we are reading a classical whodunit, the only missing element is the figure of a detective. Nonetheless, Young's suicide constitutes a turning point in Amis's novel since it subverts the traditional status of the genre, pre-eminently with respect to the murderer/murderee binary opposition. Having killed Nicola Sam feels spiritually conquered and overwhelmed by his victim who makes him realise the fruitlessness of his work and the futility of his existence. The defeat of Sam by Nicola reflects not solely the reversal of the protagonists' roles in which the murderer changes into a pursued and the victim becomes a pursuer but also illustrates Young's loss of agency as a narrator, his subjugation to other narrators of the text, most notably to Nicola Six and Mark Asprey who in turn become manoeuvred and subjected by the narrative dictum of the author of the book.

Manifold metafictional elements saturating *London Fields*, prevailing the correspondence between crime and writing, as well as miscellaneous references to metaphysics and cosmology classify the novel as a metaphysical thriller. In this regard Amis's novel bears close resemblance to Jose Carlos Somoza's novel, *The Athenian Murders*. Taking into consideration the crucial constituents of this genre, such as the

labyrinthine facet of the text, sheer purposelessness of clues and evidence, the utter defeat of detection and the absence or circularity of closure to the investigation, the Spanish work is also regarded as a metaphysical mystery story. Somoza, analogously to Amis, uses a knotty, convoluted narrative by means of which he strives to illustrate the complexity and intricacy of the story itself, the multi-layered structure of the novel, a multi-dimensional reading of the text, the confrontation between the narrator and the narratee as well as between the author and the reader, and finally he raises the questions about what constitutes knowledge and experience.

The maze-like character of the text, the effect of *mise-en-abyme* accentuate the metafictional aspect of the mystery story and reflects the highly ambiguous relation between Montalo, the author's alter-ego and the translator, acting simultaneously as the protagonist of the story, the recreator, detective and reader of the crime text. Somoza adeptly manipulates the audience, making them believe we are reading a fairly straightforward mystery. At the outset we witness the demise of a young student at Plato Academy, seemingly assailed by wolves, and a concomitant investigation carried out by Diagoras, one of teachers, and Heracles Pontor, "known as the Decipherer of Enigmas." Despite the two of them look meticulously into the case, the youth's death turns out to be much more perplexing and abstruse than originally imagined. It is interesting to observe that both Pontor and Diagoras are vividly contrasting figures, particularly in their philosophies - the former is the advocate of rationality and palpability whilst the latter relies almost entirely on airy abstraction. This dissension between the abstract and the tangible is foregrounded in the book. In terms of a detective story tradition, Somoza's novel undermines a ratiocinative facet of the crime, its logical interpretation and instead it offers myriads of unforeseen twists, false-leads and puzzles.

As a matter of fact, a mystifying demise of a Greek student constitutes the story of the crime or a *fabula* which, according to Todorov, illustrates what genuinely happened in the book. This part of the novel, recounted by the translator, functions as a separate text entitled "The Cave of Ideas." The translator, being initially the protagonist of the novel, introduces us into the mystery and discloses its arcana. Nevertheless, as the story unfolds, we realise that the protagonist gradually intimidates yet successfully loses the control of the text which begins to menace and oppress him, still he is aware and makes the readers be cognizant of the intricacy of the story which manifests itself in its eidetic character. According to the translator:

...todo lo que hacemos y decimos son palabras escritas en otro idioma en un inmenso papiro. Y hay Alguien que está leyendo ahora mismo ese papiro y descifra nuestras acciones y pensamientos, descubriendo claves ocultas en el texto de nuestra vida. A ese Alguien lo llaman el Intérprete o el Traductor...Quienes creen en Él piensan que nuestra vida posee un sentido final que nosotros mismos desconocemos, pero que el Traductor puede ir descubriendo conforme nos *lee*. Al final, el texto determinará y nosotros moriremos sin saber más que antes. Pero el Traductor, que nos ha leído, conocerá por fin el sentido último de nuestra existencia. (Somoza 126)

[Everything we do and say are words written in another language in an immense papyrus. And there is a Person who is now reading this papyrus and deciphers our actions and thoughts, discovering keys hidden in the text of our life. This Person is called the Interpreter or Translator...Those who believe in him think that our life has a final sense which we do not know but the Translator can discover it while he *is reading* us. The text will finally end and we will die not having more knowledge than we had before. However, the Translator who was reading us will finally get to know the ultimate sense of our existence.]

The above citation, coming from the text the translator reads and interprets, refers directly to him and thus makes him feel apprehensive. His sensation of foreboding and trepidation becomes shortly augmented when he proceeds to read the ensuing extract from “The Cave of Ideas”:

Y de repente levantó la mirada hacia el oscuro techo de la habitación. Parecía buscar algo. Te buscaba a ti. - ¡Escucha, Traductor! – gritó con su voz poderosa -. ¡Tú, que tan seguro te sientes de existir !Dime quién soy!...!Interpreta mi lenguaje y defíneme!...!Te desafío a comprenderme! !Tú, que crees que sólo somos palabras escritas hace mucho tiempo!...!Tú, que piensas que nuestra historia oculta una clave final!...!Razóname, Traductor!...!Dime quién soy...si es que, al leerme, eres capaz también de *descifrarme!*....-Eso es lo que le gritan al supuesto Traductor. Pero, naturalmente, el Traductor nunca responde, porque no existe. Y si existe, es tan ignorante como nosotros... (Somoza 127)

[And he suddenly raised his eyes towards the dark ceiling of the room. He seemed to be searching for something. He was searching for you. – Listen, Translator! – he cried with his powerful voice. – You who are so certain of your existence! Tell me who I am!...Translate my language and define me! I challenge you to understand me! You who claim that our story hides a final key! Reason me, Translator! Tell me who I am...if while reading me, you are also capable of tracking me down and deciphering me!...It is what they are shouting at the supposed Translator. But, of course, the Translator does not respond because he does not exist. And if he exists, he is such an ignorant as we all are...]

The two quotations mirror a metafictional joke or a cunning literary trick played by Montalo on the translator, a perilous hide-and-seek game between the author of the text and its interpreter. Montalo steadily vexes and torments the translator while testing his knowledge, intelligence and professional experience. He makes the interpreter realise his ancillary role to the text he is striving to translate or recreate and in this regard grand him the status of a fictional character, similarly to all the protagonists in the text. More importantly, Montalo highlights the significance of the continuity of the narrative act which has the higher rank than its author. As has been pointed out in the first citation, the text will exist after the demise of the characters and in the end the translator will discover the sense of their existence and the mystery of their life. In fact, when the novel draws to its close the interpreter is given the key to all murder mysteries, yet it happens at the cost of his life. On this score Montalo who functions in the novel as the author's alter-ego expresses Somoza's view on the metafictional aspect of the book and the fictitious character of its protagonists. With reference to the status of the author and the narrator of the text, the Spanish writer upholds Roland Barthes's theory about "the suppression of the Author in the interests of writing" (Barthes 168) and the impersonal, neutral character of the narrative act: "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality..., to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (Barthes 168). In this respect *The Athenian Murders* bears some resemblance to *London Fields* where the British novelist comically exemplifies Barthes's thesis about the death of the author and yet parodies it by rendering it literal. Amis's novel bashfully dramatises a literary competition, a contest for authorship; all of the protagonists play the roles of 'authors' of mini-texts who rival with each other in order to shape events into the form of a story that will be regarded as authoritative (Tredell 110). Nevertheless, none of them is a genuine originator of the plots and the narratives reflecting the subjectivities of the characters are prefabricated and clichéd and therefore validate Barthes's assumption that: 'the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner "thing" he thinks to "translate" is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely' (Barthes 170).

There is no escaping that both in Amis's and Somoza's texts the stories and their characters overwhelm their narrators, contributing successively to their deaths. The opposite power and labyrinthine dimension of the texts render Sam Young and the translator impotent, defenceless, hence the audience expressing sympathy for them may feel disoriented. Still, the writers purposefully torment and ultimately annihilate their narrators in order to accentuate, on the one hand, the autonomy of the narrative act, and, on the other hand, to induce the readers to identify with the authors of the novels rather than with the objects of their creation. In the British and Spanish metaphysical thrillers the emphasis is placed on the relations between the author and the reader – Amis and Somoza deliberately weave an intellectual web not solely on their protagonists, but above all on their audience with the aim of assessing their knowledge and literary experience. With reference to a detective aspect of their works, Amis and Somoza perform the roles of the criminals whereas the reader is either left to detect and investigate literary crimes or he/she falls prey to the author's murderous instincts.

The relation between reading a text and detecting a crime is also clearly visible in Jorge Luis Borges's labyrinthine story *Death and the Compass*. Here, the criminal and the author weave an intellectual net around the detective, luring him into a deathtrap. Erik Lönnrot, despite regarding himself as "Auguste Dupin," embodies to a greater extent a reader than a detective and therefore lacks the professionalism and the astuteness of his precursors in Edgar Allan Poe's and G. K. Chesterton's stories. The sources of Lönnrot's failure are his misreading or erroneous interpretation of miscellaneous clues or evidence left by the perpetrator and indubitably his intellectual pride which ultimately blinds him. Furthermore, his debacle could be attributed to the lack of understanding of the enemy's viewpoint, his genuine motives and sophisticated, efficacious methods. In other words, the mental activity of analysis extolled by Lönnrot fall through on account on his inability to identify with another, which constitutes a marked contrast with Poe's Dupin (Merivale, Sweeney 75).

Death and the Compass is a metaphysical riddle in which the reader becomes lost and invariably misreads the information conveyed by the author. In Borges's story the difficulty lies not in the message per se since it actually presents no interpretative problem but "the very medium of the message that renders what it appears to say misleading or irrelevant" (quoted in Merivale, Sweeney 75). Erik Lönnrot's failure to read unerringly significant clues and leads brings about his death. The fact that he falls prey to Red Scharlach's skilful murderous plan betokens his non-professionalism as a

detective. On this score he epitomises a naive and inexperienced reader who becomes gradually entangled in an intellectual net woven by the writer. Erik Lönnrot's debacle lies in underrating the intelligence and perspicacity of his opponent and his lack of empathetic understanding through identification with another (Merivale, Sweeney 75). The protagonist's pride and hauteur blind him and therefore his final defeat, humiliation and subjugation by his insidious enemy make him realise his impotence both as a detective and a man, as well as create the sensation of the acute anxiety over the existential void, the sense of life and death:

Lönnrot evitó los ojos de Scharlach. Miró los árboles y el cielo subdivididos en rombos turbiamente amarillos, verdes y rojos. Sintió un poco de frío y una tristeza impersonal, casi anónima...Ya era la noche...Lönnrot consideró por última vez problema de las muertes simétricas y periódicas. (Borges, 1997: 171)

[Lönnrot avoided Scharlach's eyes. He looked at the trees and the sky divided into rhombuses bearing the colours of turbid yellow, green and red. He started to feel a little fever and impersonal, almost anonymous sadness...It was dark already...Lönnrot ultimately considered the problem of symmetrical and periodic deaths.]

In similar vein, the audience, accustomed to the conventional effortless and uninvolved absorption of a detective story, become steadily disorientated and imprisoned in Borges's masterly literary intrigue. It becomes apparent in the denouement of the story where Scharlach announces the protagonist's imminent death: “-Para la otra vez que lo mate – replicó Scharlach – le promete ese laberinto, que consiste de una sola línea recta y que es invisible, incesante. Retrocedió unos pasos. Después, muy cuidadosamente, hizo fuego” (Borges, 1997: 172) [-When the next time I kill you – replied Scharlach – I promise you the labyrinth which consists only of a straight line and which is invisible and incessant. He receded a few footsteps. After that, aiming a rifle at Lönnrot very carefully, he fired.] By way of analogy, the writer appears to suggest that the key to the interpretation of his tale lies in the readers' identification with the author, not with the protagonist. In this respect *Death and the Compass* heralds a postmodern aspect of crime fiction propagated, among others, by Vladimir Nabokov, Martin Amis, Paul Auster or Jose Carlos Somoza.

In the light of the above examination of Borges's crime story one may pose the questions: 1. In what ways can the meaning of the text be regarded as stable or

unstable? and 2. What knowledge is necessary for the reader to bring to the text to understand its sense/meaning? The answer to the former question could be two-fold. One ought to scrutinise the two texts of the story: the first written by the author and the second read and analysed by the audience. It appears that the meaning of the writer's literary material is stable – the language seems lucid, transparent and reflects the ratiocinative aspect of the story. Nonetheless, the linguistic structure through which the writer strives to transmit his message turns out to be deceptive and ambivalent for the audience who erroneously decipher the meaning of the narrative text. Hence, the sense of the story alters in the process of reading it. The answer to the second question lies in the reader's ability to study the text, in particular to detect the covert and overt meaning of the story, to distinguish the key clues from false leads, etc. Moreover, *Death and the Compass* is not only a metaphysical crime riddle but also the story about a problematic interpretation of the crime. In view of that, the reader, in order to make out the sense of Borges's story, ought to ruminate on the very process of scrutinising detective texts and on their own contribution to unraveling the crime mystery.

Borges adroitly manipulates the audience, their images about the role of a detective, a criminal, the process of detecting crime and its resolution. *Death and the Compass* does not live up to the expectations of the readers of the classical genre of the fiction. The unpredicted ending of the novel, illustrating the triumph of Scharlach over Lönnrot, betokens the fall and erroneousness of the protagonist's subjective vision of crime investigation and his declining of any alternative interpretation of murder mysteries. The main character of *Death and the Compass* is finally condemned to death and in fact annihilated not only by another protagonist of the story but first and foremost by the author of the book who thus stresses the unreliability of his narration, lack of poise and the erroneous analysis of homicide. In doing so, Borges purposefully forces the reader to sympathise not with the protagonist but with the very creator of the text. In this regard the Argentinian writer anticipates a postmodern facet of crime fiction promulgated mostly by Nabokov, Auster or Amis.

Correspondingly to Borges, Martin Amis outlines the subjective vision of reality and the maze-like world in *Money*. Despite that the work is hard to be considered a crime story owing to the absence of homicide, a detective and a culprit, the author's violence and humiliation of the protagonist as well as the process of the reader's manipulation come to the fore, testifying to the writer's sadistic inclination. More importantly, Amis's novel bears a close resemblance to Nabokov's *Despair* largely in terms of the depiction

of the internal, highly personal, subjective world of the narrators-protagonists and of a perilous ambiguous game between the authors and the main characters. John Self and Hermann Karlovich aspire to be the creators of their imagined microworlds – the former endeavours to shape and control the world of media and film industry while the latter strives to act as a gifted artist murdering the man whom he considers his imaginary double. Both John and Hermann lust for immortal fame and glamour, they attempt to convince the reading public that they are original creators and credible narrators of their works. As the stories gradually unfold, we discover that their narrations are more and more subjective, all the greater preposterous and lunatic, particularly in *Despair*, and the narrators become more and more perplexed, disorientated and no longer capable of controlling the course of events.

John Self and Hermann Karlovich strive to portray themselves as all-powerful authors, the originators of their creations, nevertheless they are unaware that their presence is purely fictional and that they are not in control of the texts. This holds true especially for Nabokov's character whose dementia and derangement make him impossible to face the atrocity and madness of his criminal act, and to realise the incredibility and ludicrousness of his narration. As Wladimir Troubetzkoy observes in "Vladimir Nabokov's *Despair*: 'The Reader as "April's Fool," Karlovich could never be a great artist and a genius no matter how hard and expertly he tried, "for these are no genial murderer and, *a fortiori*, no genial artist could compose an apology for crime, for art is creation, and crime mere destruction" (Troubetzkoy 2008). The protagonist of *Despair* is apparently not cognizant, or takes no notice of the authorial power of a genuine writer of the novel who unscrupulously torments him and seals his doom. Hermann Karlovich is ruthlessly manipulated by Nabokov who makes his protagonist believe that he is the originator of the story. The protagonist's drama stems from that till the end of the text he cherishes the hope of becoming a creator whilst in fact he constitutes a mere creature of God-Nabokov, a shadow of shadows of creatures, and for that matter he allows himself arbitrarily the privilege of giving and taking back the life of creatures in order to prove to himself that he epitomises God (Troubetzkoy 2008). Notwithstanding this, Karlovich functions exclusively as a literary character in the fiction he believes he is writing when in fact he is *being written* and cannot flee from the domination of the real implied author to whom he intends to pay homage in his manuscript. On this score Nabokov, negating the role of Hermann Karlovich as the author of the text upholds, analogously to Martin Amis, Roland Barthes's theory that

the author is dead or absent in postmodern narratives and that he “can play but the part, the role of the author, a host and a ghost, for there is no more room for the author in the text” (Troubetzkoy 2008).

Nabokov’s authorial sadism and inexorable manipulation of his protagonists has largely influenced Amis’s perception of a novelist and the vision of a literary narrative. The British writer advocates the American author’s view that a literary artist vies with the “Almighty” and he/she must possess the inborn capacity not only of recombining but of re-creating the given world” (Nabokov, 1990: 32). In view of this, the author of *Money*, likewise Nabokov, exhibits some degree of contemptuousness and insolence towards his characters and narrators, likening himself to god. Both Amis and Nabokov, advocating the vision of omnipotent writers who exhibit their artistic prowess accentuate the view of fiction via involution. Nevertheless, unlike the author of *Despair* who once enters his novel, Amis appears as a regular character in his work, hence his involvement or rather the inclusion of his alter-ego is more tangible than in the case of Nabokov’s work. When set beside *Despair* in which the protagonist is, or appears to be entirely unaware of the author’s controlling power, John Self in *Money* becomes cognizant of his life being directed and supervised by some mysterious artist, which is implied by the British writer. When reading both the novels one cannot escape the impression that the two narrators get disorientated and perplexed in presenting the stories, the first one being a lunatic, self-centred despot, whilst the second remaining a boastful maleducated arrogant. At first glance, it seems that it is John Self who falls prey to the novelist’s manipulation and who suffers an incessant humiliation and indignity whereas Hermann Karlovich strives to depict himself as an omnipresent writer who adeptly experiments with his fiction and deliberately deludes his audience. On closer inspection, however, it turns out that Amis’s character finally liberates himself from the overwhelming dominance of the author, yet his successive life looks poignant and deplorable whilst Nabokov’s protagonist becomes imprisoned and sentenced to death by the creator of the novel. Hence, regardless of the characters’ ups and downs we are prepared to concede that they both play the roles of marionettes subjected to their authors’ wills.

Finally, Amis and Nabokov make innumerable references to other texts when depicting their protagonists. Miscellaneous critics, such as Ellen Pifer, detect in the American writer’s portrayal of Hermann the allusion to the protagonist bearing the same name in Pushkin’s *The Queen of Spades*, to Popristchin from N. V. Gogol’s *The*

Memoirs/ or Diary of a Madman, to Mr Golyadkin from Turgenev's poem *How fair, how fresh are the roses*, and above all to Raskolnikov from Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Nabokov's references to the above-mentioned classical texts, prevailing the Russian works, symbolise the struggle of the protagonist-narrator against his literary doubles that are embodied by the figure of Felix. Nonetheless, as Wladimir Troubetzkoy remarks, by murdering his presumed double, Hermann unavoidably brings in the death verdict on himself, and by killing his literary doubles, he condemns himself to meaninglessness and aberration (Troubetzkoy 2008). Intertextual allusions are equally perceivable in *Money*. Here, Amis refers to classical and modern British works, such as Shakespeare's *Othello* or George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or *Ninety Eighty Four* by means of which he endeavours to satirically illustrate the protagonists' relations and, what is more, to compare his narrator to the characters of the afore-said texts. Taking into account *Othello*, Amis parallels Iago's irrational abomination of Othello and Goodney's "motiveless malignity" (quoted in Diedrick 87) and virulent hatred for Self, as well as depicts the protagonist's final violent confrontation with his foe. Regarding the above-mentioned satirical facet of the novel, the author refers to *Animal Farm* when depicting Self as an "inhuman dog," which further extends a web of animal imagery that clings to him throughout his narrative (Diedrick 88). This imagery serves to widen the taunting portrait of John on the one hand, and to engage the reader's empathy for him on the other hand. Lastly, Amis's allusion to *Ninety Eighty Four* provides, or rather augments Orwell's analysis of totalitarian ideology into the realm of postindustrial capitalist democracies (Diedrick 78).

The examination of the above works demonstrates the complex process of narrative and narrated crime, the author's sadistic treatment of the protagonists as well as a metaphysical and artistic dimension of homicide. A textual labyrinth, a polyphonic aspect of a story, the lack of closure, the writer's involvement in the narrative text and the correlation between the acts of murder and writing and the process of investigation and reading a crime story constitute major themes in Amis's novels. As has been delineated in this section, the British novelist dexterously mingles cosmology, metaphysics, existential angst and ontological concern, thus paralleling his works to Somoza's and Borges's books with the issues concerning crime and artistic creation, the subjectivity of narration, the ambivalent relations between the author, the narrator and the audience, taking as a point of reference Nabokov's works and critical texts.

To conclude, the scrutiny of Martin Amis's works shows how skilfully the author manipulates, torments and frequently condemns to death his characters and narrators during the act of writing. The three successive parts of this chapter have shown the process of the protagonists' alienation, exploitation and annihilation by the "God-like" novelist. As has been recurrently pointed out, Amis invites the readers to participate in the act of storytelling and to share with him the pleasure of the narrative homicide by modeling, among others, on Vladimir Nabokov or Jorge Luis Borges. The satire, black comedy and ironic mode are the author's artistic tools by means of which he strives to delineate the atrocities of the contemporary world and the vile nature of men. As a postmodern novelist, he recurrently refers in his stories to other literary texts and motifs in order to verify the audience's reading experience as well as to stress the fictitious nature of his novels.

Chapter 4: Power relations in Martin Amis's writing

4.1. Political, social and cultural totalitarianism in Martin Amis's works

4.1.1. Dictatorial ideologies and their agonizing societies

Who controls the past controls the future
Who controls the present controls the past.
(George Orwell: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*)

As I formerly remarked, a great part of Amis's works is saturated with violence, death, murder and victimisation. The critics, such as Brian Finney assert that the writer focuses on these issues largely in order to illustrate the murderous, barbaric nature of contemporary civilisation. Having been born a few years after World War II and brought up during the Cold War with its political turbulences as well as with a perennial menace of nuclear annihilation and finding himself in a world at the brink of millennial war and close to ecological catastrophe, he stresses that it is not his intention as a writer to picture this modern life bleak, atrocious and frightful as it is self-evidently frightful.

Martin Amis recurrently portrays his characters, employing irony, satire and black humour, as victims of varied kinds of oppression. Firstly, he foregrounds a murderous side of totalitarian systems, prevailingly Communism, Nazism, the former being in this view closely linked with nuclear concerns. Subsequently, the author underscores a manipulative and exploitative facet of postmodern capitalism, in particular, the omnipresence of media culture, mass communication and information technology. The issues concerning political and social dictatorships are mingled with those presenting capitalist oppression, which is best exemplified in *Money*. Lastly, the novelist brings into light the problem of literary rivalry, the question of the status of a writer and of the value of a literary work in the face of postmodern social and cultural challenges, painstakingly illustrated in *The Information*.

Regarding the theme of totalitarianism, Amis concentrates largely on the atrocities of Communism and Nazism, yet in his most recent works he touches upon the problem of Islamic fundamentalism. Taking into account the first two regimes, one may notice that, on the one hand, the author depicts them individually and distinctively in two novels, *Time's Arrow* and *House of Meetings*, but, on the other hand, he merges them both in his fiction (*Yellow Dog*) and non-fiction (*Koba the Dread*). The depiction of Hitlerism and Stalinism in these two dissimilar books betokens the writer's political concerns which becomes noticeable in the above-mentioned novels, as well as his exposition of the novels' artistic values.

When juxtaposing *Time's Arrow* and *House of Meetings*, the novels written around fifteen years separate from each other, we may easily observe their structural and stylistic dissimilarity and discrepancy in delineating the relations between the author and the characters in a narrative text. The first work is indubitably more experimental and innovative in terms of a narrative form, perspective and mode, yet it is simultaneously polemical and disputatious, whereas a more moderate, elegiac, mournful tone of the second work and its traditional narration, the writer's employment of a reliable narrator as a counterbalance to his regular ironic play with narrator and reader, appears by far less controversial and more critically acclaimed. Like in a larger part of his novels which present the ferocious reality of the 20th century, both *Time's Arrow* and *House of Meetings* are not free from ironic undertones, nonetheless it is the former work in which irony becomes its vital and inseparable constituent. By the use of irony as a mode of presenting temporal reversal and splitting of the protagonist and narrator, Amis illustrates the character's perverted ethics and moral decay of Western civilisation. The novelist makes us recognise the ironic mode and time-reversed structure as the most telling yet shocking and ethically contentious ways of narrating the story of the Holocaust and its aftermath, especially through the prism of the Nazi's psyche.

In comparison with a perplexing narration and an ambiguous tone in *Time's Arrow*, *House of Meetings* emerges as a genuine tragedy devoid of a satirical undertone, a linguistic and stylistic experimentation and in this vein constitutes Amis's departure from the use of a comic genre dominant in almost all his previous works. Although in both of the novels the author depicts the horror and heinousness of the two totalitarian systems, it is undeniably his later book which highlights the tragic fate of their victims. In *Time's Arrow* genocide is presented by an unreliable, naive narrator who inadvertently distorts, or blurs its genuine dimension and therefore the readers are

denied the insight into the minds of the persecuted. What is more, the novel's aim is to exhibit the barbarous, inhuman nature of a war criminal and his desperate attempts to expunge from his memory acts of terror and his contribution to Jews' extermination. Contrastingly, in *House of Meetings*, the novel which revisits the subject of the Russian gulags, the narratorial voice is given to an unnamed political prisoner and a victim of Stalinism who relates the story of his life during and after his incarceration in Norlag, the Russian concentration camp in the Arctic Circle. The protagonist and simultaneously narrator introduces into the text the figure of his half-brother, Lev and Zoya, a Jewess girl who they both fall in love with and who becomes Lev's spouse. In this regard the story concerns a love triangle between the two brothers and Zoya, and becomes a prelude to the central event of the book – the moment of opening the eponymous House of Meetings where prisoners were permitted conjugal visits after Stalin's death in 1953. Nevertheless, the description of marital meetings in the Russian concentration camp constitutes the background for the analysis of the protagonists' deplorable situation in a gulag and its pernicious influence on their psyche and lives in the ensuing years.

Taking into consideration language and style, one may observe the novel's realist approach reinforced by Amis's use of a reliable narrator who graphically recounts the events. This narration, so untypical of the British writer, combined with his exploration of the subject utterly deviating from his former issues delineating mostly Western European and American matters, constitutes a new, uncharted territory to Amis. Moreover, the theme examined in *House of Meetings* concerns not only its protagonists but every single character of the book as well. Therefore, the linguistic and stylistic innovation as well as the very narration of the text become subordinated to the ends of tragedy. As Finney remarks, despite the narrator's personal involvement in the story and his foregrounding the figures of his brother and beloved woman, the tragedy of the novel is seemingly not confined to the three protagonists. The critic asserts that here Amis expresses his profound grief and sorrow over the loss of Russia's soul as a result of a long process of dehumanisation and barbarism its society experienced under Stalin's regime, particularly prisoners of gulags, which is illustrated by the following mottos of the prison: "the first law of camp life: to you, nothing- from you everything" (Amis, *HM*: 223) or " You may live, but you won't love" (Amis, *HM*: 85). These two quotations, in particular the second one, reflecting Russian citizens' physical and mental

maltreatment, and their undergoing the process of emotional washing up, indicate the book's parallel with George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

It is interesting to observe that the narrator recounts the story of his life in a Russian gulag and outlines a camp reality, addressing his book to his American stepdaughter, Venus, who additionally writes the footnotes in it. The figure of Venus as the recipient of the narrative as well as the writer's allusions to momentous dates in both American and Russian recent history – the four-part narrative is dated September 1-6, 2004, which refers to Beslan tragedy and echoes the terrorist attacks on World Trade Center, symbolise American and Russian shared dramas at the outset of the third millennium. More importantly, however, Amis endeavours to show that Venus's thoroughly American experience makes her fully recognise a Soviet camp life and its reverberations on the one hand, and helps the narrator explain to her the effect on both himself and Lev of their eight years spent in Norlag on the other hand (Finney, 2008: 66). This outcome constitutes the main theme of the novel and it becomes disclosed in the final pages of the book when the narrator, near to death, opens the letter addressed to him by his long-dead brother Lev.

Amis purposefully uses the figure of the narrator's stepdaughter as a messenger or secret sharer of her uncle's tragic story and stresses that without Venus's American experience he would find himself unable to disclose the heinousness of the Russian gulag. Brian Finney points out that unlike most writers depicting the theme of Soviet camps, such as Solzhenitsyn, exposed the enormous life force of their protagonists, their powerful willingness to survive and recover from their traumatic experience in the camps, Amis strives to show the alternative dimension of a gulag reality, the "more typical experience" embodied by the narrator incapable of transcending the camp's ferocity. In keeping with this, the protagonist does not exhibit the qualities attributed to Solzhenitsyn's heroes, apparently larger-than-life characters, but rather stands for a common or "typical" representative of gulag's victims. Considering the figure of the narrator's stepdaughter, her role as the story's addressee, the author parallels her wholly American experience with the Russian tragic history to make the readers, especially those of Western Europe and of the United States, comprehend the heinousness of any totalitarian system. Amis deliberately places Venus as the recipient of her uncle's story at the beginning of the 21st century in order to highlight the fact that at the outset of the third millennium Western society, having simultaneously experienced a political, social and economic catastrophe, can utterly recognise the tragedy of Russian civilians

persecuted in the name of the ferocious ideology of Soviet Communism. In view of that, *House of Meetings* has an educational and didactic dimension. Here, the author apparently abandons humour, satire and lessens his ironic tone, as well as he renounces the narrative and linguistic innovation in favour of a realistic depiction of the gulag's prisoners' trauma. Hence, this novel stands in a startling contrast to *Time's Arrow* where the narrative experimentation is mingled with irony by means of which the writer, on the one hand, makes his mostly British and American audience perceive the ludicrousness and irrationality of the Nazi ideology and, on the other hand, accuses them of their entire ignorance of the history of genocide as well as of their attempts to blot out from their minds the recollections of this disgraceful chapter in the history of World War II.

When set beside *Time's Arrow* and *House of Meetings*, the novels that separately outline the horrors of the two totalitarian systems, *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million* constitutes a blend of a political-historical essay on the Soviet Russia, a black farce, a satire on both Stalin's and Hitler's terrors and an acrimonious debate among Western intellectuals over Communism and Nazism. Although in this work Amis makes references to the two dictators, presenting them as comic pairs, it is the Soviet oppressor and his regime to which the title of the book alludes to. "Koba the Dread" refers to Joseph Stalin who adopted the nickname "Koba" as a child after the hero of a well-known Russian novel *The Patricide* whilst "The Dread" derives from Ivan the Terrible, also known as Ivan the Dread, a "hands-on torturer" and "paranoid psychotic" after whom Stalin modeled himself. The two elements of the second part of the title mirror a grotesque or irony: "Twenty million" indicates the number of victims who died in his purges, famines and forced collectivization whilst "Laughter" recognises the literary paradigm that organises the writer's examination of Stalin's evil (Diedrick, 189-190). Amis directs his satire in the book at the ideas of a Communist society, and analogously to *House of Meetings*, he is demonstrating his defiance of all forms of ideology, asserting that: "ideology brings about a disastrous fusion: that of violence and righteousness" (Amis, *KD*: 86).

As for Stalin, the novelist's presentation of the Soviet dictator echoes a monstrous world-historical version of the grotesque, preposterous villains that recurrently appear in his novels, the most prominent of whom are Quentin Villiers in *Dead Babies*, Fielding Goodney in *Money* or Steve Cousins in *The Information*. Furthermore, the novelist invariably employs literary tropes and categories to explain the outcomes of Stalin's

iniquity (Diedrick 190). In *Koba the Dread* the Soviet dictator is not solely depicted as a historical figure but is also as a literary character equipped with most grotesque and hideous features attributed to the afore-mentioned characters. Placing this book within the convention of a crime story, one recognises Stalin as a murderer, the eponymous twenty million are anonymous, unnamed group victims exterminated during the Communist regime, whereas the audience play the role of a detective. In view of such analysis, *Koba the Dread* bears resemblance to *Time's Arrow*, especially with respect to the foregrounding the figure of the perpetrators, their repugnant portrait and a thorough scrutiny of their crimes. What distinguishes Amis's later work from his previous novel is its humouristic, satirical undertone and the author's deviation from presenting Stalin and the Soviet holocaust towards his fierce polemics with various intellectuals and thinkers concerning totalitarian systems.

As was formerly underscored, *Koba the Dread* is called a black farce owing to the novelist's grotesque, caricatured portrayal of the Soviet dictator and likewise to his perception of the situation in Russia as weird and absurd when Stalin was in power. At this point, Diedrick refers to the writer's reporting the seminars with Northrop Fry in 1969 concerning the condition of Russia during its most brutal regime: "Russia, 1917-53: what is its genre? It is not a tragedy, like *Lear*, not an anti-comedy, like *Troilus and Cressida*, nor yet a problem comedy, like *Measure for Measure*. It is a black farce, like *Titus Andronicus*." However, the critic stresses that the author's juxtaposing Stalin with *Lear* garbles Shakespeare's greatest tragedy and his comparison of the state of Soviet Russia to these plays appears unseemly as it renders both literature and history trivial and simplistic. Diedrick underlines the discordance between Amis's delineation of Stalin's murderous policies, citing and referring to prominent Russian novelists, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Eugenia Ginzburg and Nadezdha Mandelstam, which occupies a vast majority of his books, and the writer's pondering on the macabre yet satiric facet of the Soviet system and its ideology. In this respect the critic claims that *Koba the Dread* ought not to be considered as a serious historical study, and therefore a black farce seems to be a more appropriate term for this work.

Needless to say, farce constitutes one of a few generic components of Amis's work. In fact, it is a hybrid form, combining personal elements, such as autobiography, biography, and historical ones, like political science and historical fiction (Keulks, 2003: 243). Taking into account its historical and political aspect, it is worth referring to the writer's rumination on the attitude of a Western society towards Soviet crimes. He

voices his disquiet over the “chief-lacuna” of the 20th century – the failure of Western intellectuals, among others, his father, Kingsley Amis, to condemn the grotesque, gruesome crimes perpetrated in the USSR even as they were occurring, and their disinclination to utterly renounce some of their Communist sympathies since (Diedrick 191). Amis highlights the hypocrisy of Western thinkers in their assessment of the disgraceful legacy of Stalinist Russia and, in this respect, he parallels it with their equivocal treatment of the Holocaust which he accentuated in *Time’s Arrow*.

In *Koba the Dread* Amis focuses on the Soviet oppressor and his regime, yet Stalinism is not the exclusive theme permeating his work. The figure of Stalin echoes that of Hitler to whom the novelist refers when comparing the two totalitarian systems. The juxtaposition of the two dictators and their dissimilar ideologies reflects the writer’s predilection for portraying in his fiction opposing comic pairs and exaggerated contrasts, such as Terry Service and Gregory Riding in *Success*, Keith Talent and Guy Clinch in *London Fields* or Richard Tull and Gwynn Barry in *The Information*. He employs a similar procedure in *Koba the Dread* but one may detect a disparity between the caricatured, satirical portrait of the afore-mentioned fictional pairs, miserable, defenceless characters and the narrators devoid of agency, and a depiction of the two powerful oppressors. Amis uses literary references or categories to assess the historical and moral differences between the evils of Hitler and Stalin. The author remarks that “Nazi terror strove for precision, while Stalinist terror was deliberately random” (Amis, *KD*: 85), employing this allusion to the witches’ chant in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* to compare the two leaders: “Ideology brings about a disastrous fusion: that of violence and righteousness – a savagery without stain. Hitler’s ideology was foul, Lenin’s fair-seeming” (Amis, *KD*: 86). Subsequently, he endeavours to explain why, in contrast to the Holocaust, the Soviet calamity is capable of evoking laughter, as he suggests in the title of his work, finding the solution in utopian hankering –an idea he considers when alluding to *Dr Faustus* and Milan Kundera’s *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*:

Is that the difference between the little moustache and the big moustache, between Stalin and Beelzebub? One elicits spontaneous fury, and the other elicits spontaneous laughter? And what kind of laughter is it? It is, of course, the laughter of universal fondness for that old, old idea about the perfect society. It is also the laughter of forgetting. It forgets the demonic energy embedded in that hope. It forgets the Twenty Million. (Amis, *KD*: 256-57)

Diedrick underlines Amis's maintaining that scanty observers of the Soviet experiment laugh spontaneously when they consider Stalin and therefore he regards this comparison as affected and false, typical of a farce or grotesque, but not of an in-depth historical examination (Diedrick 194).

Nevertheless, one cannot fail to notice that the novelist's hinting at a satirical perception of the Soviet dictator indicates his irony on the cultural paradox in viewing diversely Communism and Nazism, particularly with respect to the unequal social condemnation of the two systems and their ideologies. Amis blames Western thinkers and men of letters for disregarding the horrifying scale of Stalinist regime in respect to that of Hitlerism and indicates that some part of Western society distort the images of the two totalitarian leaders who evoke disparate mental reactions, that is wrath in the case of Hitler and laughter and mockery in the case of Stalin. Furthermore, one may concur with Diedrick's viewpoint that Amis's book cannot be regarded as a serious, objective historical-political study on the Stalinist history owing to the writer's personal involvement in polemics with various critics and thinkers concerning Communism as well as his digressions and references to personal matters, such as a depiction of his sister's death. However, in *Koba the Dread* the British author does not aspire to elicit a historical truth and his book serves rather as a base or prelude to his mulling over his family concerns and dilemmas – the writer correlates Stalin's cruelty to the Fatherland and his father's severity, or even sadism as a husband and father, as well as he compares, misfortunately, as critics assert, the extermination of the unnamed twenty million victims of the regime to the demise of his sister Sally. From a literary standpoint, specifically a detective story convention, Amis's work constitutes a painstaking analysis of the nature of evil and perception of a criminal. In a grotesque portraying of the Soviet dictator the author makes references to his most well-known villainous characters, adroitly combining dread, horror, repulsion with satire and farce.

4.1.2. Money: “free” society and cultural enslavement

This is a suicide note. By the time you lay it aside (and you should always read these things slowly, on the lookout for clues or giveaways), John Self will no longer exist. Or at any rate that's the idea.

(Martin Amis: *Money: A Suicide Note*)

Stalin's and Hitler's dictatorship delineated by Amis in the hitherto-mentioned works reflect the author's preoccupation with any forms of suppression, persecution and abasement of an individual in the 20th century. Nonetheless, when we inspect more closely his fiction, it appears that these two totalitarian regimes are not the sole systems that oppress and manipulate their victims. The novels, such as *Money*, *Success* and *London Fields* illustrate the mechanisms of mass-media and show business industry's manoeuvring and controlling the protagonists by creating the illusory, distorted and biased vision of reality and by imprisoning in it the naive characters. In these works the writer attributes evil, corruption and moral degradation of contemporary, mainly British and American society, largely to the detrimental influence of late modern capitalism in the era of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. The grotesque portrayal of the characters, embodying the spiritual decay of the landed gentry and the greedy self-betterment of the 'yobs' (*Success*), sexual and materialistic successes (*Money*) as well as gender conflict and class struggle (*London Fields*) constitute the caricature of British and American conservative leaders of the 1980s and the parody of their politics. From the literary standpoint, these characters and their ambience echo Dickens' urban industrial setting and a satirical depiction of the protagonists, mainly in his investigation of their relationships, rivalry and struggle most visibly in *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* or *Great Expectations*. Amis follows numerous themes recurrent in Dickens's fiction, such as characters' doubles, the orphaned childhood, mercenariness and moral corruption, the faceless, automaton-like qualities of his protagonists and the author's doubts about the redemptive potentiality of human nature.

The protagonists of *Success*, *Money* and *London Fields* are entirely dominated by their obsessions, most prominently by money, sex drives and a desire to attain success at all costs, and therefore they epitomise deplorable products of the political and social systems of the late 1970s and 1980s in Britain and in the USA, the era of late capitalism

and postmodern culture which, according to Fredric Jameson, has become a product in its own right and constitutes the consumption of sheer commodification as a process (Finney, 2008: 145). Amis ironically delineates Terry Service, Gregory Riding, Keith Talent, Guy Clinch, Nicola Six ,and above all John Self as naive victims of the manipulative mechanisms of the epoch they live in, not solely the impact of late modern capitalism but of other facets of all the 20th century as well. Among all the main characters and narrators of these three novels the writer has singled out John Self as the most conspicuous victim of miscellaneous aspects of cultural and social oppression, most notably capitalist exploitation and Communist totalitarianism.

In *Money* Amis excels at portraying the disarming ingenuity of his narrator who is not cognizant of any controlling forces exercised both by his closest friends, lovers and relatives as well as of the fact that the British author uses him and other characters as literary models for his exploration of the roots of evil, the mechanisms of tyranny and victimisation, making allusions to classical and modern literary works. John Self, a naive semi-illiterate and unreliable narrator of his text, though being steadily acquainted, or, from his perspective, bombarded with the information about various literary canons and traditions, mostly by the figure of Martin Amis and Martina Twain, obstinately remains ignorant of literature and high culture which constrains him and finally unables him to comprehend the motifs of people's wickedness and the circumstances of his downfall.

On a surface level John Self falls prey to his insatiable erotic desires and the overwhelming power of money which is comically exposed as the spoiler of quality human life. Due to his British-American origin John embodies a transatlantic culture, an everyman of materialism in the decade of Thatcher's and Raegan's governments. The novelist attributes Self's worship of money, his expression of deeper feelings only in financial terms and his incapability of relating commiseratingly to others, especially to the impecunious, to the pernicious influence of the politics adopted by the two leaders, particularly their supply-side economics which greatly contributed to the augmentation of the disparity between affluent and rich, and to the increase of the universal pursuit of money (Finney, 2008: 48). However, the protagonist's naive idolisation of wealth turns out to be delusive and lures him into an almost death trap adroitly weaved by his fiercest enemy, Fielding Goodney. Goodney's implacable, motiveless hatred towards Self pushes him into arranging a cunning plan to ruin financially the main character and to deeply humiliate him. The producer's preposterous envy of John, his zealousness to

destroy and subjugate the narrator and to take absolute control over his fiction leave the protagonist disorientated and vainly pondering on the grounds of Goodney's vengeance. In fact, Fielding's plotting against John and concomitant leading his associate to material bankruptcy and to public degradation constitutes a part of this oppressive mechanism which entails, among other things, the Amis character's gradual unveiling of John's literary ignorance and his humiliating, or discrediting the narrator in the final section of their chess game, Self's ex-girlfriend, Selina's and her lover, Martina's husband's plotting against him and deceiving him, as well as the protagonist's disclosing disgraceful facts about his family roots, which contribute to his failed suicide attempt. The character's chronic addiction to money and pornography hamper him from moral reformation undertaken both by Martina Twain, his "spiritual angel" and "Martin Amis," playing a double role of John's artistic reformer and his would-be executioner. In consequence, Self, wilfully or unwillingly, falls prey to the abusive, devious social machinery operated by those who consider him an easy, inviting target for manipulation.

Money, similarly to Amis's other novels is equipped with numerous literary allusions, predominantly to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Animal Farm*, Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" as well as to William Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Hamlet*. As a matter of fact, this novel illustrates most profoundly, thanks to its multitudinous intertextuality, the protagonist's victimisation and oppression on a narrative and narrated level. Among its diverse intertextual references the author seemingly exposes the theme of Orwell's Communist totalitarianism which constitutes, next to the corrupt late modern capitalism propagated by Thatcher and Reagan, another oppressive mechanism to which he alludes in his work. The critics, such as James Diedrick maintain that Amis redefines or extends Orwell's examination of totalitarian doctrine outlined in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the work considered a seminal postmodern novel, into the realm of post-industrial democracies (Diedrick 78). He stresses that similarly to Orwell's protagonist, Winston Smith, John Self lives in a "free" society, and unlike Winston, his responses have been determined not by the totalitarian state mechanism but by an equally mighty economic system that moulds individual subjectivities, identities, fetishes objects and commodifies human relations. Diedrick further argues that Self's position in this system – as a director of television commercials – makes him become the primary focus of its meditating machinery. At this point, the critic refers to Jean Baudrillard's diagnosis of the "loss of the real" as a pertinent

illustration of Self's reality which is both an illusion and an intricate joke. When speaking of Baudrillard's "real" defined by the French theoretician in terms of the media which creates it, Diedrick emphasises that the reader who is poking fun at Self, he/she is also laughing at the exaggerated version of other selves (Diedrick 78). Regarding Amis's and Orwell's textual interconnection, John Dern contests Diedrick's perception of Orwell's work as heralding post-industrialism and postmodernism painstakingly analysed in Amis's book, attracting our attention to the contrast of the protagonists of *Money* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The critic underlines that unlike Self's inertia, emotional passivity and stubborn resistance to change his lifestyle, Winston Smith endeavours to redefine himself in the face of regime and attempts to affirm a new self thanks to which he will be entirely free to decide about his life and to act according to his will. In this respect Self epitomises a modernist character whereas Smith exemplifies the author's anti-modernist tendency and thus foreshadows postmodernism (Dern 26). Nevertheless, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the protagonist's perseverance in altering his life ends up in failure since his self becomes defined for him by the authority of Big Brother, who, symbolising the paternalistic modernist artist, does not acknowledge the right of the individual to establish truth for himself, whereas *Money*'s apparently submissive, childlike narrator, despite his suffering countless bitter humiliations, finally manages to survive and liberate himself from his persecutors and money mania:

But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother. (Orwell, 1984: 311)

All that morning when death felt so near and life seemed such good stuff – I never called for help. My life has been a fight between shame and fear. In suicide shame wins. Shame is stronger than fear, though you still feel shame. You still fear fear, in my case, and suddenly you want to call the whole thing off. In the finished suicide, shame wins, but you wouldn't want anyone to see it winning. Suicide is so shameful. I would have hated anyone to see me at it. No, I wouldn't have been seen dead in the bathroom there, committing suicide like that.

(Amis, *M*: 386) [italics in the original]

I want my money again but I feel better now that I haven't got any. There are these little pluses. You, they can't do much to you when you haven't got any money. There's no money in it for them. So they can't be fucked. I've been rich and I've been poor. Poor is worse, but rich can be a clunker, too.

(Amis, *M*: 391-392) [italics in the original]

Contrary to Orwell's lucidity and straightforwardness in depicting Smith, his determination to struggle against repressive totalitarianism and his ultimate surrender, Self, though portrayed as a deplorable, grotesque character, appears, in fact, a complex and enigmatic person with regard to his fight with the Amis character's and Fielding Goodney's manipulation and oppression who epitomise Big Brother's narrated and narrative dictatorship. John finally escapes his doom, yet, on the other hand, during his affluent life he gradually becomes cognizant of the unknown controlling power, though he is unwilling to overtly recognise it and face it. Martin Amis via "Martin Amis" and Martina Twain invariably makes allusions to Orwell's novel, most visibly, to its symbolic place of oppression – Room 101, in order to illustrate the parallel between Self's and Smith's wretched situations, but John has doubts whether the presence of the Room is a fact or a dream:

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

The protagonist's questioning testifies to his ignorance since his author makes himself known. However, his literary inexperience, semi-illiteracy and naivety constitute his sole weapons in a fight to retain a delusory autonomy and a mythical control of his own destiny that Smith lost and handed it over to the state (Dern 88).

Orwell's theme that saturates Amis's novel, in particular the image of Big Brother, largely shapes its protagonists. As was pointed out before, John Self bears a close resemblance to Winston Smith, at least it is how the readers may perceive the protagonist, though in the interview with John Haffenden Martin Amis asserts that his character misleadingly and ingenuously identifies himself with part of the corruptive, oppressive mass media and film industry system operated by its mogul, Fielding Goodney, undeniably reminding us of the figure of O'Brien:

"Did you have any sense of Fielding Goodney, being a type of O'Brien, persecuting his victim of modern society, John Self?"

"The wised-up operator, the one who knows all the uncomfortable truths: there was a glimmer of that, but it doesn't have particularly wide emphasis. The point of it is that John Self's education is under way, but he still sees himself as on the O'Brien side whereas in fact he isn't: he's a victim.

He likes the sound of classless Oceania, and he sees himself as an idealistic young corporal in the Thought Police, but the reader suspects that he's more of an occupant of Room 101."

(quoted in Tredell 65)

Furthermore, one may see the analogy between Julia from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Martina Twain, Smith's and Self's saviours and counterpoises to the Communist regime and post-industrial capitalist democracy. Nonetheless, both John and Winston renounce their mistresses, sacrificing them to the systems that tyrannise and manipulate them.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is indubitably the most recognisable yet not the exclusive literary work that has influenced Amis's novel. In the satirical depiction of his protagonist the writer frequently employs animal imagery, alluding mainly to *Animal Farm*, *Othello*, as well as hinting at Kafka's story, "Metamorphosis." Animal references constitute an indispensable part of the book, both in terms of its subject matter and its linguistic structure – they reflect John Self's animal-like status, his degradation and ignominy when being described by the writer in jocular situations, as well as mirror his awareness of having the status of an inhuman creature, most notably, of a dog. Animal imagery from Orwell's allegorical novel becomes the crux of Self's narrative, illustrates and extends the taunting, derisive portrait of the main character while concurrently arousing the reader's imaginative compassion for him (Diedrick 88). Paradoxically enough, having read *Animal Farm* he misses its irony and its allegory which points directly at him, and he depicts himself in animal terms well before his American girlfriend acquaints him with Orwell's book, for instance, when he gazes at a barmaid with "the face of a fat snake, bearing all the signs of its sins" (Amis, *M*: 14), or when walking with an enormous hangover, enters the bathroom, appearing "on all fours, a pale and very penitent crocodile" (Amis, *M*: 16).

Self recurrently compares his life to that of an animal, yet he is unaware that his constant reinforcement of this analogy reflect, in fact, the author's manipulation of his person by purposefully expounding his animal-like qualities when alluding to pigs and dogs from *Animal Farm*. Showing abhorrence to the pigs in Orwell's novel ("You should see these hairy-jawed throwbacks, these turd lookalikes, honking and chomping at the trough") (Amis, *M*: 191), John fails to perceive the correspondence between their behaviour and his own lifestyle ("200 pounds of yob genes, booze, snout, and fast food") (Amis, *M*: 35). On the other hand, he seemingly aspires to the position of a dog:

Where would I be in *Animal Farm*? ...Now, after mature consideration, I think I might have what it takes to be a dog. I *am* a dog. I am a dog at the seaside tethered to a fence while my master and mistress romp on the sands. I am bouncing, twisting, weeping, consuming myself. A dog can take the odd slap or kick. A slap you can live with, as a dog. What's a kick? Look at the dogs in the street, how everything implicates them, how everything is their concern, how they race towards great discoveries. And imagine the grief, tethered to a fence when there is activity – and play, and thought and fascination – just beyond the holding rope. (Amis, *M*: 193)

According to Diedrick Self's referring to *Animal Farm* as an animal story and associating himself with a dog constitutes one of the greatest comic conceits in *Money*. He points out that it is comic but not patronising or disdainful since the Self-referential image of the dog exemplifies his animal habits but longing for the world without restraints and control is human, and therefore stirs up profound sympathy in the reader (Diedrick 89). Furthermore, it is tempting to suggest that the protagonist's remark reflects his willingness yet incapability and failed attempts to alter or reform his animalistic behaviour. This is best exemplified by Self's description of his exercising by "wiggling my legs in the air like an upended beetle," attributing this attempt to reform himself as "my metamorphosis" (Amis, *M*: 312), not being cognizant of the fact that he alludes to Kafka's story, "Metamorphosis," in which a son rejected by his father (analogously to Self) changes into a beetle (Finney, 2008 :49).

As was formerly pointed out, Amis satirically presents his pathetic character who is totally unaware of miscellaneous machinations occurring around him, referring, apart from Orwell's works and Kafka's story, to Shakespeare's plays, mainly to *Othello* and *Hamlet*. The novelist alludes to British classical texts in order to comically accentuate his treatment of Self's relationship to high culture, the protagonist's literary ignorance which renders his life simplified and primitive and, what is more, hampers him from recognising the author's manipulative artistic strategies and the oppressive social mechanism that he is surrounded by, which are implied in these two Shakespeare's plays. Martin Amis's protagonists and alter-egos, the Amis character and Martina Twain, acquaint John with *Hamlet* and *Othello*, encouraging him to ponder upon the plays, yet their efforts fall through as Self incessantly turns a deaf ear to literature itself but instead he rates highly its commercial vogue. Needless to say, contrary to the altruistic Martina who aims at reforming and educating his lover, the Amis character torments and pesters John by displaying the congruity between his forlorn life and the

anguish of Shakespeare's tragic heroes as well as by unveiling to him the wicked, corrupted, treacherous side of human nature.

As for the first Shakespearean allusion, Amis outlines one of Self's well-known television commercials of *Hamlet* and the manner in which the protagonist describes it:

Me, I was up in Stratford making a TV ad for a new kind of flash-friable pork-and-egg bap or roll or hero called a Hamlette. We used some theatre and shot the whole thing on stage. There was the actor, dressed in black, with his scull and globe, being henpecked by that mad chick he's got in trouble. When suddenly a big bimbo wearing cod pants and bra strolls on, carrying a tray with two steaming Hamlettes on it. She gives him the wink – and Bob's your uncle. All my commercials featured a big bim in cool pants and bra. It was sort of my trademark. (Amis, *M*: 69-70)

The above citation, together with other references to Shakespeare's plays, echo the protagonist's situation. The writer discloses the parallel between Hamlet's belligent attitude to his stepfather, Claudius and Self's tempestuous, violent relationship with his supposed father, Barry. As a matter of fact, Barry Self withdraws his paternal backing from his son, having on different occasions invoiced him for the money he spent on his upbringing and taken out a contract on his life – Laertes' hiring Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which is echoed in a pulp fiction fashion (Diedrick 86). Moreover, the revised script for the autobiographical film Self is striving to make mirrors the Oedipal motif of *Hamlet*: the son murders his father believing he secures in this way his mother. Besides these plot analogies, the protagonist's existential soliloquies which frequently appear somewhat ludicrous, reverberates with a skewed insight which calls into mind Hamlet's own high-pitched dramatic monologues (Diedrick 86).

Self's contemplation on his troubled relationship with his father ("Why do I bother with my father? Who cares? What is this big deal about dads and sons? I don't know – it's not that he's my dad. It's more that I'm his son. I am aswirl with him, with his pre-empting, his blackballing genes"(Amis, *M*: 170) visibly mirrors Kingsley and Martin Amis's relations. *Money* is one of numerous novels in which the writer depicts father-and-son stormy relations as a reflection on his ambivalent attitude towards his father and a complex situation in his family. In this work Amis foregrounds his relationship with Kingsley and the characters, Barry and John Self, referring to their personal and professional bonds. This is vividly illustrated in the conversation between John Self and the Amis character during which the narrator alludes to the literary career of his interlocutor and of his father, accusing the author of nepotism: "Your dad, he's a writer

too, isn't he? Bet that made it easier"(Amis, *M*: 86). As a riposte, Martin sardonically remarks: "Oh, sure. It's just like taking over the family pub" (Amis, *M*: 86), and, in this way, he points to the Selfs' genealogical ambivalence reflected in Barry Self's profession as the proprietor of a pub named after the quintessential literary patriarch – the "Shakespeare." The novelist, via the Amis character, underscores the parallelism between his father's patronizing attitude towards Martin's work and Kingsley's professional rejection, and Barry's withdrawal of his paternal support from John. (Keulks, 2003: 190). One may assume that the novelist, portraying John Self as a victim of his father's negligence, wickedness and power, accentuates his own father's disrespect for his work as a writer and his solitary road to a literary career.

John Self's victimisation, naivety and ignorance are reinforced with reference to *Othello*, the novel's even more pervading motif. Analogously to *Hamlet* and Orwell's books, the narrator of *Money* misinterprets Shakespeare's play, primarily erroneously assuming that Desdemona is being unfaithful, basing on a previously seen pornographic film which uses the identical plot, and he therefore exhibits his stereotypical feelings and sexual obsession. Furthermore, Self's résumé of *Othello*'s plot serves as one of the novel's most outstanding parodies and illustrates the manner in which Amis "doubles" Self's voice, speaking through it of Self's character and his restraints:

Luckily, I must have seen the film or the TV spin-off of *Othello* for despite its dropped aitch the musical version stuck pretty faithfully to a plot I knew well. The language problem remained a problem but the action I could follow without that much effort. The flash spade general arrives to take up a position on some island, in the olden days there, bringing with him the Lady-Di figure as his bride. Then she starts diddling one of his lieutenants, a funloving kind of guy whom I took to immediately. Same old story. Now she tries one of these double-subtle numbers on her husband-you know, always rooting for the boyfriend and singing his praises. But Othello's sidekick is on to them, and, hoping to do himself some good, tells all to the guvnor. This big spade, though, he can't or won't believe it. A classic situation. Well, love is blind, I thought. (Amis, *M*: 277)

The above quotation reflects Self's facile, shallowing interpretation of Shakespeare's play, which, in turn, illustrates the process of the commodification of culture in postmodern capitalist society. In addition, he is unaware of the fact that his depiction of the characters and the plot of *Othello* mirrors, correspondingly to Orwell's novels and Kafka's story, his own fate as well as the intrigues and manipulations he shortly falls prey to. Hence, John's situation resembles Othello, though the very author asserts in the

conversation with Haffenden that he epitomises Roderigo, a victim of Shakespeare's play and, in Amis's words, the "lecherous spendthrift and a gull"(Tredell 65). Amis's statement is confirmed by Diedrick who claims that John Self indeed bears more resemblance to Roderigo than to Othello and alludes to Coleridge's assessment of Roderigo, asserting that it may apply equally to John Self: "the want of character and the power of the passions, like the wind loudest in empty houses, forms his character" (Diedrick 260). However, the American critic simultaneously underlines the fact that the protagonist of *Money* resembles *Othello* in his double credulity – he is, or wants to be ignorant of the intricate web of deceitfulness, treachery and double-dealing in which he is involved. As an illustration, Diedrick refers to John's astonishing discovery that Martina's husband, and later his best friend, have been making love to Selina and to his finding out that "Frank the phone," the mysterious caller who has been provoked and beset him during his sojourn in New York turns out to be Fielding Goodney who contributes to Self's financial ruin. As for Goodney, he epitomises Iago since neither of them had no clear motive for taking revenge on their putative friends, acting, according to Coleridge, from "motiveless malignity" (quoted in Diedrick 87).

Taking into account *Money*'s linguistic affinity with *Othello*, Amis incorporates the language of Shakespeare's play to expand it to Self's concluding, fierce confrontation with Goodney, even though the protagonist remains oblivious to the author's allusion. This becomes visible when Self, having viciously beaten the disguised Goodney, taking him for Frank the phone, asks him to identify himself and is given in response Fielding's crying: "Oh damn dear go. Oh and you man dog" (Amis, *M*: 322). It is not until late in the book, when John relates this scene to the Amis character during their chess game, that he receives a translation of these lines from the play, pronounced by Roderigo when he becomes knifed by Iago: "Oh damned Iago. Oh inhuman dog." As a remark, "Martin Amis" states "pure transference," referring to the language of Freudian psychology he is fluent in which he acknowledges that Goodney considers himself as the wronged Roderigo and Self as Iago. Nevertheless, John, having been given by Martina a book on Freud, neither understands Freudian terminology nor Amis's comment: the protagonist is utterly unaware of this reference to him as "inhuman dog" which is uttered by Fielding who falls prey to Self's fury and which illustrates, in fact, John as a victim of Goodney's intrigue. This, together with Self's misinterpreting the *Othello* citation as a reference to the Amis character's car (an Iago 666): "The cunning bastard, I thought. Oh, I caught that reference to his own little rattletrap. He's definitely

after my *Fiasco*” (Amis, *M*: 347), symbolises the narratorial ingenuity which makes him an inviting target for the manipulation of “Martin Amis” and any other character in the book save Martina.

To sum up, when interpreting *Money* on the grounds of its reference to all the above-analysed works, we can easily notice that Martin Amis adroitly connects the themes of corruption and manipulation of individuals by the oppressive mechanisms of post-industrial capitalist democracy and the enslavement and victimisation of the society by the totalitarian regime. The novel constitutes an illustrative example of the author’s employing comism and satire with reference to the prominent, well-known literary works as a form of deepening and broadening his book’s issue. Regarding the motif of the Communist dictatorship, *Money*, though not regarded as a political-historical novel, like *Koba the Dread*, or social tragedy, such as *House of Meetings*, visibly mirrors the process of imprisonment, the emotional washing-up and the exploitation of individuals, particularly the weak and susceptible ones, by the powerful media, show and porn industry system in the time of the assumed “free” society and democracy.

4.1.3. Islamism and Otherness

The champions of militant Islam are, of course, misogynists, woman-haters, they are also misologists – haters of reason. Their armed doctrine is little more than a chaotic penal code underscored by impotent dreams of genocide. And, like all religions, it is a massive agglutination of stock response, of clichés, of inherited and unexamined formulations.

(Martin Amis: *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom*)

Communism and Nazism constitute two elements of Amis’s informal literary totalitarian ‘triade’. As was pointed out before, a substantial part of his recent fiction, and especially non-fiction, reflect the novelist’s preoccupation with Islamic fundamentalism. In the works, such as *Yellow Dog*, “The Last Days of Muhammad Atta” and *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom* the author attempts to disclose cultural and social backgrounds to the terrorist ideology, making allusions to Islamic extremists, and to accentuate the idea of power and hegemony in the contemporary world. Despite the fact that Amis’s latest fiction and essays provoked acrimonious debates among literary circles, prevailing in Arabic countries, they mirror

a new tendency in his literary oeuvre, such as his concerns over religious fundamentalism, women's discrimination in Islamic countries, or the relationship between faith and political terrorism. There is no escaping the fact that all the above-mentioned books written after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 provided a deep insight into a devastating reality of this late modern era. This event, together with the concomitant Islamic bombing attacks on the London tube and a railway station in Madrid, which reflect social, political and economic hecatomb of Western civilisation, became a turning point for Amis as well as for numerous Western intellectuals and thinkers in perceiving the world and its society at the turn of the new millennium, in particular with respect to troubled relations between Western and Islamic cultures. The scale and dimension of this terrorism induced the novelist to ponder on the very nature of Islamism and to create his theory and interpretation of what it represents. The author asserts that the roots of Islamic militancy goes back to the 13th century when Islam became subordinated to the West and this resulted in radicals' unrepressed fury, and he stresses that it represents an extreme fanatical ideology which presupposes the rejection of reason (Finney, 2008: 109).

Amis considers Islamic fundamentalism as preposterous and irrational, and thus compares it to the ludicrousness of Stalin's and Hitler's regimes, arguing that their ideologies imply the abomination of reason. Added to that, the writer underscores misogyny, racial and ethnical prejudice and religious fundamentalism as inseparable elements of Islamism. In response to the charges of discrimination and hatred for the Muslim culture he stirs up in Arabic countries and Islamic minorities in Britain, he totally denies being an Islamophobe, asserting that he finds the harassment and violence against Muslim women outrageous and that it is mortifying to be a member of a society in which any minority feels endangered. Still the same, the writer considers himself an anti-Islamist since he underlines that "there is nothing irrational about fearing someone who professedly wants to kill you" (quoted in Finney, 2008:109).

Amis's works concerning Islamic extremism mirror his polemics on the social, political and historical dimension of religious fundamentalism, but above all his meticulous observation and exploration of the iniquity of any totalitarian system. Similarly to *Koba the Dread*, in *Yellow Dog* and *The Second Plane* the novelist's historical-political concerns are intertwined with his linguistic inventiveness and literary allusions. This becomes apparent in the first-mentioned novel, the work which does not directly and overtly outline the issue of Islamic terrorism, but it incorporates "the mental

environment that seemed to come after September 11th” (quoted in Finney, 2008: 62). *Yellow Dog* focuses on the problem of male insecurity and their desperate attempts to gain power and control over women via violence and harrassment. Amis delineates this concern through a mental metamorphosis of the main character, Xan Meo, who, having been severely beaten over the head by two hired criminals, becomes sent back to an atavistic state of mind in which his male fantasies and yearnings dominate his behaviour. The author underlines a correlation between the figure of Xan and his image of Islamic extremists who are so obsessed with their powerlessness, helplessness and indignity that they dream of compensatory dominance over women. He shows that both his protagonist and fundamentalists use violence as a retaliation against their humiliation and maltreatment.

Taking into account *The Second Plane*, one may notice their considerable structural and stylistic difference from *Yellow Dog*. When set beside a linguistic experimentation of the previous novel, exemplified by the proliferation of fragmentary sentences and exchanges as well as the book’s narrative complexity, especially a multiplication of plots, the next two works are regarded as political essays on Islamic ideology and terrorism. However, in terms of its style, “The Last Days of Muhammad Atta” bears some resemblance to *Yellow Dog* and to *Koba the Dread* since in these works the novelist satirically and grotesquely portrays Xan and Atta, yet, as critics maintain, he much more demonises the latter and turns him into a mindless ideologue (Finney, 2008: 109).

Amis’s dealing with Islamic fundamentalism, together with his presentation of the two heinous 20th-century totalitarian systems, mark a turning point in his literary output, and reflect a new dimension of his fiction and its new, at times alternative readings. Contrary to the novels written in late 20th century, his afore-mentioned fictional and non-fictional works composed at the beginning of the third millennium are predominantly grotesque or farcical allegories on political dictatorship, social and cultural oppression and religious fundamentalism. With respect to a crime story tradition which permeates a vast majority of his former novels, *Koba the Dread*, *Yellow Dog*, *The Second Plane* and to some extent *House of Meetings* echo the salient elements of this genre and give it a new literary shape. Hitler, Stalin and the most well-known Islamic ideologues are satirical, caricatured, diabolic versions of the murderers that populate most of Amis’s fiction, whereas their victims are people annihilated in concentration camps, incarcerated in Soviet forced-labour camps, the ones who died as

a result of political purges and social discrimination, as well as some of current readers who still fall prey to the manipulative ideology of the perpetrators. In these works, especially in those devoted to Islamic extremism, it is at times difficult to set a clear-cut boundary between a genuine murderer and his/her victim since their protagonists epitomise both the roles (for instance, suicide terrorists) as well as to rationally elucidate the motives of their crimes. The preposterousness and atrocity of the perpetrators' evils is to be verified by a reader-detective. Amis's books do not focus on individual murders, nor they reflect personal motives of homicide, but instead present mass-killing and human extermination in the name of ludicrous ideologies. They diagnose the toxic effects of their misogyny and misogyny to which the only antidote is laughter (Diedrick 227).

4.2. Nuclear anxiety and cosmic oppression in Martin Amis's works

(Recently I have started staying out in the daylight. Ah, what the hell. And so, I noticed, have the human beings). We wail and dance and shake our heads. We crackle with cancers, we fizz with synergisms, under the furious and birdless sky. Shyly we peer at the heaven – filling target of the sun. Of course, I can take it, but this is suicide for the human beings.

(Martin Amis: *Einstein's Monsters*)

Martin Amis's preoccupation with a political, social and cultural facet of totalitarian regimes allude to his concern with nuclear cataclysm and planetary annihilation. These problems become conspicuous in *Einstein's Monsters*, *London Fields*, *Night Train*, though the last novel foregrounds the existential anxiety and cosmology, particularly the relation between human existence and the universe, as well as permeate at times his non-fictional works, such as *Visiting Mrs Nabokov* and *The War Against Cliché*. Nuclear anxiety betokens the novelist's political and ecological angst, especially his foreboding of the nuclear war and the threat of nuclear annihilation as an outcome of the Cold War. In his novels the author speculates about the aftermath of the nuclear

catastrophe, on its pernicious influence on the psyche and mentality of the present generation and their offspring, and on social relations at the turn of the 21st century.

Einstein's Monsters is the first book in which Amis thoroughly examines nuclear apocalypse. Some critics, among others John Updike, perceive the novel as the beginning of the informal trilogy in Amis's career: *Einstein's Monsters*, *London Fields* and *Time's Arrow*. Updike maintains that the theme of holocaust constitutes these three works' common thread: "‘Holocaust’ has taken on two meanings in our time – nuclear war, which hasn't yet happened and we hope never will, and Nazi Germany's systematic murder of six million helpless European captives, most of them Jews. This Holocaust did happen, yet remains, like the other, unthinkable" (Updike 86). He asserts that it is the irrationality and ludicrousness of the Holocaust, a "determination to think the unthinkable" (Diedrick 105) which unites all three books, together with an uneasy quest for narrative forms suitable to the task. Nonetheless, apart from Updike's and Diedrick's underscoring these novels' affinity, one may probably benefit from looking into the propinquity between *Einstein's Monsters*, *London Fields* and *Night Train* since all of them, in particular the first two works, foreground postwar pre-apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic vision of society, a premonition of ecological disaster and existential anguish.

Einstein's Monsters could be regarded as a transitional work as it comprises the stories outlining the world before and after nuclear cataclysm. In the first two parts Amis unveils a cruel illusion of nuclear deterrence and dire, far-reaching consequences of scientific nuclear experiments, whereas the three consecutive ones reveal the apocalyptic reality with its time diminution, sex role inversions and the cessation of mortality. From the amalgamation of various themes and facets of the nuclear catastrophe emerges the leading idea of the novel – a destructible legacy of Einstein's knowledge, expressed by the eponymous character of the story "Bujak and the Strong Force": All peculiarly modern ills, all fresh distortions and distempers, Bujak attributed to one thing: Einstein's knowledge, knowledge of the strong force. It was his central paradox that the greatest – the purest, the most magical genius of our time should introduce the earth to such squalor, profanity and panic" (Amis, *EM*: 46). This knowledge is why the "world looks worse every day," why it's "suicidal" (Amis, *EM*: 47). The protagonist's explanation mirrors the author's conception of nuclear malaise and its aftermath.

In this story the writer foregrounds the notion of Einstein's annihilating legacy by introducing the figures of two Scottish louts, described as "terrible mutations, a disgrace to their human moulding" (Amis, *EM*: 47) who rape and viciously murder Bujak's mother, wife and daughter. Strange as it may seem, the protagonist does not retaliate by killing the perpetrators, instead he turns them over to the police at which his force deserts him. In this vein he shatters the illusion of deterrence with which he is invariably identified: "the peacemaker, the vigilante, the rough-justice artist...He was our deterrent" (Amis, *EM*: 41) and symbolises physical and emotional paralysis which prevents him from combating the villains. To take the analogy further, the character's unpredictable reaction to the massacre of his family echoes his inability to speak of the trauma of World War II when his ancestors were killed in the concentration camps, although his participation in the Polish resistance against the Nazis forced him to employ the "strong force" which hardened him immune to fear and violence. In view of this he symbolises a moral paradox and life's violent unpredictability. It is tempting to suggest, however, that Bujak's incapability, or resistance to take revenge on the murderers of his family indicates his renouncement of violence as a psychological weapon against the barbarism of the eponymous Einstein's monsters – "vivid representatives of the twentieth century" (Amis, *EM*: 51). The protagonist's moral strength influences Samson, in part an authorial alter-ego who in the conversation with Bujak states that: "And now that Bujak has laid down his arms, I don't know why but I am minutely stronger" (Amis, *EM*: 58). On the other hand, the character's refrain from taking revenge on the perpetrators could be attributed to his yearning to come back to the pre-apocalyptic, pre-Einstein reality, which is illustrated by the imaginary reversal of time when his family becomes restored and they are all sent back to the innocence of infancy – both theirs and the world's (Finney, 2008: 68). Such a utopian ending of the story with its time running backwards epitomises ironically Bujak's cruel fate, his futile desire to efface from his memory all the war and post-war traumatic events which are irreversible, and it announces the illusory return from the Holocaust reality to an innocent mythological past with its time-reversed narrative structure in *Time's Arrow*:

If, and I don't believe it, time would also be reversed, as Bujak maintained (will we move backward too? Will we have any say in things?), then this moment as I shake his hand shall be the start of my story, his story, our story, and we will slip downtime of each other's lives, to meet four years from now, when, out of the fiercest grief, Bujak's lost women will reappear, born in blood

(and we will have our conversations, too, backing away from the same conclusion) until Boguslawa folds into Leokadia, and Leokadia folds into Monika, and Monika is there to be enfolded by Bujak until it is her turn to recede, kissing her fingertips, backing away over the fields to the distant girl with no time for him (will that be any easier to bear than the other way round?), and then big Bujak shrinks, becoming the weakest thing there is, helpless, indefensible, naked, weeping, blind and tiny, and folding into Rosa.” (Amis, *EM*: 47)

Taking into account language and style of the concluding fragment of the first story of *Einstein's Monsters*, Diedrick ponders on its startling beauty and elegance, presented by means of poetic images and modulation which is discordant with a genuine loss chronicled in the story and which underscores the gap between the world and the word.

The second, pre-apocalyptic story, “Insight at Flame Lake” reveals mental effects of nuclear scientific tests. The author presents its protagonist and one of the narrators, a twelve year-old schizophrenic Dan, as a victim of his father’s experiments and as the embodiment of moral “malformations” that are produced as a result of nuclear physical tests. In fact, Dan, whose father committed suicide while working in nuclear weapons delivery systems, exemplifies a proliferation of the syndrome of nuclear poisoning, its spread from generation to generation. Having stopped taking his medication he becomes increasingly delusional and deranged, and, in effect, constitutes a potential threat to the others, mainly to his newborn cousin, Hattie. Dan’s mind is deformed by his proximity to nuclear weapons to such an extent that he sees Ned’s baby not as an innocent human being but as the embodiment of Evil. The same holds true for his distorted perception of nature and universe, particularly his seeing the lake beside which he is staying as “an explosion” and a foreboding that the sun “is really going nuclear” (Amis, *EM*: 61,71).

Dan’s increasing insanity, his delusion and perverted vision of reality parallel him with Mary Lamb/Amy Hide’s split personality expressed by his schizophrenic narrative. Both the characters embody simultaneously innocence combined with emotional lethargy, apathy and moral degeneration. Although the heroine’s double identity betokens social and cultural decay of her generation whilst the boy’s hallucinations and mental deformation are attributed to the syndrome of nuclear contamination, the two protagonists could be viewed as representatives of the 20th century’s nihilism and existential angst. Furthermore, due to their suicidal and homicidal natures they function as victims and murderers. The examination of their psyche and exploration of the roots of evil lie in the hands of a detective whose role is partially played by the readers and partly by the narrators, John Prince and Ned. When set beside Prince’s double function

of a detective-murderer, Ned seems to be a passive participant in his own and his nephew's narratives until the final page of the story when he recognises what triggered Dan's suicide. It is the revelation of the motives of Dan's tragedy and of Ned's ignorance of it which finally comes to the fore:

Yesterday, at breakfast, Dan was there. As he drank his juice he gazed at the backs of the cereal boxes. What could be more – what could be more natural? I used to do that myself as a kid: toy-aircraft designs, send-in competitions, funnies, waffle and cookie recipes. But now? On the back of the high-fiber bran package there are tips for avoiding cancer. On the back of the half-gallon carton of homogenized, pasteurized, vitamin D-fortified milk there are two mugshots of smiling children, gone, missing... Missing, and missed, too. I'll bet – oh, most certainly. Done away with, probably, fucked up and thrown over a wall somewhere, fucked and murdered, yeah, that's the most likely thing. I don't know what is wrong. (Amis, *EM*: 67)

In this regard "Insight at Flame Lake" reflect, similarly to "Bujak and the Strong Force," a criminal facet of the nuclear subject. Moreover, the very title of the story entails its moral overtone marked both by Dan's father's and uncle's blindness in realising a monstrous scale of nuclear experiments and its aftermath. As for the style of Ned's final narrative, one may observe that, analogously to the ending of "Bujak and the Strong Force," there is a discord between language and a narrative reality. Diedrick accentuates that in this case Ned attempts to counter or hinder the tone of desperation permeating Dan's notebook by employing a hard-boiled style.

The subject of the omnipresent nuclear menace and the distinctive ways in which it has (mis)shaped contemporary life also comes to the fore in Amis's ensuing post-apocalyptic stories. In the first and third of them, "The Time Disease" and "The Immortals" the writer depicts a paradoxical aspect of time and its impact on people, the idiosyncrasy of life's cycles, while in the central one he foregrounds the reversal of gender roles – the downfall of patriarchy. What unites all the three parts is the author's dystopian vision of the 21st century – the world which echoes George Orwell's postwar Communist Britain in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Adolus Huxley's society after the scientific, technical and moral revolution in *Brave New World*.

The post-apocalyptic reality depicted in "The Time Disease" and "The Immortals" is not the only product of a nuclear disaster but also the aftermath of the very nature of the 20th century urban life, mass culture, the development of information technology, etc. This becomes conspicuous in the first part where nuclear experiments and a

contemporary pace of living have contributed to violating the world's natural order and life cycles. The author outlines the new reality when natural changes of life become reversed, for instance, during the ageing process energy and vitality are restored whilst the youthness is considered a disease, and, what is more, human responsiveness is preposterously reduced in this ghastly lethargic world since any kind of feeling brings about pain and suffering.

A collective sensationlessness and emotional paralysis closely reflect the characters' limited and simplified language, which is the case of Lou Goldfader, the narrator of the story whose prose reaches its utmost limits in the utterances like "it's a thing," "it's a situation," or "it's a feature." Amis's delineation of Goldfader's linguistic simplification and its absurd reduction seemingly mirror the author's reluctance, all the more aversion to Samuel Beckett's experimentation in fiction and theatre, his idea of linguistic limitation and oversimplification expressed in various plays and books: "Beckett was the headmaster of the Writing as Agony school. On a good day, he would stare at the wall for eighteen hours or so, feeling entirely terrible; and, if he was lucky, a few words like NEVER or END or NOTHING or NO WAY might brand themselves on his bleeding eyes" (Amis, *WAC*: 384). All the same, regarding the existential aspect of the story, the protagonist of "The Time Disease" appears trapped in repetitive time, which in this case is linked to the problem of being and identity in the face of time, analogously to Beckett's characters. In addition, the writer's depiction of his narrator's narrow obsession with time comically echoes the manias of other characters, most notably John Self's fixation with money and sex. Contrary to a serious, solemn tone of all the remaining parts of *Einstein's Monsters*, Goldfader's narration betokens Amis's employing comic writing in this story, attaining a masterly effect: "Nobody thinks about anything else anymore. Oh yes, except the sky, of course. The poor sky...It's a thing. It's a situation. We all think about *time*, catching *time*, coming down with *time*. I'm still okey, I think, for the time being" (Amis, *EM*: 80). A distorted dimension of time which conditions life on earth is accentuated in "Thinkability" where the writer asserts that "something seems to have gone wrong with time" (Amis, *EM*: 21) and the result is that: "the present feels narrower, the present feels straitened, discrepant, as the planet lives from day to day" (Amis, *EM*: 22).

The notion of time malady and its effect on the reversal of human life processes are reinforced in "The Immortals" in which the author depicts the most deluded character in the collection who thinks he lives in a hallucinatory world and who considers his life as

dream-like and illusory. Due to the lethal influence of solar radiation on the protagonist the man delusively imagines that he is immortal, though in the story's final pages the readers discover that he is in fact fatally ill: "Sometimes I have this weird idea that I am just a second-rate New Zealand schoolmaster who never did anything or went anywhere and is now painfully and noisily dying of solar radiation along with anybody else. It's strange how palpable it is, this fake past, and now human: I feel I can almost reach out and touch it" (Amis, *EM*: 148). Similarly to Amis's preceding parts in *Einstein's Monsters*, the narrator's story, especially its conclusion, mirrors an incongruity between the narrated reality and its linguistic expression – here, the protagonist attempts to convince us, in vain, that his dying is a delusion (Diedrick 116).

The tone and subject matter of "The Little Puppy that Could" apparently differs from the remaining post-apocalyptic stories, though this part still follows the dystopian vision of the world and its society after nuclear cataclysm. Here, the author uses the genre of the mythic fable, precisely, he reexamines, or appropriates the Greek myth of Andromeda, who was saved by Perseus from being sacrificed to an immense sea monster, as well as he parodies a children's story, "The Little Engine that Could." The protagonist of the story is a young girl who, having renounced her given name "Briana" for "Andromeda," preserves the Greek heroic tradition and repudiates the matriarchal hegemonic system imposed by her community. Amis's protagonist functions as a counterpoise to the society dominated by women who resists the gender inversion of her community by bringing a puppy that kills the mutant dog. Having sacrificed himself to liberate the village from the evil, the puppy, a reincarnated young boy, from now on, starts wielding authority over the whole society. As was shown in the previous section, when the story draws to its close, Amis introduces the figure of a victorious boy as the triumph of masculinity over female supremacy and as a restoration of what the author suggests, a more "natural" gender rule – coming back to the male power of the ancient Greeks (Diedrick 115). In this regard the happy ending, the imaginary returning to the Arcadian world or biblical paradise represents, in fact, the writer's sexist fantasy, an illusory coming back to a social patriarchal order: "His arms were strong and warlike as he turned and led her into the cool night. They stood together on the hilltop and gazed down at their new world" (Amis, *EM*: 134).

In "The Little Puppy that Could" as well as in the introductory "Thinkability" Amis mingles his nuclear disquiet with gender concerns which illustrate the novelist's patriarchal ideas and misogynist inclinations. However, when scrutinising *Einstein's*

Monsters, we may observe, when put aside the leading motif of the nuclear menace, other concerns, such as his preoccupation with the homicidal nature of the contemporary civilisation, a disclosure of the recurrent polemics with his father on nuclear weapons, or his bringing out the issue of the imagined deaths of children. In terms of language and style, the critics highlight Amis's successful experimentation with fictional technique, his excelling at shifting his tone from satire to sentimentality. Besides, the critics, such as Rachel Falconer, call our attention to the book's representation of time, its scientific and cosmological dimension, and stress the role of the reader in shaping and responding to its dominant theme. In her essay, "Bakhtin's Chronotope and the Contemporary Short Story," she points out that Amis's collection "thematizes the lack of agency entailed by a doomed sense of time on the scientific and technological level, where our cosmological timescales dwarf the human life span, and our ability to destroy the planet reduces all time to present crisis" and that "...the short story form enables Amis to focus on a single theme, the threat of nuclear holocaust, while presenting a range of different responses to it so that no one perspective dominates and the exercise of agency rests finally with the reader" (Falconer 706, 707).

The theme of nuclear catastrophe, the lifetime and the universe, and finally, the question of agency in a narrative text saturates *London Fields*, the second book of Amis's informal trilogy. In comparison with the linguistic and stylistic innovation and thematic diversity of the former work, this novel stands out by its homogenous subject – the protagonist's anticipation of and waiting for her death at the turn of the new millennium which coincides with the prophesied nuclear war and planetary disaster. The very figure of Nicola Six generates a lively controversy since, as some critics point out, she incarnates the prodigious mutant canine that intimidates the post-apocalyptic villagers in "The Little Puppy that Could" and thus mirrors Amis's sexist inclination. On closer inspection, however, we observe that the syndrome of nuclear catastrophe affects other characters of the story as well, especially Guy Clinch's monstrous baby boy, Marmaduke and Keith Talent's little daughter, Kim, deformed by her father's physical maltreatment. Marmaduke's and Kim's deformities, echoing the homicide of Bujak's granddaughter, the suicide of Dan, the near deaths of Hattie and Andromeda, the demise of all present and future children, and childhood itself in "The Immortals," illustrate Amis's reexamination of children's situation in the face of nuclear cataclysm. Needless to say, despite the author's end of century's dilemmas and the book's inner darkness, *London Fields* is frequently considered a funny novel which merges

millennial murder mystery, urban satire, apocalyptic jeremiad and domestic farce (Diedrick 119).

The atmosphere of the ongoing nuclear calamity and the premonition of a planetary annihilation are emphasised by Samson Young's publishing miscellaneous apocalyptic weather bulletins: "The winds tear through the city, they tear through the island, as if softening it up for an exponentially greater violence..." (Amis, *LF*: 43), and Guy's brother's foretelling "that at the moment of full eclipse on November 5, as the Chancellor made his speech in Bonn, two very big and very dirty nuclear weapons would be detonated, one over the Palace of Culture in Warsaw, one over Marble Arch. That until the cease of the flow of fissionable materials from Baghdad, the Israelis would be targeting Kiev...That the confluence of perihelion and syzygy would levitate the oceans. That the sky was falling..." (Amis, *LF*: 394).

Furthermore, the novel's main characters come down with acute illnesses and undergo weakened physical states that portend the ultimate geopolitical and ecological catastrophic events. The most affected of them is Samson Young who suffers from an unnamed lethal disease whose symptoms imply either radiation poisoning or AIDS. Contrary to his biblical namesake, Sam is stripped of his strength, energy and vitality. In the conversation with Nicola he maintains that "we are most of us...in some kind of agony" (Amis, *LF*: 62), and it is the heroine's anticipation of death torment, both Sam's and her own, which constructs and propels the novel's plot (Diedrick 125). The two other protagonists experience some minor ailments – Keith Talent suffers from a "bad chest, his curry-torn digestive system, the itchings and burnings of his sedimentary venereal complaints, his darts elbow, his wall-eyed hangovers" (Amis, *LF*: 108) whilst Guy Clinch feels recurring waves of nausea coming over him after each meeting with Nicola. The fatal or ill physical states of the three men are brought about by the radiation poisoning, which is Sam's case, a potential victim of his father's nuclear weapons research, and, by their physical and emotional contacts with Nicola who acts as an erotic magnet and an annihilating black hole that lures her lovers into a lethal trap. On the other hand, as was pointed out in the preceding section, the protagonist's craving and readiness for her death embodies the character's unacceptance to live in a vicious, corrupted, loveless contemporary world. With respect to the nuclear theme, the heroine's suicidal act betokens death and love engendered by nuclear terror ("Hard to love, when you're bracing yourself for impact") (Amis, *LF*: 197) as well as the demise of the earth, its nature, fertility and maternity ("In the last week the winds have killed

nineteen people, and thirty-three million trees”...”The animals are dying”) (Amis, *LF*: 43, 97).

Nicola’s self-destruction in the face of the millennial nuclear cataclysm and her role as a prophet and one of authorial alter-egos parallel Jennifer Rockwell’s suicidal act and its powerful influence on the narrator and on shaping the narrative text. Despite the protagonists’ distinctive roles and the author’s dissimilar attitude towards them, both of the heroines apparently overwhelm the remaining characters and their demise upholds a sense of agency the world has negated them. Nicola and Jennifer are the victims of the reality which devastates them and of the oppressive society, yet they simultaneously, though unevenly, disseminate the negative energy, inflicting physical and emotional pain on the others. Nonetheless, in comparison with more evident destructive and self-destructive comportment of the heroine of *London Fields* reinforced by the novel’s dismal nuclear ambience, Jennifer’s suicide unveils her inherent struggle and reflects the existential anxiety of an individual in the contemporary world. It is tempting to suggest that the heroine’s utter engrossment in her work, most noticeably, her persistent, in-depth examination of the universe, made her become more vulnerable to depression, which could concomitantly led to her death, and, furthermore, contributed to her more profound understanding of the outer space, to ponder on the sense of human existence in the light of the expansion of the universe.

In *Night Train* and partly in *London Fields* the author incorporates astrophysics and cosmology in order to elucidate the characters’ actions and the arcanae of the protagonist’s demise. Jennifer’s job and life are entirely subjected to the exploration of the cosmos, to “asking if the universe is open or closed” (Amis, *NT*: 108), whether it is expanding forever or not. While attempting to see the sense of human existence, the process of life in the cosmic perspective (“From big bang to big crunch”) (Amis, *NT*: 108), she embodies “a revolution of consciousness” (Amis, *NT*: 111) when challenging Newton’s and Hawking’s scientific and rational attitude to earthy existence regarded as a negligible element of the macrocosm. It is Rockwell’s sensitivity and deep humanist viewpoint, her inability to answer the questions about the death of humankind with respect to the interminable expansion or contraction which make her almost-perfect-seeming life extraneous and immaterial and which prompts her to commit suicide. More importantly, her act, viewed as inscrutable by others, especially by Mike Hoolihan, have a detrimental influence on the main female protagonist who, having become perplexed, desorientated when exploring more and more unreasonable motifs of her death,

gradually perceives her own life as irrelevant and recurs to her chronic alcoholic addiction.

Amis's preoccupation with nuclear and cosmological issues explored more noticeably yet not solely in the afore-said books mirrors his interest in social, political and existential matters, as well as outlines his insight into other millennial concerns, among others, a moral decay of contemporary society, a gloomy, oppressive side of late modern capitalism and its contribution to the emergence of materialism, and finally, the omnipresence of violence and brutality in real and literary postmodern world.

4.3. *The Information*: cosmic, existential angst and postmodern literary contest

The Man in the Moon is getting younger every year. Your watch knows exactly what time is doing to you:tsk, tsk, it says, every second of every day. Every morning we leave more in the bed, more of ourselves, as our bodies make their own preparations for reunion with the cosmos.

(Martin Amis: *The Information*)

As was remarked in the preceding section, nuclear issues, cosmology and metaphysics which come to the fore in innumerable works of Martin Amis are depicted by the author as the sources of oppression for a contemporary man, together with political dictatorship, social, ethnic, racial and sexual discrimination, and they simultaneously make us ruminate on the value of life and the sense of our existence on earth. Planetary and cosmological concerns are frequently linked with literary anxieties, mainly with the problem of artistic rivalry and the question of literary success at the turn of the third millennium, which becomes conspicuous in *The Information* as well as in *The Rachel Papers*, *London Fields*, *Experience: A Memoir*, to name but a few. The first of the above-mentioned novels probably most visibly depicts the angst and internal struggle of a writer in postmodern literary world which defines the position of a contemporary man of letters, the value of literature, and which outlines the insignificance of a man against the power of the universe. Taking into account the artistic competitiveness between the book's two protagonists, Richard Tull and Gwyn Barry, as well as the main characters' personal crisis, *The Information* could be

considered *a roman à clef* about Martin Amis's relationship with Julian Barnes, or about the breakup of his marriage (Diedrick 153). Needless to say, reading the work exclusively from an autobiographical angle seems misleadingly reductive, especially when viewing the novel's afore-said theme of cosmic oppression, existential distress, specifically midlife masculinity dilemmas, as well as the author's depiction of the information environment on the verge of the Internet Age and the presentation of successful authorship as a media phenomenon (Menke, 2006: 137). Analogously to his other novels, Amis deepens his themes by frequently referring to classical literature, in the case of *The Information* to mythology, ancient literary texts of British 17th-century literature, mainly to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and he thus highlights the intertextual dimension of his work.

The Information is described by some critics as Amis Agonistes, the second part of the term signifying in Greek "in struggle" or "under trial," and it refers both to Richard Tull, the suffering and tormented protagonist of the novel and to his creator who, like in *Dead Babies* and *Other People* comes into view in the book as an omniscient but personalised narrator presiding over what he labels an "anti-comedy" of resentment, enmity and thwarted revenge, speaking in a voice of male midlife anxiety and dwelling on lost innocence and loose morals (Diedrick 143). Similarly to the main character, the narrator perceives individual wretchedness as some parts in a longer and more complex story of cosmic disgrace and subjugation. As Richard observes, "the history of astronomy is the history of increasing humiliation. First the geocentric universe, then the heliocentric universe. Then the eccentric universe – the one we're living in. Every century we get smaller" (Amis, *I*: 129). The protagonist's words underscore Amis's brooding on the sense of a man's life and the decreasing, all the greater more and more negligible role of human existence against the increasingly overwhelming power of the universe.

The writer's emphasising, at the example of Richard Tull, the expanding cosmic subordination of mankind apparently alludes, on the one hand, to various historical phases of the astronomy and to its contrastive theories, and, on the other hand, to selected literary texts, delineating a symbolic relationship between human existence and the universe, most notably to Jorge Luis Borges's "The Aleph" and "The Circular Ruins." In *The Information* Richard invariably ponders on "The Aleph," the story "about a magical device, the aleph, that knew everything: like the Knowledge. About a terrible poet, who wins a big prize, a big requital, for his terrible poem" (Amis, *I*: 224).

Analogously to Borges's story, Amis's protagonist, like Tantalus, incessantly endeavours to achieve a cultural mastery that every time exceeds his grasp, albeit his extensive reading and the unending book reviews he writes for *The Little Magazine*: "Who was said to be the last man to have read everything? Coleridge...Two hundred years on, nobody had read a millionth of everything, and the fraction was getting smaller every day" (Amis, *I*: 242). In addition, Richard's rivaling friend is a terrible writer who is nevertheless nominated to win a prestigious literary award called "The Profundity Requit" (Diedrick 151). Taking into account a further symbolic and philosophical interpretation of *The Information*, in Amis's book, similarly to Borges's text, Richard's story constitutes the unstable centre containing a series of symbolically concentric circles, analogously to the aleph which is "a sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere....one of the points in space that contains all other points" (Borges, 1995: 23,26). In the book of the Argentinian writer aleph constitutes a paradox, a centre without a centre which denotes the nothingness of the individual ego, and the equivalent theory according to which the one is the all – that the microcosm comprises the macrocosm (Diedrick 151). Correspondingly, the notion of the sphere is evoked by Amis in *The Information* through recurrent references to the sun and solar system as well as through various allusions to mythology, classical literature, among others to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Richard's attempts reflect the lessons in his insignificance and meaninglessness, from his professional and personal mortifications to his rendition of literary and cosmic history, to "the information" which comes to him during the night, conveying its existential message of death and destruction.

For a few days after his return, when he looked back on his torments in America, he saw himself up there among the big-league sufferers, with Job, with Griselda, with Milton's Adam, with Milton's Eve. (Amis, *I*: 406)

In literature as in life everything would go on getting less and less innocent. The rapists of the eighteenth century were the romantic leads of the nineteenth; the anarchic Lucifers of the nineteenth were the existential Lancelots of the twentieth. And so it went on... (Amis, *I*: 436)

He was being *informed* – the information came at night, to inhumane him. (Amis, *I*: 150)

All these painful lessons do not concern the protagonist alone since his story reflects the human history, the story of lost innocence, to what Amis refers as “the journey from Narcissus to Philoctetes” (Amis, *I*: 197). The concluding sentence of the novel alludes to Philip Larkin’s poem “High Windows” which commences by visualising a kind of paradise and finishes with a vision of “the deep blue air, that shows/ Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless”.”And then there is the information, which is nothing, and comes at night” (Larkin 165) (Amis, *I*: 494).

Although the underlying vision appears dismal, the way in which the author links the comic to the cosmic – the microcosm to the macrocosm – frequently sounds invigorating. As an example, Diedrick considers Amis’s symbolic depiction of Richard Tull’s plane flights providing mythological allusions, particularly referring to the protagonist who, in an imaginative attempt to “solarsystemize his immediate circle,” portrays himself as Pluto and adds that “Charon was his art” (Amis, *I*: 230-231). Evoking the Greek god of the dead and the ferryman conveying the deceased to Hades heralds Richard’s near death which starts with an epic nosebleed that bursts open shortly after takeoff. Diedrick observes that later, while paying visit to Gwyn in First Class, Richard remarks that “the light was coming in sideways, and everything looked combustible or already white-hot, close to burn-out or heat death” (Amis, *I*: 290). The premonition of the oncoming catastrophe and the protagonist’s imagining his situation with reference to death in Greek mythology as well as his incessant allusions to classical literature and cosmology while talking about his life and professional career creates a hyperbolic, magnifying dimension of the story, but at the same time Richard’s paralleling his dilemmas to literary tragedies and cosmic cataclysm are presented by Amis in a comic way, though the text is far from being regarded a comical or humorous.

In fact, *The Information* constitutes a digression on literary history and its genres (tragedy, comedy, romance and satire) which the author collates with four seasons, yet he simultaneously asserts that the borderline between them has been erased:

IT WAS SPRING: the season of comedy. In comedy, in the end, all is forgiven. All obstacles are surmounted, all misunderstandings resolved. Everyone is gathered into the festive conclusion. Warped schemers, incorrigible pedants: they are bahished. And everyone attends the nuptials of hope. But we haven’t had much luck with our seasons. Not yet, anyway. We did satire in summer, and comedy in autumn, and romance in winter. And this was spring. The season of comedy. But comedy has two opposites; and tragedy, fortunately, is only one of them. Never fear. You are in safe hands. Decorum will be strictly observed. (Amis, *I*: 479)

As was remarked previously, Amis, drawing a parallel between the year seasons and literary styles, points out that they merge with one another. However, when inspecting more closely the text, one may notice that the author seems to be focused on satire since this genre involves negative emotion and it is the negative sensation and tone, the empathy turned into blunder which pervade the whole novel. As Adam Mars-Jones observes, humour in satire is based on magnifying differences whilst in comedy the accent is put on recognising analogies and it is the former which best suits the writer. The critic further asserts that in the literary classification that the novelist postulates satire correlates with winter, yet the author arrived in it in spring which betokens his predilection for looking into the bleak side of humanity, viewing vitality as nascent decadence and life as a special case of death (Tredell 156). The satirical accent of *The Information* is visible in the writer's hyperbolising every aspect of Richard Tull's life, his family and literary ambience, starting with mocking the process of ageing, exposing the stormy relations between the protagonist and his wife, and especially by highlighting the reciprocal enmity between Richard and Gwyn Barry as well as caricaturing contemporary literary world and artistic competitiveness between the two main characters. Moreover, as regards male-female relations, Amis's satire operates a biased cartooniness which makes men enormous and incongruous whilst women preposterously diminished.

The satirical tone of *The Information* is probably best perceptible in the novelist's delineating the artistic ambience and literary rivalry at the turn of the 21st century. When set aside its cartoonish accent, the book constitutes polemics on the condition of contemporary art and literature, the question about the limits and the criteria of the success and the values of a literary text. Richard invariably ruminates on the character of postmodern literature, on the process of the altering status of fictional heroes:

First, gods. Then semigods. Then...failed kings, failed heroes. Then the gentry. Then the middle-class...Then it was about you-...social realism. Then it was about *them*: lowlife. Villains. The ironic age. (Amis, *I*: 435)

Prior to the closer analysis of the above historical changes in fiction one may notice that this excerpt echoes the idea used previously by Tull's creator in his piece on his real-life

hero, Saul Bellow, in the *London Review of Books* and subsequently in *The Moronic Inferno*.

In thumbnail terms: the original protagonists of literature were gods; later, they were demigods; later still, they were kings, generals, fabulous lovers...; eventually they turned into ordinary people. The twentieth century has been called an ironic age...Nowadays, our protagonists are a good deal more down the human scale than their creators. (Amis, *MI*: 5)

Martin Amis via Richard Tull stresses a decline in the status of fictional heroes and simultaneously the changing relationship between the characters and their creators. Moreover, the novelist remarks that the discrimination between good and bad writing fall apart, similarly to journalism which has been the tool for confounding author with character. In fact, Richard's recapitulation of Amis's book bears an ironic meaning in view of the context in which he uses it, the protagonist's 'borrowing' from the novelist's prior non-fictional work constitutes a reversal of the plagiarism scenario. Additionally, as a fictional author retelling the work of a genuine writer, Richard devises another fictional author so as to make the accusation of plagiarism. In the conversation with a journalist he underlines that plagiarism becomes a required possibility because, as with literary value, it "*always* comes out. It's just a matter of time" (Amis, *I*: 481). Literary heritage and mastery are not unceasingly determinable and definite, but always essential, and so illegitimacy is continually in the offing. He adds that the authentic and the stolen are horrendous twins that are not to be announced.

A debatable, equivocal facet and meaning of artistic value in the face of the invasion of plagiarism in a contemporary era mirrors the problem of a literary original and its copy as well as raises the questions about the position and function of the writer at the threshold of the third millennium. Martin Amis juxtaposes Richard Tull and Gwyn Barry, their antithetical philosophies and theories on art, the role of the audience, author and narrative acts:

Essentially Richard was a marooned modernist. If prompted, Gwyn Barry would probably agree with Herman Melville: that the art lay in pleasing the readers. Modernism was a brief divagation into difficulty; but Richard was still out there, in difficulty. He didn't want to please the readers. He wanted to stretch them until they twanged. *Afterthought* was first person, *Dreams Don't Mean Anything* strictly localized third; both nameless, the I and he were author surrogates and the novels comprised their more or less uninterrupted and indistinguishable *monologues interieurs*.

(Amis, *I*: 170)

One is prepared to concede that Richard who exhibits the features of a modernist novelist who writes demanding, ambitious yet obscure pieces of art and who requires from his audience involved serious reading parallels his creator's challenging act of writing compared with Gwyn Barry's profit-making novel. On the other hand, however, the protagonist's creation, unlike Amis, is marked by recurrent debacles and this testifies to his inability and unwillingness to adjust to postmodern literary marketplace where many a writer gains success by sacrificing their artistic talent and ambition in order to cater for the expectations of the wide, usually indiscriminating readers. Richard embodies a gifted yet unfulfilled, struggling artist, a tragic hero conquered by the mediocre, marketable contemporary literary world that promotes such figures as Gwyn Barry. The protagonist suffers from a superfluity of familiarity with literature and literary devices; he has too much information about how to write a good story, and about how to turn a novel into a success, yet he remains entirely unable to create a rewarding, profitable work himself. Albeit being an adept, experienced reader or critic of other people's writings he nonetheless becomes an unaccomplished writer, in a novel about literary competition. Richard's downfall largely results from his desire to take revenge on the success attained by Gwyn, for in Richard's view, the applause received by his friend constitutes a glorification and aggrandisement of mediocrity and simultaneously a denunciation of his own literary standards (Freitas 2008). The critic stresses that Tull's failure is attributed to Barry's success and therefore the prospect of fame of the former is conditioned solely by the ultimate degradation of the latter. In other words, for the sake of balance, disgrace of the other is indispensable for the other part to gain recognition in the world (Freitas 2008). As an extradiegetic omniscient narrator, identifiable with the author's voice, Richard presents the readers this feeling, how it is relevant both to literature and to higher, more profound levels in the life of humanity:

Supposing...that the progress of literature (downwards) was forced in that direction by the progress of cosmology (upwards – up, up). For human beings, the history of cosmology is the history of increasing humiliation. Always historically but less and less fiercely resisted, as one illusion after another fell away. You can say this for increasing humiliation: at least it was *gradual*.

(Amis, *I*: 436)

This steady downfall undoubtedly concerns Richard for whom things get worse step by step albeit his efforts to ameliorate the situation. The action that hastens this ineluctable chain of events is Richard's scheming plan to write an 'original' version of his adversary's novel, in order that Gwyn Barry would be charged with having plagiarised another writer's work. Such tactics could be attributed to an abandoned, disillusioned professional critic in a story delineating books, intertextuality, literary genres, writing styles and forms of reading (Freitas 2008).

Last but not least, Richard Tull's professional failures and humiliations echo his existential angst and, more importantly, they illustrate specific relations between the narrator and his creator as well as the writer's new approach to postmodern art. *The Information* portends a new phase in the writing of Martin Amis where the novelist departs from explicit revealing of postmodernist strategies by lessening the authorial control and granting his characters more freedom than in his foregoing novels. One cannot fail to notice that in this book, the narrator's voice is kept at the level corresponding to his protagonist who doesn't aspire to display knowledge of everything and being unceasingly in control. Apparently, it is not the author but the Universe which devastates him, contributing both to his professional humiliation and to his marriage breakup.

All in all, *The Information* is a complex, labyrinthine novel presenting an embittered individual in the face of professional and life challenges at the threshold of the third millennium. Martin Amis's depiction of the protagonist's debacles and downfall which do not concern Richard alone but rather reflect a bitterness of numerous unsuccessful people betokens the author's predilection for focusing on the dismal side of humanity. Amis evokes and reinforces the motifs of cosmological oppression and existential anxiety which are recognisable in *London Fields*, *Einstein's Monsters* and *Night Train*, yet here they are dexterously interwoven with innumerable allusions to mythology and classical literature as well as with the literary discussions on the condition of postmodern art, the altering status of fictional heroes and, finally, on the criteria of literary success and the value of a work of art.

4.4. Femininity and masculinity in Martin Amis's novels

Feminism (endlessly diverging, towards the stolidly Benthamite, towards the ungraspably rarefied), the New Man, emotional bisexuality, the Old Man, Iron Johnism, male crisis-centres – these are convulsions, some of them necessary, some of them not so necessary, along the way, intensified by the contemporary search for role and guise and form.

(Martin Amis: *The War Against Cliché*)

In the majority of his works Amis writes from a male perspective, prevailingly about male characters, addressing an implied male reader, deriving the inspiration from male novelists, mostly from Nabokov, Bellow, Roth, Ballard, Dickens, and drawing on male literary sources. Hence, it comes as no surprise that his novels have aroused lavish feminist criticism – vacillating between sweeping accusations of misogyny and obscenity to refined readings unveiling unconscious gender bias (Finney, 2008: 139). Amis attributes his depiction of tempestuous gender relations and sexual matters to the contemporary era. Quoting Bellow's pronouncement that "ours is a sclerotic Eros" – an Eros that has grown unaffectedly hardened over time – he still holds the view that romantic love "will always be true, but it's harder for it to flourish" (Stout 48). Moreover, he is strongly convinced that in our media-saturated culture it becomes increasingly difficult to find any authentic experience. The British novelist also believes that sex offers him as a writer a tool "for revealing characters 'when they're not just going through the motions.' It's an idea where need and greed converge, and where tenderness is accidental, a rare thrill" (Stout 36). Similarly to drink, sex is an "area where people behave very strangely and yet go on being themselves" (Haffenden 6). Nevertheless, Amis's assertion of his writer's right to employ sex for its psychological analyses could be understood as idiomatic of the male writer's use of the pen as a phallic weapon (Finney, 2008: 139).

Stormy gender relations and the author's equivocal attitude towards his female characters constitute the crux of almost every Amis's book, both in those novels which directly present death, murder, torture, victimisation, and those in which the motif of homicide, the presence of a culprit, a victim and a detective lie in the background. In view of that the examination of Amis's portrayal of women and gender roles seems

thorough and complete when taking into consideration not solely his mystery novels and detective stories, such as *Dead Babies*, *Other People*, *London Fields* and *Night Train*, but also his other works, primarily the ones that highlight the female objectification, their alienation, confinement and manipulation by male protagonists in their hegemonic, hermetically closed literary world, which is best illustrated in *Rachel Papers*, *Success* or *Information*. In addition, the British writer undeniably excels at depicting a bitter fate of women in totalitarian systems and crisis systems (*Time's Arrow*, *Einstein's Monsters*, *Yellow Dog*), though here the female characters constitute the background against which the author explores his main issues, such as political regimes, dictatorship and nuclear catastrophe.

Notwithstanding feminist scathing criticism of Amis's fiction, in particular the objection of some critics, for example Maggie Gee, Helen McNeil, to the writer's misogynist attitude towards women and his simplified and conservative depiction of female characters, one cannot fail to notice the author's in-depth analysis of gender relations, the role of men and women at the threshold of the third millennium – the crisis of masculinity in the descending patriarchal society and the objectification and exploitation of women in postmodern consumerist, media-pervaded culture. There is no escaping the fact, however, that regardless of Amis's complex, profound examination of gender roles, his female protagonists seem indubitably by far less conspicuous and recognisable than their male counterparts and therefore they are frequently considered as types, predominantly negative ones, rather than genuine characters. The novelist confirms such a view of his heroines, asserting that he can see no place for a positive female role model in his fictive, comically-imbued world: "I'm writing comedies. Vamps and ballbreakers and goldiggers are the sort of women who belong in comedy" (Bellante and Bellante 5). "Such women are types, the subjects of fictional narratives, genre-specific" (Finney, 2008: 141). In this regard feminist critics' objection to Amis's seemingly black and white portrait of female protagonists could be to a great extent justified, yet I still believe that having analysed painstakingly his fiction and literary criticism, particularly those of his works in which homicide, violence, victimisation and atonement come to the fore, one can notice that female protagonists are enigmatic, unpredictable characters who successfully manage to outwit their male persecutors, all the more to release themselves adroitly from an apparently absolute control of the narrators or the author's alter-egos. More importantly, having inspected closely the writer's consecutive novels and non-fiction, we may observe a gradual alteration from

the novelist's perfunctory picture of female protagonists towards their more mature, complex and more elaborate images.

It is worth scrutinising Amis's portrayal of women and gender relations referring to a detective story tradition. There is no denying that the majority of those author's novels which focus on death, murder, perpetrators and victims are influenced by the 19th century British mystery stories and psychological novels, principally by Charles Dickens's and Robert Louis Stevenson's books and Robert Browning's poems as well as by modern and postmodern American crime fiction, especially by the works of Elmore Leonard, Raymond Chandler, Norman Mailer on the one hand and by the novels of Vladimir Nabokov, Paul Auster and Jorge Luis Borges on the other hand. In most of his works Amis follows the pattern of the classical detective fiction, hard-boiled crime literature and postmodern metaphysical thrillers where the roles of women are either ascribed to innocent, acquiescent victims of male savagery, sadism and callousness or they epitomise archetypal *femme fatales*, merciless, superficial seductresses, striving to lure their male partners into a trap, challenging their virility and maleness, shattering their well-ordered life and undermining their patriarchal world. Such a dichotomy or binary opposition of female characters, their simplified two-fold images could be traced in such novels as *Dead Babies*, *Success*, *Other People*, *Money*, *London Fields*, *Time's Arrow*, to name but a few, yet such a presentation of women, however facile, cliché and biased it appears, is not devoid of the authorial ironic and satirical undertones.

With reference to the first afore-mentioned model of a heroine that undoubtedly pervades all Amis's crime novels as well as his non-fiction, the British writer delineates women as victims not only within the space of the literary work but in terms of the character-author-reader propinquity as well. In this regard his works combine the thematic tradition of the detective classical genre with postmodern grotesque and metafictional playfulness. His two early novels, *Dead Babies* and *Success* provide a vivid illustration of stormy men-women relations, the writer's and the narrator's highly ambiguous attitude towards female characters associated prevalently with their physicality, eroticism and voluptuousness. In both the works women are defined by their sexuality and, by functioning as mere physical recipients of men's lasciviousness, they are denied the roles of fully developed, autonomous characters with respect to their male counterparts. In view of that, they fall prey to the ferocity and ruthlessness of other protagonists and to the manipulation and sadistic inclination of the author. The heroines of the above-mentioned novels are narrative and narrated murderesses, yet it is in *Success*

where their victimisation becomes mostly perceivable whilst in *Dead Babies* their death is but a minute part of other protagonists' bestial massacre. Likewise, the writer appears to express greater commiseration to Ursula and Terry's sister than to Celia, Diana and other heroines of *Dead Babies* whose bitter fate, analogously to the doom of other characters, symbolises the subordination of the narratees to the ends of satire. Nonetheless, regardless of the authorial seeming compassion for his female victims in *Success*, it transpires that women as characters are overshadowed by men in Amis's both books, it is male protagonists who constitute the core of the novels and whose concerns and dilemmas are foregrounded. The British writer depicts men as villains who directly and indirectly contribute to the demise of women and in view of that he patterns the model of a male-female binary opposition promulgated in the classical detective and crime literature, mostly by the previously mentioned prominent British and American classical and modern novelists. In addition, Martin Amis focuses on the figures of male perpetrators, their vicious masculine world whereas female victims stay in the background. The novelist's heroines, rarely exhibiting the features of flawless, virginal maidens but more often spoilt, provocative temptresses, are divested of their autonomy and serve as additions to male protagonists' lives as well as become the targets of the author's literary experiments and an intellectual game with his audience.

Miscellaneous critics, among others Brien Finney, James Diedrick or Gavin Keulks, seem to confirm feminist critics' accusations of Amis's superficial, desultory portrait of female characters in his early fiction. They assert that in *Dead Babies*, *Success* or *Rachel Papers* women are depicted from a male perspective and they seem to be mostly directed to men. However, the British author rejects the charge of misogyny and prejudice against his heroines: "I don't think I've ever written about a woman with any hatred. I love my women characters, even the most scheming and tricky" (quoted in Finney, 2008: 141). Amis's female narratees function as types rather than fully developed characters. On the other hand, one cannot fail to notice that although his male protagonists come to the fore they are by and large presented in a negative light, usually pitilessly caricatured and ridiculed. Hence, it seems that the author purposefully marginalises, or delineates the schematic image of women, and foregrounds the wicked, degenerate male characters as the exposition of the villainous, corrupted side of the contemporary society. At the same time, he shows the crisis of masculinity, and the distorted, lampooned picture of his male protagonists reflects the dilemmas and fears of contemporary men being overwhelmed by the invasion of the feminist culture, the

augmentation of women's role in every facet of life, prevailing in the realm of business industry, entertainment and media communication. In this respect the reality depicted by the novelist in such works as *Money*, *Success*, *Other People*, *London Fields*, *Information*, to name but a few, could be interpreted as the utopian vision of the patriarchal world where women are but male erotic fantasies, the figments of their artistic imagination or platitudinous companions to their lives. Nevertheless, such images shortly turn out to be misleading and delusive since most of Amis's heroines surpass or fall short of the expectations of the heroes, all the more flee from the control of male narrators, which shows the irreversible process of changing gender relations at the turn of the 21st century and the unfeasibility of returning to male paternalistic culture.

As was indicated previously, Amis's depiction of female characters and gender roles slightly fluctuates in various stages of his writing career. In his initial works the novelist unveils a clichéd, facile, yet with a hint of irony and humour, picture of women as victims of male tyranny, perversion, callousness and discrimination. Out of the three novels outlining strained gender relations, *Rachel Papers*, *Dead Babies* and *Success*, it is in all likelihood the last one whose both subject matter and style bring us closer to the comprehension and immediate experience of the arcanae of the protagonists' world, the narrators' reciprocal relations and their attitude towards women. *Success* is a *dramatic monologue* of two feuding foster-brothers who address their stories to predominantly male readers. Greg's and Terry's confessions unveil the depraved, licentious nature of the protagonists and the accounts of their love affairs, in particular the incestuous relationship with their step-sister Ursula, betoken their pathological narcissism.

James Diedrick attributes the last feature to Gregory, paralleling the protagonist's depiction of Ursula's response when he first caressed her to Narcissus's own motionless stare into self-reflecting waters, pointing out that it discloses more about his own desires than his sister's: "Ursula looked up at me encouragingly, her face lit by a lake of dreams" (Amis, *S*: 68). The critic remarks that this moment initiates some kind of narcissistic withdrawal from the larger world and other people that contribute to the ruin of Greg's later life (Diedrick 53). As a grown-up man, he is reluctant to bear responsibility for the aftermath of his abnormal boyish erotic desires and to realise that these enduring intimacies with his sister have had a devastating influence on her psyche and personality, and consequently have driven her to suicide. The following citation provides a telling illustration of Greg's callousness, insensitivity towards Ursula's

despondency, and reveals his infantilism: “Why does she cry so much *now*? What else can she be crying for but the last world of our childhood, when it didn’t seem to matter what we did?” (Amis, *S*: 117).

Similarly to Gregory, Terry bears the mark of degeneracy and pathology. Nevertheless, his moral decay is linked with the rivalry with his foster-brother, his aspiring to obliterate the memory of his appalling childhood and to overcome the inferiority complex. Terry, analogously to Greg, treats women in a patronising manner and perceives them as sexual objects thanks to which he endeavours to test his male potency. In vying with Greg for the position in the family, society and for the attention of the opposite sex, Terry goes to great lengths to equal, or even to supersede his brother in wickedness and mercenariness when Gregory gradually descends in the social ladder. Terrence, out of sheer envy of Greg and curiosity takes advantage of Ursula, luring her into his bed, pressuring her to repeat sexual acts she performed on Greg and thus precipitating her self-destruction. As a form of gratitude, he offers a sort of mechanical reciprocation, not being cognizant that his sister derives no pleasure in his advances. However, when she finally approaches Terry, seeking sexual comfort and tenderness after being rejected by Gregory, their union is brief and culminates in a woman’s despair (Diedrick 54). Terrence’s relation of their concluding conversation prior to Ursula’s demise demonstrates his own emergent sociopathology: “I merely pointed out, gently but firmly, that there was no sense in which I could assume responsibility for her, that you cannot ‘take people on’ any longer while still trying to function successfully in your own life, that she was on her own now, the same as me, the same as Greg, the same as everybody else” (Amis, *S*:207).

Terrence Service’s insensitivity to Ursula’s anguish as well as his condescending, objectifying attitude towards other women symbolise the protagonist’s yearning to cast off the burden of his traumatic childhood experiences, especially to efface the memory of his mother’s and sister’s maltreatment and successive killing by his tyrannical father. Terry, having fallen the victim to his father’s sexual abuse and witnessed his sister’s violent death, endeavours to eradicate his past and social background from his consciousness, particularly the trauma of domestic violence. As a result, he becomes utterly heartless and unsympathetic towards the suffering and wretchedness of the others. As for his contacts with women, specifically his incestuous relationship with Ursula and his partial contribution to her death, Terry paradoxically follows the

example of his sadistic father. In this vein he embodies the product of the pathological misogyny and the prolongation of a patriarchal culture.

As was formerly pointed out, Greg's and Terry's confessions are male *dramatic monologues* addressed to predominantly male audience. Their language, style and tone of voice are entirely subjective and biased, mainly in the narrators' unfavourable, superficial, objectified depiction of female characters. Thus, it comes as no surprise that their very personal and confidential narration has been frequently associated with the voice of the novelist who, in this regard, has undergone a scathing criticism of numerous women writers and critics. As a response, Amis has constantly indicated that a shrewd reader ought to keep a distance from the narrative reality, to separate the voice of the narrator from that of the author and to identify with a genuine creator of a literary work. Regarding the style of *Success*, Amis acknowledges his debt to Robert Browning's *dramatic monologue*, and taking into account gender relations, prevailing the aspect of crime and female victimisation, one may draw the analogy between the novelist's book and the poem "My Last Duchess." Both in Amis's and Browning's works the narrators present to the audience their speakers' tempestuous, abnormal relations with women, yet the way they depict them unveil more about themselves than the persons described. When reading closely the novel and the poem, we are able to scrutinise the complexity of the protagonists' minds. In the case of Browning's work the emphasis is placed on the speaker's insanity, the author's striving to comprehend the psychological reasons for murder and the mystery that lie behind the murderer's motivation whilst in *Success* Amis delineates, by means of irony, satire, shock and caricature, the ups and downs of two foster-brothers, examines the dark sides of their psyche, particularly their misogynist attitude towards their mistresses and their sister, mostly expressed by Greg, and alludes to the arcanae of the tragic death of Terry's mother and sister. Although the homicide and murderer's motivation constitute the essence of Browning's poem whereas in Amis's book the crime stays at the background, both the artists highlight the speakers' narcissism, sexism and patriarchal sadism. The following quotations illustrate, on the one hand, the protagonist's ridiculed and highly suggestive portrayal of female characters and, on the other hand, the speaker's patronising attitude towards his spouse and his irrational jealousy of her:

...'And do you know how many people she's slept with? Guess. Go on. Guess. Over a hundred in two years.'... Everyone everywhere has fucked her. Everywhere we go people have fucked her! I've never met anyone who hasn't fucked her...' (Amis, *S*: 9)

What's happening to you girls these days? After spending the night with a neurotic girl – and so many of them *are* neurotic now – I feel more than my natural repugnance at the prospect of examining the bedclothes once I've shooed them from the flat. There will of course be the usual grim feminine – a dollop of make-up on the pillowslips, the school of pubic hairs on the sheets, that patch of hell somewhere further down: so much one expects... (Amis, *S*: 17)

...She thanked men, - good! But thanked
Somehow – I know not how –as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred years - old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech – (which I have not) to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
'Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
'Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, not plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
-E'en then wood be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive...'

(quoted in Sikorska 379)

Browning's *dramatic monologue* which highly influenced Amis's narration in *Success* foregrounds the psychology of crime, mainly the perpetrator's motives for oppressing and murdering his wife. However, the motif of homicide, mostly when linked with pathology, sadism and violence against women, occupy to a greater extent other novels by Amis. As regards his early works, especially *Dead Babies* and *Other People*, one may easily observe that the writer outlines the victimisation of female protagonists within the wider process of social decay. In the first afore-said novel women fall prey to the villainous sadistic pseudoartist Johnny, yet their demise constitutes but a tiny part of all the characters' extermination, even their role in the book is subsidiary, their portrayal ridiculed and lampooned, therefore their suffering and

consecutive death may evoke in the audience a lukewarm compassion. In *Dead Babies* female protagonists are shaped as types rather than fully-developed characters and their function is entirely subordinated to the ends of the satirical facet of the work. The writer combines the criminal subject matter, disclosing its most heinous and repulsive side with the grotesque presentation of the pathology and hedonism of British youth culture of the 1970s. His aim is not the exposure of the pangs of the victims killed in the country-house carnage since both male and female protagonists are equally indecent and depraved, but the depiction of the degeneration of the affluent youth society in late 20th century as well as the perishing of human values in the postmodern era.

Other People echoes the process of moral decay of British young generation, yet in this novel the female character comes to the fore, what is more, the narrative reality is viewed from her standpoint. Amis's book provides an absorbing illustration of blending the tradition of gothic fiction, the doppelgaenger literature and feminist criticism. Mary Lamb/Amy Hide, epitomising the figure of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is one of scarce examples of foregrounding feminine split personality in crime literature, especially in Amis's fiction. As was formerly stressed, in his novels, usually in the early ones, the British author focuses on male characters and exhibits the realm of men's culture, predominantly their degenerative and repellent aspect, however, this work initiates a shift of perspective, altering from describing an entirely masculine subject matter and male narration towards presenting a narrative reality in which women commence to play a substantial role yet frequently a negative one, and where both sexes vie with each other and struggle for their authorial autonomy, the most vivid illustration of which is *London Fields*.

Other People depicts the female protagonist, her double personality, life and identity crisis in late 20th century Britain. From a detective story viewpoint, Amis's character echoes the syndrome of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, nevertheless, the protagonists of the two works differ in many respects and their identity problems are approached in dissimilar ways. Stevenson delineates a psychological portrait of his hero within the conventions of the classical crime fiction, mainly by employing the third person narration and therefore the internal changes of the eponymous character are described from the outside by the omniscient narrator whilst Amis depicts his heroine from the inside, using a weird disorientating narrative structure. Furthermore, Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde is a character who embodies the internal conflict and incarnates simultaneously a detective and a perpetrator. He himself is the source of good and evil and the only

person capable of inflicting pain on himself and on the others, mostly on women. Mary Lamb/Amy Hide constitutes a highly ambivalent character, her autonomy seems questionable since she becomes incessantly manipulated by the narrator and by the author of the book. Similarly to Stevenson's protagonist, she embodies evil, making other people suffer, predominantly men, and even contributing to their death, yet unlike Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde, she herself falls prey to the sadistic treatment of John Prince, a detective and at the same time a murderer, therefore she epitomises both a culprit and a victim. Needless to say, some writers and critics, most notably J. Ballard, perceive a mark of independence in Amis's protagonist and he praises the British author for presenting the action from a woman's perspective, pointing out that: "He very skilfully constructs his portrait of this amnesiac woman who at the same time is re-inventing herself, literary from the toe-nails, upwards" (quoted in Keulks, 2006: 193). His statement is confirmed by Brian Finney who remarks that in the Epilogue the protagonist, having undergone perennial transformations, finally returned to her initial incarnation and by becoming Mary she conquered death and overwhelmed her persecutor who came back to the hellish cycle as a prisoner of both his crime and his labyrinthine fiction.

Mary/Amy is the main protagonist in the book, still she functions more as a type rather than a character – the depiction of the complex, highly ambiguous figure of Mary/Amy, the woman's split personality which brings about her dislocation and isolation, and the very narration of the work, its eponymous otherness, symbolises the alienation, emotional and moral standstill of the youth degenerated culture of the 1980s. In this respect The British writer combines the constituents of the mystery story, doppelgaenger literature with the postmodern narrative innovation and metafictional playfulness. Moreover, the author, presenting the enigmatic dualism of the protagonist, her emotional derangement as well as linguistic disintegration, has challenged the epistemological dichotomies that structure conventional wisdom, in the case of traditional detective fiction the ratiocinative comprehending and justification of crime, including such distinctions as male/female, good/evil, or life/death (Diedrick 71).

Other People initiated the alteration of the novelist's interest in exclusively male culture and their microworld towards the examination of feminine personality. Although after the publication of his novel Amis returned to the analysis of male issues, in his successive works the female characters have appeared much more frequently and their role has become increasingly prominent. Notwithstanding this, some of his well-known

books failed to escape severe feminists' criticism on account of the writer's alleged sexism, misogyny and his delineation of women pornography. The works that underwent the most excoriating reviews in feminist circles were *Money* and *London Fields*, though Amis refutes these accusations, considering them groundless, and asserts that the core of the criticism lies in the readers' confusion of distinguishing the voice of the narrator from that of the creator and their entire misperception of the authorial irony.

The second of the afore-said books deserves an in-depth analysis owing to its controversy over the gender matter and to its affinity with the murder story convention. There is no denying that the dispute over the novel had a pernicious influence on the popularity of the work and on the writer's thriving literary career as two women on the judging panel for the Booker Prize and one woman judge for the Whitbread Prize refused to shortlist it for the alleged sexist offensiveness (Finney, 2008:143). Maggie Gee, a novelist and one of the two female Booker judges, strived to justify her objection to the novel by claiming that there is confusion in the function of the narrator, Samson, who sometimes is a norm and other times he participates in the book, ignoring the wilful perplexity Amis produces by opening the novel with a note from "M.A." who, as Sam's literary executor, is accountable for the text the moment when it appears and who, as Sam speculates, have shaped and manipulated him from the outset (Finney, 2008: 143). Finney remarks that other female critics, despite their praise of *London Fields*, also disapproved of its seeming misogyny. One of them, Penny Smith asserts that Nicola's presentation: "invites accusations of misogyny, even though Amis's apparent intention is for his female character to be read as a symbol of her age rather than a sign of her gender. Nicola is self-destructive, compelled not just to cancel love but to murder it" (quoted in Finney, 2008: 143). Finney adds that the critic perceives sexism in the protagonist's preparing to execute her by using a man's hands. By the same token Betty Pesetsky points out that the book makes its audience give some thought to: "the sneaking suspicion that a misogyny lingers here somewhere" (Pesetsky 1990). According to the critic the misogynist overtone is visible in the author's portrayal of Nicola Six not as character or even caricature but as "another of Mr Amis's plastic women" (Pesetsky 1990).

In gendered readings of *London Fields* Brian Finney encompasses other critics' views, among others Susie Thomas's who extends her accusations of misogyny into racial and class prejudice. She claims that its implied reader is "white, male and middle class" and maintains that all the novel's characters seem flat because the author does not

endow them with any depth. The only emotional registers the writer has at his disposal are cynicism and syrupy (Thomas 2003). Furthermore, Susie Thomas brings the accusation of Amis's shallow, simplified depiction of working-class female characters, such as Trish and Kath. According to her the former is limited to "a titmag pin-up with a speech bubble" whereas the latter may be regarded as a mere bundle of contradictions. As for Kath, the critic highlights the fact that this female protagonist, though apparently more educated and by far more intelligent than Keith, voluntarily or willingly yields to her husband's dominance and tyranny since she regards him "as if he were a wonderful doctor, as if he were a wonderful priest" (Amis, *LF*: 266). In Thomas's view, in *London Fields* working-class women, in particular Kath Talent, are depicted as victims, yet she simultaneously remarks that it is difficult to feel much sympathy for them since they are illustrated as exploitative stereotypes stripped of personality and humanity. Contrastingly, Brian Finney underlines that in his portrayal of characters, both female and male protagonists, Amis keeps the distance between author and narrator(s) as well as between characters and he claims that Thomas denies granting Amis this distance or irony: "Amis hides behind his narrator, who in turn hides behind Keith, who is made to spout racist [and sexist] babble." "Amis seems to enjoy hiding behind his ventriloquist's dummy and getting him to make comments that neither he nor his educated narrator could get away with" (Thomas 2003). Nonetheless, the feminist critic points out that using the author's characters as his ventriloquist's dummy is tantamount to his responding to fiction, particularly to the self-reflexive one, with ultimate naivety. As a defence against the critic's charges, Amis stresses that a principal aim of the novel is to mock "certain male illusions" and asserts that "maleness has become an embarrassment" (Amis, *WAC*: 5).

In addition, one may refer to Sara Mills' scrutiny of *London Fields* in her essay "Working with Sexism: What Can Feminist Text Analysis Do?" Unlike examinations of sexism which focus only on either a linguistic or ideological side, she draws the attention to the so-called "narrative schemata" – grammatical and linguistic structures that reflect particular representations of women that are inclined to become deterministic, making readers liable to view women from a certain angle. According to the critic in the narrative schemata Amis employs in his work when delineating Nicola's waiting for her death and seeking her murderer, the protagonist "wishes to be acted upon and paradoxically strives to bring that about" (Mills 216). Mills emphasises the sexist overtone of the narrative schemata in *London Fields* which inclines the audience

to accept them as common-sense knowledge, and states that the role of the feminist critic is to reveal their constructed nature. On the other hand, Brian Finney observes that Mills aims at altering feminist critics' thinking "forward from blanket accusations of political incorrectness" to an exposition of "the way that texts offer us constructions which are retrograde" (Mills 218). He asserts that it is exclusively up to the reader to either agree to sexist schemata or to object to them. He argues that Nicola's choice to become a victim and to engineer her murdering does not resent her female submission to patriarchy; instead, it indicates her manifestation of declining to live in a patriarchal world which is devoid of love and deep human feelings (Finney, 2008:145).

Next to the scathing criticism of the alleged sexist and misogynist tones in Amis's fiction, it is worth paying attention to Fredrick Holmes's and Susan Brook's assessment of the novelist treatment of gender issues in *London Fields*. The former literary judge concentrates on the writer's scrutiny of male characters and on masculinist world in connection with mass and popular culture. In his analysis, Holmes singles out Keith, the character exhibiting the most conspicuously a caricatured, hyperrealistic facet of postmodern pop culture. The critic notices that the protagonist fails to perceive the moral debasement of what he esteems, but, on the other hand, he stresses that the author does not offer any external base or alternative to mass culture from which it could be excluded. Nevertheless, bearing in mind Fredrick Jameson's notion of postmodern culture understood as "The consumption of sheer commodification as a process," Holmes asserts that it cannot explicate what (the) reading public consider(s) to be the novel's objective to deplore the cultural malady in which it takes part. Instead, the critic attempts to figure out this equivocal quality in *London Fields* by referring to Linda Hutcheon who maintains that the incorporation of postmodernism in the capitalist process of commodification does not reject, though it comprises, its political critique of the equivalent process (quoted in Finney, 2008: 145). Holmes refers to Hutcheon's statement to elucidate the ambivalent reactions to Amis's satiric and ironic yet sexually biased representations of the images of mass culture, such as those of women:

[Nicola] has more power and freedom than any of the other characters in manipulating and revising the ready-made scripts of society, but paradoxically the exercise of this freedom entails her own oppression. [...] the plots that she orchestrates necessitate that she enact and parody the very roles which feminists have rejected as limiting and destructive: those of Madonna and whore, which she plays for Guy and Keith respectively. Her detached awareness that these roles do not express her essential identity [...] do not [...] liberate her from them.

(quoted in Finney, 2008: 145)

Ultimately, one may point to Brook's comments on gender roles in Amis's book, in particular to her response to Mills' and Thomas's criticism. She maintains that the lethargic, shapeless quality of Amis's protagonists contributes to destabilising gender identity by disclosing it as fictional and unsteady. Referring to Butler's *Gender Trouble*, she argues that "gender identity is the effect of a series of physical performances and linguistic iterations, with the result that it can be exaggerated and manipulated" (Brook 89). She demonstrates how Guy's and Keith's masculinity are constructs whilst Nicola's femininity is defined by her language and performance. Subsequently, Brook reacts to feminists' charges of sexism against Amis, referring to the novelist's argument against these accusations that Nicola wields power and control over male characters and the narrator, yet she finds it debatable, since "powerful women can be aligned with the castrating phallic mother, who is both fetishized and devalued" (Brook 89). According to the critic the British novelist inadvertently arrives at such an interpretation while defending himself against feminist charges by telling Will Self: "The only aggressive feeling I have towards women is to do with their power over me. I've spent a big chunk of the last thirty years thinking about them, following them around, wanting to get off with them, absolutely enthralled. That's bound to produce a slave's whinny for mercy every now and then" (quoted in Brook 89). The analyst indicates that although Amis's remarks are purposefully provocative, they imply that allegedly positive representations of potent and influential women can derive from highly ambivalent attitudes to women and femininity (Brook 89). Furthermore, by juxtaposing the text of the novel and his defence of it, she remarks that Amis's books agitate the discrimination between might and powerlessness, contrary to his perfunctory statements in interviews. The critic argues that the novelist's seemingly powerful characters are truly powerless as their actions are entirely supervised by the writer, nonetheless, the agency of author figures is questioned as well. As a conclusion, Brook points out that this work deconstructs concepts of authorial power and control: "Amis satirizes the abuse of power, and the plight of his manipulative author figures might be seen as self-punishment for his own authorial abuses. This interpretation further complicates the notion of power by suggesting that moral power might be gained through weakness or self-punishment" (Brook 90). In this regard the critic states that Martin Amis (or "Martin Amis") plays the equivocal role of sadist and masochist and therefore exerts power in contradictory ways (Brook 90).

The extensive analysis of gender matters outlined by Amis in his work reveals its highly controversial and disputable facet, comparable probably only to that of *Money*. Acrimonious discussions and miscellaneous critics' commentaries on *London Fields* are meticulously examined in the books and essays of Nicolas Tredell, Gavin Keulks, James Diedrick and John A. Dern to name but a few. In the scrutiny of sundry aspects of the work, such as Brian Finney's account of its links between narrative and narrated homicide analysed in the previous chapter as well as Peter Stokes's debate on the novel's concern with authorship and apocalypse, it is worth mentioning the books' millennial issues concerning mainly the correlation between the protagonist's death, the prophecy of nuclear holocaust and of the earth destruction. Penny Smith and Brian Finney suggest that *London Fields* is the indicator of the *zeitgeist*, it mirrors the crisis of contemporary civilisation, the degeneration of human values, as well as it heralds the forthcoming doom of the planet. The very figure of Nicola seems a contradictory one. On the one hand, being associated with the disastrous cosmic power and expressing her predilection for life-denying sodomy, she constitutes a black hole who contributes to her own demise and lures the others, predominantly men, into her lethal trap. On the other hand, her self-destructive nature and death epitomise the planetary apocalypse, the decline of the earth and its nature of late 20th century (Tredell 102).

The above-analysed Martin Amis's novel is not the author's solely debatable and contentious work. Taking into account the depiction of gender matters, male-female relations and the ambiguous portrait of women, *Money* has aroused equally heated discussions, predominantly among feminist critics and writers. The elements of crime and murder, the pivotal issues examined in this chapter, are absent from the book, yet the motif of power, violence and oppression come to the fore, particularly with reference to gender matters. In contrast to *London Fields* in which the female protagonist plays a crucial role both as a character and the cowriter of the narrative text, the novelist has singled out a man as his main character in *Money*, however, his life and actions are conditioned and determined by his relations with women who seemingly embody purely his erotic accessories and supplements to life. John Self is a pathetic, deplorable character who continually yet unsuccessfully attempts to demonstrate his male potency, and as a narrator he endeavours to exercise the control of all the narratees of the text. Despite his sadistic and misogynist inclinations, women constitute the indispensable part of his life, both its physical and mental side. The two major female characters that shape and influence Sam, Selina Street and Martina Twain, are utterly

contrastive figures symbolising a feminine dichotomy as well as two dissimilar aspects of life. The juxtaposition of these protagonists is one of the recurring examples of Amis's portrayal of pairs of characters, among others Gregory Riding and Terry Service, Mary Lamb/Amy Hide, Keith Talent and Guy Clinch, Mike Hoolihan and Jennifer Rockwell or the two brothers in *House of Meetings*. In their depiction the novelist exposes the complex, contradictory nature of a man. In *Money* the figures of Selina and Martina embody contrastive and disproportioned sides of Sam's world. Selina Street is the narrator's genuine addiction, her function lies in satisfying John's erotic drives which are paramount for him. Although he constantly objectifies his lover and denies her any respect, he increasingly becomes obsessed with her and finally fooled by her cunning game and manipulation. Martina Twain plays, on the other hand, an educated or 'reformatory' role – she attempts to save the protagonist from the baneful influence of porn industry by drawing his attention away from sexual matters towards literature and theatre. She endeavours to become his partner and intellectual educator, yet all her undertakings fall short due to John's utter resistance to literature and refined culture, and his predilection for erotic excess. The protagonist's preference for Selina over Martina indicates the triumph of degenerative, debased side of John, his fancy for debauchery and debasement over sophistication, spirituality and intellect, the qualities attributed to Martina Twain who is, as some critics, for instance, Richard Todd suggest, Martin Amis's alter-ego.

Regarding gendered readings of *Money*, one may perceive, similarly to *London Fields*, a feminists' extensive attack on the novelist, the charges of applied sexism and the exposition of women pornography. Among heterogeneous themes of the novel raised by reviewers, writers and literary theoreticians, it is worth referring to the most well-known opinions as well as to present the author's stance and observation on his work. First of all, the critics attract the readers' attention to the aspect of money as a point of reference to Self's attitude to women. In her examination of Amis's work Laura L. Doan remarks that due to the fact that Self perceives life through the prism of money, he divides women into two categories: whores and non-whores. The critic continues arguing, maintaining Selina's statement that "men use money to dominate women" (Amis, *M*: 90) and therefore he acknowledges women's greater potential for victimisation and submission, but his thought is not unsettling for him but rather makes him wonder that women are worthy of it: "it must be tiring knowledge, the realization that half the members of the planet... can do what they hell like with you" (Amis, *M*:

14). Thus, the critic asserts that according to Self masculine identity is shaped entirely by women who are content to get “goped or goosed or propositioned” and not loved (Tredell 78). Additionally, she points to a passage in which the first thing Self ponders on when meeting a woman is the question “will I fuck it?” (Amis, *M*: 222). Commenting the scene she states that: “By substituting ‘it’ for ‘her’, Self, like the pornography he devours, denies woman personhood, placing her in the ultimate state of disempowerment and disembodiment” (quoted in Finney, 2008: 142).

It is tempting to suggest that Doan makes an accurate observation of the protagonist’s objectification of women and viewing their value in terms of money and sex, yet she obviously misperceives, analogously to the criticism of *London Fields*, a noticeable balance between a highly biased narrative voice and the ironic authorial tone. Amis invariably emphasises a self-reflexive facet and a sardonic tone of his novel by means of which he creates the distance between the author, narrator and characters. As a vivid illustration of this process, he refers to the conversation between John Self and the Martin Amis figure about the role of the hero in a contemporary literary text. As Finney remarks, Doan accuses Self of sexism and assumes that this testifies to Amis’s own sexism (Finney, 2008: 142).

It is worth noticing that regardless of both a positive and negative reception of *Money*, the first one being mostly expressed by Eric Korn, Richard Brown or Bernard Bergonzi, and the second one pronounced by Laura L. Doan and James Miracky, the novel foregrounds the problem of masculinity in contemporary porn and business industry and media-saturated culture. The critics, such as Philip Tew, analyse the role and the very definition of a man, relating it to the aspect of class. Their main preoccupation is Amis’s grotesque depiction of John Self as a working-class parvenue, in the mode of Dickens’s portrayal of his characters, as well as the protagonist’s powerlessness, their sexual and narrative impotency, naivety and susceptibility to be influenced and manipulated by the others. The critics point out that a highly caricatured, all the greater cartoonish attributes of the protagonist devoid him of individuality and make him representative of his class. As regards gender relations, one is prepared to concede that Self’s overt masochism and yearning for dominating women reflect, paradoxically, his masochistic nature, a desperate defence of his crude, obscene masculine world against the invasion of feminist culture and his deliberate inability to extend his two-dimensional image of women. Such an analysis is upheld by the critics like Emma Parker who claims that the pathetic protagonist of *Money* not only fails to

subjugate women and control his narrative but he himself becomes the object of the male gaze the moment when Goodney places him under surveillance. Parker highlights the fact that John Self, a shambolic figure, epitomises the crisis of masculinity, especially in his longing to “leave this moneyworld” (Amis, *M*: 363) which is tantamount to his desire to flee from the conventional confines of masculinity or even manhood itself.

The grotesque and satirical tone of *Money* and *London Fields* leave space to a more meditative yet simultaneously ironic timbre in *Night Train*. In sundry essays, papers and interviews with Martin Amis Natasha Walter, Allen Barra, Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas and other critics stress the writer’s altering attitude towards his protagonists and the narrator – instead of his imposing tone and sadistic treatment of the narratees, he offers his characters more autonomy and the status of Mike Hoolihan as a narrator seems to be equal with that of the author. This illustrates a significant change and a turning point in Amis’s outlining author- characters’ relations, especially with respect to the writer’s attitude towards his female protagonists. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the novelist portrays the two heroines through the prism of their professionalism and intellect instead of their physical attributes, which is confirmed by the above-mentioned critics. More importantly, Mike Hoolihan is given much dignity and respectability, which is extremely rare in Amis’s fiction and betokens not solely a strong position of Mike as a feminine character but also her elevated status as a narrator. Nevertheless, one may observe that the behaviour of the protagonist, her crude, indelicate language, distant, seemingly unemotional attitude towards her work, fellow officers and investigated criminals, as well as her very name, imply asexual, or even masculine qualities. Mike Hoolihan is devoid of typical feminine features, both physical and mental ones, such as beauty, subtlety and sensitivity, in contrast to Jennifer Rockwell. Taking into account her relations with men, one is tempted to suggest that despite her sexual and emotional contacts with her male partners and friends, Mike appears to be mostly attached to Jennifer whose tragic preposterous suicidal death leaves the narrator anguished and perplexed. Although the novel does not imply Mike and Jennifer’s sexual relations, one may risk stating that Hoolihan has some lesbian proclivities, yet her attraction to and feeling for the astrophysicist seem purely emotional, but it is the spiritual, not physical closeness which she seeks in relations with people.

In *Night Train* Amis endows his female protagonists with depth and sagacity, in contrast to the caricatured, pathetic characters from previously analysed novels,

however, he still denies them power and agency. Both Jennifer and Mike are doomed protagonists. The inscrutable suicidal death of the former may mirror the dark, impenetrable side of human psyche and the protagonist's refusal to live in the calamitous contemporary age whilst the professional failure of the latter constitutes her lack of poise as a narrator as well as her defeat as a detective and a writer incapable of deciphering the conundrums of a postmodern mystery story.

Amis's examination of gender issues seems incomplete if we do not refer to his depiction of women's fate in crisis centres, mainly in totalitarian systems, such as Communism, Nazism and Islamic regime. In such works as *Time's Arrow*, *House of Meetings*, as well as in his non-fiction, predominantly *Einstein's Monsters*, *Yellow Dog*, *Koba the Dread* or *The Second Plane: September 11*, the novelist ruminates over the deplorable fate of civilians, both men and women who fall prey to the political dictatorships and nuclear cataclysm, yet when outlining the destiny of female characters we may observe that, on the one hand, the author employs a sympathetic, commiserating tone combined with a pinch of irony, but, on the other hand, his attitude towards women victims implies his misogyny, mostly noticeable in *Einstein's Monsters*.

Amis's latent sexist proclivities and his ambivalent treatment of female characters are undeniably recognisable in his analysis of nuclear themes. In *Understanding Martin Amis* Diedrick stresses Amis's traditional patriarchal viewpoints expressed most overtly in the story "Unthinkability" where the writer insolently claims that in the case of a nuclear attack in London he will become the unwilling executioner of his spouse and children. The critic refers to the fragment in which the British author, writing in an apartment a mile from his home, imagines what will happen if he endures the first explosions: "I shall be obliged (and it's the last thing I'll feel like doing) to retrace that long mile home, through the firestorm, the remains of the thousand-mile-an-hour winds, the warped atoms, the groveling dead. Then – God willing, if I still have the strength, and, of course, if they are still alive – I must find my wife and children and must kill them" (Amis, *EM*: 4). In response, Diedrick suggests a reader should wonder why the author's wife and children are denied the right to decide about their lives on their own (Diedrick 118). Among other debatable facets of femininity in the light of nuclear apocalypse the critic draws a special attention to another story, "The Little Puppy that Could" where the novelist presents a dystopian vision of a post-holocaustal deformed, distorted society ruled by monstrous matriarchs (Tredell 84). Adam Mars-Jones

suggests that Amis associates the abnormal, gruesome new world (an allusion to Adolus Huxley's *Brave New World*) with the power and privilege that was attributed to men prior to nuclear disaster. Finally, it is worth mentioning the critic's polemics on nuclear weapons with reference to his attack on *Einstein's Monsters*. Having scrutinised Amis's introductory essay, Mars-Jones points out that it ought to be recognised as a rhetorical construction which holds out a male antinuclearism that marginalises women's standpoints and disclaims the possibility of a connection between gender inequality and the menace of nuclear destruction (Tredell 83).

Contrastingly, in the works depicting totalitarian systems, political, social and ethnic oppression (*Time's Arrow*, *House of Meetings*) and alluding to Islamic extremism (*Yellow Dog*), the tone of Amis's voice is more alleviated, reflexive, not to say, melancholic, especially in *House of Meetings*, and his tackling gender issues seem less debatable though not entirely free from disputes. It is *Time's Arrow* which has fueled a fierce controversy on account of the disorientating narrative structure and the author's ironic tone in presenting the atrocities of Holocaust. Needless to say, most of the critics and reviewers recognise Amis's compassion and respect for the characters portrayed as victims of Nazism and Communism. As regards the feminine subject, it is interesting to observe, however, that in the works delineating a totalitarian system of the Soviet Union the author expresses his sympathy for the female victims of the regime, yet his depiction of them appears perfunctory and schematical, moreover, they play minor roles in these novels and therefore their fate constitutes the background for his more complex, profound examination of the atrocities of totalitarianism. In comparison with the books referring to the Holocaust and its aftermath and to Islamic fundamentalism, the novels outlining the Soviet dictatorship also delineate female misery as one of the constituents of the oppressive systems and its ideology, yet here their victimisation is by far more exposed. In the case of *Time's Arrow* the author ironically ruminates over the fate of Herta, Odilo's wife, in particular over the situation of his spouse suffering from sexual abuse and being subjected to her husband's sadistic lascivious experiments. At the example of Herta and Russia, the wife of Xan Meo from *Yellow Dog*, the author highlights feminine victimisation and their subjugation to the preposterous ideology of male supremacy in Nazi Germany and in certain modern societies governed by religious fundamentalists. The writer argues that men's violence against women in these dictatorial systems betoken, in fact, their male insecurity and the defence of the patriarchal order that has lessened or disappeared in contemporary culture. As an

illustration of a women's defencelessness and their sexual exploitation, the critics refer to the final scene from *Yellow Dog* where a yellow bitch tied up in the backyard was "trying to free itself of this thing – the thing on its back" – a male dog taking advantage of the female's captive state (Amis, *YD*: 337).

All told, gender problems constitute one of the crucial elements of Martin Amis's fiction. In his almost every novel one may witness references to gender and sex matters. The turbulent male-female relations, usually perceived by the implied male readers, become highlighted in those works which deal with crime, homicide, victimisation and atonement in which the writer, on the one hand, schematises the image of women as innocent victims of male violence, tyranny, sexual abuse or mercenary seductresses, and, on the other hand, he excels at delineating a complex, profound portrayal of women as professional detectives and intellectuals. However, Amis's prose stirred up a great controversy, mostly among feminist critics, on account of his applied sexism, when examining female characters, the ambiguous relations between the author, usually male narrators and female narratees, which, with reference to a crime fiction ideology, reflects a murderer and murderess propinquity, and the addressing his novels to predominantly male audience. As a defence against these charges, Amis invariably accentuates the role of the authorial irony which mirrors the distance between himself and his narrators. On the other hand, the novelist's attitude towards female protagonists and gender concerns on the whole still remain problematic and equivocal when we point to his remark on this issue in *War Against Cliché*: "Sexism is like racism: we all feel such impulses. Our parents feel them more strongly than we feel them. Our children, we hope, will feel them less strongly than we feel them" (Amis, *WAC*: 9).

4.5. Father and Son: The Amises' genealogical dissent

They seemed to think that it must have been extra difficult for me, coming out from behind my father, but it wasn't; his shadow served as a kind of protection. And I felt no particular sense of achievement, either. It's a strange surprise, becoming a writer, but nothing is more ordinary to you than what your dad does all day. The pains, and perhaps some of the pleasures, of authorship were therefore dull to me. It was business as usual.

(Martin Amis: *Experience: A Memoir*)

When scrutinising Martin Amis's oeuvre one cannot forget about the literary legacy of his father, Kingsley Amis, the writer who profoundly influenced and shaped his son's fiction, and brought about their debate, all the more a battle over the nature of reality itself and his son's and his own antithetical approaches to literature in the second half of the 20th century. The majority of the works of Amis the Son, both fictional and non-fictional ones, as well as his essays and interviews, reflect a literary rivalry and struggle with Kingsley, their genealogical dissent and polemics concerning literary canons, traditions, in particular their distinct viewpoints on realism, modernism, postmodernism, contrastive attitude towards British writers, mainly Jane Austen, Henry Fielding, Charles Dickens, Philip Larkin, and above all towards American postwar novelists, such as Vladimir Nabokov, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth or J. G. Ballard. There is no escaping the fact, however, that, next to the Amises' discord concerning predominantly their diverse narrative techniques, styles, contrastive viewpoints on the role of the author and his attitude towards the narrated and narrative acts, as well as their innumerable acrimonious disputes about social and political issues, such as their assessment of Communism, nuclear weapons and the impact of American literature on Great Britain and Europe, one can find some analogy between their works. Martin Amis recurrently stresses that his father has greatly influenced his fiction and although he chose a contrastive, alternative to his father's approach to literature and claimed a new territory in literary studies, the legacy of Kingsley Amis remains omnipresent in almost every aspect of his fiction. It becomes visible when taking into account comism and satire that saturate his works, and his disputable treatment of certain issues, most notably gender conflicts, as well as racial and ethnic problems.

4.5.1.

Money, Stanley and the Woman and Jake's Thing: chauvinism, feminism and paternal-filial conflict

In view of what was pointed out in the preceding part, Martin Amis's portrayal of women has aroused a fierce controversy, particularly in *Money* and *London Fields*, yet his depiction of gender relations cannot be profoundly scrutinised in isolation from his examination of the Amis Father and Son relationship, mainly the impact of Kingsley's presentation of women on Martin's approaching to this issue in his novels. Among miscellaneous works of these two writers outlining the problems of femininity and masculinity, Gavin Keulks has singled out for his analysis *Money, Stanley and the Women* as well as *Jake's Thing*. The critic's selection seems pertinent on account of its illumination of the Amises' equally controversial yet diverse delineation of women and their perspectives on postmodernism. In addition, these texts, especially *Money* and *Stanley and the Women*, confront alterations in literary tradition and patriarchy – one of them is a sociopolitical work which touches upon distinctions between patriarchy and misogyny whilst the other one is generic, or modal, which brings into focus the modal transformations within realism - and thus illustrate the writers' changing statuses: the literary ascendance of Martin and the eclipse of Kingsley.

Regarding the theme of femininity and masculinity, the American critic emphasises that the Amises who provoke huge gender controversy could be compared, among others, to Ernest Hemingway, Philip Larkin, D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, or Philip Roth in their portrayal of women from a clearly male perspective. Writing in a masculinist mode, they contest in their works courteous presumptions about morality and character. Martin, analogously to his father, regards gender relations as one of his grand themes, yet he treats it as a part of his diagnosis of contemporary social mores whose dark side he exposes but does not reproach. In *Stanley and the Women* and *Money* gender issues become their primary focus within their social and literary disputes. The problems of chauvinism, or sexism that constitute crucial elements of each writer's critical reception are probably best perceived against the background of the Amises' literary mediations, primarily their reflection upon characters, authorial distance, irony, and realism (Kingsley 164). One can easily notice that contrary to Kingsley's more realistic, less innovative and labyrinthine narrative structure, and his

use of moral realism in delineating male-female concerns, Martin overtly distances himself from his contentious protagonists, incorporating a usually convoluted plot and experimental technique. These stylistic and technical dissimilarities help to great extent contextualise the accusations of misogyny that surrender a considerable part of Amises' oeuvre, but, as Keulks maintains, they also exemplify the dilemmas concerning the reader's commiseration which obviously call into question the removal of such charges.

As a matter of fact, the novelists' disputable treatment of gender matters, while their employing contrastive techniques and styles, mirror their tempestuous relations with women, most visibly in the case of Kingsley, and their mutual professional rivalry for the higher position in literary world. Kingsley Amis's unfavourable portrait of women in *Stanley and the Women* which constitutes, next to *Jake's Thing*, the author's perhaps most chauvinistic work, reflects the process of the writer's more and more troubled relations with his female life partners, predominantly with Jane Howard, his increasing disillusionment with women as well as his gradual eclipse in British cultural and literary scene. Hence, the way in which he delineates male-female relations in his 1978 and 1984 texts is greatly distinct from a romantic and comic tone that pervades his early fiction, especially *Lucky Jim*, and illustrates instead his more sarcastic and derisive attitude to his female protagonists and his misogynist zealousness endorsed to his embittered male characters. Contrastingly, Martin Amis, having questioned and concomitantly overthrown numerous romantic and comic conventions and his father's stylistic decorum, plays elaborate jokes on his inexperienced and misinformed readers, and makes them mistake John Self's narratorial perversion for Martin's authorial approval. In view of that, miscellaneous critics on both sides of the Atlantic have endeavoured to redefine the Amises' novels as misanthropic, in lieu of misogynist, yet the doubts about the author's attitude towards their female characters constantly arise, disowning or overshadowing its convenient misanthropy level (Keulks, 2003: 165).

The three above-mentioned novels illustrate the writers' reexamining traditional portrayals of their female protagonists. Nevertheless, as was previously remarked, contrary to *Stanley and the Women* and *Jake's Thing*, Martin's book distinguishes itself by a narrative distance, the author's reserved attitude to his narratees, and humour. According to Keulks many a reader, among others Martin Amis himself, regards Kingsley's two texts as sardonic, cynical, devoid of genuine humour which saturates with an irresistible force in his precedent novels and equipped with the author's personal sexual prejudice with which he imbues his male protagonists.

On a close inspection, one is prepared to concede that Kingsley's alteration of portraying women in his fiction, from attractive, charming, serious, intuitive and good-hearted heroines exemplified by Margaret Peel (*Lucky Jim*), Elizabeth Gruffydd-Williams (*That Uncertain Thing*), Anna le Page (*Take a Girl like You*) and Helene Bang (*One Fat Englishman*) towards nasty, vindictive and spiteful ones presented in *Stanley and the Women* and *Jake's Thing* mirrors the reverse process in Martin Amis's depiction of his female characters. It is the works of his early literary phase which outline women as whores (*Dead Babies*), negligent supplements to male protagonists' lives (*Rachel Papers*) and secondary or background characters (*Success*) whereas the author's ensuing, frequently considered more matured novels, delineate more profound and complex portraits of women (*Other People*) and their greater role in participating in the events and shaping the story (*Night Train*). Furthermore, *Money*, similarly to *Stanley and the Women* and *Jake's Thing*, the novels marking a new path in Kingsley Amis's literary output, constitutes a decisive point in Martin's career, both in terms of its theme and a technical evaluation as well. Regarding the aspect of femininity we may observe that despite the unfavourable, sexist portrayal of some of its heroines, primarily Selina Street, the novelist emphasises the role of Martina Twain who, correspondingly to Margaret Peel, Elizabeth Gruffydd-Williams and other female protagonists from Kingsley's early novels, is a moral reformer of the book's male protagonist, a safe harbour and a spiritual relief from his chaotic life filled with sexual excesses and money obsession. Hence, Martin Amis synthesises, by the figures of Martina and John Self, his father's jocular-romantic delineation of male and female characters from *Lucky Jim*, *That Uncertain Thing* or *Take a Girl like You*, especially Kingsley's juxtaposition of his heroines' sensitivity, placidity and thoughtfulness, and the heroes' disorderly and emotionally unbalanced world. With respect to such picture of women delineated by Kingsley, *Money* partially mirrors the novelist's maxim that nice things (or nice women) are always nicer than nasty ones (Keulks, 2003: 166). However, in view of John Self's inability or unwillingness to liberate himself from his chaotic, vicious world and his reluctance to find a safe harbour with Martina, the novel overtly contests his father's early imaginative romantic worlds.

What indubitably unites *Money* with *Stanley and the Women* and *Jake's Thing* is the author's depiction of male-female relations at crisis, their reciprocal incapability of negotiating and reaching a compromise in the case of Kingsley's novels, and their conditioning and shaping their relationship exclusively on the basis of their erotic and

financial bonds in the case of Martin's work. On the other hand, all the three texts outlining the two male perspectives on gender matters reflect the authors' diverse yet not antithetical attitude to femininity and masculinity – Kingsley expresses, via his male characters, scathing criticism on women whilst his son exposes the corruptive, degenerative sides of human nature, both male's and female's, but the subjective, biased presentation of female characters from Self's narratorial perspective still stir up controversies and doubts. Moreover, taking into account the style, narration and the protagonists' characterisation, Amis the Father writes in a classically realistic mode, yet, as Gavin Keulks stresses, his representation of reality in the above-mentioned texts seems erroneous, inaccurate and subjective, mainly considering the novelist's endorsement or identification with his prejudiced protagonists (especially in *Stanley and the Women*), and he therefore undermines the tonal moderation that elsewhere sustain the book's comic realism. Contrary to what Kingsley Amis had previously asserted that characters functioned for authors as instruments for self-criticism, enabling them to "see more clearly, and judge more harshly, [their] own weaknesses and follies," in *Stanley and the Women* as well as in *Jake's Thing* all his efforts to illustrate self-criticism appear indecisive, vacillating, removed or hampered (Keulks, 2003: 169). In this respect the controversy over Kingsley's misogynist portrait of women and his patently fallacious, more ideological than artistic depiction of contemporary reality contributed to the critics' reassessment of his reputation. More importantly, his descending literary output coincided with Martin's artistic ascendancy who, in *Money*, successfully challenged his father's narrative technique, characterisation and style, mainly by the use of aesthetic distance, irony and the tonal balance that vanished in Kingsley's works.

In their novels, predominantly in *Stanley and the Women* and *Money*, the writers raise family concerns, *père-et-fils* troubled relations, in order to demonstrate their own paternal and filial conflict, both personal and professional. As for Kingsley's work, the author interpolates the tension between realism and postmodernism as a thematic discord between reason and lunacy, order and bedlam exemplified by the father and son tandem of Stanley and Steve Duke. Stanley's search for logical order clashes with his son's schizophrenic fancying, and their familial frictions which obviously allude to the Amises' tension reflect the division of realism and fabulation juxtaposed by Robert Scholes in *The Nature of Narrative* (together with Robert Kellog, 1966) and in *The Fabulators* (1967). According to Scholes realism which elevates life and diminishes art represents a self-conscious rejection of romance and fabulation, and attempts to control

fantasy to make chaos conform to pattern. Furthermore, he argues that, when subordinating imaginative immoderation to empirical reality, it endeavours to outline images of that reality that are amenable to fact, whether actual or mimetic. Keulks stresses that the base of Stanley and Steve's relationship which corresponds to Scholes' generic divisions and their paternal-filial tension unveils the extent to which Kingsley, through Stanley, ridiculed Martin, his postmodern experimental fiction, rising literary esteem and influence. In response, Martin Amis expressed his resentment against his father in various literary debates and interviews. The novelist's disillusionment with Kingsley's rejection of professional support for his son, his relentless defiance of Martin's oeuvre and their literary competitiveness are echoed in *Money*. In this novel the author alludes to his tempestuous relationship with Kingsley by paralleling the family situation of his alter-ego, the Martin Amis character and the troubled relations between John and Barry Self. In addition, by presenting numerous literary discussions between Self and the Martin Amis character in which the novelist exhibits the narrator's reluctance to learn about the generic evolutions of literary realism advised by Martin and John's failure to perceive its applicability to his life, the writer responds to Kingsley's texts, principally to *Stanley and the Women* as well as to his opinions, and concurrently establishes Martin's technical aesthetic as well as his departure from his father's more moderate realistic style (Keulks, 2003: 190).

The Amises' *père-et-fils* rivalry reflects Harold Bloom's masculinist thesis that originates out of an imaginative transaction between symbolic fathers and sons and that assumes that writers attempt to counterbalance and disarm their antecedents employing strategies of critique, assimilation and subversion, which becomes illustrated by the juxtaposition of *Stanley and the Women* and *Money*, *Ending Up* and *Dead Babies*, and above all *Lucky Jim* and *The Rachel Papers*. Nevertheless, the novelists frequently stressed their angst of influence, and their remarks divulge their concurrence - as well as divergence - from Bloom's notions of anxiety and influence (Keulks, 2003: 117). In a 1987 interview with Charles Michener Martin stated that he regarded anxiety as an artistic imperative, as a "necessary ingredient for writing": "Everything I do ends up getting done in a kind of chaos of anxiety. If you do not have the anxiety you're not onto anything" (Keulks, 2003: 118). This creatively generative dynamic finally brought about a variance between father and son's opinions: Martin remembers that his father was disinclined to provide literary support whereas Kingsley recalled that his son was exceptionally reticent about his work. Regardless of the writers' divergent views and

observations, the Amises' relationship was consistent in their polarities of restraint and aloofness, and in their writing they adopted a policy of segregation and isolation, contrary to other artistic tandems or family literary members, such as The Brontës or Rosettis whose relations mirrored complicity rather than repudiation, dialogue in lieu of refusal, even though, as Eric Jacobs asserts, an ambience of literary assistance and input existed at other times in the Amis ménage. Kingsley primarily rejected a literary agreement with his son whilst Martin interprets influence and anxiety as a creative source of motivation and inspiration (Keulks, 2003: 119).

According to the American critic the Amises' separation with regards to their writing emerges from the authors' readiness to mark the authority in the exploration of their concepts and claim their territories in the literary struggle. Hence, their segregation appears logical, a protection against unsought input, but it may also denote a more proprietary instinct, a recognition of professional and familial rivalry and a need for space in a restraint environment. The Amises' tandem infrequently constituted a suitable reader for the others' work and neither denied the purposefulness of their literary manoeuvres. In addition, their statements and demeanour differentiate them from Bloom's example of literary influence in that the Amis *père-et-fils* discords were by far more overt, reciprocal and mindful than Bloom's theory can concede and, as the above-mentioned literary doubles, in particular *Stanley and the Women* versus *Money* and *Lucky Jim* versus *The Rachel Papers* demonstrate, intertextual negotiation marked the Amises' literary trench warfare, a struggle over genre style and technique that inspired production.

All told, the Amises' three novels illustrate most conspicuously the writers' genealogical dissent, particularly their disparate outlook on literary tradition, personal and professional tensions, as well as their ambivalent depiction of gender roles. Regarding the subject of femininity, the works of both Amis the Father and the Son have provoked a huge controversy and thus they mirror the novelists' seeming affinity or parallelism, yet when inspecting their works more closely it becomes apparent that Kingsley's overt subjective prejudice and grudge against women with which he imbues his disenchanting male protagonists oppose his son's ironic distance and humour in presenting his objectification of women and the highly ambivalent male-female relations. All these concerns illuminated in *Money*, *Stanley and the Women* and *Jake's Thing* could be traced in many other Amises' novels. However, Gavin Keulks's selection of these texts seems pertinent since their themes and diverse literary styles,

especially *Money* and *Stanley and the Women* betoken the artists' different approaches to realism and postmodernism, contrastive representations of modern reality which are inextricably linked to the novelists' reciprocal rivalry and struggle for writerly supremacy. What is more, they mark turning points in the artists' career, mirroring Martin's rise from the shadow of his father and a simultaneous eclipse of Kingsley.

4.5.2. The Amises on Satire: *Dead Babies* and *Ending Up*

Human beings laugh, if you notice, to express relief, exasperation, stoicism, hysteria, embarrassment, disgust and cruelty.

(Martin Amis: *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews*)

The examination of Martin Amis's oeuvre, pre-eminently with regard to his father's literary output seems perfunctory and incomplete if we do not consider the satirical facet of his fiction. Humour and parody constitute indubitably the essence of Kingsley's and Martin's novels, the elements that define their works and mould their characters and narrative realities. In the preceding chapters the role of satire was invariably underlined during the analysis of Martin Amis's fiction, mainly with reference to his crime stories. Contrary to the light humour and comism that pervade the majority of Kingsley's novels, his son incorporates black, quixotic humour and dark laughter in order to illuminate the vile, obnoxious side of his protagonists and the sinister homicidal nature of contemporary civilisation. This kind of humour saturating *Dead Babies*, *London Fields*, *Einstein's Monsters*, *The Information* and *Night Train*, to name but a few, exemplifies the author's stylistic differentiation and challenge to his father's comism with the exception of his initial novel, *The Rachel Papers*, written in a more moderate parodic tone. When compared with Martin's dark humour by means of which he outlines his atrocious, vicious, degenerated world, Kingsley employs parody, prevailingly as a vehicle for criticising social anachronism, gender and class conflicts or generation gaps, yet murder and victimisation rarely feature in the majority of his novels. Even when regarding his works which foreground death, crime and violence, particularly *Ending Up* and *The Crime of the Century*, the novelist's humouristic depiction of his protagonists betokens his humanistic treatment of them whereas the

characters of Martin Amis's novels are mercilessly subordinated to the ends of satire, most evidently in *Dead Babies*.

Taking into consideration the intertextual influence, concurrence and simultaneously divergent forms of their parody and satire, miscellaneous critics, most notably Gavin Keulks, James Diedrick and Brian Finney, draw the attention to two pairs of novels, *Lucky Jim* and *The Rachel Papers* on the one hand, and to *Ending Up* versus *Dead Babies* on the other hand. Judging the first two books, Finney and Keulks remark that they reflect a remarkable distinction in Kingsley's and Martin's treatment of a comic genre, employing the *Bildungsroman*, and in the case of *The Rachel Papers* they underline Martin's deviation from his father's light humour and romantic overtone by incorporating as an alternative a darker form of comedy by means of which he strives to establish his own literary style and technique, and to come out from the shadow of his predecessor. The comparison of the two works, especially when regarding Martin Amis's revision and redefinition, or subversion of Kingsley's comic realistic novel written almost twenty years prior to *The Rachel Papers*, constitutes the critics' and theoreticians' in-depth examination, and deserves the readers' studious attention. Needless to say, in view of the crime subject matter, moral and social concerns, mainly the satirical and grotesque depiction of the British degradation and self-annihilation, both of the old and young generation, one should benefit, especially from analysing painstakingly *Ending Up* and *Dead Babies*. These novels which illuminate the writers' two dissimilar satirical modes and their approaching two different literary traditions mirror as well the novelists' disparate delineation of death, crime and victimisation, the themes which rarely saturate Kingsley's fiction but which are omnipresent in almost every novel of Martin Amis.

When put aside *The Rachel Papers* as Martin's initial challenge to his father's work by violating its foundation, *Lucky Jim*, *Dead Babies* betokens the intensification of this process. However, his second book written a year after the release of *Ending Up*, contested, in fact, Kingsley's contemporaneous work and therefore Martin enacted a revaluative discourse in real time. Speaking of the genre, both the novels constitute contrastive variations of the country house novel as well as the authors' following the two distinct literary traditions – Horatian satire and Henry Fielding's legacy in the case of *Ending Up*, and Menippean satire, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory and partially Jonathan Swift's literary output visible in *Dead Babies*. As for the first-mentioned influence, Martin Amis's book and to some extent Kingsley's work epitomise perverse variants on

the British genre of the country house weekend novel popularised by P. G. Wodehouse. At this point, it is worth noticing that the setting of both the works, mainly of *Dead Babies*, in which the elements of homicide, violence, persecution of the victims and quest for a murderer come to the fore, violates the municipal picture of a classical detective story. In view of that, Martin Amis's novel not only challenges and reexamines a satirical form and theme of *Ending Up*, subverts and mocks the P. G. Wodehouse 's generic legacy but reassesses and toys with the tradition of crime fiction. In contrast to his ensuing, apparently urban novels, in the main *London Fields*, *Night Train* as well as *Money*, *Dead Babies* serves as a grotesque of a crime story, a claustrophobic confinement to which the protagonists are doomed.

Albeit conspicuous stylistic and tonal dissimilarities, it is the genre and the setting which unite *Dead Babies* and *Ending Up* and which attest the Amises' recurrent competitiveness. Regarded as dueling novels of ideas, moral fables of manners and belief, these works dramatise the conflicts between an insular ambience and an exterior society. The characters, localised, or trapped in enclosed microcosms, clash with the outer world and larger societies from which they are ousted. The authors, subordinating external action to internal insight, create a spatial contrast which constitutes an unbridgeable generational abyss, a conflict of value grounded on age (Keulks, 2003: 134). In terms of style, both texts expose a Swiftian concern for explicit depiction, and in the case of *Dead Babies* this anxiety is linked with Martin Amis's allusions to Rabelais's uninhibited description of human physiology and, more noticeably, to Baudelaire's repulsive delineation of putrefying bodies: Martin exceeds his father in portraying violence, sadism and eroticism on the page, however, neither of them soothe the pain of their protagonists, nor they elevate the characters' struggles with their degenerating bodies.

On voit, ce qui rend plus completes
Ces mystérieuses horreurs,
Bechant comme des laboureurs,
Des Ecorchés et des squelettes.
De ce terrain que vous fouillez,
Manants résignés et funebres
De tout l'effort de vos vertebres,
Ou de vos muscles dépouillés. (Baudelaire 1)

[One sees, and it makes more complete
These mysteries full of horror,
Skinless bodies and skeletons,
Spading as if they were farmhands.
From the soil that you excavate,
Resigned, macabre villagers,
From all the effort of your backs,
Or of your muscles stripped of skin.]

He had broken something, something large. There was also a lot of what must be blood. Crying out with pain now, he crawled a little way, just far enough to be out of sight of anyone approaching the front door of the cottage, and found he could crawl no further.

(Amis, 1974: 174)

Frowning, he moved to his right and walked on more slowly still; then his eye fell on what might have been a heap of sacking three-quarters covered with windblown leaves, except that it had a trousered human leg and a shod foot sticking out of it. The new arrival drew in his breath, stooped quickly and brushed away the leaves until he had uncovered a face.

(Amis, 1974: 176)

Celia came through the door and with a hideous, inhuman leap Johnny was on her back, a lithe-limbed insect accelerating her fall to the ground. Holding his wife by the hair Johnny smashed her face into the stone floor, smashed until it went all runny and sweet in his hands. Without looking round he jumped and swiveled his right arm backward and upward and shattered the approaching Marvell's jaw with the side of his fist. Johnny kicked. He kicked, and stopped when the twitching stopped.

(Amis, *DB*: 203)

The characters' deaths are presented with no emotionality and romanticism, evoking realism which, most notably in *Dead Babies*, oversteps the grotesque, or farce, frequently verging on the lewdness and salacity. Thematically, physical decay reflects the authors' delineation of their characters' broader deficiencies of religion, human values and philosophy. Interestingly enough, neither Kingsley's nor Martin's works offer any solution to the existential quandary, or postulate any social system of transcendent truth. Accordingly, the protagonists are detained in asphyxiating microcosms in which they are incapable of liberating themselves from their crises of isolation and as an antidote they find solely egotism, narcissism and desperation waiting enduringly at life's end. As for their fate, it is neither a divine force nor a worldly sense

of justice which controls and manipulates the characters and determines their actions. Gavin Keulks asserts that death which pervades menacingly both texts implies Larkinesque unavoidability and absence of grace (Keulks, 2003: 135). All the same, the critic's remark could be applicable to Kingsley Amis's novel, yet in *Dead Babies*, unlike in *Ending Up*, we can observe the author's merciless manipulative and torturing hand pointed at his submissive narratees.

Kingsley's and Martin's disparate treatments of their characters and the writers' contrastive philosophical approaches to their works, together with *Ending Up*'s and *Dead Babies*'s generational discord between youth and age, shape their diverse satiric forms. Regardless of the fatalism that pervades both the books, Kingsley seemingly expresses pathos and sympathy for his narratees that Martin denies his protagonists. Moreover, *Ending Up* foregrounds social themes, such as marriage, family, friendship, the anxiety of feeling desolate, whilst in *Dead Babies* the accent is more individual and solipsistic, and the characters seem utterly devoid of family links. Whereas both novels highlight the extent to which reality threatens more dignified beliefs and yearnings, Kingsley's presentations of character are marked by the work's humanism, and contrastingly, Martin finds gratification in tormenting and harrowing his doomed clique, and in this respect he stresses that the amelioration is defunct or nonexistent in a deterministic postmodern world (Keulks, 2003: 138).

Taking into account a satirical facet of the two works, the contrast between the writers' discrepant worldviews and philosophies parallels their opposing styles. In the case of *Ending Up* the critics, such as A. Robert Lee call the attention to Kingsley's employment of "double satire," that is, his depiction of two distinct visions of the characters at Tuppenny-hapenny Cottage from within and outside the house. Such divided outlook constitutes a spacial and generational contrast, making readers encounter the protagonists on two levels: directly, as they introduce and present themselves via their words and action and indirectly, as they are viewed by others. By virtue of this twofold presentation and irrespective of their distinctive impediments, a lot of the characters ultimately gain the reader's empathy, since they confront the purposelessness of their lives and their seclusion with wide-eyed self-consciousness (Keulks, 2003: 139). Notwithstanding their awareness of living in a spiritless present and worthless contemporary world, and facing a bleak, unfruitful future, they unceasingly strive to struggle, work out their forthcoming plans and to endure. No matter how pathetic and risible their attempts appear to be and despite that they can foresee solely

physical vexation, personal animosity and lessened mobility, their efforts bear some significance, and, although they are unable to alter their destiny and transcend their conditions, they last, and this betokes, according to Keulks, their habitual heroism, a celebration of commonness, of petite, fortuitous victories.

Contrastingly, the protagonists of *Dead Babies* evoke neither our sympathy nor endorsement. Puzzlingly enough, Martin Amis's characters, endowed with a plethora of flaws, abhorrence and delusion, seem to vie for the status of the book's most revolting figure. Accordingly, Martin's text, constituting a hostile, blatant, inexorable satire, at times regarded as an "excremental" one, defies the humanist tone of his father's novel as well as the comic fine humour of *The Rachel Papers* that contributed to the book's popularity and success. Regarding the novel's title, "dead babies" alludes to all the humanistic notions that have been stillborn and futile, such as family, friendship, love, rectitude, social integration and perseverance, the values so indispensable in *Ending Up* become blank and insignificant to Martin's characters. Furthermore, the critics, such as James Diedrick and Neil Powell stress the resemblance between the title of the book and philosophical ideas postulated by Jonathan Swift in "A Modest Proposal" and by Denis Diderot in *Rameau's Nephew*, yet, as Diedrick observes, Martin Amis overturns all forms of existential or human belief, thus he offers a more dismal, fatalistic kinds of social criticism that renders his protagonists confined and depleted (Keulks, 2003: 141).

Taking into consideration the setting of the two novels, prevailingly of *Dead Babies*, it may be remarked that the author pays little or no attention to the place he delineates, and respectively his characters have no links with their abode. In fact, the protagonists, albeit their upper-class origins, expressing no unease about money and being entirely detached from ordinary matters, subvert, or pervert a seeming country-house tradition of Appleseed Rectory and are hard to be qualified as stewards of the land or of themselves. They obviously fail as model upper-classes, representatives of noble genteel society exhibiting moral decay, soulessness, directionlessness, lethargy and narcissism. It is the examination of the downfall and a satiric portrayal of this class crumbling gentility, not the house which come to the fore; the place is not the subject of the author's analysis, his accent is neither social nor communal but apparently personal and solipsistic.

In view of the two distinct literary traditions and ideologies underlying *Ending Up* and *Dead Babies*, the afore-mentioned Horatian form of satire and Henry Fielding's legacy in the case of Kingsley's novel and the impact of Menippean satire on Martin's text, one may benefit from Keulks's and partially Diedrick's perfunctory analysis of the

two novels with respect to these opposing satirical models as well as of the critic's outlining the writers' theoretical assumptions and approaches to humour. The Amises' opposition mirrors the novelists' personal struggles with, at the example of Kingsley, the dual labels of comic realist and moral satirist, and, in the case of Martin, objecting to his being classified as the moral and realist writer, claiming residence for his novel on "the humorous wing of self-conscious postmodern fiction" (Morrison 99).

Referring to the satirical model of *Ending Up*, Kingsley Amis recurrently stressed a profound impact of Horatian satire on his work and on his perception of this genre. According to the writer satire ought to be free from the burden of social prognostication and acknowledgement, and, instead, should rectify vice and absurdity via ridicule. He argued that although humour may influence society, softening its weaknesses and imperfections, these endeavours remain the satire's secondary considerations, dissociated from its crucial artistic deliberations. In his 1957 essay "Laughter's to Be Taken Seriously" Kingsley invoked satire as a humanising, didactic or heuristic force which offers a social and moral contribution, highlighting that: "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 restraining influences of savage laughter. Even if that influence at times seems negligible, the satirist's laughter is valid as a gesture – a gesture on the side of reason" (quoted in Finney, 2003: 143). In this remark the author referred to the unsteady social situation in the 1950s to which satire constituted the sole antidote and whose "savage laughter" was beneficiary and revitalising and which could contribute to another satirical "golden age" in Britain after World War II, yet he was simultaneously cognizant of the fact that then such attempts remained vague and aimless, hence the novelist investigated the history of English satire, pinpointing its supposed successes and debacles.

When scrutinising Kingsley Amis's viewpoint on satire and humour postulated in "Laughter's to Be Taken Seriously," Gavin Keulks remarks that the British writer assesses the 18th and early 20th century English satire, in particular the legacy of Samuel Butler, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Henry Fielding and Jonathan Swift. The critic observes that Kingsley, on the one hand, recognises the significance of the forerunners of the "great age" of English satire, most notably Dryden, Pope and Swift, but, on the other hand, realises the irrelevance of their didacticism, high style and elevated tone to the social and cultural postwar English reality. Kingsley argues that

when set beside Dryden's majestic wrath, Pope's rocketing shrewdness, Butler's daydreaming or Swift's exposition of social nightmares which contributed to the decline of humour and realism at that time, Henry Fielding's prose reflected more closely the satirical realia of the British fiction after 1945 (Keulks, 2003: 144). The author of *Ending Up* who incorporated in his novel Fielding's realism and humour observed with buoyancy the seeming revival of this prominent 18th –century satirist, prevailingly the influence of his legacy on the works of Kingsley's contemporaries, mainly on John Wain and Iris Murdoch who attempted to blend violence with ludicrousness, grotesque with Romanticism, and force with dread. Nevertheless, added to such combinations which formed some elements of the satire Kingsley proffered, the novelist postulated eschewing intellectualism as the satirist's "occupational disease," promulgated the indispensability of humour and realism as well as the renouncement of commitment and didacticism. The writer remarked that these new satirical targets and qualities, enlivened and revitalised, mirroring the foundations of Fielding's resuscitative type of satire, constituted the vision of satire's another golden age (Keulks, 2003: 145).

Kingsley Amis's essay "Laughter's to Be Taken Seriously" where the author delineated his assumptions about satire were followed by his other theories on humour and art. In *I Like It Here* (1958) he paid tribute to Fielding as his satiric master, particularly to his version of Horatian satire which illustrated a division between anger and mockery, stressed a realistic presentation of characters and events devoid of propaganda and didacticism, and a moral persistence that centred on human nature, not metaphysical fate. Moreover, the writer accentuated in Fielding's more moderate Horatian model which he incorporated in his narrative, the behavioural constraints of particular individuals rather than social conditions, and thus he disowned satire's socio-political warrants underlying its humanistic, educative facets. Having dissociated himself from Butler, Dryden and Swift who, in Kingsley's view, employed a distinctively didactic, or Juvenalian satiric mode, the author of *Ending Up* promulgated a more personal than social form of this genre.

In contrast to his father, Martin Amis claimed that the essence of good art is solely "remotely and unclearly...a humanizing and enriching process" (Haffenden 24, 15) and, to him, literature's purpose is aesthetic, ludic or ridiculous, a kind of metafictional game and linguistic play or *jouissance* in order to toss concepts, ideas, to galvanise and divert the reading public (Keulks, 2003: 147). Unlike Tom Wolfe's statement that the novel ought to consist in 80 percent of research and in 20 percent of inspiration, the author of

Dead Babies emphasises the significance of artistic spontaneity and gives priority to style over content, thus mirroring his favouring Nabokovian expressiveness over fictional leading thoughts. In this regard Martin Amis is hardly considered a Juvenalian satirist, comparably to Dickens or Swift, since even though he echoes these writers' preoccupation with social issues, his objectives are stylistic and aesthetic, not social and political. Furthermore, both him and his father mock the principles of Juvenalian satire, yet they redefine the form distinctly and individually. In opposition to Kingsley Amis, Martin renounces the historical legacy of both Horatian and Juvenalian satire heading towards its Menippean forms. Having rejected his father's tonal temperance and remaining exceptionally sensitive to the moral facets of his protagonists' lives, he nevertheless declines to judge, assess his characters, and refuses his accountability for their well-being and edification, and instead he follows Nabokov's delight in an amoral artistic elation and a deliberate submission to the creative requirements of the narrative.

Martin's satirical technique and style differs from his father's type of comic realism and assumes as an alternative a more amoral and ludic mode, invigorated principally not via ideas but via words: "I would certainly sacrifice any psychological or realistic truth for a phrase, for a paragraph that has a spin on it" (Amis/Haffenden 15). This stylistic thesis stems from the writers' seemingly incongruous elucidation of the creative process. When delineating the creation of his works, Martin exposed a romantic, passive yielding to his works, remarking that: "It is terribly difficult for a writer to know what he is up to, since so many decisions are already made before he sits down to write – like the selection of material," which is not, he claimed, "a conscious choice on the writer's part" (Amis/Haffenden 22). Nonetheless, these comments appear astounding, granted that Martin's oeuvre is frequently distinguished by its manipulative features and subjects. All the same, various critics draw the attention to the author's accentuation of the function of inspiration in the process of writing. Among the assumptions of miscellaneous critics he refers to, mostly to F. R. Leavis and his theory on the selection of material, Martin argues that it is "as unconscious as the deeply mysterious business of a novel arriving – when you suddenly feel a little twitch. The only thing that appeals to you about that twitch or idea is that you can write a novel about it; it has no other appeal, and you might even deplore it, but there it is. All that part of it is completely amoral, uncounscious, and god-given..." (quoted in Finney, 2003: 149).

The novelist's postulation of the intuitive recognition of the creative process reflects his moot relation to satiric mode. From a traditional standpoint, satire, which

foregrounds an author's biases and proclivities, presents his/her fixed moral stance, the hierarchical arbitrating voice, the undaunted imposing ego, invariably contradicts Martin's oeuvre in which matters are hardly ever steady or resolute and which are permeated with overt aggressiveness and perplexity. Menippean satire whose foundations saturate *Dead Babies* is the key to understanding not solely the satirical facet of his book but it can also help to recognise the essence of Martin's other explicitly violent and aggressive novels as well as to illustrate the Amises' satirical negotiations and rivalry.

Martin Amis usually regards his books as satirical for he perceives satire as the most seemly form of delineating crimes and atrocities of the contemporary era. In a 1990 interview for *Cosmopolitan* magazine the novelist remarked that: "Looked at seriously, of course, my books are ghastly, but the point is they are satire. I don't see myself as a prophet; I'm not writing social comment. My books are playful literature. I'm after laughs" (Amis, "Amis and Conolly" 71-72). Keulks asserts that such statement contradicts, at first glance, the work of the British writer which is celebrated for its metaphysical and overarching handling of *fin du millénaire* reality, and, additionally, his priority to style over subject seemingly undermines the foundations of satire which draws their power from the unrelenting expression of an author's ethics. Nevertheless, he displays morality and reality in his works by incorporating unreliable narrators or author surrogates who usurp the authority of the hierarchical voice, and the fortuity of his fictive milieu destabilises a moral base. Menippean satire whose elements are prominent, apart from *Dead Babies*, in *Success*, *Other People*, *Money*, *London Fields* and *Time's Arrow*, unravel the afore-said incongruities between merrymaking and satire, diversion and didacticism by placing a carnivalesque, amoral realm where bacchanalian anarchy supersedes accepted reality.

Gavin Keulks and James Diedrick accentuate the features of Menippean satire in *Dead Babies* in which the British author refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* as well as to Philip Roth's *The Breast*. As for the textual clues to Menippean satire, the critics allude to the book's epigraph, which is yet doubtfully ascribed to Menippus: "Even when [the satirist] presents a victim of the future, his business is not prophecy; just as his subject is not tomorrow...it is today" (Amis, *DB*: 1). Keulks stresses that, according to Bakhtin, this attribution remains debatable since none of the satires of Menippus of Gadara has survived modern times and respectively contemporary readers are familiar with their titles only through the records of Digenes

Laertius. In this respect he asserts that the epigraph could be regarded as the first of numerous testaments to the epistemological maelstrom of the novel. Moreover, he argues that Martin Amis raises the mode in the introductory paragraphs of the book to Denis Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, a classic 18th-century exemplary of Menippean satire, to which the main character, Quentin Villiers has frequently referred. Keulks and Diedrick observe that the narrator's words corroborate the novel's satiric style as the aesthetic distance warranted by third-person voice permits him to manipulate the protagonists, to subordinate them to the requirements of satire. Diedrick further notes that Amis stages dialogues between his characters, prevailingly between Villiers and Marvel, which bear some resemblance to the conversations between the narrator and the Rameau's nephew in Diderot's novel. In both the works one character puts forward moral relativism whilst another defies such hedonistic extravagances, attempting to register the humanist values that have become currently considered passé and obsolete. Concludingly, the critic states that Marvel is "a late twentieth-century embodiment of the same presumptuous and reductive rationalism that satire traditionally opposed" (Diedrick 34-35).

The American critic additionally underlines some correlation between Amis's satire in *Dead Babies* and the Menippean satire scrutinised by Northrop Fry in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Keulks observes that Fry, unearthing this genre from Lucian and Varro forward in time through Petronius, Erasmus, Voltaire, François Rabelais, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Butler and Adolus Huxley, emphasises that within the realm of Menippean satire the characters' aspirations are entirely subjected to fictional autonomy or development, and, frequently, as Martin Amis's novel shows, the protagonists are assembled at a rural house or other encircled amenity in which they participate in intellectual dialogues whose inner progress largely surpasses their own (Keulks, 2003: 152).

Among all the above-mentioned literary models and influences, the critics highlight the lasting impact of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* on Amis's novel both in terms of satire and crime story conventions. In his two texts, especially in the second one, the Russian theoretician throws light on the correlation between *menippea* and *carnival*, stressing that the former is galvanised by a "carnival attitude toward the world," gaining strength from its "jolly relativity" and celebratory haphazardness, and its dynamic overthrow of all existing hierarchical forms, relating either to social status or to personal ethics. Similarly to *Dead Babies*, the reality

of Bakhtin's menippea is perilously internal and precarious, giving rise to the inverted worlds of lunacy and illusion, disenchantment and reverie, in which insanity, split personalities, frenzied, wild passions and suicidal proness saturate the structure and theme of the work. According to Bakhtin the menippea delineates a "breach" in the everyday activities of human conduct, and this discordant world purposefully destabilises customary aspects of normality and stability, encompassing those of language and verisimilitude, thus fantasy, imagination and parody mingle with "crude underworld naturalism" (Bakhtin 94-96). Consequently, the critic argues that the menippea exposes classical assumptions of character and motivation, replacing an overthrown amoral world where veracity and value turn out to be wavering propositions entangled by existential fortuity.

Bakhtin's exploration of the Menippean satire which constitutes the key part of *Dead Babies* alludes to the Russian theoretician's scrutiny of the notion and phenomenon of carnival depicted by Gardiner who asserts that: [u]sing a constantly recurring metaphor, Bakhtin argues that popular festivals and rituals carved out a 'second life' for the people within the womb of the old society, a world where the normal rules of social conduct were (at least temporarily) suspended and life 'was shaped according to a certain pattern of play'(quoted in Gregoriou 95). In *Deviance in Contemporary Crime Fiction* Christiana Gregoriou links the carnivalesque 'second life of the people' to the acts of crime and crime reading, stressing that Bakhtin's carnival, being the realm of bitterness, irrationality and ridicule, mirror in fact crime reality, and this second informal and unconventional life is where ordinary life resides and where the logic and rationality of law becomes undermined. Referring to Presdee, the critic asserts that this second life is forcefully expressed and activated through carnival which for prudent, rational people is tantamount to the carnival of crime (Gregoriou 101). Analogously, the world created by the young adults in *Dead Babies* mirrors the alternative, second life of the British and American youth culture in the 1970s in which moral decay, callousness, disillusionment and fear give rise to homicide and self-annihilation. Hence, the novel, exhibiting the features of both carnival and crime fiction, permits us to escape into a restructured, corrupt, villainous reality, yet it does not, or only partly challenges the ordered, established world but rather mocks this degenerated youth subculture of the Appleseed Rectory dwellers. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the author scathingly satirises his protagonists and the vicious environment to which they become confined, he is simultaneously cognizant of the readers' entertaining the murderous scenes, their

fascination with violence and crime occurring in the novel. One is prepared to concede that this sadistic reading of Amis's work conforms to the manner in which we derive pleasure from murder, humiliation and victimisation while perusing crime stories, and reflects our attraction to violence and homicide encountered in contemporary popular culture (Gregoriou 100). As a matter of fact, the reader's fascination and the author's obsession with life's brutality, degradation and horror in *Dead Babies* betokens Presdee's theory on the violence of human possibility and imagination invoked during the act of reading crime fiction, the moment we enter the realm of challenge, control, resistance and carnival. In other words, the pleasure and excitement we derive from the ruthless, ferocious and obscene microcosm in Amis's novel is seemingly 'related to the breaking of boundaries, of confronting parameters and playing with the margins of social life in the challenging of controllers and their control mechanisms' (in Gregoriou 101). The British author, notwithstanding his evident caricature and mockery of the degenerated youth culture of the Appleaseed Rectory's dwellers, their existence on the verge of ordered, established life, stimulates the audience's pleasure which, according to Presdee and Gregoriou, could be sought and obtained on the margins of social life.

Taking into consideration the Amises' diverse viewpoints on satire, one ought to also inspect the authors' characterisation of the protagonists and their approach to closure. As for the former facet, one can easily notice that despite both in *Ending Up* and *Dead Babies* no character is utterly laudable and arouses no profound compassion, the writers seemingly single out two protagonists who may gain some readers' sympathy and pity, namely Adela Bastable in Kingsley's novel, by bringing a wave of humanism into the life of the aged inhabitants of Tuppenny-happeney Cottage, and Keith Whitehead in Martin's work, the rotund midget who falls prey to his own wretchedness and to the implacable vilification of the remaining characters. There is no denying that Amis the Father's and the Son's satirical portraiture and their empathetic treatment of these two protagonists are apparently dissimilar and illustrate the novelists' contrastive attitudes to other characters as well. Kingsley's satiric aim was to unravel realistic, unromantic pictures of people wrestling with the growing futility of their lives and though his text does not propose the solace of faith or philosophy and the characters all meet their deaths when the story draws to its close, the novel's structure constitutes a redemptive, revivifying power (Keulks, 2003: 154). Adela, the most blameless and innocent character gains the reader's and supposedly the author's solicitude largely due to her human spirit manifesting itself in her efforts to reconcile unsteadiness of her life with

her internal rationality, orderliness and logic as well as the heroine's recurrent attempts to unite other characters. Kingsley Amis depicts Adela as a considerate, realistic figure, a token of human anguish who controls the novel's pervading exposition of the meaninglessness and amorality of life. She is the one who declines to surrender to death, confronts chaos and anarchy with monotony, solitude with companionship attaining in this process some liberation from the loneliness that more bothers other characters.

Similarly to Adela Bastable, Keith Whitehead appears the most innocent and likeable figure in Martin Amis's work, however, when set beside Kingsley's comical yet simultaneously gentle and humane treatment of his heroine, the protagonist of *Dead Babies* remains the most tortured of "Martin's brutal gang" (Keulks, 2003: 156), mirroring the augmented haphazardness and amorality of the writer's fictive world. This ingenuous, stunted character, unconsciously assuming his status as an attenuated, vulnerable Christ figure, falls victim to fierce physical and emotional persecution and becomes situated in the midst of the author's polarisation of his characters. In the conversation with John Haffenden Martin pointed out that his preference for polarising the protagonists in *Dead Babies* and his other works generates a moral spectrum against which solipsism, willfulness and vanity could be gauged. He explained that at one end of his spectrum he places delinquents, criminals, incensed egoists, such as Andy Adorno, Keith Talent or John Self, and at the opposite pole he locates the so-called degenerates, characters of established social status and educated class, like Quentin and Celia Villiers or Guy Clinch, who display the impotence of class to preclude contingency and agony. As was mentioned previously, beside these extreme characters, labelled as "victimisers," Martin Amis positions in the midst of his spectrum the figures, such as Keith Whitehead – defenceless, naive victims whose lack of perception, experience, knowledge and volition "render them easy prey for the vampiric characters who encircle them" (quoted in Keulks, 2003: 156). Keith, tormented, abused and forsaken, more human than his persecutors, strives to arbitrate the unleashed tortures of the others, but he is incapable of preventing their abuse and concomitantly their doom. What is more, he fails to escape his destiny despite having been given a chance to embrace his exile from the group and ignoring his premonition, and eventually, wilfully or unwillingly meets his cruel fate, fulfilling therefore his role as the novel's ultimate victim. In this respect the protagonist's doom, along with the preceding deaths of other characters, exposes the nihilism of Martin's Menippean satire, which quashes all sense of hopefulness, transcendence and significance.

Last but not least, the Amises' divergent attitude towards their characters, particularly in the moments of their decease mirror the authors' distinct approaches to closure. Although *Ending Up* and *Dead Babies* both end up with group deaths of their protagonists, the novels' endings illuminate the authors' contrastive attitudes towards satire and their worldviews. In contrast to Kingsley's work in which demise comes by chance and results only partly from the characters' intrigues and machinations, Martin's conclusion is by far more ominous, menacing and deterministic, and in lieu of the movement from bias to pathos projected in *Ending Up*, he undertakes a journey to entire destruction or annihilation, a Mansonian carnage, mirroring no logic or rationality. Despite the fact that both the novelists foreground moral issues defining value and identity in a world of proliferating chaos and fortuity, it is the ashes of Kingsley's characters from which apparently rises exultant humanism, whereas Martin's apocalyptic novel of ideas equipped with scathing, merciless satire, refuses to improve the protagonists' mounting excesses.

On the whole, *Ending Up* and *Dead Babies* constitute puzzling, thought-provoking satirical works which mirror the authors' divergent approaches to humour, dramatise their contrasting philosophical viewpoints and ideological struggles. As for the detective story convention, death visibly pervades both the texts, yet it is Martin Amis's work which exposes its vicious, murderous facet. By foregrounding the atrocious, degenerative side of his protagonists, by subjecting them to his sadistic authorial tortures and sacrificing them to the ends of satire, the author of *Dead Babies* manifests his departure from and assault on the underlying values and the satiric form of his father's precursor text, as well as problematises the unparalleled absolutes that permitted Kingsley to affix and exercise judgement and significance in the novel. In this way, in the process of negotiating the confines of their genealogical intertwining, the Amises challenged each other's representational errors, indicating that the other had misconceived contemporary realia. Consequently, their novels held out competitive aspects of reality fixed in their satiric techniques and styles.

From the above chapter it transpires that the theme of death, violence and persecution closely reflects the author's rumination on the bleak side of human life and on the murderous nature of modern civilisation. Having always expressed his preoccupation with social, political, cultural, and above all moral issues, the writer highlights a perpetual struggle of individuals facing miscellaneous menaces in the second half of the 20th century and at the turn of the 21st century, most notably

totalitarian regimes, nuclear and ecological catastrophes. At the same time, Amis's fiction provokes huge controversy, mainly over his delineation of tempestuous male-female relations, the equivocal portraiture of women and his viewpoint on Islamic fundamentalism. Finally, considering a satirical facet of his writing, the novelist contests and successfully challenges his father in proffering alternative approaches to literary humour and contrastive philosophical worldviews.

Conclusion

The present dissertation devoted to Amis's literary output may constitute a penetration of detective literature, pre-eminently postmodern crime fiction, as well as the rumination over the condition and function of contemporary prose and the role of an artist in the face of civilisational threats, perils and existential distress at the threshold of the third millennium. In the thesis I endeavoured to disclose a multifarious dimension of homicide, distorted and deformed portraits of both the culprits and the victims and the entangled, labyrinthine relations among protagonists, narrators, author and reader. As was marked in the introduction and in one of the chapters, Amis has been infrequently perceived as a crime writer, yet the pivotal components of this genre permeating his prose permit to situate his fiction to a large degree within a detective story tradition, basically its postmodern type.

The British author, analogously to other postmodern men of letters, excels at linguistic experimentation, stylistic innovation and at employing sundry metafictional techniques, prevailing intertextual references by means of which he launches a literary dialogue between himself and the critics or other writers on the one hand and the reading public on the other hand. Nevertheless, on account of this structural and narrative experimentation and inventiveness, the plethora and heterogeneity of other literary allusions and influences combined with seeming thematic indeterminacy and vagueness, the analysts find it difficult to circumscribe not solely the bounds between detective and non-detective elements of his prose but to detect and define the chief goal and major premise of his fiction as well. It is the Kafkaesque social, cultural and political nightmare, twisted reality governed by intense personal moods and emotions adroitly mingled with Ballardian hallucinatory narrative acts which lay the foundations for Amis's oeuvre. These influences, together with the author's satirical eccentricity and a quixotic sense of humour, become the crucial determinants of his postmodern fiction. Taking into consideration the humouristic aspect of his oeuvre, it is tempting to suggest that Martin Amis, despite being celebrated and internationally recognised for his scathing satire and irony, is hard to be labelled a comic writer. There is no escaping the fact that the nihilism and existential anguish that pervade his works outshine their humouristic face, being an inherent constituent of his fiction, pre-eminently in the face

of the novelist's vying with Kingsley Amis who surmounted his son in comic literary realm.

Regarding the entirety of Martin Amis's literary output, commencing with his early literary phase and finishing with currently published novels, essays and articles, one may perceive remarkable stylistic and generic alterations. The critics, such as Brian Finney, underline the three conspicuous literary stages in Martin Amis's fiction: the initial period between 1974-1984, marked by the author's endeavouring to emerge from his father's shadow, the ensuing decade of ascendancy, 1985-1995, and the ultimate phase, 1995-2007, distinguished by the novelist's engrossment in socio-political issues. Finney's threefold division of Amis's oeuvre to a large extent reflect the novelist's stylistic distinctiveness and thematic alterations, yet such categorisation, albeit accurate seems incomplete due to its omission of the writer's most recent works and thus becomes subjected to certain variations and modifications. As far as the criminal aspect of Amis's oeuvre is concerned, one is tempted to argue that the three tendencies in his literary output mirror different time phases than those postulated by Finney. The first one, comprising his works from the 1970s, early, mid and late 1980s, linked to a great extent to the author's strife to vie with and challenge his father's prose, is distinguished by the novelist's energetic, all the more aggressive tone, in particular his condescending, god-like attitude towards the characters combined with his linguistic hyperbole, exaggeration, pre-eminently in the satirical realm. The novels like *Dead Babies*, *Money*, *Other People* or *London Fields* which deal with moral corruption, sexual licentiousness, financial obsession and murderous instincts expose Amis's propensity for authorial sadism, his deriving pleasure from unmasking, ridiculing and torturing his protagonists and narrators who are deliberately sacrificed for his artistic, principally satirical ends. Contrastingly, in the second literary phase, referring mostly to the end of the 1980s and to the first half of the 1990s, the emphasis is placed on the author's less parodic and more nostalgic rumination on the sense of human existence, a cosmological and metaphysical dimension of earthly life and, more noticeably, on gratuitous violence, motiveless homicide and unjustified suicide. The books, such as *The Information* and *Night Train*, picturing protagonists' personal humiliation and professional debacles, the writer's control becomes distinctly lessened and his sadism appeased. In these works Amis strives to prove that his characters' tragedies and pang are attributed exclusively to the cosmic oppression and inexorable fate rather than to the authorial dominance and torturing hand.

The third, undeniably most controversial stage of the author's last literary decade, brings to the fore socio-political matters, most visibly Islamic terrorism, revindication of Stalin's and Hitler's dictatorship, nuclear and ecological anxieties, a dispute concerning feminist and masculinist worldviews, and the role of an artist in contemporary mass-media and information society. Although some of these issues, such as nuclear threats, a Nazi regime or male-female ideological battles, appeared in previous periods of Amis's literary output, in the main in the 1980s and early 1990s, most of them constitute the core of the novelist's current fiction and become the subjects of acrimonious discussions among contemporary critics. Martin Amis's non-conformist, all the more militant response to social, cultural, political transformations and civilisational menaces of the present-day world fueled fierce controversies in sundry literary circles but they have simultaneously provoked a broader spirited debate over the function of an artist in the face of today's perils and calamities. The British novelist, having always remained sensitive to socio-political turbulences and any forms of oppression and terror that prevailingly yet not exclusively concerned his country and the entire Western world, has devoted a substantial part of his works to Islamic fundamentalism and their contribution to the polarity between Islamic and Western cultures. The publication of *The Second Plane*, "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" and *The Pregnant Widow* have generated fierce polemics and towering rage in the Islamic world whose representatives charged the novelist with islamophobia and racism. In response to the accusations, the writer has frequently asserted that his attacks have targeted on religious fundamentalists whose ideology undermines reason, common sense, respect for the opposite sex, tolerance for other cultures, ethnical groups and denominations.

Regardless of the charges and defences of Amis, his fiction remains highly controversial and equivocal, mostly with regard to its linguistic and stylistic side. It is the inventiveness, comism but aslo subjectivity and a manipulative power of his language which betoken the novelist's artistry but at the same time make the reading and reception of some contentious themes ambivalent, mostly those concerning the above-mentioned Islamic terrorism, feminism, nuclear arms race, Nazism and Stalinism. Brian Finney, citing Brown's and Loose's statements, rightly observes that Amis either "writes like a fallen angel" (quoted in Finney, 2008: 147) or that he is "the poet of profligacy, the expert on excess" (quoted in Finney, 2008: 147) and that his style is so identifiable that he has been often imitated by a number of his contemporaries, most visibly by Will Self (and Zadie Smith in *White Teeth*), and most notoriously by Jacob

Epstein. The novelist's highlighting the importance of style partly results from his renouncement of mimetic realism in his narratives: "the more superbly an author throws away the crutches of verisimilitude, the more heavily he must lean on his own style and wit" (Amis, *WAC* 95), but also from its integrity with the content. Amis, referring to Nabokov and Bellow, unceasingly disavows a neutral aspect of style and underlines instead its moral side: "I would argue that style is morality: morality detailed, configured, intensified. It's not in the mere narrative arrangement of good and bad that morality makes itself felt. It can be there in every sentence" (Amis, *E*: 122). The author who views style as a reflection of the kind of perception that the writer employs, particularly by its freshness and exactitude, places it within a broader social framework while writing, for instance, about Nazi and Soviet Communist ideology in *Time's Arrow* and *Koba the Dread*. Together with his lengthy criticism of the corruption of the murderous history of the two totalitarian regimes, Amis finds their perfidy equally in their murderous misuse, or perversion of language. In fact, the writer considers the unconscious, automatic employment of cliché as a crucial revelation of the user's unawareness of the effect of what he or she is writing, in which he is indebted to Nabokov, who "regarded cliché as the key to bad art" (Amis, *WAC*: 245).

Finally, it is worth noticing that the author of *Dead Babies*, *Success*, *Money*, *Time's Arrow* and *House of Meetings* remains obscure and unrecognised in Poland, and his oeuvre is minutely explored by Polish critics, analysts and reviewers. This state of affairs could be due to the fact that the novelist is still overshadowed by his father, and his surname is identifiable mainly with Kingsley which affects the process of unequal promotion and publication of these two men of letters. Furthermore, Martin Amis's oeuvre is analysed in terms of a crime story tradition, thus miscellaneous critics fail to see this aspect of his prose, even though they simultaneously perceive homicide, violence and victimisation as the leading motifs of his works.

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Streszczenie

Niniejsza rozprawa jest monografią poświęconą twórczości współczesnego pisarza brytyjskiego, Martina Amisa, w kontekście literatury kryminalnej, zwłaszcza jej postmodernistycznego modelu oraz w świetle tematyki cywilizacyjnych konfliktów i zagrożeń, z jakimi zmierzała się ludzkość w XX wieku oraz zmierza się u progu III tysiąclecia, w szczególności problem zniewolenia przez systemy totalitarne, zagrożenia ekologiczne i wojny nuklearne oraz burzliwe i kontrowersyjne relacje damsko-męskie. Jeśli chodzi o kryminalny aspekt dzieł pisarza, autorka pracy zaznacza, że mimo iż w oczach większości krytyków i teoretyków autor *Dead Babies*, *Success*, *Other People*, *London Fields*, *Time's Arrow*, *Night Train* czy *Information* rzadko jest uważany za przedstawiciela powieści detektywistycznej, a tylko znikoma część jego utworów utożsamiana z konwencją gatunku kryminalnego, praca ukazuje motywy śmierci, zabójstwa, przemocy i prześladowania ofiary, które są wszechobecne w niemalże każdej książce pisarza, a jednocześnie analizuje językowy, stylistyczny i narracyjny eksperymentalizm artysty, zwłaszcza metafikcyjną grę autora z czytelnikiem, narracyjny sadyzm pisarza wobec swoich protagonistów, ironię, sarkazm i groteskę oraz intertekstualność i wielowymiarowość jego dzieł.

Rozpatrując intertekstualny aspekt powieści Martina Amisa nie sposób nie wspomnieć o wpływie dwudziestowiecznych, głównie amerykańskich, a także południowo-amerykańskich i francuskich prozaików, takich jak, Vladimir Nabokov, Saul Bellow, J. K. Ballard, Philip Roth, Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, Jorge Luis Borges i Alain Robbe-Grillet oraz brytyjskich klasyków, szczególnie Jonathana Swifta, Roberta Browninga, Charlesa Dickensa czy Roberta Louisa Stevensona. Powyżsi literaci i teoretycy w znaczny aczkolwiek różnorodny sposób ukształtowali u brytyjskiego pisarza tematykę kryminalno-psychologiczną i filozoficzną oraz metafizyczne wątki powieści detektywistycznej, zwłaszcza jej postmodernistycznego modelu oraz wydatnie przyczynili się, szczególnie Nabokov, Bellow i Ballard, do wykreowania i zdefiniowania przez Amisa roli i statusu współczesnego pisarza, jego relacji z bohaterami i czytelnikiem oraz funkcji literatury w dobie komunikacji masowej, technologii informatycznej oraz politycznych i społeczno-kulturowych zagrożeń przed jakimi staje ludzkość u progu III tysiąclecia.

Wątki detektywistyczne stanowiące rdzeń rozprawy i analizowane wielopłaszczyznowo tak pod względem narracyjno-strukturalnym jak i stylistycznym są często rozpatrywane w odniesieniu do utworów innych pisarzy, głównie Paula Austera, Alaina Robbe-Grillet, Jorge Luisa Borgesa czy Jose Carlosa Somozy. Pomimo różnic gatunkowych, językowych i tematycznych praca ukazuje podobieństwa brytyjskiego pisarza z powyższymi artystami w kontekście postmodernistycznej metafizycznej powieści kryminalnej, opowiadania *neo-noir*, powieści anty-detektywistycznej, pastichu oraz groteski tzw twardej literatury kryminalnej. Niemniej jednak, badanie wybranych utworów Amisa, z których na pierwszy plan wysuwają się *London Fields* i *Night Train* pod kątem kryminalnej metafizyki czy raczej połączenia powieści metafizycznej z twardą literaturą detektywistyczną stanowi jedną z głównych, lecz nie jedynych interpretacji książek tegoż powieściopisarza utrzymanych w nurcie gatunku detektywistycznego. Oprócz fikcyjnego lub narracyjnego aspektu zbrodni analizowany jest także narratorski i autorski wymiar morderstwa oraz przebiegła, niebezpieczna i często zwodnicza metafikcyjna gra autora z czytelnikiem widoczna w szczególności w *Dead Babies*, *Other People* i *Money*. Trzecia spośród innych możliwych kryminalnych modeli interpretacyjnych książek brytyjskiego prozaika to językowy, gatunkowy, a przede wszystkim społeczny aspekt *deviance*, zwłaszcza motyw bakhtinowskiego karnawału w psychologiczno-sensacyjnych i filozoficznych obrazach Amisa, najbardziej utrwalaonych w *Dead Babies*.

Tematyka śmierci, zbrodni, przemocy oraz nieustannej walki autora, narratora i protagonistów, których podwójna, a niekiedy potrójna tożsamość ofiary-przestępcy-detektywa komplikuje przebieg wydarzeń oraz podkopuje fundamenty i schemat klasyki gatunku często przesycona jest ironią i czarnym humorem. Elementy humorystyczne, zwłaszcza satyra, karykatura czy groteska stanowią nie tylko integralną część dorobku pisarskiego Martina Amisa, ale są także czynnikami odróżniającymi jego powieści od książek Kingsleya Amisa. Rywalizacja, współzawodnictwo z ojcem, walka o wyznaczenie własnej drogi literackiej, a jednocześnie ogromny podziw dla dorobku artystycznego Kingleya w ogromnej mierze ukształtowały pisarstwo artysty w jego początkowej (1974-84), środkowej (1985-95) i obecnej fazie (1995-2010) zarówno w dziedzinie komedii i humoru jak również w kwestii filozofii i polityki. Mimo iż głównym celem pracy nie jest ukazanie relacji Martina Amisa z ojcem, niemniej jednak znaczna jej część, w szczególności czwarty rozdział przedstawia portret literacki Amisa

syna i obraz jego dzieł w kontekście rywalizacji z ojcem oraz próby podważenia i zredefiniowania teoretyczno-literackich i filozoficznych założeń Kingsleya.

Rozprawa doktorska składa się z czterech rozdziałów oscylujących wokół wybranych utworów Martina Amisa analizowanych pod kątem różnych teorii dotyczących literatury detektywistycznej, w szczególności jej postmodernistycznych modeli gatunkowych badanych w kontekście relacji autor-narrator-protagoniści i czytelnik, narracyjnego i narratorskiego aspektu morderstwa a także przedstawiających społeczno-polityczny, kulturowy, kosmologiczny i egzystencjalny wymiar zbrodni oraz różnorodne zagrożenia cywilizacyjne u progu XXI wieku.

Rozdział 1, stanowiący teoretyczne zaplecze do badań nad literaturą detektywistyczną i do analizy gatunkowej powieści Martina Amisa, przedstawia klasyczne, modernistyczne i postmodernistyczne podejścia do opowiadania kryminalnego. W początkowej części rozdziału nacisk położony jest na studium gatunku detektywistycznego, jego podwójnego statusu i funkcji – z jednej strony zaliczanego do kategorii literatury popularnej, a z drugiej strony mieszczącego się w kanonie literatury pięknej, oraz strukturalny podział opowiadania detektywistycznego i analizę jego poszczególnych komponentów dokonaną przez Tzvetana Todorova. Typologia bułgarskiego teoretyka, poprzedzona historycznym wstępem do klasycznej, głównie brytyjskiej powieści kryminalnej zostaje zestawiona i porównana z analizą amerykańskiej twardej literatury kryminalnej. Ostatnia część rozdziału jest poświęcona badaniom wybranych postmodernistycznych teorii dotyczących gatunku detektywistycznego, w szczególności założeniom metafizycznej powieści kryminalnej przedstawionej przez Particię Merivale i Susan Elisabeth Sweeney oraz teorii *deviance* i jej trzyczęściowej struktury nakreślonej przez Christianę Gregoriou. Cały rozdział stanowi preludeum i teoretyczno-historyczną podstawę do badań nad powieściami Martina Amisa w kontekście zbrodni, przemocy, relacji detektyw-przestępca i ofiara. Kolejne trzy rozdziały ukazują do jakiego stopnia dzieła brytyjskiego pisarza odzwierciedlają powyższe teorie oraz czy i w jakiej mierze mieszczą się w konwencji gatunku kryminalnego lub przekraczają jego granice wyznaczając nowe, niezbadane obszary literackie.

Rozdział 2 obejmuje badanie trzech różnorodnych tematycznie, strukturalnie i stylistycznie powieści Amisa pod kątem kilku teorii i podejść do literatury detektywistycznej nakreślonych w poprzednim rozdziale. Na początku na plan główny wysuwa się analiza *London Fields*, jego tematyczno-narracyjnych komponentów w

odniesieniu do *The Typology of Detective Fiction* Tzvetana Todorova, jak również w kontekście postmodernistycznej metafizycznej powieści detektywistycznej. Następne dwie, częściowo pokrywające się ze sobą podrozdziały wnikliwie studiują *Night Train*, tak osobno jak i w odniesieniu do *The New York Trilogy* Paula Austera. Celem tych części jest interpretacja tekstu Amisa jako połączenia twardej powieści kryminalnej i trillera metafizycznego oraz odczytanie i podkreślenie egzystencjalnego wymiaru zarówno *Night Train* jak i *The New York Trilogy*. Końcowa sekcja, stanowiąca przedłużenie dyskusji na temat schematu i konwencji opowiadania detektywistycznego jest poświęcona wnikliwej analizie *Time's Arrow*. Jednakowoż, z uwagi na niezwykle polemiczną i kontrowersyjną kwestię ludobójstwa przedstawioną w powyższej powieści ta część rozdziału wychodzi poza granice analizy gatunku detektywistycznego kierując się ku badaniom psychologicznego, filozoficznego i metafizycznego wymiaru masowych zbrodni nazistowskich podczas drugiej wojny światowej.

Rozdział 3 podkreśla paralelizm między fikcyjnym morderstwem, śledztwem, tropieniem i prześladowaniem ofiary i przestępcy a procesem tworzenia i odczytywania tekstu kryminalnego. W pierwszym podrozdziale nacisk położony jest na analizę procesu pisania jako aktu zbrodni, eksponowanie podwójnej roli autora i mordercy oraz przedstawienie niejasnych i dwuznacznych stosunków między pisarzem, narratorem a protagonistami. Przedmiotem badań jest powieść *Other People* rozpatrywana w kontekście związku pomiędzy pisaniem jako aktem morderstwa a procesem alienacji i konfliktu podwójnej tożsamości w odniesieniu do innych utworów, takich jak *No-Exit* Jean-Paul Sartra, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* Roberta Louisa Stevensona, a zwłaszcza *Travels in the Scriptorium* Paula Austera. W kolejnej części poświęconej analizie *Dead Babies*, *Success* i *Money* na plan pierwszy wysuwa się z jednej strony przemoc, autorski sadyzm, manipulacja i władza, a z drugiej strony walka bohaterów o autonomię i niezależność. Poszczególne powieści Martina Amisa są interpretowane w intertekstualnych paralelach: analizując *Dead Babies* odwołuję się *Ending Up* Kingsleya Amisa i do utworów Ballarda, z kolei *Success* jest badany w odniesieniu do monologu dramatycznego Roberta Browninga oraz tematyki społecznej Charlesa Dickensa, natomiast szekspirowskie i orwelowskie motywy są eksponowane podczas analizy *Money*. Ostatnia część koncentruje się na wątkach śledztwa i dochodzenia kryminalnego w procesie tworzenia i odczytywania tekstu jak również na kwestii uwięzienia bohaterów przez autora w wybranych utworach Amisa. Podobnie jak w poprzedniej sekcji, w tym podrozdziale analizuję powieści brytyjskiego pisarza

odwołując się do utworów innych prozaików. Ilustracją tego jest *London Fields* badana w korelacji z *Anthenian Murders* Jose Carlosa Somozy i z *Death and the Compass* Jorge Luisa Borgesa oraz *Money* interpretowane w odniesieniu do *Despair* Vladimira Nabokova.

Rozdział 4 poświęcony jest tematyce społecznych, politycznych, kulturowych i nuklearnych zagrożeń współczesnej cywilizacji w twórczości Martina Amisa. W przeciwieństwie do poprzednich części rozprawy skupiających się na różnych konwencjach, teoretycznych koncepcjach i elementach literatury detektywistycznej, ten rozdział traktuje o historycznych i bieżących okrucieństwach i niepokojach społeczno-politycznych, takich jak dwudziestowieczne systemy totalitarne, katastrofy i zagrożenia nuklearne, jak również erotyzm, pornografia, szowinizm i mizoginizm. Obok tych kwestii rozdział obrazuje literacki, filozoficzny i polityczno-ideologiczny konflikt Martina Amisa ze swoim ojcem, przeważnie spór dotyczący odmiennego podejścia autorów do satyry i humoru. Początkowy podrozdział skupia się wokół politycznego, społecznego i kulturowego wymiaru totalitaryzmu w wybranych dziełach pisarza, w szczególności przedstawieniu stalinowskiej dyktatury, nazistowskiej propagandy i zaplanowanego ludobójstwa oraz islamskiego terroryzmu. Pierwszy najbardziej eksponowany w tej części rozdziału oraz częściowo drugi motyw zostaje poddany wnikliwej analizie w odniesieniu do *House of Meetings*, *Time's Arrow*, *Koba the Dread* oraz *Money*, *Animal Farm* i *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, przy czym badając intertekstualnie trzy ostatnie pozycje nacisk położony jest na porównanie problemu pogwałcenia wolności i prywatności zarówno w społeczeństwie demokratycznym jak i w kraju rządzonym przez aparat państwowy. Ostatnia część podrozdziału poświęcona interpretacji *Yellow Dog* oraz *The Second Plane* ukazuje zagrożenia ze strony islamskiego fundamentalizmu i związaną z nim polaryzację między światem zachodu a islamem. Kolejny podrozdział traktuje o zagrożeniach nuklearnych i niepokojach kosmicznych w *Einstein's Monsters* i *London Fields*, a także o problemach egzystencjalnych współczesnych literatów w dobie propagandy sukcesu, agresywnej reklamy i kultury konsumpcyjnej nakreślonych w *Information*. Trzecia część rozdziału przedstawia różne wizerunki bohaterów i napięte, wręcz wojownicze relacje damsko-męskie w takich powieściach jak *Money*, *London Fields* i *Night Train*. Podczas analizy kontrowersyjnej tematyki *gender* w twórczości Martina Amisa przywołuję zarówno krytykę feministycznych kół literackich jak też przychylnie brytyjskiemu autorowi opinie głównie męskich analityków, recenzentów i teoretyków. Ostatnia sekcja

czwartego rozdziału odsłania genealogiczny spór i rozdzwięk pomiędzy Martinem a Kingsleyem Amisem dotyczący z jednej strony feminizmu, szowinizmu i skomplikowanych relacji syn-ojciec, co obrazują *Money*, *Stanley and the Women* oraz *Jake's Thing*, a z drugiej strony ujawnia kontrastywne spojrzenie tych dwóch pisarzy na komiczną, a przede wszystkim satyryczną funkcję literatury zilustrowanych w *Dead Babies* i *Ending Up*.

Cała rozprawa doktorska przedstawia różnorodne aspekty twórczości Martina Amisa w odniesieniu do tradycji powieści detektywistycznej oraz szeroko rozumianego pojęcia zła, śmierci, zbrodni, prześladowania, konfliktu tożsamości i osobowości tak w kontekście literackim jak i społeczno-kulturowym. Jednocześnie celem pracy jest ukazanie w jaki sposób i do jakiego stopnia powieściopisarz przekracza granicę pomiędzy postmodernistyczną powieścią kryminalną i anty-kryminalną poszukując i odkrywając nowe obszary literackie. Chciałabym zaznaczyć, że chociaż esencją tej rozprawy było wyeksponowanie i badanie przemocy, zabójstw, kryminalnej patologii, śledztwa, prześladowania ofiar oraz społeczno-kulturowych, politycznych i planetarnych zagrożeń i niepokojów w utworach brytyjskiego autora, te tematy nie są jedynymi poruszonymi przez pisarza zagadnieniami.