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Paper of the Year Award

The Politics of Antimodernism: Realism, Modernism, and the Problem of the Welfare State in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*

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1. Introduction

"If one man's got ten buns and another's got two, and a bun has to be given up by one of them, then surely you take it from the man with ten buns" (51). This is a justly famous remark by Jim Dixon, the eponymous hero of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954). This belief in distributive justice and support for the welfare state is expressed as a retort to the complaint against the heavy taxation of the rich, a conservative stance taken by Bertrand, the arty son of Professor Welch (Jim's boss) and a rival in love for Christine, the novel's heroine. The statement is also notable in its commonsensical plain speech, which is a sign of realism that was seen as bringing a fresh wind to the literary scene of the fifties. Thus, both in terms of style and content, *Lucky Jim* was hailed as the epitome of the "Angry Young Men," a generation who rebelled against the "establishment"—Britain's class system—in the postwar years.

However, the rebellion of the Angry Generation has long since been revealed as a "myth" (Hewison 130) as its leading figure, Amis, became increasingly explicit in his support for conservative politics from the mid-sixties, later becoming an admirer of Margaret Thatcher (Leader 371). This later development is not considered to be extrinsic to *Lucky Jim*. Even the reader's pleasure in Jim Dixon's apparently innocent triumph is now lost after later critics have turned their keen eyes to the symptoms of misogyny and homophobia in this and other Angry Young Men novels (Sinfield 92; Segal 1–20). After all, the alleged radicalism of the young writers of the fifties, Amis in particular, has turned out to be not so radical. In spite of this widely shared disillusionment, however, many critics still continue to recognize the canonical status

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of *Lucky Jim* in literary history; Malcolm Bradbury calls it "the exemplary Fifties novel" (339), while D. J. Taylor highlights it as "a key post-war English novel" (xxv) with lasting resonance despite his personal dislike of its author.

This paper sets out to shed light on this somewhat confusing status of Amis and his *Lucky Jim* as a canon for reconsidering the literary history of mid-twentieth century Britain. Instead of the "Angry Young Men" or the "Movement," I have chosen to focus on the concept of "antimodernism" as a perspective from which we analyze Amis's fiction and nonfiction work within the larger dynamics of literary history. A term first applied to the fifties novelists by David Lodge in his 1981 article, antimodernism is defined as "writing that continues the tradition modernism reacted against .... It regards literature as the communication of a reality that exists prior to and independent of the act of communication" ("Modernism" 6). Lodge claims that the fifties novelists were exemplary antimodernists in their espousal of "traditional realism" and their reaction against the modernist doctrine of aesthetic autonomy.[1] Yet the problem with this view is that it presupposes an oversimplified binary between realism and modernism, a binary constructed by Amis and others to justify their own antimodernist reactions. In a more recent study, Lindsey Stonebridge and Marina MacKay argue that the "mid-century writers were self-consciously rewriting modernism" (7). I suggest that Amis's antimodernism is one of the most powerful of such postwar rewritings and is one that has left a lasting impact on our sense of literary history.[2] In what follows, I will analyse how Amis achieved this effect by both rejecting and appropriating the legacies of high modernism in a particular historical context: i.e. the foundation of the welfare state in Britain after the Second World War. In order to unravel the seeming contradiction between the enduring fascination of *Lucky Jim* and a number of its political ambiguities, this novel should be read with reference to Amis's ambivalent attitude to the welfare state. Indeed, it is only within the context of this particular historical event and its aftermath that we are able to discern the politics of antimodernism.

[1] Lodge is not alone in using the term "antimodernism." Subsequent critics such as Rabinovitz and Shaffer also use this term in their account of the Angry Young Men (e.g., Rabinovitz "The Reaction" 896; Shaffer 5).

[2] Obviously, it is not my claim that such rewriting was achieved singlehandedly by Amis; as we shall see below, it was rather a result of the concerted effort of various novelists in the fifties and their proponents. For a suggestion that the Angry Generation distorted our sense of literary history of the mid-century, see Patrick Deer's *Culture in Camouflage* (235–242). Fredric Jameson famously argues that the Cold War period saw the rise of "the ideology of modernism" (such as the New Criticism and Abstract Expressionism), which is devoid of the political utopianism of interwar modernists such as Eliot and Pound (168). We may consider that the image of modernism as apolitical experimentalism was also fostered by the opposite camp in the antimodernist reaction of the British writers in the fifties.

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2. Realism, Late Modernism, and the Welfare State

If we set aside Jim Dixon's love interest for the moment, the most crucial of his many predicaments (one that would certainly command the reader's sympathy) is a career crisis. As a young man with a lower-middle-class background who has recently graduated from Leicester University, Jim is hired as a lecturer of history at a local university without tenure. As he nears the end of the first year in this position, whether or not his contract will be renewed is soon to be decided by Professor Welch. To improve his career prospects, Jim tries to have an article accepted for publication in a scholarly journal, yet apparently unconcerned with his desperate efforts, Welch bombards him with a series of "ability-testing" tasks (72), which Jim must willingly complete to win his boss's favour. In reality, Jim is "blackmailed" into serving Welch as his assistant, such as amassing materials for his historical research, correcting the proofs of his articles, and agreeing to accompany him to "a folk-dance conference" (82). These menial tasks imposed on Jim accentuate the "decisive power" that Welch retains over his future (8), yet Welch is so incompetent that Jim wonders how he could have ever become a professor even at a provincial university. Jim's resentment grows when he learns that Welch's professional salary is supplemented by the "good-size income" of his upper-class wife (66). The situation is not helped by Jim's rivalry with Bertrand, Welch's son; in fact, the latter even threatens Jim with dismissal from his job to prevent him from approaching Christine (184, 218).

Jim's predicament may appear a mere exposé of low academic politics. Yet his situation has a larger implication if we consider it within the particular context of the period, when universities were radically transformed as part of welfare-state institutions. After the 1944 Butler Education Act, which made secondary education a right for all, and the 1946 NHS Act, which promised to make medical care free for all, school and hospital became two institutions that best embodied the welfare ideal of postwar Britain. Compulsory secondary education also led to the expansion of universities, and graduates were expected to become teachers themselves to further extend the benefit of education. According to Arthur Marwick, "over three quarters of all students in England were receiving public grants" during the fifties (61). In this situation, James English claims, education became "the cultural work on which the communitarian overcoming of class oppression and social divisiveness would ultimately depend." Thus, as he goes on to suggest, the academic novels of the postwar years (of which *Lucky Jim* is a prime example) are "among the most interesting texts of the welfare state and its aftermath" (131–32).[3] When considered in this context, Jim's bitterness over his "precarious position" (103) can be understood as

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far more than a private frustration. Even though Jim has climbed the educational ladder provided by the welfare state, his fate is still held by the hands of a few upper-class people, such as Welch, who occupy the higher positions of the same institution that gave Jim an opportunity for upward mobility. Therefore, as many critics have noticed, Jim's battle against the "establishment" is also a criticism of the welfare state. This criticism was motivated both by the state's failure to deliver its egalitarian promise and by its bureaucracy, which was increasingly seen as stifling individual freedom (Davies and Saunders 24; Hartley 149).

Meanwhile, less often noticed is the possibility of mapping out the position of these "texts of the welfare state" in the "nativist cultural turn" of Britain after the thirties. Jed Esty argues that the late modernist texts such as T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943) and Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941) were energised by a nativist turn of cultural production away from the reality of the empire to a focus on the British Isles themselves. In opposition to the conventional narrative of imperial decline, Esty suggests that "the culture of retrenchment" provided these modernists with a utopian vision of social totality that had been lost in the imperial expansion of the period of high modernism. In effect, the nativist turn of British culture "created new genres and stories adapted to the needs of a late imperial welfare state and generated new romances about the folk, about the working class, about the countryside, about national character" (40). What is omitted from this picture, however, is the further inflection of the nativist turn when the wartime hope of cultural renewal was replaced by a mixture of expectation and disappointment with the welfare state in the fifties.[4] A more sober reflection on the realities of the welfare state seemed to have driven the fifties novelists away from the earlier hopes of late modernism. At this juncture, a certain brand of antimodernism was also fuelled by the rhetoric of Cold War politics. For example, in a 1955 article titled "Storytelling for the Atomic Age," C. P. Snow castigated modernists such as Joyce, Woolf, and Dorothy Richardson for their "timid" retreat from the age of "the technological revolution" and for leading the novel into "the most hopeless cul-de-sac" (1). Snow instead commended the new generation of

[3] The novelists in the fifties also used hospitals as a common setting for their novels. For instance, the hero of John Wain's *Hurry on Down* (1953) experiences a job as a hospital orderly; he finds momentary satisfaction in a world that he sees as lacking "the usual social classification" (156), later suffering bitter disillusionment. It is interesting to note that Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net* (1954) provides a more positive image of the nationalised hospital (228–34). Even in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), its main character Anna Wolf thinks of taking up some kind of "social work"—either as a "psychiatric social worker" or a school teacher—in the final section of "Free Woman" (633).

[4] Deer criticizes Esty for not considering the Angry Generation as "the true heirs of the culture of retrenchment" ("Mapping" 734).

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realist writers, such as Amis, Doris Lessing, and William Cooper, as "their attitude to their art [was] much tougher than their immediate predecessor[s]" (29). William Cooper, Snow's friend and literary ally, was even more acerbic; he contemptuously rejected writers of the experimental novel because they were, in his eyes, "really on the side of totalitarianism" (36).

However, in the case of Amis's antimodernism, such rhetoric of Cold War politics is less obvious than his immediate concern with the welfare state, at least in the fifties. In an essay titled "Laughter's To Be Taken Seriously" (1957), Amis calls for a revival of the spirit of Henry Fielding because contemporary society needs "the restraining influence of savage laughter" best exemplified in Fielding's satirical realism. As Amis asserts,

> The welfare democracy, with its internal shifts in the balance of power is a satirical arena far vaster and richer than the stratified democracy which is now yielding place to it. Old establishment forms of privilege are on the defensive, although far from being on the retreat: at this stage aristocratic posturings are at their most vapid and most vulnerable. New kinds of privileges are in the ascendant, each battling for mastery: at this stage the vices and follies of the social climb and the economic rat-race offer themselves for deflation. Until the new society is simplified and stabilized, which may not be for decades, we are in for what I have called a golden age of satire. (1)

This passage may be seen as a virtual explanation of *Lucky Jim*; the Welches represent the "aristocratic posturings" of the old establishment while Jim's numerous antics illustrate "the vices and follies of the social climb." In addition, it is noteworthy that Amis defends the value of realism on the ground of this satirical observation of the "welfare democracy." For him, it hardly achieved anything other than destabilizing the old hierarchy; instead of an egalitarian community, "the new society" only opened the arena of competition for economic gain and social privilege for the declining bourgeois and rising meritocrats. Realism in this context is not merely a category that refers to a set of established conventions; rather, it is essentially contingent on this perception of contemporary social reality.

The satirical observation of the welfare state can be potentially valuable, yet a problem arises when this particular "realism" is pursued to the exclusion of other social realities. It is at this point that Amis's antimodernist rejection of "experiment" becomes most problematic. In a 1958 essay titled "Fresh Winds from the West," Amis declares,

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> The idea about experiment being the life-blood of the English novel is one that dies hard. "Experiment," in this context, boils down pretty regularly to "obtruded oddity," whether in construction—multiple viewpoints and such—or in style; it is not felt that adventurousness in subject matter or attitude or tone really counts. Shift from one scene to the next in midsentence, cut down on verbs or definite articles, and you are putting yourself right up in the forefront, at any rate in the eyes of those who were reared on Joyce and Virginia Woolf and take a jaundiced view of more recent developments. (565)

Ever since Rubin Rabinovitz quoted this passage in his 1967 study, many critics have requoted it as a prime example of Amis's antimodernism. Hardly mentioned is the fact that Amis is not directly targeting the interwar modernism of Joyce and Woolf; the essay was actually written as a review article of the works of his contemporaries associated with the Caribbean literary renaissance, a group including Jan Carew, Edgar Mittelholzer, Victor S. Reid, V. S. Naipaul, and Samuel Selvon. Thus, in rejecting the "experiment," Amis is in reality dismissing the value of these emergent postcolonial writers. Against this review, another Caribbean author George Lamming angrily writes, "What maddens one is the fact that this type of mind cannot register the West Indian writer as a subject for intelligent and thoughtful consideration" (29).

Amis is at least not mistaken in associating these writers with Joyce and Woolf since they had appropriated the literary experiment of high modernism for their own aesthetic and political purposes. Yet Amis completely misses the nature of the relationship between high modernism and the Caribbean writers. A case in point is Victor S. Reid's *Leopard* (1958), a work that Amis targets. According to Amis, this is "an ordinary tale about a Mau Mau warrior," one that is ruefully twisted by the author's inflated sense of style. The main character is slowly dying from a mortal wound he received when he killed his former white master. Amis suggests, "Only in the closing pages, when the wound becomes the centre of [his] world, does style show off subject-matter to advantage, which suggests the unsurprising conclusion that abnormal states of mind are the ones to be legitimately rendered in abnormal style" (565). It is not difficult to find fault with this judgement. First of all, by calling it "an ordinary story," Amis also belittles the seriousness of the Mau Mau War in Kenya (1952–1960), which was far from ordinary. Secondly, he fails to appreciate the power and purpose of Reid's highly figurative style; for example, in an early scene of the novel, the panorama of the Kenyan landscape is described as follows: "In March, or sometimes in April, the long rains come, impregnating the earth with frightening fecundity, and the ancient wounds spread their lips again and new shoots spring from

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them" (6). In this description (slightly reminiscent of Eliot's *The Waste Land*), the downpour of Kenya's rainy season, which heralds spring, is compared both to sexual intercourse and to wound-inflicting violence in a trope effectively prefiguring the deadliness of the violent battle between the white and the black over the ownership of the fertile land.

Perhaps Amis is most culpable for the misunderstanding of the motive for Reid's linguistic experiment. Apart from the figurative style, the novel is also notable in mixing Standard English with words from various dialects and indigenous languages, such as Kikuyu and Swahili, in its narration. At one moment, the main character of *The Leopard* recalls that he once saw "some tribal elders stuttering over the words in the white man's book" in an adult education class, even though their speech in the Kikuyu tribal council was like "the winds combing the heads of the taller pines, or the thunder at the commencement of the seasons" (16). This scene vividly illustrates how the English language in Africa was also a tool of colonial domination, depriving the village elders of their linguistic authority. Therefore, Reid's attempt at mastery and renovation of English is an integral part of his resistance to the empire and struggle to convey the social reality of the colonial Kenya. With reference to Lamming, Simon Gikandi argues that it is the "acute understanding of the problems of language in a colonial situation" that leads the novelist to the "self-conscious subversion of traditional conventions of realism and [the] rejection of coherence in narrative language" (27). The same awareness also drove many Caribbean novelists to appropriate various themes and techniques of European modernism while resisting the strain of aesthetic autonomy. Dismissing their efforts as a mere "experiment," Amis closes his eyes to the social and political motives that inspired the late modernism of the Caribbean literary renaissance. It is difficult not to concur with Doris Lessing's critique of Amis's and others' parochialism; as she states, "their horizons are bounded by their immediate experience of British life and standards" ("The Small" 23).[5]

Thus, Amis's antimodernism is not merely a preference of one literary convention over another. In claiming the moral value of realism, he is in fact upholding the epistemological priority of one social reality over the others: namely, the domestic reality of the welfare state over the anti-colonial struggles abroad—which we can

[5] Also see Caryl Phillips's comment: "Although Amis and Osborne were writers, not social historians or journalists, the omission of [black immigrants of the fifties] from the literary landscape is so glaring it does beg questions about the politics of literary representation" (par. 7). The achievement of the Caribbean writers of the 1950s and their London modernist connections are now rapidly being restored to literary history. See King and Kalliney, respectively.

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clearly see in *Lucky Jim*. Moreover, in reacting to modernism, Amis in effect fabricates an image of apolitical experimentalism, which is far from the real political ideologies of his contemporary Caribbean novelists, as well as the utopian aspirations of the high modernist authors.

3. Modernist Allusions and Their Discontents

A paradox is that, in spite of his antimodernist rejection of experiment in his nonfiction work, Amis's *Lucky Jim* deploys the modernist technique of allusion; as we will see below, this is done to appropriate various works of high modernism to the novel itself. This may sound paradoxical because the novel is often celebrated for the transparency of its realist style and plain speech, which is the very opposite of high cultural pretensions. Indeed, Jim Dixon's major objection to Welch and his set derives mostly from their use of obfuscatory language, such as arty jargon and idiolect. Even in his first appearance in the novel, Professor Welch uses musical terms such as "*á bec*" and "*traverso*" in a casual chat with Jim (7). Jim's troublesome colleague Margaret uses learned vocabulary such as "*compos mentis*" even in an apparently painful recollection of her own suicidal attempt (19). Jim is particularly irritated when he overhears Bertrand using the phrase "contrapuntal tone-values" in speaking to Julius Gore-Urquhart, his potential patron (112). Jim objects to Christine's association with Bertrand partly because Bertrand stuffs her mind with this type of jargon and threatens to turn her into "a refined gracious-liver and arty-rubbish-talker" (142).

This pretentious use of language also betrays the duplicity of these characters' personalities. Seemingly generous, Welch is in fact highly skilled at an "evasion-technique" when it comes to the question of Jim's career (86). His son Bertrand is committing adultery with his friend's wife, Carol Goldsmith, while simultaneously courting Christine. In addition, near the end of the novel, Margaret's suicidal attempt turns out to have been feigned to attract the sympathy of men around her such as Jim and Catchpole. It is as though their disingenuity were inseparable from their academic and artistic pursuit of obscure language.

In contrast, the virtue of Jim is often found in his honesty and down-to-earth morality. Yet even the most cursory look at Jim's inner thoughts—often rendered in free indirect discourse—reveals that he is, in some senses, even more high-cultural than all others. For example, he refers to the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Rilke, and I. A. Richards when assessing his own feelings (72, 107). More typical is covert references to literary works, as in the following example: "He remembered somebody once showing him a poem which ended something like 'Accepting dearth, the shadow of

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death'" (129). In the text, the author of this poem, W. H. Auden, is not revealed.[6] As Blake Morrison says, "Dixon is surprisingly well-read, but in order to avoid the taint of academicism, Amis keeps Dixon's memory vague and makes his encounters with literature appear in large measure painful and involuntary" (130). *Lucky Jim* is full of these oblique allusions and quotations whose authorship is deliberately withheld.

Even though we take these vague references as a sign of Jim's anti-academicism, the problem is that such references lure readers into the game of source-hunting, and scholars do tend to reap interpretive rewards from decoding these intertextual connections. For example, when Jim thinks of giving up Christine and returning to his unsatisfactory relationship with Margaret, he "remember[s] a character in a modern novel Beesley had lent him who was always feeling pity moving in him like sickness, or some such jargon" (185). David Lodge, a veteran reader, suggests that this is a reference to Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (1948). In Greene's novel, the main character, Scobie, feels compelled to compromise his integrity by committing adultery and corruption out of a strong sense of pity. Earlier in the novel, he feels that he is bound to his wife by "pity and responsibility" (13). Similarly, Jim continues to feel himself entangled with Margaret by "pity and sentimentality" until, at the very last minute, the disclosure of her dishonesty allows him to break "pity's adhesive plaster" (242–43). From this observation, Lodge concludes that "*Lucky Jim* is a comic inversion of the tragic *The Heart of the Matter*. Amis's hero acquires happiness and good fortune by throwing off the pity and guilt that destroys Greene's Scobie" ("Introduction" xiv).

A second example of allusion is missed by the astute eyes of Lodge but correctly identified by more recent critics such as Greg Londe and Susan Brooks. As Lodge argues, one of the main problems of the novel is that, despite his instinctive honesty, Jim is always forced to play up to Welch and his clan and to meet their expectations and demands because of his subordinate position. This necessity creates a wide gap between his outer performance and his inner thoughts, with the latter full of extremely violent images to vent his equally extreme frustration. At one point in the novel, Jim thinks, "He'd never be able to tell Welch what he want[s] to tell him, any more than he'd ever be able to do the same with Margaret" (86). Lodge points to the scene where Jim knocks Bertrand down as the moment of breakthrough from this dilemma, when "the inner and the outer worlds [of Jim] coincide" (*Language* 255). The scene is as follows:

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[6] The lines Jim remembered are the final two lines of the third ode of "The Six Odes," published as part of W. H. Auden's *The Orators* (1932). See Auden 98–101.

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> It was clear that Dixon had won this round, and it then seemed, the whole Bertrand match. He put his glasses on again, feeling good; Bertrand caught his eye with a look of embarrassed recognition. The bloody old towser-faced boot-faced totem-pole on a crap reservation, Dixon thought. 'You bloody old towser-faced boot-faced totem-pole on a crap reservation,' he said. (209)

After this encounter, Jim becomes apparently more adept at integrating his outer and inner selves, which finally leads to his hilarious, drunken performance at the public lecture. Yet as both Londe and Brook notice, at this moment of seeming authenticity, Jim is in fact recycling a quotation he remembered earlier when he was first offended by Bertrand: "[Jim] thought of a sentence in a book he'd once read: 'And with that he picked up the bloody old towser by the scruff of the neck, and, by Jesus, he near throttled him'" (50). The book he'd once read is in fact Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922); the line is from episode twelve, "Cyclops," in a scene where the narrator describes a character called the "citizen" roughly treating the "towser," that is, a large dog (243).

As is well known, the citizen in *Ulysses* is a narrow-minded Irish nationalist who later threatens to assault Leopold Bloom. Thus, according to Londe, by incorporating the phrase from *Ulysses* in this particular scene, "Jim and Amis ironically internalize Joyce in this later context by putting *Ulysses* into pugilistic action" (140). Jim seems to prefer the citizen's violence to Bloom's pacifism. Yet the scene in question may be even more problematic than this, since Amis mixes the phrase from *Ulysses* with fragments of Native American culture, such as the terms "totem-pole" and "reservation." Earlier in the novel, Jim is seen "crumpling like a shot film-gunman" (64). In his victory over Bertrand, therefore, Jim identifies himself with the Irish nationalist and the Wild West gunman taking vengeance on Native Americans—a perverse identification that is also an appropriation of high modernism and the political incorrectness of the popular western films.

This exercise in source-hunting is potentially endless, but let's look at one final example concerning how affects are represented and transformed in this novel. Despite his tough-guy performance at "the Bertrand-campaign" (219), Jim is revealed as being keenly sensitive both to his own and others' feelings. Brook correctly points out that such attention to the sensitivity of male characters is a common feature of *Lucky Jim* and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), which is new to this period as these feelings had been traditionally associated with female rather than male characters. However, the problem is that, as Brook asserts, the "emphasis on individual affect replaces a concern with the wider world, as neither the novel nor the play are particularly interested in the world beyond their protagonists" (62). I suggest

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that this problem arises not simply because of the emphasis on affect, but because the affect is deliberately individualised in *Lucky Jim*. A case in point is the following scene where Jim first notices his own intense feelings towards Christine:

> He wanted to implode his features, to crush air from his mouth, in a way and to a degree that might be set against the mess of feelings [Christine] aroused in him: indignation, grief, resentment, peevishness, spite, and sterile anger, all *the allotropes of pain* .... He remembered seeing in a book once that some man who claimed to have love well weighed up—someone like Plato or Rilke—had said that it was an emotion quite different in kind, not just degree, from ordinary sexual feelings. Was it love, then, that he felt for girls like this one? (72; italics mine)

This passage nicely evokes the ambivalence of Jim's feelings; his natural affection towards her is mixed with negative affect, such as resentment and spite, because he senses an insurmountable gap between his own and her social status. In a sense, the scene effectively illustrates how even matters of feelings are cruelly distorted by the persistence of the class system in postwar Britain. Yet instead of seeking a collective solution for the problem, Amis lets Jim escape from this cul-de-sac by means of personal advancement enabled by the benign patronage of Gore-Urquhart, a millionaire and Christine's uncle.

How does modernist allusion have anything to do with this? From my perspective, it is concerned not with the explicit references to Plato and Rilke, but with the phrase "the allotropes of pain." Although "allotrope" is a perfectly normal term of chemistry, it is quite uncommon to use it to describe human emotions. The notable precedent Amis might have had in mind when writing this passage is D. H. Lawrence's letter to Edward Garnett on June 5th, 1914:

> I don't care so much about what the woman feels—in the ordinary usage of the word. That presumes an ego to feel with .... You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, *allotropic states* which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically-unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond—but I say 'diamond, what! This is carbon.' And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.) (182–184; italics mine)

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In this letter, Lawrence objects to "a certain moral scheme" of nineteenth-century realism that created characters with stable social identities. Instead, he calls for a new kind of experimental writing that discovers "another ego" that releases the affective energies from "the old stable ego." What is expressed here is, to use Fredric Jameson's words, another of modernism's "longing for depersonalization, and very precisely for some new existence outside the self, in a world radically transformed and worthy of ecstasy" (136). In this connection, we may understand the "allotropic states," which elide the difference between diamond and coal, allegorizing a condition where the difference of class and status ceases to exist. Considered in this context, Amis's possible appropriation of Lawrence's lexicon is doubly interesting—firstly because "all the allotropes of pain" intensify Jim's affective ambivalence, almost "implod[ing]" his subjectivity itself; and secondly because, in the end, Amis recontains all the energies of such virtual psychic fragmentation in the individual sensitivity of Jim as a social climber.[7]

All these examples show that Amis's antimodernism is neither an outright rejection of modernism nor an unambiguous return to traditional realism. Rather, he employs the modernist technique of allusion to invert, mix, and appropriate the innovative energies of various modernists such as Joyce and Lawrence. In so doing, Amis also transforms the established conventions of realism by making the text itself highly allusive. Yet crucially, all these manoeuvres somehow contribute to augmenting the individual personality of Jim; notwithstanding his anti-academic pose, he seems certainly far more intelligent than the other characters. In a famous argument, T. S. Eliot once claimed that, in a complex civilization, the poet too "must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning" (65). It appears that Amis gives such features to his protagonist without making him quite so comprehensive.

4. The Perils of Academic Life

It may not be difficult to charge Amis with double dealings with modernism—that is, professing antimodernism while in fact relying on modernist allusions. However,

[7] To be sure, this may also be a case of unintended intertextuality, as there is no decisive evidence that Amis had this passage in mind when writing *Lucky Jim*. However, the passage is singled out as "a very interesting and important letter" (19) in Aldous Huxley's introduction to Lawrence's *Selected Letters*, which was published as a widely available Penguin paperback in 1950 (originally published in 1933). Amis's friend and mentor Philip Larkin was a devotee of Lawrence, and he gave advice to Amis concerning the manuscript of *Lucky Jim* (Leader 100–2, 262–9).

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the question of allusion needs to be pushed a bit further. In *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), I. A. Richards defends the practice of allusion as he believes that it can enrich the poetic sensibility. Meanwhile, he is also keenly aware of its potential pitfalls. He firmly forbids us from confusing the pleasure of spotting allusions with the real appreciation of literary value. Indeed, for the purpose of the latter, allusion-spotting may be superfluous, which is a point often forgotten by the erudite. Richards thus claims, "To turn the capacity of recognizing recondite references into a shibboleth by which culture may be estimated is a perversion to which scholarly persons are too much addicted" (203). Such a perversion can be very harmful if it cancels out the sheer pleasure of reading. Note that Richards seems to regard this danger as being more relevant to academics than poets. In the light of this warning, we also need to keep in mind that a possible critique of Jim's pedantry can rebound on his critics, since it takes a specialist of literary modernism to dig up allusions buried beneath the seeming realism of the text. Yet such knowledge may be available only to a few fortunate academics with ample free time. The game of source-hunting alone cannot determine the final meaning of a novel.

The above consideration is not extrinsic to *Lucky Jim* insofar as one of the central themes of the novel is the questionable value of humanities research and education. At first sight, the novel's pronouncement on this issue appears to be wholly negative. For Jim, the only value of his article on medieval shipbuilding is its potential contribution to the improvement of his career prospects—he is only too aware of the worthlessness of an article written for that purpose, or "the article's niggling mindlessness, its funeral parade of yawn-enforcing facts, the pseudo-light it threw upon non-problems" (14). But others in academia are even more dishonest than Jim; as it turns out, L. S. Caton, who gave Jim a vague promise of publication, plagiarized Jim's manuscript to advance his own career, ultimately receiving a professorship in Argentina (229). The humanities education in this novel does not fare well, either. At one point, Jim's friend, Alfred Beesley (a lecturer of English literature), complains of "all this outside pressure" to let students pass the courses regardless of their exam scores (169); the academic standard was apparently being compromised to satisfy the government, who did not want to waste grant money on repeaters, and the university authorities, who did not want to scare away potential applicants. Yet the novel also warns us not to confuse its attack on spurious research and education with a total negation of university. In reply to Gore-Urquhart, Jim says, in a rare eloquence, "Well taught and sensibly taught, history could do people a hell of a lot of good. But in practice it doesn't work out like that. Things get in the way. I don't quite see who's to blame for it. Bad teaching's the main thing. Not bad students, I mean"

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(214).[8] Given this remark, academic readers like us need to first assess the quality of our own teaching and research before denouncing Jim and Amis for their anti-academicism.

The question is even more serious because a large percentage of universities has been sponsored by public money in the welfare state. Does academic life really deserve such special treatment? This uncomfortable—and certainly rather dangerous—question lingers in our mind even after Jim severs all "connexions with the academic world" (233). Some readers may criticize Jim for accepting the private patronage of Gore-Urquhart since it can be seen as signifying Amis's turn towards personal advancement in opposition to the ambivalence of the welfare state's promise of delivering an egalitarian community and its failure to do so in the face of a class-ridden society. This is certainly ominous, given Amis's later support for Thatcher, who set out to dismantle the welfare state. Yet we cannot so easily dismiss the dream of personal advancement. As Bruce Robbins asserts, following Louis Althusser, "If there is no privileged (that is, theological) position completely outside ideology, attempting to reconcile versions of self-interest with versions of the welfare becomes something all social players are obliged to do" (*Upward* 6). In other words, reprobation of Jim's ultimate choice may tip the balance of this much-needed reconciliation to the unquestioned acceptance of the "public good."

However, I suggest that the novel's ending should mark the formal limitation of Amis's antimodernism. In his 1969 article "Novelist at the Crossroad," David Lodge suggests, "If the case for realism has any ideological content it is that of liberalism. The aesthetics of compromise go naturally with the ideology of compromise" (131). This assumption of "fixed relations between literary forms and political/philosophical positions" is untenable, as Stuart Laing rightly criticizes (256). Instead of assuming that "realism" is a single entity, it is necessary to reconsider realism as "an open-ended concept" that is constantly revised and transformed by the writer's struggle to capture a variety of changing social realities (Gąsiorek 17).[9] But Lodge's idea of realism as liberalism seems to be relevant to the case of Amis, given that *Lucky Jim* so heartily

[8] It should also be noted that the novel's attitude to state-sponsored students is a bit more ambivalent than this remark. For instance, Margaret speaks of their "poor little brains" (22), and Jim gleefully parodies the bad writing of "his less proficient pupils" (153). This is potentially significant because Amis turned to the right over the issue of the further expansion of universities. See his notorious comment, "More will mean worse" ("Lone Voices" 163). As Bruce Robbins argues, the (auto-)critique of academic life is one of the virtues of academic novels, but "it takes a certain magnanimity to recognize this virtue" ("What" 262) at a time when the pressures of global capitalism question the value of humanities and threaten to dismantle universities. As a counterargument to these pressures, see Spivak.

[9] Also see Williams's argument that realism always needs to be "a creative discovery" (314).

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celebrates its protagonist's individual freedom. Yet the triumph of Jim can also pave the way for his own undoing. As Raymond Williams judges of some fifties novels, the "phantasy release" of their characters in the ending seriously mars their realism, while they are otherwise so skilled at recording "so many actual feelings." What we need instead is a kind of realism which retains the "real tension" between "our feelings and our social observations" (310–11). To put it another way, we should not be so ready to part with either the frustration over unfulfilled private desires or the recognition of general social difficulties. From this perspective, the significance of *Lucky Jim* lies primarily in its recording of the general ambivalence towards the welfare state, even if its fairy-tale ending betrays a serious flaw in Amis's antimodernist realism.

5. Conclusion

To a certain extent, this paper is a debunking of the "myth" of the fifties antimodernism. As I have shown, on the one hand, Amis fabricates the image of apolitical experimentalism to dismiss the serious challenges posed by his contemporary Caribbean authors; on the other hand, his antimodernist rhetoric also masks his fiction's heavy dependence on the modernist technique of allusion. Yet the point of this paper is certainly not to castigate Amis's declared wish to return to realism. Rather, it calls for a drastic revision of our reading habits still trammelled by the narrow binary opposition of realism and modernism; in the end, this is a formalist definition that is, in fact, influenced by the still lingering impact of the antimodernist argument put forward by Amis and others. It is only after we devise a reading method that overcomes such a formalist distinction that we can seriously start to revise our literary history and accurately assess the aesthetic and political challenges—and the limitations—of Amis's antimodernism.

At the same time, despite Amis's later regressive politics, we can recognise the continuing value of *Lucky Jim* since it forces us to ask several uncomfortable questions about our own academic lives, as either students or teachers. Are our efforts in education and research worthy of the premise of the welfare state? Are the humanities still relevant? Have our areas of expertise not fallen into esoteric knowledge unworthy of public pursuit? Are we not solely motivated by self-interest? These questions inevitably remain unanswerable within the limited scope of this paper. But Amis gives us a hint concerning the last one. In *Socialism and the Intellectuals* (1957), Amis declares that "the best and most trustworthy political motive is self-interest" (12). As some critics say, this comment prefigures Amis's later conservatism; yet *Lucky Jim*, which was published three years before this statement, is a bit more uncertain about

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this point. In a conversation with Jim, Christine admires Bertrand, as she believes that "he's got something to arrange his life around, something that isn't just material, or self-interested." To this, Jim simply points out Bertrand's self-interest. Then Christine replies; "Well, in a way everyone's self-interested, aren't they? but you must admit there are degrees of it" (140). We all know that Bertrand isn't as saintly as she imagined; in many ways, he is no different from Jim. But in laughing at these characters, are we really certain that we are not just as self-interested? Until we can answer this soul-searching question with a resounding Yes, we cannot let go of the self-tormenting pleasure of reading *Lucky Jim*.

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