

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS:  
AMERICA IN MARTIN AMIS'S *MONEY: A SUICIDE NOTE*

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Martin Amis's self-sufficient, well-wrought fiction demands a comprehensive perspective which highlights the relationship and interconnections between its constituent parts. The writer himself has made this clear through his emphasis on the indissolubility of form and meaning in a narrative which attempts to combine the aesthetic quality with an interpretation of the historical present. It is the purpose of this essay to develop an in-depth analysis of a significant motif, America, in one of Amis's most representative novels, *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984). Through a formal, symbolical and historical reading of this motif, I will trace how these different readings support each other and open a window to some of Amis's central tropes and topics, such as duality, otherness and the nature of the self in the context of the twentieth century.

KEY WORDS: self, dualism, otherness, postmodernism, America, Martin Amis, contemporary fiction.

Martin Amis's writing has been defined by Victoria Alexander as "a queer hybrid of a Nabokovian and Bellovian world-views" (Alexander 1994: 78). By this, the critic means that it is a fiction supported and enhanced by the tension between the formal and moral aspects of his prose. Through the recurrent presence of a fixed repertoire of motifs and thematic lines, we can simultaneously observe the workings of the aesthete in search of the perfect pattern and design and hear the musings of the social commentator and satirist. These two sides of the task of a writer, the formal and the moral concerns, are to Amis necessary dimensions of artistic creation, and central elements of his understanding of the novel as a literary genre. Accordingly, the inability to pattern random and shapeless reality are frequently used by the writer as a grudge against some of the novelists he reviews.

To Amis, life is nothing but raw material: "the trouble with life (the novelist will feel) is its amorphousness, its ridiculous fluidity" (Amis 2000: 7), which the novelist shapes through style, understood by the writer as "a radical reworking of impressions" (Haffenden 1985: 17). The search for form becomes a priority: "I would certainly sacrifice any psychological or realistic truth for a phrase . . . I think it's the higher consideration" (Haffenden 1985: 16). Some critics have understood this authorial insistence on the importance of form and style as a shield to protect his moral vacuousness (Mars-Jones 1990). However, this formal emphasis is not an isolated impulse, but works in the direction of what Amis considers to be the complementary aim of the novelist, that of producing "a reading of the world," an answer to the imaginary question of "what's going on here?" (Haffenden 1985: 22). To Amis "style is not neutral; it gives moral directions" (Haffenden

1985: 23). Form and meaning appear as inseparable, one leading to and sustaining the other; content not being the direct display of a set of ideas through plot, but the spontaneous emanation of the way in which the writer organises his artificial world.

These conflicting drives at the core of Amis's fiction are a primal example of an essentially dualist imagination, of "Amis's persistent double perspective" (Reynolds and Noakes 2003: 6). Amis's narrative thrives on dual patterns, his fictional universe being organised according to a multitude of conceptual pairings and symbolic thematic oppositions; shape and shapelessness, the conscious and the unconscious, the reader and the writer, presence and absence, experience and innocence, sickness and health, pain and pleasure, life and death. The precise structural designs and the plots of his books are an expression of the author's world of double-dealing and deception; the characters in his stories are trapped in a web of doubles, reflections and shadows trying to control, manipulate and eventually, destroy them.

The dual nature of Amis's writing has been highlighted by Karl Miller who has labelled Amis as "the latest of Anglo-America's dualistic artists" (Miller 1987: 410). Miller describes *Success* (1978), *Other People* (1981) and *Money* (1984) as "orphan deliriums" (Miller 1987: 409), and interprets the presence of "alter egos . . . double-takes and double-pates" (Miller 1987: 412) in these novels as an expression of the characters' feeling of exclusion and their attempt to escape unhappiness. In a different section of the same study, Miller deals with the connection between the motif of the orphan and that of America. To the critic, "America is an orphan of a kind," an embodiment both "of escape . . . and danger of a new life" (Miller 1987: 349). However, Miller does not provide an interpretation of America's presence in Amis's narrative as a form of doubling.

In his comprehensive analysis of Amis's fiction, James Diedrick defines "narrative doubling" as "an organizing principle" (Diedrick 1995: 40) in *The Rachel Papers* (1973), *Dead Babies* (1975) or *Success* (1978). He also surveys the way in which characters double each other in Amis's different novels and attributes the abundance of doubles in his writing to "the complex relationship between Amis's career and that of his father" which he signals as "one source of all the 'doubles' that haunt the younger Amis's fiction" (Diedrick 1995: 4). Diedrick also mentions the role of America in Amis's writing, but, like Miller, he does not attempt an interpretation of the motif which relates it to other aspects of Amis's narrative, such as the form and content dualism, America's symbolic significance as a form of doubling, or its function as a symbol in the writer's analysis of the historical present.

It is the purpose of this essay to bring the elements previously mentioned together through a systematic reading of America as a central motif in *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984). From a formal perspective, I will explore the way in which the American motif contributes to the structure of the novel and how this contribution connects to the thematic level of the story. I will analyse how America, as a form of duality, as a representation of otherness, plays its part in the psychological development of the protagonist. Then, from a historical perspective, I will deal with the role of America in the novel as an embodiment of the postmodern present and a tool for social and political comment.

*Money: A Suicide Note* (1984) has been widely acknowledged as a major achievement in Martin Amis's narrative and a turning point in his development as a writer. The novel is a sophisticated literary artefact. It combines a complex web of postmodern tricks and narrative devices with an accurate depiction of the 1980s and its materialist philosophy of

self-development through material success. However, the novel's main accomplishment is "its vibrant narrative voice" (Tredell 2000: 55) personified by its first-person narrator and protagonist John Self. Everything we perceive in the book, we perceive through John Self's arresting, energetic monologue. Self's very name, as all the names in the book, is heavily loaded with meaning, and proclaims what the character represents. John Self embodies both the particular and the general, both the individual self in search of a resolution, trying to escape from a web of manipulation and abuse, and the prototypical twentieth-century self, isolated and blinded by a wall of material concerns, a victim of self-delusion in a complex present he is unable to read.

The plot of the novel is, as put by Diedrick, "deceptively simple" (Diedrick 1995: 71). Over a period of six months, John Self, the director of "controversial TV ads for smoking, drinking, junk food and nude magazines" (Amis 1984: 78) travels back and forth between London and New York. He does so in order to make the necessary arrangements to boost his project of shooting an autobiographical film alternatively called, through the different phases of the project, *Bad Money* and *Good Money*. Self attends meetings and makes arrangements with Fielding Goodney, his American producer, and through him with the starring actors involved in the project. His main role will be that of heeding the actors' and actresses' paranoid requests, and trying to smooth things over between them. Self will do this despite his inability to focus on things, and his inaccurate and fragmentary perception of reality. The protagonist's shortcomings are thoroughly enhanced by jet-lag, alcohol and all types of twentieth-century addictions such as pornography, fast food and instant credit. Self concentrates all his limited abilities on this project which he sees as the door to big money and success, and simultaneously, as a way out of a burdensome past. As an orphan, his past is dominated by the absence of his mother and the surrogate love of his aunt, and, later, his teenage years in a striptease pub, Self's surrogate home. As for the protagonist's present, it is ruled by his endless need of money to satisfy the unquenchable demands of his girlfriend Selina Street, his father or his car. The ignorant protagonist finds himself trapped in a web of conspiracy, manipulation and betrayal of which he is the final target. As things become increasingly blurred, Self is offered an opportunity of redemption through his relationship with Martina Twain and the twin character of Martin Amis. The writer's persona enters the book as a character to help Self with the film script and give him some hints about his real situation in the story and his delicate position as a fiction. Self, who remains consistently deaf to all the warnings scattered through the story, finally falls prey to the conspiracy set up for him by Fielding Goodney. The film project has never existed. It was nothing but an unmotivated financial trap devised by a madman. It is too late to get things right when Self finds out that he has been signing cheques and documents unknowingly and must escape back to London. There, he tries to commit suicide, but survives, ending up moneyless, ready to start anew.

A first evident way in which America contributes to the novel is at its structural level. The novel is divided into eight unnumbered sections corresponding to Self's journeys between New York and London. Each section takes place alternatively in one of the two cities, starting in New York and finishing in London. This dual organization which follows Self's shuttling between the two continents is preceded by a brief introductory note signed M. A., and followed by a postscript, narrated, as the rest of the novel, in first person by the protagonist. These problematic two sections are to be seen as being outside the story proper and acting as its frame. They are both italicised and the only sections in the book

which are dated. Interestingly, the opening note's date is previous to that of the postscript. Thus, the M. A. signature must be read as that of the Martin Amis character, acting here as an editor or commentator of John Self's suicide note, and not as that of the Martin Amis author. In any case, the aspect which is more relevant to our study is how Self's journeys act as the central organizing principle. It is a structural design which shows an evolution of the American motif in Amis's fiction pointing towards a fusion of the symbolic and the formal.

In Martin Amis's previous novels, America is embodied by different American characters (DeForest Hoeniger in *The Rachel Papers* [1973] and Marvell Buzhardt, Skip Marshall and Roxeanne Smith in *Dead Babies* [1975]) whose function is that of opposing the English characters in order to destabilise their self-assumed identities and reveal their weaknesses as psychological constructions. According to Richard Brown, the American characters are stereotyped designs, functioning as narrative devices which push the story forward by eliciting the English protagonists' overviolent reactions in a "transatlantic meeting of competitive self-destruction" in which "their own death wish drives them to destruction" (Richard Brown 1994: 100). In the two subsequent novels, *Success* (1978) and *Other People* (1981), the allusions to America become more sporadic. They are reduced to some recurrent mentions which can be read as an expression of the characters' wish to escape their suffocating realities—"I . . . watch aeroplanes [take me to America]" (Amis 1978: 32)—or as cultural stereotypes or literary allusions working on the formation of the English characters' selves—"Mary learned a little about glass, desire . . . America" (Amis 1981: 57), "She read . . . *America, Sadness, Despair*" (Amis 1981: 104). It is precisely in *Money* that the story moves to America for the first time. From then on, journeys to and from America become a permanent hallmark in all of Amis's novels. The moving between England and America happens again in *London Fields* (1989), *Time's Arrow* (1991)—from Germany via Portugal, in this case—*The Information* (1995) and *Yellow Dog* (2003), and in four of the nine short stories contained in *Heavy Water* (1998). In fact, the only novel in which there is no displacement between the two continents, *Night Train* (1997), can be seen as a step forward in the same direction as the whole action takes place in America and all the characters are American, any reference to England having disappeared.

America, as an organising principle in *Money*, is an evident example of Amis's formal concern and of the author's liking of clear cut, neat, almost visual narrative structures. Recurring themes, scattered leitmotifs shape Martin Amis's novels, engaging the reader in an intellectual game of tracing and recognition. However, these repetitions must be justified at the level of plot, or, otherwise, the novel becomes a pointless crossword. John Self's episodic moving between London and New York is not only a structural feature, but it is related to the symbolic core of the novel. His journeys are a metaphor of both his displaced self and his attempt to escape such displacement. In New York, Self, a victim of jet-lag, still functions according to English time. The same lack of temporal concurrence recurs whenever he is back to London. This keeps Self unaware of the present time he lives in, and, consequently, unaware of the nature of most of the situations in which he is involved. His shifting between the two continents is a narrative device to portray Self's anaesthetised consciousness, placing the character in a intermediate, unstable position from the start. When asked if he is English, Self replies to a waitress with a premonitory name in one of the strip bars he frequents in New York: "Tell you the truth, Dawn, I'm half American and half asleep" (Amis 1984: 9). Here, Self's words reflect two of the features

which define him. On the one hand, he is a shapeless, half constructed, hybrid identity. He is a provisional, not entirely made, ontological structure. On the other hand, his perception is limited. Mediated, blinded, he is absent or unable to access what surrounds him.

This moving between America and England is also a doubling at the structural level of the character's frantic moving throughout the novel. From the first scene in which Self takes a taxi at the J. F. K. airport, to his fleeing America at the end of the book, the protagonist moves incessantly from meeting to meeting, from bar to bar, from date to date. While everything seems to impel him to move in New York, pace slows down radically in his London stays. Everything there seems designed to stop him. Even his car, his Fiasco, refuses to work. His life in London is nothing but "repetition, repetition, repetition" (Amis 1984: 25). All the activity, the movement points towards an understanding of Self's journeys to America as a metaphor of the character's existential quest. The symbolical nature of his travelling is also present in the fact that, in Self's eyes, New York is just an intermediate stage of his American dream which has Los Angeles and California, epitomes of the American promises of wealth and eternal youth, the land of the untroubled self, as its final stage: "California, land of my dream and my longing" (Amis 1984: 167). The film project began in California, when he met Fielding by chance in Los Angeles, in the months previous to the present moment when the novel starts. There, he plans to finish his days, when money lets him have a total reconstruction, a radical rebuilding of himself: "I can see me now. I'm in the design department over at Silicone Valley . . . Eventually I produce my wallet, and silence falls. 'Okay, boy . . . I'm paying top dollar and I expect the best . . . I want it blue, I want it royal, I want the best blood money can buy'" (Amis 1984: 171).

In setting off for America, Self is enacting a symbolical escape from the different forces acting on him and trying to destroy him, though, as to most of what happens to him, John Self is blind to this fact. We could distinguish three different types of pressure acting on Self. First, he tries to escape from his inner contradictions, represented by the unresolved oedipal tensions of past and present. Self's familial background seems the perfect soil for all kind of psychosis; his loveless and motherless childhood, his coming of age at the Shakespeare, his father's strip pub, his deeply faulty and traumatic relationship with Barry Self, his fake father who is able to hand Self a bill for the money he has spent on his upbringing, and Vron, a porn actress, his grotesque stepmother. This Dickensian past and freakish present frame Self's affective reality. As often happens in Amis's stories, the need to flee is here related to the characters' feeling of restraint and suffocation the result of a castrating past and present which weighs on them and threatens to erase them as individuals.

Second, the external conditions acting on him are represented by the character's efforts to keep up with the demands of his social and historical context. Success through money is the only possible form of self-development available to Self's limited consciousness. Self represents the "fallen, divided self," who, in his process of degradation, is reduced "to the status of 'social Being' subordinated to the reign of money" (Bényei 1995: 1). So, it is only in terms of money that he relates to those around him. His autobiographical film project is an attempt both to come to terms with the unresolved aspects of his past, and to get the necessary money to satisfy his limitless demands and those of everybody surrounding him, his girlfriend Selina, his father or his Fiasco.

Finally, in his moving to and fro, in Self's affirmation of his independence and resolution, the character unsuccessfully tries to outlive the murderous nature of the

narrative act itself, that “highly ambiguous relationship that pertains between a writer and the characters whom he tortures into life” (Finney 1995). The author’s sadistic impulses, his drive to manipulate and plot, are represented through a multitude of thematic and symbolic doublings, hints and warnings threaded around the protagonist. Mirrors and windows reflect him and show him, or he is recurrently likened to dogs, like the one owned by Martina, revealingly called Shadow. He is surrounded by characters aiming to destroy him (Fielding Goodney, Selina Street), who act as different projections of the author’s destructive impulse. Other characters are there to redeem him and save him (Martin Amis and Martina Twain), as emanations of the author’s compassion. Moving not only from place to place, but from one character to another, Self is characterised as an essentially split consciousness. He is trapped between what he is and what he thinks he is or wants to be, this continual displacement being an irony on the impossibility of escaping from himself.

Self is an isolated consciousness, blind to circumstances and external considerations, to the exchange with the other at the root of the formation of identity. He is a prototypical narcissistic individual, in the sense that all his psychic energy is invested in an imaginary representation of himself. This libidinal energy which is retired from the object and reverts in the subject is symbolically rendered in *Money* through departure and return, suicide or masturbation, all of them different forms of duality recurrent in the novel. America, as a metaphor of the protagonist’s self-reflexiveness, functions as a projection of Self’s expectations and moods, and, as a doubling of England, it embodies the stage for Self’s dream of renewal and success in contrast to London. America is the mirror which gives Self back the image he is eager to see. Whenever in New York, he feels charged with the energy of the place, “the contention, the democracy, all the italics, in the air” (Amis 1984: 6), it is “something to do with the energy of the place” which makes him feel “a different proposition in New York, pulled together, really on the ball” (Amis 1984: 96). The sky and the scenery are also painted with the colours put in them by the protagonist. He sees the sky and clouds as “sketched by an impressively swift and confident hand” (Amis 1984: 19). In his energetic, unrepentantly positive perception of the place, New York “is a jungle,” its buildings “the columns of the old rain forest” (Amis 1984: 193), and America the “land with success in its ozone, a new world for the go-getters” (Amis 1984: 207). At the other end of the spectre, London becomes the paradigm of exhaustion. Being back to London “didn’t feel like anything. It just felt like I was in London again, dumped out of the sky into nothing weather” (Amis 1984: 51). The recurrent descriptions of London’s weather and sky are charged with the gloomiest images. London is “an old man with bad breath . . . weariness catching in his lungs” (Amis 1984: 85). Its skies are covered with “shades of kitchen mist,” the air smelling “like an old sink full of washing-up” (Amis 1984: 159). London and England become the epitome of the absence of future, a chaotic dead-end which is again a projection of Self’s fears and anxieties. England is depicted as “scalded by tumult and mutiny, by social crack-up in the torched slums” (Amis 1984: 66). In contrast with New York’s energy and limitless future, London has “jet-lag . . . culture shock. It’s doing everything the wrong way at the wrong time” (Amis 1984: 150).

The America depicted in *Money* is an artificial construction, a doubling or imaginary reflection moulded according to Self’s dreams. Accordingly, the protagonist’s consecutive failure and doom can be seen as a consequence of his ignorance of the rules governing the symbolical exchange between the subject and its double. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), Jean Baudrillard tells us of “the narcissistic dream of the subject’s projection into

his ideal ego . . . the one in the mirror, in which the subject is alienated in order to find himself again” (Baudrillard 1994: 97), but he also warns us that such duplication belongs to the realm of the subject’s dreams and, like a dream, it “must remain one” and “never pass over to the side of the real” (Baudrillard 1994: 105). To the French philosopher, “the imaginary power and wealth of the double . . . rests on its immateriality, on the fact that it is and remains a phantasm” (Baudrillard 1994: 95). So, the double’s power is “destroyed when one attempts to force the dream into the real” (Baudrillard 1994: 95). Once that line has been trespassed, the double turns into an image “seductive and mortal, in which the subject sees himself in order to die there” (Baudrillard 1994: 97). John Self’s tragic fate is a direct consequence of his crossing the threshold between the imaginary and the real, a violation enacted through Self’s journeys to America, and symbolised in his grotesque and distorted perception of the two countries. Pushed by his unrestrained narcissism, the character develops a fictitious reality, entirely patterned to his convenience. This inability to have an objective apprehension of what surrounds him leaves Self completely defenceless and liable to be the suitable victim for all kinds of conspiracy. As a matter of fact, the protagonist’s narcissism makes it impossible for John Self to have an intuition of the mechanisms at work in the construction of the subject’s identity from an epistemological perspective, and so, the possibility of having access to the real structures of his self are barred to him from the start. According to Sartre’s design of the subject/object relationship, the subject is in need of the other as an intermediate stage to have an access to the deep structures of its self—“par l’apparition même d’autrui, je suis mis en mesure de porter un jugement sur moi-même comme sur un objet, car c’est comme objet que j’apparais à autrui” (Sartre 1943: 276). The other is simultaneously a fictitious construction—“nous le constituons peu à peu comme un objet concret” (Sartre 1943: 283)—which mirrors the subject, but which, in giving back the subject’s image, acts as an observer—“autrui n’est pas seulement celui que je vois, mais celui *qui me voit*” (Sartre 1943: 283)—whose gaze possesses and moulds the subject’s body, keeping the secret of what it is—“le regard d’autrui façonne mon corps dans sa nudité, le fait naître, le sculpte, le produit comme il *est*, le voit comme je ne le verrai jamais. Autrui détient un secret : le secret de ce que je suis” (Sartre 1943: 431). This is not a neutral and harmless process, but a dialogical and violent one in which subject and object attempt to subdue each other—“je tente de me libérer de l’emprise d’autrui, autrui tente de se libérer de la mienne . . . Il ne s’agit nullement ici de relations unilatérales avec un objet-en-soi, mais de rapports réciproques et mouvants” (Sartre 1943: 537). As a consequence of his structural limitations as an individual, his self’s faulty nature, John Self perceives his American project as a one way adventure of limitless prospects, one in which only possibilities of reward are involved. In doing so, not only does he commit the sin of breaking into the realm of his dreams, of the double, but does so unaware of what is at stake in this exchange. Following Baudrillard, “when the double materializes . . . it signifies imminent death” (Baudrillard 1994: 95), and so Self’s crime is punished with America’s resolute response in the shape of the character’s symbolic destruction.

In the final third of the book, the general tone of the narrative and the character’s perception of America get increasingly gloomier. Self becomes progressively conscious of his inadequacy as a human being. He has an intuition of what is beyond his mediated, defective reality, and tries to redeem himself through his relationship with Martina, but it proves to be too late. His final seduction by Selina is a plot to frustrate any possibility of

redemption through Martina. The film project has never existed and he owes enormous amounts of money. Up to then, America has been characterised according to Self's delusions. Once the veil is lifted, America plays the part of Self's omen: "Haven't you heard? The money's not enough anymore. They want revenge" (Amis 1984: 306). Now a wrathful other, America's response is a violent one. America turns from an open promise into a vengeful organism which protects itself against an alien threat: "all the States were keying in my name . . . America played space invaders with words john self. I was money enemy" (Amis 1984: 351). The circle comes to a close and America fulfils its active role in Self's progress towards self-knowledge through consecutive phases of delusion, redemption and final destruction.

Amis's declared interest in developing a valid representation of our historical present through his writing takes us finally to a complementary reading of America connected not to the aesthetic and the symbolical but to the ethical aspects of Amis's narrative. Following Linda Hutcheon's definition of the postmodern fiction, we could say that Amis's fiction is the outcome of the clash of realist and modernist impulses in which "documentary historical actuality meets formalist self-reflexivity and parody" (Hutcheon 1989: 7). *Money*, the novel itself, can be read as a reflection of its historical time, and its characterisation of America, one of the ways through which the writer attempts to grasp the quiddity of such moment. Through Fredric Jameson we understand postmodernism as the "effort to take the temperature of the age" (Jameson 1991: xi), so we must define *Money* as a radically postmodern book with the evident purpose of providing a key to a reading of the late twentieth century. The protagonist himself can be seen as an embodiment of those features attributed by Jameson to the postmodern; "a new depthlessness" (Jameson 1991: 6), the subject's loss of "its capacity . . . to organize its past and future into coherent experience" (Jameson 1991: 25), the schizophrenic perception of reality as "a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers . . . of pure and unrelated presents in time" (Jameson 1991: 27), these are all accurate descriptions of John Self's nature.

In his given historical context, Self's travelling to America seems unavoidable. As put by Jameson, America is "the hothouse, or forcing ground, of the new system" and postmodernism "the first specifically North American global style" (Jameson 1991: xx). The plot in *Money* moves to America in search of the right place to be for an exploration of what is at stake in its present historical moment. The writer elaborates a detailed characterisation of the country which combines fascination and dread, feelings which are a reflection of the same attraction/repulsion which governs Amis's relationship with America and the twentieth century.

Surprisingly, to some extent, and leaving a flank open to his critics, Amis's depiction of America does not point towards a moral conclusion. An author who loathes "Ideas with a capital I" (Haffenden 1985: 15), he has declared that he is not interested in showing the way, giving explicit moral directions: "I don't offer alternatives to what I deplore. I am clear about the moral transgressions . . . but I don't ever feel the need to point them out" (Haffenden 1985: 14). Amis's representation of America, and, connectedly, of reality and the historical present, strives to be self-explicit. Simultaneously, it is a parallel reflection on the state of England, or, more generally, of the old continent as opposed to the new, America functioning as Europe's other and becoming "the mirror of our decadence" (Baudrillard 1988: 104). Self's perception of America's reality allows Martin Amis to carry out an exploration of a land which combines the real and the symbolical, the protagonist's

mixture of euphoria and depression being both a spontaneous reaction to America's dynamism and hyperreal vitality, and a consequence of the character's personal quest. In the States, Amis finds "the ideal material for an analysis of all the possible variants of the modern world" (Baudrillard 1988: 29), and, in this sense, America becomes the field where the writer can develop the different impulses at work in his fiction.

My reading of the presence of America in *Money* is not an exclusive analysis of an isolated element within Martin Amis's narrative. In choosing it as the centre of this essay, I have simultaneously tried to develop a suitable method to approach Amis's fiction and outline a reading map to his texts. The analysis of America in *Money* has shown that the stylistic features of Martin Amis's writing are not an external ornament, artificially added in order to distract the reader from the vacuousness of his works. On the contrary, the recurring elements displayed in his stories and the way in which those elements are arranged and assembled make up the core of his narrative. In Amis's novels, plot frequently appears as a distraction of which the reader must get rid in order to follow the author through a narrative suffused with his presence. The reading act from an Amisian perspective consists mainly of the reader's gathering and reassembling of these recurring elements purposefully scattered in his novels. Aesthetic and moral delight are the spontaneous outcomes of such intellectual exchange.

In the light of this essay, it is possible to highlight several similarities and differences between the American motif and other metaphors in Amis's repertoire. America has in common with all the other permanent presences in Amis's stories its being a symbolical projection of the authorial concerns at play, namely, the reconciliation of form and meaning through the formal organisation of the work by means of the repetition of significant metaphorical units. However, a detailed reading of America in *Money* suggests some peculiar features which can only be ascribed to this motif. Earlier in this essay, I observed how John Self, in common with all of Amis's protagonists, tries to survive three different forces acting on him: his inner contradictions, his socio-historical context, and the murderous impulses of the narrative act itself. This triple struggle is represented in Amis's narrative through different recurring metaphors. To the first group, we could attribute the exhausting recurrence in all his fiction of mirrors, windows, bodily detail, bathrooms and hospitals. To the historical forces acting on his characters, we could ascribe the centrality in his work of some thematic lines such as pornography, the media, and money. The ambiguous drives and feelings involved in the relationship between author and creation are to be seen at the root of the multiplicity of surrogate narrators, doublings, anonymous notes and phone calls recurring in all his books. From the present analysis of *Money* we can conclude that what makes America a special and relevant case is that it embodies in a single motif all the above mentioned aspects. America is an evident formal feature, not only by means of repetition, but through the same structure of the novel. But, what is more important, the presence of America in *Money* seems to respond concurrently to all the elements involved both in the protagonist's characterisation and in the thematic contents of the novel, being a compendium of all that is represented by the other motifs mentioned above. America, like a mirror, reflects the character's deep structures; like a window, it has the ability to look into his soul. Like bathrooms or hospitals, it is a place for self-appraisal, re-birth or death. Like the centre where money and pornography have their seat, it acts like a window onto the core of the twentieth century. Like a surrogate author, it looms over John Self's destiny, scrutinises him, dissects him, and, finally, defeats and annihilates him.

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