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## A Critique of Consumer Culture and Millennial Catastrophe In Martin Amis's *London Fields* (1989)

**Zhaneen Arif Rushdi**

Department of English Literature Master Program, College of Education, Tishik International University, Erbil, Iraq

[zhaneen.rushdi@com.gov.krd](mailto:zhaneen.rushdi@com.gov.krd)

**Juan Abdullah Ibrahim**

Department of English, College of Languages, Salahaddin University, Erbil, Iraq

[juan.ibrahim@su.edu.krd](mailto:juan.ibrahim@su.edu.krd)

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### ABSTRACT

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This scholarly and communal study investigates the design and notion of criticism in a modern culture inside the millennial catastrophe in the Social Satire *London Fields* (1989) of Martin Amis.

The fiction is preferred due that it combines the features of how consumer culture is designed and settled in the society. The Context of the fiction is grown into the reality of which the culture and tradition of consumer and consumerism is at its peak and it appeals to the connection which the fictional work engages with readers and what perspectives are shown. Amis's dark comedy, the *London Fields* is selected to be studied according to its academic articles and its public visibility in the society. *London Fields* abstracts the consumer culture and consumerism in an idea that it has shaped public

perception and how as a literary text fictionalises consumerism as its main topic and the paper evaluates the subject matter emphasis as well.

This paper critically discovers consumerism and consumer culture in the minds of the greedy individual and how it has become a main topic of Martin Amis's fiction. Hence, the researcher seeks to analyse how *London Fields* depict the effects of consumer culture and consumerism and why Martin Amis is right in concentrating on the experience of fictional figures who are involved by consumerism, consumer culture and a millennial catastrophe. It indicates that consumer culture is a fundamental field to study and publish articles as it has become an attractive and proper issue of today's world of globalisation, capitalism, and the socio-cultural pages of history of our current time.

Adding this, the main themes that Martin Amis utilises in his novel and the process he fictionalises his story are related depictions of characters dominated by consumerism that aid readers a social, cultural and academic function to a concise conclusion and analysis.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 An Introduction to *London Fields* (1989)**

London Fields narrates the story of Samson Young one of the main characters in the story which is a talentless American novelist who swaps apartments with a more acclaimed British fellow writer. The ungifted writer has had a writer's block for twenty years and suddenly, he discovers that London can provide him with a thriller lifestyle as he quotes "the makings of a really snappy little thriller" (Amis, 2003, p. 3)

Hence, Lorena Mihaes in a statement supported the fiction and stated that his fiction is mixed social narrative that travels through the realm of love, hate and hunting that she approves to be a clear mirroring reflection to our lifestyle. In her article the researcher quoted: "...a true story, a love story and a murder, all in one - a blockbuster, every writer's wildest dream" (Mihaes, 2014). And she also stated that the content or story to be more persistent that the author gets involved and tangled in his own story.

Brian Finney on this regard writes that the novel is set in the near future, depicting that London suffers from the double and combined effects of nuclear fallout and enormous ecological disaster that gives a dystopic picture of the reality. Quoting "general unease about the fate of the planet..." "...imminent prospect of planetary death" (Finney, 2008).

London Fields is told from the perspective of an American citizen called Sam, who is suffering of the effect of the post radiation phase and has been poisoned. Thus, Sam mistakenly believes that he is in control of his narrative.

The novel consists of several main characters. Among them, Nicola, who matches the persona of self-destruction with its suffering from love to an upper class person in which designs the errors of outdated tradition concept of love and feelings. Then, Keith, a rebirth of John Self, whose working class and desires is temporary, new and not trustful. However, the Novel failed to be nominated for Bookers Prize and has been alleged of sexism, but this did not stop the book to be sold very widely and get titled the Rock Star of English Literature besides the different criticism, lifestyle satire and design.



Mihaes, Lorena (2014) on this novel adds that Amis's novel did not make it to the Booker Prize shortlist. Despite David Lodge's desperate attempt to include it, but the novel met two strong refusals - those of the novelist Maggie Gee and of Helen McNeil, a lecturer at the University of East Anglia. These two critics disliked the way Amis treated his female characters and they managed to convince the other panel members that they were right. Yet, *London Fields* has turned out to be one of the most successful contemporary British novels (Mihaes, 2014).

The time when the book was written and published is important for its insight and scope of analysis - the 1980s was a decade of practically dominated by the policy of Margaret Thatcher, Britain's Conservative Prime Minister. The dominant discourse of that period had as central issue money, acquisition and consumption rather than production. The 80s are also known in history as the women's decade, due to the advent of women organizations and increasing role of feminism.

Mick Imlah in a review of Amis *London Fields* states that it is not a nuclear crisis, nor a virus-related one, although it has a cold-war element or feeling when reading the story (Imlah, 1989). Adding to this, the concerns about the threat of nuclear weapons - the novel depicts a dystopian world with persistence of certain social and political obsessions. However, Ana Raquel Fernandes claims that this novel is a postmodern apocalyptic story illustrating and critiquing the millenniums (Fernandes, 2009, p. 120).

McLean Bonnie (2015) however argues that Amis in his novels responds to the complex moral expectations of individuals living in neoliberal Britain by examining the relationship between the individual and society through the role that manners play in constructing one's identity and moral values. The novelist with his *London Fields* reveals that Consumer identities become apparent in the domestic, as the way individuals configure manners in order to appear a certain way.

Thus, as the title of the fiction tells itself - as paradoxical irony reveals the stories content with its themes. In reference to this Samson a character in the novel says 'This is London; and there are no fields - Only fields of operation and observation, only



fields of electromagnetic attraction and repulsion, only fields of hatred and coercion' (Amis, 2003, p. 134). The title therefore stands for a desire of escape from the time & the world in its reality. Hence, the iconic character Samsung looks at London Fields as a space of harmless escape and quotes "But I am trying to ignore the world situation - I am hoping it will go away - Not the world, the situation... I want time to get on with this little piece of harmless escapism - I want time to go to London Fields" (Amis, 2003, p. 64).

In reference to the real world, one can see that the Fields of the title of the novel is a park in Hackney - East London, but the novel is set in West London, like most of Amis's literary works, referring to Hyde Park in central London. Sam reminisces that he played in London Fields as a boy and wants to return there before his death. Though whether London Fields he refers to is the real East London Park, or whether it has another meaning is not visible. Thus, it is clear that the title suggests a paradox: a rural or pastoral place within a modern urban setting. Sam's narrative refers again to this inherent paradox, as he remarks that in London there are no fields as mentioned in the context of his stories, only fields of attraction and repulsion, only fields by force.

### 1.2. *London Fields* as a Millennial Fiction and Cultural Politics

Nick Bentley a critic and writer considers the story of *London Fields* as a kind of futuristic Millennial Fiction - According to Bentley Amis is a creative writer with productive output in his works and states that Martin Amis produces a new novel a certain fizz of excitement circulates the literary establishment (Bentley, 2015).

The reviewer's line up to either crush or honor his works, the artistic critics felt obliged to give opinions on the developmental politics of his latest publication. This position has been set up over forty years and he is one of the most remarkable, well established and prominent of new storytellers. Martin Amis fiction shaped a generation of writers, and many other novelists. Many among young male writers have often identified themselves drawn against the Amis standard. Amis himself has been changed by prevalent tendencies and thematic interests in contemporary



literature, and his fictions join with social, cultural and political developments with a satiric taste that is generally as intense as it is depressing. We have identified him with other classical forms through his career, in specific, postmodernism, state of the nation satire, pornography, parody, the mixing of high literary style with popular artistic forms, and even sentimentalism. In many ways his fiction coincides with the trajectory of British fiction over the last forty years generally, and a close look at his novels produces a criterion with which to measure several key developmental arguments and concerns over the time cycle.

The author of *London Fields* is firmly dubious and one of the traditions he has passed on to contemporary fiction is the investigation of deep moral and virtuous cases uttered in a style of dark satiric humor that comes out at first to be quite improper. Amis goes on to lead to and often upset in his fiction and cultural criticism.

Many accounts of this debates deal with the quality of the style and substance and the control of words. However, the normal Amis idea or word allows readers and observation into how poor cultural matters move into the subject of treatment. Even though it subsists of a type of satire which many will regard as inappropriate or even in a state of juxtaposition. Amis in making his story he is not worried of inventing characters getting sympathy among readers and audience - the original quality of him is that he prefers to prove the deeper facets of the individual nature through figures that confront us directly.

(Diedrick, 2004, p. 114) However, considers the novel as “a mutant form as well-an unstable mixture of millennial murder mystery, urban satire, apocalyptic jeremiad, and domestic farce”.

Thus, the novel can be regarded as a mix of categories and highlights the personal drama living amongst each character – As, Nicola, Talent, Clinch and Young. The story starts with a mystery of murder, a drama of fear even though it is a little odd since the victim Nicola Six is anxiously seeking for her own murder.

Nicola has a persona in which she is in control of the entire story and knows what will happen to her and she writes these details in her diary and later puts the diary at the disposal of Samsung Young, the American writer, who suffers from a terminal illness and running out of time and it is his last opportunity to write a masterpiece:

“This is a true story, but I can't believe it is really happening

It's a murder story, too... I can't believe my luck

And a love story (I think), of all strange things, so late in the century, so late in the goddamned day

This is the story of a murder. It has not happened yet. But it will (It had better) I know the murderer. I know the murderess and I could not stop them...” (Amis, 2003, p.1).

Henceforward, the story is again dealing with to a catastrophe, to the risk of a nuclear catastrophe. This was a major concern to the British society in the 1980s and affected Martin Amis's writing. The Nuclear Holocaust is expelled into another catastrophe scenario where London belongs to a metropolitan nightmare inhabited by ominous weather. Hence, the writer's creatures are ill-conceived characters primed between blind self-destruction and painful deliverance, products of an unhealthy world burgling to its end. Therefore, Martin Amis used the more necessary and convenient to apply and exploit the biological relationship between character and society since the system turned into a sick organism.

Amis chooses for the representation of gross and pathetic confusion of cultural absence in a time of “mass disorientation and anxiety” (Amis, 2003, p. 25). Meaning has deceased from an insane planet, leaving but a feeling of delinquency and irrationality. Truth, in any case, as quoted “not matter anymore” (Amis, 2003, p. 395) - “Rocks and shell catch and grate in neither sea nor shore, and nothing is clean or



means anything, and nothing works” (Amis, 2003, p. 225). Meaning, like man according to John Self is receding and Keith Talent himself confesses that “the world, and history, could not be reordered in a way that would make sense to him” (Amis, 2003, p. 9). Thus, for Martin Amis making sense of the prevailing ontological disorder becomes more crucial in his works.

In nutshell the fear of the Nuclear War in London Fields is threatening against a background of general disorder created by tension which has seized the world on the eve of the twenty-first century. The events happen in a sort of interregnum: 1999 as mentioned in the story as “The year of behaving strangely” (Amis, 2003, p. 14). Amis depicted a world full of predicament of political and atmospheric factors.

Of towards the tension of politics rumors are heard and the outrageous seem to struggle and according to which the world is on the brink of total dystopia as mentioned as “cathartic war” (Amis, 2003, p. 417) and “bonfire night” (Amis, 2003, p. 62).

Hence, the new age of millennium is drawing us close to a nature that also seems to be out of place, it is malfunctioning hysterically and stated as “the weather is super atmospherically and therefore, in a sense, super meteorological” (Amis, 2003, p. 14).

London Fields the icon of inorganic agony prevails.

“...dead clouds limply squashing against the windows of glass and steel skyscrapers, like... “god's fouled window rags” (Amis, 2003, p. 345), - “X-rated weather reports which have been put on late at night, after the children have supposedly gone to bed” (Amis, 2003, p. 369), are as many symptoms of the universal organic disorder conceals. Hence it gets more intense in description of the greed of the dystopian system as mentioned; “After its latest storm, after its latest fit or tantrum, the sky is blameless and aloof, all sweetness and light, making the macadam dully shine” (Amis, 2003, p. 81), - “Every day the sun is getting lower in the sky” (Amis, 2003, p. 325) this supports the fact that the real phenomenon resulting from the influence of the three





effects of perihelion , perigee and syzygy . And this astrological phenomenon is thought to be leading to political crisis. Thus Amis stretches the power of imagination and representation to utmost limit. His characters are confronted with the brute power and the pathology of the nuclear age of which London Fields makes a farcical and millenarian satire.

#### 4.3 Cultural Critique, Mass Culture and Commodification in *London Fields*

The aimed yet achieved death is a postmodernist caricature of the deconstructionist position on vocabulary and meaning (Holmes, 1996). Thus, *London Fields* is a metafiction which flamboyantly parodies its own artificiality. Although the stories narrator shows the function of invention and holds a valid situation for the issues which the critic claims he reports directly from time or copies from Nicola's diaries, his many hopes about the form of writing the work only have the effect finally of exposing its constructed structure. So it moves the matter and evidence that the other characters sort or another, put our attention on the model, on the handling of writing rather than the finished product. Hence, Samsung's persistent allusions to the literary works of others and connections of his own work in progress with them also assist to the lead edge of cloak, as do the incredible, extremely stylized names of the characters: we have, to provide few examples, Guy Clinch, Chick Purchase, Annalise Furnish, Trish Shirt, and Dink Heckler. The characters act like the one-dimensional caricature figures as their names suggests.

The story of Keith Talent's identity as a womanish inconsequential villain and darts enthusiasts is utterly the assemble of the narratives dispersed by television, cinema, and the channel press. The very social milieu which he inhabits, the violent, misogynistic one of dingy pubs and after-hours drinking clubs, where stolen property is fenced and sexual conquests are bragged about, operates according to the not-always-compatible codes which structure advertising, action movies, television dramas, and pornography, tabloid gossip about celebrities and sports writing and



broadcasting. When the subject of conversation turns to soccer or darts, the demotic Cockney and West Indian dialects of the speakers suddenly give way to the more literate, but heavily clichéd, argot of spots reporting.

Holmes later explains how Keith conceives himself and the world around him: “At first I thought he just memorized sections of the tabloid sports pages (Holmes, 1996). In support to this “...Absolutely wrong... When Keith goes to a football match, that misery of stringer’s clichés is what he actually sees” (Amis, 2003, pp. 97,98). Thus Keith does not meet the inconsistencies evident in his introduction of himself and neither knows the false nature of his own personality. He mistakes characteristics and practice for nature and therefore neglects to recognize the false figure of the models which form his credibility. He takes the fictions published by the majority media as absolute truths. However, Keith assumes that television discloses a real, attainable world that transcends poverty and shabbiness of his own and states; “Television was great shopfront, highly electrified, up against which Keith crushed his nose” (Amis, 2003, p. 8).

Keith one of the main characters of the story represents the type of individual in which a type of addiction is represented to publish the defect of the society, the character is addicted to pornography and he mistakes his imagination of sex for reality and does not recognize the moral conflicts of what he values. He represents the type of what see pornography as aesthetic, art for art’s sake, due that time pornography was spread through paintings and art- a sentiment to attach to substance objects just in the way advertisers intend. He is addicted to material objects and status associated with them rather than attached to people. The character is incompetent of adoring the family like his wife, Kath, or he does not recognize how cruelly he treats her. In the story it is stated as: “...triggers his ire : His projective instincts were stirred - Loyalty: it was a question of loyalty - Nobody talked that way about Keith’s dog-or about his cigarettes and had intentional standing” (Amis, 2003, p. 258).

In a sphere of real world out of the novel, Keith is both inadequate of faithfulness and or sincerity which represents many individuals nowadays. Keith becomes a moral of

male boldness because he is able to disregard his paradoxes and to regard himself as a noble and honorable man.

## **Conclusion**

This study is about the concept of consumerism in Martin Amis's novel *London Fields*. They are about transgressions and excess of consumerist culture of late Western Capitalist society. Martin Amis criticizes such society. Amis tries to justify the miseries felt by his hero characters in the novel.

Amis clarifies that consumerism becomes an ideology that affects all aspects of life. Everybody has increasing appetite for consumption. Amis is often described as the most influential English novelist; his literary writings and critical voice is against the absurdity of postmodernism due to the Western capitalist society.

Amis's style is innovative and authentic. This is clear from his unconventional narrative style. His use of sarcastic situation is a means for criticizing the society. Thus humor is necessary to make fun of the situation of the Modern man. For example the doctor's case when they open the stomachs of their patients to plant tumors rather than healing them. Sarcasm and black humor made Amis's works innovative. Amis's writing combines both ambition and anxiety, this is more apparent when he fictionalizes human suffering.

Amis has been a continuous contributor to and his writing has featured in the most groundbreaking publications such as *The New Yorker*, *Square*, and *The Observer*. In his capacity he writes articles about politics, literature and cultural issues and topics in a unique and distinctive style. In most of his writing Amis tends to highlight the problems that afflict contemporary western society, particularly what is wrong with addiction to consumerism as certain way of life. It is obvious that the thematic topic of consumerism and commodification forms a central part of his writing. Amis seems to have been influenced by modern consumer culture theory

and all those thinkers who have formulated their own conceptualization of this topic. In most his novels the major characters' lives are uncertain and precarious.

Amis's characters often find themselves in a world that is lacking a true human relationship and that everything is defined by its nature of competition, money and success. This is symptomatic of consumer culture that is a result of a neoliberal economy. Under such consumerist and neoliberal society human relations are characteristic of competition and citizens are redefined as consumers and they reinvigorate the market community. In such a world the characters exercise their freedom and democratic choices by buying and selling commodities and looking to get rich quick and not by engaging in political activities.

Twentieth century culture depended on individual and social ideas in determining the nature of consumption for an individual and or a whole family. This has become a prevailing concept and idea in contemporary society and as a result one of the main thematic topics of the novels of Martin Amis.

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پوخته:

ئەم توێژینه‌وه‌یه باس لە چەمکی کەلتوری بەرخۆریزم دەکات لە رۆمانی کێلگەکانی لەندەن ی رۆماننوسی بەریتانی مارتین ئەمیس. ئەم رۆمانە باس لە و کێشه و ئالنگاریانە دەکات کە توشی کۆمەلگادەبن لەمیانە ی مومارەسەکردنی رەفتاری بەرخۆریانە. نوسەر رۆماننوسی داری بەریتانیا و رۆمانەکانی بۆ زۆر لە زمانەکانی جیهان وەرگیراون. رمانە کە باس لە زیادبوونی دیاردە ی کالاً بەکارهێنان و زیادەڕووی کردن لە کەلتوری بەرخۆریزم دەکات. هەرۆهە کارێگەر بە نینگە تیفەکانی ئەم کەلتور و رەفتاری بەرخۆری بە چ لەسەر ئاستی کۆمەلگا و چ لەسەر ئاستی تاکەکان. ئەم توێژینه‌وه‌یه هەولێکە بۆ باسکردنی رێچکە ی نوسەر کە تاییه‌ته بە رەخنەگرتن لەم شێوازی ژیان و لەم شێوازه کەلتورە کە بۆ ماوه‌ی سێ دەیه‌یه لەسایه‌ی سیستەمی سەرمايه‌داریدا بووه بە باو. ئەم توێژینه‌وه‌یه دەوه‌ ده‌خاته‌ ڕوو کە رەخنەگرتن لە کەلتوری بەرخۆریزم بووه بە دیاردەیه‌کی ئاشنا و بەشێک لە رۆماننوسەکان ئەم چەمگەیان کردوه بە کرۆکی کاره‌ئەدەبیه‌کانیان. بەرخۆریزم دیاردەیه‌کی جیهانی و لەسایه‌ی سیستەمی سەرمايه‌داریدا بووه بە باو هەرۆه‌ها ئەم دیاردەیه‌ خێراتر بووه و گەشە‌ی سەندوه‌ بەهۆی دیاردە‌ی بەجیهانیبوون و ئابوری سەرمايه‌داری و مێژووی کەلتوری و کۆمەلایه‌تی لەم سەردەمه‌ی ئیستاماندا. ئەم توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ش هەولێکە بۆنیشان‌دان و خستنه‌ ڕووی ئەم دیاردە‌یه‌ و کارێگەرکانی لەسەر کاره‌کته‌ خه‌یالیه‌کانی ناو رۆمانی "کێلگەکانی لەندەن" ی مارتین ئامیس و ئاکام و مه‌غزاکانی ئەم دیاردە‌یه‌ لەسەر ژبانی کۆمەلایه‌تی و فیکری و کەلتوری بۆ خوێنه‌رانی ئەم سەردەمه‌ی ئیستامان

## نقد ثقافة المستهلك فى الرواية حقول لندن لمارتن أميس (1989).

الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث مفهوم نقد ثقافة المستهلك فى رواية حقول لندن لمارتن أميس (1989). تركز هذه الرواية على كيفية مناقشة ثقافة المستهلك. إن تعامل النص مع ثقافة المستهلك والنزعة الاستهلاكية يدعم منهجه. تعمل الرواية كعمل خيالي مع القراء للتفكير فى عواقب الاستهلاك. يتم اختيار هذه الرواية بناءً على شعبيتها ورؤية الجمهور. تصور هذه الرواية كيف شكلت ثقافة المستهلك والاستهلاكية الإدراك العام فى السنوات الأخيرة وكيف تؤثر على الأفراد والمجتمع. تستكشف هذه الدراسة بشكل نقدي كيف أصبحت الاستهلاك وثقافة المستهلك موضوعًا رئيسيًا فى رواية مارتن أميس. تسعى الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية تصوير الرواية لآثار ثقافة المستهلك والنزعة الاستهلاكية ولماذا ينخرط الروائي فى تجربة الشخصيات الخيالية التي تأثرت بالنزعة الاستهلاكية. تجادل هذه الورقة بأن ثقافة المستهلك أمر حيوي للدراسة والفهم لأنها أصبحت قضية مثيرة للاهتمام وذات صلة بعالم العولمة والرأسمالية والتاريخ الاجتماعي والثقافي لعصرنا. مثل هذه التمثيلات النقدية للشخصيات التي تستهلكها الاستهلاك تخدم قرائنا وظيفة اجتماعية وثقافية وفكرية للقراء المعاصرين