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## *Pre-millennial Premonitions: Postmodernity and Narrative Techniques in Selected Contemporary British Fiction*

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***To Rosina***

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

> *Postmodernism is arguably the most depressing philosophy ever to spring from the Western mind. […] But what this philosophy basically says is that we've reached an end point in humanity. That the modernist tradition of progress and ceaseless extension of the frontiers of innovation are now dead. Originality is dead. The avant-garde artistic tradition is dead. All religions and utopian visions are dead and resistance to the status quo is impossible because revolution too is now dead. Like it or not, we humans are stuck in a permanent crisis of meaning, a dark room from which we can never escape.*[1]

Every millennium has been approached by humankind with feelings of extreme unease due to the unanswerable question of what the future has in store for us. In other words, facing the turn of the century has always been accompanied by apocalyptic visions about the future; i.e. a pessimistic outlook expressed through a variety of doomsday scenarios suggesting that humanity is on the road to the end of the world. That is to say, predictions about global catastrophes or the upcoming Armageddon, as for instance Nostradamus's famous prophecies in the 16th century suggesting mankind's total annihilation, are nothing new. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the zeitgeist towards the end of the 20th century was characterised by a similar distrustful mood. Caused by the upcoming turn of the millennium people were haunted by the apocalyptic fear that the world would come to a tumultuous end soon. In general, in the wake of World War II a rather pessimistic mood with regard to the future had already emerged during the middle of the 20th century. Historical events such as the horrors of the Holocaust revealed the dark side in human beings as well as mankind's vulnerability. Unsurprisingly, these horrors of the past did not leave critical thinkers of the time untouched. "There [was] a general feeling among many thinkers that at some point after the Second World War a new kind of society [had begun] to emerge."[2] Thus, more and more philosophers began to look extremely sceptically at modern society, which instead of having become more human had actually turned out to be barbaric and self-destructive. As a consequence, many started to turn their backs on the ideas associated with modernity and declared the project of Enlightenment as failed. That is to say, while modernity had originally been characterised by an optimistic mood and the belief in humankind’s progress towards absolute freedom and happiness, the time after 1945 was in contrast characterised by extremely apocalyptic feelings. This period can thus be said to mark the beginning of a new era, generally referred to as postmodernity. The emergence of postmodern critical theory had a considerable influence on various aesthetic movements, amongst others literature. Much of the fiction published after Word War II shows that the authors of the time were and still are well aware of the postmodern discourse going on in contemporary society as many of the postmodern issues of the critical debate are clearly implemented in their novels. It is therefore indispensable to read postmodern fiction in the light of the critical theories of the current period.

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[1] Lasn, 28.

[2] Sarup, 143.

The aim of this thesis is to provide an analysis of the phenomenon of postmodernity and its influence on contemporary literature. That is to say, this thesis intends to explore the postmodern condition through a reading of three selected contemporary British novels, all of which have been published towards the end of the 20th century. Sensing that a new century is upon us the three books express a fearful pessimistic outlook. The selected novels are not meant to be exhaustive. However, they provide a good model representing other novels published around the same point in time addressing similar themes to the ones that will be analysed. The focus will be on the author’s awareness of critical theory and it will be argued that the ongoing critical debate has certainly been an important point of departure for the production of their literary works and the analysis and critical reflection of contemporary culture and society as depicted in their novels. That is to say, this thesis will start by introducing the reader to a theoretical overview of key issues of postmodern critical theory and typical postmodern narrative techniques in order to later provide an in-depth analysis of contemporary British literature, i.e. it attempts to acquaint the reader with the major critical concepts, themes and stylistic devices of postmodernism as a means of approaching postmodern British literature published just before the year 2000.

What is postmodernity and what are the major differences between modernism and postmodernism? In how far does postmodern fiction engage with contemporary critical theory and reflect upon contemporary society and culture? How do the novels represent recent history and deal with historical trauma? Do contemporary novels share philosopher’s scepticism with regard to the project of Enlightenment? In how far is their pessimistic outlook towards the future justified? Is there a relationship between history and pessimism in the selected novels? How do the novels reflect upon the nature of truth and reality and does spirituality play a role? Has mankind’s belief in metaphysical powers such as God ceased due to the celebration of modern rationality, scientific findings and the development of new technology? What influence does postmodern capitalism and consumerism have on human relationships and humanity in general? How do the novels of the period adopt and adapt the techniques of traditional storytelling and what are typical postmodern narrative techniques in contemporary British literature? These are some of the questions that will be dealt with in the course of this thesis.

# 2. POSTMODERNITY

## 2.1. What exactly is Postmodernity?

> *It is a cliché by now to say that we live in a postmodern world, and indeed "postmodern" has become one of the most used, and abused, words in the language. Who has not heard the phrase "that's postmodern" applied to some occurrence in everyday life? And doubtless replied with a knowing look, smile or laugh. Yet it is striking that few people can say with any sense of assurance what the term "postmodern" actually means or involves.*[3]

To begin with, as the quote already suggests there is little agreement on the subject of what postmodernity really is. In general, the complex and wide-ranging term "postmodern" has been applied to a broad variety of recent or rather contemporary phenomena in Western society. Literally speaking, in contrast to modernity, taking its origin from the Latin word *modo* meaning *just now*, postmodernity implies *after just now* and thus denotes a sense of ending of the modern epoch and hence the period after the modernist movement.[4] Thus, in its simplest terms postmodernity is the period following modernity and refers to the current historical age we are living in at the moment. That postmodernity is still happening is perhaps one reason why it is so difficult to define because whatever it is, it is going on now and human beings can usually only grasp the present in retrospect: "When something else develops from it or instead of it, it will, perhaps, be easier to identify, describe and classify."[5] The following definition of postmodernity briefly outlines the major issues that will be dealt with in more detail in the course of this thesis and shall thus serve the reader as an initial point of reference.

> [Postmodernity is a] periodizing term suggesting that a set of social, economic and philosophical paradigms have been established from roughly the end of the Second World War that distinguish (usually Western) civilization from modernity. These include theories associated with a post-industrial society and the move to an economics based on consumption rather than production. One of the philosophical tenets of postmodernism is that all claims to truth should be treated with scepticism. This is replaced, philosophically, by a model where a

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[3] Sim, vii.
[4] Cf. Taylor, 304.
[5] Cuddon, 690.

> range of discourses (political, social and ideological) communicate with each other, but with none of them claiming absolute authority over the others.[6]

Postmodernity is “inextricably related” to the expression postmodernism.[7] Scholars sometimes even use these terms in interchangeable ways. Both have been applied to various disciplines and allude to various aspects of contemporary culture, economics and society that are the result of the unique characteristics of the late 20th and early 21st century life. However, while the first one usually makes reference to the socio-historical facet of the present period, the latter in contrast specifies the aesthetic side of the postmodern period, i.e. the contemporary broad artistic expression of various sorts including philosophy, “architecture, literature, photography, film, painting, video, dance, music,” among other areas.[8] That is to say, while postmodernity refers to what is going on now, postmodernism usually encompasses all kinds of postmodern works that attempt to make sense of what is going on now and which thus aim to critically reflect on the postmodern condition. Accordingly, it can be argued that as a state of being, postmodernity, describing the condition of society which is said to exist after modernity, provides the basis for the aesthetic aspects of postmodernism. However, as already indicated, sometimes it is difficult to make a precise distinction between the two concepts since no clear-cut definitions are available. Again, the subsequent definition of postmodernism forms a constructive point of departure.

> [Postmodernism is a] complex term, that most often relates to the artistic practices that have become increasingly dominant in art and culture from the 1960s onwards in Western societies. As can be seen by the term itself, it offers a critical dialogue with modernism, a form of art and culture prominent in the 1920s and 1930s. Postmodernism tends to take an ironic or cynical approach to all art, even that which is done in its name. It is often the art form most associated with consumer capitalism, although the approach varies amongst artists and writers. Some of them celebrate the release from grand narratives such as religion and patriarchy. Others see consumer society as a system that devalues art and social relationships and use postmodern literary techniques to produce a critique of postmodernity.[9]

The fact that postmodernity and postmodernism are difficult to define and distinguish from each other and that they have been applied to various areas and thus mean something slightly different to different disciplines is anticipating a major characteristic of postmodern critical thinking: the belief that there are no universal truths. Thus, any attempt to provide a precise or exhaustive definition of postmodernity or postmodernism would be against the nature of postmodern thought itself. Postmodernism “is not merely contested, it is also internally conflicted and contradictory. […] [It] is not something we can settle once and for all and then use with a clear conscience.”[10] The same holds true for any attempt to come up with an exact temporal location with regard to the beginning and ending of the postmodern movement. “To talk of post-modernism [as that which is following modernism] is to imply that modernism is over and done with. This is not so. There never is a neat demarcation line.”[11] In some cases it is simply impossible to say what counts already as postmodern and what is still modern. In that sense, the postmodern age can be understood as both a continuation as well as a sceptical reaction against the modern era.

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[6] Bentley 2008, 213.
[7] Cf. Hutcheon 1989, 26.
[8] Hutcheon 1989, 1.
[9] Bentley 2008, 213.

Accordingly, the most fruitful way to provide a characteristic of the postmodern condition in order to later analyse the way contemporary society and postmodern concepts and theories are reflected in contemporary fiction is probably by relating it and contrasting it to the period from which it seems to emerge. Therefore, the next section will start with a brief outline on the process of Enlightenment, which is usually defined as the high point of modernity, before focusing on important postmodern concepts and theories. In this context it is also important to add that this thesis aims to focus on both the representation of what is happening now as well as the critical reflection of what is going on now as depicted in contemporary British novels. Thus, overlapping terminology will be used; i.e. postmodernity and postmodernism will be used interchangeably given the fact that their precise definitions are contested and that the evolution of their definitions is still ongoing rather than finished.

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[10] Jameson, xxii.

[11] Cuddon, 690.

## 2.2. From Modernity to Postmodernity - Selected Postmodern Concepts and Theories

As was just mentioned, the postmodern era covers a wide range of different aspects and responses to modernism and often the exact meaning of "postmodern" is highly debated even among postmodernists themselves. Any attempt to provide a total summary or list of postmodern theories and concepts would therefore not only go beyond the scope of this thesis but is simply impossible also due to the fact that we are still living in the postmodern period and thus have no temporal distance to it; i.e. the postmodern debate is still going on. Apart from that, as was already mentioned above, any attempt to come up with "absolute" definitions would be against the nature of contemporary thinking itself. Nevertheless, "[f]or the study of contemporary British fiction it is a great advantage to know a little of [contemporary] critical theor[ies]."[12] Hence, this part of the thesis will put emphasis on those postmodern assumptions which are reflected in the selected contemporary British novels and will therefore be crucial for their analysis in section three. However, the following points are not intended to be understood as exclusive characteristics of the postmodern period but rather as tendencies.

### 2.2.1. Modernity and the Process of Enlightenment

Since the origins of postmodern belief can be traced back to the modern period, i.e. the postmodern condition can be regarded as "being after but not free of" modernity, it is essential to briefly outline the most notable influences, that is, the most relevant characteristics of the preceding modern period, before paying attention to the most crucial features of the postmodern era itself and what is therefore implied by the "post".

Similarly to postmodernity, modernity is an imprecise and contested term, which is usually associated with the historical period of the nineteenth and twentieth century while modernism rather stands for the aesthetic movement responding to it.[13] Generally speaking, the "modern" era is regarded as a very progressive one characterised by the process of Enlightenment, which is said to begin roughly in the first half of the eighteenth century, and the rise of capitalism as a consequence of the Industrial

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[12] Bentley 2008, 25.
[13] Cf. Childs 2000, 15.

Revolution.[14] Both developments are characterised by the optimistic idea of humanity's progress through the use of rationality. With the help of modern scientific and technological advances human beings succeeded in understanding and controlling nature, which had an enormous positive impact on people's lives.[15]

Generally speaking, the period before Enlightenment was characterised by *myth*, which is manifested when human beings make use of demons or godly spirits in order to explain and make nature's forces comprehensible, which are beyond their control. However, in this way people were acting out nothing more than an entirely illusionary control of natural forces.[16] Myths are consequently "synonymous with deception, false clarity, fixation, domination, exploitation" and therefore must be countered by Enlightenment.[17] To put it another way, believing in myths such as those proposed by religion equals believing in dogmas that authorities have established and is contrary to making use of one's reason, which is, however, the central characteristic of enlightened and consequently modern thought.

> Enlightenment thinking replaces mysticism with reason or the rational, and a passive acceptance of the way the world is socially structured is replaced with critical analysis and reappraisal. Beginning in the eighteenth century, with the rise of scientific approaches to issues that had previously belonged to religion, the Enlightenment became a movement that sought to liberate humanity from class, religious and other forms of oppression.[18]

That is to say, Enlightenment, which equals the attempt of humankind to overcome its fear of the threat posed by nature and which is closely linked to scientific findings by historical figures such as, for instance, Galileo, Newton, Darwin and Einstein, challenged the old beliefs in myths and eradicated the principle of God's creation of the world. Enlightenment, as defined by Immanuel Kant, is therefore humankind's emancipation from superstition. The fundamental premises of Enlightenment are that it places human reason and rationality at the centre of everything aiming at the creation of order out of chaos by the mastery of nature and a disillusionment of the world.[19]

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[14] Cf. Klages.
[15] Cf. Childs 2000, 21.
[16] Cf. Adorno and Horkheimer, 27-8.
[17] Boer, 27.
[18] Lane, 37.
[19] Cf. Gregson, 1.

"The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy." [20] Genuine knowledge, acquired through science, removes the fear of the overwhelming power of nature by making the uncontrollable controllable.

> The gods cannot take fear away from man. […] Man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown. That determines the course of demythologization, of Enlightenment, which compounds the animate with the inanimate just as myth compounds the inanimate with the animate. Enlightenment is mythic fear turned radical.[21]

Accordingly, Enlightenment aims to destroy all mythical qualities and provide rational explanations about the world in order to achieve domination of nature. Through the exercise of reason, which frees humanity from doctrines, Enlightenment thus becomes a liberating process.

> Freeing reason from the societal bonds which had constrained it was identified as the means for achieving human sovereignty over a world which was typically conceived of as the manifestation of some higher, divine authority. Enlightenment embodies the promise of human beings finally taking individual and collective control over the destiny of the species.[22]

This means that modern thought is characterised by a religious scepticism and assumes that the more eternal universal truths about the world are produced by human beings through science the more order is established and the better society will function. Alongside, reason becomes "the ultimate judge of what is true, and therefore of what is right, and what is good."[23] To sum up, through the help of scientific and technological advances Enlightenment denied established traditions by overturning myths, brought freedom and the potential of humanity and civilisation and therefore absolute happiness. That perspective, however, accounts only for one side of the coin. This is why towards the end of the 19th century more and more scholars and important precursors of postmodern thought began to question the interpretation of the process of Enlightenment as a wholly optimistic one.[24]

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[20] Adorno and Horkheimer, 3.

[21] Adorno and Horkheimer, 16.

[22] Fagan, 3.

[23] Klages.

[24] Cf. Lash and Lury, 1-2.

### 2.2.2. The Failure of Enlightenment - The Evil Human Nature and Postmodern Pessimism

> *The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do not repeat themselves. It isn't absurd, e.g., to believe that the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end for humanity; that the idea of great progress is a delusion, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known; that there is good or desirable about scientific knowledge and that mankind, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means obvious that this is not how things are.*[25]

As was already indicated, in the course of time more and more scepticism with regard to an entirely positive attitude towards the process of Enlightenment emerged, and soon it became clear that Enlightenment actually holds the potential of causing devastating consequences. "[The] crucial question in these debates is: has the Enlightenment project failed? Should we […] declare the entire project of modernity a lost cause?"[26]

With his highly influential proposals on the death of God the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the first intellectuals who addressed the issue that modernity's destruction of religious and other certainties can be felt as a disorientating threat instead of a wholly liberating one. In *The Gay Science* (1882) Nietzsche declares that due to modern findings God and religion in general have become implausible and thus cannot be taken seriously any longer.[27] In other words, he points out that through the achievements of modern science Christian doctrines have lost their credibility. That is to say, humanity has killed God by non-believing in a cosmic order any longer and therefore abandoned its old moral values that had formed the basis of human life for centuries. The devastating consequence of the loss of God, according to Nietzsche, is the emergence of a nihilistic period characterised by a feeling of indifference and meaninglessness; a void in the form of a disbelief in the truth of higher values and an overall rejection of any values.[28] In general, nihilism "denotes the refusal of established authorities and institutions. In philosophy, [it accounts to] an extreme form of scepticism that rejects all existing values and beliefs, more colloquially, a revolutionary doctrine of destruction for its own sake."[29] As a matter of fact, God's absence from the universe leaves chaos on earth because there are no structures and authorities human beings can rely on: “With the recognition that the world aims at nothing and achieves nothing we also lose the hope that there is some underlying order to the world, and with the loss of that hope nihilism takes over.”[30] In this sense, a “nihilist denies God, the good and even truth” and takes a rather negative outlook towards the future.[31] Hence, the consequence of the death of God is the death of Christian morality and morality on the whole. Everything humanity had relied on before disappeared and only nothingness, nihilism, remained. That is to say, as Nietzsche pointed out, Enlightenment, which is leaving humanity without absolute foundations and a feeling of rootlessness, does not offer any guidance or rules as to what is morally good or bad and thus can potentially lead towards nihilism.

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[25] Wittgenstein, 56.
[26] Sarup, 143.
[27] Cf. Nietzsche, *The Parable of the Madman*.
[28] Cf. Schrift, 22.
[29] Childs 2000, 210.

However, Nietzsche still saw the possibility to overcome nihilism by the creation of a new moral system. Hence, for him the death of God has not only devastating consequences but is actually associated with the idea of absolute freedom because by killing God human beings free themselves from the doctrines proposed by Christianity. This is related to Nietzsche’s principle of the Übermensch, who is able to overcome nihilism because the Übermensch “is conscious of itself as will to power.”[32] The Übermensch, who is more than human, is characterised by the fact that it does not worship anybody and is thus completely free; it has transcended itself by overcoming the inherited morality and is conceiving the world beyond good and evil. That is to say, for Nietzsche there is still a chance to overcome nihilism.

In the presence of the aftermath of the First and Second World War and facing new technological inventions such as nuclear weapons, which have the potential to erase the entire human race all at once and forever, the scepticism against Enlightenment thought and pessimistic attitudes towards the future which had been initiated by thinkers such as Nietzsche were taken up by many postmodern thinkers. Their critical reflection on the project of Enlightenment marks the break away from modernism.

> In the second half of the twentieth century, some scientific insights and technological innovations have particularly contributed to shaping the sense of a

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[30] Welshon, 72.
[31] Deleuze, 147-8.
[32] Schrift, 28.

> new historical age. Nuclear technology (both bombs and power plants), journeys to the Moon and Mars, television, global communication networks, the discovery of DNA, *in vitro* fertilization, the cloning of animals, the human genome project, digital technology from the personal computer to the WorldWideWeb, and environmental disasters such as those at […] Chernobyl have all contributed to defining the postmodern period. The intensive push of techno-scientific innovation in the decades following World War II opened up new fields whose impacts have […] given rise to utopian hopes as well as to apocalyptic fears, and that have most strikingly created the sense of an epochal break.[33]

Two significant pioneers, who in the face of the Holocaust agonised about the failure of nineteenth-century rationalism, are the widely recognised philosophers Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. In their masterpiece *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), they argue that the process of Enlightenment has failed because instead of being liberating and “entering into a truly human condition [mankind] is sinking into a new kind of barbarism.”[34] That is to say, they question why our supposedly enlightened society degenerated into an uncivilised culture. They accuse Enlightenment by arguing that our modern anti-human society, which manifested itself in phenomena such as the Holocaust or modern capitalism, can be attributed to the failure of the process of Enlightenment. “In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.”[35] Consequently, the authors attempt to discover why Enlightenment, which originally was intended to advance mankind towards freedom and happiness, caused unintended effects; i.e. why Enlightenment has a self-destructive character. Their analysis leads to the paradoxical theses that “myth is already Enlightenment; and Enlightenment reverts into mythology.”[36]

Their first thesis that “myth is already Enlightenment” is based on the claim that they share the same functional purpose: “Both myth and Enlightenment are modes of representing reality, both attempt to explain […] reality.”[37] Like Enlightenment myth expresses already the effort to control hostile nature “thereby being a tool for overcoming our fear of the dangerous unknown."[38] For instance, by performing a rain dance the shaman's aim is like the purpose of science to control nature. Like Enlightenment myth includes elements of rational critique through which older mythologies have been displaced. Understood in this way, myths are already a product of Enlightenment. This argument suggests that myth is already a form of enlightened, instrumental reason, "a kind of rationality, a way of ordering, classifying and controlling the world."[39]

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[33] Heise, 136-7.
[34] Adorno and Horkheimer, xi.
[35] Adorno and Horkheimer, 3.
[36] Adorno and Horkheimer, xvi.
[37] Fagan, 3.

With their second thesis Adorno and Horkheimer postulate that "by the process of radical rationalization […] Enlightenment reverts to mythology."[40] They argue that this regression, which indicates that something fundamental has gone wrong with the development of Western civilisation, is the reason for barbarian phenomena such as Nazism. The cause for the reversion is manifested in Enlightenment's basic tendency for domination. "[The] source of today's disaster is a pattern of blind domination […]: the domination of nature by human beings, the domination" over oneself as well as the mastery over other human beings.[41] The motives of this triple domination can be found in the irrational fear of the unknown, as was discussed before. This suggests that "what men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order to wholly dominate over it and other men."[42] Nature turns into mere objectivity, it becomes an instrument of human will in the quest of knowledge. Since the "domination of nature by man has […] its corresponding social part, that is, the domination of man by man" Enlightenment, which originally had the aim of liberating men, produces the opposite effect.[43] Thus, Enlightenment collapses "into new forms of the very condition it had set to overcome."[44] Enlightenment reduces reason to a tool that aims to bring all material reality under one single representational order. "Reality is henceforth to be known in so far as it is quantifiable."[45] Reason that was once liberating becomes instrumentalised and irrational.

> The consequence is a kind of rationality which is a tool, blindly applied without any real capacity either to reflect on the ends to which it is applied, or to

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[38] Dumain, The Concept of Enlightenment.
[39] Jarvis, 23.
[40] Jarvis, 25.
[41] Zuidervaart, 2.
[42] Adorno and Horkheimer, 4.
[43] Tar, 90.
[44] Cascardi, 25.
[45] Fagan, 3.

> recognize the particular qualities of the objects to which it is applied. Adorno and Horkheimer call this unreflective rationality instrumental reason.[46]

That is to say, Enlightenment restricts legitimate knowledge to the category of objectively verifiable facts. It eliminated myth but also the "meaning" that transcends the bare facts.

> On the road to modern science, men renounce any claim to meaning. They substitute formula for concept, rule and probability for cause and motive. […] It provided the Enlightenment thinkers with the schema of the calculability of the world. […] To the Enlightenment, that which does not reduce to numbers […] becomes illusion.[47]

This implies that Enlightenment strives for an utterly objective order as constituted through the author's notion of identity thinking and excludes any subjective fallacies.

> What was different is […] brought to actual conformity. […] The unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual. […] Every attempt to break the natural thraldom, because nature is broken, enters all the more deeply into the natural enslavement. Hence the course of European civilization.[48]

"Reality is thus deemed discernible only in the form of objectively verifiable facts and alternative modes of representing reality are thereby fundamentally undermined."[49] Thought confines itself to the facts and thus comes to a halt. "The question […] whether these facts might change is ruled out by enlightened thought as a pseudo-problem. Everything which is, is thus presented as a kind of fate, no less unalterable […] than mythical fate itself."[50] This leads to the decline of critical thought.

> Thinking objectifies itself to become an automatic […] process; an impersonation of the machine that it produces itself so that ultimately the machine can replace it. Enlightenment has put aside the classic requirement of thinking about thought. […] Hence, Enlightenment returns to mythology, which it never really knew how to elude.[51]

As a result, in the process of distinguishing itself from myth, enlightened thought does just what it accuses myth of doing: It reverts into a blind, "uncritical mode of configuring […] reality. […] Reverting to mythology means a reversion to a heteronomous condition."[52] Through the rise of domination and instrumental reason

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[46] Jarvis, 14.
[47] Adorno and Horkheimer, 5-7.
[48] Adorno and Horkheimer, 12-3.
[49] Fagan, 4.
[50] Jarvis, 25.
[51] Adorno and Horkheimer, 25-7.
[52] Fagan, 3.

Enlightenment is no longer liberating but becomes like myths dogmatic, irrational and totalitarian, which is a consequence Enlightenment had not intended: “Reason itself destroys the humanity it first made possible.”[53] That implies the more humanity aims to liberate itself from unreason the closer it actually moves towards its own destruction. Therefore, Enlightenment turned emancipation and progress into regression and thus has a self-destructive character, which expresses itself in phenomena such as fascism.

Considering “any of the appalling uses to which modern technology has been put”, i.e. bearing in mind that the “worst natural disasters in modern history destroy fewer lives than do human disasters”[54] the way Horkheimer and Adorno justify their theses about the failure of Enlightenment seems very plausible and convincing. A concrete example to illustrate their claims form, for instance, atomic bombs. Nuclear weapons are man-made artefacts produced in order to destroy humanity. According to Adorno and Horkheimer due to Enlightenment’s self-destructive “spirit” there is no longer any hope in Enlightenment’s power. That is to say, the philosophers offer hardly any prospect of escape from the constraints of instrumental rationality and thus they take up a distrustful stance on the future.

As was suggested for instance by Nietzsche, Adorno and Horkheimer, the postmodern period is largely influenced by the disillusionment induced by events such as “the death of God” and World War II. In the face of never-ending progress the world becomes subject to rapid and destabilising change. After all, applying science and reason lead to the construction of gas chambers and atomic bombs, both of which were only possible due to modern technology. Enlightenment leaves humanity without a clear ordering principle. As Nietzsche indicated, the bitter aftertaste of secularisation is that apart from being liberating it simultaneously leaves humanity without absolute foundations. Similarly, Fredric Jameson, who is generally regarded as one of the leading figures of postmodernism, describes the postmodern society as being characterised by a “new kind of superficiality” and “depthlessness.”[55]

> Instrumental reason cannot tell us anything about how to live our lives. […] Scientific knowledge has brought about a disenchantment of the world. Means can be calculated with efficiency – this is what is called technical [or

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[53] Lucero-Montano, 2.

[54] Bowie, 236.

[55] Jameson, 9.

> instrumentalised] rationality – but ends, values, become increasingly problematic to determine.[56]

People have no longer any guiding rules in regards to what is good or bad, noble or evil, right or wrong, moral or immoral. Some kind of irresponsible ethical relativism breaks out.[57] Therefore, the postmodern period clearly takes a dystopian attitude compared to the optimistic Enlightenment mood.[58] That we are heading towards a new dark age is thus a typical postmodern belief. A new kind of barbarism caused by human evil will emerge and the fall of society will bring the world to an end.[59] At this point, it is worth drawing a parallel to the famous poem *The Second Coming* by William Butler Yeats, which was published in the aftermath of World War I and is widely praised as one of the most evocative prophetic poems of the twentieth century.

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.
>
> Surely some revelation is at hand;
> Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
> The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
> When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
> Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;
> A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
> A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
> Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
> Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.
> The darkness drops again but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?[60]

A number of key issues arise from this poem. In the first stanza the speaker laments over the nightmarish conditions present in the world, where things are currently falling apart. Like a falconer who has lost any control over his falcon, anarchy is loosed upon the world. The kind-hearted people lack all conviction, while the worse are full of passionate intensity. Thus, as the speaker reasons in the second part of the poem, the world is near a revelation; i.e. a monstrous second coming is about to take place. However, instead of a second coming, which in the Christian sense, is entailing a return of virtue and religiousness, the opposite will happen. Thus, in place of Jesus a violent beast, representing a new age, will appear and make its way to Christ's birthplace, i.e. Bethlehem. That is to say, having experienced extensive loss of human life during World War I and sensing that the world is spinning out of control Yeats envisions the end of the Christian epoch and the world being on the threshold of apocalypse.

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[56] Sarup, 69.
[57] Cf. Waugh, 53.
[58] Cf. Jameson, 335.
[59] Cf. Waugh, 7.
[60] Yeats, *The Second Coming.*

Philosopher's pessimistic proposals had a significant and lasting effect upon many contemporary authors and are thus often reflected in contemporary literature. A central theme often taken up by many postmodern authors is, for instance, the idea of the loss of values or the crisis of belief in general. Postmodern fiction often reflects upon the conflict between rational and mystical belief. Moreover, questions such as the following are often addressed in postmodern literature: Does science provide an alternative to the religious view of life, or does it leave us in need of an alternative? What meaning does scientific knowledge give to everyday life? How useful, ultimately, is scientific knowledge? etc.

### 2.2.3. Postmodern Scepticism and Relativism

*The only absolute truth is that there are no absolute truths.*

Realism "is characterised by its attempt objectively to offer up a mirror to the world. […] [However, the] hegemony of realism was challenged by modernism and then postmodernism, as alternative ways of representing reality and the world."[61] That is to say, in contrast to realism postmodern theory tends towards extreme scepticism about knowledge and being.

> [To be more precise,] postmodernism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific, or objective, efforts to explain reality. In essence, it stems from a recognition that reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding of it, but rather, is constructed as the mind tries to understand its own particular and personal reality. For this reason, postmodernism is highly sceptical of

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[61] Childs 2000, 2-3.

> explanations which claim to be valid for all groups [or cultures] and instead focuses on the relative truths of each person.[62]

In other words, postmodernism is doubtful about explanations which claim to be valid for all human beings; i.e. postmodernism denies the existence of any universal or ultimate truths.

> [Accordingly, in] the postmodern understanding, interpretation is everything; reality only comes into being through our interpretations of what the world means to us individually. Postmodernism relies on concrete experience over abstract principles, knowing always that the outcome of one's own experience will necessarily be fallible and relative, rather than certain and universal. Postmodernism denies the existence of any ultimate principles, and it lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody.[63]

The anti-realism, which is characteristic of postmodernism, grew out of Ferdinand de Saussure's postulations on structuralism and is closely connected to the present-day theory of poststructuralism. Saussure analysed the relationship between language and the "real world" and came to the conclusion that there is no direct but an arbitrary relationship.

> Saussure refers to the real things like trees and horses as "referents" and stresses that these are nowhere present in the words, or linguistic "signs". He divides the signs into the "signifier" and the "signified." The signifier is the sound of the word ("sound-image") and the signified is what the sound is trying to say (the "concept"). The most important point for the anti-realist input into postmodernism is that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. There is no natural or real connection between the sound of the word "tree" and the concept "tree". […] The gap this opens between language and the world is the space into which all postmodernist theorising, and explicitly postmodernist literature, enters.[64]

The theory of poststructuralism grew out of Ferdinand de Saussure's postulations on structuralism. Poststructuralism, which forms an essential milestone and a major point of departure for many postmodern critics, "stresses, above all, issues of representation – it focuses upon how the "real" is constructed through language, how it is everywhere transformed into textuality, and how what appears literal is in fact metaphorical."[65] The difference between structuralism and poststructuralism marks the contrast between modernism and postmodernism.

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[62] Wertheim.
[63] Wertheim.
[64] Gregson, 3.
[65] Gregson, 7.

> Saussurian linguistics is characteristically modernist in an anti-realism which is nonetheless able to discern hierarchies and patterns of meaning. Arbitrariness is important at the level of the individual sign, but even so becomes the necessary premise of an overriding structure in which those signs find their proper place. Poststructuralism is characteristically postmodernist in the way it flattens these hierarchies and subjects these patterns to subversive questioning; structure, for postmodernists, arouses endless suspicion.[66]

Hence, poststructuralism stresses the idea that reality is not directly accessible to us. As a consequence, "what claims to be real or natural is actually artificial, is actually fabricated. It is this which leads to a constitutive suspicion of all claims to authority, all claims to direct expression of truth."[67]

To sum up, postmodern belief is characterised by extreme scepticism and thus forms a reaction against realism and rationalism. It assumes that there are no universal truths and that language is incapable of reflecting reality. Since truth is always subjective a total description of reality is simply impossible. That is to say, in contrast to modern thought which used to believe that meaning is stable and can be grasped in its entirety, postmodern thought questions all certainties and is therefore highly suspicious of any dogmatic claims to knowledge. However, since postmodernism asserts that there cannot be any absolute truths even postmodernism's own principles must be questioned. In this sense, the introductory quote of this chapter stating that "the only absolute truth is there are no absolute truths" must be questioned as well. Hence, the "typical postmodernist conclusion, that universal truth is impossible, and relativism is our fate."[68]

> What is striking is precisely the degree of consensus in postmodernist discourse that there is no longer any possibility of consensus, the authoritative announcements of the disappearance of final authority and the promotion and recirculation of a total and comprehensive narrative of a cultural condition in which totality is no longer thinkable.[69]

In postmodern literature, the aspect of postmodern realism and relativism is often found in feminist or postcolonial works providing a critique of Western descriptions of Non-Euro-American "others". Another interesting issue often addressed by postmodern literature is the idea of relativism in regards to competing values and the lack of universally valid reasons for living one way rather than another. Moreover, through the employment of metafictional elements, i.e. drawing attention to the fictionality of fiction and the technique of magic realism, both of which will be dealt with in more detail in the section focusing on postmodern narrative techniques, the concepts of postmodern scepticism and relativism are addressed.

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[66] Gregson, 5.
[67] Gregson, 4.
[68] Butler, 16.
[69] Connor 1997, 9.

### 2.2.4. Postmodern History

> *[The postmodern condition is characterised by] a disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve. […] The information function of the media would thus be to help us to forget, to serve as the very agents and mechanisms of our historical amnesia.*[70]

As was discussed in the previous section, postmodern belief assumes that a correct description of reality which is valid for all human beings is impossible and hence denies the existence of any universal truths. What does this suggest for the postmodern experience of history? It means that the representation of history must be questioned too. History, which during the modern period and before was usually perceived as providing an account of what “really” happened, is now in the postmodern period regarded as being only a narrative of what really happened from one individual’s perspective. That is to say, postmodernity questions the representation of history since it can always only present one perspective of the past rather than provide an absolute account of what really happened. Hence, postmodern thought addresses the problem of representation and mediation.

This aspect is taken up by Jean-François Lyotard, who counts as one of the leading postmodern theorists. In his masterpiece *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* he defines postmodernism as a sceptically inclined form of philosophy which calls into question the certainties proposed by universal theories. Lyotard distinguishes between *grand narratives*, which have lost all their credibility due to their authoritarian connotations, and *little narratives*, i.e. the narrative of individual human beings, which need no foundational justification.[71]

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[70] Jameson, 28.

> The ways that modern societies go about creating categories labelled as “order” or “disorder” have to do with the effort to achieve stability. François Lyotard [...] equates that stability with the idea of “totality,” or a totalised system [...]. Totality, and stability, and order, Lyotard argues, are maintained in modern societies through the means of “grand narratives” or “master narratives,” which are stories a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs. A “grand narrative” […] might be the story that democracy is the most enlightened (rational) form of government, and that democracy can and will lead to universal human happiness. Every belief system or ideology has its grand narratives […]. [One] might think of grand narratives as a kind of meta-theory, […], that is, an ideology that explains an ideology […]; a story that is told to explain the belief systems that exist. Lyotard argues that all aspects of modern societies, including science as the primary form of knowledge, depend on these grand narratives. Postmodernism then is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice. […] Postmodernism […] favours “mini-narratives” [which] are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability.[72]

That is to say, for Lyotard the postmodern condition is marked by a dissolution of master narratives, i.e. narratives which are traditionally used to give cultural practices some form of authority or legitimacy. As examples of a grand narrative Lyotard identifies “the Enlightenment story of progress and political emancipation, and the Hegelian narrative of the manifestation of scientific reason.”[73] Lyotard argues that Auschwitz is an event which demonstrates the collapse of these metanarratives: Auschwitz’s “stark, appallingly cruel irrationality destroys the belief in rational human progress achieved through increasing knowledge.”[74] As a result, in the postmodern period metanarratives have lost their credibility. This is also why Lyotard defines the “postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives.”[75]

Apart from Lyotard, Walter Benjamin made another highly important contribution to the postmodern understanding of history by pointing out the non-neutrality of history. History, he argues, usually represents only one point of view of the past, which is the point of view of the powerful winners rather than the defenceless losers. This idea can be linked to Karl Marx’s claims on the nature of ideologies. He pointed out that the ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, also the ruling ideas. This might sound a bit complex at first. But what Marx basically intends to say with his statement is that the ruling class's interests appear to be the interests of all because what is considered as true is usually what the ruling people want the masses to consider as true. A famous example offered by Marx is his identification of religion as the opium of the people. This implies that according to Marx the dogmatic rules prescribed by religion are used by the powerful in order to stay powerful.[76]

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[71] Cf. Lyotard, 60.
[72] Klages.
[73] Sheehan, 28.
[74] Gregson, 8.
[75] Lyotard, xxiv.

So while modernity is characterised by a belief in master narratives, which represent all knowledge and are able to explain everything, postmodern belief is clearly suspicious of these master narratives and totally rejects and refuses them due to their totalising nature. Instead postmodernists believe in local narratives, in contesting explanations none of which can claim any authority. As the word itself already implies, "history" itself contains the word "story" and thus there is not just one history, only histories. Because of this, any number of people can be in the same general place at the same time and have completely different sets of experiences. Hence the postmodern period is characterised by the idea of the constructedness of history which leads to the idea of the end of history. This issue is often taken up by feminist, postcolonial and postmodern authors who rewrite traditional accounts of the past, reflecting upon the idea of competing views of history and tradition.[77]

### 2.2.5. Postmodern Capitalism and Consumerism

> *We are somehow to lift our minds to a point at which it is possible to understand that capitalism is at one and the same time the best thing that has ever happened to the human race, and the worst. The lapse from this austere dialectical imperative into the more comfortable stance of the taking of moral positions is inveterate and all too human: still, the urgency of the subject demands that we make at least some effort to think the cultural evolution of late capitalism dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together.*[78]

A further major characteristic of the postmodern condition is the fact that we are living in a world dominated by the logic of capitalism where exchange value, that is money, has become the dominant force of our lives. In this context it is fundamental to introduce Karl Marx's model illustrating society's development towards capitalism. His paradigm is based upon the distinction between a commodity's use and exchange value. Whereas the use value of a commodity denotes its usefulness in regards to the fulfilment of a certain need, such as clothes in order to keep oneself warm, the exchange value of a commodity "is an "abstract" expression because it does not relate to the commodity itself, such as the clothes […], but to the cost of the labour (among other things) needed to make the commodity."[79] That is to say, the exchange value of a product or service refers to the exchange of goods on the capitalist market and thus represents a commodity's value compared to other objects on that market. Marx argues that in order to be able to exchange two or more commodities on the open market it was necessary to compare them with a "universal equivalent". Hence, money came into existence in order to function as the universal measure of exchange value. In other words, money is used to measure the exchange value of a product and thus nowadays a commodity's exchange value refers to what the commodity would cost to purchase. In society's development towards capitalism, "Marx suggests that in a first stage (in feudal society, for instance), only a small proportion of what is produced in handicrafts, agriculture, etc. is surplus and therefore available to be […] exchanged in the market-place."[80] Accordingly, in this situation, use-value still predominates over exchange-value.

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[76] Cf. Bowie, 120-2 and 233.
[77] Cf. Connor 1997, 49.
[78] Jameson, vi.

> In a second phase, the phase of industrial production, [Marx notes,] everything that is produced by the new industrial forms of production becomes a commodity to be sold and exchanged on the market. A third phase supervenes when abstract qualities, like love, goodness and knowledge, which had previously been thought to be immune from the operations of buying and selling, themselves enter the realm of exchange-value.[81]

Thus, according to Marx, in our society, the principle of exchange has come to direct the production of goods and provisions of services; i.e. production is geared towards the exchange of goods and services for money.

Marx's model parallels the three stages of capitalist development pointed out by the postmodernist Fredric Jameson. According to Jameson, the first phase, market capitalism, took place from the eighteenth century onwards in Western Europe and the

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[79] Lane, 67.

[80] Connor 1997, 51.

[81] Connor 1997, 51.

United States. It is characterised by particular technological advances such as the steam-driven motor, and realism. Market capitalism was then superseded by monopoly capitalism in the late nineteenth century. Monopoly capitalism is associated with modernism and “identical with the age of imperialism, during which markets grew into world markets, organized around nation-states, but depending on the fundamental exploitative asymmetry of the colonizing nations and the colonized who provide both raw materials and cheap labour.”[82] The third phase, which began around the Second World War and in which we are now, “is multinational or consumer capitalism (with the emphasis placed on marketing, selling, and consuming commodities, not on producing them), associated with nuclear and electronic technologies, and correlated with postmodernism.”[83]

Both Marx and Jameson argue that we are living in an age where consumption is conditioned by the principle of exchange. To put it more explicitly, we have all become slaves to money because money dominates our lives: “It surrounds and suffuses us at every moment. […] It has total control over the circumstances in which we live.“[84]

> [This includes that] we are not free to […] leave the market and its commodity culture. […] The market has a built-in idea that it is inevitable. It is just human nature, we are told, to want to own things, to buy and sell, to desire more profit for our labours, to compete for personal advantage […].When we consume the process of consumption we also consume this ideology.[85]

In other words, we are immersed in an overwhelming system which it seems impossible to escape from.

The postmodernist Jean Baudrillard developed Marx’s theories further and argued that nowadays a shift from production to consumption has taken place, in particular an abundant consumption of objects.

> Today, it seems, everything is for sale. Everything is valued only according to the price tag that the market hangs on it. Capitalism has gradually been turning more and more aspects of life into commodities to be purchased. But modern culture still had a place for works that were detached from the economic process and therefore could make critical judgments about it. Now, in late capitalism, every cultural artefact is merely another commodity to be bought and sold in the market. “The market” here means the sum total of all the production and

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[82] Connor 1997, 45.

[83] Klages.

[84] Chernus, The Postmodern Sublime.

[85] Chernus, The Appeals of Postmodern Life.

> consumption processes taking place in the world. When market and culture are fused, all of life becomes one great marketplace. […] Everywhere in the world, culture and the market meet in the act of consuming. The market is now dominated by consumption rather than production.[86]

It is undeniable that we are currently living in a period where consumption plays a central role in all our lives. Taking into consideration that more and more people opt out of church and prefer to spend their leisure time with shopping rather than attending mass, i.e. cathedrals are "consumed" as tourist destinations rather than holy buildings, it can even be claimed that capitalism has become the dominant religion of Western society.

> Modernity seemed to make everything in the past old-fashioned and useless, including the beliefs of traditional religion. The old religious forms seemed outdated […]. They contradicted the materialistic discoveries of modern science. […] Therefore religious belief became a challenging problem. […] Our society is now "effortlessly secular" […]. The void created by the demise of religion is filled with the images created by our consumer culture.[87]

That is to say, today's consumers attempt to find satisfaction in the products they purchase. I consume, therefore I am. The market causes people to believe that the consumption of goods gives meaning to their lives and thus makes them happier, a role performed by religion in the past.[88]

Despite the fact that capitalism takes over the function of religion and consumption supersedes production another crucial point in terms of late capitalism is the postulation that everything, literally all things, even human beings themselves, are commodified and fetishised, i.e. made into an object of desire. This can easily be exemplified by reference to today's advertisements a majority of which play with the notion of eroticism. Sex is omnipresent; i.e. we are bombarded with advertisements consisting of desirable objects like lightly dressed girls lounging in front of the newest sports car. A relationship between the product being advertised and the almost naked woman is nonexistent. Yet, as is generally known, sex sells. Sex, which "used to be proclaimed to be the secret, forbidden truth of human life [has now become] subject to economic transaction, to buying and selling."[89] Thus, the woman becomes objectified and the car becomes a desirable product. However, in order to understand the argument that everything, even human beings themselves, are commodified and furthermore grasp the full impact late capitalism has on individuals and society as a whole it is necessary to introduce the concept of reification.

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[86] Chernus, Commodity Culture.
[87] Chernus, Organized Religion.
[88] Cf. Watson, 55.
[89] Connor 2004, 11.

Reification is a specific form of alienation, which goes back to Karl Marx's assumptions about the damage capitalism has caused to human life. In Marx's viewpoint an increasing power over nature has not only positive consequences but also leads to men's alienation, which denotes the general condition of human estrangement. To be more precise, alienation refers to the condition in which men are dominated by forces of their own creation which then confront them as alien power. People are alienated and consequently feel powerless because they tend to forget that society is constructed by human beings and thus can also be changed by them. That is to say, Marx suggests that since we are no longer free under capitalism all spheres of capitalist society are marked by the condition of alienation. In comparison to alienation, reification refers to the aspect that we are living in a world where "human beings become commodities, like consumer goods. In other words, human beings are valued for reasons other than their "humanity"." [90] Reification therefore leads to "the conversion of social relationships into inert and frozen objects."[91]

This can be related to Adorno's idea of "identity thinking", which he claims to be the source of the damage that capitalism has caused to our lives. Identity thinking is a mode of thinking that involves the subsumption of the particular under the universal. An example of identity thinking would be money, which - as was indicated before - subsumes the "particular" under the "universal" in order to be able to compare the value of things that are utterly different. Yet, when the "particular" is a human being, this subsumption becomes repressive because human beings are no longer perceived as individuals but reduced to exchangeable things or objects: "Under the "spell" of exchange, or what Adorno also called the "universal," individuals have effectively become "the same"." [92] As a result, people are reified and become abstract, commensurable and replaceable commodities. The abstract category of usefulness in general reduces the quality of the things of everyday life or human beings into a means-end calculation.

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[90] Lane, 67.
[91] Connor 1997, 46.
[92] Cook, 45.

> The economic organization of modern capitalist society provides for this final realization of instrumental reason and self-destruction of Enlightenment. Under capitalism all production is for the market; goods are produced not in order to meet human needs and desires, but for the sake of profit, for the sake of acquiring further capital. While production for exchange rather than the use is a feature of economic forms, what uniquely characterises capitalist economies is the tendential universality of production for exchange rather than use. This too is a procedure for making and treating unlike things as identical, for displaying the intrinsic properties of things for the sake of ends (capital accumulation) extrinsic to them. The domination of use value by exchange value thus realizes and duplicates the tendencies of enlightened reason: as enlightened reason occludes ends-oriented rationality, so capitalist production occludes production for use; and as enlightened rationality subsumes particulars under universals indifferent and insensitive to sensuous particularity, so capitalist production subsumes the use value of things under exchange value. Enlightened rationality and capital production preclude reflection.[93]

To put it differently, the major problem of reification under late capitalism is that every aspect of our life is based on exchange. That includes that we have come to understand the value of human life in terms of its pure utility. As commodities, we are all measured by the output we produce rather than by our internal values. That is to say, reification involves that we have come to regard ourselves as things.

> Today, we are everywhere surrounded by the remarkable conspicuousness of consumption and affluence, established by the multiplication of objects, services and material goods. This now constitutes a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species. Strictly speaking, men of wealth are no longer surrounded by other human beings, as they were in the past, but by *objects*. […] As the wolf-child becomes wolf by living among them, so we are ourselves becoming functional.[94]

Accordingly, the prevalence of exchange value and identity thinking, which has become the dominant mode of thinking under capitalist society, lead to reification and thus existential impoverishment of contemporary society.

> The reifying effects of the exchange principle of interpersonal relations may be seen in the commodified understanding that individuals have of themselves and others as so many instances of exchange value. Individuals measure their own self-worth in terms of the "value" of the goods they possess and the places they occupy within the economic system.[95]

Since people are dominated by the exchange principle and are only valued insofar as they own a fortune they develop narcistic tendencies and start competing with each other in order to gain more prestige. "Because it transforms interpersonal relations into relations between things, the exchange principle also estranges or alienates individuals from each other".[96] These days even love has succumbed to exchange relations. As a result, more and more people find it difficult to sustain lasting, emotionally involved relationships.[97] Read in this way, the concept of reification helps "to understand why regressive forms of social identity and solidarity have emerged", which manifested itself in movements such as Nazism.[98] The long-term consequence of late capitalism is a world dominated by social coldness. "Utterly dependent on economic forces that are, for the most part, beyond their comprehension and control, individuals have become depersonalized and denatured cogs in the gears of the economic machinery."[99] To sum up, the market with its overall aim to maximise profit dictates us insofar as everything, even we ourselves, becomes based on exchange. Hence, late capitalism can be interpreted as the source of today's social and economic malaise.[100] Apart from being condemned to live in a world where all things are commodified including ourselves we are also living in a world in which genuine experience has been replaced by simulation and spectacle as will be outlined in the following chapter.

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[93] Bernstein, 5.
[94] Baudrillard 1988, 29.
[95] Cook, 45.

### 2.2.6. Postmodern Culture and Mass Media

> *Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which "culture" has become a veritable "second nature".*[101]

Another distinctive feature of postmodernism in contrast to modernism is its rejection of the older distinction between "high" and mass or popular culture. Modernity, which through the process of industrialisation and the development of new technologies brought along the phenomena of mass production and mass media, used to distinguish strictly between low and high culture and claimed that only high culture deserved to be studied. In opposition to the modern period, the postmodern period is characterised by a disruption of the dominance of high culture, a new valuation and inclusion of popular culture or a mixing of both forms, which consequently results in the destruction of the categories “high” and “low” culture.[102]

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[96] Cook, 45.
[97] Cf. Cook, 44.
[98] Cook, 43.
[99] Cook, 47.
[100] Cf. Edwards, 82.
[101] Jameson, ix.

> [Postmodernism has], in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole “degraded” landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader’s Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer simply “quote;’ as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance.[103]

As was discussed in the previous chapter, due to capitalism everything becomes commodified. As a result, the prevailing dichotomy of high and low culture, which existed in the modern period, collapses and high culture mixes with popular culture and thus results in commercial mass culture. “In effect, all culture is seen to be mass culture, a culture of commodification.”[104] With the emergence of the so-called culture industry it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the economic sphere from the realm of culture.

> The line between “high” and […] “mass” culture is quickly disappearing. And culture is marketed just like toothpaste. So the line between culture and commodity consumption is disappearing too. The greatest opera stars, for example, are now celebrities. […] We see […] them on TV endorsing products totally irrelevant to their art. […] [Accordingly,] the process of consuming commodities is, above all, a process of consuming the images of culture. When we buy a product, we are buying the many signs that go into its production and come out of it. The product itself is also a sign. We do not value commodities primarily for their practical ability to meet our needs. Rather we value them as signs, as images that are satisfying in themselves. […] In other words we do not consume the commodity; we consume the cultural image of the commodity. We consume signs. But every time we consume a sign we are also consuming the culture that produced it. And the culture now consists essentially of the process of consuming its own signs.[105]

Popular culture has undoubtedly been heavily influenced by the rise of mass media. The most prominent postmodern medium in the boom of information technology, which has attracted a lot of attention from various theorists of postmodernism, is television. Television was developed around the beginning of the twentieth century and by the early 60s almost every household in the United States owned their own television set.

> The rapid evolution of television into a diverse, multinational, well-nigh global industry exemplifies the socio-economic processes of postmodernisation, while

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[102] Cf. Jameson, 63.
[103] Jameson, i.
[104] Waugh, 44.
[105] Chernus, Commodity Culture.

> the fractured, conflicting ideologies of programmes on burgeoning numbers of TV channels fluidly incarnate the experience of postmodernity. Particular channels or programmes, from MTV, *Miami Vice* and *Moonlighting* to *Twin Peaks, Ren and Stimpy* and *Fantasy Football League*, provide us with some of the best formal examples of postmodernism in any medium.[106]

As indicated in the chapter on postmodern scepticism, the modern period was still marked by the belief in the "real" beyond language, symbols, representations and the media. That is to say, people believed "that signifiers always point to signifieds, and that reality resides in signifieds." [107] In the postmodern era, however, this was challenged – signifier and signified move away and we are left with a decentred world.

> In postmodernism […] there are only signifiers. The idea of any stable or permanent reality disappears, and with it the idea of signifieds that signifiers point to. Rather, for postmodern societies, there are only surfaces, without depth; only signifiers, with no signifieds. Another way of saying this, according to Jean Baudrillard, is that in postmodern society there are no originals, only copies – or what he calls "simulacra".[108]

Baudrillard's analysis of the contemporary epoch as a media society, a universe of simulacra where images can no longer be separated from the real, had a strong impact upon many contemporary thinkers. In his works Baudrillard emphasised the dominance of simulacrum in postmodern society. "The term "simulacrum" […] refers to the phenomena such as life-style models that bear little relation to actual social existence but which are produced and reproduced throughout the media and in particular the entertainment industry."[109] According to Baudrillard, our society is "so influenced by the technological media that any sense of the real is lost and replaced by the multiplying of signs and representations. Depthless simulacra are so all-pervading that they create a sense that experience cannot be real unless it is represented, preferably by television."[110]

Baudrillard enlarges his ideas by arguing that there are three levels of simulation. "[The] first level is an obvious copy of reality and the second level is a copy so good that it blurs the boundaries between reality and representation."[111] To be more precise, a first-order simulation refers to an artificial representation of the real that is obviously just that, whereas with a second-order simulation the simulation in a sense has become as real as the real. “The third level is one which produces a reality of its own without being based upon any particular bit of the real world. […] It is this third level of simulation, where the model comes before the constructed world, that Baudrillard calls the hyperreal.”[112] The “hyperreal”, which is more than real, “refer[s] to the way in which contemporary culture operates in a world where signs, images and simulacra are taken to represent reality, but which, in fact, have no original referent in the real world.”[113] Whereas with first- and second-order simulation, the real still exists and simulation is always measured in terms of how well it represents the real, third-order simulation generates “hyperreality”, i.e. a world without a real origin. Since our contemporary society is dominated by this third-order simulation people become so obsessed with spectacle that life has become television and television life. Nowadays people regard what is being presented on TV as more powerful than unmediated experience.

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[106] O'Day, 112.
[107] Klages.
[108] Klages.
[109] Mengham, 8.
[110] Gregson, 9.
[111] Lane, 30.

> [The] balance between fiction and reality has changed significantly in the past decade. Increasingly their roles are reversed. We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind – mass-merchandizing, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the instant translation of science and technology into popular imagery […]. We live in an enormous novel.[114]

The hyperreal is a system of simulation simulating itself or rather what is represented is representation itself. An example of third-order simulacrum would be virtual reality, which is created by simulation, i.e. computer language and abstract codes, and does not have an original.[115]

As a consequence of the world being dominated by simulated experience and feelings people lose the capacity to comprehend reality as it really is. In other words, we can no longer distinguish between what is a true and what is a false state of affairs. The boundaries between fact and fiction become blurred. “With simulation, we can no longer negotiate the differences, so the differences themselves are threatened.“[116] Hence, in the case of television, for example, we take everything shown on TV for real and do not question what we are told. On the other hand, however, we do not really believe in what we see. For example, we do not really feel emotionally affected by a news report informing us about the deaths of people in a war or terrorist attack. As Baudrillard puts it, war shown on TV becomes in a sense hyperreal. He exemplifies this thesis by referring to the Vietnam War, which was the first "television war", and argues that it was like a film before it was even filmed.[117] Another interesting example in this context illustrating our detachment from the real and production of "reality" with third-order simulation forms "an absurd moment in the reporting of the [Gulf War] when the news channel CNN switched to a group of reporters "live" in the Gulf to ask them what was happening, only to discover that they were watching CNN to find out themselves." In this example "news is generated by news, or the source of the news is also the news […] [N]ews [was] producing the "reality" of the war, not only for viewers, but also for those involved." [118] For this reason, Baudrillard finally comes to the conclusion that the Gulf War did not take place at all. Another similar example of third-order simulation is nuclear war. If a nuclear war took place, there would be no tomorrow and thus thinking about nuclear war is according to Martin Amis thinking about the unthinkable: "Nuclear weapons repel all thought, perhaps because they end all thought."[119]

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[112] Lane, 30.
[113] Bentley 2008, 208-9.
[114] Cf. Gregson, 2.
[115] Cf. Lane, 30.
[116] Lane, 87.

Owing to the blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction we are easily manipulated. Television makes us powerless because it denies any kind of response. Not for nothing does Baudrillard call the media a "speech without response" which manipulates the needs of people, forces them to silence and is thus nothing more than a system of power and control.

> [The media] plunges us into a state of stupor […]: a radical uncertainty as to our own desire, our own choice, or own opinion, our own will. This is the clearest result of the whole media environment […]. The situation no longer permits us to isolate reality or human nature as a fundamental variable. The result is therefore not at all any additional information or any light on reality, but on the contrary, because of the fact that we will never in future be able to separate reality from its […] simulative projection in the media, a state of […] definite uncertainty about reality. And I repeat: it is a question here of a completely new species of uncertainty, which results not from the lack of information but from […] an excess of information. It is information itself which produces uncertainty, and so this uncertainty, unlike the traditional one which could always be resolved, is irreparable. […] [The media] are the strategy of power, which finds in them the means of mystifying the masses and of imposing its own truth. […] And the addiction that we have for the media, the impossibility of doing without them, is a deep result of this phenomenon: it is not a result of a desire for culture, communication, and information, but of this perversion of truth and falsehood,

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[117] Cf. Lane, 92.
[118] Lane, 94.
[119] Amis 1987, 17.

> of this destruction of meaning in the operation of the medium. The desire for a show, the desire for simulation, which is at the same time a desire for dissimulation. This is a vital reaction. It is a spontaneous, total resistance to the ultimatum of historical and political reason. [120]

### 2.2.7. Postmodern Self and Identity

Psychological theories such as Freud's revolutionary postulations on the role of the unconscious had an immense impact on the modern understanding of the self and identity.

> Modernity taught us that we ought to have a unified sense of who we are as individuals - an integrated personality, a single identity. It taught us that there should be some unifying principle holding together the moments of our experience. In fact it taught us that our lives would only be meaningful if we had this sense of personal unity. Some modern philosophies said that we had to make rational ethical decisions from a personal "centre," or with the "whole self," in order to be truly responsible individuals.[121]

However, the idea of a unified monolithic self was challenged by postmodern thinkers. Instead, postmodernism assumes an unstable fragmented and decentred self, which is historical and thus can be changed. To be more precise, postmodernists act on the assumption that identity is nothing stable but rather performatively and socially constructed. "Postmodernism depicts the self as a social and ideological construct which is endlessly in process, and identity as being constituted performatively, by what the self does." Since postmodern thought deconstructs the idea of a stable coherent self "which is present throughout an individual's life and which constitutes their true being" the postmodern condition is sometimes referred to as being marked by the "death of the subject".[122]

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his prominent contributions based on the combination of Freud's psychoanalysis and structural linguistics are reckoned as highly influential in this context.

> So Jacques Lacan, by deploying both Freudian psychoanalysis and structuralist linguistics, allows each to infiltrate the other so that both are interrogated as systems of thought. This collision of structures has been especially important for a characteristically postmodernist anxiety about the self – Lacan's theorising is directed above all at exploring how identity is constructed by language. This

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[120] Baudrillard 1985, 579-80.
[121] Chernus, Postmodernism: Rejecting Totality.
[122] Gregson, 41.

> produces perhaps the biggest postmodernist affront of all to common sense because, in applying an anti-realism to identity questions, it insists that the self is a linguistic construct, so that its reality is as inaccessible as the reality of Saussure's tree. The "I" is a sign amongst other signs. […] Lacanian thought shakes up the focus upon the subversion of any unitary or coherent self by repressed and displaced desire but it then intensifies that subversion by its insistence that the unconscious is structured like language.[123]

That is to say, Lacan depicts the self as being entangled in structures which pre-determine what is possible to think. Accordingly, an individual is not really free but rather occupied by structures of language. Michel Foucault extended this theory by focusing on the relationship between linguistic structures and power structures. In his analysis he showed not only how the subject is socially constructed but came to the conclusion that systems of thought, e.g. jurisprudence, establish themselves as forms of objective knowledge. They are so powerful that they appear to be simply common sense; i.e. they impose themselves as ideological structures and are thereby establishing norms. As a counteraction the "dominant strategy of both postmodernist philosophy and postmodernist aesthetics is [therefore] deconstruction, which is disbelief put into practice. […] Deconstruction unscrews belief systems and uncovers their whirring cogs."[124]

Amongst other areas, a prominent example where these thoughts turned out to be extremely fruitful was feminism and gender studies in general. The awareness of a socially constructed self helped to deconstruct assumptions about traditional patriarchal values and thus facilitated the eradication of misbeliefs such as that gender roles are unalterable.

> The rise of the women's movement is one of the key cultural shifts which mark the postmodern, and the accompanying feminist critique of "essentialist" gender assumptions (linked to biology) has been of crucial importance in a newly unstable view of identity. Postmodern writers, both women and men, have responded markedly to these changes. Many postmodernist texts are explicitly feminist.[125]

Likewise, facing the multicultural nature of contemporary Britain as a result of the former Empire these postulations were significant in hindsight of postcolonialism and national identity.

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[123] Gregson, 5-6.
[124] Gregson, 1.
[125] Gregson, 100.

## 2.3. Selected Features and Narrative Techniques in Postmodern Literature

> *[The] ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents.*[126]

As was shown in the previous sections, the postmodern condition differs in various ways from the modern period. Historical events, e.g. the Holocaust, technological and scientific advances, e.g. mass media, new perceptions on the nature of reality and the self but also developments such as capitalism and the commodification of culture had an enormous impact on society. However, these developments were not only interpreted in a positive way but in some respects led to a rather negative and pessimistic outlook. Unsurprisingly, these worries about the future of the world are also reflected in contemporary literature.

Postmodern literature, like postmodernism as a whole, is complex and difficult to define. As with the postmodern era itself, no definite date exists for the exact beginning of postmodern literature. Some associate its beginning with significant publications, such as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1948, while others mark the shift from modern to postmodern literature by referring to essential moments in critical theory. In any case, the term postmodern in connection with literature is commonly used to describe various aspects and tendencies of literature produced since the aftermath of the Second World War. Postmodern literature can probably be best explained by regarding it as a continuation or rather expansion of the experimentation launched by writers of the modernist period and, at the same time, as a reaction against Enlightenment values implicit in modernist literature.[127] Thus, while postmodern literature seems very much like modern fiction in some ways, it differs from its precursors in its attitudes towards a lot of trends. That is to say, both aesthetic movements share several characteristics like the break from 19th century realism, when stories such as those written by Jane Austen or George Eliot were traditionally told from an objective or omniscient point of view. However, simultaneously they differ from each other in the way that the contemporary one is often regarded as a reflection upon significant post-war events or developments, e.g. the Holocaust, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the beginning of the Cold War, the civil rights movement in the USA, postcolonialism and the rise of new technology, etc. To be more precise, while literature from the realist period attempted to depict life in an entirely objective manner, modernism "challenged […] these conventions, particularly in terms of narrative technique, character portrayal, self-referentiality and linearity."[128] Postmodern literature then intensified and carried the experimentation launched by modern authors such as Virginia Woolf or Joseph Conrad further: "The kind of experimental writing many British authors were practising in the 1970s and 1980s clearly saw itself as new and more attuned with contemporary concerns and ideas."[129]

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[126] Barth, 34.

[127] Cf. Connor 1997, 117.

As there is no clear definition of postmodernism there is also little agreement on the exact characteristics of postmodern literature and it is thus impossible to come up with an ultimate and complete list of postmodern narrative techniques. As a consequence, this part of the thesis will pay attention to those postmodern literary features and narrative techniques relevant for the analysis of the selected postmodern novels in section three. For a more complex list the reader is recommended to study the literary theorist Ihab H. Hassan's table on differences between modernism and postmodernism.[130] Furthermore, it should be noted that the following devices usually do not occur in isolation but are frequently combined by postmodern authors in their literary works.

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[128] Childs 2000, 74.
[129] Bentley 2008, 31.
[130] Cf. Hassan.

### 2.3.1. Irony, Playfulness, Parody and Pastiche

*Post-modernism is not an entirely original viewpoint. It brings together elements presented in many other perspectives and melds them into a variety of different post-modern orientations. Post-modernists would not see this creation, which they call pastiche, as violating their promise not to put back together what they deconstruct, because they make no claims for what emerges.*[131]

Though these features were already employed in many modern works, among the most distinctive aspects of postmodern literature are clearly irony, along with black humour, and playfulness. Irony generally refers to an incongruous relationship between what is said and what is meant. That is to say, many postmodern works attempt to treat serious subjects in a playful and humorous way often with the purpose of attacking something and making the audience aware of which the person behind strongly disapproves. Irony as a mode of literary expression occurs in postmodern fiction, for instance, in the form of silly wordplays within a serious context. Sometimes authors also play with the ambiguity between the audience's expectations and what actually happens. The concept of "play", which can be closely related to the ambiguous character of irony, can be defined as follows.

> In its most general sense, play is an attitude of mind, a perspective on life or on being in the world, together with actions manifesting this attitude. It affirms freedom and possibility against restriction, resignation and closure, thus blurring distinctions between observation and participation, and between spectators and collaborators, distinctions which are far from clear. To observe is to be involved, in activity, discourse and change, in the play of the world.[132]

The concept of "play" goes back to the sceptical postmodernist Jacques Derrida. He is the founder of a method called deconstruction, a poststructuralist strategy of critically analysing texts and thereby revealing inherent arbitrary hierarchies, incongruities and presuppositions. Following the typical postmodern notion that universal truths do not exist the method of deconstruction, which can be applied to all kinds of writings, avoids absolute statements and aims at the annihilation of binary oppositions. Deconstruction is therefore regarded "as breaking apart from oppressive systems, then going on to rebuild the systems with a new set of values. […] [It] focuses on the hierarchies implicit in systems built upon binary oppositions (e.g. good/bad, male/female), and normally aims at a reversal of them."[133] Consequently a deconstructive argument allows the greatest number of possible interpretations rather than just presenting one strict viewpoint. The concept of play can also be applied by deconstructing literary forms and genres, e.g. breaking down the barriers between genres via a mixture of genres. Implemented in this way play is closely related to the concept of pastiche.[134]

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[131] Vaillancourt, 306.

[132] Edwards, 17.

One of the most characteristic features of postmodern fiction is the employment of pastiche as a particular form of parody. Both parody and pastiche usually refer to a kind of writing that is imitating previous styles or genres by reformulating them either in a critical or comical fashion. However, "[parody] tends to refer to the way in which the style being commented upon is made to seem foolish some way and presumes that a better or more accurate approach could have been taken."[135] That is to say, parody usually denotes a kind of ironical mimicry where an author ridicules something by imitating it in an exaggerated way, e.g. the writing style of another author. But still he or she assumes that there is some kind of better alternative or linguistic norm behind all parody.[136] In contrast to parody, which was already employed by modern writers, pastiche goes back to the Italian word *pasticcio* and denotes a medley of various ingredients, i.e. it means the imitation of previous styles by combining or "pasting" together multiple elements like, for instance, mixing various genres to create an exclusive piece of work.[137]

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour.[138]

That is to say, pastiche "tends to adopt a style without the critical edge shown in parody, so that the style is mimicked without suggesting better alternatives."[139] Pastiche is a result of the fact that we are now living in a world where everything has been done before. To be more precise, in the postmodern world it has almost become impossible to invent something absolutely new. Hence, the only opportunity left is to combine what has been done already, i.e. to imitate dead styles is to make use of pastiche.[140] Pastiche is often employed via intertextuality, which represents “the way texts allude to, reflect back or parody another named text.”[141] In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* the literary critic Linda Hutcheon states that pastiche is one significant characteristic which distinguishes postmodern aesthetic works from modern ones because it highlights the postmodern rejection of the boundaries between high and low forms of art. According to her, pastiche is employed when subjects and elements of the mass culture, which were previously not deemed fit for literature, are incorporated into literary works. Thus, pastiche attacks the distinction between what is considered high and low culture or, as Hutcheon puts it, “[p]ostmodernism is both academic and popular, elitist and accessible.“[142]

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[133] Lane, 56-7.
[134] Cf. Cuddon, 210.
[135] Bentley 2008, 211.
[136] Cf. Cuddon, 640.
[137] Cf. Lewis, 124.
[138] Jameson, 16.
[139] Bentley 2008, 211.

That is to say, pastiche and play in essence both refer to the combination of multiple elements, e.g. traditional components mixed with pop cultural references which then result in a “postmodern genre”. In that way postmodern thought attacks the distinction between high and low culture. Contrary to modernism, postmodernism is aware of the impossibility of establishing order and instead prefers to play with chaos and ambiguity. Irony, playfulness, parody and pastiche are thus often used along with metafictional elements in order to draw attention to ambiguity and bring to light the possibility of various interpretations.

### 2.3.2. (Historiographic) Metafiction

A further quite experimental literary device frequently used by postmodern authors is metafiction. Metafiction means writing about writing and is used by authors to highlight the fictional and artificial character of their work. In other words, metafiction describes fictional writing that self-consciously draws attention to its fictional status as something being constructed. Since the audience is never to forget that they are reading a constructed piece of work metafiction provokes questions about the relationship between fact and fiction.[143] That is to say, metafiction addresses the issue of postmodern scepticism in the way that the “common-sense value placed upon a text being “realistic” is opposed and often mocked."[144] This is achieved via a variety of techniques such as, for instance, by authors explicitly commenting on the act of writing or directly addressing the reader. Postmodern authors who employ metafiction sometimes also involve themselves in the story plot. By appearing in their own fiction or posing the question of "how narrative assumptions and conventions transform and filter reality, [they are] trying to ultimately prove that no singular truths or meaning exist."[145]

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[140] Cf. Lewis, 124-5.
[141] Bentley 2008, 209.
[142] Cf. Hutcheon 2004, 44.
[143] Cf. Bentley 2008, 210.

Linda Hutcheon coined the related expression "historiographic metafiction" to denote the postmodern variant of the historical novel.

> By this she means works of fiction which reflect knowingly upon their status as fiction, foregrounding the figure of the author and the act of writing, and even violently interrupting the conventions of the novel, but without relapsing into mere technical self-absorption. […] The essential point, for Hutcheon, is that such texts expose the fictionality of history itself. These texts deny the possibility of a clearly sustainable distinction between history and fiction, by highlighting the fact that we can only ever know history through various forms of representation or narrative. In this sense, all history is a kind of literature.[146]

Hence, historiographic metafiction refers to postmodern fiction that engages with history; i.e. that fictionalises actual historical events or figures and thus reflects upon the nature of history by breaking down the distinction between reality and fiction. More precise, Hutcheon states that "historiographic metafiction self-consciously reminds us that while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning."[147] This relates to the idea mentioned above that postmodern thinkers became aware of history as a narrative which has been constructed by human beings. A very central technique associated with postmodern cultural works therefore includes the questioning of the distinction between fiction and history connected to the idea that "objective" history is impossible. "The historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only "represent" our ideas and stereotypes about that past."[148]

On the basis of Jean-François Lyotard's rejection of master narratives it is furthermore assumed that history is always written to create meaning and fulfil a certain ideological purpose. In that way historiographic metafiction highlights the notion that there is not just one History, which is assumed to provide only a limited perspective of understanding the past. It rather celebrates multiple, even contradictory ways of seeing the world, i.e. histories or what Lyotard called “little narratives”. Historiographic metafiction therefore “problematize[s] the entire question of historical knowledge;”[149] i.e. History can only provide an individual’s account of the past and is never able to depict what “really” happened.

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[144] Gregson, 3.
[145] Orlowski, Characteristics.
[146] Connor 1997, 132.
[147] Hutcheon 2004, 97.
[148] Jameson, 25.

The critique of History claiming authority is, for instance, put into practice by rewriting it from marginal or unusual perspectives. Another possibility of implementing the historiographic metafictional paradigm of postmodern narration is by combining historical with fictional elements. That is, presenting the imaginary as historical and the historical as something invented or fictional. Employed this way, historiographic metafiction “plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record. Certain known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error.”[150] These strategies are all based on the awareness that every historical representation or so-called “historical facts” are actually a subjective narrative construction written from a certain perspective and often ideologically motivated.[151]

Accordingly, (historiographic) metafiction exemplifies the transgression of the boundaries between fact and fiction. Such fiction, which is based on and combined with fact, is also sometimes referred to as faction. Likewise, “[it] is by merging fact and fiction, by offering creative forays into the past as history that magical realists [,which will be dealt with in the following chapter,] draw attention to matters of perception and communication.”[152]

### 2.3.3. Magic Realism

Magic realism denotes another style of writing that emerged during the postmodern era. This style of narrative fiction, which is linked to the literary term fabulation, is characterised by the appearance of magical and imaginary elements in an otherwise normal or rather realistic setting. “As the term suggests, it constitutes a mixture of realistic scenarios with characters and events drawn from a non-realistic or fantastic context."[153] That is to say, realistic elements are combined with fantastic or outlandish dream-like ones.

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[149] Hutcheon 2004, 285-6.
[150] Hutcheon 2004, 294.
[151] Cf. White, 21.
[152] Edwards, 209.

> Some of the characteristic features of this kind of fiction are the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skilful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable.[154]

Hence, the occurrence of myths, fairy tales, dreams but also supernatural figures such as witches are typical implementations of magic realism. In the same way as (historiographic) metafiction, magic realism thus provokes questions upon the notion of universal truth assumed by classic realism and the relationship between fact and myth.

> [This can be seen in] the hybridity of magic realism which collides fairy tale with the realist strategies of the traditional European novel. […] The deliberate lack of fit between the subject matter and its treatment is like a self-conscious confidence trick, or a magic trick where the author makes the reader ask what is "real" and what is fictive sleight of hand. The continual effect of magic realist writing it [therefore] to call into question the boundary between truth and fiction, so that the presence of ideology shaping the depiction of truth is repeatedly interrogated.[155]

### 2.3.4. Fragmentation

From a literary perspective, postmodern art rejects totality and instead favours fragmentation. This is often related to the idea that "no one can grasp what is going on in a society as a whole. […] Rejecting totality, […] postmodernists stress fragmentation – of language games, of time, of the human subject, of society itself."[156] This tendency towards discontinuity can be realised in a variety of ways. For example, it is common for postmodern literature to employ a non-linear form of narrative and in doing so stressing the idea of temporal disorder, loss of chronology and erosion of any sense of time in general.

> Linear narrative is one of the structural conventions of the realist novel. It is based on the assumption that events occur one after the other in a logical order and that each event has some causal relationship with the events that precede and

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[153] Bentley 2008, 210.
[154] Cuddon, 488.
[155] Gregson, 75.
[156] Sarup, 147.

> follow it. Postmodern narrative techniques have often upset this framework by using non-linear structures, thus problematizing the logical relationship between events that you might expect to find in the realist mode.[157]

"Another means of allowing place for the open and inconclusive is by breaking up the text into short fragments or sections, separated by space, titles, numbers or symbols."[158] Accordingly, achronology, flashbacks, flashforwards, circular perceptions of time and the splitting into segments are widespread literary devices among postmodern fiction.

Yet fragmentation can also be expressed by emphasising the idea of a destructured, decentred, dehumanised and unstable subject as typical of the postmodern condition. This can be done via the presentation of various conflicting perspectives stressing the idea of the impossibility of universal truth: "Through the multiplication of diverse perspectives a complex portrait of the [postmodern] phenomenon […] is produced."[159] Another identifiable aspect of postmodern fiction rejecting the idea of totality is the employment of unreliable narrators.

> Such a narrator is one whose perception and interpretation of what he or she narrates does not correspond or coincide with the perceptions, interpretations and opinions of the author who is or purports to be the controlling force in the narration. Thus, there is a kind of contrived discrepancy between the narrator […] and the actual author.[160]

The employment of a questionable narrator allows a strategic unfolding of the story insofar as our responses as readers are being manipulated all the time and we are often left with the choice of either believing everything the narrator is telling us or doubting everything. The fact that narrators are no longer trustworthy also stresses the idea that there is no such thing as one true version of what is going on. Hence, the use of fragmentation as a literary device celebrates postmodernity due to its highlighting of confusion and chaos instead of order and harmony.[161]

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[157] Bentley 2008, 209.
[158] Lewis, 126.
[159] Bernstein, 7.
[160] Cuddon, 536.
[161] Cf. Gregson, 41

### 2.3.5. Paranoia

Last but not least, another crucial characteristic of postmodern literature, which is especially important for the analysis of the selected novels in the following section because it appears frequently in fiction that has been published in the approach of the millennium, is paranoia. Generally speaking, paranoia is considered a prevalent symptom of our postmodern condition. Many protagonists in postmodernist fiction suffer from paranoid anxieties: "Paranoia […] is keenly felt by many of the dramatis personae of postmodernist fiction. It is tempting to speculate that this is an indirect mimetic representation of the climate of fear and suspicion that prevailed throughout the Cold War."[162] That is to say, a collective paranoia is discernible, for instance, in terms of the threat constituted by terrible events of the past but also e.g. by modern technology such as nuclear weapons. Furthermore, many characters in postmodern novels show paranoid tendencies due to living in a world they cannot fully explain, where all that counts is to function productively rather than human feelings and where there is a lack of knowledge with regard to what to expect from the future. They are wondering what their place is on the planet. As a consequence, they develop paranoid tendencies, e.g. they are so scared about the future that they come up with conspiracy theories, which are reassuring and thus give them a means to explain the inexplicable now that God is dead. That is to say, just like primitive societies made use of myths or gods to describe and explain the elements of nature people nowadays come up with prophesies or theories in order to create comforting explanations. "Here, the link of paranoia to the postmodern condition is undeniable; the postmodern individual is alienated, inaccessible, and in dire need of a comfort zone; he or she needs not merely to feel alive, they need to prove it somehow. Paranoia is a means to this end."[163] Thus, postmodern novels tend to depict characters who suffer from the postmodern condition of the world; they feel rootless and long for a place, identity, meaning and order. "Paranoia is not so much a disease as it is a symptom, a viable conduit to shaping identity and character for the hundreds of disaffected men and women, victims if you will, of our postmodern culture; this age of anxiety."[164]

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[162] Lewis, 128.
[163] Campanioni, 1.
[164] Campanioni, 7.

Moreover, living in the information age many characters feel paranoid because they sense that they are being watched and manipulated. “Much postmodern writing reflects the feeling of being under the gaze of an anonymous surveillance.”[165] In this context paranoia in postmodern fiction can be interpreted as a symptom of contemporary postmodern society which is currently going through a period of profound malaise and pessimism.

> [A] recurrent linking of mental illness, the fractures of late capitalist society and the linguistic experiments of contemporary writing is not accidental. Temporal disorder, involuntary impersonation of other voices (or pastiche), fragmentation, looseness of association, paranoia and the creation of vicious circles are symptoms of the language disorders of schizophrenia as well as features of postmodernist fiction. It is in this alignment that we can find the primary contrast between the modernists and postmodernists.[166]

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[165] Flieger, 87.
[166] Lewis, 132.

# 3. SELECTED POSTMODERN NOVELS

## 3.1. The End of History and the Relation between Fact and Fiction in Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983)

The major focus of attention in Graham Swift's *Waterland*, which can be identified as a typical example of the postmodern genre of historiographic metafiction, involves the interwoven relationship between history and narratives. The novel attempts to analyse the complex nature of history and problematises its limitations concerning the accessibility of an accurate representation of the past. Furthermore, the novel juxtaposes history with narratives and reflects thoroughly upon the function of storytelling. The nature of truth is therefore a major issue in the text. By suggesting that the boundary between history and narrative, i.e. fact and fiction, is blurred *Waterland* presents a sceptical outlook on the future as it addresses the question of the possible end of history.

### 3.1.1. The Healing Function of Storytelling – Narration as Therapy

One of the prominent themes which carefully considers the blurring boundary line between history and narrative is the text's concern with the healing function of storytelling. Narrated in the form of a history lesson addressed to his students, the fifty-three-year old history teacher Thomas Crick, who is simultaneously the narrator and the main protagonist of *Waterland*, explains to his students that man can be defined as the story-telling animal who makes use of stories to create meaning out of chaos.

> But man – let me offer you a definition – is the story-telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker-buoys and trail-signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories, he has to keep on making them up. As long as there's a story, it's all right.[167]

Furthermore, Tom classifies man as the animal which demands an explanation and therefore asks why.

> I always taught you to accept the burden of our need to ask why. I taught you that there is never any end to that question, because […] history is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken without knowledge. […] I taught you that by forever attempting to explain we may come, not to an Explanation, but to a knowledge of the limits of our power to explain. […] [T]he past […]

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[167] Swift, 62-3.

> complicates, makes difficult. But to ignore this is folly, because […] what history teaches us is to avoid illusion and make-believe, […] – to be realistic.[168]

Tom regards stories as the central form of human comprehension, a comforting way of making sense out of chaotic events. Accordingly, for Tom narration is a way of coping with previous traumatic events resulting in a healthier state of affairs.

Tom inherited his belief in the therapeutic function of storytelling from his mother Helen Atkinson. After the First World War Helen devoted her life to nursing soldiers who had turned insane due to the horrors experienced on the battlefield.

> [S]he believes in stories. She believes that they're a way of bearing what won't go away, a way of making sense of madness. [...] Like frightened children, what they most want is to be told stories. And out of this discovery she evolves a precept: No, don't forget. Don't erase it. You can't erase it. But make it into a story. Just a story. Yes, everything's crazy. What's real. All a story. Only a story…[169]

Comparably Tom, who as a little boy has been told consoling stories by his mother whenever he was afraid of the dark, is convinced that storytelling helps to cope with the unbearable horrors of the present and the past as it enables to talk about unutterable things and thus cope with traumatic events.

Confronted with sudden undesirable changes in his present life, that is being forced into early retirement after thirty-two years teaching at school and his dearly loved wife Mary having apparently gone insane given that she has stolen a baby at a supermarket, Tom turns to storytelling to escape from and cope with the unbearable present.

> My earliest acquaintance with history was thus, in a form issuing from my mother's lips, inseparable from her […] and I believed, perhaps like you, that history was a myth. Until a series of encounters with the Here and Now gave a sudden pointedness to my studies. Until the Here and Now, gripping me by the arm, slapping my face and telling me to take a good look at the mess I was in, informed me that history was no invention but indeed existed – and I had become part of it. […] So I began to look into history – not only the well-thumbed history of the wide world but also, indeed with particular zeal, the history of my Fenland forbears. So I began to demand of history an Explanation. Only to discover in this dedicated search more mysteries […] only to conclude forty years later […] that history was a yarn. And I cannot deny that what I wanted all along was not some golden nugget that history would at last yield up,

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[168] Swift, 108.
[169] Swift, 225.

> but History itself: the Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears and the dark?[170]

Longing for an explanation for his current unpromising state of affairs, Tom "undertake[s] the search into the past as a means of escaping the confusion and pain of the present."[171] Such traumatic unsettling moments which force us to face grim reality are referred to as visits by the "Here and Now" in the novel. The fishing of Freddie Parr's dead body out of the sluice or the abortion of Mary and Tom's unborn baby are examples of such encounters with the Here and Now – i.e. "things which happen outside dreams that should only happen in them."[172] The Here and Now always denotes life-transforming moments, brings pain and creates a sense of intense reality. Experiencing the knife blade of the Here and Now is exactly what Tom is feeling when he is faced with his wife's madness and his early retirement. He therefore decides to turn to unravel the truth about his past in order to make meaning of the present. "While History in the novel is the "reality obscuring drama" that converts that which causes unease and fear into a comprehensible narrative that comforts and explains, it becomes clear that that which causes fear, the "Here and Now" can, at times, intrude […] bringing the sense of reality back" which had been suppressed by stories.[173] That is to say, the main protagonist attempts to tell self-serving narratives to escape the fear produced by the Here and Now.[174] This is linked to Tom's theory of curiosity, often referred to in the book as "detective spirit".

> It's called reconstructing the crime. From last to first. It's an analogy of the historical method; an analogy of how you discover how you've become what you are. If you're lucky you might find out. If you're lucky you might get back to where you can begin again. Revolution.[175]

In other words, Tom is curious about his past and aims to uncover his family history because he wants to find out how he became the way he is in order to then be able to leave everything behind and start his life anew from scratch. That is to say, Tom endorses in an investigation of the past because he considers it as the only way of providing him with an explanation of his life story. This is connected to Tom's firm conviction of the principle of causality; i.e. his belief that nothing happens without reason and that the present is therefore rooted in the past:

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[170] Swift, 62.
[171] Thompson, 262.
[172] Swift, 308.
[173] Berlatsky, 277.
[174] Cf. Irish, 919.
[175] Swift, 312.

> “Historia” or “Inquiry”. […] To uncover the mysteries of cause and effect. To show that to every action there is a reaction. That Y is a consequence because X preceded. […] To know that what we are is what we are because our past has determined it. To learn […] from our mistakes so it will be better, in future…[176]

Tom’s past, however, cannot be characterised as having been too pleasant. Reflecting about the past Tom is ridden by strong feelings of guilt because he feels responsible for the death of several people. First of all, he considers himself in charge for the death of his friend Freddie Parr, who has been murdered by his mentally handicapped brother Dick since Dick was told by Mary that Freddie was the father of Mary’s unborn baby. Giving credence to Mary, however, Tom was the actual father and she refused to tell Dick the truth in order to protect Tom.

> And we know who spoke first and to whom. We know what she said. We know she steered a straight course between two amorous brothers to a convenient third party, named Parr. And we know that she did it to protect me. We know what Dick did. He went out and got Freddie drunk, then pushed him in the river, after first knocking him on the head with a bottle. And we know what little Tom, whose initiative in this whole affair is so conspicuous by its absence, did. He watched; weighed evidence. Put facts together. […] Fished a bottle – Ah yes, he’s hooked by now, it’s got serious, this historical method, this explanation-hunting. It’s a way of getting at the truth - or […] a way of coming up with just another story, a way of giving reality the slip. And let’s not get the impression that our little keen-eyed sleuth, our junior investigator into questions of cause and effect, is being cool, calm and scientific. We know he’s not. He’s scared.[177]

This story is connected to the second death Tom feels responsible for. When Tom was fifteen, his girlfriend Mary Metcalf got pregnant unwantedly. Owing to the unfavourable circumstances, i.e. Freddie’s death due to Dick’s jealousy, Mary came to the decision to abort the baby. Together Tom and Mary visit the local witch Martha Clay who performs the intervention. Thus, Tom suffers from a guilty conscience due to the death of his and Mary’s unborn baby. Even worse, as a result of the brutal abortion Mary turned infertile, which Tom interprets as the cause why she acted desperately and kidnapped a baby years later.

> So when your history teacher’s […] wife, who is yet to be branded by the local press as […] “The Child Thief of Greenwich,” delivers herself […], he obeys both human instinct and academic training. He drops everything (even the French Revolution) and tries to explain.[178]

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[176] Swift, 107.

[177] Swift, 263-4.

[178] Swift, 108.

Apart from that, Tom feels guilty for the suicide of his brother Dick. By revealing his true origin to Dick, i.e. he is the result of the incestuous love between Helen and her father Ernest Atkinson, Tom drove Dick into taking his own life.[179] Being curious Tom was driven by the strong desire to uncover the truth about Dick's origin. While his father Henry wanted to protect Dick by keeping him in the dark insofar as he refused to teach him to learn to read and write, "Tom cannot resist finding out what is in the box that was passed down to Dick from his father, and once he knows its dark secret, he cannot resist telling Dick the truth of his parentage."[180]

> But don't shun him [Henry], Dick. Don't shun your own – I mean – He's the one who never wanted you to be educated. Your protector, your guardian. I'm the one who had to ask questions, who had to dig up the truth (my recipe for emergencies: explain your own way out). He would have kept you, happily, in the dark.[181]

In this case, curiosity does not produce happiness but results in despair and death. "In effect, [it portrays] a moral dilemma with respect to the existence of unpleasant truths: how far should one uncover a secret (however immoral) when it is clear that its disclosure will cause harm to those it concerns."[182] Last but not least, Tom is convinced that his mother's death is his fault. When he was still a little boy Tom infected her with influenza which consequently caused her death. For many years, Tom believed that "his mother's rejection of him and consequent favouring of Dick, while she was dying was punishment for his having infected her in the first place."[183] Tom remembers exactly the emotional pain he felt for being excluded in that significant moment. "In a little while she won't be here any more. It's a unique, a momentous event. […] And though indeed, it only happened once, it's gone on happening, the way unique and momentous things do, for ever and ever, as long as there's memory for them to happen in."[184] Although Tom's memories on his mother's death are very intense, he cannot recall whether he really overheard his mother's and Dick's conversation at her deathbed or whether he has simply supplied the words necessary to complete his memory in such a way as to ease his guiltiness.

> So this is the hour of my mother's death. Then why only Dick? Then why should Dick and not I-? […] Your history teacher […] makes out (or does he?

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[179] Higdon, 188.
[180] Bentley 2008, 139.
[181] Swift, 324.
[182] Bentley 2008, 140.
[183] Thompson, 263.
[184] Swift, 275.

> Did he supply them six years later?) the words ‘Open’ and ‘Eighteen’. He hears Dick – for it cannot be Mother, she cannot have got so miraculously to her feet again – cross the room and (or so he fits actions to sounds) pull out a drawer in the chest of drawers which stands in the far corner of the parental bedroom, fumble amongst its contents, then return to the bedside. […] [Why] not him? Why this exclusion? Some last word for him too?[185]

This passage clearly shows how Tom makes use of stories to make sense of what happened. Besides, it demonstrates how he deliberately manipulates the past in order to come up with a coherent meaningful interpretation. He supplies the words necessary to create sense. In general, the whole tragic series of deaths Tom feels responsible for and all the other horrors experienced by his forbears, which are introduced by Tom in the course of the novel, are narrated in such a way that they perfectly fit into the law of causality. For example, his argument that Mary’s abortion has led to her abduction of a child from the supermarket fits into his idea of history being marked by causes and effects. He firmly believes that all events are connected with each other and with the past. “In creating his story, by which he attempts to substantiate the explanation he desires, Tom draws connections between otherwise unrelated events, driven, as is his narrative, by jealousy and guilt.”[186] That is to say, turning to stories does not only aid Tom to deal with the traumatic events of the present and the past but coming up with narratives also helps him to defend himself and excuse his own actions. Tom is perfectly aware of his desire to avoid painful truths by making up stories. He agrees with his rebellious student Price who argues that “explaining’s a way of avoiding the facts while you pretend to get near to them.” Moreover, Price notes that storytelling is a sign of trouble and instability. “[P]eople only explain when things are wrong […]. So the more explaining you hear, the more you think things must be pretty bad that they need so much explaining.”[187] Indeed, that Tom is in need of so much explaining and justifying is a result of the fact that things are pretty bad for Tom at the moment. In contrast to the conventional aim of history, which is to reveal the truth about the past, the function of Tom’s narratives is to deliberately manipulate the past in order to salve his bad conscience. “And your best chance of finding forgiveness is to tell stories, as true as you can make them, that others will listen to and perhaps believe in”[188] and by this means prove to his pupils and consequently himself that he is innocent. Thus, Tom’s stories function as a way of coping with reality, manipulating the truth and consequently constitute a method of effectively avoiding the truth. In view of that, it can be said that Tom is caught in a psychological dilemma. On the one hand, being a history teacher he aims to reveal the truth about the past. On the other hand, however, he intentionally influences his representation of the past in order to come up with a coherent story which presents him in a better light. This demonstrates how *Waterland* plays with the notion of truth and the blurring boundaries between fact and fiction as is emblematic of postmodernity.

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[185] Swift, 278-9.
[186] Thompson, 263.
[187] Swift, 167.
[188] Poole, 162.

Swift further stresses the comforting and therapeutic function of narratives by presenting stories as a way of overcoming "nothingness". Tom describes the Fens of East Anglia, the region where most of the novel takes place, as a landscape which most approximates to nothing. This is linked to the title of the novel.

> For what is water, which seeks to make all things level, which has no taste or colour of its own, but a liquid form of Nothing? And what are the Fens, which so imitate in their levelness the natural disposition of water, but a landscape which, of all landscapes, most approximates to Nothing?[189]

Life in the Fens is characterised by nothingness and the arduous and interminable process of land reclamation. "What silt began, man continued. Land reclamation. Drainage. […] You do not reclaim a land without difficulty and without ceaseless effort and vigilance. The Fens are still being reclaimed even to this day. Strictly speaking, they are never reclaimed, only being reclaimed."[190] For Tom, the Fens are a metaphor of reality itself, an empty vessel. "Reality is uneventfulness, vacancy, flatness. Reality is that nothing happens."[191] "To live in the Fens is to receive strong doses of reality. The great flat monotony of reality; the wide empty spaces of reality."[192] The Fens and the Fenland with their shrinking, empty characteristics are thus a symbol of a nihilistic psychological state.

In addition to defining man as the story-telling animal that asks why Tom describes man as "the animal who craves meaning – but knows."[193] That is to say, human beings cannot bear meaninglessness. Instead, they desire to make things happen and want to live a purposeful life. Therefore, the Fens "become a metaphor for the emptiness of human life, the inadequacy of human knowledge and the oppressive absurdity of history."[194] This can be related to the passage where Tom addresses the secular nature of the contemporary world, a world where people have stopped believing in God and are thus faced with a feeling of nothingness and meaninglessness.

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[189] Swift, 13.
[190] Swift, 9-10.
[191] Swift, 40.
[192] Swift, 17.
[193] Swift, 140.

> But God doesn't talk any more. Didn't you know that, Mary? He stopped talking long ago. He doesn't even watch any more, up there in the sky. We've grown up now, and we don't know him any more, our Father in Heaven. We can fend for ourselves. He's left us alone to make what we will of the world. […] God's for simple, backward people in godforsaken places.[195]

Tom's rootlessness is also expressed by the fact that Tom has no mother. In general, *Waterland* features an absence of mothers. Similarly to Tom, Mary has grown up without a mother and after the abortion she is refused to become a mother herself.

So what options are there to cope with the meaninglessness produced by reality? Apart from being attacked by the "Here and Now" which generates reality, either in the form of "joy or terror"[196], Tom realises that you can either make things happen, as did his mother's ancestors, the Atkinsons, or you can tell stories, as done by Tom's relatives on his father's side.

> How do you surmount reality, children? How do you acquire, in a flat country, the tonic of elevated feelings? If you are the Atkinsons it is not difficult. If you have become prosperous by selling fine quality barley, if you can look down from your Norfolk uplands and see in these level Fens – this nothing-landscape – an Idea, a drawing-board for your plans, you can outwit reality. But if you are born in the middle of that flatness, fixed in it, glued to it even by the mud in which it abounds…? How did the Cricks outwit reality? By telling stories. [….] While the Atkinsons made history, the Cricks spun yarns.[197]

Like his ancestors, Tom is aware that human beings strive for "presence, for feature, for purpose, for content."[198] From his parents Tom has learned that the most successful way to outwit reality, namely transform chaotic reality into a bearable one, is by putting events into a meaningful tale. Making history, as done by the Atkinsons, is not successful in the long run. This aspect, however, will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter on the notion of progress and the cyclical quality of history. Yet again, telling stories is acknowledged as being curative since it offers a successful way to overcome one's disorientation and achieve the meaning one strives for. [199] That is to say, as far as Tom is concerned human beings believe in myths "in order to convince themselves that reality is not an empty vessel." [200] "It is the terrifying and boring meaninglessness of reality, then, that provokes the creation of both our narratives of fiction and those of history" as evident in the examples of the Cricks compared to the Atkinsons.

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[194] Malcolm 2003, 97-8.
[195] Swift, 268.
[196] Cf. Swift, 61
[197] Swift, 17.
[198] Swift, 41.

> Since both [ways] are "reality-obscuring," there seems little to distinguish them from each other in [Tom]'s perspective. […] Like silt, stories help us cope with the harshness of reality by driving back the waters of chaos. Nevertheless, as a historian, he is always aware of the fictiveness of our fiction. […] [Similarly,] History can [provide] […] islands of order."[201]

In view of that, the indistinguishable nature between history and fiction is once more illustrated. Furthermore, the novel reflects upon other alternatives how characters living in the Fens try to strive against the nihilism they experience. To begin with, there are those characters who overcome their lack of meaning and feeling of disorientation by escaping into drunkenness: "you can drink and be merry and forget what your sober mind tells you."[202] For example, "[after] his son's death, Jack Parr takes to drink. But his reasons are not only connected with Freddie's drowning. The drinking also helps to dull his sense of the emptiness of the Fens."[203]

> As Freddie Parr's father drinks, so the Atkinsons purvey beer "trying to assuage emptiness" (177). […] "All right, so it's all a struggle to preserve an artifice. It's all a struggle to make things not seem meaningless. It's all a fight against fear," Crick declares (241). Human activity becomes a long attempt to stave off a sense of meaninglessness, absurdity, and nothingness.[204]

That is to say, "Crick's ancestors on his mother's side provided the Atkinson Ale to help […] Fenlanders [like Freddie Parr] forget the watery woes of reality."[205]

> And – I put it to you, children – were Ernest and all the beer-producing Atkinsons doing anything more, if on a grander scale, than what Freddie Parr's father did when he took to drink? Trying to assuage emptiness. Lifting sunken spirits. Kindling fire and ferment out of watery nothing…[206]

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[199] Cf. Mecklenburg, 145.
[200] Swift, 41.
[201] McKinney, 825.
[202] Swift, 61.
[203] Malcolm 2003, 98.
[204] Malcolm 2003, 99.
[205] McKinney, 825.
[206] Swift, 177.

"[Tom] himself, however much he imbibes liquor to forget his marriage problems, rejects this option as unsuitable for human beings."[207] He knows that alcohol does not only function as release but can lead to devastating consequences. For instance, in a moment of jealous madness and totally drunk Thomas Atkinson strikes his wife Sarah who consequently turns insane. Another example illustrating the demoralizing outcome of drunkenness is again Jack Parr, "who on one occasion in his job as a signalman narrowly avoids causing a train crash due to his excessive drinking."[208] Except for drunkenness, the novel suggests madness as a way of repressing the horrors of the past and coping with the unbearable pointless present. Sarah Atkinson and Mary Crick both turn insane as a way of outwitting reality. At one point in the text, when Tom wonders about visiting his wife at the asylum he suggests that "perhaps amnesia's best."[209] While Mary is insane precisely because she cannot make up a story about what has happened, the ward sister at the asylum is perfectly able to do so. She aims to buoy Tom up by inventing the improbable but "cheery prognosis" that "[his] wife will be out soon."[210] Tom is aware that the ward sister's statement is an evasion of the unbearable truth rather than admitting the truth. Accordingly, Tom puts forward that suppressing the past as done by Mary is probably the best way of coping with it.[211] In a comparable way, Tom envies his mentally retarded brother Dick because of his lack of any sense of history. Dick does not think about the past or the present, "for him present eclipses past […]. [He] possesses those amnesiac, those time-erasing qualities so craved by all guilty parties […]. No Before; no After. Just another day."[212] Similarly, immediately before Dick's suicide Tom says: "He's here. … And the smell of silt is the smell of sanctuary, is the smell of amnesia. He's here, he's now. Not there or then. No past, no future. … And he's the saviour of the world."[213] This passage points already towards the last alternative suggested by the novel, which is suicide. For both Dick and his (grand)father Ernest Atkinson suicide seems to be the only solution to evade what they cannot bear. As Tom says, "[m]elancholia and self-murder are not unknown in the Fens. Heavy drinking, madness and sudden acts of violence are not uncommon."[214] Yet, for Tom storytelling is certainly the better option in his search for “something”. Even if myths do not present reality as it is they successfully produce meaning.

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[207] McKinney, 825.
[208] Bentley 2008, 137.
[209] Swift, 330.
[210] Swift, 328.
[211] Cf. Malcolm 2003, 96-7.
[212] Swift, 134.
[213] Swift, 355.
[214] Swift, 17.

To sum up, the image of the healing power of narratives is confirmed throughout the whole novel. The narrator of *Waterland* turns to storytelling because narratives are comforting and create meaning. However, stories obscure the truth and, as such, conceal and falsify. Still, Tom feels trapped in the consequences of past events.

> Nothing is just an accident. […] All the “Now’s” […] have grown out of past actions and events. The past is forever returning – seizing, and affecting the present. […] The text constantly reminds the reader […] that the past – history – is inescapable and deeply operative in the present.[215]

That is to say, since Tom aims to make sense of the unpleasant Here and Now he attempts to unravel the truth about the past because he dearly believes in the principle of causality. By illustrating Dick as the result of an incestuous love, Mary’s sterility as the result of a botched abortion, *Waterland* emphasises the inescapability of the past. At one point in the novel, Tom explicitly describes himself as “a prisoner […] of irreversibly historical events.”[216] Thus, Tom thinks integrating the past into a narrative, i.e. his attempt to comprehend his life by rewriting the past, will provide him with the explanation and comfort he is searching for. Yet, Tom deliberately manipulates the past by inventing myths as to present the past in such a way as to suit him to get rid of his bad conscience. That is to say, his wish to know more about the past is accompanied by the fear of what he will find out and how this knowledge influences his present life. Still, narrating has a healing effect on Tom. Narratives are therefore presented as healing and both a way to access and at the same time avoid facts. Hence, it is suggested that history cannot present an accurate picture of the past but it is only a yarn. In view of that it can be argued that *Waterland* aims at breaking up the binary oppositions of myth and history, that is fact and fiction.

### 3.1.2. The Notion of Progress and the Circularity of History

The notion of progress and the cyclical pattern of history are two recurrent motifs in Graham Swift’s *Waterland*. They are exemplified in the novel by Tom’s comparison of his paternal and maternal ancestors, the Cricks and the Atkinsons. The family of Tom’s mother, the ambitious and forward-looking Atkinsons, were no original Fenlanders but migrated to the Fens where they set up their own brewery business. In order to move their products from Norfolk to the growing market of the Fens they used the River Leem as a major means of transportation. Thus, they imposed a system of reclamation on the country through building pumps, dikes, sluices, etc. Within a few years they expanded their trade and became wealthy from their famous Atkinson Ale. For example, "[a] special brew called Atkinson India Ale, was shipped regularly to Bombay, India."[217] Since the Atkinsons rely on science and technology in order to control nature and outwit reality they embody capitalist expansion and the idea of Enlightenment's belief in progress.[218] The rise of their dynasty is compared to the rise of Britain as an industrial power.

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[215] Malcolm 2003, 87-8.
[216] Swift, 319-20.

> Have they not brought great improvement to a whole region, and do they not continue to bring it? Do they not travail long and indefatigably in the council chamber as well as in the boardroom, for the welfare of the populace? Have they not established, out of their own munificence, an orphanage, a town newspaper, a public meeting-hall, a boys' school, [...] a bath house — a fire station? And are not all these works, and others, proof of that great Idea [of progress] that sways them; proof that all private interest is subsumed by the National Interest and all private empires do but pay tribute to the Empire of Great Britain?[219]

Tom draws parallels between the rise of the Atkinson dynasty and the growth of the British Empire. Thereby the interweaving of individual's lives alongside official history is suggested. This is, for example, "indicated by the occasions for which the Atkinsons brew "special" versions of their heralded beer, 'The Grand '51'; 'The Empress of India'; 'The Golden Jubilee'; 'The Diamond Jubilee' (93), all celebrations of British imperial success."[220]

In contrast to the Atkinsons, Tom identifies his father's ancestors, the Cricks, as the natural Fen inhabitants, i.e. the original "water people".[221] At first they sabotaged any attempts at draining their homeland. In the long run, however, they fail to secure a permanent victory and thus eventually "joined in the efforts at reclaiming the land by becoming builders and repairers of sluices, dikes, and canals as well as keepers of locks and windmills."[222] That is to say, they make their living in the employ of the Atkinsons who profit at the expense of their workers. While the Atkinsons make things happen and consequently write history, the Cricks have a phlegmatic attitude to the world. They "participate in the day-to-day activity of drainage and "human siltation" which is characterised almost completely by a lack of progress."[223]

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[217] Thompson, 274.
[218] Cf. McKinney, 827.
[219] Swift, 92-3.
[220] Berlatsky, 264.
[221] Cf. Swift, 64.
[222] McKinney, 822.

> There's this thing called progress. But it doesn't progress, it doesn't go anywhere. […] My humble model for progress is the reclamation of land. Which is repeatedly, never-endingly retrieving what is lost. A dogged, vigilant business. A dull yet valuable business. A hard, inglorious business. But you shouldn't go mistaking the reclamation of land for the building of empires.[224]

The fact that the entrepreneurial Atkinsons are associated with the process of history-making owing to their progressive world-view can be related to the postmodern premise of the non-neutrality of history suggesting that "the histories that count as History come from the perspective of the victor and that those who are excluded are those who are oppressed."[225] At various points in the novel, Tom makes his students aware of how discriminating and ideological history is. For example, in the context of the French Revolution Tom introduces the statement "Vox populi, vox Dei" ("the voice of the people is the voice of God").[226] Thereby he intends to show that history is selective and nothing more than the construct of the ruling class. The powerful make use of religion as a means to represent their own interests and consequently succeed in continuing to oppress the masses while they remain authoritative. It shows "how the metanarrative of History [or religion] provides confidence and reassurance through the great Idea of Progress […] to those who profit by it."[227]

> How many of the events of history have occurred, ask yourselves, for this and for that reason, but for no other reason fundamentally, than the desire to make things happen? I present to you History, the fabrication, the diversion, the reality-obscuring drama. […] [F]or each protagonist who once stepped onto the stage of so-called historical events, there were thousands, millions, who never entered the theatre - who never knew that the show was running - who got on with the donkey-work of coping with reality.[228]

This statement indicates that history is selective and calls into question the possibility of unravelling the "real" truth about the past. In order to convey a unifying meaning history must take on the form of a single coherent story and therefore exclude certain

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[223] Berlatsky, 272.
[224] Swift, 336.
[225] Berlatsky, 265.
[226] Swift, 139.
[227] Berlatsky, 264.
[228] Swift, 40.

"other histories"; i.e. historical narratives select certain events to be included while omitting many others. However, they always give the "impression of a unified whole with no exclusions or erasures, in which the past makes sense and all events are connected."[229] Traditional history can therefore be regarded as both a representation of the past as a "Golden Age" as well as a reduction of it to a series of events and dates which is ignoring and excluding the real suffering of the masses.[230] The narrator even goes as far as to pretend that "[w]e don't know the half, so a good half must be make-believe", which leads to Price's ironical and exaggerated conclusion that "[t]he French Revolution never really happened. It only happened in the imagination."[231] That is to say, history "functions as a structuring and ordering principle which excludes all events or information that do not fit into its "coherent story"."[232] Thus, *Waterland* challenges the traditional understanding of history and shows how history is ideological and always related to power relations between people. It stresses the fact that "past events are different according to the position from where they are viewed."[233] By presenting a broad range of diverse, sometimes even contradicting, narratives including, for instance, the working class (e.g. represented by the Cricks), women, the mad, etc. instead of a single unified account *Waterland* unambiguously passes criticism on history's totalising, limited and therefore inaccurate representation of the past. This questioning of the reliability of history as recorded by grand narratives again highlights the idea of the blurring boundaries between fact and fiction and consequently puts forward the end of history.[234]

The suggestion that history does not provide us with facts but is artificially constructed is once more addressed in the passage where Tom muses about the precise date of the zenith of progress of the Atkinson family.

> When can we fix the zenith of the Atkinsons? When can we date the high summer of their success? Was it on that June day in 1849? Or was it later, in 1851, when among the products privileged to be represented at the Great Exhibition was a bottled ale from the Fens, known appropriately as 'Grand '51', which [...] won a silver medal for excellence [...]? Was it before that, in 1846, when [...] George Atkinson was unanimously elected mayor? Or was it in 1848

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[229] Berlatsky, 257.
[230] Cf. Swift, 142.
[231] Swift, 140.
[232] Berlatsky, 256.
[233] Bentley 2008, 129.
[234] Cf. Wagner, 140.

> [...] when his brother Alfred succeeded to the same office [...]? Was it in 1862?[235]

Tom continues to suggest several other reasonable dates, e.g. 1872 because it is the year the Atkinson Ale is sent to imperial India. Another possible date would be 1874 which marks the year Arthur is elected Member of Parliament for Gildsey, Kessling Hall is turned into an asylum for mentally-wounded soldiers, Sarah Atkinson dies, the great flood takes place and Ernest Atkinson is born.[236] That is to say, Tom is aware that the family history of the Atkinsons has been constructed to fit the climax and narrative of progress of the British Empire. This again stresses the parallels between construction, fabulation, falsification and history.

However, just as the rise of the Atkinsons coincides exactly with the period of growth of the British Empire, so does the fall of Britain as an industrial power have its corresponding equivalent in the decline of the Atkinson dynasty. The Atkinson's empire finally falls in 1911 with the fire at the brewery which parallels roughly the beginning of the First World War – a conflict that also marks the beginning of the end of Britain's position as the world's leading imperial power. This is linked to Tom's extreme scepticism about the whole idea of progress. By interpreting history in the light of the ancient Greek notion of hubris Tom offers a redefinition of the concept of progress. The theory of hubris basically puts forward "that there can be no success with impunity, no great achievement without accompanying loss […]. [It] teaches us that nothing is given without something being taken away."[237] That is to say, Tom believes in the principle that every progress is followed by a subsequent regression or fall. His theory is therefore based on a cyclical understanding of time and history; i.e. history does not progress but actually goes in circles.

> It goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours. Do not fall into the illusion that history is a well-disciplined and unflagging column marching unswervingly into the future. […] One step forward, one step back. […] We believe we are going forward, towards the oasis of Utopia. But how do we know – only some imaginary figure looking down from the sky (let's call him God) can know – that we are not moving in a great circle?[238]

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[235] Swift, 91.
[236] Cf. Swift, 91-101.
[237] Swift, 72.
[238] Swift, 135.

Tom imposes his theory of hubris on various examples, e.g. the rise and subsequent fall of both the British Empire and the Atkinsons. Sarah Atkinson being hit by her husband is the decisive moment initiating the Atkinsons' decrease in wealth. Ernest Atkinson, who is Sarah's great grandson and Tom's grandfather, is subsequently faced with the total ruin of the family fortunes.

> For Ernest Richard, my grandfather, was the first of the brewing Atkinsons to assume his legacy without the assurance of its inevitable expansion, without the incentive of Progress, without the knowledge that in his latter days he would be a richer and more influential man than in his youth.[239]

In contrast to his father Arthur, who was a conservative Member of Parliament, Ernest attacks conservatism. He does not believe in capitalistic values because for him "the Boer War was the inevitable outcome of British imperialism" and instead stands for Parliament as a Liberal candidate.[240] In 1909 Ernest warns about the imminent war, however, his pacifist ideas are ridiculed and rejected by Gildsey's inhabitants.[241] As a result, Tom assumes, Ernest produces the strong and disastrous Coronation Ale, which he distributes for free on the occasion of George V's ascendancy to the throne in 1911, in order to intoxicate the whole population and thereby seek revenge, "bringing to an end, according to Tom's causal interpretation, the Edwardian Age."[242] It is also on the Coronation Day that a fire of undetermined origin burns down the brewery, symbolising the ultimate ruin of the Atkinson's empire. Ernest does not rebuild the brewery but instead uses the insurance money to open an asylum for traumatised soldiers at Kessling Hall. Being confronted with the mentally wounded victims of the war he starts suffering from paranoid anxieties for the future. He is convinced that the only solution to overcome the apocalyptic prospects is to beget a child with his daughter Helen who will be the saviour of the world. Following the logic of the theory of hubris Tom attempts to show that the decline of the Atkinson family terminates in Dick's suicide. He argues, "when fathers love daughters and daughters love fathers it's like trying up into a knot the thread that runs into the future, it's like a stream wanting to flow backwards."[243] In other words, Tom interprets Dick as "a return of repressed guilt that seems to hang over the Atkinsons, generated by Thomas's acts of violence against his wife."[244] Moreover,

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[239] Swift, 157.
[240] Thompson, 282.
[241] Cf. Swift, 159-62.
[242] Thompson, 283.
[243] Swift, 228.
[244] Bentley 2008, 136.

Tom uses the example of the French Revolution and, in particular, the implications of the word “revolution” to provide evidence for his postulations about the theory of hubris.

> Do you remember when we did the French Revolution? […] How I explained to you the implications of that word “revolution”? A turning round, a completing of a cycle. How I told you that though the popular notion of revolution is that of categorical change, transformation – a leap into the future – yet almost every revolution contains within it an opposite if less obvious tendency: the idea of a return. A redemption; a restoration. A reaffirmation of what is pure and fundamental against what is decadent and false. A return to a new beginning… […] How it repeats itself, how it goes back on itself, no matter how we try to straighten it out. How it twists, turns. How it goes in circles and brings us back to the same place.[245]

“The problem with cyclical history, from this perspective, is that it is “meaningless”, in the sense that it does not move toward a conclusion, that is, fulfil a purpose. In this way, cyclical history can be seen as undermining the […] presumption of mankind’s advance toward perfection.”[246] The idea that forward movements have always brought regression becomes more apparent in the following examples listed by Tom.

> It cannot be denied, children, that the great so-called forward movements of civilization, whether moral or technological, have invariably brought with them an accompanying regression. That the dissemination of Christian tenets over a supposedly barbarous world has been throughout the history of Europe – to say nothing of missionary zeal elsewhere – one of the prime causes of wars, butcheries, inquisitions and other forms of barbarity. That the discovery of the printing press led, likewise, as well as to the spreading of knowledge, to propaganda, mendacity, contention and strife. That the invention of the steam-engine led to the miseries of industrial exploitation and to ten-year-olds working sixteen hours a day in coal mines. That the invention of the aeroplane led to the widespread destruction of European cities […] [We] move in circles. [Man] […] finds himself involved in bigger and bigger catastrophes.[247]

Tom suggests that the whole idea of progress is an illusion. Instead of advancing humankind towards absolute humanity and happiness, progress has led to a new kind of barbarity. The development of new technology, e.g. nuclear weapons, can even cause the annihilation of mankind and thus the end of the world. Although Tom refuses to retreat in any pessimism – i.e. he still believes in the potential of civilisation - the novel still creates a gloomy feeling. This, however, will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter. With regard to history, Tom concludes that human beings’ belief in progress is nothing more than a narrative invented to overcome the feeling of nothingness. By providing enough evidence for his theory Tom ultimately seeks to verify that the loss of the Atkinsons was pre-programmed and could not be prevented by any means. “The French Revolution leads to Napoleon and hundreds of thousands of deaths, and [similarly] the rise of the Atkinsons brings loss and eventually ends in failure.”[248] That is to say, Tom aims to “show Dick to be the just result of several generations of exploitation […] and thereby, he hopes, to mitigate his own culpability in his brother’s death.”[249]

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[245] Swift, 137-42.
[246] Thompson, 273.
[247] Swift, 135-7.

The circular quality of history is reinforced everywhere in the novel. For instance, “[i]n July 1940,” Tom observes, “Hitler contemplates - as in 1805 Napoleon contemplated - the invasion of England. Only to put it off and go marching off to Russia. Just as Napoleon once did. Now who says history doesn’t go in circles?”[250]

> Dick, whose grandfather/father was born of water (the flood of 1874), returns to water; Henry Crick, who gains a will to live being nursed by a brunette, loses that will to live while nursing the brunette, and then dies while being nursed by a brunette. There are also parallels (concentric circles) between Mary Metcalf and […] Sarah Atkinson, both of whom lose their minds and are put away; between Mary Metcalf and St. Gunnhilda, both of whom hear the voice of God; between Napoleon’s conquest of Europe and Thomas Atkinson’s conquest of the fens; and then, as if sides of the Channel did not matter, between the further conquests of George, Alfred, and Arthur Atkinson and British Imperialism during the reign of Victoria. These parallels point to the interrelated circularity of all events.[251]

Furthermore, Tom uses the metaphor of the Fens and the process of land reclamation to demonstrate his theory that history is both simultaneously progressive and regressive. “The Fens are a low-lying region of Eastern England which was originally under water. This land first began to be reclaimed naturally.” By draining and dredging the land through building canals, sluices and dikes men continued what nature had begun. However, it is a never-ending process requiring much vigilance. “For when water is squeezed out of the land, the land shrinks and, accordingly, sinks.”[252] That is to say, “however much you resist them, the waters will return; that the land sinks; silt collects; that something in nature wants to go back.”[253] Since it is impossible to reclaim the land permanently any belief in progress is illusory. History always follows the same pattern, i.e. rise is always superseded by fall in order to progress once more and then decline again. The Cricks, who possess “phlegm”, know ”what water makes, it also unmakes.

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[248] Malcolm 2003, 105.
[249] Thompson, 270.
[250] Swift, 180.
[251] Irish, 928.
[252] McKinney, 823.
[253] Swift, 17.

Nothing moves far in this world. And whatever moves forward will also move back. A law of the natural world."[254]

Accordingly, in detailing various examples illustrating the negative impact and illusory quality of progress the reader is encouraged to think that Tom rejects the traditional understanding of history, which is implying constant progress and forward movement and instead suggests that history is mere myth-making. In this sense, history is presented as being nothing more than myth and therefore rejected.[255] Yet, Tom is aware of the value and necessity of history and therefore rejects a reduction of history to mere storytelling.

> There are times when we have to disentangle history from fairy tale. There are times […] when good dry textbook history takes a plunge in the old swamps of myth and has to be retrieved with empirical fishing lines. History, being an accredited subscience, only wants to know the facts. History, if it is to keep on constructing its road into the future, must do so on solid ground. At all costs let us avoid mystery-making and speculation, secrets and idle gossip. And, for God's sake, nothing supernatural. And above all, let us not tell stories. Otherwise, how will the future be possible and how will anything get done? So let us get back […] to solid ground…[256]

That is to say, "[Tom] does, at times, reject history as mere myth-making [and] […] insists on separating the two terms."[257] "He calls himself back from such imaginative speculation by reminding himself that he is seeking "facts, facts" (88)."[258] In fact, *Waterland* contrasts and simultaneously equates history with narratives. On the one hand, the novel rejects the totalising and unifying characteristic of grand narratives and suggests that history can never provide an account of what "really happened"; i.e. it is impossible to separate history and ideology. On the other hand, however, Tom himself still longs for "a unifying and totalizing History, which explains the trauma of his own past and that of his nation."[259] Apart from that, the text suggests that progress is inevitably destructive. "Why is it that every so often history demands a bloodbath, a holocaust, an Armageddon? And why is it that every time the time before has taught us nothing?"[260] That is to say, it puts forward that we did not learn from the mistakes of the past which can be related to the postmodern assumption that the project of

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[254] Swift, 73.
[255] Cf. Berlatsky, 263.
[256] Swift, 86.
[257] Berlatsky, 270.
[258] Thompson, 278.
[259] Berlatsky, 263.
[260] Swift, 141.

Enlightenment did not succeed in making human beings more human. Therefore, it can be argued that *Waterland* expresses a bleak outlook towards the future, which will be discussed in more detail as follows.

### 3.1.3. Fear is Here

As was noted before, “so-called forward movements of civilization, whether moral or technological, have invariably brought with them an accompanying regression.”[261] In the novel this feeling of decay becomes most apparent in the students’ apocalyptic fear of the future. In general, *Waterland* expresses the unease and anxiety of the upcoming end of the world felt during the 1980s. The 1980s was a decade marked by the threat of a nuclear fuelled Third World War which would bring the end of the world. The rebellious student Price “raises [exactly] this issue and registers his concerns about an impending nuclear holocaust.”[262] He is convinced that the world is about to end soon. Like Price, his classmates are haunted by similar paranoid apocalyptic worries. All of them suffer regularly from nightmares suggesting the upcoming Armageddon. The threat of nuclear destruction leads to the students’ establishment of the “Anti-Holocaust Club” whose motto is “Fear is Here.”[263] In this regard the novel can be read as a rejection of society and the contemporary condition of the world and thus expresses a very pessimistic and nihilistic philosophy. After all, if the whole idea of progress is nothing more than an illusion, if all children are destined to “make the same mistakes as their parents”[264] anyway, “then why not give in to the amnesia promised either by alcohol or suicide?”[265] The latter represents Ernest Atkinson’s way of circumventing the dilemma of the world descending further into the abyss of war. Apart from committing suicide, the idea that the end of the world is near becomes apparent in Ernest’s “deluded belief that he should father a new Messiah and that the mother of this Messiah is to be his daughter;”[266] i.e. Dick’s characterisation as the “Saviour of the World”, who will rescue humanity which is en route to decline.[267] Correspondingly, Mary, who cannot have any offspring, believes devoutly that the baby from the supermarket is a messiah who was sent to her by God to bring an end to her personal suffering. In general, children, “who will inherit the world”, symbolise the hope for the future in the novel.[268] In view of that, Mary’s abortion further emphasises an unwelcoming image of the future and creates a feeling of pessimism as it symbolises both the destructive nature of society and the end of the world because it is the death of “what the future’s made of.”[269] Both Tom and Mary attempt to get over their trauma through obtaining child substitutes, e.g. in the form of their dog Paddy. However, while Tom finds a “real” substitute son in Price, all of Mary’s attempts to cope with her distress do not prove to be successful. The only solution she can think of to overcome this threatening lack of a future is by kidnapping a child. Due to this lack of future a strong sense of pessimism and melancholy pervades the novel.

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[261] Swift, 135.
[262] Bentley 2008, 133.
[263] Cf. Swift, 333.
[264] Swift, 240.
[265] McKinney, 829.
[266] Bentley 2008, 136.
[267] Swift, 229.

Since civilisation appears to be on the point of destruction; i.e. the world is going to end soon, Price questions the relevance and validity of history. He is only interested in the future (“But - I want a future.”[270]) and thus he can absolutely see no point in studying the past. “The only important thing about history, I think, sir, is that it’s got to the point where it’s probably about to end.”[271] In this context, Tom explains that the pupils’ worries about nuclear war are nothing new but “the old, old feeling, that everything might amount to nothing.”[272]

> Once upon a time people believed in the end of the world. Look in the old books: see how many times and on how many pretexts the end of the world has been prophesied and foreseen, calculated and imagined. But that, of course, was superstition. The world grew up. It didn’t end. People threw off superstition as they threw off their parents. They said, Don’t believe that old mumbo-jumbo. You can change the world, you can make it better. The heavens won’t fall. It was true. For a little while – it didn’t start so long ago, only a few generations ago – the world went through its revolutionary, progressive phase; and the world believed it would never end, it would go on getting better. But then the end of the world came back again; not as an idea or a belief but as something that the world had fashioned for itself all the time it was growing up.[273]

Accordingly, for Tom the end of the world “is as much a fiction we have manufactured as the notion of progress. Both are destructive because they refuse to be examined critically. If, in the end, stories will be our only reality, then Crick imagines us sitting in our bomb shelters telling stories […] and thus perpetually putting off the end to yet another day."[274]

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[268] Swift, 7.
[269] Swift, 308.
[270] Swift, 131
[271] Swift, 7.
[272] Swift, 269.
[273] Swift, 336.

> But when the world is about to end there'll be no more reality, only stories. All that will be left to us will be stories. We'll sit down, in our shelter, and tell stories […] hoping it will never…[275]

Although every progress calls for a subsequent regression for Tom it still makes sense to struggle so that we can at least prevent the world from getting worse.[276] In addition, Tom states that despite its artificial quality he still believes in the possibility of civilisation. He "explains […] that he became a teacher of history because of his discovery, in the rubble of postwar Germany, that civilization is precious."[277]

> Children, there's this thing called civilization. It's built of hopes and dreams. It's only an idea. It's not real. It's artificial. No one ever said it was real. It's not natural. No one ever said it was natural. It's built by the learning process; by trial and error. It breaks easily. No one said it couldn't fall to bits. And no one ever said it would last ever.[278]

Therefore, he concludes, "I do believe in education". Apart from that, despite of the fact that it can lead to the discovery of unpleasant truths curiosity is according to Tom still a vital force. "Children, don't stop asking why. […] Though it gets more difficult the more you ask it, though it gets more inexplicable, more painful, and the answer never seems to come any nearer, don't try to escape this question Why."[279] Tom asks his students to be curious because taking Mary as an example he knows what happens to people who lose their curiosity.

> Curiosity will never be content. Even today, when we know so much, curiosity has not unravelled the riddle of the birth and sex life of the eel. Perhaps these are things, like many others, destined never to be learnt before the world comes to its end. Or perhaps - […] the world is so arranged that when all things are learnt, when curiosity is exhausted (so, long live curiosity), that is when the world shall have come to its end. […] Children, be curious. Nothing is worse (I know it) than when curiosity stops. Nothing is more repressive than the repression of curiosity. Curiosity begets love. It weds us to the world. It's part of our perverse, madcap love for this impossible planet we inhabit. People die when curiosity goes. People have to find out, people have to know.[280]

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[274] McKinney, 830.
[275] Swift, 298.
[276] Cf. Swift, 240.
[277] Del Ivan, 86.
[278] Swift, 336.
[279] Swift, 130.
[280] Swift, 203-6.

"Crick's love for "civilization", then, must not be interpreted to be a hymn to the status quo. On the contrary, his commitment to the dictates of curiosity means that all institutions which repress such questioning zeal must be challenged."[281]

The idea of history ending is further signalled by the closure of the history department at Tom's school and him being forced into early retirement. In this way, Graham Swift engages with the political debate over the academic study of history during the 1980s. "Thatcherite policies […] questioned the relevance of humanities subjects in state school" and consequently aimed at the restructuring of the British education system.[282] Similar to Price questioning the necessity of studying history, the headmaster Lewis regards history as nothing more than the "rag-bag of pointless information." He plans to remove it from the curriculum since it does not prepare pupils for the "real world" and consequently announces "We're cutting back History."[283] As a response to Price's and Lewis's disapproval of history and the fact that he is losing his job Tom begins to reflect upon the nature and worth of the study of history. He "continually returns to the topic of what the study of history is, what the motives behind it are, and what its uses are."[284] Reflecting upon their criticism Tom agrees, "Yes, you may be right, we don't learn from the past. What's more, what we pick up from dwelling on it, is a defeatist, jaundiced outlook. [...] History breeds pessimism."[285] Moreover, he admits that "history is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge."[286]

Nevertheless, Tom still regards history as something relevant and acknowledges the importance of stories to eliminate fear and fight against a feeling of nihilism.

> All right, so it's all a struggle to preserve an artifice. It's all a struggle to make things not seem meaningless. All a fight against fear. You're scared. No need to start a club about it. Saw it in your face. And what do you think I am right now? What do you think all […] these stories are for which I've been telling as a finale to my teaching career […] [?] It helps to drive out fear. I don't care what you

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[281] McKinney, 830.
[282] Bentley 2008, 133.
[283] Swift, 21-3.
[284] Malcolm 2003, 85.
[285] Swift, 154.
[286] Swift, 108.

> call it – explaining, evading the facts, making up meanings, […], dodging the here and now, education, history, fairy-tales – it helps to eliminate fear.[287]

In the course of the whole novel Tom aims to persuade his class that despite all its flaws the study of history is still crucial, "not only in understanding the past, but also how historical narratives (personal and social) have determined our identities in the present."[288] Moreover, like stories told to little children history is vital for the reason that it assists to "quell restless thoughts" and coping with personal crises, e.g. unexpected sudden attacks by the Here and Now.[289] "So there's no escaping it: even if we miss the grand repertoire of history, we yet imitate it in miniature and endorse, in miniature, its longing for presence, for feature, for purpose, for content."[290] In other words, history can help to create islands in the middle of floods. Yet, Tom accentuates the need for stories, including history, to acknowledge their own fictiveness. Due to its concern with storytelling and history *Waterland* itself continually addresses its status as a fiction and therefore is an archetypal example of historiographic metafiction. In general, *Waterland* consists of numerous elements raising the issue of the interface between fiction and reality and thereby illustrating the metafictional nature of the text. One of the most marked features of *Waterland* is its employment of pastiche in the form of genre mixture. The novel combines elements of a traditional detective, murder, love and mystery story. Apart from that, it can be characterised as a psychological and philosophical novel containing references to fairytales, historical studies, geographical descriptions, scientific investigations and newspaper articles, amongst others. In addition, *Waterland* contains elements which ironically imitate nineteenth-century novelistic conventions. Several passages, e.g. "ours was the marsh country" in the preface, allude to Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*.[291] This mixing of various genres to create an exclusive piece of work illustrates the problems associated with capturing reality since it "suggests both the elusiveness of reality and necessity of employing a variety of different kinds of texts to capture it."[292] Aside from genre mixture, *Waterland* rejects totality and instead favours fragmentation. This becomes obvious, for instance, in the way the text is written in terms of style and grammar; i.e. achronological sequence and distortion in time in the form of frequent tense shifts are central features in Swift's novel.[293] Taking this into consideration, it can actually be said that Tom's narrative equals his definition of history: "It goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours."[294] In addition, Tom is not able to look at the past objectively and his trustworthiness therefore must be called into question. Various times in the novel he seems unsure of what is reality and what fiction. He identifies himself as somebody "who is no longer sure what's real and what isn't."[295] "His history lessons continually drift into legend […] and myth. The wife he thought he knew turns out to be someone quite different."[296] "Now tread carefully, history teacher. Maybe this isn't your province. Maybe this is where history dissolves, chronology goes backwards. That's your wife over there; you know, Mary, the one you thought you knew. But maybe this is unknown country."[297] Tom's reliability as a narrator must therefore be called into doubt.

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[287] Swift, 241.
[288] Bentley 2008, 133.
[289] Swift, 7.
[290] Swift, 41.
[291] Cf. Cooper, 375.
[292] Malcolm 2003, 94.

As was mentioned, Tom stresses that stories need to be reflected from time to time so that they do not become absolutist dogmatic pretensions. At the outset Tom himself wanted to give the complete and final version of the past; however, he realised that there are always different versions.[298] One of the most prominent examples illustrating this aspect is the fact that Tom can never be sure whether he was the true father of Mary's baby or not.

> Or that's Mary's story. Because first of all Mary's version went like this: We never actually- I just wanted to […] Or that's Mary's story. Because how did I know, how could I be a hundred per cent sure that when Mary said Dick's was too big, it really was too big? And that Mary hadn't proved to herself that it wasn't Too Big, in fact was just right, at the beginning of our little educational experiment? And suppose it – the baby, that is […] was mine, what was Mary going to say to Dick? […] And what would Dick do? And given that all along there's this margin of doubt, given that all along it might be – it just might be – really Dick's then, for God's sake, what should I do? But Mary swears […] that it isn't Dick's. […][299]

Tom "believes, according to Mary, that Dick, who thought the baby was his, killed Freddie because Mary, covering for Tom, told Dick that Freddie was the father."[300]

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[293] Cf. Irish, 923.
[294] Swift, 135.
[295] Swift, 41.
[296] Malcolm 2003, 94.
[297] Swift, 265.
[298] Cf. Swift, 8.
[299] Swift, 261-2.
[300] Thompson, 292.

However, at the same time Tom knows that he can never be really sure who the real father was. Likewise, he decides to believe that Dick must be result of an incestuous relationship between Ernest and Helen because it fits perfectly to his theory of hubris and the law of causality, although, theoretically speaking, Henry could also be the true father.

> Helen’s [father desires] to have a child who would redeem the madness of the world. […] Coincidentally, Helen falls in love with […] Henry and offers to have her father’s child if he will permit her to marry Henry. […] [Her] hope was either that she would get a child by Henry whom Ernest would consider his or, should Ernest be the father, she would encourage Henry to believe the child was his. A third possibility, which she apparently never considered, since she believed in her mother’s instinct to know the father, was that she would be unable to detect whether Ernest or Henry was the father. Indeed, […] no one […] knows the identity of Dick’s father.[301]

That is to say, although some passages such as Dick being a “potato-head”[302] point towards the incest, there is no ultimate proof whether this is really true. Tom simply chooses to believe that Dick is his grandfather’s son because he “is thereby able to argue that Dick’s death, for which he is indirectly responsible, was excusable, if not inevitable, and so exonerate himself from culpability.”[303]

> But […] it is just as likely that Henry is Dick’s father, as Helen had hoped originally. […] The text supplies several points in support of this reading, such as Dick’s mechanical dexterity and almost mystical communication with such mechanical devices as motorcycles and dredges, characteristics associated, as Tom points out, with the Crick family.[304]

Maybe Dick is only mentally retarded due to the fact that his parents always prevented him from being educated since for them it seemed reasonable to believe that Dick was the effect of Helen’s and Ernest’s incestuous relationship.[305] Likewise, Tom chooses to believe that Dick is the result of incest although he lacks any evidence. That is to say, “Tom forges a link between the mad Sarah and her equally mad great-grandson Ernest in order to demonstrate that Dick is the “logical” and just effect of the cause (the Atkinson family)”.[306] He regards something as the truth, which actually can never be proved, simply because he wishes it to be true and since it helps him to make sense of his past and fits perfectly into his theory of hubris.

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[301] Thompson, 287.
[302] Swift, 32.
[303] Thompson, 282.
[304] Thompson, 288.
[305] Cf. Thompson, 289.
[306] Thompson, 281.

In general, Swift's novel plays with the notion of truth. Tom is aware of the fact that he cannot be a hundred percent sure of the sources he is relying on, e.g. including local archives, rumours, "popular opinion", local newspaper, legends, Ernest's notebooks and the use of his imagination to fill gaps. When his class is sceptical about Helen's magically curing of the soldiers, Tom's initial response is: "You don't believe it? It's in that journal."[307] However, later he admits that "precise accounts of [past] events […] are hard to track down."[308]

> [Accordingly,] Tom learns that Ernest's journal, as with all historical records, cannot represent "truth", but can only reveal what Ernest was thinking, or what he wanted the journal's readers to believe he thought. Documentary history […] has not authoritative claim on "truth".[309]

However, although he is aware that "[r]umour is but rumour" and therefore not reliable he simultaneously states: "But several rumours, of similar vein, from different stories, cannot be ignored."[310] In the same way, Tom makes use of repetition in order to make things sound more realistic. For example, he says, "Added to my grandfather's (conjectural) inward sorrowfulness was. [...] Added to my grandfather's inward sorrowfulness was. [...] Added to my grandfather's (surely no longer conjectural) inward sorrowfulness […]"[311] Hereby it is suggested the more often certain things are repeated the "more true" they appear. That is to say, in the case of history, which is ideological, the more something is claimed the more natural and logical it appears in the end; i.e. people start taking authoritative statements for granted and no longer reflect upon them.[312]

Apart from that, *Waterland* is a typical example of a magic realist text; i.e. magical elements appear in an otherwise normal or rather realistic setting. The word "fairy-tale" is mentioned throughout the novel in a variety of contexts. For instance, the outset of the novel is already evocative of the beginning of a fairytale: "But we lived in a fairy-tale place. In a lockkeeper's cottage, by a river, in the middle of the Fens. Far away from the wide world."[313] Similarly, a few pages later Tom says, "And since a fairy-tale must have a setting, a setting which, like the setting of all good fairy-tales, must be both palpable and unreal, let me tell you … About the Fens."[314] Apart from that, the novel contains several mystical figures, e.g. the witch Martha Clay and her husband Bill, who both embody typical fairytale figures.[315] Furthermore, there is the mystifying legend of Sarah Atkinson. "After he strikes his wife and causes her to lose her wits, Thomas Atkinson behaves like a fairytale king."[316] "He will offer a fortune to the man who will give him back his wife; but no man will claim it."[317] In addition, Sarah is presented as a mystical figure due to her "gift to see and shape the future," which enables her to guard her two sons George and Alfred towards success and becoming the new "kings in their own country." Her ability to see visions of the future is furthermore stressed by the information that the only words Sarah uttered since her injury were "Smoke! Fire! Burning!" According to "popular opinion", by this means she prophesied the burning down of the Atkinson brewery in 1911.[318] As a consequence and owing to Sarah's mysterious resemblance to Gildsey's patron Saint Gunnhilda she is subsequently referred to as Gildsey's Guardian Angel. However, "Tom suggests that the elevation by "popular opinion" of Sarah to the status of a local legend, like St. Gunnhilda, may have been engineered by the Atkinson brothers themselves."[319] However, Sarah's condition grew worse and she finally dies in 1874.

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[307] Swift, 224.
[308] Swift, 171.
[309] Thompson, 286.
[310] Swift, 102.
[311] Swift, 160.
[312] Cf. Irish, 930.
[313] Swift, 1.

> In fulfilment of the townspeople's expectation for reconciliation between Sarah and Thomas in "good old story-book fashion – in a fairy-tale ending to make the heart melt" – the family buries Sarah next to her husband, or at least that is what Tom's narrativization seems to require (96). Sarah's funeral coincides with a disastrous rainstorm that causes the Ouse and Leem rivers to flood their banks.[320]

As a result, the "[r]umours of Sarah's supernatural qualities are re-enforced by the flood that immediately follows her death in 1874, during which her ghost is seen in the graveyard of St Gunnhilda's church."[321] That is to say, several mysterious appearances of female figures dressed in mid-century clothes reinforce the magical elements employed in *Waterland*. Tom acknowledges that he cannot determine whether these rumours about the mysterious Sarah Atkinson are true or not.

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[314] Swift, 8.
[315] Cf. Swift, 55 and 298-308.
[316] Malcolm 2003, 89.
[317] Swift, 79.
[318] Swift, 83-4.
[319] Thompson, 276.
[320] Thompson, 280.
[321] Bentley 2008, 136.

> Whether any of this contains a grain of truth; whether the brothers themselves regarded their mother as oracle, priestess, protectress, or merely allowed these rumours to circulate as a means of securing the favour of the town, no one can tell.[322]

However, he still notes that there is some truth in every myth: "Yet in every myth there is a grain of truth."[323]

Apart from Sarah Atkinson there is the myth about the mystifying reproductive cycle of the eel. All scientific hypotheses produced speculating on the eel's life and breeding cycle have been discredited and the eel's reproduction remains an unanswered mystery up till now. The eel is representative of the fact that we can only arrive at partial explanations of the way things are or, as Tom ruminates, the eel is an example of how "curiosity begets counter-curiosity, knowledge begets scepticism. […] But even if we learn how, and what and where and when, will we ever know why? Whywhy?"[324] In general, the eel is a linking motif throughout the whole novel. For example, it also plays an important role in the episode about the swimming competition where Mary promises the winner a glimpse of her naked body. Yet although Dick wins he does not claim his prize. The scene ends with Freddie Parr dropping a living eel into Mary's knickers.[325] Freddie's trick is of crucial importance insofar as it offers a second possibility of how Mary became infertile. In the Fens, there is the myth that "a live fish in a woman's lap will make her barren."[326] As a consequence, if in Mary's case the myth became true and Mary cannot have any children due to the trick played by Freddie Tom and Mary are not to blame for the abortion and Mary's subsequent sterility.

As was shown, *Waterland* is a typical example of the postmodern genre historiographic metafiction. The whole plot revolves around the narrator's quest to understand why things came the way they are. The main protagonist turns to storytelling because he believes that exploring the past and seeking connections between the past and present will help him to make sense of his current state of affairs. However, in his attempt to unravel the past Tom does not find the ultimate explanation he was looking for. Instead he discovered "more mysteries, more fantasticalities, more wonders and grounds for astonishment than [he] started with."[327] As a consequence, he does not shrink away from presenting the past in such a way that makes him appear in a positive light and thus salves his bad conscience. Tom's making up of stories is a way of avoiding the truth; i.e. escaping a reality ("Here and Now") which is too cruel to bear. He realises that history is only a "yarn" with which we can spin tales to create meaning where none exists; i.e. fill up the empty space experienced in our lives and thus satisfy our desire for wholeness. History is nothing more than a narrative constructed by human beings written to fulfil an ideological purpose claiming to produce "facts". That is to say, Tom "suggests that any narrative can, at best, give a partial and limited account of the truth."[328] Since both stories and historical narratives cannot represent events as they really happened, the novel proposes that there is no sustainable difference between them and thereby breaks up the boundaries between history and fantasy, fiction and fact.[329] That is to say, on the one hand, Tom is aware that all kinds of narratives obscure and falsify truth by giving the illusion of being complete. On the other hand, however, he admits humanity's desire for storytelling to escape reality and make sense "of a random, meaningless, collection of events."[330] Hence, the novel remains ambivalent about the function and value of narratives. Accordingly, one of the key features of the novel is the typical postmodern suspicion towards grand narratives, which provide a restricted, often ideological, picture of the past. By presenting his audience instead with various, partially contesting, "little narratives", without one becoming dominant, the main protagonist substitutes "history" by "his stories" and therefore resists history's yearning for closure and totality. However, *Waterland*'s resistance for closure and totality becomes not only apparent in Tom's constant redefinition of history but is already shown in the title of the novel – *Waterland* – "in that it combines two contradictory physical states."[331] Moreover, as typical of postmodern texts *Waterland* itself refuses to be conclusive and dogmatic but instead calls for an active involvement of the reader in the process of interpretation.

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[322] Swift, 84.
[323] Swift, 215.
[324] Swift, 202-4.
[325] Cf. Swift, 192-3 and 208.
[326] Swift, 18.

> [For example,] the text invites our speculation that Mary's renewed piety may, in fact, be caused by her feelings of guilt about adultery, the possibility of which Tom seems more than a little suspicious, hinting at "a different explanation" throughout "About the Change of Life" and "Longitude 0°" chapters. […] Tom [is suspicious] that Mary has recently had an affair, possibly with Price? Is Tom

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[327] Swift, 62.
[328] Malcolm 2003, 97.
[329] Cf. Cooper, 379.
[330] Berlatsky, 257.
[331] Bentley 2008, 139.

> not inviting, perhaps tempting, us to make this connection? […] And, of course, Tom knows that Mary had previously betrayed him in a similar manner.[332]

That is to say, it is up to the reader to decide whether Mary really committed adultery or not. Likewise, throughout the whole novel *Waterland* encourages the reader's active engagement in the construction of meaning and the formation of a coherent text out of a somewhat random, meaningless collection of narratives.[333] The way Tom narrates his stories and the fact that the novel does not achieve closure keeps his pupils but also the reader curious.

> [When Price asks if] we can find whatever meaning we like in history [Tom answers,] "I do believe that. I believe it more and more. History: a lucky dip of meanings. Events elude meaning, but we look for meaning".[334]

Correspondingly, since Tom's search to unravel the past leads to no ultimate resolution the book can therefore be said to lack totality and deny closure since it does not want to impose one "truth" on the reader but remains, as is emblematic of postmodernism, open to interpretation.

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[332] Thompson, 262 and 293.
[333] Cf. White, 19.
[334] Swift, 140.

## 3.2. “Okaying Bad”? – Social and Cultural Decline in Martin Amis’s *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984)

Martin Amis’s novel *Money: A Suicide Note* forms a prime example of postmodern fiction. By presenting vulgar decadence and corruption as typical characteristics of the contemporary age the text critically reflects upon the greedy nature of Western capitalistic consumer society. In this way, *Money* brings to the reader’s attention the horrifying and appalling state of the postmodern world where religion has been replaced by consumerism. To be more precise, *Money* deals with the inescapability of capitalism and analyses its impact on human relationships and humanity in general; i.e. it satirically illustrates the damage capitalism has caused to human life. Furthermore, *Money* highlights the disappearing boundaries between high and low culture. It plays with the shifty nature of truth and reality, which is typical of postmodern literature, under the pervasive influence of mass media. Amis depicts a world where internal values have become secondary, i.e. social coldness prevails, where human beings indulge in a self-destructive lifestyle and are unable to distinguish between good and bad. By this means, the author poses the question whether nowadays human beings are consenting to be bad, and hence a pessimistic feeling pervades the whole novel.

### 3.2.1. The Money Conspiracy – Debased People Living in a Debased World

#### 3.2.1.1. “The Money Monkey”

As already indicated, Martin Amis’s novel *Money: A Suicide Note* is a dystopian reading of the global “money conspiracy”.[335] The text depicts six months in the life of the thirty-five-year-old anti-hero John Self, who is simultaneously the novel’s narrator and main protagonist. Being an extremely successful and thus wealthy director of TV commercials, Self frequently indulges himself with pleasurable activities such as spending a fortune on fast food, alcohol or pornography. He is meant to represent the archetypical postmodern human being. Throughout the novel, Self travels to and fro between London and New York City where he is directing his first major film project, which is a loosely autobiographical narrative set in England’s violent lower class and which he considers to be the door to big money and success. The fact that the movie is originally titled "Good Money" but eventually renamed "Bad Money" is alluding to the novel's end, where it turns out that the whole project is nothing but a financial trick played by the American film producer Fielding Goodney. Self, who is greedy and wholly corrupted by money, is trapped in the web of an elaborate money conspiracy and ends up totally bankrupt.

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[335] Amis, 262.

Set in the summer of 1981, *Money* reflects upon the British society of the 1980s. It portrays the radical political and social changes and hints at a series of portentous events that took place in Britain under the power of Margaret Thatcher, who took office in the final decade of the Cold War.

> Upon election in 1979 the Thatcher administration put in train a series of economic policies which broke fundamentally with the broadly Keynesian model of previous governments and advocated a free market economy with limited state intervention. Over-reliance on the welfare system was discouraged in this model in favour of self-help, self-reliance and financial self-empowerment. The imperative for economic control by the state was largely relinquished to the trends of a market that embraced the dynamism of capitalist exchange.[336]

That is to say, during her time in office from 1979 to 1990 Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government shifted the responsibility for social welfare from the state to the individual. In contrast to Keynesianism, "which advocated a mixed economy of private and state run industries, and [which] had been the prevailing system adopted in Britain from the end of the Second World War", Thatcherism adheres to Milton Friedman's position on monetary policy. It stands for a laissez faire approach to economics leading away from state intervention to the open market.[337] As a consequence, a number of national companies were denationalised; i.e. industries such as British Rail or British Telecom were sold and privatised while simultaneously several other state services such as the National Health Service became subject to the process of extreme rationalisation. The resulting radical rise in unemployment and the accompanying development of an impoverished working class, i.e. the lack of money, stirred people's emotions and led to a series of riots in England, e.g. the famous Brixton riot on 11th April 1981 which came to be known as "Bloody Saturday".

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[336] Lea, 71.

[337] Bentley 2008, 214.

> And now I am one of the unemployed. […] Money is so near you can almost touch it, but it is all on the other side – you can only press your face up against the glass. […] In my day, if you wanted, you could just drop out. You can't drop out any more. […] You cannot hide out from money. […] Russia is going to beat Poland up. If I were Russia, that's what I'd do […]. The Western Alliance is in poor shape, I'm told. Well what do you expect? They've got an actor and we've got a chick. More riots in Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester. The inner cities left to rot or burn.[338]

That is to say, while the 1980s mark a time which was characterised by the impression that everyone was better off, there was also the other side of the coin, i.e. bad money. In other words, a profound social division was splitting British people into rich versus poor. With the Cold War prevailing and Europe still being divided by the Iron Curtain things looked no more peaceful abroad. After defeating Jimmy Carter in the US presidential election in 1980 Ronald Reagan had taken office at the beginning of 1981.[339] "Thatcherism has close affinities with Reaganomics, [which refers to the] economic ideology named after the U.S. President Ronald Reagan."[340] Both Reagan and Thatcher condemned the Soviet Union and its communist ideology. Hence, they adopted a hard political line by increasing their military spending to antagonise and frighten the Soviets as much as possible. "[I]n staffing his national security posts with hawkish allies [Reagan] had both indicated his opposition to Carter's attempts to limit nuclear proliferation and fortified Thatcher's own expensive defensive ambitions."[341]

As already indicated, there was a strong divergence of opinion about Thatcher's policy and the consequent rise in redundancy. "In these scenarios, sovereign money becomes either the only thing that can make us truly free or an apocalyptic power that makes freedom impossible."[342] On the one hand, there were those who argued that the freeing of money from state interference, i.e. privatisation of state-owned industries, had to be met with approval because only a spontaneous competitive market can protect people of the inevitable authoritarianism of the nation state. This is associating money with a liberating power. On the other hand, however, Thatcher's policies were also met with enormous criticism. Opponents of Thatcherism saw most notably a contradiction between Thatcher's nationalism and global capitalism. They argued that Thatcher's devotion of free market economics and international capital conflicted with nationalism.[343] Regarding the criticism on Thatcherism, it is crucial to bear in mind that the eighties form a period where the process of decolonisation, which had begun after the Second World War, was largely complete. This time thus constitutes the definite end of the British Empire, i.e. the final stage in the downward trend in the United Kingdom's status as a world power. It was possible to sense the fact that the USA was becoming and England ceasing to be the centre of the world in the form of an identity crisis and a general pessimistic feeling among the British population. All the more, British people were longing for a sense of national identity. However, free-market expansionism as advocated by Thatcher is, according to Amis and other critics, incompatible with definitions of unique local and national identity. "For Amis the hypocrisy of the Thatcherite dichotomy lies in the faux-naif assumption that an absolute, culturally cohesive national identity can coexist with the sprawling, indiscriminating momentum of capitalism."[344] Therefore, those critical of Thatcher's policies argued that capitalism cannot coexist with the concept of a singular nation. "Internationalization [was] the trend indeed."[345]

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[338] Amis, 153-5.
[339] Cf. Bentley 2008, 214.
[340] Bentley 2008, 214.
[341] Marsh (a), 46.
[342] Marsh (a), 48.

"The limitations of Thatcherism's conflation of nation and international politics are seen most clearly in the framework of references to the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in 1981."[346] Self, who initially does not really care about the wedding, becomes more and more interested as he watches its TV live broadcast together with the character Martin Amis.

> The Royal Wedding is getting nearer and nearer to being over. London feels like Blackpool or Bognor or Benidorm in bad weather. This is history: the subjects of England converge on the capital, to honour the nuptials of the heir to the throne. This is history, and they want a piece of it. The Turks and Persians and robed boogies, the new London sahibs, they look baffled, affronted – they're not used to being outnumbered by the natives. The pallid celebrants are gaily dressed in the murky warmth of summer. […] They are loud and happy. Their time has come…
> […] Lady Diana cruised slowly up the aisle, her tottering dad at her side and the pocket bridesmaids smirking in her wake. […] As I twisted in my seat and muttered to myself I found I kept looking Martin's way. The lips were parted, suspended, the eyes heavy and unblinking […], the moonspots and boneshadow you're bound to get if you hang out in the twentieth century. Of course, you do see people who appear to be quite unaffected by all this. […] They have a colour. That colour, it looks like the sheen of health or sun or gimmicked youth but it is

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[343] Cf. Marsh (b), 849.
[344] Lea, 71.
[345] Marsh (a), 46.
[346] Lea, 74.

> only the colour of money. […] Anyway, Martin hasn't got that colour. Neither have I. And neither have you. […] Princess Diana has it. She is nineteen years old, just starting out. There she goes now, gathering herself into the carriage while the horses stamp. All England dances. I looked at Martin again and – I swear, I promise - I saw a grey tear glint in those heavy eyes. Love and marriage. […] After a while he dropped a toilet roll on to my lap.
> 'Do you want a cup of tea?' I heard him ask. […] 'Don't be embarrassed. It was very moving in its way.'[347]

Charles and Diana's wedding symbolises a new beginning for England after a period of decline. It is closely linked to people's attempt to understand themselves and, facing the increasingly uniform global market, particularly their longing to form some kind of collective national identity they can identify with. However, "[g]iven a relationship where politics is motivated and perpetuated by economics, the idea of an essential identity which defines Britain as distinct from the rest of the world is futile."[348]

> The wedding displays the British as a separate people with a long monarchical history, and as an attenuated part of a global community where ownership of a national heritage is seriously compromised by international media coverage. On a microcosmic level the wedding functions as a focus of national togetherness, concretising the political discourse of Britishness. Macrocosmically the wedding reveals how monarchy and heritage have become commodified and sold to a global market as a living performance of history. [The wedding marks] a moment of hopeful self-assertion by the British, representing a […] collective identity which reacts triumphantly against a pressure for uniformity. […] In this acknowledgement of the potentiality of youth there exists a hope for escape from the greed which appears ubiquitous and all-consuming. The hyperbolic "all England dances" attests to the communal impact of a national event which appears to define the British within a paradigm of an independent nation-state. […] The event is relayed worldwide by media networks and British "ownership" is at best tangential, because it becomes a global rather than a parochially national experience. […] The anachronistic retrospection of this presentation emphasises further the degree to which the power of the individual nation-state has become atomised and irrelevant. Influence no longer resides with monarchical structures but exists outside and across national boundaries in the collisions between capitalism and the expanding market.[349]

Self's life is indoctrinated by the ideological influence of capitalism. He is a typical example why Thatcher's claim that national and individual identity can coexist with the demands of free unlimited markets must be put into question. This is further stressed by the fact that Self is half British and half American and therefore suffers from a severe identity crisis accompanied by a feeling of radical rootlessness. "He belongs in no traditional sense and stands alienated from any defining culture. Yet Amis suggests that

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[347] Amis, 240 and 262-3.
[348] Lea, 74.
[349] Lea, 75.

Self represents the condition of the contemporary self – detached, homeless, fluid."[350] However, this particular facet will be dealt with thoroughly later. Accordingly, Amis offers a critique on the effects of Thatcher's policies. He satirises "Thatcherism's tendency to reduce the individual to a commodity."[351] In the novel, John Self shows the ideology of Thatcherism by embodying the idea of the greedy state of Western society. He represents every self of contemporary consumer culture.

> I am pussy-whipped by money, but then so is the United States. So is Russia. We are all stomped and roughed up and peed on and slammed against the wall by money. Should the earth enter turnaround tomorrow, nuke out, commit suicide, then we'll already have our suicide notes, pain notes, dolour bills – money is freedom. That's true. But freedom is money. You still need money. We ought to shake money like a dog shakes a rat. Grrrrrr![352]

This does not only implicate the idea that money both creates and destroys freedom but also the general overwhelming all-encompassing power of capitalism. By depicting money as the dominant motif in his novel and, as the authorial note preceding the novel reminds or rather warns the reader, equating it with a suicide note, Amis provokes his readership to reflect upon the fact that money has become the most powerful force in our lives. In other words, he suggests that capitalism absorbs everything that tries to undermine it. It is impossible to escape from capitalism no matter how hard one tries. We are no longer free under money, money colonises our lives.[353]

The notion that money lays claim to our lives becomes most notable by frequent references to George Orwell's novel *1984*. Amis draws a parallel between the life-controlling impact under capitalism and the totalitarian ideology described in *1984*. Self is introduced to the novel by Martina Twain. Since it parallels his own life he immediately feels attracted to the world it depicts.

> Airstrip One seemed like my kind of town. (I saw myself as an idealistic young corporal in the Thought Police). In addition, there was the welcome sex-interest and all those rat tortures to look forward to. Stumbling into the Ashbery late at night I saw with a jolt that the room I had hired was Room 101.[354]

Accordingly, it is no coincidence that Self's hotel room in New York City is numbered 101, the same room number where the main protagonist in *1984*, Winston Smith, is being tortured. Although Self, in contrast to Winston Smith, lives in a "free" society both seem to be the product of conditioning. Whereas Winston Smith is manipulated by a state apparatus Self is influenced by “an equally powerful economic system that shapes individual subjectivities, fetishizes objects, and commodifies relationships;” i.e. postmodern capitalism.[355] Both worlds lead to a lack of self-control.

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[350] Lea, 74.
[351] Acheson, 3.
[352] Amis, 270.
[353] Cf. Marsh (a), 28.
[354] Amis, 223.

> The totalitarian state of Oceania is dedicated to reducing human freedom and choice by steadily narrowing the range of thought. In the mass-mediated commodity culture in which Self has temporarily thrived, advertising and film have engendered a similar effect.[356]

Both characters realise that they are being constituted by a manipulative power. Yet, although Self feels he is being influenced by someone, he is not able to detect by whom nor does he get the deeper symbolical meaning of *1984*. Self identifies most with the character O’Brien in *1984*, who is, however, in contrast to him aware of all the uncomfortable truths. This characteristic of being controlled by someone, in the case of Self by the author, has to be related to the various metafictional elements in the novel, which are typical of the postmodernist reading experience, and which will be focused on in the chapter on the decline of high culture.

Taking all this into consideration, in *Money: A Suicide Note* Martin Amis presents the reader with the polarised scenario as it started to emerge in Britain at the beginning of the eighties. That is to say, by setting the novel in the summer of 1981 Amis does not only reflect upon Britain at a moment of political and economic crisis but also reflects upon the beginning of globalism, capitalism and Americanisation.[357] In this way the novel suggests that in our postmodern consumer society, which is characterised by greed, corruption and the importance of money, there is no freedom. “You cannot beat the money conspiracy. You can only join it.”[358] Self’s whole life is dictated by money and his wish to make more profit. Self is therefore no longer an independent self but dominated and colonised by the logic of capitalism. He cannot make up a separate identity, individual or national, outside money and, above all, he cannot escape. “You just can’t kick it, that junk, even if you want to. You can’t get the money monkey off your back.”[359] The money conspiracy offers no alternatives; i.e. nothing is left without having a price tag attached to it. That love is no exception, i.e. contemporary society is cursed by the effects of reification, will be dealt with as follows.

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[355] Diedrick, 78.
[356] Diedrick, 101-2.
[357] Cf. Marsh (a), 46.
[358] Amis, 288.
[359] Amis, 384.

### 3.2.1.2. The Death of Love

Another crucial issue *Money: A Suicide Note* reflects upon is the postmodern process of reification; i.e. the damage capitalism has caused to human life in regards to social relationships. This becomes apparent in one of the text's central themes, that is pornography, and, on a more general level, the satirical attitude the novel takes towards the depiction of women.

The contemporary age, as depicted in the novel, is unquestionably a world run by and dominated by men. Whereas the majority of the male characters are powerful, the women in *Money* are powerless and often the subject to violence. "I've hit women. Yes, I know, I know: it isn't cool. Funnily enough, it's hard to do, in a sense. Have *you* ever done it? […] It's hard. It's quite a step, particularly the first time. After that, though, it just gets easier and easier."[360] The passage where Self says, "They are only *women*, after all."[361] is just another example out of many suggesting the notion of misogyny. Yet, the most outstanding one is perhaps the depiction of Self's girlfriend Selina Street, who is in some sense Fielding's female double. Similarly to most names in *Money*, her name is meant to be allegorical, alluding to street prostitution. Whenever Self talks about Selina he describes her as the personification of male sexual fantasies. "Her tastes are strictly High Street too, with frank promise of brothelly knowhow and top-dollar underwear. […] [S]he goes around the place looking like a nude magazine."[362] That is to say, being beautiful, sexy and in every respect corrupted by money, i.e. she would do anything to get money, Selina represents the debased values prevailing in our contemporary society.

> Selina Street has no money, no money at all. […] She has fucked for money. […] She has always said that men use money to dominate women. I have always agreed. That's why I've never wanted to give her any. But right, dead right, to give her money. […] Cold out there. When it's cold. That's when you really feel your money.[363]

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[360] Amis, 19.
[361] Amis, 202.
[362] Amis, 14.
[363] Amis, 90.

Like all other women, Selina is presented as powerless and passive. At the beginning of the novel she is financially dependent on Self and in the end she is "possessed" by Ossie.

> A week I've been back, and still Selina keeps her distance. […] She's in a sensitive state, she says. […] I've offered her thousands. I've offered her marriage, kids, houses, the whole deal. […] She's not doing any dressing up, little Selina. […] So then I tried to rape her. In all honesty I have to confess that it wasn't a very distinguished effort. I'm new at this and generally out of shape. For instance, I wasted a lot of time attempting to control her hands. Obviously the proper way to rape girls is to get the leg question sorted out and take the odd slap in the face as part of the deal. Here's another tip: undress before the action starts. It was while I had Selina's forearms in my right hand and the belt-clasp in my left that she caught me a good one with the bony fist of her knee. […] 'I'm sorry. Oh I'm so sorry,' I said. 'I've never felt this ashamed before. […] Selina. Please say it's all right.' […] 'It's all right,' she said. […] Then I tried to rape her again.[364]

Since the novel features traditional patriarchal gender relations and misogyny is a recurring motif it has often been attacked and criticised, especially by a feminist readership. Reading the passage above, which is to some extent comical even though it is touching upon a very serious topic, the critique raised sounds more than appropriate. However, keeping in mind that not only this particular scene but the portrayal of all female characters in the novel is pushed to such an extreme, it is actually more likely that these passages are meant to be read ironically and thus aim to be provocative. In fact, almost all characters in *Money* "are so overplayed that they are parodies of the stereotypes." [365] Hence, Amis deliberately exaggerates, e.g. his sexist portrayal of women, to satirise contemporary society. To make this unmistakeably clear a range of passages, such as the following, overtly criticise misogyny: "It must be tiring knowledge, the realization that half the members of the planet, one on one, can do what the hell they like with you."[366]

Yet, women are not only portrayed as passive and lacking power, even worse, they are reduced to their status as desirable buyable sex objects; i.e. prostitution and pornography are leading motifs in the novel. All of Self's relationships to women except Martina Twain, who embodies the only woman he is seriously involved with in the course of the novel, are actually characterised and determined by money. When dreaming of Selina Self describes her as follows.

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[364] Amis, 249-51.
[365] Bentley 2008, 38.
[366] Amis, 14.

> […] the arched creature doing what that creature does best – and the thrilling proof, so rich in pornography, that she does all this not for passion, not for comfort, far less for love, the proof that she does all this for money. I woke babbling in the night – yes, I heard myself say it, solve it, through the dream-mumble – and I said, *I love it. I love her … I love her corruption*.[367]

This shows that Self does not love Selina herself but her commodified sexuality. “While making love, we often talk about money. I like it. I like that dirty talk.”[368] It is also the reason why Self lacks a way of relating to Martina at the beginning of their relationship. “[T]he thing about Martina is that I can’t find a voice to summon her with. The voices of money, weather and pornography (all that uncontrollable stuff), they just aren’t up to the job when it comes to Martina.”[369] Likewise to his relationship with Selina, which is only of sexual and materialistic importance, his friendship with the New York bellhop Felix proves to be based upon nothing else but outrageously inflated tips. “Felix the bellhop turned out to be a good pal to me here. […] Felix was getting money for this.”[370]

John Self himself is addicted to pornography. This becomes obvious, for instance, in the fact that he is very much pleased when he gets a plastic woman as a gift from the anonymous mystery caller Frank the Phone or, even more obvious, his visits to various brothels. “Pornography is construed as an expanding and diversifying service industry, aggressively responsive to the fetishistic demands of the international market-place.”[371]

> Fielding explained to me about the lucrative contingencies of pornography, […] the soft proliferations of soft core in worldwide cable and network and its careful codes of airbrush and dick-wipe, the stupendous aberrations of Germany and Japan, the perversion-targeting in video mail-order, the mob snuff-movie operation conceived in Mexico City and dying in the Five Boroughs.[372]

That is to say, the novel reflects upon the fact that pornography, i.e. the treatment of women as desirable buyable sex objects, is becoming more and more socially and morally accepted in our consumer society. For instance, seeing the upper part of a naked woman’s body in an advertisement is no longer appalling but has become the norm. Therefore, it must be argued, *Money*’s original cover, which depicted the body of a naked woman, is in all likelihood no coincidence but must be read as playing with the concept “sex sells”. However, this does not only suggest an interconnectedness of sex and money but also highlights the idea of the decline of high culture or rather the novel as a saleable commodity that will earn the author a lot of money. The pornography business booms and provides an easy way to earn a fortune.

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[367] Amis, 37.
[368] Amis, 151.
[369] Amis, 119.
[370] Amis, 36.
[371] Begley, 88.
[372] Amis, 94.

> So now I stand in the porno emporium, on the lookout for clues. I flick through the wax-smelling gloss of a cassette brochure. Grannies, kids, excreta, dungeons, pigs and dogs. Oh world, oh money. I suppose there must be people who want all this. I suppose there must be people who like all this. Supply and demand, market forces. […] Now even the paedophile – the type of human being so keen on violation that only children will do – dares show his shadowed face: he wants a little respect around here. Turn up the lights. Nothing matters. I look around this store of need, at the mag-racks, the private booths, the dark janitoriat saddlebagged with money. I feel singled-out, high-strung and easily spooked but the others in here, they’re brisk lunchtime shoppers, quickly attending to their wants and likes. Me, I don’t like what I want. What I want has long moved free of what I like, and I watch it slip away with grief, with helplessness. I’m ashamed and proud of it. I’m ashamed of what I am. And is that anything to be ashamed of?
>
> I’ve taken up handjobs again. You should see me. I’m back with the rest of you – I’m doing it too. Hello again. […] [We] can’t beat it. So let’s join it.[373]

By addressing the audience directly in the passage above the idea that Self actually stands for ourselves, all of us out there, is accentuated. This passage is also crucial inasmuch as it does not only stress the booming of the porn industry but also highlights the difference between what people are made to want by the market as opposed to what they actually like. The mass-mediated commodity culture we live in at the moment reduces human freedom by narrowing our range of thought. As a result, we desire things which we know are actually bad. After some time these bad things become morally accepted and constitute the new norm. For instance, in the quote above Self pictures a world where paedophile desire is already socially accepted and no longer dreadful. Self unequivocally philosophises about the idea of “okaying bad” when he tells the reader that he refused to have sex with a prostitute due to her being pregnant.

> She was like me, myself. She knew she shouldn’t do it, she knew she shouldn’t go on doing it. But she went on doing it anyway. Me, I couldn’t even blame

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[373] Amis, 323-4.

> money. What is this state, seeing the difference between good and bad and choosing bad – or consenting to bad, okaying bad?[374]

Since the novel implies that nowadays human beings are okaying or rather consenting to bad the terms “good” and “bad” become exchangeable.

An additional argument worth paying attention to is the suggestion that John Self is, like ourselves, the typical product of living in a world dominated by simulation.

> [Self’s] role in this system – as a maker of television commercials – puts him at the centre of its mediating machinery. Jean Baudrillard’s famous diagnoses of the “loss of the real” is apposite here […]. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, originally published in 1981, Baudrillard claims that the “real” is now defined in terms of the media which constitutes it. Laughing at Self, the reader is laughing at ten exaggerated versions of other selves as well.[375]

Self’s attitude towards women and sex is entirely conditioned by the media, especially the porn industry.

> Normal girls, they aren’t like the girls in the pornographic magazines. Here’s a little-known fact: the girls in the pornographic magazines aren’t like the girls in the pornographic magazines either. That’s the thing about pornography, that’s the thing about men – they’re always giving you the wrong ideas about women. *No* girls are like the girls in the men’s magazines, not even Selina, not even the girls in the men’s magazines. I’ve checked out one or two of them and I know. It transpires that everyone has their human shape, their human form. But try telling pornography that. Try telling men.[376]

Above and beyond, the production of semipornographic “controversial TV ads for smoking, drinking, junk food and nude magazines”[377] is what made Self successful and rich. He is addicted to porn movies, which are nothing but simulated sex, and prefers sex on video to actual sex because it allows him to fast forward the unexciting bits and to freeze frame what arouses him most; i.e. he prefers fiction as mediated by the media to reality. This idea is hinted at, for instance, in the scene where Self is not aroused by Martina Twain, who personifies the female alter ego of the character Martin Amis, since she is not interested in his money. That is to say, sex in the first place is wrong for Self if it is for free.

> I love giving money away. If you were here now, I’d probably slip you some cash, twenty, thirty, maybe more. How much do you want? What are you having? What would you give me, sister, brother? Would you put an arm round my

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[374] Amis, 26.
[375] Diedrick, 78.
[376] Amis, 236.
[377] Amis, 78.

> shoulder and tell me I was your kind of guy? I'd pay. I'd give you good money for it.[378]

Another crucial passage in this context refers to the scene where Self films and simultaneously comments on his sexual encounter with the actress Butch Beausoleil.

> I'm giving Butch Beausoleil one. You don't believe me? But I am! Round from the back, what's more. You get the picture: she's on all fours and clutching the headpiece of her neighing brass bed. If I glance downwards, like so, and retract my gut, I can see her valentine card and the mysterious trail of her cleft, like the inside of a halved apple. Now do you believe me. Wait: here comes her hand, idling slantways, down her rump, ten bucks of manicure on each fingertip. Why, she seems to be… Wow.[379]

Since the reader gets the impression that Self prefers to consume what he sees through the camera's lens rather than with his eyes and Butch rather than being her true authentic self seems to be performing solely for the camera, the novel is reflecting upon the notion of mediated reality; i.e. images produced by the media as opposed to "real" solid reality. For Self, who is the archetypical postmodern human being, the real seems too fictional to be convincing whereas the fictional seems more real than the real. In other words, since he can no longer distinguish between reality and simulation he is the typical product of the age of simulation. "Self is not describing events just after they happened; his present tense verbs and assorted emphases indicate that he wants the reader to believe he is somehow recording events as they happen."[380] This way of narrating is, of course, highly experimental and thus forms a prototypical example of postmodern narrative devices. In addition, by presenting himself in a better light, that is the successful lover he desperately longs to be but is not, the whole scene seems very unrealistic and surreal and the reader is urged to doubt whether it really took place. However, the question of Self's reliability will be examined thoroughly later on.

Additionally, the annihilation of love is put forward by the absence of Self's mother and his grotesque relationship to his father. "[His] mother died when [he] was very young."[381] Self was raised by his aunt in America. During his adolescence he moved back to England where his surrogate home became *The Shakespeare*, the striptease pub owned by his official father Barry Self. The lack of parental support is emphasised in Self's traumatic relationship with his father or rather the man he believes to be his father. Barry invoices Self for every penny he has spent on his upbringing. What is more, Self assumed he might eventually inherit his father's pub like Amis inherited the gift of writing from his father. However, ending up bankrupt by the end of the novel, Barry finally denies his paternity and has disowned him. Throughout the novel various hints are given implying that Fat Paul is Self's brother, e.g. "Me and Fat Paul – we're like brothers."[382] At the end of the novel it turns out that they are siblings indeed; i.e. the pub doorman Fat Vince is Self's real father. Self's complicated family constellation is reflected in the largely autobiographical movie he is intending to produce in the USA. It "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."[383]

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[378] Amis, 46.
[379] Amis, 275.
[380] Dern, 90.
[381] Amis, 75.

> Caduta Massi, approached to play the role of the mother, takes an immediate maternal interest in the motherless Self, and literally succours him at her breast. Butch Beausoleil, sought for the part of the mistress, embarrasses Self sexually in anticipation of Selina's later betrayal. And the revised plot of the film […] concludes with a scene of Oedipal violence that anticipates Self's violent encounter with his father near the end of the novel.[384]

The idea of absent parents and Self's consequent feeling of rootlessness and displacement, i.e. Self's existential quest, are mirrored by his constant journeys between England and America.

> Self is at home in both and neither. Much of the novel is devoted to his spiritual homelessness and his frustrated desire to find a space of belonging which endows him with a stable past and historical origin. […] The man he has always assumed to be his father is revealed to be an impostor, who not only provides Self with a carefully itemised bill for his upbringing, but also arranges a contract beating to be enacted on his "son". Self is incapable of defining himself in the terms of any stable self-origin, yet at the same time, he is willingly alienated from means of self-definition through his devotion to a money-greed which paralyses his ability to judge value in terms other than the financial.[385]

Hence, "*Money* describes a transatlantic culture dangerously in thrall to a globalised "money conspiracy" in which social relations have been entirely emptied by the sovereignty that money alone possesses."[386]

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[382] Amis, 243.
[383] Campañón, 91
[384] Diedrick, 93-4.
[385] Lea, 72.
[386] Marsh (b), 853.

> ‘You know, Slick,’ he said, ‘ – sometimes business looks to me like a big dumb dog howling to be played with. Want to know my hunch for the next growth area in the addiction line? Want to make a million? Shall I let you in?’
> ‘Do it,’ I said.
> ‘Cuddles,’ said Fielding Goodney. ‘Cuddling up. Two people lying down and generating warmth and safety. Now how do we market this? A how-to book? A video? Nightshirts? A cuddle studio, with cuddle hostesses? Think about it, Slick. There are millions and millions of dollars out there somewhere in cuddles.’[387]

At first glance, the idea of buying cuddles sounds rather exaggerated but after careful consideration one has to confess that this might actually become true sooner or later. As was already mentioned, under capitalism everything is becoming commodified. Therefore, in our time people are spending money on things they would actually never have bought years ago. To offer a plain example, in the past people would have laughed at the idea of buying bottled water, however, in this day and age buying bottled water is considered to be something quite normal. Another example taken from everyday life refers to the commercials telling us that it is indispensible to eat five portions of fruit a day in order to stay healthy. Fruits play certainly a crucial part in maintaining one’s shape, however, still it can be argued that the commercial’s primary goal is to increase profit rather than people’s health status. When it comes to capitalism, the bizarre thing is simply that “[y]ou just cannot beat [it]. You can only join it.”[388] The prevailing debased materialistic values are illustrated by the fact that Self only loves buyable things. One outstanding example in this context forms his fetishistic relationship to his sports car, the Fiasco, which he regards as and treats “like a pal.”[389] Since it is more for him than just a machine Self personifies it. “It’s temperamental, my Fiasco, like all the best racehorses, poets and chefs.”[390] In this way, Amis satirically portrays the effects of commodity fetishism. This is even more stressed by Amis’s use of witty or rather silly names for consumer goods. For instance, driving a Fiasco alludes, of course, to the tenor of it’s owner’s life. In contrast to Self, Fielding owns a limousine called an Autocrat, which is highly symbolic too.

All the aspects discussed prove Self’s inability to engage in meaningful human intimacy. In point of fact, Self’s entire life, i.e. his actions and relationships with other people, are governed by money. “Selina says I’m not capable of true love. It isn’t true. I truly love money. Truly I do. Oh, money, I love you. You're so democratic: you've got no favourites."[391] Hence, *Money* depicts "[m]oney's ability to remove intimacy from social relations through commodification."[392] Self is incapable of controlling his sexual desires, e.g. at the end of the novel he has to give in to Selina, who stages his betrayal of Martina. This lack of sexual control is represented as part of the money conspiracy.

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[387] Amis, 95.
[388] Amis, 288.
[389] Amis, 63.
[390] Amis, 63.

As was shown, the novel depicts how human beings, especially women, become objectified commodities under the influence of late capitalism. They are valued for reasons other than their humanity; i.e. for their capital or rather the capital they bring. All the worse, capitalism makes human beings exchangeable. This notion is explicitly emphasised at the end of the novel when Self talks about his present girlfriend Georgina, whom he imagines to be exchanged by some other woman.

> And Georgina loves me. She does. She said so. Tonight I'm going to make it clear just how grateful I am. Without Georgina, I'd be a dead man. She will shine with pleasure, if I do it right. Selina shined to money, Martina to paintings but most of all to flowers … Georgina would probably shine to flowers – and money too, come to that. I can't afford to giver her any. And when I can, I tell myself, Georgina won't do any more. I'll be off with someone like Martina (no. [*sic*] No. That won't happen again) or Selina or some other Tina or Lina or Nina.[393]

By illustrating that similar to Self all characters are unable to establish and maintain profound and lasting intimate relationships based upon mutual trust and respect *Money* clearly proposes that reification leads to the conversion of social relationships into frozen objects. Self's life is devoted to nothing else except maximal material output and consumption. In this way, human beings are transformed into machines, "well fed and entertained, yet passive, unalive, and with little feeling."[394] Money eliminates the possibility of the social. It is hardening the heart and causes the death of love.

### 3.2.2. The Decline of High Culture

Another essential matter reflected upon in *Money: A Suicide Note* is the decline of high culture; i.e. the change of Britain's "high" culture towards mass or rather "junk" culture. This is best exemplified by the main protagonist himself, who comes from a working class background and is not at all well educated. To put it another way, Self cultivates a very distant relationship to high culture. The scene where Self visits a brothel called “The Happy Isles” in New York provides a good example. In a conversation with one of the prostitutes, who turns out to be a graduate student in English literature, Self pretends to be an English writer named Martin. When the woman wants to know what kind of fiction he is writing Self is not able to give her an answer simply because he is unfamiliar with the word *genre*. While Self understands “John roar mainstream?” her actual question reads “Genre or mainstream?”[395] “In fact, his subsequent rejection of this intimidating woman in favour of a less educated, more voluptuous prostitute named “She-She” anticipates his later, more fateful turn from the literary Martina to the pornographic Selina.”[396] Another example which provides evidence that Self is not very well acquainted with the general canon of literature and which shows the highly satirical style employed in *Money* is the passage where Self tells his audience that Martin Amis lives in his neighbourhood, “Oh yeah, and a *writer* lives round my way too. […] This writer’s name, they tell me, is *Martin Amis*. Never heard of him. Do you know his stuff at all?”[397] Apart from that, there is a passage in the novel where he even openly admits that he does not read a lot.

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[391] Amis, 238.
[392] Marsh (a), 56.
[393] Amis, 393.
[394] Fromm, 1.

> About me and reading (I don’t know why I tell you this – I mean, do you read that much?): I can’t read because it hurts my eyes. I can’t wear glasses because it hurts my nose. I can’t wear contacts because it hurts my nerves. So you see, it all came down to a choice between pain and not reading. I chose not reading.[398]

The only people in the novel who embody high culture and thus form cultured alter-egos of Self are the characters Martin Amis and his female double Martina Twain. Martina “is intelligent, thoughtful, rational and not at all deceptive.”[399] Accordingly, she forms the antagonist of the pornographic Selina Street. Besides, she is American but English raised and consequently represents both America and England. It is her who points Self towards a better life by teaching him to read proper literature, e.g. books on Freud, Marx, Hitler, etc. and thereby providing Self with a “how-to kit for the twentieth-century.”[400] But still, when Martina takes him to see a performance of Shakespeare’s *Othello* at the opera, it becomes once more obvious that Self remains a hopeless case. He identifies with Cassio and assumes that Desdemona has been unfaithful, like Selina cheated on him, missing the point entirely and thus leaving him ignorant of all the hints foreshadowing his own breakdown. “Self’s subsequent summary of Othello’s plot is one of the novel’s many brilliant parodies.”[401]

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[395] Amis, 100.
[396] Diedrick, 85.
[397] Amis, 71.
[398] Amis, 42.
[399] Dern, 92.
[400] Amis, 334.

> Opera certainly takes its time, doesn’t it. Opera really lasts, or at least *Otello* does. […] The other striking thing about *Otello* is – it’s not in English, […] but no: Spanish or Italian or Greek was evidently the deal. Maybe, I thought, it’s some kind of guinea fest or beaner evening, a rally for the Hispanics or the Ricans. But the audience seemed stolidly non-ethic. […] Luckily I must have seen the film or the TV spin-off of *Othello*, for despite its dropped aitch the musical version stuck pretty faithfully to a plot I knew well. The language problem remained a problem but the action I could follow without that much effort. The flash spade general arrives to take up a position on some island, in the olden days there, bringing with him the Lady-Di figure as his bride. Then she starts diddling one of his lieutenants, a funloving kind of guy whom I took to immediately. Same old story. Now she tries one of these double-subtle numbers on her husband – you know, always rooting for the boyfriend and singing his praises. But Otello’s sidekick is on to them, and, hoping to do himself, some good, tells all to the guvnor. This big spade, though, he can’t or won’t believe it. A classic situation. Well, love is blind, I thought.[402]

Self entirely misreads *Othello* by remembering it only from a poor television adaptation. Given this, it is possible to state that he only knows “high culture” through popular mass culture. Under capitalism everything is becoming commodified, including culture. It seems, for instance, that nowadays the personality of an author is as important if not to say more important than the novel he or she has written in order to become a best-selling book. That *Money* suggests the decline of high culture becomes equally obvious in the passage where he introduces the reader to one of his most popular TV commercials.

> Pornography and money enjoy a close concordat. […] [It was an advertisement] for a new kind of flash-friable pork-and-egg or roll or hero called a Hamlette. We used some theatre and shot the whole thing on stage. There was the actor, dressed in black, with his skill and globe, being henpecked by that mad chick he’s got in trouble. When suddenly a big bimbo wearing cool pants and bra strolls on, carrying a tray with two steaming Hamlettes on it. She gives him a wink – and Bob’s your uncle. All my commercial featured a big bim in cool pants and bra. It was sort of my trademark. No one said my ads were subtle. But boy did they sell fast food fast.[403]

Taking this into consideration, the degradation or rather misuse of high culture by popular mass culture and therefore the death of culture is emphasised. “*Money* is subtitled *A Suicide Note,* and the suicide is that of a culture."[404] Equally important, the allusion to Shakespeare's Hamlet parallels Self's relationship with his father. "Like Hamlet's relationship to his stepfather, Self's relationship with his father is troubled and violent. […] In addition, the revised script for the autobiographical film Self is attempting to make echoes the Oedipal dynamics of Hamlet: the son kills his father hoping to protect his mother."[405] Since the novel contrasts high culture with popular culture and in particular the American film industry it critically reflects upon the process of Americanisation.

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[401] Diedrick, 86.
[402] Amis 299-300.
[403] Amis, 69-70.

> There used to be a third-generation Italian restaurant across the road: it had linen tablecloths and rumpy, strict, black-clad waitresses. It's now a Burger Den. There is already a Burger Hatch on the street. There is a Burger Shack, too, and a Burger Bower. Fast food equals fast money. […] There used to be a bookshop here, with the merchandise ranked in alphabetical order and subject sections. No longer. The place didn't have what it took: market forces. It is now a striplit boutique, and three tough tanned chicks run it with their needly smiles. There used to be a music shop (flutes, guitars, scores). This has become a souvenir hypermarket. There used to be an auction room: now a video club. A kosher delicatessen – a massage parlour. You get my idea? My way is coming up in the world. I'm pleased [...] - the other stuff was never much use to me and I'm glad it's all gone.[406]

This quotation confirms the idea that the text reflects upon how the world as a consequence of the global money machinery is becoming more and more colonised by Anglo-American civilisation. The process of Americanisation with powerful global markets makes it more and more difficult for small businesses to compete, so they are slowly dying out. Again, it also makes it more complicated to form an identity as was already mentioned earlier.

Another comic passage in this context refers to the scene where Fielding Goodney gets beaten up by Self. After being asked by Self to identify himself his victim replies, "Oh damned Iago. Oh inhuman dog." Unsurprisingly, being illiterate Self fails to comprehend that Fielding is quoting a passage taken from Shakespeare's *Othello* but only understands, "Oh damn dear go. […] Oh and you man dog."[407]

> It is not until late in the novel, when Self recounts this scene for the Martin Amis character during their chess game, that he is given a translation for these lines from the play, spoken by Roderigo as Iago stabs him. […] [T]he Amis character

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[404] Rennison, 8.
[405] Diedrick, 85-6.
[406] Amis, 70-1.
[407] Amis, 350.

> recognizes that Goodney thought of himself as the wronged Roderigo and Self as Iago.[408]

However, in contrast to the Amis character, who is educated and thus immediately grasps the metaphorical meaning of Fielding's words, Self fails to understand even with the help of Amis's clarification. Funnily enough, he misinterprets Amis's explanation as a reference to Amis's old car, which is a Iago 666, "convinced that if he wins [the chess game] the author will demand as his prize Self's Italian sports car, the Fiasco."[409] "The cunning bastard, I thought. Oh, I caught that reference to his own little rattletrap. He's definitely after my Fiasco."[410]

Apart from *1984* George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm* is a central motif in *Money*. Fielding's comparison of Self with an "inhuman dog" is thus no coincidence. Self is "so debased that he often seems subhuman. […] The [fact that the] pigs in *Animal Farm* [become the leaders] clearly disturb[s] him, however, doubtless because they remind him of his earlier self-characterisation."[411] "I mean, how come the *pigs* were meant to be so smart, so civilized and urbane?"[412] He often describes himself in animalistic or rather inhuman terms, for instance, when he portrays himself as, "Me, […] 200 pounds of yob genes, booze, snout, and fast food."[413] What is more, since Self reads *Animal Farm* strictly as an animal story he does not get the novel's ironical and allegorical meaning.

> Where would I be in *Animal Farm*? One of the rats, I thought at first. But – oh, go easy on yourself, try and go a little bit easy. Now, after mature consideration, I think I might have what it takes to be a dog. I am a dog. I am a dog at the seaside tethered to a fence while my master and mistress romp on the sands. I am bouncing, twisting, weeping, consuming myself. A dog can take the odd slap or kick. A slap you can live with, as a dog. What's a kick? Look at the dogs in the street, how everything implicates them, how everything is their concern, how they race towards great discoveries. And imagine the grief, tethered to a fence when there is activity – and play, and thought and fascination – just beyond the holding rope.[414]

That is to say, Self can imagine himself as one of the dogs in *Animal Farm*. This thought is reinforced by Self being symbolically associated with Martina's dog, who is revealingly called Shadow. “She had found him bouncing and tumbling about on Eighth Avenue, ownerless, starving, chewed up from fights with other dogs and the random clouts and kicks of the human canines on Twenty-Third Street.”[415] Although Shadow enjoys a better life with Martina, whenever they walk him “toward the sin and death of Twenty-Third Street, Chelsea, the world’s end” Shadow keeps tugging at his rope because something in his nature wants to return to his old life. When Martina says, “Every night it gets weaker. But sometimes he pulls really hard and seems to want to go.” she is in some way foreshadowing Self’s final collapse. Still, Self reassures her that Shadow “knows what the good life is.”[416] Since the dog functions as Self’s shadow Self is not only speaking of the dog but also himself. He is aware that the good life is with Martina and thus wants to stay with her. “But part of his nature, or more precisely his mediated desires, pull him in other directions.”[417] “Like Shadow, Self is instinctively drawn toward the “sin and death” of the “world’s end” […]. Inevitably, Shadow’s escape from domestication is accompanied by Self’s return to Selina Street and the cultural framework of the money-pornography nexus.”[418]

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[408] Diedrick, 87.
[409] Finney, 2.
[410] Amis, 377.
[411] Diedrick, 88.
[412] Amis, 205.
[413] Amis, 31-2.
[414] Amis, 207.

Bearing in mind the previous points, with Martina’s guidance Self starts to change as he realises there is more to life. When she hands him a book entitled *Money*, which deals with the economic history of money, “Self almost articulates a recognition that capitalism, and his own greed, go hand in hand with economic and social inequality.”[419]

> You have to be tough to make money, as everyone knows. But you have to be tough to want it. Money means as much to those who have it as to those who don’t. It says that in *Money*. And it’s true. There is a common pool. By wanting a lot, you are taking steps to spread it thin elsewhere. […] You know, they used to use meat for money, and snout, and booze, and chicks of course, and ammunition for fighting with. Now those sound like my kind of market forces. I’d have been happier then, in the old days. You wouldn’t have had to pay me in money. You could have used all that other stuff, that bad money. Sometimes *Money* gives me an odd feeling, a worried feeling.[420]

Still, he does not comprehend the novel’s entire moral implications. Moreover, when Martina attempts to warn Self about his place in *Money* by educating him on the subject of “the reluctant […] - the sad, the unwitting narrator”, which is in fact alluding to Self’s lack of autonomy and thus marks an attempt to raise Self’s awareness about his fictional existence, Self simply does not get it.

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[415] Amis, 285.
[416] Amis, 289.
[417] Diedrick, 92.
[418] Begley, 93.
[419] Diedrick, 90.
[420] Amis, 284-5.

> She talked about perception, representation and truth. She talked about the vulnerability of a figure unknowingly watched – […] the reluctant narrator – the sad, the unwitting narrator. […] I could follow her drift for seconds at a time, until the half-gratified sense of effort – or my awareness of watching myself – intervened, and scattered my thoughts.[421]

It must also be noted that Martina helps Self to glimpse the “difference between fetishistic desire and human connection.” She is, in fact, the first woman “Self has related to on fully human terms since his mother died during his childhood. Since then, all his relationships with women have been mediated by money and pornography.”[422] Due to Martina, Self is able to define himself and clarify his existence, “Martina makes me strong.”[423] “[N]ow I’m surer of my ground.”[424] Owing to her Self has started to reflect upon his life and explicitly utters a wish to change.

> Look at my life. I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking: But it’s terrific! It’s great! You’re thinking: Some guys have all the luck! Well, I suppose it must look quite cool, what with the aeroplane tickets and the restaurants, the cabs, the filmstars, Selina, the Fiasco, the money. But my life is also my private culture – that’s what I’m showing you, after all, that’s what I’m letting you into, my private culture. And I mean *look* at my private culture. Look at the state of it. It really isn’t very nice in here. And that is why I long to burst out of the world of money and into – into what? Into the world of thought and fascination. How do I get there? Tell me, please. I’ll never make it by myself. I just don’t know the way.[425]

In contrast to Self, Martina never had to worry about money. She has got the power to escape the money machinery because she has always had enough; i.e. to declare that one does not care about money is only possible when one does not lack money. That is to say, unlike the Amis character who rationally resists the “money conspiracy” Martina has got the confidence of the super rich because money has been there all along.[426]

> [She] sounds sane, doesn’t she, among all these other people I’m working around? But then she has always had money – she has never not had money. […] Her smile is knowing, roused and playful, but also innocent, because money makes you innocent when it’s been there all along. How else can you hang out

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[421] Amis, 132.
[422] Diedrick, 90-1.
[423] Amis, 297.
[424] Amis, 320.
[425] Amis, 123.
[426] Cf. Marsh (a), 52.

> on this planet for thirty years while still remaining free? Martina is not a woman of the world. She is a woman of somewhere else.[427]

Self imagines Martina as some kind of alien from somewhere else, and “her name is after all an anagram for Martian.”[428] This is partly on account of the fact that unlike most people living in contemporary society “she’s all too human in the end.”[429] The literate Martina represents Self’s only hope for genuine human emotions and thus renewal and reform.[430] However, all her attempts to warn Self that he is heading towards nothing but sadistic self-destruction fail. Unfortunately, Self “is [only] able to participate in high culture and [resist] the “money conspiracy” momentarily.[431] In the end, catching Self in bed with Selina it is Martina who suffers most.

> She looked like a child who has suffered more reverses in a single day than ever before in living memory, and is now poised between refusal and acceptance of the fact that life might be significantly worse than she thought, that life was unkinder in its essence, and no one had given her fair warning.[432]

Her final experience of loss and isolation suggests that you cannot buy true emotions and in particular love with money and thus she is “another sharer of the postmodern condition as diagnosed by the novel.”[433] Again, since Martina, who embodies the “good” person in *Money*, is not well rewarded but actually suffers most the novel suggests “okaying bad”.

Aside from his relationship with Martina, through his encounter with her male twin character Martin Amis Self is offered a further opportunity of redemption. Like her, her double, who has been hired by Self to rewrite his film’s script to resolve the actors’ conflicting demands, represents high culture.

> I get up at seven and write straight through till twelve. Twelve to one I read Russian poetry - in translation, alas. A quick lunch, then art history until three. After that it’s philosophy for an hour - nothing technical, nothing *hard*. Four to five: European history, 1848 and all that. Five to six: I improve my German. And from then until dinner, well, I just relax and read whatever the hell I like. Usually Shakespeare.[434]

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[427] Amis, 134.
[428] Diedrick , 92.
[429] Amis, 338.
[430] Cf. Diedrick, 92.
[431] Marsh (b), 857.
[432] Amis, 346-7.
[433] Diedrick, 101.
[434] Amis, 236.

This is, of course, extremely overplayed; however, it makes clear that the literate Amis is meant to personify the antithesis of Self. In addition, unlike Self the character Amis has been able to resist the "money conspiracy". "This […] is […] reinforced by Self's debunking mockery of his student existence, book habit, and hand-rolled cigarettes."[435] "When Self learns that Amis makes "enough" yet does not own a video player, he becomes indignant."[436] "You haven't got shit, have you, and how much do you earn? It's immoral. Push out some cash. Buy stuff. Consume, for Christ's sake."[437] The persona Amis is portrayed as "a naïve literary modernist clinging to the fiction that he can protect his art from the influence of the marketplace."[438] Nevertheless, he is aware that, in the long term, it is impossible to avoid, "I suppose I'll have to start one day. […] But I really don't want to join it, the whole money conspiracy."[439]

The fact that the author Martin Amis enters as a character into the narrative is undoubtedly the most noticeable metafictional element in *Money*. In general, throughout the novel the reader is never to forget that they are reading a fictional text; i.e. the book highlights its own fictionality continuously. "In creating a character for himself within the novel Amis effectively removes – while, of course, calling attention to – the possibility of authorial intrusion."[440] Throughout the novel Self senses that he is being constituted by manipulations. "Like Winston Smith, the doomed hero of *1984*, Self spends most of his narrative discovering that he is trapped – not by a totalitarian state, but in the prison of a debased private culture."[441] "I am a robot, I am an android, I am a cyborg. I am a skinjob. […] I sometimes think I am being controlled by someone. Some space invader is invading my inner space, some fucking joker. But he's not from out there. He's from in here."[442] Another time he says, "I disclaim responsibility for many of my thoughts. They don't come from me."[443] When they talk about the rewriting of the script, the Amis character even discusses various aspects of narrative structure, in particular the author-narrator relationship, with Self.

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

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[435] Begley, 99.
[436] Diedrick, 100.
[437] Amis, 262.
[438] Diedrick, 100.
[439] Amis, 262.
[440] Marsh (a), 52.
[441] Diedrick, 102.
[442] Amis, 229-330.
[443] Amis, 267.

> boring you? […] The further down the scale he is, the more liberties you can take with him. You can do what the hell you like to him, really. This creates an appetite for punishment. The author is not free of sadistic impulses.[444]

Here, being the author within his own fiction, the textual Amis is unambiguously stating that he can do anything he likes with his fictional characters. In other words, he is aiming to explain to Self, who represents the typical postmodern anti-hero, that he is subject to the author's impulses and thus manipulated. Accordingly, Self might be the designated narrator but actually lacks autonomy since it is Martin Amis, entering the novel as one of the characters, who equals the puppet master and therefore controls the whole plot. An evident scene in this context forms their second meeting where Amis inquires Self about one of the actors in his movie, Lorne Guyland, even though he supposedly does not know anything about Self. "His knowledge parallels the author's, and Self subconsciously registers this fact in his […] question."[445] "'What made you say Lorne Guyland?' Perhaps he'd recognized *me* – or *recognized* me."[446] Having authority over Self's destiny, it is in fact not Fielding Goodney but Amis who plans the deception of Self. In view of that, it can be argued that Self's chance of redemption does not actually exist. He is doomed and cannot control his own fate, no matter how hard he tries to escape.[447] Ironically enough, Self is bored by all of Amis's hints and views them as a waster of time. Due to the presence of Amis's persona(s) within the novel, "Martin Amis collapses the boundaries between fiction and reality […]. He also eliminates the respectful "distance" that an author should keep from his work."[448] By highlighting Self's fictional construction the boundaries between fiction and reality collapse. Accordingly, the book can be said to form a notable example of metafiction as is characteristic of the postmodern reading experience, which is usually radically rejecting classical realism.[449] What is more, a metafictional pattern also emerges from the constant doubling in the novel. For instance, Self's whole life is paralleled in his movie. Over and above, it seems that every character has some kind of double, e.g. Selina forms the female alter ego of Fielding Goodney. Amis even has Self address the issue by saying, "People are doubling also, dividing, splitting."[450] To a certain extent, "[t]he reader is [even] invited to consider Self, Amis and Martina as aspects of a single consciousness."[451] "Interestingly, this Amis speaks through all of the main characters: Self, Martin Amis and Martina Twain – the first manipulated by the second while the third vainly attempts to warn the first – all of whom receive their knowledge reflexively."[452] At the same time, it can be argued that by creating a character for himself Amis aims to differentiate himself from Self. To be precise, by presenting the Amis character as intelligent, highly educated and uncorrupted Amis simultaneously distances himself from Self. Several passages in the book are undoubtedly beyond Self's linguistic capacity and hence indicate the voice of Amis the author. Taking all this into consideration and keeping in mind that postmodern fiction favours ambiguity and playfulness it might therefore make most sense to conclude that "[t]he extent to which the author Amis acts and speaks through Self remains debatable."[453]

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[444] Amis, 246-7.
[445] Dern, 91.
[446] Amis, 175.
[447] Cf. Dern, 91-3.
[448] Dern, 86.
[449] Cf. Mecklenburg, 50.
[450] Amis, 63.

One outstanding scene, which visibly illustrates that Self is being controlled by someone and on a broader level reflects upon the power any author has over his/her characters, forms the chess game played between Self and the character Amis. Amis outwits Self, "who is an uncharacteristically talented chess player. At first, Self believes he will [easily] defeat Amis, who seemingly lacks knowledge of the game."[454] It seems as if Amis is unable to distinguish the individual chess pieces, e.g. when he pulls a pawn out of the jade box he asks, "What's this? A king or queen?"[455] Holding it in his hand, Amis symbolically holds Self; i.e. as the author he has total control over Self.[456] Being convinced he is going to win, Self has to realise that he finally has been brought to a zugzwang, which "[l]iterally [means] *forced to move*. It means that whoever has to move has to lose."[457] During the game the character Amis is trying to enlighten Self about Fielding Goodney's insidious plot and real intentions. However, since all Self wants to do is win the game and in doing so money off the author, he is not listening consciously. Yet, at last he realises his lack of autonomy and screams, "*I'm the joke. I'm it. It was you. It was you.*"[458] The fact that Amis wins over Self, i.e. that Self is forced to move, illustrates Self's lack of autonomy and the idea that he has actually no single self. "I feel invaded, duped, fucked around. I hear strange voices and speak in strange tongues. I get thoughts that are way over my head. I feel violated…"[459] Yet, although Self feels to some extent that he is being manipulated he remains unaware of the machinations occurring around him. Self is ignorant of the reasons why things are happening to him. For instance, he fails to understand that Selina is having an affair. Thus, it is finally Selina herself who identifies her secret lover, Martina's husband Ossie Twain. Apart from that, Self remains blind to the fact that Frank the Phone and the red-haired woman who has been following him are none other than the madman Fielding Goodney. Consequently, owing to the fact that he remains deaf to all the warnings scattered through the novel Self is finally trapped by Fielding. Only when it is too late does he discover that the film project has never existed and all the contracts he signed with Fielding hold him financially liable. Having lost everything, his father, Martina and all his money, Self escapes to London where his final breakdown culminates in an unsuccessful suicide attempt. The novel ends with Self being a fallen, divided self struggling hard to change himself.

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[451] Diedrick, 94.
[452] Dern, 92.
[453] Dern, 92.
[454] Dern, 91.
[455] Amis, 372.
[456] Cf. Dern, 91.
[457] Amis, 379.
[458] Amis, 379.

> A cigarette millionaire, I blew it all away. That's the past now – I've cut right down to less than two packs a day. It's all I can afford. I even roll my own, God damn it. I hardly drink any more: just a Barley Stout, two Particular Brews, a Whisky Tak and a few Ginger Perries. Either that, or a bottle of Cyprus sherry or Bulgarian port to lower me into the night. It's all I can afford. I'm economizing on pornography too.[460]

Nonetheless, at the end of the novel Self takes a more sober look at the world and has gained, at least, some kind of understanding.

> I've settled the motivation question. I supplied it all. The confidence trick would have ended in five minutes if it hadn't been for John Self. I was the key. I was the needing, the hurting artist. I was the wanting artist. I wanted to believe. I wanted that money so bad.[461]

When Self sits awaiting his new girlfriend Georgina in the final scene he is mistaken for a beggar and thrown a ten-penny piece into his cloth cap by a passer-by. Yet, even though this makes his debasement almost entirely complete he is still able to laugh at himself: "Well, you've got to laugh. You've got to. There isn't any choice. I'm not proud."[462] Accordingly, the novel closes only with a faint possibility of reformative change. Through poverty Self is at least for the time being saved.[463]

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[459] Amis, 66.
[460] Amis, 388.
[461] Amis, 392-3.
[462] Amis, 394.
[463] Cf. Diedrick, 93.

### 3.2.3. Postmodern Lifestyle and Society's Tendency towards Self-Destruction

A further issue Martin Amis unmistakably passes criticism on with his novel relates to contemporary society's postmodern lifestyle tending towards self-destruction. This becomes notable by reference to the main protagonist, that is John Self, himself. Self suffers from various addictions. Almost at the outset of the novel he informs the reader that he is "addicted to the twentieth century," in particular the materialistic excesses of the late twentieth century.[464] That is to say, Self is addicted to all kind of "bad" things. He cannot get enough of alcohol, cigarettes, drugs and junk food. For example, during "a ninety-minute visit to Pepper's Burger World […] [he] had four Wallies, three Blastfurters, and an American Way, plus a nine-pack of beer."[465] Furthermore, Self cannot resist bad television, the consumption of stupefying gossip newspapers, promiscuous sex, handjobs and everything else related to the porn industry.

> Watching television is one of my main interests, one of my chief skills. […] I realize, when I can bear to think about it, that all my hobbies are pornographic in tendency. […] Fast food, sex shows, space games, slot machines, video nasties, nude mags, drink, pubs, fighting, television, handjobs. I've got a hunch about these handjobs, or about their exhausting frequency. I need that human touch. There's no human here so I do it myself. At least handjobs are free, complimentary, with no cash attaching.[466]

As was already discussed in the chapter focusing on the death of love Self's attitude towards women is entirely manipulated and conditioned by the media, especially the porn industry. The media constructs desires and needs and Self actually prefers the fictional world to the real cruel one outside, i.e. the media helps him to escape unbearable reality.

> Yesterday afternoon I was doing then what I'm doing now. It's one of my favourite activities – you might even call it a hobby. I was lying on the bed and drinking cocktails and watching television, all at the same time… Television is cretinizing me – I can feel it.[467]

Due to this addiction, Self is no longer able to distinguish between reality and images of reality. He is brain-washed and believes that everything shown on television is providing an accurate picture of the world. At the very end of the novel, however, he seems to have been enlightened to some extent as he considers the problem from another angle. That is to say, towards the final pages of the book, he is explicitly criticising the media and in particular advertising for their exploitation of "the mystical part of ordinary minds."[468] "Television is working on us. Film is. We're not sure how yet. We wait, and count the symptoms. There's a realism problem, we all know that. TV is real! some [*sic*] people think. And where does that leave reality?"[469] Hence, it can be argued that *Money* encourages its audience to reflect upon the manipulative power of the media, being similar to money, a tremendously far-reaching, influential and therefore also dangerous and destructive force of the present period, and the nature of truth in general.[470]

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[464] Amis, 91.
[465] Amis, 29.
[466] Amis, 67.
[467] Amis, 27.

Unsurprisingly, all these addictions leave their marks on Self's body and character. He is in poor health physically and psychologically. In the long run his lack of self-discipline and his obsessive self-indulgence to satisfy present desires lead to total self-destruction.

> I cleaned my teeth, combed my rug, clipped my nails, bathed my eyes, gargled, showered, shaved, changed – and still looked like shit. Jesus, I'm so fat these days. […] How did it happen? It can't just be all the booze and quick food I put away. […] Can money fix it? I need my whole body drilled down and repaired, replaced.[471]

His body is "a site of degeneration as a result of his lifestyle, but also reflects a deeper psycho-social malaise. […] [N]ot only does he indulge in a culture of junk, but junk penetrates and contaminates his bodily space rendering him internally, as well externally corrupted."[472] "I am made of – junk. I'm just junk."[473] Apart from leading a careless life in regards to his health, Self is as a general rule ignorant to his future. He is only concerned with the here and now and the satisfaction of present needs. To put it differently, the money Self got from Fielding allowed him to indulge in a luxurious lifestyle which, however, was self-destructive. "Oh it's hard. It isn't easy. Jesus, I never meant me any harm. All I wanted was a good time."[474]

> In this reading John Self is both target and victim, a one-man carnival of junk taste and junk morality who has relinquished most of his free will by embracing commodity culture in all its pornographic excess. The fact that most of Self's

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[468] Amis, 384.
[469] Amis, 361.
[470] Cf. Cohen, 133.
[471] Amis, 5-6.
[472] Lea, 72.
[473] Amis, 265.
[474] Amis, 11.

> pleasures are solitary and onanistic reinforces the sense that he is a prisoner of his own addictions.[475]

He feels guilty in a way because he is aware these things are bad. Self cannot resist but has to continue to keep on satisfying his demanding appetites.

> John Self […] is willing to sell what remains of his soul if only he can receive the immediate gratifications that consumer culture offers. Excess is what the culture teasingly offers, if you have the money to pay for it, and excess – of booze, drugs, sex and food – is what Self craves. Yet, beneath this absorption in the now, he senses the weight of future retribution.[476]

Throughout the book the anti-hero Self is dreaming of going to "California, land of my dream and my longing"[477] where "he plans to finish his days, when money lets him have a total reconstruction, a radical rebuilding of himself."[478] "When I make all the money I'm due to make [I will be] off to California for that well-earned body transplant I've promised myself."[479] That is to say, when he has earned enough money he intends to transform and self-improve his decaying body with the help of plastic surgery.

> I see me now. I'm in the design department over at Silicone Valley. The sun shines but no dust stirs. I move confidently among the technicians, the ideas-men and creative consultants, the engineers and fine-tuners. Someone shows me the rough of my new ears and nostrils. […] We move on to the gene pool, the DNA programmers, the plasma bank. […] Eventually I produce my wallet, and silence falls. 'Okay, boys, now, I want to make this absolutely clear. I'm paying top dollar and I expect the best. I don't care what it costs. I want it blue, I want it royal, I want the best blood money can buy. Go on, God damn it, and give me the *right* stuff this time around.'[480]

In general, for Self America embodies "the land of opportunity" and second chances.[481] Yet, "[b]oth cities between which the novel alternates show signs of irreversible decay." [482] "London becomes the paradigm of exhaustion. […] The recurrent descriptions of London's weather and sky are charged with the gloomiest images."[483] One time Self refers to London as "an old man with bad breath. If you listen, you can hear the sob of weariness catching in his lungs. Unlovely London."[484] To return to an earlier point mentioned above, Amis addresses England's political situation by describing it as “scalded by tumult and mutiny, by social crack-up in the torched slums. Unemployment, I learned, was what had got everyone so mad.”[485] Another time he creates an apocalyptic picture of London by referring to it as “[b]lasted, totalled, broken-winded, shot-faced London, doing time under sodden skies.”[486] In view of that, “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.”[487] Correspondingly, New York is characterised by a similar social debasement, a place where human values have been replaced by money values.

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[475] Diedrick, 77.
[476] Rennison, 8.
[477] Amis, 167.
[478] Campañón, 91.
[479] Amis, 18.
[480] Amis, 170-1.
[481] Amis, 207.
[482] Finney, 2.
[483] Campañón, 92.
[484] Amis, 85.

Due to his addictions Self’s reliability must be put into question. Self is a highly unreliable narrator. Throughout the novel he consumes excessive quantities of alcohol and therefore his mind is not working properly. Addiction is depicted as a common way of life. Lulled by chemicals his repressed drives come to the fore and surface in the form of an animalistic, less human behaviour. He constantly keeps forgetting certain incidents due to being dead drunk or high and also cannot recall whether he has informed the reader about them yet. “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.”[488] For instance, when he receives his first phone call from Frank the Phone he admits his memory problems by being unable to remember whether he has informed his audience already about it or not.[489]

> I can’t remember half the stuff I do any more. […] Oh yeah, and while I remember – I haven’t briefed you about that mystery caller of mine yet, have I? Or have I? Oh that’s right, I filled you in on the whole thing. That’s right. Some whacko. No big deal … Wait a minute, I tell a lie. I *haven’t* briefed you about it. I would have remembered.[490]

Being an unreliable narrator it must be assumed that Self sometimes deliberately withholds certain pieces of information from the reader such as his various visits to brothels, with the aim of presenting himself in a better light.

> I have a confession to make. […] I can’t fool you. The truth is, I - I haven’t been behaving as well as I’ve led you to believe. No doubt you suspected that it was all too good to be true. […] Ah, I’m sorry. I didn’t dare tell you earlier in case

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[485] Amis, 66.
[486] Amis, 159.
[487] Campañón, 92.
[488] Campañón, 89.
[489] Cf. Dern, 88.
[490] Amis, 26-7.

> you stopped liking me, in case I lost your sympathy altogether - and I do need it, your sympathy! I can't afford to lose that too.[491]

There are a series of other passages in the book where Self admits that he longs for the reader's sympathy. For instance, when he admits, "I'm touched by your sympathy (and want much, much more of it: I want sympathy, even though I find it so very hard to behave sympathetically.)"[492] Aside from this, sometimes Self deliberately plays with the reader by providing ambiguous information or blurring the boundary line between fact and fiction. One striking example in this context marks the scene where Self leaves the reader in the dark about whether it is him or the character Amis who is crying when they watch the broadcasting of the Royal Wedding on TV. To offer a second example, the following passage plays with the dichotomy of memory and dream. "Someone had come to the end of the long passage outside Room 101, once, twice, perhaps many more times, someone had come and mightily shaken the door, and not with the need for entry but in simple rage and warning. Did it happen, or was it just a new kind of dream?"[493] Further exemplary scenes in this regard form the ones where Self has skipped an entire day due to his immense alcohol consume and the dinner party at Martina's place. In the latter, Self arrives at Martina's apartment and apologises for being late. However, some pages later the reader and the astonished Self himself are informed that he had actually been at the party before, yet, was too drunk too remember. That is to say, when he returns there later, thinking he is merely late, he is ignorant of the fact that he has already been there before. Moreover, Self is often unable to grasp the real connection between certain elements in the story. Therefore the reader has to figure out many things by themselves. Self's untrustworthiness is additionally asserted by his lack of education and knowledge. Given the piece of information that Self is illiterate, it is very unlikely that he has written the novel on his own. In support of this view it has to be added that Self even admits that he does not remember writing out his story, his "suicide note". "I don't remember writing [my memories] down. The handwriting on the pad was unrecognizable as mine, much more upright and correct."[494] Besides, the brief introductory suicide note preceding the novel is actually signed M.A. indicating the character Martin Amis rather than John Self.[495] Taking all this into consideration and bearing in mind that the narrative includes frequent omissions and flashbacks a threat is posed to the narrative coherence and chronology of the text and thus Self's reliability must be drawn into doubt.[496]

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[491] Amis, 211.
[492] Amis, 29.
[493] Amis, 42.
[494] Amis, 385-6.
[495] Cf. Campañón, 89-90.

An additional point put forward by *Money*, which has already been indicated before, is the emblematic postmodern notion of a fragmented self and unstable identity. Right at the beginning of the novel Self informs his audience that he has recently been suffering from distracting noises in his head. "Owing to this fresh disease I have called tinnitus, my ears have started hearing things recently, things that aren't strictly auditory."[497] In particular, Self has identified four voices in his head, which are competing for attention.

> There are, at the latest count, four distinct voices in my head. […] First, of course, is the jabber of money, which might be represented as the blur on the top rung of a typewriter - £%Â¼@=&$! -sums, subtractions, compound terrors and greeds. Second is the voice of pornography. This often sounds like the rap of a demented DJ: the way she moves has to be good news, can't get loose till I feel the juice – suck and spread, bitch, yeah bounce for me baby … And so on. […] Third, the voice of ageing and weather, of time travel through days and days, the ever-weakening voice of stung shame, sad boredom and futile protest…
>
> Number four is the real intruder. I don't want any of these voices but I especially don't want this one. […] It has to do with quitting work and needing to think about things I never used to think about. It has the unwelcome lilt of paranoia, of rage and weepiness made articulate in spasms of vividness: drunk talk played back sober. And on the TV they keep showing hysterical ads or the fucking news… […] I wish I could flush [all the voices] out of my head. As with vampires, you have to ask them in. But once they're there, once you've given them headroom, they seem pretty determined to stick around. […] Don't let them in, whatever you do.[498]

All four voices are conflictual and configure Self's invaded, programmed, fragmented and decentered subjectivity or rather self, i.e. his lack of autonomy, wholeness and his feeling of rootlessness. "[T]hey come to *constitute* Self – who he is, how he sees and hears the world, how he relates to others. They represent his subjective experience of the world what he calls his "private culture"."[499] Whereas the first two voices point towards an invaded self, the other two voices imply regret and possible reform and are thus in conflict with the first two. The "third voice is a vaguer gesture towards a melancholy at the passing of time. […] The process of ageing represents his failure effectively to "buy time", and he is possessed by dread at the prospect of his impotence in a world of conspicuous power."[500] Since Self refers to the weather and ageing as "things that move past us uncontrollably while we stay the same" they are presented as a source of implacable anxiety.[501] Otherwise put, they amount to forces which are beyond our control and not buyable with money. His final voice, which Self finds most intimidating, threatens the first two by revealing "human values", as represented by Martina, and the expression of a "need for something beyond the protective cordon of money."[502] The fourth voice, which incarnates the voice through which Self's creator, i.e. Martin Amis, speaks, appears, for instance, when Self "experiences guilt toward his treatment of women, […] becomes sentimental during the Royal Wedding; and dissimulates a moral lecture that he delivers to a pregnant prostitute."[503] Self defines himself by his possessions in comparison with others. His focus is on having not being. Only during his relationship with Martina does Self realise that there is more to life than money. Like every human being he has an immanent need for values which guide his actions and feelings and a purpose in his life. Having lost religious faith or rather living in contemporary secular society material values are the only ones that count for Self. Self's God is money, which is, however, a destructive deity. Such being the case, Self's tinnitus can be read as an increasing dissatisfaction with his passiveness and nihilistic way of living.

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[496] Cf. Diedrick, 79.
[497] Amis, 1.
[498] Amis, 107-8.
[499] Diedrick, 76-7.

> My thoughts dance. What is it? A dance of anxiety and supplication, of futile vigil. I think I must have some new cow disease that makes you wonder whether you're real all the time, that makes your life feel like a trick, an act, a joke. I feel, I feel dead. There's a guy who lives round my way who really gives me the fucking creeps. He's a *writer*, too … I can't go on sleeping alone – that's certain. I need a human touch. Soon I'll just have to go out and buy one. I wake up at dawn and there's nothing.[504]

Self is longing for a joyful, meaningful existence and gradually realises that consumer's paradise does not deliver him with the happiness it has promised. "Am I happy? I'm not sure."[505] Finding reading pleasurable, he wonders, "Perhaps there are other bits of my life that would take on content, take on shadow, if only I read more and thought less about money."[506] "What [Self] wanted was confidence, the confidence that a large bank balance is supposed to offer", however, in the course of the novel he becomes aware that no matter how much money you possess it cannot make you truly and permanently happy.[507] Due to his lack of human values it has to be proposed that Self de facto suffers from postmodern paranoia.

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[500] Lea, 73.
[501] Amis, 316.
[502] Lea, 73.
[503] Begley, 93.
[504] Amis, 60.
[505] Amis, 75.
[506] Amis, 223.

> Something is waiting to happen to me. I can tell. Recently my life feels like a bloodcurdling joke. Recently my life has taken on form. Something is waiting. I am waiting. Soon, it will stop waiting – any day now. Awful things can happen any time. This is the awful thing. Fear walks tall on this planet. Fear walks big and fat and fine. Fear has really got the whammy on all of us down here. Oh it's true, man. Sister, don't kid yourself.[508]

Another time he states, "The future's futures have never looked so rocky. Don't put money on it. Take my advice and stick to the present. It's the real stuff, the only stuff, it's all there is, the present, the panting present."[509] However, the best example illustrating his postmodern paranoia refers to the passage where Self explicitly states his apocalyptic belief in the end of the world: "I'm too worried about earthquakes or nuclear warfare or extraterrestrial invasion or Judgement Day coming between me and my reward."[510] Self experiences the four voices of his consciousness "as fundamentally alien and involuntary. Yet Self has no alternative means of vocalising his alienation or lack of self-control. The voices which come from elsewhere are those of an imperialistic capitalism that has infiltrated his private culture and replaced any "authentic" voice with a ventriloquial script."[511] That is to say, Self is representative of the conditions of postmodernity manifested in a capitalistic commodified consumer culture. His symptoms of tinnitus must be interpreted as global symptoms standing for contemporary society's moral callousness arising from our debased lifestyle.

Constituting an integral part of his apathetic way of living, Self's greatest addiction, which also causes his final fall, is – what else could it be - money. As the novel's subtitle already indicates, money is a suicide note and therefore dangerous and destructive.

> If we all downed tools and joined hands for ten minutes and stopped believing in money, then money would no longer exist. We never will, of course. Maybe

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[507] Finney, 2.
[508] Amis, 4.
[509] Amis, 208.
[510] Amis, 152.
[511] Lea, 73.

> money is the great conspiracy, the great fiction. The great addiction: we're all addicted and we can't break the habit now.[512]

Functioning as a drug money fosters dependence and is misleading people, e.g. Self has been deluded to believe in the existence of the film project. Money determines and constitutes our lives. Being addicted we are becoming slaves to money and like drug addicts would do anything to get more.[513] Nevertheless, the text does not only depict the destructive power of money but also how contemporary society tends to indulge evermore in self-destructive and antisocial behaviour. Instead of becoming more human, nowadays the vast majority of human beings have become greedy and can ascribe being competitive and corruptive to their predominant character traits. They cannot get enough but always want more and more while others do not have enough to survive. Rampant capitalistic greed, which is the source of the catastrophic state of contemporary society, is the order of the day. With only a few exceptions, practically everyone of the characters depicted in *Money* is addicted to money. To some extent, it can be argued, the greedy and highly egocentric actors hired to play in Self's movie are even more debased than Self himself. They are vehemently engaged in a struggle for power and continuously competing for success. For instance, in "Lorne Guyland, the actor signed to play Gary, Self's father, Amis has created a classic portrait of the ageing male narcissist."[514] Whereas Self wants the movie to parallel his own lower-class roots, Lorne prefers to personify a "lover, father, husband, athlete, millionaire – but also a man of wide reading, of wide … culture, John. […] I see Garfield at a lectern reading aloud from a Shakespeare first edition, bound in unborn calf."[515]

> Amis charts a society in which the battle is already won because there exists no alternative but to conform to the values prescribed by that impersonal system. The characters in *Money* are thus will-less automata that blindly seek to advance themselves in society according to their preset roles.[516]

Only with the aid of Martina Twain is Self able to redeem himself. However, his revelation lasts only for a short time. In the long term he simply cannot resist the temptations and seductions offered by the 20th century life style. Since money causes Self's final ruin it can be said that Amis vigorously attacks the principles of money-greed.[517] Furthermore, to emphasise this argument it has to be added that the main protagonist, John Self, is actually standing for ourselves. Self himself even addresses the fact that his name is meant to be allegorical suggesting that he represents a kind of contemporary “Everyman”. “I am called John Self. But who isn’t?”[518] Another time he says, “Names are awfully important.”[519] Accordingly, “[a]s his surname suggests, Self is meant to be broadly representative.”[520] All of his negative attributes can be identified in contemporary society. He “embodies […] 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.”[521] To conclude, bearing in mind all previous points, *Money* depicts the viciousness and inescapability associated with capitalism and attacks its dehumanising influence on contemporary civilisation. By situating his novel at the end of the twentieth century, Amis is able to make overt many of the issues underlying the present age. It suggests that the by-product of junk taste and culture is inevitably junk morality. Reflecting upon the text the reader is constantly asking themselves where will this lead us to? In this way, throughout the novel an immanent sense of ending, moving towards total self-destruction and an apocalyptic tone pervades, or as the Amis character puts it: “the twentieth century is an ironic age – downward-looking.”[522]

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[512] Amis, 384.
[513] Cf. Cohen, 139.
[514] Diedrick, 93.
[515] Amis, 184.
[516] Cohen, 137.

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[517] Cf. Lea, 79.
[518] Amis, 100.
[519] Amis, 359.
[520] Diedrick, 78.
[521] Campañón, 89.
[522] Amis, 248.

## 3.3. History Breeding Pessimism and the Crisis of Belief in Ian McEwan's *Black Dogs* (1992)

Ian McEwan is considered to be one of the most significant British authors of postmodernism. By illustrating that evil forces are omnipresent and immortal, his novel *Black Dogs* reflects upon the nature of good and evil and addresses the failure of the process of Enlightenment; i.e. a degradation of civilisation into an inhuman and barbaric one due to human beings' destructive tendencies is suggested. As a consequence, since a circular understanding of history and therefore the idea that the horrors of the past will repeat themselves is put forward, the novel takes up a pessimistic and apocalyptic stance on the future. A further key matter *Black Dogs* puts emphasis on refers to the question of how people try to cope with the horrors of the past and those which are probable still to come. To be more precise, by examining the conflict between feeling and intellect, i.e. the clash between mysticism and enlightened belief in scientific rationalism, the text draws attention to the contemporary crisis of belief and poses the question of how to live a meaningful life within a secular society where God is considered dead.

### 3.3.1. The Problem of the Human Nature – Inherently Good or Evil?

#### 3.3.1.1. Facing Human Evil

The primary theme explored in Ian McEwan's novel *Black Dogs* is the nature of evil. That is to say, the book makes a complex statement about the manifestation of evil as an active force in the world on an individual as well as societal level. The image of evil is spread throughout the whole book, however, is most often hinted at by various references to the central scene in the novel. That is, the character June Tremaine's confrontation with two monstrous black dogs. On a hiking tour during June's and her husband's honeymoon in Southern France in 1946, June gets ahead of Bernard, who has stopped in order to observe a train of caterpillars. Walking on her own she is suddenly attacked by two feral dogs in the size of donkeys and expects to be eaten alive by them. Although she miraculously finds the power to fight them off with a penknife and her rucksack functioning as a shield and the beasts finally run away, the incident becomes a lasting experience that changes her entire life fundamentally. As the beasts had approached her, June had experienced the divine within herself.

> June whispered, “Please go away. Please. Oh God!” The expletive brought her to the conventional thought of her last and best chance. She tried to find the space within her for the presence of God and thought she discerned the faintest of outlines, a significant emptiness she had never noticed before, at the back of her skull. It seemed to lift and flow upwards and outwards, […] an envelope of rippling energy, or, as she tried to explain it later, of “coloured invisible light” that surrounded her and contained her. If this was God, it was also, incontestably, herself. […] Even in this moment of extremity she knew she had discovered something extraordinary, and she was determined to survive and investigate it.[523]

Later on when Bernard reappears he is totally unimpressed by her story. The newly-wed couple change their plans at the request of the traumatised June. Instead of continuing their journey in the wilderness, they retrace their steps back up the gorge and seek temporary refuge in a nearby village. Recounting her confrontation with the two dogs to the local *Maire* it turns out that the two beasts are said to be remainders of the Nazi era. According to circulating rumours they are supposedly former Gestapo guard dogs, which have now run wild, however, had once been trained by the Nazis in order to threaten the population and even worse track down and eventually rape women. “[The *Maire*] tries to tell the lurid story of how the dogs had been trained to rape women, though he is interrupted furiously by Mme Auriac, the hotel owner, who dismisses the story as a salacious fantasy, designed to shame a woman attacked by the Gestapo.”[524] That is to say, Mme Auriac believes that the dogs are only a metaphor standing for the animal-like wildness and ferocity of the Gestapo men who raped a woman. Similar to Mme Auriac, for Bernard Tremaine the idea that the dogs were trained to rape women sounds like mere fantasy and he quite overtly acknowledges to his son-in-law Jeremy, when they are talking about the incident years later, that he had always been deeply sceptical about June’s narrative. “Face to face with evil? I’ll tell you what she was up against that day – a good lunch and a spot of village gossip.”[525] Yet for June the encounter gives reason to change her life and start from scratch. For her, the encounter with the dogs, whom she regards as the incarnation of evil, explained “why she left the [Communist] Party, why she and Bernard fell into a lifetime’s disharmony, why she reconsidered her rationalism, her materialism, how she came to live the life she did, where she lived it, what she thought."[526] As a consequence, June starts to believe in God. This aspect, however, will be dealt with in more detail in the next section which is focusing in detail on the treatment of belief in *Black Dogs*. Whether the beasts were really trained in order to rape women or not, the incident with the black dogs definitely ruined the Tremaine's honeymoon and as a result marks the initial point of the lifelong deep cleft in their marriage. Till the end of their lives they cannot reconcile their views of the world and of the nature of evil.

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[523] McEwan, 149-50.
[524] Head, 104-5.
[525] McEwan, 173.

That is to say, June rejects Bernard's trivialisation of her encounter with dangerous animals run wild as having been in the wrong place at the wrong time but rather insists that the black dogs "emanated meaning".

> [In June's opinion, the encounter with the killer dogs was a symbol of a] malign principle, a force in human affairs that periodically advances to dominate and destroy the lives of individuals or nations, then retreat to await the next occasion; it was a short step from this to a luminous countervailing spirit, benign and all-powerful, residing within and accessible to us all.[527]

Accordingly, "June understands the dogs to be embodiments of evil, of a pervasive, ever-present force that can arise anywhere at any time."[528] Indeed, June succeeded to escape the evil but so did the two beasts manage to run away. Thus, the two fierce dogs, representing fascist barbarity, function as a symbol of the omnipresence of evil returning anywhere any time. In this sense, the dogs are a metaphor for human beings' destructive tendencies and potential violence in modern Europe.

> [That] morning I came face to face with evil. I didn't quite know it at the time, but I sensed it in my fear – these animals were the creations of debased imaginations, of perverted spirits no amount of social theory could account for. The evil I'm talking about lives in us all. It takes hold in an individual, in private lives, within a family, and then it's children who suffer most. And then, when the conditions are right, in different countries, at different times a terrible cruelty, a viciousness against life erupts, and everyone is surprised by the depth of hatred within himself. Then it sinks back and waits.[529]

An example offered in the text, illustrating the idea of evil forces regaining strength after a period of waiting is the passage where Bernard is attacked by Neo-Nazis in Berlin suggesting the revival of fascism. Yet this will be discussed in more detail later on.

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[526] McEwan, 50.
[527] McEwan, 19.
[528] Childs 2006, 96.
[529] McEwan, 172.

The powerful imagery associated with the black dogs is elaborately explained in the book itself by June's husband, Bernard Tremaine. He tells Jeremy, who is also the narrator of *Black Dogs*, that Churchill used the term "black dog" to refer to the depressions he occasionally suffered from.

> I was the one who told her about Churchill's black dogs. You remember? The name he gave to the depressions he used to get from time to time. I think he pinched the expression from Samuel Johnson. So June's idea was that if one dog was a personal depression, two dogs were a kind of cultural depression, civilisation's worst moods.[530]

The dogs are an emblem for evil and embody potential cruelty and chaos in the future. "The black dogs are all of these, and more: they are the obvious manifestation of historical portents, foreboding the evils, from the [Holocaust] to the everyday [life], that humans continuously heap upon one another. They are tangible testament to the pervading darkness, the encompassing violence" in the contemporary world.[531] In this manner, the image of the black dogs representing all the horrors of the past and those which are probably still to come is suitable insofar as they are something to which it is possible to attach one's thoughts in order to express those actually unutterable ideas such as the cruelties done to people in the Nazi death camps.

A further interesting aspect regarding the powerful symbolism of the black dogs lies in their equation with human beings; i.e. representing the evil in human beings the dogs simultaneously draw attention to man's animal nature, his barbarous instincts and uncivilised impulses. This notion becomes most palpable in the episode in France in 1989 where Jeremy rescues a French boy from being beaten up by his father. While Jeremy is dining in the same hotel Bernard and June had stayed after her encounter with the black dogs, Jeremy becomes the eye witness of a brutish father striking his seven- or eight-year-old son's face. Horrified by the incident and standing up for the self he perceives in the little boy, Jeremy decides to challenge the man to a duel and finally beats the boy's father to the ground without getting injured in return.

> I caught him hard and full on the nose with such a force that even as his bone crunched, I felt something snap in my knuckle. There was a satisfying moment when he was stunned but could not fall. His arms dropped to his side and he stood there and watched me as I hit him with the left, one two three, face, throat and gut, before he went down. I drew back my foot and I think I might have

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[530] McEwan, 104.
[531] Slay, 145.

> kicked and stomped him to death had I not heard a voice and turned to see a thin figure in the lighted doorway across the road.
> The voice was calm. “Monsieur. Je vous prie. Ça suffit.”
> Immediately I knew that the elation driving me had nothing to do with revenge and justice. Horrified with myself, I stepped back.[532]

This passage is of crucial importance for various reasons. First of all, “Jeremy is only stopped from seriously injuring the boy’s father by a French lady’s peremptory “Ça suffit” (That’s enough), something one says to misbehaving dogs.”[533] This echoes exactly the words used by June to fight off the two black dogs. In this way, the fight between the two men is equated with primitive animalistic behaviour. The evil in Jeremy, that is his own repressed rage, has all of a sudden been unlocked. This illustrates the potential for evil forces that hides in all of us just waiting to emerge, breaking finally out in the form of sudden violent aggression. Besides, the scene makes a clear statement against contemporary society since according to Jeremy the boy’s faith is representative for the miserable condition of the world.[534] Maybe this and his personal history is also why Jeremy identifies so wholeheartedly with the little boy. “It was his loneliness that gripped me. I remembered my own after my parents died.”[535] Besides, “the recognition of the boy’s defencelessness compels Jeremy to act protectively on his behalf.”[536] He cannot just sit there and watch the father’s dubious educational methods. “It was impossible, I thought I had not seen it, a strong man could not hit a child this way, with the unrestrained force of adult hatred.”[537] Thus, by fighting with the father, Jeremy is in a way repaying the injustice from his own past and also the guilt he feels due to his personal abandonment of his niece Sally. Last but not least, it is worth noting that the scene brings to light that Jeremy actually makes use of violence in order to show his disapproval of violence or rather to attempt to stop violence: “it is […] when Jeremy loses sight of the father’s humanity, his “face”, and treats him like an “animal” (107) to be killed that he replicates the violence he rightly seeks to end.”[538] This makes him recognise that the vicious impulse symbolised by the black dogs had temporarily manifested itself in him.

> As his violent impulses overcome his urge simply to help the boy, however, Jeremy has to be prevented from “stomp[ing]” the father “to death” (108) […]

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[532] McEwan, 131.
[533] Malcolm 2002, 140.
[534] Cf. McEwan, 128.
[535] McEwan, 128.
[536] Wells, 120.
[537] McEwan, 129.
[538] Wells, 120-1.

> At that violent extreme, Jeremy becomes associated with the novel's central metaphor of malignant power, the black Gestapo dogs that attacked June on a hiking expedition with Bernard in France in 1946.[539]

This scene demonstrates that "any individual has the capacity for extreme hatred and violence, whether from good motives or bad ones,"[540] or as June would put it, the evil lives in us all. Moreover, the binary opposition of good and evil collapses as Jeremy's role is degraded within seconds from the protecting hero to a cruel bully. This points up the idea of revitalising violence, the black dogs running throughout history, which will be dealt with in more detail as follows.

### 3.3.1.2. The Nightmare of History

The second issue regarding the nature of evil, which will be addressed as follows and which has already been indicated above, is the statement about the omnipresence and revival of evil throughout history. Along these lines, this section will show how the novel constitutes the idea of the impossibility to overcome evil. In this way, it suggests that history is circular and consequently breeding pessimism. The whole plot of the novel is steeped in recent events and developments of European history such as, for example, World War II, the Holocaust, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 but also Neo-Nazism in contemporary Europe. References to key historical events and processes are thus frequent and always related to the actions and individual fates of the novel's protagonists. "Postwar British communism, the legacy of World War II, Poland in 1981, the fall of the Berlin Wall – all these are the conditions and the circumstances of June and Bernard's failed marriage and of Jeremy's fascinated pursuit of the causes of that failure."[541] Another example illustrating the relation between the private and the public realms demonstrating how a character's personal life is closely related to public historical events is Bernard's decision to leave the Communist Party due to the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Furthermore, his post-war experience during their honeymoon where he witnesses a woman grieving over her dead husband and two brothers can be interpreted in this way.

> The consequence of the war he now sees less as a geopolitical fact, but rather: "a multiplicity, a near-infinity of private sorrows, as a boundless grief minutely subdivided without diminishment among individuals who covered the continent

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[539] Wells, 120.
[540] Childs 2006, 92.
[541] Malcolm 2002, 7.

> like dust, like spores whose separate identities would remain unknown, and whose totality showed more sadness than anyone could ever begin to comprehend" (BD, p. 165) The question that formulates in Bernard's mind as a consequence is a political conundrum, filtered through this empathic response: "what possible good could come of a Europe covered in this dust, these spores, when forgetting would be inhuman and dangerous, and remembering a constant torture?"(BD, p. 165)[542]

Throughout the novel, similar allusions are made regarding the impact of major public events upon the private little worlds of the characters; i.e. the larger historical evil is constantly connected to smaller personal acts of cruelty or unkindness. In this way, the novel portrays the fragility of civilisation and life in general and shows the massive and powerful influence historical horrors have on an individual person's life. Yet, on the other hand the novel also shows that evil is not restricted to individual people but evil is depicted on an international level indicating the idea of a decline of contemporary society.

The most obvious example illustrating that destructive violent forces are an ever-present-danger and that the horrors of the past such as the Holocaust can revive any time anywhere just as the black dogs can return any time anywhere marks a scene during Bernard's and Jeremy's stay in Berlin in 1989. Jeremy and Bernard decided to fly to Berlin because they felt the strong desire to witness the historic event of the fall of the Berlin Wall at first hand. "History was happening."[543] While the masses are celebrating the collapse of the wall on the streets, Jeremy and Bernard become witnesses of some Neo-Nazis shouting "Foreigners out"[544] while attempting to attack a Turkish immigrant with a red flag. Nobody comes to help. Only Bernard, strongly identifying with the communist revolutionary due to his past as a member of the Communist Party, is brave enough to countervail and comes to the young man's rescue. As a consequence, the Neo-Nazis direct their attention to Bernard and almost kick him to death if not Grete, a girl who mysteriously resembles June, who at that point in time is already deceased, "returns to assist [him] in the fracas with the fascist yobs."[545] Bernard's confrontation with the skinheads is echoed later on in the text in Jeremy's fight with the French father. Just like the skinheads have to be prevented from killing Bernard, Jeremy is stopped by a woman from stomping the man in the hotel to death.

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[542] Head, 105.
[543] McEwan, 70.
[544] McEwan, 104.
[545] Head, 112.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the skinheads, as well as the French father, are described in less than human terms, i.e. like animals run wild: “The kids had stopped short and were bunched up in a pack, breathing heavily, heads and tongues lolling in bemusement at this beanpole, this scarecrow in a coat who stood in their way. I saw that two of them had silver swastikas pinned to their lapels.”[546] To put it another way, the group of skinheads “[is] explicitly paralleled with June’s dogs. The connection is clearly drawn between the central vision of the dogs, which attack and are wounded but then are ultimately reprieved by public complacency or complicity, and the continuing threat of the neo-Nazism.”[547] Thus, the metaphor of the black dogs functioning as a symbol of the omnipresence of evil is rightly applied in this context. “In the Berlin section of *Black Dogs,* we see a self-conscious transposition of the parable of the black dogs from its place in June’s visionary understanding to a scenario of concrete historicality in which Bernard becomes the protagonist.”[548] Besides, what the Berlin section clearly illustrates is that, on the one hand, there is the collapse of the Berlin Wall signifying the end of the Cold War and thus the end of domination in the name of communism.

> *Black Dogs* […] explores the world of politics and their incorrigible effects on intimate alliances; the relationships within these novels reflect the changes – social, psychological, political – of the latter twentieth century. In conveying these changes in the world consciousness, McEwan uses the Berlin Wall as a central image. [The] wall plays a crucial role in a pivotal sense, a sense that emanates hope and possibility.[549]

On the other hand, however, the fall of the Berlin Wall leads to a dramatic, abrupt and unexpected change of the world. Thus, the end of the Cold War was not only embraced with joy and optimism but simultaneously created a feeling of anxiety since people were quite unsure what to expect from the future. Furthermore and even worse than these feelings of insecurity, there is this vicious new generation of racists who attempt to revive fascism.

> As the monument to the defeat and division of Nazi Germany topples, a vicious new generation of racists emerges to take up the torch of fascism, and a terrible question takes shape: what if the event that seemed to mark the victory at last of reason and popular democracy turns out to hatch a basilisk? This is the anxiety which lies behind the creation of *Black Dogs*. It is the widespread fear that, far

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[546] McEwan, 97.
[547] Morrison, III.
[548] Morrison, III.
[549] Slay, 134.

> from having left the apocalyptic horrors of both world wars behind, we may be en route to reliving them.[550]

This is not only a sign of the recurring evil danger but at the same time suggests that human beings have not learned from the mistakes of the past. Apart from that, the scene takes place in front of the former Reichstag building and Gestapo headquarter which both function as a reminder of Germany's Nazi past. Consequently, the entire scene with the xenophobic skinheads resembling their spiritual forebears of the Nazi era suggests that history is going round in circles and thus is unmistakably breeding pessimism. This becomes even more discernable in the passivity displayed by the people on the streets when the skinheads attack the young Turkish immigrant. "There was a groan of disapproval from the crowd, but nobody moved."[551] The fact that no one comes to help except for Bernard and then Grete emphasises the idea that humanity has not learned from the horrors of the past and is in a way connected to the belief of the present's rootedness in the past. Consequently the Berlin section raises the anxiety that after two world wars and all the other horrors of the past history will repeat itself "because the human drives which fuelled [these horrors] had merely been suppressed, and may never be eradicated."[552] Evil is therefore closely connected with the fall and abandonment of civilisation. To be more precise, it is indicated that men's destructive tendency can revive anywhere any time as is expressed via the metaphor of the black dogs and as has happened throughout man's recorded history several times. Therefore, it can be argued *Black Dogs* clearly creates a feeling of unease and expresses an apocalyptic outlook rather than confidence towards a peaceful future.

The idea that evil forces are immortal, that people have not learned from the mistakes of the past and thus that the horrors of the past keep repeating themselves is also hinted at in the scene where Jeremy and Jenny visit the former concentration camp of Majdanek in Poland in 1981 ten months before they marry. Approaching the gate of the concentration camp they read an official sign in commemoration of the victims.

> We stopped outside the main entrance to read a sign which announced that so many hundreds of thousands of Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, French, British and Americans had died here. It was very quiet. There was no one in sight. I felt a momentary reluctance to enter. Jenny's whisper startled me.

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[550] Ryan 1997, 61.
[551] McEwan, 98.
[552] Ryan 1997, 61.

> ‘No mention of the Jews. See? It still goes on. And it’s official.’ Then she added. More to herself, ‘The black dogs.’ These last words I ignored. As for the rest, even discounting the hyperbole, a residual truth was sufficient to transform Majdanek for me in an instant from a monument, an honourable civic defiance of oblivion, to a disease of the imagination and a living peril, a barely conscious connivance with evil.[553]

This scene creates a strong feeling of unease and a sense of threat. It suggests that humanity has not learned from their mistakes of the past and therefore stresses the idea that evil is something universal, recurring and immortal.

A further argument regarding the connection between history, evil and pessimism running throughout the book is the idea of how an individual’s history or rather faith is influenced and shaped by the past. This is best portrayed by referring to the character of Sally, who is Jeremy’s niece, and with whose family Jeremy has lived as an adolescent after the death of his own parents in a car accident. When Sally was still a little child she was beaten by her parents. Subsequently, her life is affected by a disastrous marriage with “a man who had beaten her and left with a child. [Eventually, two] years later, Sally had been found unfit, too violent to care for her little boy who was now with foster parents.”[554] As a result of Sally’s individual history, i.e. the violence experienced on her own body throughout her entire childhood, she lays violent hands on her own child as an adult. Thus, in order to cope with her past as a powerless victim of brutality she becomes a perpetrator herself. Sally is somehow entrapped in a spiral of violence which replicates the disaster experienced in her childhood. Since Jeremy abandoned Sally by moving to Oxford to take up his studies he feels responsible for her unhappy life which is haunted by domestic violence. His love for her and feeling himself like an abandoned child constitute also the reason why Jeremy defends the little boy in the hotel in France thereby taking revenge for the wrongs suffered by himself and his niece. In some respects, he universalises Sally’s faith and regards all evil in the world as an extrapolation of her individual pain. These allusions to domestic violence and child abuse directly address the novel’s central theme of human evil and individual suffering. Moreover, Sally’s story accentuates the idea of the immortality of evil forces and thus the nightmare of history. Just as Jeremy tries to stop the French father's violence by using violence, Sally's story also illustrates that violence breeds violence.[555]

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[553] McEwan, 109-10.

[554] McEwan. 68.

The episode about the killing of the dragonfly can quite similarly be read in the light of the present's rootedness in the past. While Bernard and June are on their honeymoon in Provence roughly one week before the incident with the black dogs, Bernard captures a colourful dragonfly. He attempts to kill the beautiful insect in order to take it home and add it to his collection. However, revealing her pregnancy June demands to set it free because she fears that if Bernard kills the innocent insect nature will take revenge on their unborn baby.[556] Nevertheless, Bernard puts it in the killing bottle as he doubts "that nature could take revenge on a foetus for the death of an insect."[557] Nonetheless, Jeremy wonders whether Jenny's sixth finger could be understood as the dragonfly's revenge. The scene is not only crucial insofar as Bernard's and June's divergent attitudes and beliefs foreshadow already the failure of their relationship, which will be dealt with in depth in the following section, but also due to the fact that it suggests the idea of the present's rootedness in the past. Moreover, her husband's killing of the insect symbolises, for June, the evil quality in human beings. In this way it supports the proposal made earlier about circular history breeding pessimism.

That history plays a central role in individual people's lives insofar as it has an unavoidable influence on the present can be seen in the narrator's fascination by the past. For instance, when Jeremy is confronted with an old picture of his parents-in-law depicting them when they had just become members of the Communist Party he reads in their faces that they were "full of optimism about the future of the world."[558] He points out a glimmer of innocence in their faces, "which he sees coming from a seeming unawareness of the future passage of time and its changes."[559] Jeremy notes that, whereas Bernard almost seemed unchanged in comparison to now, June had changed almost beyond recognition. The incident with the black dogs changed her life fundamentally. Thus, when looking at his parents-in-law's photograph as well as when thinking of his niece Sally Jeremy is not only "noting differences between past and present yet also trying to understand how the present grew out of that particular past."[560] That is, he is reflecting upon the present's rootedness in the past.

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[555] Cf. Childs 2005, 96-7.
[556] Cf. McEwan, 77-9.
[557] McEwan, 79.
[558] Malcolm 2002, 144.
[559] Malcolm 2002, 144.

To sum up, the novel is notably concerned with the evil human nature. "The black dogs themselves surely cry out to be interpreted as metaphors of a brutal and recurrent history."[561] This is especially emphasised in the ending of the novel, where Jeremy states that the two dogs "will return to haunt us, somewhere in Europe, in another time."[562] Thus, *Black Dogs* continually presents a decline of civilisation linked to infinite violence. The idea that humanity cannot overcome the evil within themselves and thus the horrors of the past will keep repeating themselves – the black dogs are still out there in the mountains of Europe just waiting to return – creates a strong feeling of unease and pessimism. This thought becomes even more threatening if one starts wondering why exactly McEwan decided to have two dogs instead of one. As Bernard already indicated in the book, June's suggestion was that if one dog stands for a personal depression, two dogs represent a kind of cultural societal depression. Yet, another possible interpretation could be that the two dogs are a gendered pair, i.e. a breeding pair. Accordingly, they might not only have offspring – the idea of evil running and repeating itself throughout history – but even worse might proliferate themselves. Evil might enlarge itself. Read in this light, Ian McEwan's novel presents the reader with a total loss of confidence in the future. There is no guarantee that the appalling events of the past are not going to repeat themselves. On the contrary, facing today's technical feasibility, e.g. nuclear bombs, things will probably turn out even worse rather than better.

### 3.3.2. The Treatment of Belief - The Conflict between Reason and Superstition

Another key subject in *Black Dogs*, which is prominently raised by the narrator Jeremy throughout the whole novel, is the question of belief. Two competing world-views, the opposition between spiritual belief and scientific rationalism represented through the characters of June and Bernard Tremaine, are juxtaposed as "contending ways of facing up the terror of human history" and dealing with a jaundiced outlook towards the future.[563] At the beginning of their relationship and during the early years of their marriage, June and Bernard share an enthusiastic belief in the burgeoning Communist Party. They feel confident that communism is the political entity that would succeed in eradicating all world problems, eliminating all evil as, for instance, fascism or class struggle and thus becoming the great apparatus of history. "[T]hey feel that belonging to the Party associates them with all that is youthful, lively, intelligent and daring."[564] However, soon they realise that the Communist Party does not provide them with a satisfactory way of facing up to the terror of human history such as the horrors of the Second World War. Totally disillusioned, they finally both dismiss communism and search for new ways of how to make sense of the evil drive in human beings. They want to find explanations why our supposedly civilised society degenerated into a barbaric one. However, the new paths they strike take them in diametrically opposed directions. They come to see the world in radically different ways. As a consequence, they end up with contending and conflicting world-views which then disrupt their love affair: "They live a life of peculiar estrangement, she in France, he in London, unable to part or to be reconciled."[565]

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[560] Malcolm 2002, 144.
[561] Malcolm 2002, 143.
[562] McEwan, 174.

### 3.3.2.1. June's Belief in Spirituality

June's encounter with the two black dogs during her and Bernard's honeymoon in France in 1946, which also marks the centrepiece of Jeremy's memoir, caused a sudden and tremendous change in her life. "[I]t was in her own story of her life – the defining moment, the experience that redirected, the revealed truth by whose light all previous conclusions must be re-thought."[566] Owing to this experience with the absolute evil in the form of the black dogs, a "transformation" takes place inside her, which is however much to the dismay of her husband. June finds her belief in God and turns deeply religious: "I met evil and discovered God."[567] That is to say, the attack by the dogs "[convinced] her that a divinity shapes our ends, and that our lives should be devoted to cultivating its presence within us and resisting the incursions of its opposite, the pure malevolence manifest in the demonic hounds she fought off that day."[568] Thus, due to her vision of the divine she abandons the Communist Party immediately after her revelation because she regards politics as insufficient to face human evil. In other words, she considers “the revolutionary politics to which she too had subscribed before her revelation [as] a fatal delusion, an evasion of the deeper truths of being and the taxing obligations of the human heart.”[569]

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[563] Head, 103.
[564] McEwan, 27.
[565] Malcolm 2002, 131.
[566] McEwan, 50.
[567] McEwan, 60.
[568] Ryan 1997, 62.

> Human nature, the human heart, the spirit, the soul, consciousness itself – call it what you like – in the end, it’s all we’ve got to work with. It has to develop and expand, or the sum of our misery will never diminish. […] Without a revolution of the inner life, however slow, all our big designs are worthless. The work we have to do is with ourselves if we’re ever going to be at peace with each other. I’m not saying it’ll happen. There’s a good chance it won’t. I’m saying it’s our only chance.[570]

That is to say, she “insists that a concern with this world, with politics, and with social activity leads to an impoverishment, a lack of appreciation for the richness and beauty of that very world and the mysterious divine force that underlies it.”[571] Instead, as a way of coping with the horrors of the past and the future, June now believes in human being’s potential to overcome evil by a benign and all-powerful spirit, residing within and accessible to us all.

> [W]e have within us an infinite resource, a potential for a higher state of being, a goodness… […] Call it God, or the spirit of love, or the Atman or the Christ or the laws of nature. […] What matters is to make the connection with this centre, this inner being, and then extend and deepen it. Then carry it outwards, to others. The healing power of love.[572]

June prefers to rely on the system of intuition and believes in religion, mysticism and above all the healing power of love. Being a typical spiritualist, June is of the opinion that “life really does have rewards and punishments, that underneath it all there’s a deeper pattern of meaning beyond what we give it ourselves.”[573] Maybe this belief is also the reason which enables her to stay optimistic when she is diagnosed with a rare form of leukaemia. Thus, typically of a metaphysical world-view, June believes in an underlying meaning of life. She evidently expresses this belief when she is reflecting upon her encounter with the black dogs.

> Though she is scared of the animals’ presence on the country path, she is even more frightened by “the possibility of their absence, of their not existing at all” (BD 145). Thus, what June is afraid of most is a semantic vacuum, a “chasm of meaninglessness” (BD 49) in which all frameworks of belief that promised to

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[569] Ryan 1997, 62-3.
[570] McEwan, 172.
[571] Malcolm 2002, 150.
[572] McEwan, 60.
[573] McEwan, 80.

> provide a meaningful interpretation of the self and the universe evaporate into nothingness. June reacts to the intimidating experience of absence by replacing her rationalist explanatory pattern with a mystical one, hoping it will secure her against the epistemological void experienced on her walk through the "gothic" countryside: "She tried to find the space within her for the presence of God and thought she discerned the faintest outlines, a significant emptiness she had never noticed before, at the back of her skull" (BD 149).[574]

Accordingly, what June is most afraid of is a feeling of meaninglessness; i.e. she is anxious that nihilism takes over. For her it is important to make sense out of everything and believe in something rather than living a meaningless life. In her opinion things do not happen without reason. "June is aware of the meaning-giving, pattern-building function her pivotal encounter with the black dogs has in her life."[575] It filled her life with meaning insofar as it made her believe in God.

> I know everyone thinks I've made too much of it – a young girl frightened by a couple of dogs on a country path. But you wait until you come to make sense of your life. You'll either find you're too old and lazy to make the attempt, or you'll do what I have done, single out a certain event, find in something ordinary and explicable a means of expressing what might otherwise be lost to you. […] I'm not saying that these animals were anything other than what they appeared to be […]. I don't actually believe they were Satan's familiars, Hell Hounds, or omens from God. […] I haven't mythologised these animals. I've made use of them.[576]

Accordingly, "June in *Black Dogs* is a benign mystic, but her beliefs are highly subjective and beyond reasonable proof. […] As a counterbalance to the severe irrationality […] McEwan does show the possibilities of reason, rationality, and, above all, science" personified in June's husband Bernard.[577]

### 3.3.2.2. Bernard's Belief in Rationality

In contrast to June, who left the Communist Party immediately after her encounter with the two evil beasts, Bernard holds on to his beliefs until the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. At that point in time he feels disappointed due to the Communist Party's inability to solve the world's problems and thus decides to opt out of the party and as an alternative becomes a Labour Party MP. In contradiction to June who turns to some private mysticism, Bernard does not abandon politics as a whole but continues throughout his life to devote himself to political principles and ideology, e.g. he is working as a political expert for the BBC. In addition, another central aspect of his life forms his profound belief in science, i.e. steady “progression.”[578] This includes his counting on intellect and the system of reason. “[I]t is human beings who inscribe on reality whatever intelligibility it yields; we make things the way they are, and we can change them for better or worse by changing the way we think and behave as individuals and communities.”[579] That is to say, Bernard believes that we can change the world and overcome evil forces by using our rationality and defends his convictions by making use of systematic, logical argumentation. At one point for example, during a conversation about the fall of the Berlin Wall, Jeremy notes that Bernard “had a way of presenting all his opinions as well-established facts, and his certainties did have a sinuous power.”[580] This includes that Bernard considers it absurd to be driven by emotions such as his wife June. She searches for the hidden truth of the universe while he is convinced there is none that science cannot ultimately reveal. He believes that the more universal truths about the world are produced with the help of science the more order is established and the better society will function, which is typical of a belief in the project of Enlightenment. Moreover, he condemns unspecified “malign principles” or “perverted spirits no amount of social theory could account for” and rejects June’s belief in “the healing power of love” as “consoling magic” or “[r]eligious cant.”[581] Unlike his wife, he does not trust in a higher state of being or religion. On the contrary, he “regards evil as a result of wrongly implemented social and political policies, convinced that it can be corrected or eradicated by a different, rational application of the same social and political means.”[582] Hence, he believes in “idealistic, future-bound politics”[583] and would “argue rationally that all […] examples of ‘evil’ are historically specific incidents of violence that better … political systems could eradicate.”[584] In contrast, June is of the opinion that politics are totally insufficient in the face of human evil. Apart from that, Bernard rejects myths because he complains about they way in which they are used to supplant truth. For example, Bernard is of the opinion that June simply borrowed the black dogs from Churchill and Samuel Johnson so as to allow her to take a direction in life she had already decided upon anyway.[585]

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[574] Schemberg, 75-6.
[575] Schemberg, 77.
[576] McEwan, 59.
[577] Malcolm 2002, 14-5.

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[578] McEwan, 38.
[579] Ryan 1997, 62.
[580] McEwan, 72.
[581] McEwan, 172, 80 and 104.
[582] Schemberg, 64.
[583] Ryan 1997, 63.
[584] Childs 2006, 96.

An example of Bernard's rational scientific standpoint as opposed to June's belief in spirituality guided by emotions to improve the world is the scene with the dragonfly early during their honeymoon. Whereas June superstitiously worries that nature could take revenge on their unborn baby for the killing of the dragonfly and thus wants to secure the insect's life, Bernard wants to kill it for his collection and feels "extremely vexed by the way he sees her lack of respect for any kind of objective, verifiable truth."[586]

> My wife might have been interested in poetic truth, or spiritual truth, or her own private truth, but she didn't give a damn for truth, for the facts, for the kind of truth that two people could recognise independently of each other. She made patterns, she invented myths. Then she made the facts fit them.[587]

Their argument over the dragonfly marks also the first time the discrepancy of their beliefs becomes apparent.

> Bernard remembers that during the argument he was, as always, "cold, theoretical, arrogant. I never showed any emotion" (BD, 58). The acceleration reveals their underlying and overwhelming difference: Bernard is the rational, June, the spiritual. With the appearance of the black dogs, this rift becomes the unhealing wound of their lives.[588]

Consequently, it can be argued that while Bernard stands for the prototypical enlightened rational person, June instead prefers to believe in the mystical, which cannot be proved by science.

> Despite their vast differences, however, the two never abandon each other completely. Though they separate and live the majority of their married lives in different countries (June in France and Bernard in England), they never divorce. Jeremy tells us that, for Bernard, June "felt love and irritation in equal measure" (BD, 11). June later admits, "The truth is we love each other, we've never stopped, we're obsessed and we failed to do a thing with it. We couldn't make a life. We couldn't give up the love, but we wouldn't bend to its power" (BD, 32). They exhaust each other, then, not only through their ideological oppositions but also through the love they cannot rein. Their relationship becomes an obvious representation of postwar Europe, a combination of love and hate, politics and

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[585] Cf. Schemberg, 65-6.
[586] Malcolm 2002, 150.
[587] McEwan, 86.
[588] Slay, 142

> sentiment, and their marriage, appropriately, spans the cold war, ending only when June dies in 1987.[589]

Comparing June's and Bernard's opposing beliefs under the aspect of gender it can be argued that June represents the typical "female" and Bernard the classical "male" attitude. Corresponding to traditional gender roles, the woman acts according to intuition and emotions whereas the man prefers to rely on reason and rationality.[590] Apart from that, there is also a gendered representation when it comes to the context of violence. It is a woman who stops Jeremy from stomping the French father to death and it is also a woman who saves Bernard in the Berlin scene: "She was […] an object of desire and aspiration. […] The force of her disgust was sexual. They thought they were men, and she was reducing them to naughty children. They could not afford to be seen shrinking from her, backing off."[591] Violence is thus explained in terms of tempered masculine aggression only combated by female presence. Nevertheless, regarding Bernard's and June's clashing modes of seeing the world *Black Dogs* remains balanced. Jeremy does not prefer one over the other and remains undecided till the end as will be discussed in the following chapter.

### 3.3.2.3. Jeremy and Postmodern Rootlessness

"Presented in the form of a memoir, a "divagation" as the narrator refers to it, [*Black Dogs*] chronicles Jeremy's fascination with his wife's parents, June and Bernard Tremaine."[592] Right in the opening lines of the novel, Jeremy explains that he had always been fascinated by other people's parents since he had lost his parents in a car accident at the age of eight. This obsession of appropriating other people's parents terminates when he marries Jenny Tremaine and thus acquires parents in the form of in-laws. Still, Jeremy realises that being an orphan for so many years left a deep impact on his personality.

> I discovered that the emotional void, the feeling of belonging nowhere and to no one that had afflicted me between the ages of eight and thirty-seven had an important intellectual consequence: I had no attachments, I believed in nothing. It was not that I was a doubter, or that I had armed myself with the useful scepticism of a rational curiosity, or that I saw all arguments from all sides; there was simply no good cause, no enduring principle, no fundamental idea which I

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[589] Slay, 142.
[590] Cf. Seaboyer, 30.
[591] McEwan, 98-9.
[592] Slay, 141.

> could identify, no transcendent entity whose existence I could truthfully, passionately or quietly assert.[593]

"This establishes Jeremy as an empty vessel, in moral terms."[594] In other words, attempting to overcome his feeling of typical postmodern rootlessness Jeremy's life is characterised by a constant quest for meaning. He is longing to fill his lack of guiding rules telling him what is good or bad. Aiming to overcome his rootlessness by comparing June's and Bernard's opposing philosophical positions in order to find out which is more convincing Jeremy simultaneously seeks to unravel the circumstances that led to their estrangement. He soaks "up [their] conflicting selves and standpoints.[595]" Under the pretext of writing a memoir of June's life, he thus takes every opportunity to gather as much information as possible about the Tremaine's lives: "He wants to know everything about June and Bernard – from their first kiss to June's death – [this] helps him […] to acquire an identity and solidity he would otherwise lack." To a certain extent, "Jeremy becomes the go-between through whom the two continue their feud."[596]

Yet, although Jeremy tries hard to understand his in-laws' diverging viewpoints he cannot subscribe to either of their positions. In addition, he fails as a go-between.

> [Thus, for example, when] Jeremy is with Bernard, he feels June holds the key to what is "missing from [Bernard's sceptical] account of the world" in which "too much was closed off, too much denied." When he's with June, he feels stifled by the "unstated assumption … that faith is virtue, and, by extension, unbelief is unworthy or, at best, pitiable" (BD 19-20)[597]

Thus, Jeremy is torn between their positions. On the one hand, he feels convinced by June's opinion and believes in the possibility of love transforming and redeeming life.

> [For instance,] when Jeremy thinks of his wife and children during a trip to Southern France in 1989, he feels that he has finally found the "hearth" (e.g. BD 15, 17) he had been vainly searching for as a boy. He states: "A thousand miles away, in or near one house among all the millions, were Jenny and our four children, my tribe. I belonged, my life was rooted and rich" (BD 122). In our aspirations to fullness, substance, and wholeness, certain hypergoods or values –

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[593] McEwan, 18.
[594] Head, 110.
[595] Ryan 1997, 67.
[596] Ryan 1997, 64-5.
[597] Harpham quoted in Seaboyer, 30-1.

> such as family life in Jeremy's case – provide spiritual landmarks which help us to assess our lives as we move forward into the future or look back to the past.[598]

On the other hand, however, June and Bernard serve as an example where love is not strong enough to redeem life as they fail to resolve their dilemma in a final way. Besides, as the end of the novel suggests, evil will return anyway. "Neither the rationalist nor the mystic will save us, nor will love."[599] Neither is Jeremy totally convinced of Bernard's position, which, contrary to postmodern thinking, reduces everything to objectively verifiable facts and the binary dichotomy of right versus wrong.

> Bernard's certainty that a consensus about what is true or right or adequate in European politics can be reached through adversarial discussion is not only naively idealistic, but also strikingly opposed to his professed scepticism and radical denial of master narratives. Bernard might claim that "[y]ou should always keep an open mind" (BD 117) and stay inside what we called an ongoing discourse of values, but in fact, his rational, scientific outlook on the world is no less teleological and narrow-minded that his wife's patchwork mysticism.[600]

That is to say, Bernard is a typical supporter of Enlightenment believing in the calculability of the world. That which does not reduce to numbers is categorised as myth. Accordingly, Bernard eliminated myth in his life but also the "meaning" that transcends the bare facts. To a certain extent, however, it can be argued that Bernard's outlook on the world is like June's at heart spiritual.[601] After June's death, he imagines that June is trying to communicate with him.

> I couldn't stop thinking that if the world by some impossible chance really was as she made it out to be, then she was bound to try and get in touch to tell me that I was wrong and she was right. […] And that she would do it somehow through a girl who looked like her. And one day one of these girls would come to me with a message.[602]

Nonetheless, Bernard cannot maintain this idea for long and rejects Jeremy's belief that Grete, the woman who saves Bernard in Berlin, is actually "his guardian angel, the incarnation of June."[603] "Bernard, rationally and off-handedly, dismisses his wife's "appearances" as "quite a coincidence, I suppose" (BD, 82)."[604] Thus, Jeremy comes to the conclusion that these illusions "are not sufficiently concrete to meet stringent scientific criteria of proof of the existence of the afterlife."[605] Yet, for Jeremy still the intellect alone proves insufficient when it comes to understanding ourselves or the world we live in. Consequently, Jeremy shuttles back and forth between their opposing sets of beliefs. "Each proposition blocked the one before, or was blocked by the one that followed. It was a self-cancelling argument, a multiplication of zeros, and I could not make it stop."[606] Jeremy is caught between two stools. He cannot decide which of the two competing beliefs he shall give credence: "Whether June's black dogs should be regarded as a potent symbol, a handy catch phrase, evidence of her credulity or a manifestation of a power that really exists, I cannot say."[607] Apart from that, it is interesting that Jeremy is consciously aware that his search for a consistent framework of belief is a typical characteristic of the postmodern condition. "To believe in everything, to make no choices, amounts to much the same thing, to my mind, as believing in nothing at all. I am uncertain whether our civilisation at this turn of the millennium is cursed by too much or too little belief, whether people like Bernard and June cause the trouble, or people like me."[608] However, what can be said with certainty is that "[f]rom June, he learns compassion for "all life" (56), even a dragonfly […]; from Bernard, he gains the courage to sacrifice himself on behalf of the less powerful."[609]

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[598] Schemberg, 41-2.
[599] Malcolm 2002, 154.
[600] Schemberg, 65.
[601] Cf. Schemberg, 65.
[602] McEwan, 83-4.
[603] McEwan, 76.
[604] Slay, 143.

Above and beyond, Jeremy feels not only torn between Bernard's and June's diverging world views but also between their contradictory accounts of past events. Various passages in the text give reason to consider June and Bernard unreliable characters. First of all, whenever Jeremy visits June at the Hospice, where she takes her time over dying, he notes that she has massive problems to recollect herself; i.e. her narratives are driven by amnesia. "She cleared her throat. "Where was I?" We both knew she had peeped into the pit, into a chasm of meaninglessness where everything was nameless and without relation, and it had frightened her. It had frightened us both."[610] There is yet another passage where Jeremy wonders whether June is perhaps deliberately manipulating her accounts of the past.

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[605] Byrnes, 42.
[606] McEwan, 119-20.
[607] McEwan, 19.
[608] McEwan, 20.
[609] Wells, 120.
[610] McEwan, 49.

> We had been over this more than once, how and why June changed her life. Each time it came out a little differently. […] As I wrote I wondered, ungenerously, if I was being used - as a conduit, a medium for the final fix June wanted to put on her life.[611]

Apart from June, the reader is provoked to question the reliability of Bernard's versions too. For example, he tells Jeremy about his shocking post-war experience where he had witnessed a woman in front of a war memorial grieving over her deceased husband and two brothers, whose names, Bernard adds, were engraved on the tombstone. However, years later when Jeremy visits that very same place he "found that the base of the monument was inscribed with Latin quotations. There were no names of the war dead."[612] Apart from that, there are various other passages in the text that cause doubt regarding the reliability of the Tremaine's accounts. For example, Jeremy compares June's version with Bernard's memories about their first sexual encounter and must realise that they are totally incongruous. Not to forget their divergent versions when it comes to June's encounter with the black dogs. Accordingly, their incompatible records raise the question of their reliability. Linked to this is, of course, the postmodern insight that any account of the past can only represent one person's perception and that it is so to speak impossible to express the past in an adequate and accurate way that fits for all people involved.

However, despite of the doubts in regards to the Tremaine's trustworthiness, Jeremy's reliability as the narrator of *Black Dogs* must be questioned too. Already in the preface when recollecting his own past, Jeremy admits that his problematic youth as an orphan has influenced his personality. This is also the reason which has led some critics to conclude that Jeremy is unreliable insofar as he is "psychologically damaged in ways that, we are encouraged to think, may affect his judgement, for all his external considerateness."[613] Moreover, at one point, he says for instance "I do not know if this was actually the case or not, but in memory each of my few visits to her in the nursing home in the spring and summer of 1987 took place on days of rain and high wind. Perhaps there was only one such day, and it has blown itself across the others."[614] Beyond that, Jeremy's reliability must be questioned due to the fact that he as the writer self-reflexively addresses the text's artificial status as a story rather than a "true" account of the past all through the course of the novel. For instance, that the novel consists of constant time and setting shifts, which can be argued to echo the bewildering experience of the war, foregrounds the text's fragmentation and fictionality; that is its status as a story. Typical of the postmodern literary device of metafiction, "[t]he reader is never in this novel allowed to forget that he/she is being told a story."[615] All in all, the Tremaine's and the narrator's reliability must be questioned and the readers must constantly ask themselves: "Who is telling the truth and who is lying?" Thus, the novel demonstrates the difficulties associated with recounting past events. The impossibility of knowing the truth and representing the past as it "really" happened for all individuals involved is highlighted. The fuzzy boundaries between fact and fiction are thus explicitly brought to light. While reflecting on June's encounter with the black dogs, Jeremy says for instance: "It was a story whose historical accuracy was of less significance than the function it served. It was a myth, all the more powerful for being upheld as documentary."[616]

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[611] McEwan, 38-40.
[612] McEwan, 165.
[613] Head, 103.
[614] McEwan, 28.

Taking all into consideration, Jeremy wants to make sense of what really happened by negotiating between Bernard's rational and June's spiritual viewpoint. At one point in the novel, the conflicting world views even come together as voices in his head: When Jeremy "narrowly escapes being stung by a scorpion because he has a feeling that June's presence in the room is warning him" the book becomes dialogue-like, with the voices of June and Bernard giving clashing explanations of the event.[617] Whereas June's voice argues that he should acknowledge that her presence prevented him from touching the scorpion, Bernard's voice advances a rational explanation proposing that he must have recognised the animal unconsciously. Accordingly, Jeremy cannot come to any conclusion.

> Rationalist and mystic, commissar and yogi, joiner and abstainer, scientist and intuitionist, Bernard and June are the extremities, the twin poles along whose slippery axis my own unbelief slithers and never comes to rest.[618]

That is to say, the novel suggests that both perspectives do not prove satisfactory to face up the evil in human beings. Besides, it is suggested that both can cause the breakdown of civilised norms and violence.

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[615] Malcolm 2002, 104.
[616] McEwan, 50.
[617] Childs 2006, 92.
[618] McEwan, 19.

> In fact, “evil” and violence are frequently thematised in the novel and their sources are diverse: […] the neo-Fascist skinheads […] are animal-like in their appearance and driven by irrational anger, whereas the Nazi killings in the concentration camp of Majdanek (BD 108-110) and the “licensed violence” (BD 107) practised by the Communist regime in Poland are soberly executed crimes, committed in the name of perverted order and rationality. In the end, it is up to the reader to decide where to place himself in the debate between mysticism and rationalism, metaphysics and irony.[619]

Since “Bernard’s master narrative is the master narrative of science and rationalism, June’s the belief in a higher spiritual reality”[620] Jeremy’s positioning between those two can be read as “weighing up of two of the central themes of Western civilization: the claims of metaphysical, religious belief and materialist rationality.”[621] Jeremy’s conflict in a way represents the general crisis of belief as typical of the postmodern condition. He is sceptical towards both June’s and Bernard’s “grand narrative” due to their totalising nature. In general, the incongruity of Bernard’s and Jeremy’s viewpoints and testimonies can undoubtedly be read along the postmodern assumption that events can be interpreted differently and it is impossible to reach an ultimate truth.

Likewise, since the dispute between their clashing ideologies cannot be resolved in a final way there is no ultimate suggestion which way of coping with a jaundiced outlook is the better one. This is also the reason why *Black Dogs* calls for active interpretation on the side of the reader. For instance, it should be noted that it is actually never really mentioned what exactly the black dogs have been trained for. It is the duty of the reader to reduce ambiguities and instead produce meaning and imagine what “really” happened. All sentences that suggest that the dogs were trained to rape women are actually incomplete and the “reader is required to supply the ending based on an interpretation of context.”[622] Thus, the novel asks for the reader’s active participation in the process of interpretation. Consequently, which solution is more plausible has to be chosen individually.

What conclusions can be drawn from all this? The arguments that were presented clearly suggest that *Black Dogs*, which actually can be considered as a mixture of various genres ranging from psychological, historical, political study to philosophical novel, is in a way unfinished. As is typical of postmodern thought it lacks a final statement and thus leaves an abyss.

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[619] Schemberg, 66-7.
[620] Schemberg, 65.
[621] Malcolm 2002, 150.
[622] Malcolm 2002, 148.

> [The reader is asked] to make a choice between two positions. […] But this is not an easy choice. […] [The] book challenges the reader to take sides, to hold opinions and defend convictions, while at the same time asserting that there are no definitive answers to moral problems, only perspectives, and further questions.[623]

Thus, the novel does not only address the clash between science and mysticism but additionally provokes its audience to reflect upon their own ethical practices in the face of disappearing moral and intellectual standards typical of contemporary postmodern society. In addition to the ethical enquiry, suggesting the possibility of racism's resurgence in Europe the novel constitutes a critique of contemporary civilisation and creates a feeling of history breeding pessimism; i.e. paranoid anxieties towards the future. As was shown, the whole plot of the novel is built around major historical events and illustrates how the horrors of the past may affect individuals' lives; i.e. how the private and the public sphere are intertwined. As was shown, all events in the book, from June's encounter with the black dogs to Jeremy's fight with the French father, etc. can be read in this way. Accordingly, the book can be interpreted as a pessimistic outlook suggesting that humankind did not learn from the historical past and thus horrors such as the Holocaust can revive. Two opposing ways in which people may respond to these horrors are introduced in the book, however, it is not suggested which way is more suitable to explain evil forces. McEwan demonstrates "that evil is a continuous, universal entity; it exists everywhere, in all forms, at all times."[624] Reflecting on the nature of good and evil, the novel can also be interpreted as a cautionary note. It can be said that the novel expresses anxiety of a world that seems incapable of long-term peace and in which human violence threatens to bring global destruction. The defeat of the black dogs has only been temporary. They are still out there and "will return to haunt us, somewhere in Europe, in another time."[625] To be more precise, the novel suggests that the potential evil of human beings is a threat that we should and must continue to take seriously.

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[623] Childs 2006, 103.

[624] Slay, 145.

[625] McEwan, 174.

# 4. CONCLUSION

> *Our time is different. All times are different, but our time is different. A new fall, an infinite fall, underlies the usual – indeed traditional – presentiments of decline […] something seems to have gone wrong with time – with modern time; the past and the future, equally threatened, equally cheapened, now huddle in the present. The present feels narrower, the present feels straitened, discrepant, as the planet lives from day to day.* [626]

The objective of this thesis was to explore the phenomenon of postmodernity and postmodern narrative techniques in selected contemporary British fiction. That is to say, the goal of this study was to provide a survey of current key issues in the cultural and critical agenda functioning as a theoretical framework in order to approach and identify the main preoccupations of contemporary British fiction. Hence, this thesis aimed at exploring and discussing Graham Swift's *Waterland*, Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note* and Ian McEwan's *Black Dogs* in terms of concerns foregrounded in the postmodern theoretical debate, i.e. contemporary philosophical concepts and critical theories. As has been mentioned in the introduction, the selection of texts is not meant to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, they can be regarded as exemplary as they fulfil the purpose of identifying trends, typical themes and central concepts characteristic of the postmodern period and thus provide a fruitful means to approach the postmodern literary movement.

This thesis proceeded from the assumption that every millennium has been met by humankind with feelings of extreme discomfort and pessimism. Being at a loss with regard to what to expect next people worry a lot about the future. Full of fear human beings start to come up with explanations or possible versions of the future in order to overcome their anxiety. In uncertain times, especially when awaiting a new millennium, it is not unusual for people to seek guidance by coming up with prophesies. As the past has shown us there has been a long millenarian tradition of prophesying. This implies that predictions about the future are nothing new. Interestingly, in the majority of these cases, the forecasts tend to be apocalyptic rather than optimistic. That is to say, especially when awaiting a new century, people tend to come up with doomsday scenarios suggesting the imminent end of the world.

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[626] Amis 1987, 17.

> Estimating the nature and timing of our collective demise, the end of civilisation, of the entire human project, is even less certain – it might happen in the next hundred years, or not happen in two thousand, or happen with imperceptible slowness, a whimper, not a bang. But in the face of that unknowability, there has often flourished powerful certainty about the approaching end. Throughout recorded history people have mesmerised themselves with stories which predict the date and manner of our wholescale destruction, often rendered meaningful by ideas of divine punishment and ultimate redemption; the end of life on earth, the end or last days, end time, the apocalypse.[627]

As a result, various apocalyptic visions about the future exist suggesting that the world is inevitably doomed and thus coming to an end soon. These doomsday events include amongst others, for instance, predictions about natural catastrophes, e.g. a global viral pandemic, a massive flood, the collision of a meteoroid with the Earth, the creation of a black hole, depletion of oil or other vital resources, severe climate changes such as global warming but also supernatural events like an alien invasion, etc. In addition, there are also a variety of ideas claiming that man-made events will cause the genocide of the human species, e.g. a nuclear, chemical or biological war. With this in mind, doomsday events may range from a major disruption of human civilisation, to the annihilation of human life, to the total destruction of the Earth, to the extinction of the entire universe. They can either be of religious or secular nature. With regard to the former, it has to be noted that the *Book of Revelation* in the Old Testament is etymologically connected to the word apocalypse. Whereas the word *apocalypse*, deriving from the Greek, originally meant revelation, in the course of time it has become to be used synonymous with catastrophe, destruction and disaster. In Martin Amis's novel *London Fields*, the main protagonist addresses this issue when he says, "Even the Old Testament expected the Apocalypse "shortly". In times of mass disorientation and anxiety … But I am trying to ignore the world situation. I am hoping it will go away. Not the world. The situation."[628] McEwan identifies a connection between doomsday scenarios based on a religious motivation and the rise of religious fundamentalism.

> Many of these stories are highly specific accounts of the future and are devoutly believed. Contemporary apocalyptic movements, Christian or Islamic, some violent, some not, all appear to share fantasies of a violent end, and affect our

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[627] McEwan 2008, part I.

[628] Amis 2003, 64.

> politics profoundly. The apocalyptic mind can be demonising – that is to say, there are other groups, other faiths, that it despises for worshipping false gods, and these believers of course will not be saved from the fires of hell. And the apocalyptic mind tends to be totalitarian – which is to say that these are intact, all-encompassing ideas founded in longing and supernatural belief, immune to evidence or its lack, and well-protected against the implications of fresh data.[629]

Hence, numerous prophetic theories exist even if we have no evidence at all that the future can be predicted. One could assume that a look directly to the past revealing numerous unrealised future predictions should be sufficient enough to prove that we actually cannot foretell the future. Nonetheless, numerous apocalyptic prophesies exist. "Our secular and scientific culture has not replaced or even challenged these mutually incompatible, supernatural thought systems."[630] A lucid explanation of human being's fascination with the apocalypse is that it forms one of the easiest ways to give our life meaning. In other words, if we are not satisfied with our present way of living it is human to believe in the destruction of the world accompanied by the hope for a new beginning. "When people are profoundly frustrated, either materially or spiritually, there will be dreams of the perfect society where all conflicts are resolved, and all needs are met."[631] "Science may speak of probable rising sea levels and global temperatures, […] but on the human future it cannot compete with luridness and, above all, with the meaningfulness of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel or Revelation."[632] This argument reaffirms what has been observed in the section on the failure of Enlightenment, i.e. the dialectic relationship between myth and enlightenment. Adorno and Horkheimer's second thesis proposes that although human beings aim to overcome myth with the help of knowledge gained through science, in the long run reason eventually reverts back to myth because human beings long for more than just verifiable facts, i.e. sense and meaning. Although science implies more control, it seems that the more control over things the more out of control they get and in this particular respect result in a dystopian millennial mood.

> Rather than presenting a challenge, science has in obvious ways strengthened apocalyptic thinking. It has provided us with the means to destroy ourselves and our civilisation completely in less than a couple of hours, or to spread a fatal virus around the globe in a couple of days. And our spiralling technologies or destruction and their ever-greater availability have raised the possibility that true

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[629] McEwan 2008, part I

[630] McEwan 2008, part II.

[631] McEwan 2008, part II.

[632] McEwan 2008, part II.

> believers, with all their unworldly passion, their prayerful longing for the end times to begin, could help nudge the ancient prophecies towards fulfilment.[633]

What McEwan is insinuating here is, for example, willed terrorist attacks by brainwashed kamikaze pilots or mass suicides by sects with a vigorous end-time belief. According to him, here lies the problem with fatalism. All these people believe devoutly in redemption, i.e. a fundamental change brought by apocalypse. In other words, a total destruction of the present world that only a group of the devout and dedicated, i.e. the true believers, will survive, followed by the creation of a totally new, purified and perfect world. Taking into consideration that people have always come up with prophetic dystopian visions of the future with the purpose of giving meaning to their lives, either fatalistic or not, it is not surprising that the 21st century, in spite of all our scientific knowledge, was met with similar pessimistic feelings. As has been proved by the past, periods of uncertainty or rapid, bewildering change appear to give apocalyptic beliefs even greater weight. In general, World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust have cast their disturbing shadows across the second half of the twentieth century. Unsurprisingly, the resulting pessimistic mood was taken up by many intellectuals of the time and applied in their works. The emergence of postmodern critical theory is thus congruous with the birth of a new epoch, i.e. postmodernity.

As has been argued at the outset of this thesis, the term *postmodernity* covers a wide range of phenomena and has been applied to a broad variety of artistic movements. Since the postmodern nature celebrates playfulness and demands that there are no universal truths it is impossible to provide the reader with an ultimate definition of postmodernity. Significantly, postmodernity is difficult to define and demarcate because of our lack of temporal distance to it. Postmodernity is still happening and human beings can usually only grasp the present in retrospect. Maybe the reason for the present widespread pessimism has to be related to the fact that “post” implies “after” but offering no clue what to expect.

> ”Post” implies after but with no indication of whither next. The sense of transition is powerful, but inevitably accompanied by the spectre of decadence: the feeling that we are at the end of an era. Postmodernism is Apocalyptic. Or, if not in the full Christian millenarian sense of a Last Judgement ushering in a New Jerusalem, then Apocalyptic at least in its sense of crisis. The old verities may be breaking down, but there is no clear sense of what is to replace them. Although it will become apparent that the postmodern sense of crisis is bound up with

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[633] McEwan 2008, part II.

> specific changes in the contemporary world, crisis thinking is as old as the Judeo-Christian tradition itself. In both modes, redemption can only come after revolution (internal or external). The new world may be revealed if there is a destruction of the old (the Greek apokalypsis meaning revelation). Once both the redemptive framework of Christianity and the rationalist Enlightenment belief in progress cease to provide foundational certainty, however, the possibility of a New Jerusalem may begin to seem a chimerical projection of desire: an image which provides aesthetic play or functions as a form of psychological compensation and no more. Or if nihilism has, indeed, come to stand at the door, the image of the future may be the shape of that rough beast slouching its way towards a new and monstrous birth. Postmodern apocalypticism tends, therefore, to be teratogenic in its imaginings: plagued by catastrophe, disease, images of final burnout; post-Auschwitz versions of the falling stars and floating wombs […]. Again these are familiar biblical images. Yet the idea of a condition which is "post" modernity suggests an epochal break.[634]

As a consequence, there is not one single answer to the question of what is postmodernity. Still, this thesis intended to move towards a definition of postmodernity by analysing to what extent it differs from modernity. As was observed, postmodernism carried modernism further and partly reacted against it, e.g. by questioning Enlightenment values associated with progress, science and capitalism.

> The postmodern, then, operates at (at least) two distinct and interconnected levels in historical terms. It signals a style of writing that supersedes, or at least marks itself as different from the modernist literature of the early twentieth century whilst at the same time employing a philosophical outlook that rejects many of the tenets of modernity as established during the Enlightenment. Philosophers that have been influential to postmodern thinking such as Lyotard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freund, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, […] [etc.] all tend to position their respective ideas in some sense alternative to or critical of the enlightenment thinking of modernity. […] As well as being used as a periodizing term, it can also be used to signal an extension of the experimental techniques developed in modernist writing; in the sense that postmodernism extends the boundaries of modernist experimentation. Or it can refer to a term of differentiation from some of the tenets of modernism. […] One caveat to add to this brief account of postmodernism, however, is that there are many different versions of the postmodern, and, each [contemporary] writer […] has their own understanding of how their work relates to, engages with, or rejects its positions. In keeping with its embrace of multiplicity it is more accurate to talk in terms of postmodernisms rather than a clearly defined theoretical discourse. It is important to note therefore that the term postmodernism does not relate to a fixed set of characteristics or criteria, but is a rather fluid term that takes on different aspects when used by different critics and different social commentators.[635]

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[634] Waugh, 9-10.

[635] Bentley 2008, 32-3.

Similarly to postmodernity, postmodern literature consents to diversity and is therefore hard to locate and define.

> Contemporary fiction, then, tends to be defined as the period from the mid-1970s to the present. […] The main factor in choosing 1975 is that it is the year that saw the election of Margaret Thatcher as the leader of the Conservative Party and marks a key moment of transition in the politics of Britain, and by extension the social, economic and cultural climate. […] In hindsight, then, the mid-to-late seventies heralded a period of political, social and cultural change that divides some of the fundamental characteristics of contemporary Britain from the end of the Second World War onwards. The novel is traditionally a form of literature that has responded symbiotically with social and political movements and fiction in the contemporary period has continued in that vein.[636]

Since postmodernity desires to remain open to interpretation and several styles co-exist there is no such thing as the prototypical postmodern novel. Nonetheless, despite the complexity and multiplicity of forms and subject matter, it is still feasible to determine distinctive themes and techniques typically employed within this new era of literary production.

> Trying to identify the defining characteristics of any period of literary history is a difficult task, especially when the period under question is close to us. However, even from our relatively short distance from the 1990s, it is possible to begin to map out some of the dominant trends within the fiction of the period.[637]

Hence, the thematic concerns and narrative techniques outlined in the second section of this thesis constituted the theoretical backbone indispensable for the ensuing discussion and analysis of the selected contemporary British novels; i.e. the offered overview of the postmodern panorama provided the background information necessary to be applied in chapter three for the analysis of the selected texts. Again it has to be highlighted that the issues covered were chosen under the aspect of relevance for the novels under discussion and are therefore not meant to be exhaustive. Still, they can be understood as tendencies in the fiction and culture of the period before the millennium and therefore provide a useful overview of the most viable and long-lived postmodern concerns. That is to say, this thesis located its theoretical approach in the work of modern and postmodern philosophy, i.e. contemporary intellectuals and precursors in order to stress the salient role of ethical, social and cultural criticism in the domain of literary studies at the turn of the millennium. *Waterland*, *Money* and *Black Dogs* are three different responses facing the upcoming millennium. Yet, as has transpired in this thesis, sensing that a new century is upon us Swift, Amis and McEwan express a similar fearful pessimistic outlook towards the future and reflect upon contemporary society. Like the postmodern intellectuals under discussion in section two, they clearly and distinctly engage with contemporary critical theory and reflect upon recent changes and tendencies in our society. For instance, they reflect upon the rise and influence of mass media, the destructive power of money under capitalism, the death of God in a secularised society, the nature of truth, the death of love and the evil human nature as can be seen in the prevailing social hostility and coldness, the decline of morality, etc. With this in mind, though each novel focuses on a slightly different aspect, all of these issues perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism. Without a doubt, what they unmistakably share is the underlying nihilist tone in their fiction. That is to say, by depicting emotional and spiritual waste lands of frustration, they suggest the decline of human civilisation and moral apocalypse, that society is heading towards a new dark age or rather that the world as we know it is coming to an end. They unambiguously express unease and anxiety due to living in a world that seems incapable of long-term peace.

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[636] Bentley 2008, 2.
[637] Bentley 2005, 1.

> There have been a number of key international events that have impacted on Britain over the last thirty years and have been used as source material for British writers. At the beginning of the period the ongoing Cold War between communism and capitalism led to the amassing of armaments by the Soviet Union and the US-led Western Powers. The anxieties caused cast a significant shadow over British culture, often articulated as fear for an impending, nuclear Third World War. This has formed a significant topic in fiction by writers such as Martin Amis, […] and Graham Swift.[638]

All three novels “centre round the difficult yet inescapable task of searching for coherent structures of meaning and orientation in a (post)modern world characterised by a loss of horizon and the absence of ultimate Truth.”[639] Therefore, what they share is end-time thinking. Believing that the world is purified by decline they clearly take a dystopian attitude towards the future. As a result, since they critically explore the social and cultural zeitgeist of the period in the light of contemporary critical theories it can be concluded that the ongoing critical debate has certainly been an important point of departure for their literary works and the analysis and critical reflection of today’s culture and society as depicted in their novels.

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[638] Bentley 2008, 7.
[639] Schemberg, 7-8.

> With the end of the Cold War, history played a trick on fin de siècle sensibilities in that the most immediate vehicle of apocalypse – global nuclear war – seemed to have evaporated. Millennial anxieties were thereby channelled into a proliferation of alternative forms: from global warming to wayward asteroids to millennium bugs. The "end of history" debate […] connected with other discourses and narratives of ending: the end of ideology, the end of oppositions to the market economy and globalisation, the end of alternative futures, the end of idealism, the end of culture, the end of value and the end of meaning. These various narratives and discourses of exhaustion and closure represented a form of millenarianism adapted for postmodernity, and fuelled the concerns of many novelists in the 1990s. Despite the claims to the demise of postmodernism, the theoretical ideas explored by Baudrillard, Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault still haunted much of the literary criticism and fiction of the 1990s.[640]

Apart from typical subject matters, it was also possible to identify a series of trends in terms of formal narrative techniques within contemporary British fiction. That is to say, postmodernism has been highly influential both as a form of social and cultural critique but also in terms of formal techniques. As was demonstrated, the novels studied employ a broad variety of narrative techniques that can be identified as characteristically postmodern, e.g. former unconventional experimental devices such as metafiction, magic realism, etc.

> The traditional understanding of formal realism is based on its ability to represent some aspect of the world accurately in a narrative form. […] Realism, therefore, persuades us to believe that the fiction we are reading is verifiable in terms of its closeness to a believable world. Much postmodernist fiction is interested in interrogating this claim of realist fiction and many of the narrative techniques associated with postmodernism function to pursue this aim. These techniques include metafiction; the disruption of the linear flow of narratives and the relationship between cause and effect, challenging the authority of the author, the use of events and characters drawn from fantasy; self-reflexively drawing attention to the language that is being used to construct the fiction; the use of parody and pastiche, and more generally a scepticism towards fixed ideologies and philosophies.[641]

All of the examples mentioned could be identified in the novels covered in this thesis. As is typical of postmodern writers, the selected authors reject realist traditions of the novel by flouting nearly all literary conventions; i.e. a deviation from former accepted rules of narration was detected.

> A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and

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[640] Bentley 2005, 6-7.
[641] Bentley 2008, 34.

> categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of *what will have been done*.[642]

To return to a point mentioned earlier, every forthcoming millennium is characterised by hysteria. Apocalyptic feelings and thoughts are always present at the end of an era.

> [P]eople with no clear sense of their ending will always fabricate one. Concordances are reassuring: they produce the illusion or retrospective significance. Postmodernism is itself, in this respect, another Grand Narrative, but one about the End of Grand Narratives.[643]

However, what seems to be an extraordinary and unique feature with regard to the upcoming 21st century is that the prevalent pessimism towards the end of the 20th century did not convert back to optimism. All subsequent novels by Swift, Amis and McEwan published after 2000 are conveying a sense of doom too. This enduring lack of confidence in the future can be seen, for example, in McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), which addresses the topics of terrorism and Iraq War, or in Amis's *Yellow Dog* (2003), which focuses on the subject matter of violence and ethical decline.

> Perhaps the most significant event of the last thirty years or so, in terms of its consequences, was the attack of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 and such a historic event was bound to find itself addressed in fiction written after that event. […] Ian McEwan in his 2005 novel *Saturday*, uses the context of 9/11 in the observation early in the novel of an airliner on fire flying over London: "Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory and doomed." […] The consequences of 9/11 are still being played out in Afghanistan, Iraq and in acts of terrorism in Britain and other parts of the world, and it is likely that these will continue to produce subject matter for much fiction produced in Britain in the coming years.[644]

Hence, the selected novels, published before the millennium, must be regarded as part of a continuing trend. Reflecting upon what the new millennium has brought us so far, the pessimism expressed in their novels seems comprehensible and justified. To mention a few examples: the events in New York and Washington on 11 September (9/11), various other terrorist attacks such as the bombings on the London underground in 2005, the Iraq War, the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 killing over 300000 people, the present Global Financial Crisis, pandemics such as the Swine influenza, etc. In addition, it seems as if the dispute about nuclear machinery has flared up again given that some countries have recently announced their intentions to enlarge their uranium enrichment facilities. They justify their plans under the pretext to produce more energy, yet, by doing so they will inevitably create enough uranium to fabricate nuclear bombs. Consequently, the nuclear threat is still hovering over the world. According to Amis, nuclear weapons and the Holocaust are Enlightenment's two greatest failures.[645] In fact, no single technological invention in the 20th century but nuclear weapons had a greater impact on society. Owing to their existence any feeling of stability and security has been lost and thus nuclear weapons will continue to form a constant threat in the future. Above and beyond, what makes nuclear weapons so special in the context of apocalyptic visions is that they actually only exist on the level of simulation. That is to say, we can only imagine what a nuclear destruction looks like, when everything is becoming nothing at once. Apart from that, nuclear weapons, which are the most powerful leverage there is, constitute a vicious circle.

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[642] Lyotard, 81.
[643] Waugh, 12.
[644] Bentley 2008, 7-8.

> How do we prevent the use of nuclear weapons? By threatening to use nuclear weapons. And we can't get rid of nuclear weapons, because of nuclear weapons. […] In a way, their most extraordinary single characteristic is that they are man-made. They distort all life and subvert all freedoms. Somehow, they give us no choice. Not a soul on earth wants them, but here they are all.[646]

Accordingly, nuclear weapons exemplify how men become "the prisoner of his own creation in serious danger of destroying himself."[647] No one dares to take the first step and is willing to give them up as long as others will have them. Ironically, this is exactly what implies their "value". It requires trust in other countries to get rid of them. The result is an increasing hopelessness because since we are not able to trust the sanity of others we will never get the world clean of nuclear weapons. Taking this into consideration and reflecting upon the appalling events the new millennium has brought us so far, it is possible to conclude that the selected novels, which express menacing anxiety about the future, can actually be regarded as pre-millennial premonitions. Up to now one doomsday scenario is haunting another.

As has been argued, the selected writers are well aware of the postmodern discourse going on in contemporary society as they implement many of the postmodern issues in their texts and thereby reflect upon the major conflicts of the twentieth century. That is to say, their fiction is a literary expression and reflection of the present period and a mode of consciousness that has, in a different way, been expressed by philosophical writers. “Many of the writers covered […], such as Martin Amis […] have a knowledge of the recent developments in literary and cultural theory and often refer to these ideas in their novels.”[648] They “[convey] a strong sense of impending apocalypse, of the end of the millennium and perhaps the end of the world.”[649] Hence, the novels are not only end-of-the-millennium but also end-of-the-world novels. By this means, Swift, Amis and McEwan aim to make people aware of the disturbing trends in contemporary society and produce, like philosophers, a critique of contemporary society. Since an interconnectedness of fiction, theory and criticism is discernible “literature’s many roots in philosophical ideas” is verified.[650]

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[645] Cf. Dern, 94-5.
[646] Amis 1987, 2.
[647] Fromm, 2.

> Literary texts cannot be “autonomous” in these terms, nor can “theory” be seen to occupy a radically different order of discourse from that of “fiction”. Postmodern theory and literature are thus seen to be caught up in a web of intertextual overlap, neither (to use Habermas’s terminology) being purely “world disclosing” nor “problem solving”, because both are seen to be part of a world in which such rigid distinctions have broken down.[651]

Like critical theories, the novels aim to be provocative and initiate the audience’s active reflection upon their lives. The texts give rise to questions such as the following: Where are we now and where are we headed? Where are we moving? What is the kind of society we might find in the future, provided we have not been able to change and destroyed ourselves before then? Instead of thinking about questions such as these and facing up with problems in general, people usually tend to blind themselves so as not to be disturbed in their daily routine. In this manner, long-term consequences of bad behaviour are likely to be ignored. However, while reading the selected novels the reader is constantly forced to reflect his/her understanding of his/her place within the world, the human nature and condition. “If people are not [made] aware of the direction in which they are going, they will awaken when it is too late and when their fate has been irrevocably sealed.”[652] Herein lies the importance of critical reflection. That is to say, it is crucial to constantly critically reflect upon the course society is taking and upcoming millenniums, especially a date like 2000, have always provided a good reason for this. To put it another way, it is essential to become consciously aware of the monsters to which we are giving birth in order to initiate a change of course whenever necessary. All three “novelists set out to vex and disturb. They repeatedly run the risk of antagonising their readers, and of affecting the charge of compliance with everything from which they should recoil.”[653] This idea is emphasised in the following statement by McEwan, whose novels all address extremely shocking topics and are therefore hard to swallow for the reader:

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[648] Bentley 2008, 25.
[649] Tredell, 97.
[650] Childs 2000, 61.
[651] Waugh, 50.
[652] Fromm, 28.

> I am aware of the danger in trying to write more politically, in the broadest sense – trying to go out more into the world, because it is a world that distresses me and makes me anxious – I could take up moral positions that might pre-empt or exclude that rather mysterious and unreflective element that is so important in fiction. […] So I hope that moral concerns will be balanced, or even undermined, by the fact that I still don’t have complete control. Some element of mystery must remain.”[654]

Similarly, reflecting upon his role and responsibility as an author Amis states that he wants his work to enlighten and exhort without prescribing or preaching:

> I would say that the point of good art is remotely and unclearly an educative process, a humanising and enriching process. If you read a good novel, things must look a little richer and more complicated, and one feels that this should eat away at all ills. The only hope is education, and one is vaguely – though not centrally – involved in the process of education.[655]

Hence, it can be argued that the novels embrace wider public and political issues in order to prompt critical thinking. As a reader we are left with the choice between taking the novel’s unremittingly bleak outlooks as a warning that our society and culture is on the brink and realise that a change in direction is indispensable or we can remain deaf and blind.

> Their books set to unseat our moral certainties and sap our confidence in knee-jerk judgements by making us recognize our involvement in what we are reading. They force us to face the dishonesty of dividing ourselves from the imaginary populace of their fiction and disavowing our kinship with the authors who imagined such beings for our diversion.[656]

That is to say, the authors’ goal is to shake up people. They want to teach their audience a lesson by forcing them to reflect upon their values and society in general, to make them aware that we are running headlong into the abyss if we do not change. At the end of the day there is no one to save us but ourselves.

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[653] Ryan 1999, 204.

[654] John Haffenden. Interview with McEwan. *Novelists in Interview*. London: Methuen 1985, 173-4. quoted in Ryan 1999, 206.

[655] John Haffenden. Interview with Amis. *Novelists in Interview*. London: Methuen 1985, 24. quoted in Ryan 1999, 205.

[656] Ryan 1999, 206-7.

> Postmodernism is the world we actually live in, the only kind of world we are likely to live in for many years to come. If we want to begin to think about a new way to live, beyond postmodern culture, we must do it while we are still living within that culture. […] If we look far enough, we may find a way to see beyond postmodernism while still living in it. The challenge is to use the elements of postmodern culture to transcend it. This is theoretically possible because everything is dialectical. The present, no matter how constricting, holds the seeds of change that will lead to a different, perhaps better, future. The crucial question is what specific resources postmodernism gives us for that change. Diversity itself is certainly one resource. It has put a new emphasis on freedom and equality as well as on nature and the body. All of these have created important new political ideas and movements. There is no way to predict where they will lead. […] This freedom is a challenge. There is no authority to tell us how to do it. We have to figure it out for ourselves. Nor is there any possibility that we will arrive at a permanent solution. […] This gives us unprecedented possibilities of ingenuity, innovation, and experimentation. It also gives us a new responsibility for shaping and constantly reshaping our own world.[657]

Thus, this research concludes that contemporary British fiction, similarly to philosophy, engages with major contemporary cultural debates in order to critically reflect upon the appalling state of our society and culture. By this means, the significance of critical reflection, which must always be regarded as a continuing process rather than a product, is stressed. However, as is generally known, despair and hope go hand in hand. Therefore, the moral apocalyptic scenarios pictured in the selected novels are not (yet) unavoidable outcomes but must be regarded as mere possibilities. The authors actually believe in the human nature and their works can be read as calls for action and wise human agency to underscore existing power structures and effect a change upon society. Thus, there is still a glimmer of hope and hence, the novels, although they express extreme pessimism, paradoxically convey optimism at the same time.

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[657] Chernus, Changing the Totality.

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# German Abstract

Es scheint in der Natur der Menschheit zu liegen bevorstehende Jahrtausendwenden, aufgrund des Unwissens, was die Zukunft für uns bereithält, mit Gefühlen der Unsicherheit zu begegnen. Unmittelbar herannahende Millennien boten immer schon Anlass für die Kreation von apokalyptischen Zukunftsvisionen, d.h. sie gingen seit eh und je einher mit einem pessimistischen Blick in die Zukunft begleitet von unzähligen Katastrophenszenarios, die darauf hinweisen, dass die Gesellschaft direkt auf einen Weltuntergang zusteuert. Derartige Vorhersagen über globale Desaster und bevorstehende Apokalypsen, wie zum Beispiel die berühmten Prophezeiungen von Nostradamus im 16. Jahrhundert, die das Ende der gesamten Menschheit vorhersagten, sind demnach nichts Neues. Angesichts dessen ist es nicht weiter überraschend, dass der Zeitgeist am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts von einer ähnlich angsterfüllten und unzuversichtlichen Stimmung geprägt war. Im Angesicht der immediat bevorstehenden Jahrtausendwende zeigten die Menschen Symptome von apokalyptischer Lähmung und waren überzeugt, dass die Welt bald untergehen würde. Eine allgemeine negative und bedrückte Weltanschauung war bereits ab der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts als Reaktion auf den zweiten Weltkrieg spürbar. Historische Ereignisse, vor allem die Grausamkeiten des Holocaust aber auch Erscheinungen wie der Kapitalismus, brachten gleichzeitig die dunkle Seite der Menschen als auch ihre Verletzbarkeit zum Vorschein. Wie nicht anders zu erwarten gingen diese barbarischen Geschehnisse nicht spurlos an den kritischen DenkerInnen der Zeit vorüber. Generell hatten viele Leute schon längere Zeit das Gefühl, dass die Gesellschaft sich stark verändert hatte. Infolgedessen äußerten immer mehr ihre Bedenken gegenüber der modernen, angeblich so aufgeklärten Gesellschaft und versuchten verzweifelt eine Erklärung dafür zu finden, warum die Menschheit, anstatt in einen wahrhaft menschlichen Zustand einzutreten, in eine neue Art der Barbarei mit selbstzerstörerischen, unzivilisierten und unmenschlichen Qualitäten degradiert war. Als Resultat kehrten viele Menschen den mit der Moderne assoziierten Auffassungen ihren Rücken zu und erklärten das Projekt der Aufklärung, deren Intention es ursprünglich gewesen war die Menschen zur absoluten Freiheit und Glücklichkeit zu avancieren, als gescheitert. Das heißt, während die Moderne die Idee von Fortschritt und Optimismus verkörpert, war die Zeit nach 1945 im Gegensatz dazu von extremem Pessimismus und Nihilismus geprägt. Dieser Umbruch markiert demnach einen Paradigmenwechsel beziehungsweise den Beginn einer neuen Ära, die

allgemein als Postmoderne bezeichnet wird. Das Entstehen von postmoderner kritischer Theorie übte entscheidenden Einfluss auf zahlreiche ästhetische Bewegungen aus, unter anderem auf den Bereich der Literatur. Die Mehrheit der literarischen Werke, die nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg publiziert wurden, offenbaren klar und deutlich, dass die AutorInnen mit dem postmodernen Diskurs, der Kritik an der gegenwärtigen Gesellschaft äußert, vertraut sind da sie zahlreiche der in der postmodernen Debatten angesprochenen Thematiken unmissverständlich in ihren Werken aufgreifen und einer intensiven Reflexion unterziehen.

Das Ziel der vorliegenden Arbeit ist es das Phänomen der Postmoderne zu analysieren und die Erforschung der damit einhergehenden Einflüsse auf gegenwärtige britische Literatur. Das heißt, diese Arbeit versucht die postmoderne Kondition durch eine Lesung von drei ausgewählten britischen Romanen, die alle drei kurz vor der Jahrtausendwende publiziert wurden, zu erforschen. In Anbetracht der Tatsache, dass ein neues Jahrhundert unmittelbar bevorsteht, drücken die Texte eine extrem pessimistische Zukunftsperspektive aus. Die selektierten Romane sind nicht als allumfassend zu verstehen, veranschaulichen jedoch exemplarisch welche Thematiken auch in anderen zeitgenössischen Büchern aufgegriffen werden. Das Hauptaugenmerk der Arbeit bezieht sich auf das Bewusstsein der Autoren über die derzeit vorherrschenden kritischen Theorien. Es wird angenommen, dass die momentane kritische Debatte einen entscheidenden Ausgangspunkt für die Produktion von literarischen Werken, die eine Untersuchung und kritische Reflexion der gegenwärtigen Kultur und Gesellschaft vornehmen, bildet. Diese Arbeit wird den/die LeserIn zunächst mit den gesellschaftskritischen Hauptthesen und relevanten narrativen Techniken der Postmoderne vertraut machen um im nächsten Schritt, auf der Basis dieser theoretischen Einführung, eine detailreiche Analyse und Interpretation der ausgewählten postmodernen britischen Romane durchzuführen.

Was genau ist unter Postmoderne zu verstehen und worin bestehen die wesentlichen Unterschiede zur Moderne? Inwiefern setzt sich zeitgenössische britische Literatur mit den gegenwärtigen kritischen Theorien auseinander und reflektiert über die augenblickliche Gesellschaft und Kultur? Wie wird auf unmittelbar zurückliegende historische Ereignisse eingegangen und wie wird mit historischen Traumata umgegangen? Teilen gegenwärtige Romane den Skeptizismus vieler PhilosophInnen

hinsichtlich des Projekts der Aufklärung? Inwiefern ist die in den Büchern ausgedrückte bedrückte Zukunftsperspektive gerechtfertigt? Besteht eine Relation zwischen historischen Momenten und einer pessimistischen Weltanschauung? Wie reflektieren die Texte über die Natur von Wahrheit und Realität und spielt Spiritualität eine Rolle? Welche Auswirkungen haben die Idee der modernen Rationalität, wissenschaftliche Erkenntnisse und die Entwicklung von neuen Technologien auf den Glauben der Menschen an metaphysische Kräfte wie Gott? Welchen Einfluss haben Kapitalismus und Konsum auf zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen und die Menschheit im Allgemeinen? Wie verwenden und erweitern die selektierten Bücher traditionelle Erzähltechniken und was sind charakteristische Stilmittel im zeitgenössischen britischen Roman? Auf diese und andere Fragen wird im Laufe dieser Arbeit eingegangen.

# CURRICULUM VITAE

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