

**Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's Money: A Suicide Note**



"تمويه الواقع وتسليع الثقافة في رواية مارتن آميس المال: رسالة انتحار"

أ.م. حميد مانع دايع

جامعة القادسية، كلية التربية، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

البريد الإلكتروني Email : [Hameed.mana@qu.edu.iq](mailto:Hameed.mana@qu.edu.iq)

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المال، الاستهلاكية، الثقافة، التسليع، والحلم الأمريكي.

**كيفية اقتباس البحث**

دايع ، حميد مانع، تمويه الواقع وتسليع الثقافة في رواية مارتن آميس المال: رسالة انتحار،  
مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، شباط 2025، المجلد: 15، العدد: 2

هذا البحث من نوع الوصول المفتوح مرخص بموجب رخصة المشاع الإبداعي لحقوق التأليف والنشر ( Creative Commons Attribution ) تتيح فقط للآخرين تحميل البحث ومشاركته مع الآخرين بشرط نسب العمل الأصلي للمؤلف، ودون القيام بأي تعديل أو استخدامه لأغراض تجارية.

مسجلة في  
**Registered ROAD**

مفهرسة في  
**Indexed IASJ**



## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's Money: A Suicide Note

### Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's Money: A Suicide Note

Asst. Prof. HAMEED MANA DAIKH

University of Al-Qadisiyah, College of Education, Dept. of English

**Keyword:** money, consumerism, culture, commodification, and American dream.

#### How To Cite This Article

DAIKH, HAMEED MANA, The Impact of the Battle of Badr on Establishing the Islamic Call, Journal Of Babylon Center For Humanities Studies, February 2025, Volume:15, Issue 2.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)



[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

#### المخلص

المال (1984) هو هجاء على حياة ومصائر جون سيلف وهو صرخة مدوية عن صعود وسقوط ثمانينيات القرن العشرين عقد الإفراط. يأخذنا آميس مباشرة إلى صميم الموضوع في شخصية سيلف من خلال نقده الحاد لعالم التسويق وثقافة الإعلام الأوسع واستعدادها لخدمة آلة الاستهلاك المتدرجة ومظاهر الأخلاق السطحية والانحطاط الأخلاقي. ظلت المشاهد تجعلهم يتساءلون ولا يعرفون النهاية حتى قراءة الصفحة الأخيرة. كان الوعي محدوداً على الشخصية الرئيسية في القصة منتقلاً من مضات إلى انفجارات، كلها تدفع القارئ نحو نهاية متصاعدة. يصور الفيلم مجتمعاً بئساً أعطى الأولوية للمال والعلاقات الشخصية لدرجة أن الإنسانية والاهتمام الأساسي للناس أصبح مجرد وهم. في رواية آميس تظهر صناعة الإعلان كدمر من خلال الفساد الذي يحدث في هذا العالم. هنا يُعطى المظهر والإدراك قيمة أكبر من

## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's *Money*: A Suicide Note



الواقع أو الحقيقة، وبالتالي هناك فرق بين رواية أميس والقصص الأخرى المتعلقة بالإعلان. من خلال عمل سيلف كمدير إعلاني، يُظهر أميس كيف يتم تنفيذ أساليب خادعة في التسويق يتم من خلالها تكييف جمهور الإعلانات ذهنياً وكقاعدة يتبع هذا التكييف ظهور وجهات نظر مشوهة للغاية حول أنفسهم والعالم بأكمله. موضوع المال هو الفكرة الرئيسية والمال هو نوع من الكتب الذي يُظهر كيف يمكن أن يفسد الناس الأكثر جشعاً وتعطشاً للسلطة بشكل مدمر حتى لو تم الاعتراف بهم اجتماعياً على أنهم مثاليون.

### ABSTRACT

*Money* (1984) is a satire on the life and fortunes of John Self, an out-loud about the rise and fall of the 1980s, the decade of excess. Amis takes us directly to the heart of the matter in the Self's character by his sharp criticism against the marketing world and wider media culture willingness to serve the rolling of the machine of consumption and the manifestations of shallow morality and moral decay. Scenes kept them guessing and never knowing the end till they read the very last page. Consciousness was limited to the main character of the story, going from flickers to bursts, all urging the reader to a climatic end. The movie portrays a miserable society that prioritized money and interpersonal relationships to the extent that the humanity and prime concern of the people became mere illusion. In Amis' novel the advertising industry is a destroyer shown by the corruption that occurs in this world. Here appearance and perception is given more value than reality or truth, therefore there is a difference between Amis' novel and other tales regarding the advertising. Through Self's job as an advertising executive, Amis shows how false methods of merchandising are implemented with which the audience of advertisements is mentally preconditioned and, as a rule, this conditioning, what follows is the appearance of extremely distorted views concerning of themselves and the whole world. The topic of money is the main idea, and money is a kind of book that it shows how the greediest and most power-hungry people, even if they are socially acknowledged as perfect, can be destructively corrupted.





## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note*

### Introduction

The world man lives in is full of excess and illusion. The protagonist of Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note*, John Self, takes the readers in a journey, which shows how money twisted our reality, media, and false desires. The novel was published in 1984, and speaks to every house even today, as it discovers how our culture modifies everything, from relationships to personal identity. It commodifies everything and turns to be bought and sold. Amis reveals a world where what's real and what's fake become hard to tell apart through Self's messy adventures in London and New York. Much of our own social media-driven society where appearances often matter more than truth. (Diedrick, 2004, p.24)

The protagonist tale targets all people who have undergone loss and despair in the present time consumer culture. The protagonist's struggle with reality reflects our own daily encounters with advertisements, entertainment, and the continuous pressure to buy happiness. Alcohol for Self becomes the last resort together with fast food, and pornography, to escape his bitter reality. He is not just a man who suffers, but humanity suffer because he represents something bigger than just one man's downfall. He shows us that we lose ourselves in a world that keeps telling us we're never enough unless we buy more. (Finney, 2008, p. 78)

### Analysis

*Money* (1984), a novel by Martin Amis, is a postmodern masterpiece that investigates issues of truth and fiction and the commercialization of culture. John Self, the protagonist of the novel, is a wealthy film producer who can't control his desire for more and more cash. Amis uses John Self as a metaphor for how the influence of money can shape and deform a person's life. John's values have been lowered because of the centrality of money and his contradictory internal relationship to it. Amis uses Self's story as a method to comment on the commodification of art, as well as the ways in which the media and popular culture have blurred the lines between fact and fiction. By an examination of the novel's narrative structure, vocabulary, and usage of pop culture allusions, this paper will investigate how money reflects the blurring of reality and fiction and the monetization of culture; (Torkdeh, 2000, p.72)



## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's *Money*: A Suicide Note



Oh Christ, the exhaustion of not knowing anything. It's so tiring and hard on the nerves. It really takes it out of you, not knowing anything. You're given comedy and miss all the jokes. Every hour, you get weaker. Sometimes, as I sit alone in my flat in London and stare at the window, I think how dismal it is, how hard, how heavy, to watch the rain and not know why it falls. (Amis, 1984, p. 153)

Amis demonstrates how the allure of wealth trumps all other considerations, ultimately leading to intoxication, sexual promiscuity, and dependency. When viewed through the lens of currency, human values become warped and distorted commodities, (it's not your fault..... it's money's fault." ( Amis, p. 26) Rather than being motivated by greed or a desire for money gain, John's decision to end his life is prompted by his intellectual realization that he has failed at all he has attempted and by the discovery that his biological father is a poor man. The man's insatiable hunger for wealth brings him both setbacks and insights. As John learns that most of their pals have abandoned him due to their debts, the corrupting influence of money is once again brought to light. (Bényei, 2001, pp. 50-51)

Amis's use of postmodern storytelling techniques in *Money* makes the line between fact and fiction difficult to discern. For Self, "money is the only thing we have in common." (Money, p. 98) The novel is also self-referential in that the protagonist, Self, is a movie producer working on a film adaptation of the novel. The novel's use of metafiction, in which the narrator makes pointed comments about the act of narrating, further emphasizes the blurring of truth and fiction. For example, the narrator states that "All novels are really about other novels." (Amis, 1984, p. 5). The postmodern condition, when the line between fact and fiction blurs, is reflected in this phenomenon. Amis argues that the media and popular culture are to blame for the commercialization of the arts. It shows how the value of money subtly limits people's agency and awareness. Self's infatuation with wealth and renown causes him to lose touch with reality and behave more and more like a fictional character in his own film. His infatuation with wealth, notoriety, and influence exemplifies how culture



## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's *Money*: A Suicide Note

has been commercialized. John Self, who is an asocial nomad who shuttles between the two major Western capitals like a link between antiquity and modernity, has no friends or family. In a world where everything, even people, has a price, he is the personification of consumerism at its most extreme, (Gil and Nesci,2018 , p. 148)

You never can tell, though, with suicide notes, can you? In the planetary aggregate of all life, there are many more suicide notes than there are suicides. They're like poems in that respect, suicide notes: nearly everyone tries their hand at them some time, with or without the talent. We all write them in our heads. Usually the note is the thing. You complete it, and then resume your time travel. It is the note and not the life that is cancelled out. Or the other way round. Or death. You never can tell, though, can you, with suicide notes. (Amis, p. 2)

Self puts all his effort into this one thing because he believes it will open the floodgates to wealth and fame, allowing him to finally escape his troubled past. Being an orphan, Self's life story is shaped by the absence of his mother, the surrogate affection of his aunt, and his formative adolescent years spent in a striptease pub. The protagonist's present is dominated by his incessant desire for money to meet the insatiable requirements of Selina Street, his father, and his automobile. In this story, the naive protagonist is the ultimate victim of a network of intrigue, deception, and betrayal. As the lines between reality and fiction blur, Self is given a chance at redemption by his friendship with Martina Twain and her twin, Martin Amis. In order to aid Self with the film script and provide some insight into his true predicament in the novel and his precarious position as a fiction writer, the author's ego joins the book as a character. (Campañón, 2004, pp. 89-90)

Amis also takes aim with how art and culture are commercialized in *Money*. The fictional character of Self values financial success over artistic expression. Looking for new ways to increase his fortune, he is always on the lookout. Culture has become commodified in our capitalist society, as seen by the market's prioritization of financial gain over creative quality. The novel also contains several allusions to popular



## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's *Money*: A Suicide Note



culture, such as lines from well-known movies and TV series and advertising slogans. The novel's use of these works strengthens its argument against the commodity status accorded to popular culture and in favor of its use as a form of artistic expression. While his body is humanlike, he is soulless, (Kaur, (2017), pp. 90- 91)

My clothes are made of monosodium glutamate and hexachlorophene. My food is made of polyester, rayon and lurex...My brain is gimmicked by a microprocessor the size of a quark and costing ten pee and running the whole deal. I am made of junk\_ junk, I'm just junk. (Amis, p. 225)

Due to his reliance on materialistic existence to fulfill his bodily desires, Self reveals his duplicity and artificiality, revealing himself to be an unnatural product devoid of natural qualities like self-respect, dignity, self-control, and independent thought. The fragmented society, inauthenticity, and amoral lifestyle of his day are mirrored in his own personality, which has broken into several voices. The modern man, who has reduced everything to a commodity and lost touch with reality, is embodied by the concept of self. For him, "Maybe money is the great conspiracy," ( Amis, p. 338)

Culture, according to Amis, has become a commodity in a capitalist economy, where monetary value is given more weight than artistic or cultural importance. Most characters are plagued with obsession of money as 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. You even things out for me and my kind." (Amis, p. 197) As a result, we have created a cultural landscape that is driven solely by the pursuit of profit, at the expense of uniqueness and creativity. Cultural commodification undermines the worth of creative expression, silences critics, and helps maintain social disparities. In addition, it fosters hedonic narcissism by encouraging the consumption of culture in convenient, pre-packaged formats. Amis, in studying this topic, draws attention to the risks of seeing cultural artifacts as mere commodities in a capitalist society. Self is a kind of bewildered, confused character that he waits, (Ibrahim, 2020, pp. 95- 97)





## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's *Money*: A Suicide Note

Things still happen here and 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. (Amis, p.6)

Self is part of a generation of young people who are financially secure and focused on their own personal enjoyment. For many of his ilk, money is a deity, a great equalizer of caste and education. Self openly mocks individuals who put cultural pursuits ahead of financial gain, even as she strives to be accepted by those same people. Much of civilization is beyond self's comprehension. Amis uses a number of devices to make the distinction between fact and fiction difficult to establish. For instance, his narrative is fractured because he uses so many different types of media. Each chapter of the literature corresponds to a distinct scene in the film adaptation, (Brooker, 2012, pp.5,8, 10)

There was a white-haired old robot at the desk, and we shot the breeze for a while as he checked me out on the intercom. I told him a joke. How does it go now? There's this farmer who keeps his wife locked up in the – Wait, let's start again,...Anyway we had a good laugh over this joke when I'd finished or abandoned it, and I was told where to go. Then I got lost for a bit. I went into a room where a lot of people in evening dress were sitting at square tables playing cards or backgammon. I left quickly and knocked over a lamp by the door. The lamp should never have been there in the first place, with its plinth sticking out like that. For a while I thrashed around in some kind of cupboard, but fought my way out in the end. Skipping down the stairs again, I fell heavily on my back. It didn't hurt that much, funnily enough. (Amis, p. 42)

In London and New York, John Self roars as a whore, alcoholic, masturbating monster, “the ultimate consumerist paradise,” lacks awareness of the mayhem he causes. His muddled involvement in the casting and production of a picture based on a concept of his is basically irrelevant, serving only as a backdrop to the persistent hedonism of Self. Some parts are hilariously over the top, like when he goes out to a



## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's *Money*: A Suicide Note



nightclub. Without seeing the havoc he creates, he acts in complete ignorance. Since that the reader isn't sure whether they're reading a script or a novel, Amis is free to mess with the reader's expectations of what they're about to experience. Amis uses *Self* as a metaphor for a society that prioritizes profit over interpersonal connections through his critique of capitalism ideals. The story depicts a society where the pursuit of wealth and social standing has corrupted people's morals and ideals. Amis prompts readers to consider whether or not their perceptions of reality are influenced by media and marketing. The movie *Money* demonstrates the social and economic costs of consumption culture. It's a warning not to put money and success before people and not to let capitalism distort our perception of reality. (Campañón, 2004, pp. 89, 95)

Amis uses a number of literary techniques to make the story's narrator seem unreliable. John Self, the protagonist, is a dishonest liar and fabricator of the truth. He has a tendency to blur the lines between reality and his own imagination. The protagonist, John Self, is so consumed with the excesses of modern culture that he is willing to sell his very soul for them. Our culture caters to those with the financial means to indulge in its gluttony, and Self is no exception. Attempted rape of his girlfriend is evidence of Self's fixation with wealth, consumer goods, and sexuality; (Mulalić, 2015, pp. 63, 64)

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 took it right in the join of my splayed and aching tackle. Whew, that was a good one, I thought, as my back hit the deck. Arched and winded, I lay there with the lampshade in my face. I felt I was slowly turning green from the toes up. Then at last I crawled next door like a knackered alligator and roared for many moons into the wind tunnel of the can. (Amis, p.210)





## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's *Money*: A Suicide Note



Rather from being a rapist, self serves more as a narrator. He then goes on to analyze and explain his own work, “the proper way to rape girls.” After his failure, Self's eloquence increases as he profusely apologizes to Selina till she finally forgives him. The combination of the alliterative cadence and Self's sincere remorse lulls the reader to sleep. Their relationships and experiences, as well as everything else, are evaluated solely in terms of their monetary worth. Considering the pervasiveness of advertising and consumer culture in modern day society, this theme couldn't be more timely. *Money* by Martin Amis is a postmodern masterwork that defies categorization. Amis creates an universe where everything is for sale and the line between fact and fiction is constantly blurred through his use of fragmented narrative, unreliable narration, and examination of topics like addiction and consumerism. Namely, the novel's condemnation of modern society's fixation on materialism and the selling of human experiences is what give it staying power. (Selwyn, 2011, pp. 2,3)

It is unclear if what is being read is a script or a novel because of this fragmentation, thus blurring the boundary between truth and fiction. The novel's fundamental topic is ambiguity, and the author intends for the reader to feel confused throughout. John Self, the main character in the story, “bought a joint, a popper, a phial of cocaine and a plug of opium from a fat spade in Times Square and snuffled it all up in agogo bar toilet,” (Amis, p,40) is unable to be trusted as a storyteller; his fabrications and lies only serve to further muddy the waters between reality and fiction. Consumption is another major idea in the book. The novel's protagonist and other characters are consumed by their desire to acquire wealth and material goods as a means of breaking free from their humdrum existence. Their materialistic worldview is demonstrated in the fact that they put a monetary value on everything from their relationships to the memories they cherish. With the pervasiveness of advertising and consumer culture in today's world, this theme couldn't be timely. (Snyder, 1996, pp. 8,9, 10, 101, 140)

## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's Money: A Suicide Note



The novel also explores the theme of addiction, and this is reflected in John Self's drug and alcohol abuse. Brian Finney (2008) states that "His addiction to pornography and masturbation illustrates the extent to which his subjectivity has been formed by the mass media. It also dispenses with the need for live women, offering him the satisfactions of solitary gratification." (p.46) The novel's critique of modern society's fixation on quick gratification and the pursuit of pleasure at all costs is reflected in the way his addiction warps his perspective of reality. The novel's disjointed structure, narrator's questionable credibility, and examination of topics like addiction and consumerism all work together to make it difficult to tell what's real and what's imagined. The author's indictment of modern society's fixation on consumerism and rapid fulfillment is reflected in this novel's focus on the fuzziness of reality. (McLean, 2009, p.235)

The novel provides a scathing critique of the dangers of consumer culture and the commercialization of human relationships. Amis, drawing from his own life, vividly depicts a society where consumerism and commercialization have taken control, along with the repercussions of this trend. John lives in a society that values material success and excess. Without thinking twice, he feels grasped by the chance to be rich as he gradually disappears into the very depths of consumerism. However, John's fellow people at work especially those people who he know as his friends and colleagues often look at him like he is a material thing, commodity. He is actually nothing remotely thinkable, but a thing to be twisted and used for their benefit. It is not surprising that the novel's topic of caring for people beyond a point being a trade-good is a stern warning against the dehumanizing effect of materialism.

### CONCLUSION

He utilizes art not only as metaphor, but also obsessively treats most of his characters as merchandise. They, especially in advertising business, are perceived as lacking moral values and make money for their own lust and audience's insecurity. The protagonist in "Money: A Suitable Case for Treatment," an Amis's novel, is used to criticize modern consumer culture in 1980s. The idea of consumerism in Amis's works is inseparable from our present world. Consumption takes the form of a





## Blurring Reality and the Commodification of Culture in Martin Amis's Money: A Suicide Note



soul-corrupting disease with Self as the representative of ever-growing passion for material exiation of people. By now the prosperity is judged not as the quality of the character but as the amount of gained riches. The pull of Money emerges through the history as a preventive instance which one should never exchange real human relation for financial prosperity. Particularly this novel by Amis teaches a painfully true lesson that how a commercialized art is dangerous not only to private lives but also to communities. It is still true that in a society where people are still slaves of consumerism, things like money can possibly lead to the unraveling of social values and to the destruction of human character.

### References

- Almasa, Mulalić. (2015). The Treatment of Violence in Martin Amis's Money and Pinter's the Caretaker. *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies*. 8 (1), pp. 57-67.
- Amis, M. (1984). *Money: A Suicide Note*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Bényei, T. (2006). *The Passion of John Self: Allegory, Economy, and Expenditure in Martin Amis's "Money"*. In
- Bonnie, McLean. (2009). *Single Man of Good Fortune: Postmodern Identities and Consumerism in the New Novel of Manners* (Unpublished Doctorate dissertation, Marquette University), USA.
- Cara L. Snyder. (1996). *Morality in Six Novels of Martin Amis' Novels*. USA.
- Carlos Silva, Campañón. (2004). Through the Looking Glass: America in Martin Amis's Money: A Suicide Note. 26 (2). *Atlantis*, pp. 87-96.
- Diedrick, J. (2004). *Understanding Martin Amis* (2nd ed.). University of South Carolina Press.
- Finney, B. (2008). Martin Amis's Money and Postmodern Capitalism. *Contemporary Literature*, 49(2), 185-214.
- Gil and Nesci. (2018). *The Cultural Life of Money: Conflict and Culture*. De Gruyter
- Harwinder, Kaur, (2017). Disintegration of the Self in Martin Amis's Money: A Suicide Note: A Satire on the Modern Consumer Society. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*. 5 (3), pp. 88-93.
- Joseph, Brooker. (2012). *Sado-Monetarism: Thatcherite Subjects in Alasdair Gray and Martin Amis*. DOI:10.1080/0950236X.2012.638767.
- Juan Abdullah, Ibrahim. (2020). Modernity, Mass Culture, and Self-Delusion in Nabokov's Lolita and Martin Amis' Money. Koya University. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3 (1), pp. 94-101.
- Keulks, G. (eds) (200). *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Matthew, Selwyn. Analysis: Money by Martin Amis. <https://www.bibliofreak.net/2011/05/analysis-money-by-martin-amis.html>.
- Torkdeh, A. (2000). Postmodern elements in Martin Amis's Money. *Journal of the Faculty of Letters and Humanities*, 33(3), 69-84