Identity as Alterity in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* and Martin Amis's *London Fields*

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0. Introduction

Do we normally look at the sky above our heads? Do we notice the ever changing colors of it at all times in our everyday life? For most people nowadays the answer is no (except maybe if you are thoughtful, and check the weather to dress accordingly); however, there are many other reasons for this which we will be exploring in the following chapters. For example, unlike us, some major characters in *The New York Trilogy* by Paul Auster and *London Fields* by Martin Amis do look up; they have no option left but to do so. Moreover, the titles of these novels are telling us that these are the stories of two cities, two very populated ones, and it is well known that in cities such as these it is sometimes hard to even see the sky and harder still to watch the stars at night; the buildings are so tall, the rhythm is so fast, the luminescence so bright, the soil so nonexistent, not to mention cloud cover and pollution. But the characters that both Auster and Amis have created are facing the end of the world, at least the end of their world, which they are *forced* to contemplate: when they look up and elsewhere they are looking for signs and what they see is more frightening for us than it is for them. Nature is not accessible for us anymore and we ask, therefore: what is the nature of the world they are forced to contemplate? What kind of reality do they face and, for that matter, and more importantly, what is reality? To answer these questions, these characters will all put their own identity to the test in search of something real and stable. During this journey of self-determination, they will learn the importance of *other people* in this process too and they will struggle to actually find any trace of reality in what they once called *themselves*, which is a situation they will either succumb to or totally reject, as we will see.

Ultimately, these characters will be searching for their true identities, for the others who are the same, and for those who are different from them, and all these, combined with the circumstances in which they find themselves, will interact in the novels in the most bizarre and sometimes unnatural ways. However, the novels are telling us that it has become clear that finding

one's identity is not all only about one's self (or oneself), as there is no way to be one without the others, an attitude that is highly influenced by the theories of Derrida, Levinas, Lacan and others, which testify to that[1]. We will explore their ideas and relate them to the representations of character in the text. We will also be analyzing discourses of 'identity', 'othering' and 'alterity', which inherently complement notions of the subjective formation of the self, notions that have perhaps inevitably become displaced and even dismissed as no longer feasible in a postmodern universe, replaced by the certainty that our sense of self comes from without and not from within. People are meant to be with other people, characters are bound to mingle with other characters and the absence and/or presence of interlocutors, the impossibility of really connecting with those 'others' and therefore with themselves, will drive our characters into homelessness, oblivion, solitude and madness. Nevertheless they are postmodern fictional characters, they inhabit a dystopian present (in the second half of the already past 20th century), which, although represented through striking techniques and meticulous linguistic choices made to bring about a sense of defamiliarization or even brechtian alienation, paradoxically seems very realistic to us living our life after the end of their world. As it will be argued throughout this paper, there are serious impediments for twentieth-century individuals (and even more so today) to find the means to satisfactorily achieve self-definition, or identification with or by anything that can be called 'real' (furthermore, we will examine whether this has ever been possible in history).

Related to this search is our interest as a species for the earthly elements, which are utterly necessary for our survival, such as water, earth, air or something so human as fire, which has always, as the evidence suggests, been parallel to our curiosity about those entities, physical or 'divine', above the clouds, and looking at the sky has brought more than one epiphany to the human race. Cities have expanded all over the world designed to *contain* our lives and interactions, tons of

1 Lacan suggests that we only come to know ourselves through the gaze of others; alternatively, Derrida points out the subjective self is a linguistic construct, and Levinas argues that the notion of the self is only known through the other but is always outwith our reach. We will provide further references in chapter 1.

concrete and cement covering original soil. Every trace that we once were animals in the wild has been erased from the city except for the sky; the forest, shore and land in general have disappeared from our sight, but the sky is not removable by the concrete giant. It is there and it reminds us of our ancient, true nature. No matter for how long these characters have looked the other way, the sky has presented itself to them, and it carries meaning. In Amis's end of the millennium London, and worldwide, the sun is “out of joint” (*LF*: 202), diseases and allergies run wild and the weather is literally burning. The heavens reveal an apocalyptic message; they say the earth is on the edge of collapse and Samson, the character-narrator-author, is sure humanity is to blame: “all this stuff was man-made, not acts of God but acts of man” (276). The New York in Auster's trilogy is, on the other hand, a far more peaceful place. It seems so like the real twentieth century New York we all know (mostly from TV, films and magazines) that it should not imprint such a feeling of displacement on the readers at all, as *London Fields* clearly does. Nonetheless it proves to be as hostile to the characters inhabiting it as Amis's London. The sky here conveys a different message, though. It only catches the characters' eyes in moments of extreme isolation and distress and it is in this solitude that the city, as part of a larger system, unfolds itself to the characters as unnatural, and also inescapable, in ways it had never appeared before. For them, it becomes a matter of stopping and trying to grasp the real or the true, only to discover they had never been there, or at least that they are not *there* anymore. Keith, Guy, and Samson in *London Fields*, and Quinn, Blue and the unnamed narrator of *The Locked Room* (the Trilogy) are all on a quest to find their selves. Moreover, Nicola Six (*LF*) and Stillman, Black and Fanshawe (*NYT*), their anti-selves, are most likely on the same journey. The readers will not be surprised that their shared destiny is deletion, dissolution and disappearance albeit in several distinct ways.

But how did they get to that point? To answer this question we will first rephrase it: how did *we* get here? Because it doesn't feel like home[2]; as Amis’s narrator reflects about one of the

2 In his article "How did I Get Here? This is not my Home..." (my translation, "¿Cómo he llegado hasta aquí?: Esta no

characters: “perhaps he was wondering why, in the fantasy, you felt at home in places like these, whereas of course you never did, and never would” (*LF*: 421). In order to engage with the texts and contextualize these apparent nihilist and apocalyptic representations of what we call the real world now we will have to turn to “parasitic citation” in search of authority (Docherty: 78), because that is how serious research is done. And, although we do not trust in language either anymore because it turns out to be a totalizing element and a creator of its own meanings[3], we will try to put into words how the humanities and sciences are worried about identity and subjectivity. In Stuart Hall's words, and he had a life-long career in criticism on identities and alterities, “This so-called ‘crisis of identity’ is seen as part of a wider process of change which [is] dislocating the central structures and processes of modern societies and undermining the frameworks which gave individuals stable anchorage in the social world” (Hall *MI*: 596). We will discuss how the influence of this predicament is palpable in the fiction of Paul Auster and Martin Amis, both nearly obsessed with the issue at every stage of their work. But it is not only them, as we will see; identity is a critical issue for all postmodernist authors and artists in general (although it had always been problematic in representation) and we will dig for the stylistic devices that these and other authors have been using in characterization to represent this loss of anchorage.

Although separated by space and talking to us from different cities, Auster and Amis are contemporary and share the same American-European literary heritage. Both of them, as well as their characters in these and other novels, tend to fly back and forth, both literally and figuratively, between Europe and America. Not only do the two novels share this enactment of postmodern characters in the immemorial journey of self-recognition on the stage of the twentieth century

es mi Casa"), Manuel Almagro contemplates this in a light-hearted manner echoing the Talking Heads's song “Once in a Lifetime” and reflects on the postmodernist subject's discomfort with everything traditionally considered stable and safe and how this presents an issue in self-definition.

3 Spivak, Lyotard, Derrida, Hall and other critics from different fields agree language is an ontology, a construct with no relation to anything beyond itself, that legitimates itself; i.e. according to Lacan the real is nowhere to be found as it is always mediated by language: “we can never know if the real lies beyond language...A reality we must assume although we can never know it” (Sarup: 24-26).

megalopolis, but they also share a fetish about particular objects or objectivized people, highlighting the notebook (and sometimes a diary), as a means for recognition and ultimately, existence. This will bring us to consider the historic formation of the city and the importance of objects and language nowadays as vectors for meaning in an otherwise alienating society which promotes "the evident degradation of *being* into *having*, [which] drives us to a generalized displacement of *having* into *seeming*" (Debord, my translation: 42-43), and how this state of affairs affects literature in every level: "Characterization in fiction, authorship and intention, readership, narrative point of view, style, genre and thematics all reflect the concern with this 'question' " (Wheeler: 15). Also, because of the meta-literary complexity brought by the notebooks and the superimposition of layers and 'authors' in these books, we will take interest, as Auster and Amis do, in the character and thematization of authorship and agency, another key point in postmodernist critique and artistic production.

These characters are not real people; they live in a fictional world which has become a fragmented collection of impressions; nothing complete or real is available to their senses and their subjectivity will be also incomplete and always in the making. We will argue that they have but a few options in behavior that are available for them to 'perform', a finite number of models or archetypes/stereotypes; therefore, for example, Keith will represent the 'macho', Guy will struggle to adapt to the standards of the old-fashioned gentleman, and meanwhile, Nicola Six will try to fill the shoes of more than one male fantasy of the female stereotype, to satisfy and deceive all of them. Could it possibly be the same for real people? Are we limited by our own societal creation? Critics say we are: "The language of autonomy, identity, self-realization and the search of fulfillment forms a grid of regulatory ideals" (Rose: 145). Our today globalized consumerist society is made up of what Baudrillard calls 'simulacra' [4], Debord calls it 'the society of the spectacle'[5]; and we seem to

4 "A world of simulacra without depth, center, or meaning" (Spariosu: 61).

5 "An accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything directly experienced has turned into a representation" (Debord, my translation: 37).

be calling it ‘life’. These characters are therefore just a representation of what subjectivity has come to be: “subjectivity, today, has characteristic and novel features such as uncertainty, reflexivity, self-scrutiny, fragmentation and diversity” (Rose: 144). Some of the characters we will be analyzing are ‘players’ and embrace ‘the game’ in all its plenitude in a conscious (Nicola) or unconscious way (Keith), and we will be comparing them to Don Quixote of La Mancha, so immersed in the postmodernist romance are they, that they perceive windmills where *there are* monsters. Another range of characters (Quinn, Blue, Fanshawe), also becoming conscious of the deceitful life they are attempting to live, pursue total isolation, contemplation and austerity, dissolving their self in their one person imaginary Walden Pond. This is postmodern escapism in its essence and its consequences are fatal.

We have already mentioned some of our protagonists but should briefly consider what, at least on the surface, takes place in the novels. In the Trilogy, we will find three apparently unrelated stories, that we will discover are connected in different ways later. It starts off as a detective novel but as *City of Glass* develops, we soon notice it turns into a reflection upon identity, others, solitude and literature itself. The same structure is repeated in *Ghosts* and the cycle is closed in *The Locked Room*, where the narrator of the whole Trilogy makes himself more present as the protagonist. Although all of the protagonists work on a case of espionage at some level, none of them will be able to successfully solve their quests, nor will the reader know the end at the end. Suspense is replaced by contemplation and confusion, the same way as in *London Fields* we are again denied suspense; we know from the very beginning it is a murder story, even who the victim, the murderer and the fall-guy are. All roles are assigned from the start, thence by this initial move, again the author forces us to focus on notions like identity, agency or the fake foundations under social conventions. Although that is more or less what we get on the surface, *The New York Trilogy* and *London Fields* are still worth carrying on with until the end; they constitute hundreds of pages of

word game; the irony is overwhelming. We are bound to watch and be accomplice to these characters' foreseen self-destruction, and the result is tragicomic. We assume social critique is implicit and accept the literary game as it is in these novels: an extreme catalog of postmodern types in motion, implying an inherently incoherent nature, therefore never meeting the reader's ontological expectations, which are preconceived, as we will later examine closely.

Unfortunately, some critics, and particularly feminist critics have been upset about one particular category of representation that has been very controversial up until today in relation to *London Fields* and Amis himself: ‘gender’ or the feminine. In *London Fields* and The Trilogy, women are virtually invisible, yet there is one character who is very visible, active and actress, manipulator and player: Nicola Six, pronounced /'siks/, misheard ‘sex’ (*LF*: 37). For us, the mistake lies in analyzing her as if she were a real woman, which she is not, or *only* as a display of the profound chauvinistic ideas of the author himself, which she might be. If we assume Amis's hatred for women makes him depict them this way, we might as well equally state that he deeply hates men, and that, too, could be perfectly possible. Either way, Nicola should be analyzed as *another* (an *other*) de-centered fictional representative type of our times and we will try to contextualize her (horrible) actions in the frame of the novel. Besides, Nicola has one final goal: to die, more specifically to be killed by one of the male characters in the symbolic act (as all her steps are willingly symbolic) of exterminating all the male fantasies she has been enacting. We will dig into the ideas of death and rebellion, and even death as a form of rebellion in these novels and their entanglement as forms of evasion. Does she succeed? Well, partly she does not. She does die, but because actual *rebellion* is not an obtainable goal, just as escapism for the characters left alive is impossible, physically and mentally the system re-accommodates the characters in their empty place. This is taken to the literal realm in Auster's trilogy, for instance with Quinn lying on the floor of an empty room, almost with an empty mind, accompanied by no one and fed by who knows who

in the last (*known*) days of his life. On the other hand, many authors think, as we will see in chapter 4, that violence and death are conceptually an intrinsic part of the idea of revolution or rebellion, and that is the route that Amis's characters take. They all lose everything (they play many roles, they live a lot of different lives); most of them *essentially* disappear, but yet are still unable to fulfill their escapist attempt.

This is the landscape of the era; it is the end of the millennium, possibly the end of the world, and the end of all these characters we try so hard not to identify with. Identity has been unseated by alterity, no matter if one behaves as one thinks one *is*, or one *should be*, or looks for belonging in place, time or the others: one *is* essentially other, recalling Rimbaud's words (Docherty: 180). Therefore some characters will try to be in actual control of the image they project, players in a game they know is extreme, a game they might lose; quoting Nicola's song of 'freedom': "What I am I wish to be, and what I wish to be I am. I am beyond God. I am the Motionless Cause. Extremity upon extremity, and then more extremity, and then more" (133). In fact, reading these novels we will observe how characters *are* many others, and we will analyze the intriguing uses of literary doublings. The point is that through these literary experiments the 'I' has been proven to be other, so unreachable to itself as alterity had been before; therefore the only possible identity, according to Amis and Auster, *is* alterity, and, to use the quantum jargon these authors really enjoy too, identity and alterity cancel each other in the manner in which particles are canceled in contact with anti-particles into the void.

1. Identities and Alterities

To understand the ways in which the notions of identity have changed in postmodernity we should consider what the nature of identity has been for humanity in the past. As we will see in this chapter, although there have been many different and specific approaches to the topic of identity, there have been mainly three kinds of subsequent notions of 'modern subject'. First there was the Enlightenment subject, a compendium of all the previous traditions and the special confidence of the Enlightenment's thinkers: he is a male subject, unified and capable of reason with a center of stable identity. In the 20th century, the sociological subject will appear, more open to the world: a modern subject, not autonomous but formed through significant others, creating values and meanings through these relationships. *He* has got also an identity core, but it is flexible and in continuous formation: identification "stabilizes both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable" (Hall *MI*: 597). As we will see, eventually a new postmodern subject will take over: previously experienced as unified, it (to avoid the gender mark in this case) is "becoming fragmented, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities at the same time. The world is fragmented and not possible to grasp so it has no permanent identity, but it changes depending on how we are 'addressed' by society" (598). And this third type of individual is clearly the kind of subject depicted through the characters in our novels. As Peter Stillman Senior tells Quinn, it is very important to take into account the plain fact that: "You see, the world is in fragments, sir" (*NYT*: 75). While the Trilogy's characters display their many doppelgangers and their own doublings in every page and fragmentation in personality becomes obvious, the characters in *London Fields* are overwhelmed by the many ways in which society is addressing them, demanding for them to play roles that are sometimes contradictory or empty but that they feel in need to enact.

There are many factors that interact within the process of identification, which demonstrates

it is not just a natural process but it depends mostly on the different social spheres and constructs experienced and learned at an early age and reinforced through the rest of one's life. This, too, is a very important topic in these novels. It is a fact well known by Amis's central character, Nicola Six, the woman who perfectly understands how social and sexual relationships are constructed, and therefore can predict and manipulate the future reactions of the rest of the characters. In Auster, the importance of socialization at the early stages of life is a central topic of the plot, mainly in *City of Glass* through Peter Stillman Jr., the man that had been locked up and isolated by his own father in the endeavor to find the true language of God, who has no knowledge at all of these conventions: “Little by little, they taught me how to be Peter Stillman. They said: you are Peter Stillman. Thank you, I said. [...] You are a human being, they said. It is good to believe what doctors say” (17). This is also a recurrent idea throughout the whole Trilogy— Auster-Quinn introduces the stories of different wild boys found by civilization through history, their difficulty in ever learning how to speak and behave as their fellow humans and their lack of interest in sex or money (33-35). As we will see in this chapter, self and identity are not confined only to the internal realm but they depend more on outside factors than we are able to imagine; there are national and cultural identities, discourses of power to justify them, minority discourses to subvert them, religious identity, Science, History and Politics, they all play a major role in the way people define themselves and their communities. There is, so to say, a system of everything we experience: ‘the System’, a designation that we will use from now on in order to refer to the compound of societal constructs the subject is a part of, or simply a synonym for ‘reality’.

That we are an entity, a beating heart and a thinking brain is all we normally would need to assume we are ourselves, we are all ‘I’. The feeling of self-preservation walks hand in hand with the feeling of self-identification. Self-consciousness is something we share with some animals, but unlike any other creature, our functional organism, self-contained and separated from the outside

world by our skin, thinks ‘I am’ and, more importantly: it verbally proclaims ‘I am’. As Derrida brings to our attention, quoting Benveniste, the linguistic capacity of the subject to posit itself as subject *is* subjectivity itself: “‘Ego’ is he who *says* ‘ego’ ” (7). Therefore language is a determinant acquired skill in order to translate our self-consciousness into existence, and thought, the fact that we think in linguistic terms, stands for both the tool and the evidence itself of the existence of an active subject— as in Descartes's ominous ‘*cogito, ergo sum*’[6]. Language and instinct also make us social beings, humans are meant for life in community, consequently, virtually everywhere you look for a definition of ‘identity’ you will find one or more synonyms for ‘belonging’. We will examine in this chapter how this apparently logical approach as to how people self-define in relation to themselves and the others has been deconstructed and torn to pieces by twentieth century thinkers, just like, in Lyotard's terms, every other ‘*grand récit*’ (Calinescu "Postmodernism...": 5). We will see how every grand truth is seen as a human construction kept through time as a heritage, in order to reassure the supremacy or the monopoly of reason, progress, power, and other key notions reinforced since the Enlightenment project, as some call it (Haidu: 597; Donald: 178)[7]. However, there is another crucial characteristic of subjectivity, and it is ‘difference’, a decisive concept in Derrida's or Levinas's view of identity and alterity that has marked all the so-called minority discourses of our times (feminist, ethnic, postcolonial, and so on). However, the oldest entry found in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* under ‘identity’ is P. Holland's 1603 translation of Plutarch: “That the soule of this universall world, is not simple, uniforme and uncompounded, but mixed of a certaine power of Identitie and of Diversity”. This is an indication of the degree to which alterity and identity have always incorporated each other.

From this, it seems the search for identity and its definition has always been a subject of

6 Thiher, however, argues that the appeal that the cartesian model represents for writers such as Nabokov, Sartre or philosophers like Wittgestein or Heidegger precisely resides in its negation of language as part of the pure and stable experience of the subject: “Descartes'[s] thought offers a model of representation that breaks out of language. In securing the self as the stage of representation, Descartes refused to allow language to disrupt his thought” (101).

7 Lyotard talks about this ‘system-subject’ project as an ideal that is still present in the philosophy of Habermas, for example, but insists this project has failed in postmodernity (77).

study for philosophy, religion, science, and also for anthropology, sociology, psychology and all branches of knowledge we could possibly imagine, on the grounds that if we were to reduce all of them to a common end, they all are in the continuous search of ways of explaining 'reality' as it is perceived, either inside our brain or through studying our surroundings, by scrutinizing all the layers of our planet or by the inexhaustible observation of celestial bodies. The eternal quest is for answers to the ontological question, 'why?' But, for Amis, "There is no why" (*TA*: 119). In philosophy, the contraposition of internal and external realities soon found it difficult to reconcile the experience of the subject's reason and his relationship to his senses. Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas or Descartes, whose "*cogito* is only one of the summits— even the highest— of a chain of *cogitos* which constitute the reflective tradition" (Ricoeur: 236), all in all, highlighted internal reality or our perception of external nature as the closest we can come to a graspable truth and they distrusted the experience of the senses. Spinoza, Leibniz or most predominantly Kant, started to consider reality as the external world unfolded to us by experimentation and positivist science, which is the beginning of modern thinking (Spinosa and Dreyfus: 100). Therefore a dialogical relationship starts between these two irreconcilable 'real' sets of experience, a relationship in which enlightened humans apprehend the laws of nature and use them to alter the environment, to *improve* it, promoting a belief in infinite positive progress. The emphasis is on the notion that experience of reality is fundamentally subjective, but nonetheless truthful. This idea makes progress possible; in fact, the idea of progress has installed itself so strongly as to persist nowadays as a predominant line of thought, very influential in the description of identity and our relationship with the environment in science and technology: for example, we must not forget that the problem created by the irreconcilability of these modes of experience still persists in the field of science nowadays, while it is impossible for scientists to find their way into a 'theory of everything' that could incorporate quantum theories and relativity, both 'real' and incompatible. However scientists still believe we

will be able to answer the ultimate questions about life, its beginning and its fate, and the universe in the near future, partly because our intellect is seen as cumulative through time, and therefore it gets sharper, partly because technology seems also to be an incombustible ally[8].

As we move into the 20th century, rapidly changing and overlapping ideas of the real and the self will coexist; some will reconsider the overwhelming importance of the internal perception of the real as more determinant of the actual experience of the subject, a trend that Freud and psychoanalysis reinvigorated by, among other postulates, taking into account memories and dreams, the unconscious, as determinant for the present status of the subject. Although the relationship with the world is important, the way in which the individual processes it is the most real field of experience. Some others will consider, on the other hand, that there are also extremely important outside factors that can alter the subject's core inevitably. Following the positivist tradition of the nineteenth century, in the need to determine which of the experiences was to be considered more real, Husserl founded the school of ‘phenomenology’, which, as its name suggests, found ‘reality’ in everything that experiments in nature revealed, later influencing Derrida or Levinas (Haidu: 682-684). Another philosopher that would deeply influence later trends of thought is Heidegger, who was the first to critique the Enlightenment notions for failing to be universalist. Incorporating a strong sense of ‘difference’ (Gingrich: 6-9), he started to look at language and other great discourses with distrust, which is a fundamental idea our authors are still exploring in their work. Earlier than Heidegger, Hume had categorically denied the existence of the world outside human experience at all. So did Nietzsche, he who confidently said: ‘God is dead’, a nihilist motto that has been applied almost to every one of the Enlightenment's big, nature/God-given truths, catapulting the work of, for example, Foucault, Deleuze or the already mentioned Derrida and Levinas: metaphysics is dead,

8 As an illustration for this belief, note for example the positive tone of the following quote by Stephen Hawking: “It is likely that answers to these questions will be found over the next few years, and that by the end of the century we shall know whether string theory is indeed the long sought-after unified theory of physics” (165). Of course he meant the end of the past century.

language is dead, the artist is dead, the author is dead. Amis recalls these affirmations, while describing Nicola as a soon to be dead character (she calls herself a Murderee and is plotting her own death):

> She welcomed and applauded the death of just about anything. It was company. It meant you weren't quite alone. A dead flower, the disobliging turbidity of dead water, slow to leave the jug. A dead car half-stripped at the side of the street, shot, busted, annulled, abashed. A dead cloud. The Death of the Novel. The Death of Animism, the Death of Naive Reality, the Death of the Argument from Design, and (especially) the Death of the Principle of Least Astonishment. The Death of the Planet. The Death of God. The death of love. It was company. (*LF*: 296)

Conceptual death combines with the death of the environment for Amis, and out of all this death, only one common point stands out in the work of the twentieth century thinkers: the relationship of the self with the other seems to be the only bridge between the self and the real, thence the only possibly stable way of self-definition. That is the starting point of the twentieth century, and we must keep in mind that “this [was] indeed a century full of visions we would like to forget, but which we have nevertheless relentlessly recorded, analyzed, and amplified” (Berger, J: 394).

Structuralism also appeared at the beginning of the century as another type of universalism, recognizing the necessity of a common bond among all the diversity of human experiences. Saussure, who would categorize all reality as mediated by language with his famous dichotomy signifier/signified, emphasized that all reality was created by humans and that neither language nor the signifier itself had an intrinsic meaning; it was only through interpretation and naming that things acquired their meaning (Strathern: 43-45). Lévi-Strauss would incorporate Saussure's ideas into anthropology, insisting on the importance of kinship and relationships as constructs related to power and historical heritage; as Strathern observes: “when people draw on kinship as a source of identity, they evoke both old and new forms of relating, as well as the tension between them” (45). Towards the second half of the century post-structuralists moved away from structuralism's universalism, focusing on the one thing that seemed for them to be consistent when referring to a global definition of culture: difference, or alterity. Semiotics then appears to challenge

Hermeneutics, which was based on tradition and heritage (Haidu: 689), and thus frees identity from its historical constraints, letting it embrace otherness:

> The experience of alterity was foundational and constitutive of what was once called structuralism, whose present forms are primarily deconstruction, semiotics, and foucaldian discourse analysis. Without this experience [...], the formalization typical of these intellectual currents would have no reason to exist. Without the interruption of subjectivity represented by alterity, the phenomenological relation between cognitive subject and object of knowledge could remain the perfectly and adequate matrimonial relation. [...] Semiotics and alterity are inextricably bound up together, not only by cause of origin, but constitutively. (684)

When post-structuralist thought enters the intellectual scene and even time as a constant becomes fragmentary and inapprehensible, all modes of identification are found to be historical lies, as we will argue later. Hence, more than a single angle must be applied to understand experience: "subjectivity as internal time consciousness; identity as the temporal construction of difference and agency as the temporal displacement of difference" (Grossberg: 100-101).

It has become clear that, to understand the nature of the self and of the other, it is not enough to identify those factors that constitute our inner world with regard to our own subjectivity or even our more immediate interaction with those others who allow us to know ourselves— an 'inner circle' constituted by the cares of the mother, the authority of the father and other family bonds—, which are very important, as studied for example by Lacan. His perspective on the formation of identity implied an 'other' who resembles the self and is like a mirror for our self-reflexive consciousness, and a non-reflexive unconscious 'Other'; so identity is not only self-consciousness, and difference can be part of identity and vice versa "at least *prima vista"* (Gingrich: 9-11). Even when we consider our relations beyond the family and the possible role we play with spouses, friends, lovers, colleagues, or other ultimately *public* relations, these are not enough to determine the nature of the self and the relation with the other. There are communal factors too, like the notions of national, cultural or even religious identity, and of course the real possibility of being the outsider or part of a minority as a defining characteristic. These factors have been determined by the

powers acting in and writing History and we must take them into consideration for being of great importance in the process of identification historically. In Amis's view:

> Countries go insane like people go insane; and all over the world countries reclined on couches or sat in darkened rooms chewing dihydrocodeine and Temazepam or lay in boiling baths or twisted in straitjackets or stood there banging their heads against the padded walls. (*LF*: 367)

National identity as a form of self-definition which is shared by the members of a given community persists through history, and is both temporal and spatial, as it is related to territory and the passage of time. National identification comes from ancient "tribe, people, religion and region" (Strathern: 612), basic concepts for human civilization that are reinterpreted through time up to our days. This type of collective identity has existed as long as there have been societies. According to Homi Bhabha, a representative of postcolonial discourse, the narrative of the modern nation comes from the ontological and medieval perception of the world, and he reminds us also about the medieval taste for visual and aural imaginary in representation (157). Therefore, symbolic national or nationalist identification is still very important for the cultural determination of people; as Hägglund points out, without national identification the modern subject would "experience a sense of subjective loss" (612). However, postmodernism has brought into consideration that any definition considered essentialist must be discarded, and even national identity is not safe. 'Essentialist' is an adjective applied to the doctrines that assume a 'thing' has a 'meaning', inherent and immutable, and this is under extreme scrutiny by critics.

In consequence, the notion of cultural identity, in all its now considered essentialist variants, has been under attack in the belief that "any claim to identify citizenship in terms of cultural identity […] undermines democratic popular sovereignty and the rights of citizenship by drawing a line separating those who are members of this political community from those who are not" (Donald:174). In other words, the discourse of the nation is anchored in traditional values that, by definition, imply the existence of other people outside of it. Hobbes in the 17th century already

reckoned that when confronting others, one could never know whether the other is violent or even if he is going to kill us, so collective identity was practical for national unity against invaders and enemies (Abizadeh: 54). To Hobbes, men have to repress their instinct for violence towards each other in order to be a part of a non-violent model of society (Pristed: 28). Although homogeneity is sought to reinforce national unity, the enemy is not only outside the frontiers of the nation; the paradox inherent in legitimate state authority will always be that the possibility of war comes as much from outside as it does from inside the nation, thence the possibility of war is always latent (Abizadeh: 49-53). So, to prevent individuals from collapsing the unity of the nation, numerous devices have been designed to control the dynamics of power historically. Foucault notices that since the 16th century, although the state prevails as a social 'unity', "most of the time [it] is envisioned as a kind of political power which ignores individuals, looking only at the interests of the totality or, I should say, of a class or a group among the citizens" (782). Therefore, it is sensed that through a fixed common identity, a minority in power can speak *for* the citizens as a homogeneity of subjects (Donald: 176).

Let us continue with Foucault's thoughts on this. In *The Subject and Power*, he provides a deep analysis of the concept of agency through history. As Marx had done before, he realizes how power is exercised through discourse, and the question of who exactly speaks for the citizens becomes a central issue from this point on in criticism. The dynamics of power have been mutating through history but do follow a thread thanks to tradition and History. For him, "the relationship of power can be the result of a prior or permanent consent, but it is not by nature the manifestation of a consensus" (788). Therefore, where are the dissidents? Apart from the official revolutions that have been recorded by their fathers or their offspring in history as key to the success of mankind and to its progress (such as the American or the French), the voices of minorities and the powerless have been silenced, and it is through History, as a discipline, that this sad fact has been reinforced. Under

these powerful discourses, as Foucault unravels, individual identity is mixed up with or even suppressed by notions of national identity and consequently also by religious identity, all of them imposed on individuals by power centers alien to them. As we will see in chapter 2, Mumford analyzes the historical formation of the city, and notices that its development as a power center parallels the enrichment of religious elites because, among other reasons, kinship turned into oligarchy naturally very early, the king sharing power and agency in exchange for support with the members of the social and religious elites.

This is a relationship between power and religion that persists up until today, as Auster, who is concerned about how and by whom History is written in the Trilogy, makes visible in *City of Glass*: when the private eye Quinn investigates Stillman Sr., he learns that among his ancestors "there were several governors back in the nineteenth century, a number of Episcopal bishops, ambassadors, a Harvard president. At the same time, the family made a great deal of money in textiles, shipping and God knows what else" (25), thus observing the latent blood relationship between political, scientific, commercial (the exchange of goods and probably people) and economic elites in society, a society rooted in a religious tradition as well. Before projecting our anxieties for self-definition on reason, as the Enlightenment or the Renaissance geniuses did, religion had come to determine what kind of knowledge and modes of identification were possible and available and this persists at the core of every civilization. Religion is no more than another way of expressing our need for subjectivity and meaning: "The self, Mark Taylor tells us, is an essentially theological concept; […] the conceptual figure of God was also elaborated in a relationship with one's effort to conceptualize the structure of one's own spirit" (Lingis: 529). As we know, religious elites have acquired power throughout history partly because they stand for this 'spiritual' human need.

Religious consciousness is mostly ontological and that makes it vitally important for the

formation of the subject; searching for the meaning of existence seems to be a universal need for human beings of all ages and eras as well. Even when the empirical sciences turned out to be incompatible with religious texts, this ontology did not disappear from the intellectual plain of discourse, but it was transferred to science. Although the sun does not move around the earth anymore and the universe seems ever bigger, *man* still remains the center of 'creation' and that makes it all meaningful. *He* has a unique spiritual relationship with the designer, now also mediated by science, as we will see. Amis, through his narrator Samson Young, questions this shift of focus in religious beliefs and mysticism from nature into the human realm: "Why didn't more people worship the sun? The sun had so much going for it. It created life; it was profoundly mysterious; it was so powerful that no one on earth dared to look its way. Yet humans worshipped the human. The anthropomorphic. They worshipped promiscuously: anybody" (148). The way or the place in which we find meaning has changed, but not the fact that we need sense and identification in order to *be*. As Calinescu notices, all the current metanarratives have in common the notion of "a universal finality": "All the major *stories of emancipation* of modernity are essentially secularized variations on the Christian paradigm" (*FF*: 274). Here causality is re-adapted, therefore history is bound to push us further and further into scientific discoveries that will better explain the cosmos in non-religious terms, reinforcing the notion that progress is always bound to go further, and so are the human skills and the technology that will eventually help us find the ultimate answers, available for us but not yet obtained. In this light, history is somehow 'Sacred History' because there is transcendence in this quest; and so there emerges a "new trinity," formed by "History, Humanity and Progress-Freedom" (Marín-Casanova, my translation: 37).

Although progress and freedom come together in this positive sacred interpretation, the negative implication is that freedom might not really be a possible part of the equation, because the assumption of positive progress may take us to justify (and *accept*) the horrible acts of mankind

through History as inevitable, as ultimately necessary sacrifices for our improvement as a species or a society. Stillman Sr. is a symbol of this trend; he goes as far as to invent a historical character, Henry Dark, a previously unknown assistant to Milton. He uses this character because "I had ideas at the time that were too dangerous and controversial. So I pretend they had come from someone else" (79). In Stillman's pamphlet that he attributed to Dark (*The New Babel*, 1690), he talks about how language is corrupted and outdated, leading to the fall of man, which justifies the experiment that isolated his son for the first half of his life: "If the fall of man also entailed a fall of language, was it not logical to assume that it would be possible to undo the fall, to reverse its effects by undoing the fall of language, by striving to recreate the language that was spoken in Eden?" (47). This point of view brings with it the concept of inevitability: if human progress is also historically bound to involve violence, then it is a sacrifice to take on as part of our present and our future. Inevitability in our System is something we will go into in further detail when talking about Debord and Baudrillard towards the end of the chapter. Inevitability is a vital part of Amis's novel as well, with a 'Murderee' who is known to be going to die from the very beginning, combined with the apparent forthcoming end of the world, both because of environmental and political decay: "We used to live and die without any sense of the planet getting older, living and dying. We used to live outside of history" (197). But history as a continuum must have a start and an end, and Amis presents to us the inevitable End of History.

History is at the very center of postmodernist critique for being a rearrangement of the past into coherent, linear facts that tend to justify the present state of affairs, creating a sense of positive evolution, or, as Vattimo argued in the 80's: "only if History exists can we talk about progress" (Marín-Casanova, my translation: 43). Nowadays, Benjamin's assertion that history is a narrative always written by the winners of any battle has become a commonplace (47). Hence, part of the information will always be missing and primary sources are never available (Aguilar: 241), ergo

“the past cannot be recovered; the cohesion and coherence of the culture— always an imaginary ideal— cannot be reconstituted” (Robins: 63). By imposing a single hegemonic discourse, history “effectively [collapses] all heterogeneous powers into the same mythic form, usually that of ‘oppression’ ” (Docherty: 73); in other words, History is seen as violent and oppressive as the state itself, because it ultimately *is* its discourse of propaganda. However, before its consolidation as a discipline comparable to science or philosophy, under the influence of the positivist mood of the 19th century, curiously enough, history belonged to the realm of literature; therefore, fictitious and realist elements in the narrative were not distinguishable and it was not conceived to be authoritative or realistic in its beginning with Herodotus— who Auster calls “a notoriously unreliable chronicler” (*NYT*: 33)— and Thucydides in the west, and Sima Qian in the orient. It was not until the positivist historians such as Leopold von Ranke and McKenzie, that historians started to change this perspective. They wanted to make a science out of History by drastically separating themselves from literature (Aguilar: 230-231). As a consequence, all previous historical texts needed to be reinterpreted and reconstructed into a continuum in search of the representation of a coherent evolution of mankind in a kind of ‘historiographic meta-fiction’, as Linda Hutcheon calls it (Aguilar: 255).

Primary sources are never available; since usually historical entries are recorded from years to centuries after the supposed events happened; even the first recordings are already reinterpreted and the resulting discourse is normally manipulated for particular ends. As Foucault noticed, mechanisms of incursion and excursion of information (and the subaltern) from this discourse are practiced deliberately; he calls on his contemporaries for “a refusal of these abstractions, [...] which ignore who we are individually, and also a refusal of a scientific or administrative inquisition which determine who one is” (780-781). Nowadays, because of the lack of objectivity in this process of rewriting history, critics are interested in reading history as literature again. In Haidu's words: “the

dialogue form of ‘tradition’ is a metaphor: it is equally well narrative fiction” (674), and for Said, the coiner of the term ‘Orientalism’, “all historical writing *is* writing and delivers figural language and representational tropes, be they in codes of metonimy, metaphor, allegory, or irony”. For him, all these devices are used as tools for promoting cultural hegemony (368). Amis introduces a sarcastic criticism as to how History is used deliberately to prove *any* point— this quote comes from a book about darts that Keith Talent reads; the *only* book he reads: “Those Pilgrim Fathers are said to have thrown darts while sailing to America in 1620 on the so-called Mayflower. [...] King Arthur was also said to have played some form of darts” (313). With no hesitation, the author keeps on introducing “some form of darts” in every relevant historical period, stating even that darts must be related to the meaning of Stonehenge (396). It is hilarious every time *Masters of Darts* is introduced in the fiction but apart from the humorous function of it, it is Amis's artifice for pointing at the way in which *anything* can be said about historical moments because, contrary to what is intended by historians, every description of them can be placed in the realm of fiction. Under the postmodernist view, history is not seen any more as a reconstruction; there is nothing to reconstruct: “it is exclusively and rigorously construction” (Oakeshott in Calinescu "Postmodernism...": 8).

Philosophers like Nietzsche, Bergson or Heidegger had anticipated this distrust of history and had questioned humanity's attachment to time, as we have said (Stevenson: 105-109). They started to see the strong bond between these forces and the definition of the self; they started to feel that external reality was mediated by human reason, which catalogs and names its experiences in the process of self-definition. They saw, and so did the historian Jacob Bruckhardt, that logic and language were being used on the subjects as a means of control (Aguilar: 232); control over the countries, control over the masses, control over the feelings of individuals were practiced in a subtle way. A crucial example of the logic of discourse justifying violence on others is, for example, the way eugenics successfully installed itself in the European public's mind, influenced by the most

important theory of the century, Darwin's evolution. The atrocities of WWII were yet to come partly based on these strong concerns of racial superiority in relation to the *evidence* that western society had come further in evolution. Also, massive cuts in the population of the world after WWII have not ended, but they have *evolved* up until the nuclear crisis and the post-crisis we now live in, as Nicola reflects in *London Fields*:

> Hitlerian hubris. From what she knew about events in the Middle East, from what she gathered from what remained of the independent press (contorted comment, speculation), it seemed possible to argue that Hitler was still running the century— Hitler, the great bereaver. Although they were entering November now, there was still time for him to reap exponential murder. Because what he had done you could do a thousandfold in the space of half an afternoon. (395)

The idea of racial superiority is also present in *City of Glass* through the albino child who is isolated in order to be the future of the human race and there is a persistent mentioning of the color white "The city was entirely white now, and the snow kept falling, as though it would never end" (130). Stillman, in Dark's disguise, interprets the Bible's migratory tendencies— "Dark stated that this passage proved the westward movement of human life and civilization" (47)—, America being the last step of human evolution, as well as paradise on earth, as the conquistadors found it. There was a strong logical reason why western society should keep expanding and imposing itself over other *less advanced* cultures. Homogenization is always the goal of globalization of any kind: "You see, the world is in fragments, sir. And it's my job to put it back together again" (75). The conception of America as the culmination of progress is not original in Auster or Amis, it is a tradition embedded in the American discourse of self-definition from the beginning and it has been exported to the rest of the world. This idea still plays a very important part in American pride, inevitable for Samson Young: "Somewhere else in *More Die of Heartbreak* Bellow says that America is the only place to be, because it contains the 'real modern action'. Everywhere else is 'convulsed' in some earlier stage of development. That's true. But England feels like the forefront of something, the elegiac side of it" (101); or "Nobody in their right mind wants to come to Europe,

not just now, not for the time being" (1). Nevertheless Young reflects: "Maybe the American dream was a farewell to dreams. And to much else" (263), which corroborates his fears for the end of civilization, embodied by the extremities of America: "Most places just are something, but America had to mean something too, hence her vulnerability — to make-believe, to false memory, false destiny. And finally it looked as though the riveting struggle with illusion was over. And America had lost" (367). Our authors, and many other contemporary thinkers show their concern for this idea; in Olderman's opinion, the previous distrust of the 'American dream', has given way to the "controlling metaphor in the image of the *waste land*" (my emphasis). Taking T.S. Eliot as a referent, he argues that: "for writers born in the years of the Depression, or raised under the shadow of World War II, the image of a promised land has lost its creative potential. We are an age weaned on tension and silent despair" (8-9).

Although the Enlightenment spirit is inspired by the search of good and truth, as we have seen, there are so many elements that point against good and truth as highly manipulated concepts, if not completely nonexistent. Progress, or the progress that some consider themselves to have achieved, usually brings dark implications with it (Said: 231); 'dark' because it is the antonym of 'light', and the world has ultimately been reduced to the simple opposition of "the enlightened and the benighted" peoples (Robins: 62). For Kant, societies "outside culture [are] outside sublime experience and cannot think the final purpose" (Mishra and Hodge: 386); or as Quinn reflects while investigating Stillman's paper: "if you don't consider the man before you to be human, there are few restraints of conscience on your behavior towards him" (42). In this investigation, Quinn also refers to the Pope's bull in 1537 that declared that Indians were human beings with a soul, although they were always considered animalistic even after Rousseau's and Locke's 'noble savage'. Even nowadays, according to Cabezón, "nonwestern religions […] occupy for European and American intellectuals a preeminent position in the hierarchy of otherness" (27). This observation brings us

back to the traditional bond between cultural recognition and religion, and the intrinsic conceptual relationship between religion, expansionism, and cultural imposition on the other.

Along similar lines, *Modernity* defines itself as being in contrast to or opposing the pre-modern in order to exist beyond the realm of ideas and to consolidate the purpose of History: positive human progress. Also, the notion of "geographical polarization" appears: the "dynamic West" vs. the "immobile Orient" (Robins: 62), and it is very clear which of the two owns modernity. It is assumed that cultures that exist and identify themselves in connection to a more natural way of living are "backward" (Said: 367) and therefore must be civilized in order for humanity to achieve global progress. This is another idea that has come with civilization since its dawn. Since its beginning, the city as an entity (remember our novels take place in and are even about the city sometimes), had the will of incorporating as much territory as possible, expanding its web of power in the form of hierarchies. Expansion was both direct and indirect —spatial and cultural: on the one hand the walls of the city tend to expand, while on the other the customs and way of life of the city, its culture and societal constructs (its religion included) were also meant to be imposed and shared by as many people as possible. We can agree that most of the content of history books is about wars and that all civilizations canonically encumbered are described as successfully expansionist and in constant search for cultural homogeneity: the Egyptians, the Greeks, and predominantly the Romans are some representatives of the ancient attempts at globalization. They all described themselves as more advanced than their contemporary others, therefore naturally having to fulfill the goal of a universal culture; a common "cultural future and even destiny" (Robins: 62) has been since a justification for colonization, western supremacy, the extermination of every type of other and the imposition of the language of a few and their way of life. This process appears as a cycle in the history of humanity always in the disguise of different ideologies, for example, Romanization, the crusades, the Spanish, British or French empires, the US quest to the west, or the spread of fascism

and communism in Europe. Apart from the positive charge given in the interpretation by traditional historians of the advance of *our* civilization through these and others highlighted historical milestones, there is also a common collateral effect: the death of millions and the systematic absence of the survivors' voices. This serves to remind us how political power and its discourse have been determinant for identity and alterity as the world sees them nowadays.

We are not to talk about colonialism in depth in this paper, but although it is not central in the novels (as all major characters, except for Nicola in *London Fields*, are white males around their thirties), these characters live in a postcolonial world. In *City of Glass*, we have Stillman's obsession with the installment of a modern tower of Babel; for him, a universal language must be found and spread in order for humans to reconnect with God and with their true destiny and nature. He echoes the racial purification sought by intellectuals and state chiefs alike during the 19th and 20th centuries and the persistence of these old concerns in the cultural mosaic of today's cities through ‘schizophrenic’ characters like him. He also echoes attempts at globalization through territorial expansion, particularly British Imperialism. We shall not forget that English is the official language in dozens of countries in all five continents, an overwhelming number of them in Africa, and that is due to Britain's imperialist achievements. Let us take Keith's very first description in *London Fields* to observe the kind of heritage young British men have received from this historic practice:

> Keith wasn't *that* bad. He had saving graces. He didn't hate people for ready-made reasons. He was at least *multiracial* in outlook— thoughtlessly, helplessly so. Intimate encounters with strange-hued women had sweetened him somewhat. His saving graces all had names. What with Fetnabs and Fatimas he had known, the Knetchis and Iqbalas, the Michikos and Boguslawas, the Ramsarwatees and Rajashwaris— Keith was, in this sense, a man of the world. These were the chinks in his coal-black armour: God bless them all. (4)

Keith, a barely educated drunk, has of course been a racist and will inevitably be so sometimes in the novel but, in his fantasy, every sexual conquest listed appears under the veil of historic conquests: he sees himself as an armed knight, a crusader. But Imperialism is closer and more present than the Crusades in Keith's life as, we only have to take a look at the names on the list,

these are all immigrants from former English colonies, now residing in London. That is a characteristic post-colonial tendency, border-crossing (Grossberg: 99), as we will see later in the chapter. Large sections of population from former colonies emigrate and try to integrate in the new society, despite the cultural shock. If the way Keith treats these women in any way resembles the way society alienates these immigrants in real life— and it does— we must say that they continue to clearly be subaltern for their hosts. In another instance, Nicola refers to a former Shah, emphasizing how some men relate imperialism and sex in their fantasies: “The whole world was his brothel. Now that's imperialism” (199). Nevertheless, every topic related to femininity will most of the time be kept out of the discussion until chapter 4, thence we must go back to imperialism and globalization and their historical development.

“Making society into a project, not the *polis*, or a kingdom or the state, but society— is where Euro-Americanism began” (Strathern: 41), and this project is an ongoing one; it is not over yet. Although colonialism *per se* is no longer practiced by the western superpowers, a new form of cultural globalization arises every now and then and it is more through “hybridization, rather than repression” that the imposition of colonial power persists (Wurgaft: 81). Critics say that although many grand deaths have been announced, we have not yet witnessed the death of postcolonialism (Mishra and Hodge: 375). We still live in a postcolonial western world, all around us we find struggles over multiculturalism and ‘political correctness’ (particularly in the States), the rise of ethnic nationalism, the resurgence of fundamentalism happening around the globe, the tensions between both consolidating and disintegrating a new European identity, and so on (Dean: 910). We will see how deeply this impacts on the process of self-identification for people also around the world because, minority or not, man or woman, more or less educated, for people from any cultural background, it is growing harder to apprehend the purpose of the individual in this world, and this affects the Nicolas, Keiths, Guys, Blues, Blacks and Fanshaws living in it. This is the broader

context in which we see how notions of identity and otherness are also shaped and formed from without, not only from within the individual.

Later we will continue to consider the effect of new tendencies both in globalization and criticism against it, but we must not lose track of the individual, the subject, and its most intimate relationship with the other(s). Derrida, Levinas and Lacan are some of the most prominent authors interested in the way our relationship with our immediate or remote others shape our conscience of our own self, as we have said before. In psychology, Lacan, revisiting Freud's theories in an unorthodox way, sees the other as a double of oneself and a means for interpretation of the subject, so he develops the simile of the mirror as the way of watching the real, being the other (and the memories and dreams of the others) a mere mirror of oneself[9]. This idea persists in Auster's trilogy, as practically every character has an anti-self with an obscure relation to themselves. One of the most prominent examples of this reinterpretation of lacanian motifs is the story in *Ghosts*, where a man named Blue has been hired to watch a man named Black for an indefinite period of time. As all he has to observe is this man writing through his window across the street, soon Blue turns to his own thoughts and finds time to digress and think about how his subjectivity makes sense in the world: “For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself” (142).

Since the 1980's, Derrida and Levinas are the number one quoted and reinterpreted authors when it comes to discourses of othering, alterity and *difference*[10]. We will be coming back to them every once in a while, particularly in the chapter about femininity. They both state that only by experiencing the other, the self appears as a meaningful being. However, on the other hand, they both recognize that the other is never fully reachable and remains unknown to the subject, therefore

9 We will only refer briefly to psychology , as chapter 2 and 4, about characterization and femanle characterization respectively, will rely more on particularly Freudian and Lacanian sources in relation to these topics than chapter 1.

10 In discourses of alterity, this term incorporates both ‘difference’ and the French term ‘*différance*’, which Derrida specifically uses to refer to the relationship with the other, as we will explain it in the following paragraph.

the subject remains incomplete too. Similarly, Levinas takes the other as a constituent part of identity, at least, he recognizes the other as the only source for self-recognition: “the other seems to be established as a complementary function of the subject, even if an overrated and idealized one” (Gondek: 33). There are a lot of shades in the implications of his ideas. Once texts like *Time and the Other* are analyzed in depth many questions arise, as we will discuss later in chapter 4. However, generally, he has a revolutionary perspective that acknowledges that the other is more important in self-definition than our own conception of our selves. An individual's identity will not make sense until the self is confronted with the other; the *sight* of the other, *his* gaze, give meaning to our actions. In *Ghosts*, the relationship between the characters Black and Blue is utterly based on this prerogative: “He needs my eyes looking at him. He needs me to prove he's alive” (178). For Levinas, the moment of connection happens by looking at the face of the other and we can see this happening in *London Fields*: Amis, as Auster did in the previous quote, focuses on the eyes of the other as the bridge for exploring *him*, a source of empathy, but even more as an ultimate mirror for the self; Guy Clinch, for whom Keith Talent is a (poor) other, manifests his empathy when he admits “Keith always made Guy think of eyes” (217). There is a similar use of the eyes throughout the Trilogy, for example, the moment the private eye sees himself in the eyes of Gold, the investigator that gave his life up out of his obsession for a case: “The look in his eyes is so haunted and imploring that Blue can scarcely turn his own eyes away” (141). Derrida will develop a similar approach to Levinas's, and he ultimately gets to identical problems: the other, although the source of meaning and a constituent part of the self, is definitely unreachable, inapprehensible. He emphasizes difference as the only predictable constant in the encounter with *any* other. In Haidu's words:

> The ‘Entirely Other’ designates a substance (in the Aristotelian sense) simultaneously irreducible to the substance of the enunciator and unknowable precisely because of the radical difference between the two substances. Hence the necessity for a negative theology basing itself on the inability of man to say that which he is not. [It] is not

absent from Derrida's thought, nor that of Levinas. (683)

This is the horrifying peak of the conflict of interpretation of the other: even assuming that we need to discover and understand the other in order to interpret ourselves there is a point at which it remains impossible, there is an unbreakable wall. Even Derrida recognizes the impasse this produces in the relationship with the other, understandable only through "*negotiation*" of meaning (Haidu: 683). The assumption is that "the category of the other appears derived from a notion of the self and of identity […]. Discovery, however, does not necessarily imply an identification of the other" (Derrida: 23).

There are many philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists that follow this wave of resignation to *différance,* and the "incommesurable translation" when facing total alterity (Povinelli: 321). They all assume there comes a stage in the search for understanding of the other, with whom one does not share the same cultural values or the same language, in which: "an undistorted translation cannot be produced between two or more denotational texts", or two or more readings can be considered as equally true, therefore "two phenomena [...] cannot be compared by a third without producing serious distortion" (Povinelli: 320). So alterity is doomed to be misunderstood when it comes to the interpretation of the other and although no author seems to really give any alternatives, that does not mean there is no opposition to this assumption. As it is common in postmodernism, both partly adjusting these notions and subverting them, a lot of trends have developed against this categorical negativity applied to interpersonal or intercultural relationships.

Since the end of the 19th century, several forces have been in motion arguing against universalism and essentialism. As Foucault observed, his contemporaries fought in "opposition to the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live" (780). For him, feminism and other movements are actively against the historical mechanisms of power, as we said previously. Even so, he recognizes that only those in the subaltern's position should be enabled to

represent their own experiences and justify them, because sometimes the subaltern is not in the position of agency over the content of the discourse, which makes any sense of belonging rare. Minority discourses, mostly of the ethnic and sexual kind, have flourished in every corner of the planet, in search of visibility and eager to vocalize their own story. It is necessary to notice that, nevertheless, "often this oppositional literature develops dominant discourses of its own" (Pristed: 36), and they can be stigmatizing and stereotyping for their 'own people'. This may happen, for example through essentialist and revisionist attempts that seek for the same status as History:

> The proliferation and multiplication of histories since the 1960s, and the theoretical reflection of their status and their relationship to mainstream history as well as to the Enlightenment and to poststructuralist critiques on the Enlightenment since the 1980's, has come to form part and parcel of postmodernist culture just as much as Lyotard's analysis of the demise of grand narrative. (Heise: 17)

The subject of a grand discourse, a collective subject, is annulled by the distrust of the discourse itself, which happened with Nazi propaganda, the Communist discourse in a more recent past and is currently happening to Western Democracy itself (Marín-Casanova: 40). Nevertheless the reconstruction of History yet again in the twentieth century seems not to be pushing individuals any closer to success in their search for identity: for example Parry or O'Hanlon, already in the eighties, criticized revisionist minority discourses for "ignoring the fragmentary and conflictual nature of discourses" and also for fictionalizing the subaltern's position (Grossberg: 99). As Kyung-Won Lee argues, in searching for the same status as History, they also fail in just the same way in their attempt at representing a "true past" (109) which is, as it has been argued elsewhere, truly irrecoverable.

Although it is paradoxical that minority discourses may turn essentialist, it is our opinion that there is an impending need for them as a counterpoint to traditional hegemonic ideas, and their historically direct and indirect oppression upon individuals. As we hinted before, there are new and different ways in which globalization has been promoted, even more than it was during colonial times, through much more subtle practices resulting in western expansion and the imposition of

their (our) culture. Because of this, postcolonial and feminist discourses focus often on the negative implications of the lacanian mirror: among them are Said, Bhabha or Spivak and Kristeva, and most of the post 60's criticism on discourses of globalization (always increasing and very much influenced by them) (Krishnaswamy: 113). For instance, in Said, ‘Orientalism’ brings about the process in which western individuals find a negative mirror in the ‘Other’. These authors claim the common perspective on the formation of identity implies an ‘other’ who resembles the self and is like a mirror in the self-reflexive conscious realm. For them, it implies a non-reflexive unconscious ‘Other’ as well, which is culturally different and consequently obscure to the self: thus, identity is not only built of self-consciousness but also from antithesis. Therefore, as we have been arguing, difference can be a direct and necessary part of identity and vice versa (Gingrich: 9-11). Some authors see globalization and universalism as a good concept, something that ideally integrates homogeneity and heterogeneity into one; some are very influential such as Habermas or Chomsky, who believe in universality beyond the different cultures— Said nevertheless questions these “reconstitution[s] of ideology”, because they are based on western triumphalism, the orient's backwardness and western canonical authors and ideas (367). Lyotard himself, who writes against the grand discourses, is also considered universalist by some critics. He has been attacked for example by Spivak, one of the well-known known heads of feminism, for his idea of the ‘global village’ which implies for her the “fictionalization of the world, or globalization” (Krishnaswamy: 109).

Hence, in postmodernism, the tendency is for these discourses to contradict, to overanalyze, to simplify and, at the same time, to coexist. Derrida, Levinas or Lacan were soon criticized by Evans-Protchard, Dumond or the above mentioned post-colonial and feminist authors for placing the other in “a zone of *irreducible* alterity” (Dean: 916), which makes it impossible to ultimately connect with the other and even enter into a negotiation: “[any] thinker [who] takes his or her

categories to be more stable than the imposition of temporary political tactics [is] criticized for faulty reasoning but also for the ethical lapse of becoming complicit in the excursion of other" (Spinosa and Dreyfus: 735). But the multiculturalist or plural-realist approaches will be criticized too, as mentioned before, for partly denying difference as an insurmountable characteristic when it comes to interpretation or interaction with the other's culture. It is true, as Bourdieu and again Said have affirmed, that universally the cultural canon has been "affirmed through negation" (Docherty: 77) of the subaltern's texts and that permanent opposition has reinforced the simplistic and essentialist relationship between the so-called *more advanced* cultures and the *less civilized* ones. There are now few options left for this second set of countries, which are either violently rebelling against this global imposition or smoothly giving in, while aspiring for some 'progress' and prosperity for themselves. For them, western cultural values are no longer just an outside imposition but also a goal in order to be advanced and participate in the global game played by western industry, politics, bureaucracy and ultimately consumerism itself which, to keep in motion and permanent expansion, is always in need of conformism and the sensation of freedom.

The "not-yet-modern" cultures have had the compulsion to emulate 'modernization', in search of this sensation of freedom, but this process has "resulted, not in cultural creativity and emancipation, but in conformism and dependency" (Gondek: 62), which is the proper soil for capitalism to develop and remain as the only possible option, as we will see later in this chapter. In Donald's words: "the cost of universal citizenship is always and inevitably cultural assimilation. A unitary state cannot tolerate alternative centres of value, legitimation and loyalty" (173). For many anti-globalization authors such as Spivak the key is that, nowadays, culture and economy are interchangeable and assimilated in globalization (Krishnaswamy: 115); you are free to select products that distinguish you from others (Debord: 11). So, in a new form of imperialism, cultural homogenization has hardened mostly through a common value: "the spread of consumerism"

(Strathern: 622)[11]. Appadurai also notices electronic media may also allow the creation of transnational identities, because individuals are exposed to many cultures in the planet without physically moving, so far as to identify with values or ideas originated far from them. However, as Grossberg argues, a process of "indigenization" or reinterpretation of the cultural customs adopted always happens as well (Grossberg: 116); thence negotiation and difference are always on display even in the intended global village: "*our world is a world of others*" (Terdiman: 7).

In order to install the idea that western culture is the most advanced culture, there is not only the idea we have inherited from the Enlightenment that we have gotten further in evolution than the rest, but as a collateral effect, there are also discourses of "deformation", as Said calls them; these have been developed about others such as 'Islam', 'Communism' or 'Japan', that together with the whole idea of the 'West', have been very effective as "gigantic caricatural essentializations" (371). In effect, it is implied that they successfully accomplish their purpose of creating an enemy in the collective mind. These simplified and utterly negative representations are disseminated mostly through school syllabuses and by the media, by manipulating what the masses perceive as real. Amis, for example, is well aware of this: "The title headline varied. YANKS: &@Φ *! or RED NYET or GRRSKI! Or, once, in unusually small type TOWELHEAD DEADLOCK" (*LF*: 359). This way, western powers have carried out and justified innumerable wars and such immoral attacks as those of Nagasaki or Vietnam, by forcing an invented flat cultural enemy into the subjects' private and collective feelings. This also kept the flame alive during the Cold War and is still in progress today, for instance in the vast cuts on personal freedoms undertaken by the United States Government implementing heavy surveillance on individuals and countries alike inside and outside its borders, in the name of anti-terrorism, since 9/11. There is a particular example in *London Fields*

11 For a particular case read Robins, who deeply analyzes the 'europeization' of Turkey during Attaturk's mandate, a more or less successful assimilation process that certainly brought them closer to Europe but at the same time was traumatic for the original cultural and religious diversity and the many minorities in Turkish society (for example, the kurds, among others) and has been a source of social tumult ever since.

of exactly this kind of racist deformations in the media that involves Japan and the lost memory of WWII. In the passage we are going to read, not only does it become patent that the masses are highly influenced by the media's simplification of these collective enemies, but it is stressed also that people will accept these images without hesitation, having forgotten (also collectively) the facts of the very near past, to replace them by empty and flat stereotypes:

> 'Is he Japanese?'
> 'I got respect for every man I play'
> 'A very determined people'
> 'Fucking loansharks' said Keith, assaying, for once, a racial slur.
> He could think of nothing worse to say about them, having, for example, barely heard of World War II. Keith's father, who had certainly heard of World War II, and had successfully deserted from it, might have asked if everyone knew the terrible things they did to some of our boys back then; But Keith was reduced to a few half-remembered grumbles from the fillers in his tabloid. (378)

No doubt nationalism itself, also called patriotism, participates in these deformations in order to strengthen *our* identity vs. *their* alterity. As Crews notices in his article "Martin Amis and the Postmodern Grotesque", Amis attacks the discourses of TV and tabloids in other works, such as *Yellow Dog*: "The way it works is that there is a positive presentation of 'one of us' combined with a negative presentation of the other[...]. The tabloids, then, present a world divided into 'us' and 'them' " (654). This idea takes us to the other major consequence of globalization nowadays because, although the nation had never been a homogeneous place in time and space, its cultural borders are becoming more and more difficult to delimit already in the second half of the 20th century; cross-cultural migration is a widespread practice, as we have previously noted, and now national identity is a compound of not one but several very different cultural identities coexisting in the same space.

Anthropologists such as James Clifford or Smadar Lavie and critics like Paul Giroy or Appadurai are using the term 'diaspora' to refer to those communities that originate inside very different and definitely bigger communities because, either as a result of special treaties with former

imperialist countries or simply of wanting to follow the first-world capitalist dream of a better life, and lately because of greater issues; whole segments of non-western communities are crossing borders. These groups normally live, develop and identify within the tensions originated between their original culture and their hosting one; their identity forms around the whole idea of displacement. The presence of this other is not always welcome in the nation, as we all know. If minorities are characterized by perceiving the other as the one who took what was theirs (Dean: 917), much more for the indigenous population, the presence of the other is a constant danger for the destabilization of homogeneity in the ideal nation. We have very recent and controversial examples of events in politics that reflect these increasing fears today, such as the policies (and democratic election!) of President Donald Trump or the overwhelming triumph of Brexit in the UK, not to mention the rejection of thousands of refugees standing on the border of our Union. Political and economic classes, mainly through the media, are known to trigger mechanisms of othering in order to reinforce the general public's ideas about immigrants, as Puškin or Starc denounce[12]. As there is to the day no scientific proof of white racial superiority, and also because of the tensions with ethnic minorities it would detonate, racism is not to be displayed openly in the media, as it is considered politically incorrect; hence it evolves: “modern racism is not primarily racial, but cultural” (Starc: 149), and it is disguised as national identity. The consequences of this narrow-minded reduction of the others to minority groups (be they women, ethnic groups, religious communities, and other collectives) are normally riots and violence against plain and bald inequality.

“Xenophobia and racism, ethnic wars, prejudice and stigmas, segregation and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, age and social class are widespread phenomena involving high levels of violence” (Jelin: 101). This is a fact at a planetary level, and it is more shocking that all

12 In their essays included in *Multicultural Dilemmas: Identity, Difference, Otherness* (see bibliography) both Maruša Puškin and Gregor Starc condemn the treatment that immigrants receive in the media in easrtern Europe.

this violence coexists with the officially accepted moral discourse of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued in 1948. The problem again is cultural relativism because, as Jelin notices, in many cases the right of a people to live in its own way can mean cruelty and the denial of basic human rights to certain social categories within that same culture. So, either Human Rights can be considered ethnocentric or some (defining) aspects of other cultures should be prosecuted; actually some are, such as fundamentalism and tyranny in several so-called Third World countries. This way military powerful countries such as the US and its allies use cultural markers to justify wars for democracy that certainly go far beyond the aim of achieving global peace by means of war, a terrible paradox of logical discourse; in every case, the importance of economic expansion is implied: a point of no reconciliation is found— yet again— between cultural relativism and Universal Human Rights (Jelin: 109-112). From all this, it becomes clear that cultural tensions are the building blocks of the current political global situation. These underlying tensions between cultures that we have been describing are not only latent but evident, and any attempt to predict the future implications of them can bring to some authors' minds only images of an apocalyptic future. For Amis the path is set down for nuclear destruction: the technology is widely and globally spread and the tensions are permanently increasing. In this light, consider that *London Fields* was published in 1989 and portrays the city of London, and the world's situation about ten years later. As an apocalyptic author, Amis is particularly worried in this novel about nuclear warfare and *biblical* weather: “Of course, in these days of gigawatt thunderstorms, multimegaton hurricanes and billion-acre bush fires, it was easy to forget that there were man-made devices— pushbutton, fingertip— which would cause equivalent havoc” (276). The political situation he portrays is one of intense *heat*, like the weather; the sun, which in the novel is lower than it should be, is literally burning life on earth: “the sun was right there at the end of the street like a nuclear detonation. [...] The sun shouldn't be coming in low at us like this” (365). That the end is coming for political and natural

reasons is a constant in Amis's fiction, it is not accidental that in the short story "Bujak and the Strong Force", included in *God's Dice* (1987), the main character is described as follows:

> Einsteinian to the end, Bujak was an Oscillationist, claiming that the Big Bang will forever alternate with the Big Crunch, that the universe would expand only until unanimous gravity called it back to start again. At that moment, with the cosmos on its hinges, light would begin to travel backward, received by the stars and pouring from human eyes. If, and I can't believe it, time would also be reversed, as Bujak maintained; will we move backward too? Will we have any say in things? (*God's Dice*: 23)

Bujak describes his belief that the end of the world will come at a point in time where time itself, and light as an observable traveller, will need to start running backwards; therefore Amis finds that the situation in London Fields is irreversible as, even if we survive our own crimes to the environment, universal expansion will be contraction at a point in time, which symbolizes the end of logical experience for human beings, and we will succumb to entropy. This post-experience of the world backwards will be magically explored in his following novel *Times Arrow* (1991).

Given all the circumstances we have described, it is hard for the characters to access the information about the world, partly because of the deliberate exclusion in the media, partly because of their lack of interest—"The sky pulsed blue, blue, blue. Whereas the cyclones and ball lightning in Yugoslavia and Northern Italy had even made it on to the pages of Keith's tabloid" (103), and we know this is the only source of information that Keith does pay attention willingly. Our characters would rather deny or ignore "the fact that on account of the political situation they and their loved ones might all disappear at any moment" (238). As readers, we get to know that there is a so-called proxy war involving Japan and Germany "(and China?)" (142), that the main focuses of tension are The Gulf, "Israel of course, Germany of course" (115), Hungary, and many others, especially Cambodia, which appears as a recurrent topic because of the magnitude of the destruction. There are even *dead*-lines for the release of nuclear weapons already, and so the end of the world is imminent:

> That at the moment of full eclipse on November 5, as the Chancellor made his speech in Bonn, two very big and very dirty nuclear weapons would be detonated, one over the

> Palace of Culture in Warsaw, one over Marble Arch. That until the cease of the flow of fissionable materials from Baghdad, the Israelis would be targeting Kiev. (394)

Here, Amis presents an imagined future end of the millennium (the end of the past millennium, for we have long passed 1999), but it is certainly based on the real world; in fact, it could easily correspond to a possible outcome if one considers the geopolitical situation in the eighties, still red-hot in the present. As Mumford argues, it is a fact that national security or survival in times of nuclear threat, imply that leaders are aware that fifty to seventy-five millions would die the first day of a nuclear war (556) and yet, many countries in the world are equipped with innumerable nuclear heads (innumerable because official reports are known to obscure the truth about exactly how many there are). Observing the tendencies followed in the last century, or millennium, all odds point to an end. So certainly not then, and not even now do we have any plan B for humanity, for the world, for the System. The world in Amis's novel is at the edge of destruction because of political, cultural and moral decay, and also because of the intrusion of humans in nature and the extreme manipulation of the mechanics of nature that we have undertaken as a species. So is ours.

This is the main problem the reader will find when confronting postmodern theory and art in general: the alarm is always on, and it is relatively easy to identify the problems of our civilization, describe and analyze them; we have denounced in many ways the inequalities of our System and made them visible, but the solutions are delayed, both theoretically and literally; they are yet to come if they are to come at all. After all, nearly nothing has changed: after more than a century of ‘petit histoires’, capitalist production still intervenes in the natural processes, altering and worsening climatic issues, while the ones in control of the capital are still the same people as they used to be: “After a thousand years of war and revolution, of thought and effort, and history, and the permanent millennium, and the promised end of mine and thine, Guy still had all the money, and all the strength” (*LF*: 464). Guy, as we commented before about Stillman, was born in a traditionally high-class white British family, with money and possessions; he is a stock trader and he even has an

aristocratic title. Guy is historically powerful and rich. All kinds of specialists have definitely made the threads of the puppets more visible and yet, there are no clear alternatives for the System. As a consequence, the subject in our novels foresees an extreme end, death, isolation, or dissolution, for the individual and the planet.

Given this outlook, authors like Auster and Amis are interested in the extreme moves that characters can make in such a world. They see that, individually, people are part of the societal big picture and that, although technologically we have advanced faster than the speed of love[13], our humanity has remained the same; we have not changed *physiologically*, nor in our most basic emotional needs, therefore the subject still needs a sense of identity in order to *exist.* As Wurgaft notices “identity appears as impossible to justify conceptually or experimentally” while at the same time “it also seems indispensable as a measure of agency or internal cohesion” (82). As we have been arguing, the subject will always find alterity where there were once possibilities for selfhood and collective recognition, which are now exhausted. It is his or her due to find *new* strategies to *be* in the world or else surrender to the impossibility of overcoming alterity, which would deeply affect the subject's agency and internal cohesion, as Wurgaft suggests. Povinelli poses the following question: is it possible to infer anything in such alterity (321)? There is not a unique answer to the questions of postmodernism, but for some authors like Auster and Amis the answer to this one is negative. No truth can be inferred in such alterity.

Theories of identification, alterity and othering, as we have seen up until now, leave us with more problems than solutions, and certainly more questions than answers. But there are descriptive philosophical theories that try to explain how this inevitability makes itself apparent in the System and the mechanisms that the System has in motion in order to not only introduce a global economic system of oppression but also to redefine the notion of what ‘reality’ is. Among the critics that have denounced that the System is completely alien to the subject of experience, two authors stand out in

13 "At the Speed of Love" is the title of Chapter 21 in *London Fields* (413).

the defense of an extreme conception: we are so detached from the experience that we were supposed to naturally have of the world, that we cannot perceive the 'real' anymore or we are simply unable to differentiate what is real from what is not. The authors in question are Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard, who refer to a society made up of 'spectacles' and 'simulacra', respectively. In *The Society of the Spectacle* (published in 1967) Debord attacks capitalism as a value system with a clearly marxist tone. For him "the entire life of those societies in which modern production conditions prevail manifests itself as a collection of *spectacles*. Everything that is directly experienced has been turned into a representation" (my translation: 37). Images and objects have not only taken nature's place, but they also condition the attitude that human beings have toward nature and among themselves. This system of images, of forgeries, of illusions, needs to be maintained in order to also maintain consumerism at a global level. Reality then only arises from a spectacle and, as a consequence, only the spectacle is real because it is the only experience we are able to grasp, the only experience available to our senses. The spectacle leads subjects to nowhere but itself, and also in every case justifies itself (39-42) and Debord insists that there is no way out, mostly because we cannot distinguish true from false anymore. He argues that there is nothing beyond the spectacle, except for one thing: if critique upon the System may exist, it is placed outside the spectacle, therefore it is *invisible* (175).

Debord, by means of what he denominates spectacles, is describing our society today in postmodernist terms; true experience has become inaccessible, and although his position seems too extreme, it has been considered clairvoyant by the many authors he has influenced. For example, the power of spectacles fascinates Baudrillard, who describes the System as a hyperreality whose fabric is made up of 'simulacra' or simulations: "Simulation is no longer that of territory, a referential being or a substance. It is generated by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" ("Simulacra...": 166). Therefore, Baudrillard makes clear that a simulation is not even a

symbol of the real; it is generated within the System and it is the System. To clarify this, he uses a beautiful simile: “The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory” (166). The simulation displays itself and substitutes reality through what he calls ‘seduction’, which turns the forgery into “trompe-l'oeil or the enchanted simulation” ("On Seduction":154). The simulation's only limitation is that it is unable to be equivalent to anything in itself (*C*: 78). Its images and objects (its *products*) are a trap for subjects, who inevitably give in and start identifying with these products; therefore objects must proliferate indefinitely so that the System can be regenerated forever (25). These notions are reflected in our novels, where some characters become aware that the experience of reality itself seems to be deceiving; its inevitability is called ‘fate’ by Blue (183) and Quinn (108). These characters even call it a ‘spell’ respectively on pages 143 and 91, which reminds us of Debord's words “Identity is not in an offensive relationship with itself, but it is an enchantment to itself” (my translation: 55). The ghost of identity is obsessively referred to in The Trilogy; it goes in circles around the same perception that Blue has in *Ghosts*: “We are not where we are, he finds, but in a false position” (165). In this second part of the Trilogy, Auster specifically reflects upon the representation of one's as well as the other's identity, which postmodernist critics also relate to phantoms, for example in Terdiman: “revealed as fantasmatic, [it] tantalizingly recedes as we get closer to it. Sometimes we fail to represent it at all” (6); or Hall, who thinks belongingness of any kind is “partly constructed on fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field” ("Who needs...?": 4). Auster will let us see in how many ways characters' identities evade them, as we will discuss in chapters 2 and 3.

Another invaluable characteristic of the simulation is that it is, as Debord previously underlined, capable of absorbing everything in reality; there is nothing on the margins of the simulation: “there is no such thing as ‘margin’ ” (Baudrillard *C,* my translation: 68). Moreover, in the society of spectacle that Debord depicts, money is the greatest of all simulations and the most

self-justifying element within the System. Notice that money cannot be turned into any mercantile value, but “it has to be put into play within the same game” (my translation: 25). It is not surprising then that money appears in the Trilogy as something the main characters are starting to disconnect from, as apparently these characters have been granted the gift of detaching themselves from the System — “Quinn never stopped giving thanks for his luck” (113)— and, as we will see in chapters 3 and 5, that implies abandoning money and other commodities in the city that come with it. On the other hand, the characters in *London Fields* are part of the System right to the end; they *are* the System, and Amis is interested, throughout the novel, in denouncing money as an actual weapon: “Was there any clean money on earth? Had there ever been any? No. Categorically. Even the money paid to the most passionate nurses, the dreamiest artists, freshly printed, very dry, and shallowly embossed to the fingertips, had its origin in some bastardy on the sweatshop floor” (255). For him, and we will see more examples towards the end of this paper, money will always represent the evil acts undertaken *for money*, a symbol of Imperialism and oppression: “*Pecunia non olet* was deadly wrong. *Pecunia olet*” (251).

For Baudrillard, humans have an immemorial feeling of being in debt with God, but ‘capital’ has taken God's place and we are always in debt to capital now (*C*: 78). As for the political situation, he observes that it is also deeply mediated by capital: “Anatomy is not destiny, nor is politics: seduction is destiny” (Baudrillard "On Seduction": 164). Capital no longer corresponds to the order of political economy; it *uses* political economy as a simulation model ("Symbolic...": 121) until “only the fiction of a political universe is saved” ("Simulacra..."181); power then can be considered as a commodity, because people need the illusion of political power. As a corollary of these views, *London Fields* refers to the consequences of the lack of real politics in the international realm; as we have seen before, the political tensions are about to culminate with military nuclear attacks that could destroy the world. Nevertheless, the media omit this information on purpose and

the characters could not access the real state of affairs even if they wanted to: "'They've been cheating,' said Kath. 'Both sides. They've been cheating for fifteen years.' 'Who says?'said Keith. There was nothing about it in Keith's tabloid. 'TV?' " (105). Instead, internationally, the media are overwhelmingly filled with 'stories of human interest' and everyday reports of the state of *Faith*'s health. Faith is the US President's wife. The media talks about her incessantly "as if the First Lady was the only lady. Or the Last Lady" (207). The strategy is for people to utterly focus their attention and empathy on that— "It's serious. But we feel we're in good hands. Much depends on Faith's health" (207)— and avoid any worries about the real political situation, which may result in riots against the Government. Nevertheless, as the only reliable source of information, there is Guy's boss in stock marketing (and his brother) Richard, who tells Guy "the President's wife [is] already dead" (394). Now that is simulation.

For Baudrillard, in order to maintain the illusion, the simulation "demands *unqualified people* more than the French Revolution demanded qualified men" (*C*, my translation: 116); and the mass media have helped create the illusion of information while actually educating people in shallowness, being a source of untruthful 'seduction'. In this regard, for Amis, TV is a direct target: "The expansion of mind, the communications revolution: well, there had been a contraction, a counter-revolution. And nobody wanted to know..." (*LF*: 141). He recognizes that even in the 'information era', although we have experienced an expansion of communications, "[t]he mind doesn't expand. It stays the same. Other things fill it" (368); and these other things are simulations, in Baudrillard's terms. While Auster's characters will be practically cut off from the information media, Amis's are swimming in them, particularly Keith, for whom reality *is* TV and tabloid shaped:

> He watched a very great deal of TV, always had done, years and years of it, aeons of TV. Boy, did Keith burn that tube. And that tube burnt him, nuked him, its cathodes crackling like cancer. 'TV' he thought, or 'Modern Reality' or 'The World'. It was the world of TV that told him what the world was. [...] TV came at Keith like it came at everybody else; and he had nothing whatever to keep it out. He couldn't grade or filter it. So he thought TV was real…. (55)

Keith, like the majority of people (because it is a *mass* medium), believes TV is real; he cannot apply any filter to it. He cannot identify what is unreal because, as Baudrillard believes, "it is not possible to apprehend the real and its sign: we will never be able to dominate both things at the same time" (*C*, my translation: 81). Hence, as he is *only* exposed to the portrait that the media show of the 'real', this directly affects also the way in which Keith sees reality outside of the screen: "When Keith goes to a football match, that misery of stringer's clichés *is what he actually sees*" (98); it is not him imposing the discourse on what he sees but the other way round.

In a world where experience is monopolized by simulations, alterity is not an option. For Baudrillard, it is "the perfect crime against alterity and the other. It is the kingdom of the identical" (*C*, my translation: 68). Nevertheless, alterity is impossible to eliminate conceptually, as we have seen previously in this chapter, but it has certainly been eliminated from the official discourse, which grows more and more marked by high levels of 'political correctness'. We must remember that everything that is invisible is out of the simulation, therefore outside the System. Derrida and Levinas already talked about the broken bridge between the self and the other but they also acknowledged that without this other, self-definition was impossible. Auster and Amis do agree with them in these novels, but they also incorporate the notions that Debord and Baudrillard brought up: these characters have absolutely nothing to hold on to as real any more, neither themselves, nor the other (who they desperately struggle to understand and connect with), nor the world around them:

> We all want to be told stories, and we listen to them in the same way we did when we were young. We imagine the real story inside the words, and to do this we substitute ourselves for the person in the story, pretending that we can understand him because we understand ourselves. This is a deception. We exist for ourselves, perhaps, and at times we even have a glimmer of who we are, but in the end we can never be sure, and as our lives go on, we become more and more opaque to ourselves, more and more aware of our own incoherence. No one can cross the boundary into another— for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself. (*NYT*: 243)

For Amis, all we can aspire to get in life is "always the simulacrum, never the real thing" (*LF*: 131),

while for Auster's characters, life is a pilgrimage that leads them nowhere, as if they were "somehow living a posthumous life" (5). These authors are trying to represent the unavoidable problems that human beings who have to endure life conditions in the present face by means of these characters.

To bring this section to a close let us consider the following: for Sven Birkets, three historical conditions have been influential for subjectivity in the twentieth century: the existence of the *actual and psychological* fact of the nuclear age and the possibility of human annihilation that has dominated power relations and political agendas since WWII; the cumulative effects of the western world's shift from *industrial mechanization* to *information processing*; and the saturation of western societies by electronic media, *particularly television* (Diedrick: 18), and they have all been analyzed in this first chapter. In their search for their identity and their mission in life, our characters will be tempted with the possibility of escaping the System, but that will only turn out to be part of the 'seduction', a 'simulation' of freedom with fatal consequences, as we will see. As the narrator of *The Locked Room*, whose name we never know, concludes in the quote above, identity is alterity and we "can never be sure" (243); or as Samson Young, the narrator of *London Fields* states: "Nothing divides us— just a screen of rain"; an obscure, insurmountable screen of radioactive rain that stands between us and the other. The world, the other and the self *are* alterity in Auster and Amis: "we hug ourselves to hold what warmth remains and because no one we love will" (*LF*: 368).

Throughout this chapter we have been talking about identity and alterity, and next we will see the different obstacles our characters encounter as they embark on their quests for self-definition, for a true self and how they will deal with the resulting contact with alterity. We have talked about an increasing distrust in the great discourses such as history, science, religion, discourses about nation, culture or race that impress identity upon subjects. Even language as a

medium has been proved deceitful. We have commented on the dangers of simplification and deformation in the media, and of logical discourses that imply violence on others; on the dangers of money, as well. We have depicted a life that does not resemble reality, but has substituted reality for our characters; that is, the project of a unified, heterogeneous global city. Because the world is fragmented, their (our) experience of it is fragmented. Auster and Amis will use the postmodern conception of identity as fragmentation and total alterity as a starting point for characterization in the Trilogy and *London Fields* and also the relationship of mankind with nature and the city, as we will see in the subsequent chapters. These authors will explore inexhaustible possibilities of literary doublings, pseudonyms and absences; their characters will play different roles but also become different people, therefore highlighting the discontinuity of identity as alterity through these literary devices in characterization. In the following chapters we will see how the authors also play with agency and with the ultimate identity of the writer himself, so that the literary game of simulation is taken to its extreme, a common tendency in postmodernist literature. We will comment as well on the literary referents the authors themselves make evident in these texts and their predisposition to complex intertextuality, later focusing on the reinterpretation of motifs from *Walden* and *El Quixote*. Moreover, we will end our discussion referring to the situation of the category of gender in these novels, as part of the study on the representation of identity as alterity.

2. Postmodernist tendencies: Auster and Amis

There is certainly nothing new under the sun, nothing original, but there does seem to be a different perspective of the real itself taking shape, as we have discussed in chapter one. From the 19th century onward, the very notion of what is 'real' is at stake and "the liability and the fugacity of the referent [becomes] a commonplace" (Terdiman: 5). This culminates in the twentieth century's progressively growing distrust of any traditional concept that had been formerly connected with the process of self-identification (and difference), such as, as we have seen, all essence attributed to race, gender, culture, nationality or religion, together with the discourses of science, history, psychology and other disciplines. According to Sarup, the twentieth century brought with it a "tendency to reduce all truth-claims to the level of rhetorics" (150). Furthermore, the present consumerist process of globalization is also criticized for not taking into consideration the differences among the subjects and the cultures in its attempt to eliminate otherness by homogenization (Debord: 68). As a consequence of all this, as Derrida, Levinas or Lacan explain, the self as such will never be fully present or understood, because true connection with the other is necessary for the process of identification but it has proven to be impossible to apprehend; alterity prevails in every attempt. Moreover, the experience of this consumerist society's reality is mediated by total alterity as well; as Debord and Baudrillard posit, the System is no longer connected in any way to the real; on the contrary, as we will show at the end of this chapter, it has substituted it leaving no trace of natural *life* behind, or beyond: "The cohesiveness of reality, which has been the goal of writers for centuries has not materialized – or rather, has evaporated under the heat and pressure of a world dominated by science and technology" (Wood: 151). For Auster and Amis, this is the intellectual scenario for their fiction, and the novels we are discussing are clearly the product of experimenting with new ways of representing this incohesive reality of ours: " 'Where to?What for?'/'See some life'/'Oh. Life! Oh I get it. *Life*' " (*LF*: 86).

So, how are writers supposed to cope with the unreality of reality? Baudrillard considers that "no consistent or cohesive life strategy emerges from the experience which can be gathered in such a world" ("The System...": 25); therefore consistency is not to be found in postmodernist literature because such a fragmented reality cannot be represented: " '*You* tell me. What's it all about, eh? Because I don't fucking get it.'/'Come on in, look at us.'/'Because I don't fucking get it'/'What?'/'Life' " (*LF*: 270). This is, no doubt, a deeply uncomfortable state for a rational mind (Baudrillard, *C*: 44) and it is a manifest conflict particularly for writers because language, the very medium of literature, is at the top of the most distrusted entities from the postmodernist point of view, as it has historically been used to 'fooling' the subject and shaping his or her perception of reality and/or reality itself. *Words as a medium* constitute one of the greatest oxymorons postmodernist authors cannot solve: "By congealing the fluid processes of thought, [words] express something that is different and must be untrue, no matter how acceptable conventionally they may be to others. And yet paradoxically little can have meaning for us except to the degree that we can find words to express it" (Mendilow: 147). Already for modernist authors, the gap between the conventions of fictitious mimesis for the representation of what is real and reality was a problem, because of the certainty that the facts of reality had outgrown imagination (Stevenson: 96). In a few words, reality has gone beyond fiction, and nowadays there is no discrimination between realism and surrealism:

> The facts in contemporary experience are constantly beyond belief; calling those facts *absurd* does not seem to subdue them. The unbelievability of events is no longer reserved for large world affairs. We have moved beyond the enormities of Buchenwald and Auschwitz and Hiroshima to the experience of the fantastic within what should be the firm shape of everyday life. The growth of mass society, the increased discoveries about the world of the unconscious, and the supremacy of scientific relativism make us no longer sure that our own idea of reality will be recognizable to anyone else. (Olderman: 1-2)

After all, writers will have to write, even if meaning has departed from an *insane* planet, "leaving but a feeling of dereliction and absurdity" (Bernard: 131). They have to find an *escape* from this

absurd, and the novel as a form is bound to evolve, as well as its content, in order to represent this vision of a hopeless world that had gone beyond belief already by the second half of the twentieth century[14]. Authors must cope with the empty core of identity and reality in their novels, which Auster and Amis will always take into account.

To illustrate this, we will start with Paul Auster, who often writes about *nothing*, as Little convincingly explains in his essay "Nothing to go on...". But nothingness turns out to be *something*, its own entity, as we will continue to point out. As Lavender argues, *City of Glass*, or the whole Trilogy in fact, is against the romance, realism and autobiography. As we will say elsewhere, nothing happens most of the time and there is no story: “The illusion, then, is one of infinity” (Lavender: 223); that is, by not presenting to us a story with a resolution but instead a series of reflections or illusions from his (dysfunctional) characters, we certainly get a picture of human nature on a larger scale, as we will see. Auster is said to be philosophical in the way of Samuel Beckett's *Watt*[15] and to explore self-reflexivity as in Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*[16] (Lavender: 220), although we will later drain the authors' literary influences from the texts themselves given that, in their metaliterary style, both Amis and Auster quote and refer to other authors and texts almost incessantly. At the same time, “Thematically Auster's trilogy is a meditation on the problematic of self-identity, in which a ‘textual’ sense of the self undermines our commonsense, essentialist notions of selfhood” (Alford: 615), and the impossibility of connecting with their self at all, as we have argued, ultimately lures characters towards total alterity. It is important to pay attention also to the lacanian/derridian/levinasian problem regarding true connection with the other as a means to reach

14 As Olderman hightlights, the facts of WWII deeply influence the post-war authors' belief that our society is actually a post-apocalyptic society already (8-9). According to Calinescu: “World War II with its unprecedented savageness and destruction, with its revelation of the brutality of the core of high technological civilization, could appear as the culmination of a demonic modernity, a modernity that had finally been overcome” (*FF*: 267).

15 In *Watt*, the main character satisfies the extravagant wishes of an unseen master named Watt, which connects with every story in the Trilogy, as there is one or more actors in each who are unseen or have dissapeared: Stillman Jr. and Sr., Black, Fanshawe, etc. and unseen employers too (Virginia, White).

16 A collection of short stories intricately related displaying metalepsis, multiple layers and frames in a way that influences Auster and others such as Beckett himself.

the self, which is latent in both novels, and the extreme turn towards isolation that Auster's characters take in their being unable to reach this connection. To quote Auster himself in an interview: “You don't begin to understand your connection to the other until you are alone. And the more intensely you are alone, the more deeply you plunge into a state of solitude, the more deeply you feel that connection”. On the other hand, though, he considers it impossible to totally isolate oneself as well, because “you are inhabited by others” (Auster in Peacock: 6); therefore the other is both unreachable but *ghostly* present “[t]o the degree that Fanshawe became inevitable, that was the degree to which he was no longer there” (295), an utterly lacanian image that finds itself truncated when an understanding of Fanshawe escapes the narrator at all times, he is an invisible reflection (although the narrator cannot escape or forget about Fanshawe, or the other, as an inevitable key element for self-definition).

From his first autobiographical work, *The Invention of Solitude*, the topics of mortality, the difficulty of knowing another person, the importance of the father, and father and son relationships are a constant in Auster's work (Peacock: 1-2); of course, the “missing person” (42) is also a very important motif for him, which is why he transgresses the genre of detective novels in the Trilogy. Brooks considers the Trilogy anti-detective because it does not satisfy in any way the key characteristic of detective novels to resolve the mystery, as we will see in the next chapter. However, he also clarifies that there is a critical trend that identifies in detective novels a special relationship between plot and story that surely has been of interest to Auster. Todorov, “for example, posits the crime and the work of its detection as the *fabula* and *syuzhet*, thus making the detective novel an allegory for narratives in general[17]” (25). For Brooks, the detective's unraveling of the crime is analogous to the reader's deciphering of the plot, which must happen regardless the genre. Plot, then, in contemporary critical theory, tends to be seen as an enigma to be resolved, as much as

17 This is sometimes referred to as langue and parole: the fabula is the underlying or deep structure, the narrative material, and the syuzhet is the specific plot organization in a particular work

the aristotelian "sequence of actions" (Brooks: 24-25). But Auster makes it clear in the first page that, in this story, there is no causality: "In the beginning, there was simply the event and its consequences. Whether it might have turned out different or whether it was all predetermined with the first word that came from the stranger's mouth, is not the question" (1).

Auster is in fact very repetitive in his work, and he generally does not give preeminence to plot in his novels. We will see the same situation over and over if we open ourselves to Auster's universe outside of the Trilogy as well. In some later novels, for example *The Book of Illusions* (2002), a man who has lost his wife and children in a plane crash (like Quinn) obsesses over the lost silent film actor Hector Mann. In this novel Auster once again brings a character to paper who becomes lost during a consuming search that nobody else cares about; the following is a passage from it that could easily apply to the main characters in all the stories in the Trilogy:

> I had no telephone, no TV, no social life of any kind. Once in April and once again in August I traveled by subway to Manhattan to consult some books at the public library, but other than that I didn't budge from Brooklyn. But I wasn't really in Brooklyn either. I was in the book, and the book was in my head. And as long as I stayed inside my head, I could go on writing the book (47).

Most of his characters are writers or eventually become writers "by changing their attitude to the language" (Peacock: 6). As we will soon see with Amis, these authors pay special attention to language; they display a difficult, intricate and defamiliarizing kind of language, in the case of Auster "to the extent that an unattentive reader might forget which character is actually speaking" (Peacock: 11). As an illustration, we will take the beginning of *Ghosts*, where Auster uses colors as names as a successful device to shock the reader and to make more difficult their understanding of a "simple enough" introduction:

> First of all there is Blue. Later there is White, and then there is Black, and before the beginning there is Brown. Brown broke him in, Brown taught him the ropes, and when Brown grew old, Blue took over .[...] The case seems simple enough. White wants Blue to follow a man named Black and to keep an eye on him for as long as necessary. While working for Brown, Blue did many tail jobs, and this one seems no different, perhaps even easier than most. (133)

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The use of colors, while clearly distinguishable for most of us, actually makes the identification of these characters more problematic. As they are all reduced to a color (other characters like Gold, Green, Gray or Red are to come up later) a sort of generic specification is being used, one that could have us confusing the identity of one with another, or labeling the character erroneously right from the beginning, a deliberate ploy that highlights once again the elusive, unstable nature of identity.

In this regard, Martin Amis is known to be very interested in defamiliarizing language; Tredell says his fiction “flamboyantly parades its own artificiality” (112). In relation to this, he is considered by some critics to be deeply influenced by the so-called “Martian School” that Craig Raine and Christopher Reid started in the late 70's (Tredell: 135). The most representative poem of this tendency is the very well-known “A Martian Sends a Postcard Home” where Raine describes everyday objects and interactions in utterly defamiliarizing ways: “Rain is when the earth is television /It has the property of making colours darker” (1); here is a description comparable to this one in *London Fields*: “It was raining all over the world. The biosphere was *raining*” (193). Amis undoubtedly explores this “bizarrely figurative expressiveness”, usually compared to the metaphysical style of the late 16th and 17th centuries (135); for example, in *London Fields*, we find it in this very poetic description of 20th century London by an *alien* such as the American Samson Young when he first walks around the streets at the beginning of the novel, after ten years of absence:

> The first thing I noticed in the street (I almost stepped in it) struck me as quintessentially English, a soaked loaf of white bread, like the brains of an animal much stupider than any sheep. So far, though, it doesn't seem as bad as some people like to say. At least it's intelligible, more or less. Ten years I've been gone, and what's been happening? Ten Years of Relative Decline. (14)

Not only is he an alien, but the world itself is alien to him, most evidently through the condition of the weather:

> Right now, the weather is superatmospheric and therefore, in a sense,

> supermeteorological (can you really call it weather?). It will stay like this for the rest of the summer, they say. I approve, with one qualification. It's picked the wrong year to happen in: the year of behaving strangely. I look out at it. The weather, if we can still call it that, is frequently very beautiful, but it seems to bring me close to hysteria, as indeed does everything now. (14)

And this is a feeling that intensifies along the novel: just as the weather grows worse, so does the emotional situation of the characters, in a spiral of entropy. The world escapes more and more from previously conceived parameters as a consequence of the ‘death of love’; even loving animals might become an endangered species: “The dogs are not living as long as they used to. Nothing is. It's weird. I mean, one expects snow-leopards and cockatoos and tsessebes to buy the farm eventually. But *dogs*? I have an image of fat Clive [Keith's dog], sitting in a zoo” (97).

This martian style is not an innovation in Amis at this point; both Auster and Amis are very recursive writers, novelists that are hyper-coherent and almost obsessed about certain ideas such as identity or the relationship of the subject with a reality that presents itself as such an *alter*. Let us take a passage from Amis's *Other People: A Mystery Story* (1981):

> The streets were full of display, of symbols whose meaning was coolly denied to her. Through an absence of power or will— or perhaps simply of time— no one bothered to stop her joining the edgy human traffic, though many looked as though they would like to. They stared; they stared at her feet; they had all grown used to their own devices— and where were hers supposed to be? It was her first mistake, she knew: no one was intended to be without them, and she was sorry. (16)

In this passage the main character, Mary, has just been released from hospital suffering what seems as an extreme case of amnesia. For her, everyday conventions have lost their meaning; having come back to her senses, they are not recorded in her mind anymore, which is why she does not even know what *shoes* are in the quote above. It reminds us of de Certeau's appreciation that to go out on the streets is to enter “a network of social signs that preexist” you (12); therefore you learn to behave in society for the rest of your life, something Mary has forgotten (and that we will discuss in depth in the next chapter). Also, in the work that would follow *London Fields*, the masterpiece *Times Arrow*, Amis retakes this situation of an amnesiac patient waking up in hospital but with a

huge difference, that the action, or this character's life will happen the other way around, from old to young. The approach to reality will then be even more shocking on the grounds that, not only will this character look at the world as an outsider who has to interpret every tiny piece of input, but he also will apprehend everything the other way around, creating a new reverse logic:

> Eating is unattractive too. First I stack the clean plates in the dishwasher, which works okay, I guess, like all my labor-saving devices, until some fat bastard shows up in his jumpsuit and traumatizes them with his tools. So far so good: then you select a soiled dish, collect some scraps from the garbage, and settle down for a short wait. (11)

Again, this interpretation is clearly wrong for the readers, stuck in their causal logic: we see that the fat man is the one who usually comes to fix devices, and, may we add, the attractiveness of eating is clearly underrated in his experience of life too.

These novels break with our given understanding of everyday events; they question any acceptance of reasons or causality, and even problematize the notion of recognition (that goes not only for objects or bodily functions, but even for one's self and other people), and we can find similar defamiliarizing strategies elsewhere in postmodernism. Both Auster and Amis have in common the aim of exploring different realities or, better said, of doing so from unusual perspectives in order to better capture this nihilist stage in the subject's self-identification. In 1999, Paul Auster did something Amis had already done in 1987; he took the point of view of a dog in his novel *Timbuktu*, while Amis had already published the short story “The Puppy That Could” as a part of the compilation *God's Dice*. In both cases, the narrators tell us the stories in a manner that is no different from the examples where a protagonist is human; they do this in order to both criticize human behavior toward animals and to create a parallelism between their (the dogs') experience of life and ours. In *Timbuktu*, Auster tells us the story of the Puppy and Mr. Bones; notice in the following quote how the word ‘shelter’, underlined in the original text, stands for a society or civilization that is distrusted by the individual: “A dog alone was no better than a dead dog, […] and Mr. Bones knew the drill by heart: how to avoid the dogcatchers and constables, the paddy wagons

and unmarked cars, the hypocrites from the so-called humane societies. No matter how sweetly they talked to you, the word *shelter* meant trouble" (4). Amis, who tells the story from a lost puppy's camera-eye, is able to detach himself from his characters to be able to represent how *any* being tries to make sense of its surroundings, which we will go back to in chapter 4. He underlines how every subject's perspective of reality can be both real, because it is the only one available, and untrustworthy at the same time, because it is mediated by the senses: ":Now, the puppy probably sniffed or sensed the village before he saw it- the fires, the crescents, the human place. In truth, his eyesight was not all that reliable, floppy, tousled, subject to passionate distortions of fear and desire" (25). Amis is actually arguing how emotion and the senses intervene in an experience to the extent they distort our perception, be us humans or dogs. In this way, a completely alien perspective of reality, a description of reality so far from our own a priori, feels paradoxically familiar again.

Objects, people, situations are somehow familiar but we no longer recognize them; meaning has gone out of the world; we live in a world to which we no longer belong, and in which some of our characters no longer want to live. Moreover, it should be emphasized that these descriptions of a familiar/unfamiliar world reflect how the characters find it difficult (or impossible) to self-identify or identify with their surroundings and other people. In relation to this somehow nihilist stage, we find that, according to some critics, the postmodernist novel has undergone "a shift of emphasis from content to form or style; a transformation of reality into images" (Bauman: 26), and this is certainly the case with the Trilogy and *London Fields.* These novels do not feature content over form, in fact, the plot is not the main focus in either of them; the emphasis is on language itself as well as solitude or death as a means of self-redemption for the characters, as we will see in chapters 3 and 4. Our novels are, like Baudrillard's reality, "a form without content" ("On Seduction": 164). In this regard, in *Ghosts*, Blue reads *Walden*, a reference introduced by Auster in the Trilogy to emphasize the parallelism and differences in the experience of solitude that characters give in to,

and while reading from it, he gets easily distracted and bored: “Blue thought he was going to get a story, or at least something like a story, but this is no more than blather, an endless harangue about nothing at all” (160). Paradoxically enough, this also applies to his own case and reports, and to the Trilogy as a whole. The intricate relationship with *Walden* will be left to be analyzed in the next chapter, but we can say confidently that both characters' as well as readers' expectations for resolution in the Trilogy are frustrated, as we will see throughout this paper.

Similarly, in Amis the story is not preeminent either, since from the very beginning it is apparent that he introduces a thriller with no suspense:

> This is the story of a murder. It hasn't happened yet. But it will. (It had better.) I know the murderer, I know the murderee. I know the time, I know the place. I know the motive (her motive) and I know the means. I know who will be the foil, the fool, the poor foal, also utterly destroyed. And I couldn't stop them, I don't think, even if I wanted to. The girl will die. It's what she always wanted. (*LF*: 1)

In a veiled allusion to García Marquez's title *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, within the first pages, the narrator will share all this information with us readers, and will quickly release us from the pressure (and motivation) of not knowing what the end will turn out to be. Readers like Blue may be upset by these revelations and may dislike this kind of fiction because it is not based on traditional cohesive patterns nor does it show linear plots which develop up until a climax followed by a resolution. However, other readers, like us, might develop a taste for the uncertainty in characterization and agency, and above all, a taste for the irony and the layers of information carried by the language in these books. Experience is unrepresentable, therefore our authors recall the ‘kantian sublime’; “that is to say, intuitions that cannot be ‘brought under’ adequate terms” (Diedrick: 150-151). Therefore, as Povinelli observes, in postmodernity, “the concept of incommensurability is closely related to linguistic indeterminacy” (320). Amis's narrator reflects on the consequent unavoidable problems that writers face and clarifies that, although he is conscious of the paradoxical place that language occupies in the process, he is still trying to write under the same

terms; realism is forcing him to avoid the issues of reality: “Perhaps because of their addiction to form, writers always lag behind the contemporary formlessness. They write about an old reality, in a language that's even older. It's not the words: it's the rhythm of thought. In this sense all novels are historical novels. Not really a writer, maybe I see it clearer. But I do it too. An example: I still go on as if people felt well” (239). Samson Young will try to capture the postmodernist experience in modernist terms, therefore he is bound to fail and it is his own fiction that will turn against him, as we will see.

Language games dwell on every page of *London Fields* and the Trilogy; according to Sarup and other critics, they constitute one of the most favorite postmodernist literary tools (150). Auster reflects directly on the fact that although language might be deceiving, as we have argued elsewhere, it is also fundamental for self-identification; this relation between language and what it refers to, the nature of reference, is problematized and can be considered as another postmodern characteristic; in Sarup's words, he represents “the self as the interaction of all the language games in which it participates” (150), something taken to the extreme by the character who is the most fond of language in the Trilogy, Stillman Sr.:

> ‘My name is Quinn.’
> ‘Ah,’ said Stillman reflectively, nodding his head. ‘Quinn.’
> ‘Yes, Quinn. Q-U-I-N-N.’
> ‘I see. Yes, yes, I see. Quinn. Hmmm. Yes. Very interesting. Quinn. A most resonant word. Rhymes with twin, does it not?’
> ‘That's right. Twin.’
> ‘And sin, too, if I'm not mistaken.’
> ‘You're not.’
> ‘And also in—one n—or inn—two. Isn't that so?’
> ‘Exactly.’
> ‘Hmmm. Very interesting. I see many possibilities for this word, this Quinn, this... quintessence ... of quiddity. Quick, for example. And quill. And quack. And quirk. Hmmm. Rhymes with grin. Not to speak of kin. Hmmm. Very interesting. And win. And fin. And din. And gin. And pin. And tin. And bin. Even rhymes with djinn. Hmmm. And if you say it right with been. Hmmm. Yes, very interesting. I like your name enormously, Mr. Quinn. It flies off in so many little directions at once.’ (73-74)

It is a game; it is also poetry, although it is the most homeless, grotesque, kind of poetry, which

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Amis also represents in *London Fields* through the character of Keith. He is at the edge of poverty but at least he does have a profession: he's a cheat, a professional burglar among other things. Amis's use of the English language is considered by many to be exquisite; language for him “becomes a kind of character”, by being “self-conscious, virtuosic, vying for attention with the plot and the other characters” (Diedrick: 14). As an example, we will take this paragraph, brilliant in its repetition of the same idea:

> Little did they know that the place they were about to burgle— the shop, and the flat above it— had already been burgled the week before: yes, and the week before that. And the week before that. It was all burgled out. Indeed, burgling, when viewed in Darwinian terms, was clearly approaching a crisis. Burglars were finding that almost everywhere had been burgled. Burglars were forever bumping into one another, stepping on the toes of other burglars. There were burglar jams on rooftops and stairways, on groaning fire-escapes. Burglars were being burgled by fellow burglars, and were doing the same thing back. Burgled goods jigged from flat to flat. Returning from burgling, burglars would discover that they themselves had just been burgled, sometimes by the very burglar that they themselves had just burgled! How would this crisis in burgling be resolved? It would be resolved when enough burglars found burgling a waste of time, and stopped doing it. Then, for a while, burgling would become worth doing again. But burglars had plenty of time to waste— it was all they had plenty of, and there was nothing else to do with it— so they just went on burgling. (248)

Amis focuses in this passage on the resonance of language, on its beauty and the many combinations possible; beyond the ugliness of reality, words arise as carriers of beauty (and humor). But underlying this he also reminds us how the power of words can sometimes be altered by the overuse of terms; by saying them too much, words begin to lose their meaning, just as burgling and so much else becomes meaningless in the passage and throughout the novel.

Against the distrust in words as bearers of truth, modernist writers and their literary descendants have reinvigorated the novel over and over in their attempts to “transcend [the temporal and spatial limitations] to convey effects and illusions beyond the strict capacities of the limiting media” (Mendilow: 27). This impulse takes literature beyond realism and the chains of language or, as here, draws attention once again to those limitations: “Then why does he feel so dissatisfied, so troubled by what he has written? He says to himself: what happened is not really what happened.

For the first time in his experience of writing reports, he discovers that words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say" (*NYT*: 145), which manifests this incommesurability that we have already talked about: "For when anything can happen— that is the precise moment when words begin to fail" (295). One cannot reproduce reality in verbal terms, one can only "create new conventions which can more satisfactorily create the illusion of real life by closing a little more the gap between a symbolized representation of the real world and the real world itself" (Mendilow: 36). In postmodernist novels, as it happens in life, the parts or fragments of the whole picture are not always "in harmony" and sometimes the result is "cacophony" (Bauman: 26).

In an era where the uncertainty principle[18] can be applied to everything (Baudrillard *C*: 80), there are many voices raised against realism as mimesis, criticizing those writers who pretended to *reproduce* the totality of human experience, because such representation is not possible. According to Mendilow, modernist writers "by breaking up the categories of language and syntax, [...] strive to express their sense of life as a sequence of non-causal impressions in which direction can be predicted only for the larger units, never of the smaller components" (Mendilow: 8); meanwhile the narrator in *London Fields* goes further by losing control of both the smaller components (Nicola and the rest of the characters) and the larger units (the novel, the plot itself). Young will nevertheless deceive himself into believing he is achieving a harmonious realist novel: "I've never been braver. It empowers me-I can feel it. Like looking for the right words and finding them, finding the powers" (11). Postmodernism thus differs from modernist ideas in several ways, but we agree with Fokkema or Lavender that the postmodern attack is more on realism than on modernism (238 and 236 respectively), and that postmodernist authors are influenced by previous innovations. For example, modernist writers had already started to explore new ways of breaking with tradition in

18 The uncertainty principle: in quantum physics, the impossibility to predict both the position and the speed or trajectory of a subatomic particle.

representation. Modernist authors such as Virginia Woolf or Joyce were already experimenting with, for example, psychological time as the actual true time, and they were starting to challenge causality and teleology as a given (Szegedy-Maszák: 43-46). In fact, the building blocks of these novels are precisely impressions of time and images of space, which can be tied together only through language .Similarly, in the Trilogy, in particular, characters are continually confused about the length of time that has elapsed— "Apparently, a whole day had gone by. At some point during Stillman's monologue the sun had set in the room, but Quinn had not been aware of it" (23); or "A long time passed. Exactly how long it is impossible to say. Weeks certainly, but perhaps even months" (111).

As well as these impressions of time and space, we had already talked about the fictitious nature of History in chapter 1, and how "the inherent ambiguity of analytic material and the associative character of linguistic referents creates an interpretive space where the desire for narrative coherence imposes order on the otherwise fragmented data" (Wurgaft: 71). Our authors are also interested in this constant need for meaning that human beings display; in our need for meaning, we interpret, and as long as we support our ideas on the text, the text itself becomes meaningful. There is an illustrative example of this in *City of Glass*; Quinn records Stillman Sr.'s every move in a very fragmented reporting style, and tries to figure out their purpose, which remains unreachable: " 'picks up pencil in middle of block. Examines, hesitates, puts in bag... Buys sandwich in deli... Sits on bench in park and reads through red notebook.' These sentences seemed utterly worthless to him" (65). Desperate for a justification for the old man's apparent directionless wandering and for his own case, he realizes that by drawing Stillman's trajectory on the map of Manhattan, he has in fact been composing, letter by letter, the following message: OWEROFBAB (70). Since he had started his records four days late, he concludes that, in all logic: THE TOWER OF BABEL is the message, that Stillman is definitely going after his son to fulfill his project. If he

can foretell all this, then resolution can at least be close in the narrative and the case; nevertheless we know his expectations will not be fulfilled. In this passage, Auster trivializes the foundations of literary interpretation, history or religion; interpretation and consensus always precede meaning, but it is not the only instance of this parallelism we will find during this paper. Contrary to what is expected (the climax and resolution of the case), the message is probably the outcome of Quinn's own obsession and craving for meaning. Stillman Sr. disappears right after this; so do Virginia and Stillman Jr., and therefore the case is bound never to be resolved. However, that is not the end of *City of Glass*; rather, it feels more like the beginning, as we will see later.

To move on from here, it should be considered how postmodernists are often criticized for being radically anti-allegorical in their fictions, "either building then destroying allegorical structures within their own fictional framework, or by postulating a world of simulacra without depth, center, or meaning, where events are governed not by necessity or causation, but by pure chance" (Spariosu: 61); and this is true, superficially, in the novel as, for example, Auster begins the Trilogy by giving all credit to chance: "Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened to him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance. But that was much later" (*NYT*: 1). However, contrary to what these critics suggest, we believe our writers can go beyond the surface by presenting a greater problem regarding human purpose; the possible deletion of meaning from the equation of life and literature: "The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is for the story to tell" (*NYT*: 1); Auster is asking the readers to dispose of pre-conceived ideas that will not work in the Trilogy and encourages critics to not go beyond the text in their interpretations. Furthermore, Auster places the whole idea of identity on a textual level, following a postmodernist trend Sarup describes as follows: "There has been a move to 'textualize' everything: history, philosophy, jurisprudence, sociology and other disciplines are treated as so many optional 'kinds of writing' or discourses" (132). History, Literature, and Fiction are all equal in the

postmodern mind. Everything is bound to be reduced to a narrative, and no text is to be considered authoritative/true/final:

> Jameson argues that it is hard to think of the world as it would exist outside narrative. Anything we try to substitute for a story is, on closer examination, likely to be another sort of story. Physicists, for example, 'tell stories' about subatomic particles. Anything that presents itself as existing outside the boundaries of some story (a structure, a form, a category) can only do so through a kind of fiction. In Jameson's view, structures may be abundantly useful as conceptual fictions, but reality comes to us in the form of its stories. Narrative, just by being narrative, [requires] interpretation, and so we must always be aware of the difference between manifest meaning and latent content. (Sarup: 179)

Notwithstanding this certainty of uncertainty, the narrators in both novels insist that the facts in the fiction have happened in real life, that they are doing nothing but record them, thus playing with the presumption of make-believe, as contemporary readers know they are not real. In fact, these might be novels that portray the most accurate picture of reality possible in our days. The first sentence in *London Fields* is: "This is a true story but I can't believe it's really happening" (1); and the last one in the Trilogy is: "I came to the last page just as the train was pulling out" (308) (he means Fanshawe's diaries, which he used to write the Trilogy). Therefore, these writers are insisting that, although realism is not an aim, our reality is not unlike the world the characters inhabit, although we already know that what is real and true is unreachable.

Auster and Amis (or shall we say the nameless narrator and Young?) no doubt pursue innovation; the reader can feel there is something different in these pages, although literature has been said to be exhausted (as stated in John Barth's famous essay *The Literature of Exhaustion*) and in spite of the language seeming, as it were, average and close to contemporary readers. This notion of renewal is common in literary history, which has been characterized as the succession of 'literary systems' differentiated according to the various semiotic communities participating in the production and reception of literature. This theory of a succession of trends "explains the current innovation of semiotic means in the production of literary texts, and more particularly the difference

between Postmodernism and the preceding trends, such as Modernism and the historical Avant-Garde" (Fokkema: 238). Moreover, History is cumulative and the novelists from the twentieth century on are constantly aware of the impossibility of innovation concerning either plot or character. While on the one hand the avant-garde destroys the past, on the other modernism is characterized by a strong romantic or melancholy view of it. Postmodernism also tries to revisit it but "with irony, not innocently" (Eco in Calinescu "Postmodernism...": 4). All generations tend to find a way to continue to innovate and to deliver a product characteristic of their times and postmodernism uses and abuses hypertextualization as a device, displaying its richness in an intra and intertextual manner, in order to maintain a constant dialogue with literary tradition. We might say that postmodern literary production, and our novels, are defined by their *transvestism*[19]; by their appropriation and re-interpretation of traditional conventions and by their interdisciplinary character. As we will see later, Auster "quotes liberally from philosophical and literary antecedents" and makes use of allusiveness "as recognition that stories, like identities, are created collectively, that there is a community of storytellers transcending individual authorities and historical eras" (Peacock: 2), which we think equally applies to Amis; they look, not for originality but for the representation of different points of view. While these writers agree with the postmodernist premise that "[t]he overall result is fragmentation of time into episodes, each one cut from its past and from its future, each one self-enclosed and self-contained" (Hägglund: 25), they also convey that if "taken outside its relationship to past and future the present loses its integrity, breaks down into isolated phenomena and objects, making of them a mere abstract conglomeration" (Bakhtin: 146); hence our novels will not exclusively show a self-contained present, because they incessantly refer to the past and past cultural references; as we will later see, these novels are extremely metaliterary, and that not only shows their connection to their literary antecedents, but also their respect for them.

19 This word is used to recall Tom Stoppard's 1974 play *Travesties,* where historical figures such as James Joyce or Lenin are fictional characters. This is an example of comic revisionism of the past, characteristic in postmodernist literary and artistic production.

Identity as Alterity

Most of what has been considered up to now has been placed within the context of the postmodern. Now, the term postmodernism is, in terms of literary fashion, not equal to Baroque, Renaissance or Gothic in its uniformity, but is what Anderson calls a ‘portmanteau’ concept, which references diverse aesthetic practices because they are contemporary and interrelated (Szegedy-Maszák: 42). Moreover, postmodernism is transnational (Mishra and Hodge: 377), but does not show itself under any fixed rules; its boundaries are not as clear as previous literary or artistic trends and, because its sources are extended into the past without restrictions, it is said that some ideas now called postmodernist have been present off and on throughout literary history. As Docherty argues, the term postmodernism is not “determined by chronology but by mood”; as an example, he quotes Duns Scotus ‘*haecceitas*’[20] as a postmodern antithesis for Aquinas's *modern* opposition between faith and reason (22). Consequently, the ‘postmodern condition’ [21] is more or less free from space and time boundaries and certainly free to re-use and revise *any* previous literary convention. It is a condition marked by a paradoxical manifesto: “Among the faces of modernity postmodernism is perhaps the most quizzical: self-skeptical yet curious, unbelieving yet searching, benevolent yet ironic” (Calinescu *FF*: 279).

Twentieth century critics agree that literature in traditional terms is exhausted, but so is identity[22]. The feeling is, in Harris's words, that “Modernism being the terminus, everything afterwards is counted out of development. It is *after*; stuck in the post” (88); this is the only certain meaning of the locution post-modernism: ‘after modernism’. Also, for some critics, modernism marks the death of the novel: “our current tiredness results from the invention of the same and from the possible, [...] so we have to reinvent invention, to let the other come” (Derrida: 341). In this

20 Scotus rejects the platonic and aristotelian legacy found in Aquinas's philosophy, denying universals and focusing in the invidualization of the subject, who exists for him in the material world beyond the realm of ideas.

21 *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* is a celebrated collection of essays by Jean-François Lyotard first published in 1979. It was the first succesfull attempt in coining the term ‘postmodernism’ and encompassing its general philosophical features.

22 In "The Death of the Author" Barthes says the first “I” has been traced to an Egyptian papyrus “where the scribe complained literature was already exhausted” (Hormung: 175).

light, therefore, we can state that Amis and Auster are trying to incorporate the other on the page; moreover, they are also trying to re-define the position of the self in the world, although they are not trying to capture reality inside a truthful portrait; while the narrators might insist on the reality of the facts depicted, the overall impression that is achieved is one of absurdity. For example, Tredell says this about *London Fields*:

> The novel's self-reflexive dispelling of fictional illusion does not signal the unreality of the text in relation to the 'real' world. It bespeaks, rather, a mimetic intention to reflect, with a good deal of parodic and comic exaggeration, the culturally constructed nature of what we conventionally think of as psychological and social reality. In the fin de siécle climate of Amis's London (which seems as much a satiric comment on present-day London as an admonitory prophecy of its future), the only available narratives for constructing the self and interacting socially are either debased and shallow or hopelessly anachronistic. They are the products of mass consumerist culture and the remnants of older patterns of behavior which no longer have currency in the society which Amis depicts. (113)

Hence, although realism is not their aim, the impression these authors make on the reader is one of familiarity out of unfamiliarity, these are broken novels that correspond to a broken world which realism is unable to capture, being, as these authors see it, stuck in time: "In common with Leo Tolstoy, Keith Talent thought of time as moving past him while he just stayed the same. In the mirror every morning: same old Keith. None the wiser" (*LF*: 172).

It is clear that these novels raise many questions for the reader. In fact, Tredell considers Amis's *London Fields* as "a text that functions as much as a textbook (designed for the undergraduate seminar requiring neat examples of the metafictional and postmodern)" (101); similarly, Lavender believes that, within the Trilogy, Auster poses the question: "How many of the normally assigned qualities of the novel, especially those qualities that have become attached to it through critical exegesis, formulation and application of theory, and scientific or semiotic analysis, can be abandoned, mutilated, ruined in and by a narrative that remains identifiable as a novel?" (219) We agree with these critics that both Amis and Auster have succeeded in adapting so-called postmodernist ideas and techniques into the novel, in an attempt to close the gap that Mendilow

referred to between the world (nowadays) and its representation in literature. Moreover, they both consider the gap existing between the subject and his or her inner truth; a stable self is insurmountable in the real world, and in literature or, in Sarup's words: “stable ego is illusory” (13). Because of this, identity will turn into absolute alterity in their fiction as literary authors need to cope with the uncertainty of the referent, because the referent is never the real itself; rather, all we know are the discourses and representations of it as we saw in chapter 1: a “reality in which reference has been replaced by make-believe” is impossible to describe in mimetic terms (Bernard: 143).

While words can only capture a very small portion of what would be the real (chunks of reality, so to speak), the novel is not *exclusively* about what we once understood as ‘reality’ anymore. Invention is experiencing a rebirth; the tendency is “not so much [to] create, imagine, produce, institute, discover” but, because of fatigue, weariness and exhaustion, the novel is undergoing a reconstruction in an “apparent contradiction” (Derrida: 116-117). Both narrators refer to this exhaustion several times throughout *London Fields* and the Trilogy, because they both struggle with literary creation, truth and lies; what is more, as we will see later, their own position as omniscient narrators will be compromised. On the one hand, Samson states he is unable to invent what he considers lies, so he is committed to realism: “I’m not one of those excitable types who get caught making things up. Who get caught improving on reality. I can embellish, I can take certain liberties. Yet to invent the bald facts of a life (for example) would be quite beyond my powers” (39). However, on the other hand, the Trilogy's narrator, who shares the same concerns with Samson, as he is unable to invent, is shocked by Fanshawe's last piece of work; he says this about F's bio: “The book was a work of fiction. Even though it was based on facts, it could tell nothing but lies” (242). Therefore Amis and Auster both agree in that a new type of novel must reject mimesis and freely cross the line between truth and falsehood. To clarify just what is meant here, Mendilow describes

the different levels of mimesis writers had traditionally considered:

> Of the four degrees of relationship of truth to life into which works of fiction might be graded, the impossible, the improbable, the possible and the probable, the novel proper claimed from the beginning to have eliminated from its field the first two, and so to have clearly marked itself off from the romance. The third was at first held by many to be legitimate, but the greater novelists maintained that they were writing within the limits only of the fourth. (40)

However, limitless, postmodernist authors, and particularly Amis and Auster, will transcend the first two levels of reality, to allow all four of them to coexist, interweave and mix, and still create in their novels an openly artificial and metaliterary world that, paradoxically, resembles, and therefore represents, a realistic setting; moreover, this also applies to identity and the fragmentary image of it readers are going to receive, as we will discuss in chapter 3 when we talk about characterization. And why should this be the case? The most successful writer in *London Fields*, Mark Asprey sentences: “The truth doesn't matter any more and *it's not wanted*” (452).

It becomes clear then that postmodernism opens the door for surrealism and puts it on the same level as realism: “To the postmodern statement that fiction is not truth, it imposes a new paradox: fiction cannot lie” (Lavender: 236). Coming after modernism (and everything else) in time, postmodernism considers itself incapable of originality; the idea of the genius has been “replaced by the assumption that art can only be repetitious” (Sarup: 132) and therefore our authors will make the best use of repetitions and lies to create an effective ‘black mirror’ for our society. This idea that “there is no progress only repetition” is explored by such authors such as Robbe-Grillet in *Dans le Labyrinthe*, Nabokov in *Pnin*, Gertrude Stein, Raymond Roussel, Borges or Proust (46-47), and our novels are themselves rooted in this assumption: *The New York Trilogy* is composed by the repetition of the same story, as the narrator himself confesses at the end of *The Locked Room*: “These three stories are finally the same story” (*NYT*: 287). Repetition is a key element in *London Fields* too because, although it is composed of twenty-four successive chapters, each of them is complemented at the end by an entry including notes and the thoughts and feelings

of the narrator. Most of the times these asides have the same length as a chapter, and the narrator discusses openly how the completion of the novel is going, and how he is acquiring all the information for it from the characters themselves, who exist in *real life.* Consequently, many scenes appear twice, even complete sentences appear twice; once on the first level of the fiction, and again on the second level, the novel the narrator is writing. Also, and openly, both narrators are very clear about the metafictional character of their work, when they interact with the reader— "The red notebook, of course, is only half of the story, as any sensitive reader will understand" (*NYT*: 129)— or their characters themselves— " '[Nicola,]what are you?'/'Christ you still don't get it, do you.' " (*LF*: 260). As we can see, postmodernism features continual references to metafictional self-reflexivity or self-referentiality like these and the Trilogy and *London Fields* are obsessively self-referential, as we will have a chance to discuss later, when we center on characterization and the narrators in the next chapter. Auster, for instance, chooses the so-called "Russian-doll constructions" (Peacock: 11) in order to create more and more stories within the frame of the Trilogy; on some occasions the parallelism is clear (it refers to an earlier part of the story) but sometimes it is yet to come: chapters 4 and 6 in *City of Glass* are a good example, as they introduce information that apparently does not belong to the story but it is at the same time relevant; they are made up of P.I. reports about real cases of speechless children as well as Stillman/Dark and the philosophical and moral foundations of his plans.

Because originality is considered impossible by these writers, self-referentiality and intertextuality are boundlessly manifest throughout the novels. They take advantage of the devices that Sarup enumerates such as quotation, artifice, randomness, anarchy, fragmentation, parody, irony, playfulness and allegory that are considered common in postmodernism (132). The intention of such devices is to disengage readers from the novel as they used to know it, and in order to do so, these writers use strategies that imply "distancing, demystification, eclecticism— the death of not

only individual styles, but also of local traditions and of a sense of history— as well as a cult of pastiche, miming, deconstructive montage, grafting, superimposing one text on the other (Szegedy-Maszák: 41). Nevertheless, irony and playfulness are applied in these revisions, as the status of tradition and popular culture is equated in value. This is recognized as a feature of postmodern culture by Frederic Jameson, who describes it in this way:

> The effacement […] of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture. This is perhaps the most distressing development of all from an academic standpoint which has traditionally had a vested interest in preserving a state of high or elite culture against the surrounding environment of philistinism, of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Readers' Digest culture […]. But many of the newer postmodernisms have been fascinated precisely by that whole landscape of advertising and motels, of the Las Vegas strip, of the late show and 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. They no longer 'quote' such texts […] they incorporate them to the point where the line between high art and commercial forms seems increasingly difficult to draw. (111)

This is what we observe in the novel. The comic effect depends on noting a discrepancy between the real and its representation and so black humor is present in our novels quite often, although none of them are strictly speaking comic novels. As an example of this, let us read the following passage of *London Fields* when Keith, seen by the narrator through his own eyes, considers what a good person he is, and how harmful it is for his reputation to not project the right image, which in his case, is (hopefully) one of a horrible man in the eyes of the reader; thus the comic effect. Keith, who is already robbing a bank, regrets not having been more (proudly) harmful:

> Although he liked nearly everything else about himself, Keith hated his redeeming features. In his view they constituted his only major shortcoming— his one tragic flaw. When the moment arrived, [...] his great face crammed into the prickling nylon, and the proud woman shaking her trembling head at him, and Chick Purchase and Dean Pleat both screaming *Do it*. *Do it* (he still remembered their meshed mouths writhing), Keith had definitely failed to realize his full potential. He had proved incapable of clubbing the Asian woman to her knees, and of going on clubbing until the man in the uniform opened the safe. (4-5)

As we can see, there is a confusion of values here, between what cheats and thieves value and the readers' (supposed) shared values (if in postmodernity we can contemplate such a thing) are

incompatible producing a rather grotesque scene characterized by understatement.

Another preference of postmodernist authors, as Calinescu points out, is that they treat fact and fiction, reality and myth, truth and lying, original and imitation, and so on, on an equal footing as a means to emphasize undecidability (*FF*: 304). This tendency provokes the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between élite and popular culture and in both novels we find items representative from both these visages of (C/c)ulture because, for these authors, they are structural constituents of the postmodern man's tale of identity. For instance, in *London Fields*, God is introduced as an imaginary character in Nicola's fictitious life (by fictitious we mean the Nicola in the novel the narrator is writing, not the Nicola living in the same reality as the narrator's, although this is fictitious for us as well); in order to court her, God embodies true ‘machos’ throughout history. All of them stand on the same level; God's: “He tempted her with His charisma: he came as King David, Valentino, Byron, John Dillinger, Genghis Khan, Courbet, Muhammad Ali, Napoleon, Hemingway, the great Schwarzenegger, Burton Else [a fictitious character for us, a *real tabloid* star in Six's England]” (121). An equal mix appears in the Trilogy on Blue's wall, where he symbolically hangs up some images he identifies with: “Next to that there is a portrait of Walt Whitman. And finally, directly to the poet's left, there is a movie still of Robert Mitchum from one of the fan magazines” (186). For writers such as Proust or Joyce, God had been replaced by art, whereas for Beckett even art had lost its supreme value (Szegedy-Maszák: 45); and this is the outcome of that attitude. With our authors comes the deletion of the boundary between art and everyday life; for them, God is no different nowadays from celebrities and movie actors, and literature can never surpass the creativity of our everyday life. However, Amis goes beyond this; Samson Young is not creating fiction, or so he says; he only collects data from reality, to the extent that he attributes authorship to the actual characters, as we will see in chapter 3: “The girl will die. It's what she always wanted. You can*'t* stop people once they *start*. You can't stop people once they *start*

creating" (1). Thus, from the very beginning there will be no boundaries between fiction and real life in *LondonFields*, a statement that brings trouble regarding the concepts of agency, authorship, characterization and the nature of the narrator, as we will see in the next section.

Another related point that goes hand in hand with how identity is constructed (or deconstructed) in these novels has to do with, as Sarup points out, one metaphor that postmodernists commonly use to illustrate their inclination to intertextuality; that of the 'palimpsest'. For postmodernist critics (inspired by deconstructionism), reading a text "resembles the X-raying of pictures which discovers, under the epidermis of the last painting, another hidden picture" (50) and the closer you read, you can only discover that texts only refer to other texts. Like monks that would rewrite again on older manuscripts, these authors show intertextuality is not only necessary but unavoidable, because tradition does not need to be incorporated into the new literary production; it is already there. Auster does not miss the chance of materializing the metaphor: "[Quinn] often discovered that he had written two or even three lines on top of each other, producing a jumbled, illegible palimpsest" (*NYT*: 62). The irony arises, as many critics argue, from more or less random hybridization, and carnivalization (a Bakhtin term); tradition and literature itself turn into a performance (Hassan: 18-21). Therefore, literary tradition is present in these novels through intertextuality in many ways, and sometimes certainly carnivalized as in the following conversation when Quinn tries to figure out who Stillman named his alter ego, Henry Dark, after:

> 'Oh, do try. Make three guesses. It you don't get it, then I'll tell You.'
>
> Quinn paused for a moment, trying to give it his best effort 'H.D.', he said. 'For Henry David? As in Henry David Thoreau.'
>
> 'Not even close.'
>
> 'How about H.D. Pure and simple? For the poet Hilda Doolittle.'
>
> 'Worse than the first one.'
>
> '[...]H for the weeping Philosopher, Heraclitus... and D for the laughing philosopher, Democritus. Heraclitus and Democritus… the two poles of the dialectic.'
>
> '[...] The initials of the name Henry Dark refer to Humpty Dumpty.'

> 'Humpty Dumpty.'
> 'You know who I mean. The egg.'
> 'As in Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.'
> 'Exactly.' (79-80)

This is a kind of ironic joke although it does reflect how the novel continually alludes to other sources, be they from high Culture or nursery rhymes. But, at the same time, this also has to do, once again, with the problem of identification, which is why postmodernist authors are said to present, in characterization, "a fake flatness, without inside/outside —or its opposite, self-multiplication,self-reflection" trying to suppress, disperse, "and sometimes [...] to recover the romantic ego" (Hassan: 19). In the constant need to refer to the outside for identity, "looking outward for sustenance" (*NYT*: 61), Hassan says: "thinking is displaced into a mode of alterity where, in the words of Rimbaud 'j'est un autre', or where the 'I', in lacanian fashion, constantly disappears from itself and reappears in the guise of alterity" (180). As a result of all these considerations, it is clear that Auster and Amis conceive a "multifaceted and disintegrating play of selves" (Sarup: 53) over *one* stable self, which directly affects characterization in their novels.

In the Trilogy, the list of literary references and inspirations that appear directly or indirectly in the text is baffling: Milton's *Paradise Lost* as well as *The Bible* are crucial for the development of the story of Henry Dark/Stillman Sr.— Columbus, Raleigh, Montaigne, Thomas More, Geronimo de Mendieta, Rousseau and Locke, among others, are also named in relation to it (41-42). There are allusions to Swift and Defoe (particularly to *Robinson Crusoe*, which Fanshawe reads as a teenager). Edgar Allan Poe appears as a direct reference many times, also through the name William Wilson (a pseudonym for Quinn and a short story by Poe). Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is also alluded to recurrently, first in a veiled way through a Kodak picture of Nantucket in Central Station (51), then more directly in Fanshawe's introduction to one of his letters: "Call me Redburn" (267), *Redburn: His First Voyage* also being a novel by Mellville. There is even a passage in Paris where the narrator and protagonist wants to be called Herman Melville the sailor by a prostitute he insists

on calling Fayaway[23] (288). Significantly, Hawthorne is present as well, through his novel on identity crisis, *Fanshawe,* as well as his short story "Wakefield". In fact, the plot of "Wakefield" itself is introduced into the narrative as a story that Black tells Blue without attributing any credit to the author; this is the story of a man who has abandoned his wife and does not return in twenty years; he even witnesses the impact of his own death on the mind of his widow (172). Clearly, part of the point of this is to parallel Blue's own story as he has abandoned the future Mrs. Blue to work on the case. Yet another example of intertextuality appears through the title of his third story, in which Auster evokes the 1935 *The Locked Room Lecture* by John Dickson Carr, which is about a murder in a locked room; it also echoes Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, where the same situation occurs— again the parallels with Auster's story are obvious. Also, Auster refers to Walt Whitman (who used to walk along Orange Street, where Blue works) (135), and to so many more we do not want to overwhelm the reader with them. However, two more references must be highlighted: Thoreau's *Walden*, read by both Blue and Black and *El Quixote*, a novel Auster (the character) is studying; both these references will actually be analyzed further in the next section. The upshot of all this is that the reader is continually being urged to trace the origin or original, not only of the plot and character, but also as regards authorship, all of which are continually displaced and deferred.

Similarly, but with less intensity, in *London Fields*, Amis also often refers to literary antecedents and even to contemporary works such as the novel *More Die of Heartbreak* by Bellow, which appears more than once as a favourite of the narrator's. Yeats is freely quoted (101); so is *El Quixote* (350). He refers to Owen, the war poet (469), and Keats's *Lamia*[24] is the topic of the false one-to-one literature class in which Nicola pretends to be Keith's teacher on camera. On another

23 Fayaway is the female character of Melville's first novel *Typee*: a literary account based on the time spent by the author with a cannibal tribe in the South Pacific.

24 The title of chapter 17 is “Cupid's College”, taken from the following line of “Lamia”: “As though in Cupid's college she had spent /Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent/,And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment” (ll. 197-199). Nicola is pretending to be a Virgin for Guy, like the lady in the lines, which we will analyze in chapter 4.

occasion, Amis compares Keith to Tolstoy (172) and he is repeatedly called Keithcliff, as a modern brutal Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* (164), because “Keith is modern, modern, modern” (10). The end of the novel, with little Kim being taken care of by the only good and rich character in the novel, Guy Clinch, has Dickensian connotations (which often crop up in Amis's novels), of course. Another example is the term ‘Murderee’, applied to Nicola by herself and by the narrator; this is borrowed from D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love.* However, above all other references, Shakespeare appears the most, for instance through Nicola, who had been a drama actress, now referred to by the narrator as Lady Muckbeth (379). There is even a character named Shakespeare (there is also one named God, the barman, and both of them are rapists as explained in page 168); he is a parody figure who is “the least prosperous of the Black Cross brothers. The bum's overcoat, the plastic shoes, the never-washed dreadlocks” (41); but Shakespeare is for Amis, above all, a figure of authority who carries the weight of History and canonical discipline: “someone watches over us when we write. Mother. Teacher. Shakespeare. God” (397); therefore he will not take Him seriously.

Like many of his contemporaries, including Auster, Amis is also interested in how tradition and popular culture leak into everyday life, introducing references to both extensively throughout the novel: “[Keith] also watched major adaptations of works by Lawrence, Dreiser, Dostoevsky, Conrad – and anything else that sparked controversy in the pull-out TV section of his tabloid” (165).The people on the pages of *London Fields* are, nevertheless, characterized by being less cultivated (except for Nicola, and the narrator to a lesser extent), than the ones in the Trilogy, where Fanshawe, the narrator, Quinn, Auster (the character), Black or Stillman Sr., are all writers who know well their literary heritage. In these novels, as we will see in the next chapter, everybody becomes a writer. Now, at first sight it may not seem clear just how all this allusiveness and intertextuality relates to our subject. However, characters and their circumstances seem to become inseparable from these ‘others’ that are continually referred to. These characters' identities, just like

real people's, cannot be separated from their relationship to others or from their position within the world. After all, as readers, we cannot help but relate characters, plots and situations to their literary antecedents (or to other cultural models); this in turn leads us, and even the characters themselves, to yet another kind of recognition of otherness. Our authors present an identity that is only achievable in textual terms; language is *a spell* by which "these 'fictions' produce the other and the 'I' as entities continually 'made' (factum) in their textual practice" (Hormung: 11).

From all of this, it becomes clear reading these novels that these authors have a great deal in common thematically and also in the way they portray certain ideas. In this paper, we are focusing on their representation of identity as alterity, but it is difficult to reduce the scope of our research, as an insurmountable number of topics is being dealt with while, at the same time, the interrelation of them is so strong it seems identity "flies off in so many little directions at once" (*NYT* 74), just like Quinn's name according to Stillman Sr. in *City of Glass*. In these novels, the main characters are desperately seeking for a source of identity and comfort in a context where nothing but alterity is apprehensible; consequently, they turn to some outside factors in order to find something recognizable. This ties in with Bhabha's philosophy: "identification is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness" (Wurgaft: 80). In their ambivalence, characters project their selves into their writing, as we hinted at the end of the last paragraph. To this end, and in order not to lose control of their actions, these characters rely on a red notebook in order to keep track of their selves through the words they write. This way they also have control over their reality; that is, they are able to intervene in people's lives. Moreover, these characters are apparently attracted to these notebooks as if chance has been substituted by destiny, as if driven by an unconscious drive. For example, Quinn writes in a red notebook all the time while following Stillman and he writes until there is no more space:

> He felt that a new notebook was in order. It would be helpful to have a separate place to record his thoughts, his observations, and his questions. In that way, things might not get out of control. He looked through the pile, trying to decide which one to pick. For reasons that were never clear to him, he suddenly felt an irresistible urge for a particular red notebook at the bottom. [...] Almost embarrassed by the intensity of his feelings. (38-39)

Yet, although there was probably no reason at the beginning, he later realizes that he was meant to have a notebook the same color as Stillman's: “it pleased him to know that Stillman also had a red notebook, as if this formed a secret link between them, Quinn suspected that Stillman´s red notebook contained answers to the questions that had been accumulating in his mind” (59). And that is also something that characters are looking for in the notebook: identification, truth, history, literature, language; words that can satisfy their need for answers. Hence, the notebook is reassuring for the characters on many occasions when they find nothing to hold on to: “Blue looks around the room and fixes his attention on various objects, one after the other. He sees the notebook and says to himself ‘notebook’ ” (*Ghosts*: 145); this is so even for Quinn who, already at the start of the story, has managed to have his own identity and past self deleted: “He picked up his pen and wrote his initials D.Q. (for Daniel Quinn), on the first page. It was the first time in years he has put his own name in one of his notebooks” (39).

What appears to be some kind of obsession here has its reasons: everything in the Trilogy happens through the notebooks: Stillman keeping notes about his promenades, Quinn recording his every move, Blue recording Black's, Black himself writing reports in one (131), and, of course, Fanshawe too, who literally exists mostly through his writings only— his manuscripts were transported in two big suitcases, and “together, they were as heavy as a man” (204). The implication here, then, is that the man is what is written in the manuscripts. But, in line with the postmodernist rejection of stability, which is latent through this symbol, the red notebook becomes unreliable when the moment comes to know any absolute truth: “even the red notebook, which until now has provided a detailed account of Quinn's experiences, is suspect. We cannot say for certain what

happened to Quinn during this period, for it is at this point in the story that he began to lose his grip" (111). These characters' identities blend in with the content of the notebooks, as if they could only exist through them, and in failing to continue to write their selves, the characters eventually are lost and virtually disappear. Let us take the example of Quinn at the end of *City of Glass* and his paranoia when he realizes that in his exile, the end of the red notebook is the end of his story, of himself, not only in the future but in the present too; it is the end of his identity:

> He began to weigh his words with great care, struggling to express himself as economically and clearly as possible. He regretted having wasted so many pages at the beginning of the red notebook, and in fact felt sorry that he had written about the Stillman case at all. For the case was far behind him now, and he no longer bothered to think about it. It had been a bridge to another place in his life, and now that he had crossed it, its meaning had been lost. Quinn no longer had any interest in himself. He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower. (128)

In the case of Fanshawe, the red notebook means even more, because the last notebook given to the narrator contains Fanshawe's last and best piece of writing, which apparently contains 'the everything', 'the nothing', the very essence of a new kind of literature according to the narrator, who cannot stand the clarity yet emptiness of his words. From the description of it, as we never access the primary source, we interpret that Fanshawe's text is a postmodernist novel and that it is not far from the style of the Trilogy itself:

> The words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out. I can think of no other way to express it. Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible. It is odd, then, that the feeling that survives from this notebook is one of great lucidity. (307)

Circularity, the opportunity of starting again, is a promise that the book delivers in its spiral shape, while at the same time the author denies the reader answers and certainties, only clarifying that all three stories are the same and subtly implying that, in our civilization, every individual's story is caught on the same spiral where identity is lost by default, and that literature is incapable of

reproducing or delivering truth in any degree:

> The same holds for the two books that come before it, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*. These three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about. I don't claim to have solved any problems. I am merely suggesting that a moment came when it no longer frightened me to look at what had happened. If words followed, it was only because I had no choice but to accept them, to take them upon myself and go where they wanted me to go. But that does not necessarily make the words important. I have been struggling to say goodbye to something for a long time now, and this struggle is all that really matters. The story is not in the words; it's in the struggle. (287-288)

The exhaustion of literature is manifest in both novels through the creativity of the intradiegetic authors/narrators as, inside the books, both the unnamed narrator of the Trilogy and Samson Young claim that the content of these books is entirely based on the content of someone else's production. In the Trilogy, it is Quinn's and Fanshawe's while in *London Fields*, every major character is given credit for their contribution to the fiction, as the narrator claims he is following real people and simply recording their moves in a dramatic story of which Nicola is the driving force and inspiration[25]. However, in all this there is an inherent paradox. As we have seen in the earlier chapter, Lacan suggests that identity is a linguistic construct, that the self is arrived at through language; however, the separation between language and its referent, the inevitable deferment of meaning, means that one never arrives at recognition; identity is ultimately inaccessible, and this is clearly implied by both the Trilogy and *London Fields*.

In the same way that all in the Trilogy is derivative, coming from a source or sources, in *London Fields* its narrator, who recognizes that he is incapable of creating fiction from imagination, will be inspired by Nicola Six and his friends in the Black Cross, a symbol of London's worst, and the place where the story is born: "If London's a pub and you want the whole story, then where do you go? You go to a London pub. And that single instant in the Black Cross set the whole story in motion" (14). But the token in this case is not going to be exclusively the red notebook, but the

25 We will dig into the questions of agency, polivocity, narratorship and characterization in these novels in chapter 3.

diary. In the novel, even Keith, who is almost illiterate, keeps a diary himself in his need for self-representation; and it is a red notebook, of course: “a red pad which had no title apart from *Students Note Book— Ref. 138— Punched for filing* and which, perhaps, could be notionally christened *A Darters Diary* or, more simply, *The Keith Talent Story*. Here it was that Keith logged his intimate thoughts, most, (but not all) of them darts-related” (177). Nevertheless as we can appreciate over and over in the novel, Keith is not smart enough to inspire the narrator all by himself. Nicola seems to be the only (female) character in both novels that earns a right to be active, to do things by herself and to be visible, very visible. She is a character in search of constant attention, especially from every kind of man, although she remains a mystery until and even beyond the end, but this makes her introduction all the more mysterious: “Nicola turned, wavered, and steadied herself. She dropped her burden into the trash and, embracing her shoulders with crossed hands, moved off in a hurrying walk. For perhaps five minutes of stretched time I waited. Then down I went and picked up my gift. […] When I looked up I saw half of Nicola Six, thirty feet away, split by a young tree-trunk, not hiding but staring” (26). Nicola has intentionally dropped her diary in Samson's (Asprey's) trashcan. The narrator, who encounters wonders in Nicola's diary, automatically decides to incorporate her as the protagonist of his new fiction. In the following quote, the narrator expresses his literal desire to *be* the notebook: “I'm intrigued by what you say about the death of love. Nicola, let me be your diary” (62). Nevertheless he keeps a diary as well, but it is not external to the narrative, as Fanshawe's was in Auster; but instead, we have access to it at the end of every chapter in the form of the asides. This is why we get to know a lot more than the author ever planned, as we will explain later.

As we have already suggested, from the very beginning, the intention of Nicola is suicidal but also autobiographical; she wants the story to be about her death, or ‘the death of love’ as she metaphorically names it, and she wants Samson to record her will. After all, this search for attention

focuses on drawing attention to her ultimate 'sacrifice'[26]. However, before elaborating further on disappearance, an essential factor to consider is simply where our characters live. After all, most of them belong to and are identified with and by their surroundings. As we have mentioned before, the setting for their exodus is none other than the city, more specifically New York and London, respectively, both representative of western civilization and its way of life. It is not a coincidence that the authors select these two bastions of civilization/progress/decadence in order to contextualize the not many possibilities for postmodernist escapism in literature (or in real life). The city is the result of a long process that has become part of a tradition of physical and discursive/moral construction; this is the rather more profound notion of the city as an entity that our authors want to imprint on their narratives. Hence, it is necessary to understand the significance of the city historically and, in order to do so, we are going to use mainly (but not exclusively) two very different sources: Lewis Mumford's *The City in History: Its Origins, Its transformations, and Its Prospects*, published in 1961 and de Certeau et al's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, first published in 1980. The first is a reflection on the historical expansion and significance of the city as an entity of power and identification for its dwellers, under a markedly criticizing, marxist tone, while the second is the strangest *description* of the sometimes unspoken, sometimes explicit, social conventions and labeling that subjects participate in in order to maintain the city as a sustainable social structure.

It has already become clear that the cities are utterly important in our novels, to such an extent that they even find their way into the titles: in the Trilogy, New York as the city of cities has a preeminent spot; it invites and helps these rootless characters to blend in, to melt in, to vanish. It makes them feel that it is a good place for being, or to become, lost; in fact, to dissolve: "New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling

26 We will talk more about our characters', and particularly Nicola's, wish for dissolution in chapter 3 and 4.

of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well" (3-4). This is a usual reaction to a great city, as Mumford notices; the city is often "'poeticized' by the subject", appropriated (13). However, Little argues on the one hand that, in Auster, New York symbolizes the "disunited state of modern existence. For him, the contemporary American landscape, epitomized by New York, is a scene of cultural decay, environmental degradation, personal isolation, and spiritual anomie, the kind of wasteland that T.S. Eliot, in *Gerontion*, calls 'a wilderness of mirrors' " (157): it is a *city of glass* that gives the subject his or her reflection back; it corroborates his or her position in society; but it can break down at any second too. Hence, because it is made of thin glass, Baudrillard argues that "it takes only a straw to collapse the whole system" ("Symbolic..." : 123). On the other hand, in *London Fields*, it has already collapsed and Samson Young has fled New York because: "How's America? Crazy like an X-ray laser" (78). He flies into London to fulfill his escape from his life, the weather and his illness, but he achieves none of these. For him, London blossoms as a trash flower, as that is the way he describes it often during the novel, yet still it is the perfect place for him to fulfill the culmination of his literary career:

> This is a London theme; the attempt at greenery would itself appear to attract the trash. The cylinders of wire-netting they put up to protect young trees sufficiently resemble a container of some kind, so people cram them with beer cans, used tissues, yesterday's newspapers. In times of mass disorientation and anxiety....But we can get back to that. On with the story. The girl was there: Nicola, the Murderee. (25)

Hence, we can ask ourselves: why would these characters hide in or escape to a place that is so hostile to their natures? Even seeing the evidence with his own eyes, Young chooses to look the other way and focus on the book. This is, according to sociologists and anthropologists, because there is no other place left to run to: "Those who think there are no alternatives to this urban fate, and no human way out, may prove correct in their estimate of probabilities" (Mumford: 554). Thence the city, a priori not that appealing, must build itself up from images and mirages in order to make itself appealing. This way, according to Baudrillard, the city is to be considered "trompe-l'oeil

or the enchanted simulation" ("On Seduction":154); this is an effect intensified through the eyes of the characters, who romanticize and 'poeticize' the city. The city *seems* to have existed forever; however, it is the climax of the development of human civilization and a huge step in our evolution as a species; there *man* creates a colossal web where interaction results in togetherness, or so it apppears. It apparently offers the dweller everything he or she might need, adapting to the imperatives of the times. It offers individuality: one's home, by definition, "cannot be the place of others […] Here the visitor is an intruder unless he or her has been explicitly and freely invited to enter" (de Certeau: 145); but it also offers endless social interaction which is a human need: "orality is the desire of engaging with the other" (251). Moreover, the city integrates several characteristics that help the subject feel supported, and it implies a certain sense of belonging to the System. It also relates to identification based on territory, not only on the group, which has been important for humans since we were only tribes. Conceptually, this is exactly the 'trompe-l'oeil' or 'seduction' Baudrillard refers to, clearly influencing postmodernist writers, such as Auster and Amis in their portrayal of the city as an apparent trap for the subject.

While reading de Certeau's work, one is reminded of the structure of a dictionary almost; here are the titles for some of the chapters: 'The Neighbourhood', 'Propriety', 'The Street Trade', 'Bread and Wine', 'The End of the Week', 'Shopping', 'Ghosts in the City'[27], 'Private Spaces', 'Doing-Cooking', 'The Nourishing Arts', 'Plat du Jour', 'Gesture Sequences', 'The Rules of Art' or 'A Practical Science of the Singular', just to name a few. According to this extensive piece (consisting of two volumes), every little aspect of human behavior is proven to be tacitly controlled by more or less strict social rules; therefore nothing we do can ever be spontaneous. He insists: "the practice of the neighborhood implies adhesion to a system of values and behaviours forcing each dweller to remain behind a mask playing his or her role […] the body is the primary, fundamental support for the social message proffered" (16). And behind this affirmation is the idea that our

27 This is a remarkable chapter for us in relation to *Ghosts*, as we will see towards the end of the chapter.

authors resonate with: identity is a compound of societal elements which results in a variety of *masks* more than personalities, which we will further discuss in the next two chapters. De Certeau has been criticized for his simplification of our roundness into these definitions, for representing a theater of actions more than a city, reducing everything to the spaces and contexts where an action takes place: “spatial practices are none other than repetitive gestures aimed at overcoming the alienation of all conceptual, abstract space” (Leach: 129); or his work is seen as a dehumanized documentary about us: “we are the indigenous tribe, we are the ones in question” (Terdiman: 8). But for us and our focus on how people draw identity from outer elements, it is quite valuable; let us not forget de Certeau's discourse is doing no more than applying anthropology to *us*, since it had always really been “a conversation of ‘us’ with ‘us’ about them” (Huggan: 92). He clarifies that every civilization, when looked at from the outside, is reducible to patterns, and he undermines the idea of the city as an unnatural way of life we are simply born into, the same way Mumford does: the city has been considered a “‘second nature’ to civilized man and is erroneously thought as natural too” (46).

Nevertheless, critics like Foucault, Debord, Baudrillard or du Gay openly attack the very foundations of the city as such as well. They argue that “the growth of cities on the detriment of the country life is a result of the immediate imperatives of mass consumption” (Debord, my translation: 147). Mumford argues that the city was born “away from the central concerns of nutrition and reproduction: a purpose beyond mere survival”; and that cities spread over the fields at an astonishing speed:

> [G]rain cultivation, the plow, the potter's wheel, the sailboat, the draw loom, copper metallurgy, abstract mathematics, exact astronomical observation, the calendar, writing and other modes of intelligible discourse in permanent form all came into existence at roughly the same time, around 3000 B.C. And in less than seven centuries between the invention of the clock and the unlocking of atomic power” (33).

He does not think this is positive or natural; instead, he enumerates several milestones in the

historical development of the cities that he considers to also be steps that humanity took in order to detach itself from nature: “natural home gods were replaced by those distant in the skies, sun, water, distant entities of power” (30). This allowed priesthood to arise as a very important agency center, fusing secular and sacred powers. For instance, he refers to fortresses or walls— and every protection device that the city offers— as being double-edged, because they also effectively succeed in containing the population, which is confined inside like a “permanently captive farm population” (47). In this light, the city was always a jail that did not feel like a jail, mostly because of the existence of religion as a soothing but powerful agent. However, since its beginning “law and order supplemented brute force” (53), an idea clearly influenced by the Foucauldian discourse we analyzed in chapter 1.

By expanding their frontiers, almost until overlapping one another, the cities necessarily take over nature: “parts of the earth, the productive agricultural areas tended to be isolated green islands, slowly disappearing under a sea of asphalt […] either entirely covering up the soil or reducing its value for any purpose other than more paving, piping and building; displacing living forms and enhancing only human desires and needs that could be profitable” (Mumford: 530); this is a reflection that both authors incorporate into their novels. Looking at the title, Amis's novel results from a compound of these two contrary realities: London/Fields; and we see a lot of London but none of the fields. Samson repeatedly reminds himself: “I must go to London Fields, before it's too late” (323); he means before he dies from his illness or the world ends, both of which are predicted to happen quite near in time. Other times, he realizes: “But this is London; there are no fields. Only fields of operation and observation, only fields of electromagnetic attraction and repulsion, only fields of hatred and coercion” (134). No wonder when he looks up and sees the sun punishing the earth, and both punishing the people, he can do nothing but blame this same people for not taking into account the consequences of our communal way of living in relation to the

planet that supports us. We will talk more about the environment in the last section, but let us anticipate this by sharing this character's vision:

> How would you begin? Well, we suspected that sacrifices might have to be made, later, for all the wonderful times we had with our spray cans and junk-food packaging. We knew there'd be a price. Admittedly, to you, the destruction of the ozone layer looks a bit steep. But don't forget how good it was for us: our tangy armpits, our piping hamburgers. Though maybe we could have got by with just roll-ons and Styrofoam. (156)

The city is, no doubt, a structural, constitutive part of Baudrillard's simulacrum, just as it is a very important piece in Amis and Auster's fiction. Baudrillard believes that the city does not derive from nature, but substitutes it: “Simulation is no longer that of territory, a referential being or a substance. It is generated by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (166), which means that human beings have lost their ability to connect or communicate with anything that can be considered natural or real whatsoever, because the System has replaced it leaving no margins, showing no borders. More real that the real, this simulation of the city is the only life we are allowed to live. Almost in the same terms, Debord considers the System is ubiquitous and self-justified, as we can only access representations (37). Can we infer that we are living a lie, then? Not necessarily; postmodernist thinkers are open to contradiction and paradoxes in every regard, as we have argued elsewhere: “reality emerges in the spectacle, and the spectacle *is* real” (my translation, my emphasis: 40). According to Debord, the spectacle does not take the subject anywhere but back to the spectacle, keeping people “*isolated and together*” in “pseudocollectivity” (my translation: 146). Therefore the city, as a design by the System to contain it, directly affects every level of the subject's life, intervening in its process of self-identification; this means that, in our novels, the city will be represented as the perfect place for alterity and alienation.

According to Little, the use of the city as a symbol by literary authors implies a traditional resonance within artistic representation; again it is metaliterary: witness the phrases ‘the book of the world’ and ‘the book of nature’, and how, metaphorically, the spheres of reality have always been

considered a fiction *written* by either human or divine entities. There is an early association between manipulating the environment and the act of writing: “as early as Plato, we find the comparison between the dressing of a field [, plowing,] and writing”. Throughout the early and middle Christian eras, significance was something not to be inscribed onto the earth but to be discovered in it: Nicholas of Cusa remarks that there had been saints who regarded the world as a written book *to be read*. However, soon enough, the manipulation of the surroundings allowed humans to *write* ‘reality’ instead of just reading and interpreting it (Mumford: 140-142). For Mumford then, the world turns into the “showing forth of the inner word” (142), a projection of the human psyche. Hence the recurrent use of synecdoche in our novels; the city, the notebook, and so on, become just such a manifestation of the inner self: “There was a time when I thought I could read the streets of London, I thought I could peer into the ramps and passages, into the smoky dispositions, and make some sense of things. But now I don't think I can. Either I'm losing it, or the streets are getting harder to read. Or both” (367). The simulation constitutes a scaled-down representation of our universal human experience of life and identity: “Always the simulacrum, never the real thing, that's art” (*LF*: 131)— always interpretation, never meaning, that's life.

We do put together ideas of ‘reality’ or ‘self’, but they are not grounded in the real: our inner life is reflected in or projected on our surroundings; therefore we imprint meaning onto reality and we infer meaning from nature, as well. These are ultimately the prevailing ideas in our novels, and everything our characters will ever achieve is a reflection of emptiness, of alterity. On these lines, Little interprets the references to the elements in the Trilogy, reflecting on the importance of time, space and nothingness, and how these concepts affect Auster's characters. He argues that in the book, for the ‘now-here’, there is a ‘no-where’ and characters recognize several times that they do not feel they *are* where they are; for example, Blue reflects in *Ghosts:* “Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's

there, he's not really there. Another ghost." (172). Another key concept in relation to the city and our novels is therefore the presence of 'ghosts'; in the chapter de Certeau calls 'Ghosts in the City' (133-144) (subtitled: 'An Uncanniness of the "Already There" ') he reflects on the importance of "legendary objects" in the city, or historical places and monuments (135): "The renovated 'old stones' become places for transit between the ghosts of the past and the imperatives of the present. They are passageways on the multiple frontiers that separate periods, groups, and practices" (137). If this is so, then New York represents for Auster the perfect city for intertextuality, full of bridges that interconnect his fiction to the past through space in several instances, like: "On this same spot, in the summers of 1843 and 1844, Edgar Allan Poe had spent many hours gazing out at the Hudson" (82); "Walt Whitman handset the first edition of Leaves of Grass on this street in 1855, and it was here that Henry Ward Beecher railed against slavery" (135); or "Many great *men*[28] have gone there, says Black. Abraham Lincoln, Charles Dickens" (my emphasis: 171).

However, as a result of being a ghostly place, the city transforms itself/is transformed into "a kind of anti-topos, a place of absence" —although it is a geographical and historical setting, (Little: 150). That is the extent to which Auster's New York is mutable:

> The world was outside of him, around him, before him, and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long […] On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this was all he ever asked of things: to be nowhere. New York was the nothing he had built around himself, and he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again. (4)

In this passage, the modern city is presented both as a desirable place (if you are interested in disappearing) but also as something that we no longer belong to; paradoxically, it is the place they want to escape from and the place some characters chose to escape to. As we will continue to argue throughout this paper, the city, as part of the System, is a self-built illusion from which we have become dissociated; the simulacra that it generates— consumerism, capitalism—, have gone too far

28 We will discuss in chapter 4 about the exclusive male literary heritage that Auster and Amis, among many other male writers, constantly refer to.

and for too long and all too fast, resulting in an overwhelming amount of alienation for the subject: “Really the thing about life was its incredible rapidity, with people growing up and getting old in the space of a single week. Like the planet in the twentieth century, with its fantastic *coup de vieux*” (*LF*: 36).

In both of our novels, the resulting relationship between the subject and its reality is shown as delusional, but Amis's characters do not find escape by wandering around London's streets; the weather makes it impossible, yet it is the place of escapism that the American Samson Young, the narrator, has chosen. Young will never leave London either; he does not know for certain yet, but he intuits he has come to the city to be terminated: “If London's a spider web, then where do I fit in? Maybe I'm the fly. I'm the fly” (3). He is in London willingly in order to evade his disease and his previous life, and ultimately to disappear, and yet he feels like he is trapped in a world he no longer wants to be in, as we will see in the next chapter. Similarly, every one of the characters in the Trilogy is trapped inside the System, each of them living a life in which they are deceived, that is founded on principles that they themselves do not understand. The individual is actually consumed by what he consumes in such a reality; the commodity, label or whatever symbolic entity ultimately *becomes* the individual, the appearance/simulacrum becomes reality and as a consequence we will see characters that are no more than walking illusions. But this is also the most alienating world, a world where people, like Keith, worship the image, the fake; and people like Nicola rise to the superior (in the System) category of the fantasy. However, some of our characters no longer wish to live in this type of world. For some, disappearance, dissolution or plain death is what they seek to escape from this. After all, the self, at least some notion of a subjective self, is no longer a possibility; as we will see in chapters 3 and 4, the result of this is that identities are slipping away, overlapping, transforming and disappearing, which directly affects characterization in our novels.

This is the context for Amis's and Auster's deliriums. Both authors can be considered to

represent a branch of what Baudrillard calls a 'new humanism', one that embodies 'serial conditioning' through the nihilism of consumerism. In his simulacrum, objects are used to allow fulfillment and liberation; as individuals we are only free to "project one's desires onto produced goods" ("The System..."12). However, freedom is negative for the control centers of the state, and therefore it is literally impossible. Consequently, in order to mediate our interpretation of the real, a new language is created within the System, that of brands (10-15). We do not have a choice but to take part in the System, yet its experience is not satisfactory, as "boredom and harassment and depression [have been] brought about by this daily shuttling between dormitory and workplace" (Mumford: 549). Because of all this, escapism is a craving for postmodern individuals. Our reality lacks cohesion and therefore the self is bound to "disappear into products which have a greater deal of coherence" than reality itself, certainly more coherence than any other elements in reality that used to support self-identification (Mumford: 15). In the city, or the System, we are permanently exposed to innumerable "floating signs" (Sarup: 167) and nothing is stable, which Mumford curiously enough interprets in the same way as Stillman Sr.: "Here we have the tower of Babel: each item speaks its own idiom" (15). Quinn, Blue, Fanshawe, the nameless narrator, Nicola, Guy....they all wish to disappear, but not through "the act of buying, [which] is surrounded by the halo of a 'motivation' that, one might say, precedes it before its completion: *faithfulness*" (de Certeau: 19), because they have already lost faith: "[Faith], the President's wife was already dead" (*LF*: 394). In these novels, once they lose connection with reality, the others, their selves, and the System, they will have to find a new way of escapism that is not the generally spread act of consumerism. But is it even possible? As we have argued until now, it appears not; but our characters, in their desperation, will find new ways of opposing the System, of disappearing, and it turns out that the only possible solution for them will be self-destruction as a means for empowerment, as we will explain in the next two chapters. However, for now, only one thing is

certain: one can never go back from the realization that what we called identity has turned out to be alterity and that this leaves the subject with very limited options for self-realization and a huge feeling of frustration and meaninglessness; this will be the nature of the epiphany all of our characters will experience at one point, just as Quinn does: “It had been a bridge to another place in his life, and now that he had crossed it, its meaning had been lost” (*NYT*: 128). Taking into account all the information in this chapter, the following one is devoted to characterization, agency and authorship in *The New York Trilogy* and *London Fields*. We will also be focusing on escapism as it appears in these novels; for this matter, we will refer to *Walden* and *El Quixote* as literary antecedents for the ideas portrayed by these authors within their postmodernist reinterpretation.

3. Postmodern personalities: revisiting *Walden* and *El Quixote*

In the previous chapter we inevitably went in circles, not unlike Stillman Sr. and Quinn in *City of Glass*, as every major topic we dealt with took us back to alterity as the only fate. The struggle for self-identification (and its inevitable failure) appears in Auster and Amis as a negative search that all characters are bound to embark upon, an epic song to disappearance, to an uncertain end. Having realized the forgery that reality *is*, our characters confront a difficult choice; that is, shall they rebel against the System or rather play by its rules? If the answer is to play, the subject must leave behind so-called moral limitations; this means that going along with the System has dark implications: you will most likely end up using or hurting others directly or collaterally (Jelin: 108). If the answer is not to play, then, as de Certeau notices, in the city, solitude is the only option: "When the public sphere no longer offers a place for political investment, men turn into "hermits" in the grotto of their private living space. They hibernate in their abode, seeking to limit themselves to tiny *individual* pleasures" (147). Characters like Quinn and Fanshawe, in the Trilogy, or Guy, in *London Fields*, will abandon their previous convictions and commodities in order to connect with others and their selves; they are characterized by their lack of action, an apparent *passivity.* Other characters like Nicola (*LF*) or the nameless narrator of *The Locked Room* will embrace the System and actively play by its rules in order to gain power and agency. Both sets of characters are categorically against the System, as they can never fit in and urgently desire to rebel against it; they all search for an escape and they will all suffer the consequences of trying. On one hand, the former retreat into solitude and isolation, limiting everything physical in favor of a contemplative attitude that resembles the intentions of Thoreau when he left society and wrote *Walden*: "I hear an irresistible voice which invites me away from all that" (Thoreau: 5). Meanwhile, on the other, the latter play by the concealed rules of the game, like nowadays Quixotes who, after elaborate (and sordid) adventures of their own creation, realize they were always real people wearing a mask, just

as Cervantes's character does: “Although I have positively been [crazy], I wouldn't like to confirm that truth in my death. […] I am Don Quixote de la Mancha no more, but Alonso Quijano” (my translation: 1040). Like Don Quixote, Nicola and the nameless narrator's strategy is to pretend to be someone else in life, in effect altering their relationship to the others, who they use, but as part of their desperate search for their own self to emerge. Related to this, in *City of Glass* Quinn asks himself: “He wondered why Don Quixote had not simply wanted to write books like the ones he loved— instead of living out their adventures” (98); a question we will try to satisfactorily answer throughout this, and the next chapter.

In this chapter, we are focusing on escapism and the way it is *re*interpreted under a postmodernist lens. In our novels, as we have seen, escapism is an intrinsic constituent of the postmodernist discovery of one's true self, or, more accurately, the discovery of the absence of it. For the reinterpretation (or rewriting) of previously conceived ideas and themes related to escapism in literature, our authors will specifically revisit two of their literary *fathers*[29], specifically Thoreau and Cervantes, both of whose works are celebrated pieces of the international literary canon and highly representative of their respective national literary traditions. Our authors consider, as we have seen elsewhere, that there is no escape from the System, neither physically nor mentally; characters are always reinserted in the System, with the certainty that there is no real or stable identity; therefore these characters become representative of a number of the different issues that affect postmodern personalities: “No wonder there is quite a generous pinch of schizophrenia in each postmodern personality [and there are] effects on popular morality and politics in a postmodern context” (Bauman, Z: 32). Auster and Amis therefore must reinterpret previously existing literary conventions in order to reinvent the novel, and to make both the themes and the novels more attuned to our times. The authors themselves are also trying to symbolically escape

29 Again gender is marked and emphasized; the issue of exclusively male voices in these novels as well as in literary tradition will be dealt with in chapter 4.

from the constrictions of literary tradition. They focus on creating the thickest of mists around the figure of the author and the notion of agency in their novels as well, thus highlighting metanarrativity and self-reflectivity in order to deliberately complicate and problematize the reader's understanding, and to get us lost in in a web of authors and agents in a fiction that is difficult to disentangle. They also transgress barriers in characterization; by stripping the characters and narrators of their identity, new and interesting interpretations of previous tropes, archetypes or types will be possible, as we will see later. According to Stevenson, narrators have had two options left from the 1920's on, and even more so after WWII; either to reproduce the fragmentary nature of contemporary experience or try to escape from it, often ending in "openness and uncertainty" (Stevenson: 152); this is how both our novels end. This is so to such an extent that we believe all writers/characters in the Trilogy end up losing the urge to describe reality: "I've been at it for more than a year already, and nothing could be more boring. I'm so bored that sometimes I think I'm losing my mind" (177). On the other hand, Samson never had any interest in describing reality anyway; rather, he was always interested in escaping from it: "Sometimes I wonder whether I can keep the world situation out of the novel: the crisis, now sometimes called the Crisis (they can't be *serious*)" (64). Therefore they are trying to escape reality through their writing, drowning in the notebooks and the city, choosing language over anything else because, as Debord puts it, we can never grasp both the real and its sign simultaneously (81), and the linguistic sign is less ambiguous than the real (15). As they have lost a pillar in reality, fearful that they might disappear, we can say our characters follow an unconscious motto: 'I *write*, therefore I exist'; hence, their identity originates again in the realm of alterity. But, nevertheless certain images of reality filter through the words, contaminating them with ambiguity and leaving us readers with the difficult task of interpreting and labelling the actors in these novels.

Of course, it was not always like this. As Docherty puts it, "Once upon a time, there were

novels with plots, ethnographic settings, and recognizable individuals known as characters" (38); it was a moment when identity was interesting in both political and religious terms, which he pinpoints in time as the early days of Protestantism and Capitalism. We do not mean identity is not present in official discourses anymore, but that "Identities are [known to be] constituted within not outside representation […], they relate to the invention of tradition [and] arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity" (Hall "Who needs...?": 4). Identity will most likely always be necessary for the System and probably, mankind will continue to build and be built out of discourse. And so identity, built out of discourse, exists as an ontology that is necessary for our being to have purpose, or as Cohen puts it: "imagination must then make a presentation that allows for synthesis of the type whereby an Idea of humanity is conserved" (110). At the same time, the harsh criticism of a subjective notion of identity on the part of postmodernist thinkers paradoxically frees us from all its flaws and constrictions, as our authors represent a less stable, plural and at the same time empty type of identity in these novels. As we said earlier, identities produce margins and outsiders, however, they also produce "subjectivities, which construct us as subject, who can be 'spoken' " (Hall "The Question...": 5-6). This subject has been a constitutive part of the novel from its origin; therefore our authors must incorporate this quandary into their fictions: to what extent can the literary subject resist as such if all his traditional characteristics are taken away? In Peacock's opinion, it will resist nonetheless because, no matter how consciously rejected, apparently individuality and the self emerge against all odds; for him, a character like Fanshawe "serves to emphasize only that an individual somehow hangs together despite being a mass of irresolvable contradictions. This is all anyone can know about anyone" (Peacock: 82). This way, even the 'anti-characterization' we will find in these novels produces subjects through what Docherty calls the "seduction of characterization", even those characters whose identity is based on total alterity or

Identity as Alterity

“the ‘economy of identity’ changed for ‘economy of alterity’ ” (40).

As we have said, the literary subject has been the basis for the novel as a genre, therefore, to understand how we got here, we should briefly consider its fundamental characteristics by the hand of critics like Bakhtin, who recollect the historical formation of the subject in the novel and the ‘chronotopes’ or types it has traditionally been related to. To this end he introduces the archaic genres and considers their continuing influence on the imagery of literature. There are, for him, three predecessors of the novel: Greek romance, adventure novel and biography, and each of them introduces new parameters and tropes that would be widely reproduced. Greek romance is the oldest; within the chronotope of the adventure, it represents the quest of a hero, who's on a road where representatives of all social classes are bound to coincide (243-246). Because it usually happens in an indeterminate point in time and space, the resulting world is often an “abstract-alien, since the world from which the author came and from which he is now watching is nowhere to be found” (101). Hence, there is no social critique or even relationship between the author's and the intended readers' society and the one depicted by the romance. Besides, the human connection with fate is considered external; divine intervention and chance are more active forces than free will. However, in a society that was starting to conceive the universe as geocentric and man as the supreme king of creation, this complete determinism and alienation in literature would soon evolve into new forms, more complete and more realistic, as it were with the corresponding changes with regard to the nature of identity and the depiction of character.

To illustrate these developments, Bakhtin goes on and points out how later adventure narrative would go a step further in several ways: *The Golden Ass*, by Apuleius, is taken as an example of this predecessor of the novel. Although it starts as a false autobiography, Lucius not only suffers the twists of chance through fictitious metamorphoses, but he is thrown onto the road and put in the “unprivileged” position (as an ass) of the observer and bearer of every-day life's

injustice. After this suffering, he is purified and released from the spell; therefore, “ineluctability is human; it is not mechanical or depersonalized” in this second archaic genre. That is, he maintains his identity. On top of that, not only social critique upon the author's society is present through satire but, here, “the temporal sequence is an integrated and irreversible whole” (119), unlike in the romance, as we previously discussed. The third ancient type of narrative according to Bakhtin is biography. Biography gives more importance to the chronotope of biographical time and allows different variants of itself to be born: the hero, as a token representative of mankind, must pass through the course of a whole life, just as a real man does. The chronotope of “the life course of one seeking true knowledge” (130) is introduced; thence real biographical time dissolves into the idea of achieving the epiphany. The recollection of someone's deeds as a lament for his death as a public discourse is an innovation at this point too. These accounts of real individuals' interventions in public life, though not entirely realistic, gave origin to the biographical chronotope (131-135). In all cases, the notion of identity is stable. Furthermore in relation to the disposition of the events in the chronological sense and to characterization, he notes there is no requirement for any strict order of occurrence, because the events will always be arranged in a convenient order, so that one or two main events can define the characters' attitude towards life. Every step in the development of biography progresses toward the representation of the self as a more specific entity, a hero or protagonist portrayed more as an individual than as a type. Later, after the fossilization of these conventions, satire and self-satire spread strongly, a modality that keeps on developing to our days, with examples like Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse5*; a satirical account of the author's participation in WWII where he mixes fiction and fact to create a fabulous science-fictional account.

Developing from all this, the individual, round, canonical protagonist would finally appear in the Middle Ages and would have great impact on the European novel (142-146). From all three, this biographical subject is the most criticized by postmodernist authors, who will totally undermine

biography as such: we have recollections of our protagonists' deeds but they acquire no life-changing true knowledge, no evolution, no fulfillment of their desires and, although some of our characters will die, there is no panegyric intention whatsoever. Our authors reject the trend where "human beings have come to imagine themselves as the subjects of a biography. […]. To make this intelligible to themselves[, people use] rituals of storytelling, supported by artifacts such as photographs, etc. " (Rose: 143). Our authors reflect openly, as we have said elsewhere, on how this illusion helps the characters carry on in spite of their lack of real motivations. For example, TV, especially in Amis, shapes people's expectations of life and the core of their identity: "When Nicola walked down the street, she was lit by her personal cinematographer, nothing too arty either, a single spotlight trained from the Gods" (69). This is also a theatrical figure of speech to refer to the highest part of theatre and suggests that Nicola is always a performer, always the protagonist. But this does not automatically create a stable subject; this is only another discourse of identification based on outer conventions. No matter where our characters look for inspiration, TV, tabloids, literature, or politics, the world has lost its own biographical right; reality is a simulacrum, past, present and future can interconnect no more: "the present has torn the fabric of infinite existence; it ignores history. It comes starting out from now" and therefore causality and realism are lost in real life, and even more so in art. Hence, the life these characters endure "is an enchantment in relation to itself" (Levinas: 56), something which Blue realizes in *Ghosts*: "perhaps a moment of real contact would break the spell" (143). For characters who are farther from the need of representation through things, there will be nothing external to reassure them of their identity; note, for example, what Blue finds in Black's room: "The room is much as he imagined it would be, though perhaps even more austere. Nothing on the walls, for example, which surprises him a little, since he always thought there would be a picture or two, an image of some kind just to break monotony, a nature scene perhaps, or else a portrait of someone Black might once have loved" (181). As we see, there

is nothing that allows Blue to get to know just who this other is; nothing to identify him or to identify him with.

Rather than being identifiable this way, our characters are more influenced by the previous romance and adventure chronotopes, albeit with a postmodernist twist, while the one related to the stable concept of autobiography (the one that extensively influences Realism) is rejected. For example, Guy Clinch is described as a modern version of a knight:

> GUY CLINCH WAS a good guy— or a nice one, anyway. He wanted for nothing and lacked everything. He had a tremendous amount of money, excellent health, handsomeness, height, capriciously original mind; and he was lifeless. He was wide open. Guy possessed, in Hope Clinch, a wife who was intelligent, efficient (the house was a masterpiece), brightly American (and rich); and then there was the indubitable vigour of the child... But when he woke up in the morning there was— there was no life. There was only lifelessness. (27)

As we can gather from this description, which is the beginning of chapter 3, "The Foil", Guy seems to be perfect for society's standards; according to business guru Tom Peters: “contemporary organizational reform accords ontological priority to a particular category of person – the ‘business person’ or ‘entrepreneur’ ”; therefore, logically, a white male is more likely to become successful or, as Weber also calls it, he is by definition “the dominant type” (Dugay: 152). Nevertheless our modern knight is also obsolete and he is bound to be torn apart by virtually everybody he interacts with in *London Fields*. Like Cervantes, Amis believes the “chivalry” code is no longer a viable option in society as it is; therefore he will ridicule Guy Clinch as the ‘ass’ in this story[30]. Moreover, the strangeness of the world depicted is also in a way romance-inspired; because what we are experiencing are but simulacra, the world is literally “nowhere to be seen”, which is paradoxical again because the settings are modern New York and London: in “the tradition of Joyce and the modernist artificers, we find the date, so that the work, with all its indeterminate self-reflection, all its postmodern ‘floating signifiers’ is positioned at a concrete point of time, place, and authorship,

30 In chapter 4, there is a quote by Amis where he expresses his thoughts on this kind of masculinity (159).

signed, as it were, and affirmed as a crafted artefact" (Lavender: 230). In other words, by insisting on their existence in real life, the effect the authors create is the exact opposite, one of artificiality.

As we have been arguing throughout this paper, our authors imply social critique as well as humor by distorting reality so much; at this point, both chronotopes, romance and adventure, are mixed to bring this about: in his mind, Guy Clinch is a knight searching for his one true love but in real life, Nicola is no Dulcinea and Guy is being put in the position of the ass: he is a real Quixote. Not only are all social classes bound to be found on the journey, but also our characters will lose any position of privilege they ever had in society: a character like Guy Clinch will spend his time more and more with the Black Cross gang, degrading himself to a Sancho Panza position in relation to Keith; or a quite successful writer such as Quinn will change into a homeless man in a matter of days with neither regrets nor hesitation. If they ever had any social status, these characters are going to lose it in order to embark on this journey: Quinn, Blue, Fanshawe, the nameless narrator, Young, Keith or Guy, they all *fall* in these novels. In fact, Nicola is a quixotic character herself, as we will see, but she does not fall in the same way; although she does die, that is exactly her purpose from the very beginning, so we must assume that she is in control of her destiny (in chapter 4, we will discuss whether Nicola can be considered to exercise real agency throughout the novel).

From the adventure chronotope, both authors take the perspective of the quest in search of true knowledge, but our protagonists will not be rewarded with an epiphany, nor will they be able to break 'free from the spell' as Apuleius did. On their quests, both in the Trilogy and *London Fields*, we have a series of protagonists who turn into detectives in search of true information, in order to solve a mystery that will be deceiving. However, critics such as Dennis Porter or Stefano Tani, believe that these are the characteristics of a 'genre' considered "antidetective", "metaphysical" or "postmodern" detective fiction (O'Gorman 44); this type of narrative usually is more about the "process of reading" than about the actual research of the PI. Hence, these stories have multiple

interpretations, they refuse to restore order, and reject the monopoly of the truth by undermining any source of authority, including the reader (Peacock: 44-45); as Szegedy-Maszák points out, this is "the false teleology of ironic works, and the reader's desire will not be satisfied" (55). Similarly, O'Gorman also notes that the authors use this device in order to compare detective fiction with historical writing; they both require coherence, congruence and verisimilitude, retracing and ultimately recovering the past (44-45): "This [traditional] model of detective fiction as history presupposes the existence of one prior, correct version of the past, at which it is possible to arrive by a careful process of recovery, and to which it is imperative to owe allegiance" (20). In our novels, our detective characters do recognize this logical similitude, as they appreciate how similar what they are doing is to paleontology: for example, in *City of Glass*, Stillman "made Quinn think of an archaeologist inspecting a shard at some prehistoric ruin" (59); and, in *London Fields*, the narrator directly relates it to the process of reading; he imagines how the readers of the future, the ones remaining after the cataclysm, will uncover the past, the fossils being the characters themselves: "dinosaurs would we be exhumed (the cheat, the foil, the murderee), would we be reconstructed and remembered by the rat, the roach, the triumphal virus?" (204). However, our detectives are unable to gain access to the past first hand; by definition, there will always be the intervention of an 'author' to some extent as historian, which Little believes postmodernist writers use "in order to draw attention to the blindness that always accompanies the insight of a private eye/I" (138).

Accordingly, all open cases are misleading in our novels; we can only speculate but can never assume our interpretations are complete or *true*; nevertheless, we do have clues that we can put together in order to give coherence to the apparent mess of voices, points of view and nothingness in these novels. During this chapter and the next, we will collect some hints that (we like to think) have been left for us in the novels to try and solve these cases as detectives ourselves;

but these are our only certainties: Quinn never solves the Stillman case, neither does Blue, nor does the narrator get real satisfaction from finding Fanshawe, or what's left of him. For Young the case is similar; he will realize that, during his whole time in England, neither the book nor his life have been under his control at all (as it had first appeared to be), and he will be forced to write (and perform) an unexpected final scene. Our characters, in their reports, usually feel their own words escape from the paper; as they strive towards a realistic account they do not quite capture anything at all: "It is as though his words, instead of drawing out the facts and making them sit palpably in the world, have induced them to disappear. This has never happened to Blue before" (*NYT*: 145). For Samson Young, following the characters is a "mission" (452), but London is a trap and he will not fulfill his prospects as he wanted; the plot does not quite go the way he planned it: "I couldn't stop them, I don't think, even if I wanted to" (1).

Because of all this, epiphanies, as in revelations of the truth, in our novels are either nonexistent or take the characters to a dead-end street[31], which brings us to the last characteristic Bakhtin considers, that is, the question of fate: ineluctability is presented as probably a mixture of mechanical destiny, chance, and human intervention in our novels; but it is never to be under control, just as with identity. According to Peacock, in Auster's universe "life's only certainty is chance" (11), but we believe that chance is the starter of the action only superficially; in the Trilogy, the setting is realistic, but it is a fact that the events that happen are too strange to happen only by chance; it is on the reader's part to find some clues that there is an apparent greater scheme that the characters are drawn into and within which they play their part. For example, Quinn's implication in the Stillman case is apparently fortuitous:

> It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not. Much later, when he was able think about the things that happened to him, he would conclude that nothing

31 "Dead-End Street" is the name of chapter 4 in *LF*, and it is mostly about Keith and his first encounter with Nicola at her house.

> was real except chance. But that was much later. In the beginning, there was simply the event and its consequences. Whether it might have turned out differently, or it was all predetermined with the first word that came from the stranger's mouth, is not the question. (1)

However, although it never occurs to Quinn that he must have been set up (because all those mishaps do seem arbitrary and unconnected to him), and although he sometimes even turns to the concept of 'fate' to justify his position (108), just like Blue (183), that is only possible until he learns, like Young in *London Fields*, that he is being somehow framed into this kind of life.

In spite of all this, for now, we will assume that apparently chance and coincidence trigger the plot at all times, although we will see later in the chapter that Auster leaves other interpretations open —even for Quinn's situation, the most bizarre and seemingly purposeless of all of the plots. Moving on to Amis in this regard, the setting is 'futuristic' and apocalyptic, though, more in tune with science fiction, and there is nothing left to chance; everything is causal and the present state of affairs is a consequence of human behavior. Even the dropping of Nicola's diary was absolutely intentional and so will be the concatenation of events it will start. So, can Nicola predict the future?: "She always knew what was going to happen next (not all the time, the gift was not obsessively consulted), and not every little detail; but she always knew what was going to happen next" (15-16)[32]. Nevertheless, in our opinion, Nicola is not a psychic at all; as we will see in chapter 4, she can only predict her own behavior and people's reactions throughout the novel because she is the most manipulative of women, and knows a lot, among other things, about psychology (particularly male). By the end of the chapter we will argue that there seems to be a greater plan also in *London Fields*; there is a larger *design* over Auster's absolute chance and Amis's total determinism, a hidden

32 There are many instances in the novel that make us think that Nicola's 'gift' represents nothing but her expectations and plans; for instance: "Nicola was an only child and knew she always would be" (16); she knows so because she plans to be a very complicated child. In the following passages, Nicola plans how she wants her day to be; more than being able to tell the future, she is able to manipulate the outcome of every situation on demand:

> Nicola stands on the crest of a slope with her new friend, pretty Dominique. And of course Nicola knows what is going to happen next: the girl will hesitate or stumble: reaching out to steady her, Nicola will accidentally propel her playmate downwards, down into the rocks and the briars. She will then have to run and shout, and drive in silence somewhere, and sit on the hospital bench swinging her feet and listlessly asking for ice-cream. And so it proves. (16)

force that pushes the plots to their extreme.

Let us return to the notion of the subject in the novel, which, as we have pointed out, developed over time to detach itself from being based solely on stereotypes. The novel has acquired strength as a very popular genre, always reinventing itself, reflecting the constant interest of novelists to incorporate new trends from every discipline to better capture the complexity of the experience of life, as Bakhtin and Docherty have noted. But Docherty, who focuses more on modernist writers, goes further by stating that the overwhelming impact of psychology as a discipline on the novel has had characters coming back to their archetypal nature (38). As Rose argues: “The psy disciplines, partly as a consequence of their heterogeneity and lack of a single paradigm, have acquired a peculiar penetrative capacity in relation to practices for the conduct of conduct. They have been able to supply a whole variety of models of selfhood and recipes for action in relation to the government of persons” (139). Thence, although the basis for psychology is hardly universal, it has managed to successfully position itself as the main agent in the categorization of different kinds of people, reducing us humans, and not only characters, to types; this is done by using labels that evidently come from without: “We find ourselves bound to a seemingly obsessional iteration of a slim repertoire of othering tropes” (Terdiman: 9). In Amis's novel the labeling of these types is not subtle; the narrator very early enumerates the stereotypes he is going to use in his book, only because, in his opinion, he just found them acting their roles in real life. The narrator is also able to classify the genre of the story that is about to happen because he happily sees himself able to confirm beforehand that the story will have all the necessary ingredients: “This is the story of a murder. It hasn't happened yet. But it will. (It had better). I know the murderer, I know the murderee. I know the means. I know who will be the foil, the fool, the poor foal also utterly destroyed. [...]A really snappy thriller. Original, too, in its way. Not a whodunit. More a whydoit” (1-3). Fortunately for us and unfortunately for him, neither the story

nor the characters will satisfy Samson's first categorization, mostly because of the intervention of Nicola as an actress incarnating a whole variety of types, as we will analyze deeper in chapter 4. As we have seen, postmodernist narrative, in sum, only shows more transparently the same problems dealing with identity that it always had, but calling into question previous intents of representing the whole of reality or identity (Docherty: 38-39). These authors are able to take these archetypes as their literary inheritance and transform them into the empty postmodern types we will next see; they are ready to destroy the presumptions that the self is a stable concept in order to balance with the actual instability of the referent: "Where the real world turns into mere images, those mere images turn into real beings and effective motivations for a hypnotic behavior" (Debord, my translation: 43).

As it has already been suggested, and according to many critics, the interpretative techniques of modern psychology have made it successfully into the novel. In her article about the constitution of identity after the 70's, Wheeler states that the subject in fiction is "part a result of the influence of psychological writing" (15), as psychology from its birth presents a new source for different and yet real experiences of life in subsequent, sometimes unconnected, layers of thought; therefore it challenges literature and art in general to "turn inward and probe to the lower levels of consciousness for its material" (Mendilow: 38), and this is very constructive at the beginning because it enriches the modernist novel "through stream of consciousness, recovered memory and loops in time" (Stevenson: 152). Wheeler also points to some very influential works that have experimented with the discoveries of psychology in order to present a new point of view in the novel, for example, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide*, which brought to the page a character with a double personality as a result of a psychiatric condition. Writers such as Stein, Joyce, Barnes or Woolf deeply experimented with psychological perceptions in their fictions, a modernist tendency that continued to develop with Roth, Nabokov, Heller, Marguerite Young, Ann Quin or Susan Sontag,

who present the self as a "network of values, attitudes or acts— with no substance (or soul) behind it, no essence underneath the surface" (Wheeler: 15). As we have said before, Amis and Auster, as their direct successors, emulate modernist fragmentation on all the levels of narrative, but they are fully aware that, by incorporating the discourse of psychology the unconscious presents itself as the deepest and the highest part of agency in the subject through "the complex operations by which we internalize the imperatives and the rules which come from agencies of society" (Ricoeur "The Question...": 238); and that, together with the mechanical explanation of every detail of our everyday life, as presented in de Certeau's *The Practice...*, leaves little room for free will in their literary universes.

Psychology, if anything, proves "consciousness is cut off from its own sense by an impediment it can neither direct nor know [...]: the dynamism of repression, in placing the unconscious beyond our reach, requires an interpretive technique adapted to the distortions and displacements which are better illustrated by dream work and the work of neurosis" (Ricoeur: 238). Therefore it not only seems that the unconscious governs the subject's free will but it is also unreachable except through a discourse that is in accord with its obscurity; the analyst is always re-interpreting the psyche, imposing order against the anarchy of thought, while identity is made to appear too stable and conflict-free to correspond to the "uncertainty, fluidity, and discontinuity" of adulthood (Wurgaft: 74). Considering all this, identity must be like a text, and "the meaning or signification of the text is not necessarily enunciated by the text itself; one is forced to recognize that its thematization can only be produced by the reader" (Haidu: 674). This metaphorical reader is the analyst, who can only interpret the subject's psyche in his or her own subjectivity. Moreover, as we have commented before, modern psychologists as influential as Lacan will insist on the notion that a "stable ego is illusory", as it is, in its totality, built on the image that others in general have of us, particularly the image that we *think* they have of us (Sarup 12-13). Hence, even psychology

pushes identity out of the realm of the conceivable, positing alterity as the agency center of human brains. Hence, for Wurgaft it "lives at the center of the individual, whom he governs in its own way, even if it has dethroned the ego" (135); and for Baudrillard, psychoanalysis "applies the principle of reality to the unconscious, thus transforming it into another simulacrum model" (122).

Undoubtedly conscious of all this, Auster and Amis are builders of new types of characters, ones that capture the spirit of our times in postmodernist literature, and they confront a difficult matter because it is known what type of categorization the psy disciplines have implanted and that has become well rooted in society; that of metal illnesses. Accordingly, Auster and Amis will capture a society that is mentally ill; as we saw in chapter 1, they believe even countries as well as people go insane just in the same way: "Some had been insane all their lives, and some had gone insane and then gotten better again and then gone insane again" (*LF*: 367). Something like this is brought about by what individuals and societies have come to believe in (or are made to believe in by the media), or have ceased to believe in. Gabel, for example, establishes a very strong parallelism between ideology and schizophrenia (Debord 173), and so we will find characters, such as Stillman Sr. who want to reinstall sense in the System, which he calls the world: "[...] The Tower of Babel stands as the last image before the true beginning of the world" (*NYT*: 43), although we must remember that the man is insane, and so is every character with an ideology in these novels. In the same way, Debord talks about the disassociation and catatonia that conducts the subject to 'spectacular autism'; with no real interlocutors outside, our characters turn within in search of safety and belonging: "This is a deception. We exist for ourselves, perhaps, and at times we even have a glimmer of who we are, but in the end we can never be sure, and as our lives go on, we become more and more opaque to ourselves, more and more aware of our own incoherence. No one can cross the boundary into another—for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself" (*NYT*: 243). About Amis, critics say he displays a "hallucinogenic atmosphere" (Peacock: 61), while

he himself has to say this about his protagonist in a later novel, *Money*: “[Self] embodies confidence, which is at last in my novels identified as a psychopathic state” (Tredell: 62). Therefore, although direct criticism on psychology as such is not apparent in our novels, Amis does mock the modern obsession for psychology as a means of escapism, as a savior; he does so particularly through the Clinch family. Apart from several therapists and counsellors to save their marriage, they inundate their home with specialists on children's behavior for their son Marmaduke, who is portrayed as a child devil who abuses his father: “During these struggles, Marmaduke's lifelong enthusiasm for hurting his father —and, within that, his specialization in hurting his father's genitals — was given play only twice. A flying headbutt to the testicles, and an unrestrained blow with a blunt instrument (a toy grenade-launcher) to the sensitive tip” (363). When the psychologists are unable to catalog or control the child's behavior, Guy confronts what might be a hard truth: “But I prefer Freud. I'd rather Marmaduke didn't like me for Freudian reasons. I don't like him just not liking me because he doesn't *like* me” (155); this proves how people find comfort in the labels of psychology more than in its ability to solve their problems.

In order to innovate in characterization, our authors are involved in a dialogue with tradition throughout both novels by incorporating the ‘ghosts’ of previous trends in the form of traditional archetypes that are reinterpreted. One model that we have considered basic (embodied by masculine characters only) is ‘the pilgrim’, an archaic protagonist in fiction that our authors will deconstruct in their novels because “living one's life as a pilgrimage is no longer the kind of ethical wisdom revealed to, or initiated by, the chosen and the righteous” (Bauman Z: 21). This means that we can take the religious character of actual pilgrims out of the equation in order to represent a quest that is more personal, towards one's own identity and individuality. In his article "From Pilgrim to Tourist …", Bauman chooses the pilgrim as a referent and symbol for the historical development of identity; he believes that although impelled by religion in the first place, pilgrims had a special

capacity no one else in the System had: they would leave all the commodities of life in society behind in order to commence a journey of self-recognition, far from all the city's ‘distractions’ or ‘seductions’ that Baudrillard, Debord or Mumford talk about. In their self-inflicted odyssey, always on the move, pilgrims will not have a dwelling place and they can settle for very little in this, and every other regard. Bauman says the perfect place for pilgrims is the desert, as it was for Christian hermits, “a land not yet sliced into places and for that reason [...] the place for self-creation”. (Auster)ity is the key for the pilgrim's successful escape from the constraints of the world, but to an extent that the System does not like and does not allow anymore, so much so that Bauman argues that their tendency to austerity constitutes the main reason why the church resented early hermits and eventually channeled them into monastic life, characterized by rules and supervision. This is so because as pilgrims freed themselves from material things they were in fact free (Bauman Z: 20-21). In the same way, Protestants were less inclined to the material and they were rejected by other Christians in Europe because, like Stillman Sr., they wanted to metaphorically bring “the desert to the world” in the form of austerity (Bauman Z: 21). But Stillman is not the focus of our attention as he is not a real pilgrim; his mission goes beyond himself alone: he wants to change language and therefore society to make it heaven on earth, to bring back the Tower of Babel. Like Bauman's pilgrims, our pilgrim-like characters pursue an isolated, one-person pilgrimage with no solid purpose but disappearance from the world: “To be inside that music, to be drawn into the circle of its repetitions: perhaps that is a place where one could finally disappear” (*NYT*: 107).

As it is well-known, the US arose from pilgrimage more than any other modern society; the rejected Puritans found a new kind of desert in the wilderness of America, a new kind of adventure for which they are called Pioneers. For the characters in the Trilogy, pure American as they are, there is a sentimental resonance to the concept, a possibility of freedom. They can track their national roots as far as conquistadors, and they find themselves inclined to romanticize these types

of historical personalities: “Fanshawe got his apartment in Columbus street, he found the name appealing” (304); or the fact that he enjoys so much Raleigh's *History of the World* and *The Journeys of Cabeza de Vaca*, because what he wanted to do in literature and life was to “to haunt the edges of things” (210). A Pilgrimage is for them the only beginning of history and probably the only solution, or end, to it; but notice how they see no real possibility of really quitting society:

> What if he just simply left? What if he stood up and went to the door, and walked away from the whole business? He ponders this thought for a while, testing it out in his mind, and little by little he begins to tremble, overcome by terror and happiness, like a slave stumbling onto a vision of his own freedom. He imagines himself somewhere else, far away from here, walking through the woods and swinging an ax over his shoulder. Alone and free, his own man at last. He would build his life from the bottom up, an exile, a pioneer, a pilgrim in the new world, but that's as far as he gets. (183)

Blue is inspired by the Founding *Fathers* and imagines he can break free from the case, the city and society altogether, which inevitably links with *Walden* as well, as we will soon develop. This is a hope that is recurrent throughout the Trilogy; (auster)ity and asceticism are praised and practiced by all three (four?)[33] main characters, who force themselves to live on only what they genuinely need: For example, in the case of Quinn, “It turned out not to be much— and as it happened, less and less as time went on” (112).

These characters look for disconnection, for purity, for a spiritual experience of reality, but as there is no more uncharted land on the planet to be explored/conquered anymore, there is nowhere physical to go; moreover identity is not a ‘place to go’ either, as all the characters will eventually learn; this is the origin of Blue's fears and anxieties regarding the possibility of leaving, although he will later progressively retreat from society as a way of escapism. Quinn, on the other hand, is the one character that is further from his identity from the beginning, due to the loss of his wife and child, who previously anchored him on earth (in society). He refuses to use his own name anymore and he has absolutely no social life —“he had managed to outlive himself” (5); Quinn's

33 There are three main characters as there are three stories: Quinn and Blue are the clear protagonists of the first two stories, but in the third story both the narrator and Fanshawe can be considered the protagonist, as we will see later in the chapter when we focus on the narrators.

transformation through pilgrimage will therefore be even more extreme, as we will see later. There is also a character in *London Fields* that longs to leave his historical wealth and his physical reality behind to be a pilgrim in search for love, for real life; that is Guy Clinch, a man secretly fascinated by love and life: "He thought of his thoughts as explorers, in virgin territory" (216); and also by poverty and austerity, for taking you closer to love and life: "And this is why Guy honoured [Keith] and pitied him and admired him and envied him (and, he sometimes thought, even vaguely *fancied* him): because he was poor" (91). Like the Trilogy's characters, Guy neglects his physical appearance and care while other characters insist on his evident deterioration: "You look like death" (212); to that, he repeatedly asserts "he never felt more alive" (142) and that is why his wife correctly concludes: "You know what you look like? A hermit" (214).

According to Bauman, pilgrims, although detached from their material possessions and their geographical and family roots, are still able to maintain their own version of a stable identity clear because the path taken is their constant; like Parmenides, they focus on the riverbed and not the water: "one can look back at the footprints left in the sand and see them as a road", as a past leading to a future, "a *progress towards*" or "coming *closer to*" that gives continuity and purpose; it is teleological. The world for the pilgrim and *his* subjectivity evolve together and on the move; "meaning and identity can only exist as projects" (21-22); therefore his happiness rests on the search, not actual achievement. Auster's and Amis's pilgrims walk with a purpose only when acting as detectives; they pursue their counterparts obsessively, recording their every move: Quinn is Stillman's shadow, Blue follows Black, the narrator stalks Fanshawe, and Young intrudes into every sphere of Nicola's, Keith's and Guy's lives in order to record the events in reality, that is the only trace they will be able to look back to: "I write these words to keep my hand steady. And because nothing means anything unless I write it down. There's some kind of absolute obligation here" (*LF*: 436). When following Stillman, Quinn eventually gets tired of following the man without figuring a

purpose to his apparent lack of direction, up until he connects the dots in the map and realizes "How much better it was to believe that all his steps were actually to some purpose" (61); but this is a postmodernist kind of pilgrimage, so it is also open to reconsideration: "He had to admit that nothing was sure: it could well have been meaningless" (69). In fact, even actual steps on the ground are misleading because in the Trilogy, all the threads left to be followed are usually there in order to confuse both characters and readers: "lt is a windless morning, so still that he can hear the snow falling on the branches of the trees. No one else is about, and Black's shoes have made a perfect set of tracks on the white pavement. Blue follows the tracks around the corner and then sees Black ambling down the next street, as if enjoying the weather" (138). This is a false trace, like the one Nicola left when throwing her diary away; Black wants Blue to follow him, to write about him, so he is being tricked into following somebody that wants to be followed. This takes us back to Derrida's idea of *différance*, when he recognizes that although there is a "trace" left from the other, the other itself will never be present (Hägglund: 43); the other must come as the "no longer" or "not yet" creating "spectrality, ghosts" (Hägglund: 47). This also relates to Lacan's reflection as to how important is the view of others for the self to actually exist, which Blue finally proves right: "He needs my eyes looking at him. He needs me to prove he's alive" (178); or as the narrator says about the relationship of Keith with Nicola: "he wanted her for her belief in him, because she was the other world, and if she said that Keith was real then the other world will say it too" (446). In spite of the steps from others on the ground, the trace of their presence might always be misleading, as: "how can identity be grounded without presence?" (Hägglund: 43).

"For the pilgrim, only streets make sense, not the houses— houses tempt one to rest and relax, to forget about the destination" (Bauman, Z: 20); just as Debord, Baudrillard, Mumford, and other authors say, pilgrims want to escape from this seduction of human shelter. Moreover, in the Trilogy and *London Fields* the pilgrimage happens in the streets as well. In an existential

pilgrimage, our pilgrims intend to leave behind their attachment to their previous identities by melting in with the city. Because real life is simulation, the city has no limits, as Guy realizes in *London Fields*, “there *was* no edge. Only life, more life” (454). Therefore, in the city it is easy for our characters to wander without a destination, which is a way of exercising their freedom in an over-organized society: “More than anything else, however, what he liked to do is walk. Nearly every day, rain or shine, hot or cold, he would leave his apartment to walk through the city— never really going anywhere, but simply going wherever his legs happened to take him” (3). We know the streets of Amis's London are a far more dangerous place to be, not only because of the harmful climatic conditions, but because the Black Cross and its surroundings are full of dangerous people too. In fact, Guy Clinch's pilgrimage is comparable to Dante's descent to hell, because it comes with the fear of leaving the most comfortable social position. In his search for liberation, identification and real love, Guy wants to reconnoiter the life that the lower classes live, which seems for him closer to reality than his own:

> Increasingly, Guy stopped going in [to work] and just walked the streets instead. Fear was his guide. Like all the others on the crescent Guy's house stood aloof from the road, which was all very well, which was all very fine and large; but fear had him go where the shops and flats jostled fascinatedly over the street like a crowd round a bearpit, with slotgame parlours, disastrous beaneries, soup queues, army hostels, with life set out on barrows, on pingpong tables, on decapitated Portakabins— the voodoo and the hunger, the dreadlocks and dreadnoughts, the Keiths and Kaths of the Portobello Road. Naturally Guy had been here before, in search of a corn-fed chicken or bag of Nicaraguan coffee. But now he was looking for the thing itself. (35)

In this description, furthermore, we can see him as a symbol of white supremacy and also the phenomenon of gentrification of lower class neighborhoods by the elite, as Guy had in fact only been here before for the intercultural commercial advantages represented by the chicken and the coffee (another reference to post-imperialism and cultural appropriation). However, Guy is now here for the people, for the Other; he wants to experience the life of racial minorities and low class people in London to give his own life a meaning.

From all this, it should be clear that the basic characteristic of the pilgrimage, which is the attainment of a better understanding of oneself and others by abandoning all earthly bonds and having the opportunity of coming back to civilization afterwards is not a realistic mission in the current System, and Bauman acknowledges this in his article by presenting the three natural evolutions of the pilgrim in postmodernity. The available possibilities for those who want to emulate the original liberating purpose of a pilgrimage are ‘the vagabond’, ‘the tourist’ and ‘the player’ (28-32). Nevertheless, “They all favour and promote a distance between the individual and the Other and cast the Other primarily as the object of aesthetic, not moral, evaluation; as a matter of taste, not responsibility” (33). However, in our authors' universes, the Tourist has little future because tourists never fully undergo the process of leaving their stable home behind; they plan their movements and keep it a safe adventure: “the strange is tame, and no longer frightens” (29); therefore they visit but the surface (the advertised part of their destination) before they are back in the safety of identity and self-recognition, which is even reinvigorated by the contemplation of the other (29-30). However, in our novels, *no one* is able to transgress the limits of propriety and then be able to go back to sanity or life as they used to know it, although we will deal with the vagabond and the player only when we can see them clearly in our characters. For example, we can recall the moment in *London Fields* when Guy first ‘intrudes’ in the Black Cross, where he is practically instantly harassed by Keith: “he *had* to step forward to deal with the royal tourist” (24); if he were a tourist, Guy would not have been able to come back to the Black Cross after this first contact, but he is on a larger mission, as we have said.

It is not only in *London Fields* that we can see someone like Guy captivated by, amongst other things lacking in his life, the conditions of poverty; he also shares this fascination with the characters in the Trilogy. The first time Quinn writes about something that is not the case he is working on, when he is starting to totally disconnect from reality, he gives in to a romantic

description of the poor, as if he has seen them on the street for the first time: “Today, as never before: the tramps, the down-and-outs, the shopping-bag ladies, the drifters and drunks. They range from merely destitute to the wretchedly broken. Wherever you turn, they are there, in good neighbourhoods and bad” (106). For Quinn, as for Guy, there is an intrinsic feeling of self-identification with the homeless: “for every soul lost in this particular hell, there are several others locked inside madness— unable to exit to the world that stands at the threshold of their bodies. Even though they seem to be there, they cannot be counted as present” (107). Here, and as we have read elsewhere, invisibility appears as a desirable quality for our characters, as an empowering strategy against the machinery of society. What these characters aspire for is the actual freedom and anonymity they see in the homeless, as we will continue to explain.

According to Zygmunt Bauman the System has been fighting against this attractive (to our characters) condition of masterlessness that characterizes vagabonds. Society wants no outcasts, no individuals out of control, yet the vagabonds' movements are unpredictable, errant; they move bit by bit and with no apparent logic or destination. They are always a stranger in the place they are at and they have no roots (29), something that Quinn unconsciously brings up by quoting Baudelaire at the end of his digression on homelessness (and we say unconsciously because he still does not know at this point that he will be one of the vagabonds soon): “It seems to me that I will always be happy in the place where I am not[34]. Or, more bluntly: wherever I am not is the place where I am myself. Or else, taking the bull by the horns: Anywhere out of the world” (108). Quinn had an identity crisis before, but he is gradually reaching Bauman's conclusion; maybe the most powerful move to make is to *become* homeless; therefore, with the excuse of the case, he installs himself in an alley across the street from Stillman Jr.'s apartment for months. But the Stillmans will not show up, which triggers his disconnection from the case and from the world. He engages then in seemingly the most peaceful and happy passages of the whole Trilogy, which are Quinn's

34 Line 5 from Baudelaire's "Anywhere out of This World", included in the collection of poems *Paris Spleen*.

descriptions of the weather; when he is utterly isolated with nothing but his thoughts, Quinn for the first time immerses himself in what seems for him real life indeed:

> He spent many hours looking up at the sky. From his position at the back of the alley, wedged in between the bin and the wall, there were few other things to see, and as the days passed he began to take pleasure in the world overhead. He saw that, above all, the sky was never still. […] Clouds, too, introduced the matter of color, and there was a wide range to contend with, spanning from black to white, with an inanity of grays between. These all had to be investigated, measured, and deciphered. On top of this. there were the pastels that formed whenever the sun and the clouds interacted at certain times of day. The spectrum of variables was immense, the result depending on the temperatures of the different atmosphere levels, the types of clouds present in the sky, and where the sun happened to be at that particular moment. From all this came the reds and pinks that Quinn liked so much, the purples and vermilion, the oranges and lavenders, the golds and feathery persimmons. Nothing lasted for long. The colors would soon disperse, merging with others and moving on or fading as the night appeared. (114-115)

The beauty of these passages is revolting; he describes the scene just like impressionist paintings, but it is nevertheless grotesque, particularly because we know this description is being literally made from a dumpster, where Quinn is now installed. The concept of the grotesque gets reinterpreted here, this is due to a certain incongruity between the decadence of his physical situation, the pointlessness or absurdity of his vigilance and the hyperbolic romanticism of the descriptions of what he observes. He convinces himself this is the closest to an epiphany whose origin is nature (without nature). Of course, the most preeminent literary referent for such a contemplation of nature, a connection that will grow more and more apparent during the novel, is Thoreau's *Walden*. Henry David Thoreau, a Concord MA essayist, believed our existence was mediated too much by human constructs and advocated for a life of freedom (non-servitude) and wildness (as early as the 1850's!). For that purpose, he moved into the woods and built himself a shelter by Walden Pond, today a state reservation where Thoreau's Walden Bed & Breakfast and Thoreau Cabin Site stand for all *tourists* to enjoy[35].

While still untouched by men, Walden Pond and the life in it could bring the author to the

35 Information gathered from Google Maps.

deepest thoughts upon what our nature might really be. He once and again argues about how humans should be in connection with the earth in order to live the life they are supposed to (biologically and spiritually):

> The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature— of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter— such health, such cheer, they afford forever! and such sympathy have they ever with our race, that all Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and the winds would sigh humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve. Shall l not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself? (67)

Thoreau is so immersed in nature that he can communicate with, or at least understand, the language of the wind and the rain. However, Quinn is not that lucky; he is *unable* to leave the city because there is nowhere to go. But nevertheless, even from a position where he cannot directly experience nature, the sky, as a constant reminder of it, is enough for him to become aware, as Thoreau did, that we are insignificant in a whole natural universe we *are ignoring*:

> Almost always there was a wind to hasten these events. From where he sat in the alley, Quinn could rarely feel it, but by watching its effect on the clouds, he could gauge its intensity and the nature of the air it carried. One by one, all weathers passed over his head, from sunshine to storms, from gloom to radiance. There were the dawns and dusks to observe, the midday transformations, the early evenings, the nights. Even in its blackness, the sky did not rest. Clouds drifted through the dark, the moon was forever in a different form, the wind continued to blow. Sometimes a star even settled into Quinn's patch of sky and as he looked up he would wonder if it was still there, or if it had not burned out long ago. (114-115)

Clearly, there are huge differences between the world of Thoreau and the world of Thoreau's Bed & Breakfast, though. Quinn is captive in the city; he is not *really* free from the System because there is no nature to turn to. In connection with this, here we must see the clear contrast with Amis's descriptions of the London sky; on the verge of collapse, the sky shows there is no comfort to be sought outside of the System anymore; therefore Amis's characters experience an even more extreme situation than Auster's:

> The sky also was empty, blown clean, an unblinking Africa of blue. Down on the beach the wind went for his calves like an industrial cleanser; Guy gained the hardened rump of damp sand and contemplated the wrinkly sea. It opened inhospitably to him. Feeling

> neither vigour nor its opposite, feeling no closer to life than to death, feeling thirty-five, Guy pressed on, hardly blinking as he crossed the scrotum barrier; and it was the water that seemed to cringe and start back, repelled by this human touch, as he barged his way down the incline, breathed deep, and pitched himself forward in the swimmer's embrace of the sea... Twenty minutes later, as he strode back up the beach, the wind threw everything it had at him, and with fierce joy the sand sought his eyes and teeth, the hairless tray of his chest. (33)

Here, there is no possible connection of man with nature, because nature has turned hostile. If Thoreau found identity in the sky, our characters find alterity; these three very different descriptions of the sky represent an evolution from a time when the experience of nature was remotely possible to a time when natural elements are so exhausted by mankind that they seem to repel its very presence, to attack it, having turned into harmful agents. As we said in the introduction to this paper, the sky is a reminder of the state of human nature or simply the state of nature, a reality long forgotten about or a reality long ignored by those who now engage in its contemplation:"Clinch had looked up. Now he looked down. To him, clouds had always been the summary of everything that could reasonably be hoped for from the planet; they moved him more than paintings, more than exciting seas" (80); for Guy, losing (H/h)ope (remember that this is also the name of his wife) will lead him straight into Nicola's trap: "Dead clouds made love hard. They made you want and need it, though: love" (242).

Although Thoreau is writing from the 'oldest' part of the States, industrialization has not yet totally engaged the whole continent in his era, and he is not forced to be either a vagabond or a tourist, he is able to chose to disconnect from the frenzies of society for more than two years and still return as a sane man, a pilgrim that has connected with his roots and has gathered new perspectives. So, Thoreau presents himself not as a pilgrim in nature anymore, but a pilgrim *from* nature, now on holidays in society: "When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself [...] I lived there two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again" (1). On the other hand, Quinn deteriorates immensely in just a few months time on the streets and becomes an *alien* to

himself: “Now, as he looked at himself in the mirror, he was neither shocked nor disappointed. He had no feeling about it at all, for the fact was that he did not recognize the person he saw there as himself” (117). He cannot go back *home* either, as someone else lives there now: “ ‘I've had some difficulties lately,’ muttered Quinn by way of explanation ‘But it's only temporary.’ […] / ‘This is my apartment and I want you out. If you don't leave, I'm going to call the police and have you arrested’ ” (123). As we can see, it is not a round trip for Quinn; in the real world, he does not exist anymore: “It was gone, he was gone, everything was gone” (123). Bauman ironically recognizes that “The world is catching up with the vagabond, and catching up fast. The world is re-tailoring itself to the measure of the vagabond” (29); however our authors show the world keeps re-tailoring itself so that not even vagabonds are allowed to exist parallel to the System; the consequence of their transgression will be disappearance; they will metaphorically die and turn into invisible ghosts —“We're the dead” (*NYT*: 261)—, unable to come back to the world of the living, which Amis ironically shows through Guy: “He looked round in fear with the ghost's eyes of the deceiver. Always this problem of *reentry*” (my emphasis: 291).

Another variant of the vagabond is Blue, and so is the nameless narrator, who makes himself more apparent in the third story; like Quinn, they represent the search for their selves through their projection on the other, namely Black and Fanshawe. In our opinion, they take a step further in the same story because, unlike Quinn, they succeed in finding the “purpose” of their cases: Black and Fanshawe both wanted to be followed from the beginning. When they realize this fatal truth, they both acquire a manuscript they believe is going to clarify things, and they can make contact; however, we can appreciate their failure because contact only brings violence and frustration, not clarification. For Blue, all this contemplation that the case has implied takes him to a new sphere where he identifies with Black as the same person; that is how he gets to his copy of *Walden*: “The only way for Blue to have a sense of what is happening is to be inside Black's mind, to see what he

is thinking, and that of course is impossible" (137). He feels the only way he can actually gain access to the man's mind is by reading the same book (a book that we can suppose Black wanted him to read) although at the beginning, as we have said, he is shocked by this non-fiction full of nothingness: "What's all this about planting beans and not drinking coffee or eating meat? Why all these innumerable descriptions of birds?" (160).

However, it takes only months of Blue being alone and disconnected from everything else for him to change his attitude and switch his interest from the case to the same nature Quinn observed, which he can now see from the window in Brooklyn that connects him to the outside:

> Life has slowed down so drastically for him that Blue is now able to see things that have previously escaped his attention. The trajectory of the light that passes through the room each day, for example, and the way the sun at certain hours will reflect the snow on the far corner of the ceiling in his room. The beating of his heart, the sound of his breath, the blinking of his eyes—Blue is now aware of these tiny events, and try as he might to ignore them, they persist in his mind like a nonsensical phrase repeated over and over again. He knows it cannot be true, and yet little by little the phrase seems to be taking on a meaning. (142)

It is then when he begins to feel like he has a purpose in life again, as he is making himself believe he is connecting with nature and the other, the only hope we have of grasping self-identification: "There are moments when he feels so completely in harmony with Black, so naturally at one with the other man, that to anticipate what Black is going to do, to know when he will stay in his room and when he will go out, he need merely look into himself" (152). The need of figuring the other out as a self-justification is a kick-start for the narrator's quest too; he is determined to find Fanshawe even when he knows Fanshawe has disappeared willingly. He is practically living the other man's life and feels the same connection to him that Blue discovered with Black; but he has done so since they were children, which feels like a quantum entanglement or what Levinas calls 'participation': "One had the impression that through participation the subject not only sees the other, but is the other" (Levinas: 43). For all these characters, desire for true connection and understanding will stay unfulfilled and they will go through a great deal of violence

and despair for trying to achieve it: Blue beats Black probably to death, both ending up all *black and blue*, while the narrator is about to shoot Fanshawe at the end, finally leaving him behind—never to look for him again. Both these characters have been framed into their pilgrimage, by the very man whose tracks they are following and their own end is uncertain. Quinn's story, on the other hand, also remains unfinished and unresolved. In sum, our pilgrim characters can never go back to their former 'identity', and, as readers, we will never know what happened to them after the stories are over, which is itself a postmodernist device writers often use in different forms: "circularity, negative teleology, open endings or multiplicity of endings and the discontinuity of narrative structures" (Sarup: 56). They have retaken modernist efforts to represent the apparent uncertainty of the referent (Calinescu *FF*: 303), which is evident for our authors, who allow alterity to filter to every layer of the fiction, letting this *différance* remain even beyond the end.

As well as the consequences we have already mentioned, along with homelessness come three basic *problems* that Quinn enumerates: food, sleep and shelter (112-113). On the one hand, Thoreau was able to build himself a respectable shelter in nature "for a lifetime at an expense not greater than the rent which he now pays annually" (23), and relies on the soil for sustenance, for example through his bean plantation: "they attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus" (75). Quinn, on the other hand, cannot access any natural source of food and finds no shelter in the city and, as a consequence, he will embrace extreme starvation as he aspires towards total detachment from the material. Quinn (and the rest of the pilgrim characters, to some extent) wants to minimize his levels of consumption in order to be able to stay in his alley almost all day and for longer; this way he will focus on the case only. But this hectic choice goes beyond a mere logistical decision and is related to a more spiritual goal; he somehow wishes he could abandon his bodily needs: "He kept total fast in his mind as an ideal, a state of perfection he could aspire to but never achieve" (113); just like Thoreau in 'Economy', our characters become obsessed with keeping

alive with as little as they need. This is precisely the point where the postmodern pilgrim meets the postmodern ascetic: "He did not want to starve himself to death [...] — he simply wanted to leave himself free to think of the things that truly concerned him" (113); therefore, what Quinn is searching for is more time and concentration to simply *be*.

Homelessness and starvation are recurrent throughout the Trilogy, and although Quinn is the one who takes the vagabond to the extreme, homelessness is referred to in all the stories: Stillman Sr. on the streets or Blue "in the garb of tramphood" (168) as Jimmy Rose are just a couple of examples. Also the unnamed narrator remembers how Fanshawe had "persuaded [him] to spend the weekend with him in New York— roaming the streets, sleeping on a bench in the old Penn Station, talking to bums, seeing how long we could last without eating" (211), a custom that Fanshawe continued to pull off throughout his life: "I watched you and Sophie and the baby[36]. There was even a time when I camped outside your apartment building. For two or three weeks, maybe a month. I followed you everywhere you went. Once or twice, I even bumped into you on the street, looked you straight in the eye. But you never noticed. It was fantastic the way you didn't see me" (303). This is what Fanshawe says to the narrator, again reflecting on the invisibility of vagabonds in society. The topic is so interesting to Auster that it appears recurrently in his work; for instance in *Moon Palace* the protagonist almost starves to death, and takes refugee at Central Park; this is because, as Peacock argues, Auster himself had experienced being on the edge of poverty while in France, where he spent some of his formative years (1). Nonetheless, characters like Fanshawe or Quinn, are not the only ones who find inspiration and peace in the abstinence from food; in *London Fields* we have Hope Clinch referring to her husband as "the famished mute" (212) or "the anorexic" (229); they all follow a call that has been heard by many before; they are what Maud Ellmann (inspired by the short story by Kafka) calls 'the hunger artists'.

36 Sophie and the baby were the former family of Fanshawe, now living with the narrator.

In her book, Ellmann reflects on “The ascetic forms of self-starvation, which extend from the medieval saints to modern slimmers” (7); although cautiously, she recognizes that self-inflicted hunger has been historically used for anti-systemic protest but that it easily turns into a problem when high numbers of people end up becoming anorexic as a consequence: “fasting as a protest differs so profoundly from fasting as a personal pathology that it seems almost perverse to link these two strange disciplines at all”; however, some people react as if the experience really captivated them as an ideal personal state (as it happens with our characters) and people “become addicted to the nothingness that [they] had learned to substitute for food, clinging to it even at the cost of life” (1). As we have seen in Bauman, characters become vagabonds in what they believe is an empowering move towards their freedom from the System; in addition to this, according to some critics like Little, Anderson or Ellmann, anorexia provides a symbolic counter-myth to the story of Creation: it is a subversive private and individual strategy of rebellion against the impositions of consumerism. Although it can be seen as a particular form of narcissism and masochism, strategies of self-denial and self-negation like these seek for a restitution of identity, as a primal unity uncontaminated by the “filth” of the ‘other’ (the other being sexual differentiation, social hierarchy and power relations, temporality or “history”) (Anderson in Little: 145). The desire for food is on the one hand seen as indicative of the self's effort to secure the boundaries of his or her stable, independent identity by assimilating or devouring the world around it (by ingesting the external world, the subject establishes his body as his own, distinguishing its inside from its outside); however, it is also indicative of the self's forever expropriated, unwholesome state; it symbolizes the inevitable dependence upon, and penetration by, others. This need to incorporate the outside world exposes the subject's fundamental incompleteness: the catch is that the very need to eat reveals the “nothing” at the core of subjectivity. This also means that identity is constantly in jeopardy, as we have said elsewhere, as it is placed outside of the body and depends on the ghost of the other. In

relation to this, feminist critics like Kristeva believe self-starvation in the form of anorexia has conquered our times precisely because it allows fulfillment by not allowing anything in, which is why she believes transcendence and diet are heavily interrelated from the twentieth century on (Little 142-143). In sum, the nothingness that our characters have found as a substitute for food is their own thoughts, the opportunity to give in to them; therefore fasting is definitely related to the process of self-identification for the anorexic characters in our books.

Furthermore, these critics explain the relationship between hunger and art itself, as these characters line up with the perception of hunger as a creative impulse, as a state for inspiration; Ellmann talks about Rimbaud, among many others:

> To write, for Rimbaud, is to hunger, and it is only through a diet of stone-crop that the poet can accede to the inhuman solitude of art. This visionary hunger also resembles the miraculous abstinence of the medieval saints, for whom to fast was not to overcome the flesh so much, but to explore the limits of corporeality, where humanity surrenders to a bodiliness so extreme that it coalesces with the bestial or divine. (13)

According to Little, Auster clearly follows this trend and shows how hunger relates to art in The Trilogy; the implication is then that Auster is creating "anorexic" texts (144): by eliminating all the pre-conceived limitations of the novel and by stripping his characters and narrators of *identity* he expresses "the desire to purge difference from the text and from the self" (135). While minimalist abstraction seeks to produce an autonomous text cleansed of the impurities inherent in acts of representation, the individual who practices self-starvation (as well as the author) seeks to produce an autonomous identity cleansed of impurities inherent in the act of consumption: "The auster(e) detective writer and the auster(e) detective who write are puritanical Operatives undertaking a religiously inflicted quest to uncover transcendent truth by eliminating waste from the body of the text and from the text of the body" (Little: 135). Therefore, Auster actually uses these characters in order to capture a literary motivation, the intention of creating a new novel that relies as little as possible on the foundations of the traditional novel.

Before we change the focus from vagabonds to players, we must talk briefly about two of the other problems that arise from the vagabond's choice: sleep and shelter. The vagabond, as we have previously said, is in search of an illusion of moral epiphanies in order to bring himself closer to the philosopher than a regular, normal, participant in the System, in this way reinterpreting the intrinsic goal of the traditional pilgrimage. According to Thoreau, “The philosopher is in advance of his age even in the outward form of his life. He is not fed, sheltered, clothed, warmed like his contemporaries. How can a man be a philosopher and not maintain his vital heat by better methods than other men?” (7). This is, for Quinn, one of the easiest issues to solve, as he finds perfect shelter for private moments and to protect himself from the rain in a dumpster: “on his knees on top of the garbage and leaning his body against one wall of the bin, he found that he was not altogether uncomfortable” (114); anyway, he still “never stopped giving thanks for his luck” (113). For Auster's characters, being dependent on eating, sleeping and shelter is misinterpreted as representative of their inability to escape from the System: as Mumford suggests “we are so detached that we are incapable of interpreting organic processes or furthering the development of human life” (554). For Thoreau, the fact that we are born into a society that does not challenge our natural thirst for survival is comfortable yet enslaving: “I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born to the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in” (2). This same idea of impasse is manifested in Amis through the character of Guy Clinch, who recognizes he must leave the commodities and comforts of his privilege and inherited position to get in touch with a more real experience of life: “How will I ever know anything in the mistake of all this warmth and space, all this *supershelter*? I want to feel like the trampolinist when he falls back to earth and to

gravity. To touch the earth with heaviness— just to touch it. God expose us, take away our padding and our room" (my emphasis: 38).

As Bauman notes, a pilgrimage-like life is in fact rooted in the delay of satisfaction and completion; inconclusiveness is necessary because, for the pilgrim, it is the actual journey that makes sense while, within the System, the demand for pleasure is immediate. For the characters who play the game of the System, as a consequence, the journey is irrelevant and must be as short as possible; the player must seek pleasure after pleasure only, therefore not really ever enjoying having achieved the goal (Bauman, Z: 22-23). Thus, pleasure is a key part of any choice humans take and "the difference in amount between the pleasure of satisfaction that is *demanded* and that which is actually *achieved*" (22) will differ from vagabonds to players obviously. Characters like Quinn, Blue or Fanshawe demand no satisfaction from society any more, turning only to themselves in search of their true self. For example, this is when Blue makes this discovery:

> He has never given much thought to the world inside him, and though he always knew it was there, it has remained an unknown quantity, unexplored and therefore dark, even to himself. He has moved rapidly along the surface of things for as long as he can remember, fixing attention on these surfaces only in order to perceive them, sizing up one and then passing on to the next. (141)

These ordinary people turn into vagabonds when they realize they have been experiencing only the surface of things; that is, a game, as Baudrillard and Debord posited, where "baits feel like desires, pressures like intentions, seduction like decision-making" (Baudrillard "The System...": 27). When these characters go deeper into their isolation, to confront an identity they presupposed was there, they are forced to find themselves feeling "something of a loss" (*NYT*: 141). In their search for a pure self, vagabonds react to otherness by rejecting it altogether, and they do so through solitude: "Fanshawe was alone the whole time, barely seeing anyone, barely opening his mouth [...]. Solitude became a passage into the self, an element of discovery" (272). As we can see, interaction with the other is perceived as very problematic by pilgrims and all kinds of ascetics and vagabonds,

something that Thoreau praises, for example, in the following segment from the chapter called 'Solitude': "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (64). However, Thoreau recognizes that "solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows" (66), which is why Quinn is capable of nearly the same realization while in the streets: "Quinn had always thought of himself as a man who liked to be alone. For the past five years, in fact, he had actively sought it. But it was only now, as his life continued in the alley, that he began to understand the true nature of solitude. He had nothing to fall back on anymore but himself" (115). Players, on the contrary, will rely on otherness and will *need* social interaction in order to configure their self out of total alterity, as we will soon see.

For Bauman, clearly influenced by the spectacle/simulacrum theories, our world is "not hospitable for pilgrims any more" (23), because no epiphanies can give the individual control of anything in the real world; and that is an empty space for the vagabond, —the empty space where Quinn or Fanshawe will remain hidden— , a locked room. All those who decide to quit the game may do so, but the game does not end (31). What Bauman presents is more of a big arbitrary game whose rules "keep changing in the course of playing"; it is a "sequence of present moments; a continuous present" (23), where any illusion of totality and connection with the past is lost. Therefore players must exist in society; they are people who go by the rules of the moment and participate in the simulacrum. In this passage from *Ghosts*, the narrator realizes that he aspires to something impossible; he longs for the life of a vagabond (Fanshawe) but he *is* a player, a captive of the images of desire and the impositions and rewards of society:

> I would admire [Fanshawe] so intensely, would want desperately to measure up to him —and then, suddenly, a moment would come when I realized that he was alien to me, that the way he lived inside himself could never correspond to the way I needed to live.

> I wanted too much of things, I had too many desires, I lived too fully in the grip of the immediate ever to attain such indifference. It mattered to me that I do well, that I impress people with the empty signs of my ambition: good grades, varsity letters, awards for whatever they were judging us on that week. (208)

This initial imbalance will turn into the game of his life; he consciously decides to cover for Fanshawe, who is missing, in all the areas of his life: he will marry his former wife, raise his child and, most importantly, he will usurp his literary career by attributing to himself the fame and fortune of Fanshawe's work. This player goes from designated literary executor to *author*: “I was the mad scientist who had invented the hocus pocus machine, and the more smoke that poured from it, the more noise it produced, the happier I was. Fanshawe's success was my success” (227). For the narrator, the big move in the game is to *become* Fanshawe (that is probably why we never get to know his name), to highlight that his identity is based solely on alterity.

We will not usually deal with powerful characters in our novels, but we see some of them who do demand agency and power. Just as vagabonds wanted to free themselves from the system, players want to be free within the System because, in a consumerist society, subjects are subaltern to capital and objects: “dependence dissolves in freedom, and freedom seeks dependence” (Baudrillard "The System...": 27); this has players trying to empower themselves by being drawn into the jaws of the System, which at the same time cancels any possibility of freedom. Baudrillard puts it as if we were “facing a massive ‘devolution’ or ‘de-volition’ ”, “a massive desisting from will, but not though alienation or voluntary servitude (whose mystery, which is the modern enigma of politics, is unchanged since La Boétie) because the problem is put in terms of the consent of the subject to his own slavery, which fact no philosophy will ever be able to explain” ("The Masses...": 215). This paradoxical enslavement is also described by Thoreau, a confusion between freedom and passivity he does not accept: “worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself” (3). As a consequence of this common tendency, even our own characters can find no justification for their own behavior, except the feeling that this is what they are supposed to do, the feeling that there is

no other choice: “The mark of postmodern adulthood is the willingness to embrace the game wholeheartedly, as children do” (Bauman, Z: 32). Therefore, one of the most important reasons why players embrace the game is basically that they must fit in, quite like in high-school, and not be treated differently, as the narrator finally acknowledges in *Ghosts*: “It was stupid. I didn't have any chance. It was either that [continue to publish Fanshawe's under his own name] or get hauled back — which would have meant being treated like a crazy man” (301).

For us, in the novels, players are more inspired by *Don Quixote* than by *Walden*, although this dichotomy is not mutually exclusive; by that, we mean that characters can act both as vagabonds and players (take Quinn, Fanshawe or Young). Players give in to the instability of the world by behaving as unstable individuals, paradoxically in and out of control because “in play, there is neither inevitability nor accident [...]; nothing is fully predictable and controllable, but nothing is totally immutable and irrevocable either. [...] The world itself is a player” (Bauman: 31). In other words, life is a succession of games and each has its internal coherence and rules; hence conventions may change from one to the other, but games may change altogether at any time as well. Thence, mutability and extremism make the best players; for this, we see Nicola as the greatest player there is in *London Fields*. Nicola knows the game and she knows what she needs: “‘I do need real life. It's true. For instance, I need the class system. I need nuclear weapons. I need the eclipse.’ ‘You need the Crisis’ ” (259). Nicola is an actress in life— “she had gone quite far with that. [...] Acting was therapeutic, though dramatic roles confused her further. She was happier with comedy, farce, custard-pie” (190)—, and she is also a “puppetmaster” (259), representing a whole range of characters that vary depending on the man she is fooling, because we can officially say Nicola is a con-artist who cheats men by default, so much so we never get to see any trace of her true self (she seems to have no motivation for showing it or figuring it out herself). In fact, Nicola acts twenty-four hours a day: “if you're the dramatic type, anyway, then *don't* go to Drama School”

(191). Therefore she likes extreme behavior and changes characters easily, which makes it difficult to label her; here follows a passage where the narrator himself expresses to her how difficult it is for him to categorize her as (only) a character type for the book:

> You're hard to categorize, even in the male fantasy area. Maybe you're a mixture of genres. A mutant. You're not a Sexpot. Not dizzy enough, You're not a Hot Lay either, not quite. Too calculating. You're definitely something of a Sack Artist. And a Mata Hari too. And a Vamp. And a Ballbreaker. In the end, though, I'm fingering you for a Femme Fatale. (260)

In this passage, and throughout the novel, we see Nicola knows all these 'categories of woman' in advance and she lives up to their characteristics for her own purposes; but we will dedicate chapter 4 exclusively to figure out how female characters are represented in these novels, thence going back to Nicola and a longer list of types she incarnates. She knows what to do because she is a total player; therefore she is remorseless, as the goal in the game is always to win, and so it allows "no room for pity, compassion, commiseration or cooperation" (Bauman, Z: 32).

Some other characters play too, although not with quite the mastery that Nicola has acquired since her early years. For example, we have seen how Samson Young readily gives in to Nicola's game in order to successfully obtain a story for his book: "What a gift. This page is briefly stained with my tears of gratitude. Novelists don't usually have it so good, do they, when something real happens (something unified, dramatic and pretty saleable), and they just write it down?" (1); therefore he sees himself as a player too, although he is going to lose in the game. In fact, Keith, Guy and Samson, all see themselves as players (and potential winners) at some point, a common expectation among players which Nicola catalogues as 'Hitlerian Hubris', just like a "loan company [which] was ready, was eager, to underwrite a millennium" (395). In the case of the Trilogy, the player who most sees himself as a potential winner is the narrator: he aspires for fame and money as a writer and for a new identity for himself, but at the same time wants to acquire these with the least effort possible, as it is common in the game. The narrator builds an identity for himself out of the

alterity that Fanshawe represents to him: first he takes credit for all of Fanshawe's work and then he fantasizes with being able to keep on reproducing his style, with absolutely no moral restraints:

> I realized that once all of Fanshawe's manuscripts had been published, it would be perfectly possible for me to write another book or two under his name— to do the work myself and yet pass it off as his. I was not planning to do this, of course, but the mere thought of it opened up a certain bizarre and intriguing notion to me: what it means when a writer puts his name on a book, why some writers choose to hide behind a pseudonym, whether or not a writer has a real life anyway. It struck me that writing under another name might be something I would enjoy—to invent a secret identity for myself—and I wondered why I found this idea so attractive. One thought kept leading me to another, and by the time the subject was exhausted, I discovered that I had squandered most of the morning. (232)

Quite like Young in *London Fields*, the narrator will eventually realize he is not in control of his own moves, of his own game; he will lose track of reality and lose everything he had or aspired towards, which is a red flag for *other* driving forces that are not apparent to him but are influencing his life and decisions; but luckily for players, for everybody in the System, we are all to be considered "foreigners to our own acts" (Laplanche: 124), therefore not responsible (not really guilty) of anything.

With all this is mind, to what extent are these books to be considered as being *by* their narrators or even by their authors, then? If they both reproduced their stories from real facts and other texts, that means identity and agency are both in question in our novels, and that influences characterization as much as the construction of the narrators. Our narrators are supposed to be capturing events from real life, with a heavy reliance on other texts (by other people), and so they present themselves as passive recorders. For example, in the Trilogy, the narrator states: "Since this story is based entirely on facts, the author feels it his duty not to overstep the bounds of the verifiable, to resist at all costs the perils of invention" (*NYT*: 111); nevertheless the same narrator later recognizes he might be altering the events in real life by his attempt: "I was offering my creation directly to the real world, and therefore it seems possible to me that they could affect this real world in a real way, that they could eventually become a part of the real itself" (245). The same

paradox appears in *London Fields*, where Young recognizes that he is not only following his characters in real life, but that he relies on texts written by each of them: “Now here's a pleasing symmetry. All three characters have given me something they've written. Keith's brochure, Nicola's diaries, Guy's fiction. Things written for different reasons: self-aggrandizement, sell-communion, self-expression. One offered freely, one abandoned to chance, one coaxingly procured” (42-43). This takes us to Tredell's interpretation of the situation in *London Fields*, which is perfectly applicable to the Trilogy too; a narrator who not only is intervening in the events of real life, but who is incorporating other texts in order to shape and impose an interpretation on those events: “As the interventions by the narrator in the events that he is narrating grow in importance, instances proliferate in the narrative of the dependence of narrative, not on life, but on other narrative” (106).

Displaying a similar use of intertextuality (which is actually intratextuality, as the originals exist within the fiction only), the narrator in the Trilogy is allegedly using a red notebook by Quinn, Blue's notes and Fanshawe's texts, although we never have direct access to them as readers, a characteristic O'Gorman believes Auster shares with detective fiction, where the first story (or the crime) is always absent (20), a characteristic we have found before in historical writing and other types of fiction. Therefore, the reflection our authors present is that literature (history or any discourse) is never “the recovered past, but the narratives of attempted recovery, and the validation or discrediting of those narratives by the structures of power which constitute the law of the social order” (O'Gorman: 23). Hence, we must take into account not only that our authors do not present a recoverable end, but also that, by trusting so heavily in inter and intratextuality, they are undermining their own *presence* in the process of writing. Rimmon-Kenan, in her book *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*¸ sums up the two types of narration that interact in the different dimensions that literature imply: “the factual one, by the author; and its fictional counterpart, the one which takes over; the narrator's” (4). Story, for her, is subsequent to a larger construct, the axis

of temporal organization, and it is not directly available to the reader (5-8). Generally, in postmodernist novels, characters in the texts do not only interact with each other but also with the author and reader (Hormung: 18), and this is how agency is distorted in our novels. Postmodern texts are said to lack "*identifiable* authority" and the intention of our authors is to displace the relation between texts, writers and readers (91-93). For example, in *London Fields,* Samson is actually delusional when he states: "Boy, am I a reliable narrator" (162).

But it is not only the narrator we cannot hold on to; we also cannot totally assume characters are going to be proper round individuals: "In most fiction, proper names […] promise coherence and identity" (52), says Peacock, but nevertheless, in Auster's novels, he appreciates characters "are always differing, not only from other characters, but from their putative 'selves'. [They] always dramatize their own 'absence' from themselves" (60) and they prefer engagement with otherness (63). This is why the characters in the Trilogy will present themselves as a multiplicity of characters, reinforcing the postmodernist idea that "our sense of a single selfhood [is] complexly refracted through the existence of various, duplicitously conflicting, voices" (Todd: 136). Critics agree names are never randomly assigned in Auster's work, and that they carry great significance (Peacock: 50); however, they do not promise to deliver an individual round stable subject. Amis also names his characters in a very witty way, so that irony arises instantly: "Keith Talent. He just didn't have...he just didn't have the talent" (5). In sum, although our characters have a proper name, it doesn't really imply this name reflects a proper identity; for example, Daniel Quinn— "He wandered why he had the same initials as Don Quixote" (126)—, a writer who consciously breaks down his personality into fragments: He is the detective fiction novelist William Wilson, a pseudonym, who "led an independent life" (5), as "Quinn was no longer the part of him that wrote books" (4). But it does not end there: "in the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist, Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that

gave purpose to the enterprise". Therefore it is Max Work who is "his interior brother, his comrade in solitude" (6) and the fictional protagonist of all of Wilson's stories. His inclination towards this character is probably why he accepts the role of (detective) Paul Auster in the first place, the pseudonym by which he will start on the Stillman case. We know he gives in to this rosary of selves in order to find comfort beyond his empty subjectivity, as a way of escapism: "By a simple trick of the intelligence, a deft little twist of naming, he felt incomparably freer and lighter. At the same time, he knew it was an illusion. But there was a certain comfort in that" (50).

Doubling and doppelgangers are commonplace in the Trilogy, mostly because our characters impersonate detectives and sometimes must disguise and change names in order to interact with the people they need to get information from. We will have them turn into "a life insurance salesman from Kenosha, Wisconsin" (176) or "The Fuller brush man" (180), while in *London Fields* we have Nicola, who is never only one kind of woman, and Keith, who will also need other names and personalities in order to *cheat*— for example Lady Barnaby thinks Harry is his name (53). Both authors also introduce doubles for their characters, usually a successful 'mitosis' of them; for example there is another Keith, a friend of Keith's whose name is Keith Double (8); this character works in advertising, a TV-related position, something our Keith could only dream about. Doubling even happens to Stillman in the Trilogy before Quinn's very eyes when, at the station, another Stillman appears right behind the original:

> Directly behind Stillman, heaving into view just inches behind his right shoulder, another man stopped, took a lighter out of his pocket, and lit a cigarette. His face was the exact twin of Stillman's. For a second he thought it was an illusion, a kind of aura thrown off by the electromagnetic currents in Stillman's body. But no, this other Stillman moved, breathed, blinked his eyes. (55)

Also, for the nameless narrator, this projection is produced by Fanshawe, and for Samson Young this anti-self is Mark Asprey, a multiple award-winning novelist whose apartment he is using in London: "Actually the whole damn place is a trophy room" (25). However, doubles are not a

postmodernist innovation, as they had been a “favourite device of Romanticism and even Jacobean drama” and already present in Greek comedy (Szegedy-Maszák: 55); but still they are very common in postmodern texts; for example, most of Beckett's works “present some form of a decentered or deconstructed subjectivity; His experimentation with several versions of one self and the reduction for the self to one or several voices” (Hormung: 184).

Moving beyond this, both our authors display an extensive usage of literary doubling that they apply not only on characters but they also go even further; to illustrate this, we should talk now about one of the most intriguing characters in the Trilogy, and that is Paul Auster. Both the real Auster and Amis like to introduce themselves in their novels as characters, intruders in their own fictions. For example, in the much commented last chapter of *Money*, Amis and his main character Self play a game of chess where Amis ‘zungzwangs’ Self, as he is the real manufacturer of his story: “Martin talked on, shadowy, flicker-faced. I don't know if this strange new voice of mine carried anywhere when I said: ‘*I'm the joke. I'm it. It was you. It was you*’ (379) . This is what Todd calls an “intrusive author” (123), which is a device that usually goes together with the use of doubles “in a tradition whose roots can be traced at least as far as a Gothic text such as James Hogg's ‘Confessions’ ” (136). It also appears in postmodernist novels such as *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, by John Fowles, which shows what Todd calls a “canonical use of the intrusive author” (123). So before we talk about Auster the character, and see if Amis is being intrusive or not in *London Fields*, we must talk about how authorial presence has evolved in the novel and see what tendency our novelists follow. According to Hormung, in the pre-modern novel we find the “author's practice of addressing the reader in prefaces and inter-chapters in order to authenticate the story”, which our narrators do, but not the real Auster or Amis. Later, modernists started inscribing some aspects of the author into the text, like a “self-consciousness to be emulated by the reader”, which we do not see, at least directly, in the novels. Finally, he lists some

postmodernist authors whose authorial self appears as “the reader of his own fiction” such as Fowles, Gray, Beckett, Barth, Federman or Sudernick, and Amis himself is also on that list (175). He also refers to Borges's short stories "The Library of Babel" and "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote", which we also consider must have certainly influenced both our authors for their theme, especially the second one, "Pierre Menard...", as the actual authorship of *El Quixote* is openly being discussed, just as in the Trilogy: “Borges's story of this second Quijote —an imaginary *Quijote*— is a teasing, kind of therapeutic thought-experiment that invites us to contemplate the way meaning is the product of diachronically given rules for the genesis of meaning” (Thiher: 160).

Having considered all this, then, do Amis and Auster present themselves as readers of their own fiction? We believe that in the case of *The New York Trilogy* and *London Fields* that assumption would be inaccurate or only partial, as they actually filter their authorial presence through the existence of certain characters: in the case of Auster it is very easy to know his double in the fiction is Auster (although the real Auster detaches himself as author of the Trilogy through the nameless narrator). There is a writer named Auster in *City of Glass*, who Quinn finds in the phone book while he is impersonating a detective also called Auster. This Paul Auster, a writer quite similar to the real Auster, is precisely working on an article on *El Quixote* and its authorship, as in Borges's “Pierre Menard...”. His dissertation is captivating and occupies a preeminent central position in the novel, which is probably not an arbitrary choice. When Auster introduces this discussion about *El Quixote*, we can tell he is making an attack on literary criticism itself: “I suppose you can call it speculative, since I'm not out to prove anything. In fact, it's all done tongue-in-cheek. An imaginative reading, I guess you could say”, because his dissertation is not on Cervantes, but on the authorship of “the book inside the book, the one he imagined he was writing” (98). In *El Quixote*, Cervantes insists, like Auster and Amis, he is not the author but merely the editor of real material that he had found written in Arabic by Cid Hamete Benengeli: “he makes a

great point of insisting that everything in the book really happened in the world [...]. Because the book is an attack on the dangers of the make-believe. He couldn't very well offer a work of the imagination to do that, could he?" (*NYT*: 97). But, actually, Auster helps us realize what the rules of the (literary) game are in the Trilogy by establishing this parallelism; to determine who the actual author really is, he relates how authority actually comes from a combination of four people: Sancho Panza is an illiterate witness who dictates stories to the priest or the barber, who eventually give them to a *Samson* Carrasco, who translates it into Arabic; but Benengeli turns out to be invented by Cervantes, who is, for Auster, the mere translator and editor of a real-life story. He argues the real origin of it all was always Don Quixote himself; he believes: "It was Don Quixote who engineered the Benengeli quartet" (98).

In the Trilogy, this quartet is represented by four actors: Quinn, Blue, the narrator —who presents himself as the author—, and Fanshawe, the one who manipulates the narrator into first living his life and then losing it to obsessively look for him; in fact, there is a moment when the narrator recognizes himself as a Sancho for Fanshawe: "I continued to go along with him, a befuddled witness, sharing in the quest but not quite part of it, an adolescent Sancho astride my donkey, watching my friend do battle with himself" (211). In the temporal arrangement of the Trilogy, Fanshawe and the narrator are real and are constituents of a more or less clarified plot where the narrator finds his counterpart; it is the other two stories that are difficult to frame and interrelate. Blue's and Quinn's stories are parallel in their thematic content but not on the level of reality; they never happen in the same dimension. Their authorship is never totally clear (on the level of fiction, of course), but a story like *Ghosts,* dated more than thirty years before *The Locked Room*, could perfectly be by the narrator or even Fanshawe, as the narrator has constant access to his work, and we know of his intentions of taking credit for it. Then we have *City of Glass*, which is really more complex and contributes to create a mystery around the actual interconnection of the

whole Trilogy, as it is dated only three years earlier and keeps a connection with the level of reality. Quinn's story comes from a diary that was given to the narrator but many questions are left open: why is Quinn contacted for the Stillman case in the first place and who is the invisible hand who feeds him at the empty apartment by the end of the story? Auster tries to mislead us as there is a second character named Quinn that is real in *The Locked Room*, a detective looking for Fanshawe who “worked doggedly on the case for five or six weeks, but in the end he begged off, not wanting to take any more of their money” (198). What this Quinn didn't know was that Fanshawe was aware of this and “I was watching him the whole time, and when the moment came, I set him up, and he walked straight into my trap” (301). However we must not confuse Quinn the character and Quinn the PI unless this chase happened in that span of three years in between stories and we assume Quinn would have taken on the profession of detective after he left the Stillman's apartment and the notebook behind, something we will never know: “As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now” (130). But there is a more ‘realistic’ possibility if we consider that the Trilogy is written by a collective; there must be a missing element besides Quinn, Blue and the narrator/Fanshawe in order to close the circle.

For Peacock, the Trilogy “is a collective work authored by Auster, Poe, Cervantes, Carroll, and any number of other antecedents”, and he poses the next question: “Who actually narrates it? Is he or she a real villain setting traps for readers and characters alike?” (60). We do not know about evil, but this could actually be part of an orchestration by Auster (the character), as it is he who leads the narrator into the Stillmans' apartment and cedes the red notebook to him: “Auster picked it up, looked through it briefly, and said that it was Quinn's. Then he handed it to me and said that I should keep it” (130). In this gesture, Auster might not be innocent and, just as Nicola does in *London Fields*, he is setting the narrator up so that it is another person who publishes the text, as Fanshawe did too. Maybe Auster and Fanshawe work together to seduce the narrator into publishing

their story, making use of his own ego and airs: “Why would I go to the trouble of creating an entire body of work and then not want to take credit for it? And yet—did people really think I was capable of writing a book as good as *Neverland*?” (232). So, there might be two Quixotes in the Trilogy, Fanshawe and Auster, and they behave as players probably for the same reason that Don Quixote tricked everybody into writing his biography, in which, according to Auster:

> Don Quixote was conducting an experiment. He wanted to test the gullibility of his fellow men. Would it be possible, he wondered, to stand up before the world and with the utmost conviction spew out lies and nonsense? To say that windmills were knights, that a barber's basin was a helmet, that puppets were real people? Would it be possible to persuade others to agree with what he said, even though they did not believe him? In other words, to what extent would people tolerate blasphemies if they give them amusement? The answer is obvious, isn't it? To any extent. (98-99)

Hence, the possibility is open that Auster (the writer in the fiction) is the real instigator, as he is currently working on this topic and experimenting with it; after all, Auster is his name, and he stands for the displacement and deferral of authorship, for the real Paul Auster has set these characters up for real, by writing a novel where their desires and needs would never be satisfied. This is a possibility that is considered by, for example, Diedrick:

> In a move intended to recall Don Quixote, we discover that the narrator is a friend of Paul Auster's (at least, the fictional character) who was actually away in Africa when most of the action took place. […] The two men have since fallen out, the narrator blaming Auster for Quinn's decline. This sudden revelation casts doubt on everything that has gone before. (62)

Again we notice the emphasis on the process of creating and understanding literature we find highlighted elsewhere in Auster's work: “Despite their both being solitary acts in the physical sense, Auster stresses that ethically and psychologically, reading and writing are collective endeavors” (Peacock: 6), which is why he not only relies on inter and intratextuality or ‘mutant’ characters but he also plays with the certainty of the author, presenting literature disconnected from all previous stable conventions; in the absence of any indisputable, uncontaminated evidence, it all depends upon our own position(s) as readers and participants in this process too.

In *London Fields*, the exact same pattern can be observed; Amis relies on another 'Benengeli quartet' to take on the responsibility for the horrible deeds in this novel who are, namely, Keith, Guy, Nicola and Samson; and the Quixote is not Samson, he is merely the "translator" (notice he keeps Cervantes's character's name, as he might be considered simply the transcriber of Nicola's adventures in real life). Although he conceived himself as an observer and a player— a player outside of his fiction—, he finally realizes: "I should have understood that a cross has four points. Not three" (466); and that is when he realizes that he is not in control; *Nicola* is, and he is the actual murderer in an end to his book that is the most unexpected for him: "Nicola destroyed my book" (466). They all succumb to the experiment of Nicola, who practices lying as an art just to feel the power from abusing others (men). Related to this, we find that Lavender argues that the characters in *London Fields* sense they are part of a fiction and they express the sensation of being "semantically overcoded" (234): for example, this is the case of Young, "I feel seamless and insubstantial, like a creation. As if someone made me up, for money. And I don't care" (470). They feel permanently observed; even Keith has the idea somehow Nicola is "watching him" (44); therefore, as in the Trilogy, there is a greater plan, another invisible quixotic character that must have played or manipulated all these characters into performing this fiction for *him*.

This quixotic theory is possible because Amis himself manifests an interest in the piece in his collection of essays on literary criticism *War against Cliché:*

> While clearly an impregnable masterpiece, *Don Quixote* suffers from one fairly serious flaw - that of outright unreadability. [...] Reading *Don Quixote* can be compared to an indefinite visit from your most impossible senior relative, with all his pranks, dirty habits, unstoppable reminiscences, and terrible cronies. When the experience is over, and the old boy checks out at last (on page 846 - the prose wedged tight, with no breaks for dialogue), you will shed tears all right: not tears of relief or regret but tears of pride. You made it, despite all that Don Quixote could do. (427)

But over the dullness and the anachronistic nature of the piece, Amis, who is interested in agency and polivocity, says himself, nevertheless, that the most appealing thing about *El Quixote* for him is how special part two is:

> Since the technique of *El Quixote* is that of periphrasis, of lapidary duplication, of saying everything (at least) twice [which reminds us of the structure of *LF*], it is appropriate that the second half should be a mirror image of the first, with one important reversal. Both in the actual world of Cervantes and in the fictional world of the novel, Volume I has been published, to vast international acclaim. […] The Don is now as famous as he could ever have wished, if for all the wrong reasons. (430-431)

It is delightful for Amis, as a modern reader, that Don Quixote is self-conscious about his existence as a literary character and wants to start another set of adventures so that his and Sancho's fame and reputation is restored: "'people have you for such a crazy man, and myself for no less a fool. Knights say that, unable to content under chivalry's limits, you have called yourself a *don*.' […] 'That'— said Don Quixote— 'has absolutely nothing to do with me' " (Cervantes, my translation: 559). This influential detail is exactly the one Lavender pinpointed: the narrator will have the final realization that he is part of a fiction himself, which leads him to believe Nicola is working with someone else; this virtually invisible character is *Mark Asprey*, a writer who is everything Samson is not: imaginative and successful. To support this idea, note that it is suggested that actually it is Asprey who prepares the situation for Samson to be hypnotized by Nicola; they were former lovers and he knew about her plan, which Samson discovers through the various stories in her diary about her and a man by the initials 'MA': "Nicola and MA? Nicola and Mark Asprey? I have to know" (205); and in his final suicide note/letter to Asprey, he asks: "PPS You didn't set me up. Did you?" (468).

There are some hints throughout the novel that this might be the case, that Samson has been framed; for example when he went to Heathrow and Asprey knew, as if he had an informant besides Incarnacion, his housekeeper, who seems in many instances to be sending him information but never knew about the trip (304). Also, Samson eventually learns that Nicola destroyed one of Asprey's novels (which was about her) and it seems that the original deal is to get a new novel co-authored by Asprey and Nicola herself, as she wants to be in control of her image in it (Tredell: 123). Moreover, it is very possible Asprey is getting copies of the manuscript while overseas as

Samson writes: “Incarnacion was in the studio. She seemed to be looking at my notebook. Another thing. The toaster-like photocopier— I thought it didn't work, but there it was with the light on. It hummed warmly...I sometimes (I don't know) I take a knight's jump out of my head and I think I'm in a book written by somebody else” (409). It is again not a coincidence his initials are MA; like Auster, Martin Amis has introduced a character that represents him and who might be the only one winning the game, although he always seems a secondary character. However, Young's last wish is: “Be my literary executor: throw everything out” (468); again this doppleganger of the author or the author himself, as it happens in the Trilogy, is the one who is responsible for the text finding its way into circulation, into print; Asprey is a man of many literary pseudonyms— we know he is also Marius Appleby (433)— so why not believe he *is* Martin Amis? Amis's novel thus plays with the notion of text-theft in such a way as to suggest that “disconnecting a text from its author is the best way to keep it moving, to get it read. Indeed, those disconnections take place at several levels in the novel” (Tredell: 120). This way Amis, like Auster, metaphorically shares the authorship of this novel with his characters and narrator, although still keeping some authority for himself, while at the same time he demands from the reader constant attention and implication.

In these novels, one can never take any identifiable element of the novel for granted, be it character, narrator, plot or author because, as we have been arguing throughout this paper, they have been all taken over by alterity. When it seems that we can identify any of these, they slip out of, not only our, but even their own grasp; identity is always displaced, *différance* is total; we can never quite arrive at some final point and know who they are. Vagabonds and players in our novels, as we have described them, have become like this because they have confronted the total alterity that their reality is, which is why they turn to escapism, mostly through writing. As the narrator of The Locked Room states: “writing about it is the only chance I have to escape” (*NYT*: 231). For vagabonds like Quinn or Fanshawe, though, the System makes no sense and, therefore, they want to

disappear from all possible social spheres in order to be closer to their true inner self, which they will, however, never be able to access, unlike Thoreau in *Walden*: “By the time he was thirteen or fourteen, Fanshawe became a kind of internal exile, going through the motions of dutiful behavior, but cut off from his surroundings, contemptuous of the life he was forced to live. He did not make himself outwardly rebellious. He simply withdrew” (212). On the other hand, other characters will embrace the alterity represented by the game of the System, giving in (all in) to it, in order to acquire status and, above all, real agency; however, this goal will escape them, as nobody is able to actually *win* in a game that is, in our novels and in real life, part of a greater design impossible for us to figure. Nevertheless, there is one player in *London Fields* who succeeds in taking control over the people who surround her and also to fulfill her plans for escapism, and that is Nicola Six, to whom we dedicate the next chapter.

4. Woman as the darkest Other

We have seen throughout this study how the very concept of identity is questionable in postmodernism as well as the multiplicity of issues it raises as regards its representation. The process of self-identification is deeply problematic, let alone the recognition of and connection with the other. As we have argued, theories as influential as Lacan's, Derrida's or Levinas's place the ultimate bridge for the subject's self-recognition in the relationship with the other, who gives sense to the entity that the subject projects and stands for. Nevertheless, as we discovered in chapter 1, there is an insurmountable obstacle that impedes our apprehension of that 'Other' in their theories; subjects are left facing alterity not only in their understanding of the other but consequently in the grasping of their own self, which is revealed as *alter,* an entity no longer stable but constituted of fragments or images, projections that most of the times are not natural but learned and performed. Furthermore, society and the current urban lifestyle worsen this situation for the lost and confused postmodernist self; as we have seen, the nature of reality itself is questioned by thinkers like Baudrillard and Debord, who place the origin of the System outside of the real. This construct that has substituted nature and every trace of reality is now the only possible place to live in, and this has dislocated people's desires and aims in favor of consumerism and capitalism. Moreover, this is a global process and, therefore, there is no way out, no possible connection to the roots of humanity, to nature. Sociologists like de Certeau describe most accurately any kind of social interaction as a human construction, utterly detached from the natural processes and inscribed into our lives by mechanical learning, which almost erases any hint of spontaneity and authenticity concerning human relationships. Mumford or Foucault are critical of these impositions and call for an awakening, the first one encouraging the preservation of the natural resources of the earth and the pursuit of a way of life that is more connected to the natural cycles, away from the city, although he recognizes it is impossible to escape from the current System. All this overwhelming alterity sets

the tone for our novels and Auster and Amis, in order to capture the spirit of the postmodernist *man*, create characters that consciously or unconsciously feel this fragmentation, this surrealism, this total alterity, and want to escape from it at all costs.

We have seen that Auster and Amis share stylistic intentions and that they have both been interested in the representation of identity as alterity throughout their careers. They both display a series of dysfunctional characters that take fragmentation to the extreme, and we can see them double, disguise themselves, and even disintegrate. They also share a taste for black humor, undermining everyday conventions and preconceptions through the smartest use of language. They reinterpret literary and psychological archetypes and stereotypes in order to create the narrators and the characters that better suit our times, questioning authority and agency at all times and confusing the readers, who are avid for answers about the causality and coherence that, of course, they will not find in The Trilogy or *London Fields*. Moreover, we can also say that Amis's novel is more extreme in its portrayal of radically stereotyped characters, implying a much more direct and sarcastic social critique than Auster, so that the reader is disgusted by, amused by, but unable to identify with any of them. We must notice, though, that up until now we have been mostly concerned with *male* types, as the main characters in our novels are all white, male, and around their thirties. Up until now, they have been the vagabonds and players in search of an escape from a society that alienates them, and also from the cage they have built for themselves. However, in this chapter we want to talk about specific feminine types, too, and see if the principle that identity equals alterity that we have been observing throughout the novels applies for female types too. This is not an easy task in general, because women's presence in canonical literature both as protagonists and as writers traditionally is limited.

In Auster, on the one hand, women are almost invisible, with the exception of certain secondary characters that never act by themselves, but only briefly interact with the male

protagonists, as we will see. In Amis, generally, it is the same, with a few exceptions where female protagonists are introduced in his attempt at writing from the point of view of others and represent alterity. Hence there is, for example, Mary Lamb in *Other People* (1981), the novel he published prior to *London Fields*: “In *Other People*, Amis uses Mary/Amy to explore varieties of ‘otherness’, [which] also allows Amis to explore gender more fully. At first, of course, the male/female dichotomy is a distinction without a difference, since Mary/ Amy has forgotten her gendered identity along with everything else”, but it does not take long for her to notice that the violence practiced by men on women is the norm in society (Diedrick: 66-67). This violence is denounced not only in *Other People* but in most of his following works, *London Fields* included, where Keith Talent stands for the representative of the worst kind of masculinity, the one directly related to violence: *“*Keith's rapes were to be viewed distinctly from those numerous occasions, in his youth, he had been obliged to slap into line various cockteasers and icebergs (and lesbians and godbotherers)” (168). As we see, Amis shows the sordid in relation to femininity, usually through the behavior of *men*; therefore it should not be surprising that porn is a recurrent theme in his novels too, always interrelated with the image that men have of women as currency, and to money itself as the most dangerous item in current times: “Pause, SloMo. Picture Search. What [Keith] was after were the images of sex, violence, and sometimes money” (165). Keith Talent, who embodies this corrupted masculinity, portrayed through the eyes of Young, even reflects on violence matter-of-factly, always concluding violence is the only possible relationship there is with women:

> It came to him as a flash of inspiration. The black guys beat up the black *girls* who went out with white guys! Of course. So much simpler. He pondered the wisdom of this and drew a lesson from it, a lesson which, in his heart, he had long understood. If you're going to be violent, stick to women. Stick to the weak. (5)

But there is something we must bear in mind always to understand the point of this chapter; Martin Amis writes satire, and femininity is represented in extreme terms, along with everything else, and sometimes with the deliberate intention of being politically incorrect, as we will argue. He

tends to refer to controversial topics, but the feminine in his work has almost never gone unnoticed by critics; for example, the women characters in *Success* have been called “a little more than caricatures” (Tredell: 56). However, against these attacks, other critics defend Amis: “Such women are types, the subjects of fictional narratives, genre-specific […] ballbreakers and golddiggers are the sort of women who belong in comedy” (Tredell: 108). Not surprisingly though, Amis's portrayal of the feminine through Nicola Six continues by far to be the most controversial point of his career, as he has been harshly attacked by feminist critics for his prototypical *femme fatale.* Unlike Mary, Nicola is not the protagonist in Amis's *London Fields*; she is the main character in the *London Fields* Samson Young is writing; therefore she only exists in the fiction. We do not have direct access to her *self* as she always appears through the voice of the narrator, who is the actual protagonist. But although we do not hear her own voice, she is far from invisible; she emerges as the most professional player we can see in the novel, unabashedly playing the puppeteer for the action to continue. Nevertheless, like the rest of the characters, she also wants to escape from this world; she wants to die. However, in order to get her way, Nicola will destroy several lives, as she gets (more than) three men involved in her games. All of her moves have been despicable from an early age and she shows no signs of empathy:

> Years ago, when she studied the Method, her instructor told her that sadness— misery, tragedy— wasn't always the way. You had to think about the things that made you cry in real life. Whereas her classmates all got by with images of lost puppies, vanished fathers, *Romeo and Juliet*, starving Namibians, and so on, Nicola found that her one sure path to tears lay through memories of irritation and above all boredom. (125)

We could also continue to do as Samson Young does; he tries desperately to look the other way while he writes his fiction– “I am trying to ignore the world situation. I am hoping it will go away. Not the world. The situation. I want time to get on with this little piece of harmless escapism” (64). We could continue with this study without acknowledging the fact that the feminine is an issue not only in this novel, but in relation to the whole discussion about identity and self-definition we have engaged with throughout. But we will not. We must assume that, if the subject builds its

identity from without, having to socially perform coherently as he or she is expected, man and woman are clearly different constructions and thence they must perform differently: "each society sets limits to the life strategies than can be imagined, and certainly to those that can be practised" (Bauman, Z: 35); and we will see that what the System delimits as 'woman' and its possible representations, are very different from the representations of 'man'. As it will become clear in this chapter, this is a fact pointed out by all the thinkers we have been referring to such as Levinas, Derrida, Lacan, Baudrillard or Debord. For example, de Certeau talks about "*The sexualized organization of public space:* all these social manifestations respond to a gendered organization of society, each partner playing the role presented by his or her sexual definition within the limits imposed by propriety" (23). Therefore we will need to consider the different categorizations or roles that woman can perform in our society.

In regard to this, we must remark on a fact that makes it difficult for women to accept female characters as realistic in the novels we are dealing with: Auster and Amis are men within a male literary tradition, as we have seen in chapter 3 (and 4), and therefore they can never actually reproduce the voice of a woman, just as they could never really capture the mind of an actual dog in *Timbuktu* or *God's Dice*, respectively. They can never experience femininity first hand and therefore they cannot reproduce it faithfully, although we do not think they are trying to, anyway. As we always said, realism is not an aim for these authors. Amis, for example, according to Diedrick, is particularly focused on a large variety of male precursors in search of substitute literary "fathers"; as it is said, Amis's relationship with his father, also a writer, is very complicated (a fact that we are not going to consider any further in this study[37]):

> Beyond their intrinsic merit, the essays Martin Amis has written on such writers as J. G. Ballard, Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Vladimir Nabokov, V. S. Pritchett, Philip Roth, John Updike, and Angus Wilson reveal a writer obsessed with (male) precursors. With a few exceptions like Jane Austen or Iris Murdoch, [his] literary essays and reviews concern male writers. (13)

37 For more information on this topic, please check bibliography for Galvin Keulks's *Father and Son: Kingsley Amis...*

Moreover, he is not the only male writer who looks back at his predecessors as figurative fathers. In this regard, the theorist Harold Bloom talks about “anxiety of influence”, an

> Oedipal struggle between literary ‘fathers’ and ‘sons’ at the symbolic center of all relations between writers, texts, and their predecessors. In Bloom's [(unrepentantly and reductively phallocentric) view,] a writer unconsciously perceives his most significant precursors as potentially castrating father figures, and thus employs strategies intended to disarm them. These typically involve taking the literary forms of the precursors, revising, recasting, and displacing them. (Diedrick: 12)

This is something we referred to when we talked about intertextuality; it reinforces “the novel's central concern with self-consciousness, mediation, and inauthenticity” (21) but, when revisiting canonical literature, it is a given that they will find a majority of male writers who are concerned with male topics: women have been historically excluded from *Culture*, which has left their voices in the background of a predominantly male History of Culture.

For feminist readers, eager to find more female actors in fiction, Nicola is an invitation for uneasiness, as most of the time she behaves as a despicable, evil person, and she uses *sex* as a means for getting everything she wants from men. We agree with whoever considers that reading Nicola sometimes implies a nasty, disgusting experience. Nicola is the main representative for women in the novel and she behaves so poorly there is evidently no justification for her extreme actions against masculinity and what she calls love, the type of desperate love Sartre explores in *Being and Nothingness*: that is, when we love someone we want to possess the other's alterity, objectivizing love this way, we use the other person only for self-recognition (Sarup: 13-18). Nicola clearly takes advantage of this as she becomes, for each of the men, whatever they want her to be, the fulfillment of their fantasies, only to bring them crashing to the ground and with them the notion of their own identity; definitely, this is the kind of love Nicola is trying to kill along with herself. So, Nicola does not want to be possessed and in this way she avoids not only the identification of the other, but that we can discover *her* identity: “Nicola had lived deliciously; but she was promiscuous *on principle*, as a sign of emancipation, of spiritual freedom, freedom from men” (68).

Identity as Alterity

We will not try to redeem Amis himself from the feminist criticism; we can never know whether he really despises women based on his representation of them. Nevertheless we will try to redeem Nicola, the character, by trying to describe and analyze her within the context of the novel. For us, Nicola represents "Amis's anatomy of male misogyny, not in his own sustained attack on women"; and we agree with Tredell that the author must not be confused with his characters and that "in his narratives, Amis will take additional interest to discourage such confusion" (Tredell: 108). Because we believe this is so, we will search for such clues in *London Fields*, looking for clarification in the text, not outside of it. Redemption is a key word at this point, as it is redemption that Nicola is looking for since she has planned her own death, but not as a solitary or meaningless suicide attempt, but by involving certain characters in her murder. She will die, and it will not be meaningless, as we will argue throughout this chapter.

Within this context we cannot really contrast Auster's and Amis's novels due to the lack of powerful female characters in the Trilogy. Therefore Auster will be relegated to the background while we try to unravel the mystery of Nicola Six. Even so, it should be mentioned that there are some female characters who all shine in their invisibility, namely, for example, the future Mrs. Blue, whose real name we never get to know, as she is just a reminder of Blue's past life he has left behind in his contemplation and later loss of control; or Sophie, Fanshawe's and the narrator's wife, who is no more than another of the *complements* of Fanshawe's life that the narrator takes for himself. This scandalous lack of importance of women is recurrent throughout the three stories, even within the short stories Auster introduces in the narrative, like *Wakefield* by Hawthorne, which we mentioned in chapter 2 when dealing with intertextuality. In this short story Black tells Blue, a man abandons his life (and his wife) for more than twenty years, witnessing his own funeral and the suffering of his wife. One day, this man just decides to come back home and Hawthorne chooses the moment his wife opens the door for an ending, to which Blue instantly responds: "And we never know what he

says to his wife? No, that's the end" (173). There is even a woman whose face we never get to see, although she could be relevant in the Black case: "meeting with a woman with no face, a smoke screen, or contingent fact?" (151), a possibility he chooses to discard just two pages later: "The woman never meant anything. She was just a diversion" (153). The most extreme case of violence and invisibility is Ms. Stillman, about whom it is implied that her husband killed her, being able to cover for his crime by means of silence:

> Then Peter's mother died. Stillman claimed that she had died in her sleep, but the evidence seemed to point to suicide. Something to do with an overdose of pills, but of course nothing could be proved. There was even some talk he had killed her. But those were just rumors, and nothing ever came out of it. The whole affair was kept very quiet. (26)

With nothingness, we have seen, Auster usually means *something*; therefore, although there is no clear denouncing of male behavior towards women, it is made evident that male characters tend to leave their female counterparts out of their adventures, that they inflict violence on women for no reason, and that this is left for the reader to ponder on, like every other topic in the novel.

The only more or less strong female character we see in The Trilogy is Virginia Stillman as "the femme fatale in his noir detective fantasy", straight from a classic detective novel (Peacock: 51). Virginia, who recalls virginity through her name, is a woman similar to Nicola, mysterious and sexy: "The woman was thirty, perhaps thirty-five; average height at best; hips a touch wide, or else voluptuous, depending on your point of view; dark eyes, and a look in those eyes that was at once self-contained and vaguely seductive. She wore a black dress and very red lipstick" (13). She kisses Quinn once, which is enough to have him on the hook of the case: "Much later, long after it was too late, he realized that deep inside he had been nurturing the chivalric hope of solving the case so brilliantly and irrevocably, that he would win Mrs. Stillman's desire" (63). It becomes clear that the kiss was part of a scheme when "his employer had rapidly retreated behind the mask of business and not once had referred to that isolated moment of passion" (63). Therefore, just as we will see in Amis, Auster uses this stereotype to reflect on male subjectivity and the real motivations men have

when it comes to women, while at the same time we can suppose Virginia Stillman is nothing but a piece in a bigger scheme, and she has been used by 'other people' to scam him.

Masculinity is not a preeminent topic in the Trilogy either, although as Little points out, it is a constitutive part of the identity that an Auster character is always forced to leave behind: "Having abandoned the traditional trappings of male power and prestige, having wasted himself, he emerges as a figure with no profession, no office, no home" (160). Characters are eventually deprived of every trace of their identity, including every label that made them 'men' in society: "Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing" (102). Moreover, masculinity is not a natural given in Auster; "he isn't made of stone, *he says to himself*" (my emphasis), but the social notion of it helps the characters reinforce themselves in their player-pilgrim moves, like when they are unfaithful: "His guilt towards the future Mrs. Blue is scant, however, for he justifies these sessions with Violet by comparing himself to a soldier at war in another country. Every man needs a little comfort, especially when his number could be up tomorrow" (157). This is only a sneak peak of what we can also witness in *London Fields*, although it reminds us of the self-justification Keith found for his interracial affairs in the passage we quoted in chapter 1, where he saw himself as an imperialist force. We will bring up some other examples from the Trilogy relevant to the ideas presented in this chapter, but from this point on, we will mostly refer to Amis.

The Times published: "After [Salman Rushdie's] *The Satanic Verses* (1989), the book most argued over in Britain continues to be *London Fields*"[38], later adding "[c]ritics of the book are accused of having mistaken satirical realism for moral turpitude, of confusing the story with its narrator and of being blinded to its merits by feminist or otherwise 'extra-literary' concerns" (in Tredell: 98). The catalyst for this controversy started up when Amis was left out of the Booker Prize

38 Rushdie included sections from the unofficial life of Mohammed in his novel, which deeply offended large sections of the Muslim community. For more on the controversy in relation to *The Satanic Verses* check Said : 370-371.

list of the year, something that Young himself predicts in the book: "let me soberly tell you that I don't think my book is prizewinning material. Though the panel might feel differently about it if they knew it was true. Christ, it's only just occurred to me: people are going to imagine that I actually sat down and made all this stuff up" (302). "His exclusion for the shortlist, it is rumoured, was insisted on by the two women judges on the panel, Maggie Gee and Helen McNeil" (Jane Ellison in Tredell: 97). This is a rumor one of the judges denies, or at least clarifies stating she likes Amis in general as a comic author, but she says "there is a strong formal, purely 'literary' case against *London Fields*, [that he] 'has tried for effects that aren't quite worked out. […] There's confusion in the book about the function of the narrator' "; adding that some male critics "have disliked the book for similar reasons". She nevertheless refers to the confusing, for her, relationship the narrator has with two particular female characters: his blessing of the little girl at the end combined with the brutal murder of Nicola "just two pages earlier" (Maggie Gee in Tredell: 98). Yet more feminist authors are vocal about the issue of gender in Amis: "Perhaps the trouble is that Amis… writes about sex. Quite a lot about sex, as it happens" (Jane Ellison in Tredell: 97; and perhaps that is the trouble; there is quite a lot of sex in the novel and *how* it is described might be disturbing for certain audiences, but we must not forget that sex is Nicola's power in the book too. Amis locates her power over men in the fact that she physically matches the erotic ideal (by men, for men) and in this way all kinds of men will succumb to her automatically, although she always transforms their infatuation with her into pain. This mission of hers in *London Fields* is a long-term ongoing strategy and she is using the impact she creates on men in her favor; this is how Young describes it:

> But let us be clear about this: she had great powers– great powers. All women whose faces and bodies more or less neatly fill the contemporary mould have some notion of these privileges and magics. During their pomp and optimum, however brief and relative, they occupy the erotic centre. Some feel lost, some surrounded or crowded, but there they are, in a China-sized woodland of teak-hard worship. And with Nicola Six the gender yearning was translated, was fantastically heightened: it came at her in the form

> of human love. She had the power of inspiring love, almost anywhere. Forget about making strong men weep. Seven stone pacifists shouldered their way through street riots to be home in case she called. Family men abandoned sick children to wait in the rain outside her flat. Semi-literate builders and bankers sent her sonnet sequences. She pauperized gigolos, she spayed studs, she hospitalized heartbreakers. They were never the same again, they lost their heads. And the thing with her (what was it with her?), the thing with her was that she had to receive this love and send it back in opposite form, not just canceled but murdered. Character is destiny; and Nicola knew where her destiny lay. (20-21)

Nicola is, although impossible to classify, an extreme version of a *femme fatale*, and she does not constitute a benevolent representation of womanhood, particularly among so much invisibility of other types of woman; we agree with the feminist side on that. We argue, nevertheless, that this is not an invention or an innovation by Amis at all and so we must figure out the possible reasons for his use of Nicola in the novel. We will not be as naive as some critics who, probably enchanted by Amis's very enjoyable virtuosity, try to literally defend him by softening down the impression that Nicola creates. For example, Penny Smith states: “Amis's apparent intention is for his female character to be read as a symbol of her age rather than a sign of her gender” (in Tredell: 101). We believe Nicola *is* a representation of her gender, in fact, she embodies all male fantasies concerning her gender and therefore she never stands for a real woman, but for a seductive simulacrum, to use Baudrillard's terminology. Amis's characters are representations of extreme, unlikable characters; hence Keith, Young, Guy, Asprey and each of the other male characters in the novel must also be considered a symbol of their time *and of masculinity* too: “Keith acted in the name of masculinity” (23); and so every character in the novel must be perceived as what might be called a negative extreme. Well-behaved characters, from our point of view, male or female, are all losers in Amis's game, as goodness in his novels almost always equates with “a gullibility bordering on imbecility” (Pesetsky in Tredell: 114). For example, he criticizes the ‘new type of masculinity’ in an essay about *Iron John: A New Vision of Masculinity.* There, he sarcastically critiques a masculinity that may consider women not as equal, but as superior:

> The masculine cultivation of his feminine ‘side’ can be seen as a kind of homage to a

> better and gentler principle. Well, the New Man is becoming an old man, perhaps prematurely, what with all the washing-up he's done; there he stands in the kitchen, a nappy in one hand, a pack of tarot cards in the other, with his sympathetic pregnancies, his hot flushes and contact pre-menstrual tensions, and with a duped frown on his ageing face. (4)

This is something that is present in *London Fields* through the character of Guy Clinch; see how he sarcastically describes Guy at home very similarly: "He had cooked the dinner himself, as usual, expressionlessly busying himself with meat-pounder, pasta-shredder, vegetable-slicer. [...] Really, Guy could have made the grade as a proletarian female. He was obedient, industrious and uncomplaining. He had what it took" (211). Therefore, moving on from this, the task we must take on is to find possible antecedents for the feminine that Nicola represents both in high and popular culture, which is what we have already done when we dealt with male types. Of course, this will mean a shift towards other sources that will help us better contextualize this specific topic, although always returning to the novel.

Until now, we have done something that most of the critics we have consulted or cited also do, and that is to look the other way when talking about theories of otherness and alterity and the topic of the feminine comes up (for certain, it *is* uncomfortable). Moreover, we have decontextualized the words of authors or at least used them partially in order to reinforce our arguments and to be able to describe the theories of alterity in our times and their relationship with our novels coherently; but it must be well noted and highlighted that Derrida, Lacan or Levinas all present the feminine as an opposite other to the masculine. Therefore, this implies that any understanding between the sexes must be ultimately impossible, at least according to what we have argued throughout this study. Is this then detrimental towards the feminine? Apparently it depends on the interpretation of the text, and, of course, language can be deceiving; therefore it is necessary to offer our own interpretation regarding this othering process that woman has undergone in silence, then also share some celebrated feminists' opinions in order to answer the question in a manner that takes us beyond a purely personal view, even though their theories are already under scrutiny,

notwithstanding those who choose to ignore this issue.

Lacan is, for example, a very controversial figure in contemporary psychology for his view of 'woman' as a complete alien, and a mere projection of the (masculine) self; but curiously enough, "many feminists use his work to challenge phallocentric knowledges" such as Juliet Mitchell, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, Julia Kristeva, Monique Plaza and Catherine Clement on the grounds that "his problematizations of the idea of sexuality have helped to free feminist theory of the constraints of humanism" (Sarup: 27)— for example, Nicole Brossard explores the possibility for "an other woman" and in her work there are many instances of a mirror that reflects more than one image (in Derrida: 16-17). This helps her explore, as our authors do, superimpositions of self and other and doubling. On the other hand, other feminist critics and writers "are extremely hostile to it, seeing it as elitist, male-dominated and itself as phallocentric", such as Germaine Greer, Dale Spender and others. However, some, such as Jane Gallop, Jacqueline Rose, Sara Kofmanor or Luce Irigay, who we will later refer to in order to support our own ideas, make use of his theories to create their own, but critique the insurmountable distance that his ideas have created between the sexes (Sarup: 27), as we will soon see.

Moving on from here, we will now take Levinas's *Time and the Other* (1987) as a concrete example in order to analyze his attitude towards the philosophical subject and its relationship with femininity. Levinas is insatiably quoted by all sectors of postmodernist criticism interested in finding a voice for the minorities; therefore Said or Bhabha, for example, acknowledge his importance, as well as Lacan's and Derrida's, for the beginning of a process of visualization of the other in western intellectual spheres, while at the same time influencing them. But male critics usually do not refer to the issue that arises from Levinas's text concerning women and their presence and participation within the philosophical experience, what Levinas calls the "light" (74). In a manner similar to Lacan, Levinas cannot but give in to his position in the world as a man and

progressively starts showing the negativity that womanhood implies in his theory. However, to digress just briefly, some critics like Paul-Laurent mention that there *could* be a *wrong* interpretation of these authors; "that the ethical subject is placed on the side of the masculine! [It] is an idea to correct immediately by saying that ethics is distinguished, as we have seen, from the metamorphosis of the virile 'ego' in an experience of a radical *passivity*" (96). Also, in a similar vein, the editor of our edition clarifies in a footnote: "The issue is important but not as simple as de Beauvoir, in this instance, makes it out to be, because for Levinas the other has a priority over the subject" and he recommends some more "sympathetic treatment of Levinas's thought on this issue" (85). We do not agree with these critics in their toning down of Levinas's conclusions simply because he clarifies that as the other is impossible to connect with, it (she) is impossible to be owned either: "Possessing, knowing, and grasping are synonyms of power" (Levinas: 90). Although some critics see in this 'gesture' or concession towards the other a type of freedom, in that it (she) is not under the power of the subject, what de Beauvoir, the well known feminist thinker, reacted against was Levinas's astonishing revelation in his digression on otherness and complete alterity. In fact, he is able to pin it down to one type of other specifically; let us read the conclusive paragraph where he makes clear the nature of the dead-end street he has entered and presents:

> What is the alterity that does not purely and simply enter into the opposition of two species of the same genus? I think the absolutely contrary contrary *[le contraire absolutement contraire],* whose contrariety is in no way affected by the relationship that can be established between it and its correlative, the contrariety that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the *feminine.* (85)

Therefore if femininity is total alterity to the subject, the problem appears that it cannot be attributed to the philosophical subject *at all*. Male characters in our novels progressively learn that the identity they relied on was actually based on alterity, but under this light, or this darkness, for females, alterity is always a given. Women are other by default and are left with absolutely no way of self-recognition that is not based on male perceptions.

Also on the same line as de Beauvoir, Irigay finds it insulting that the other is located "but

without any recognition of the other's own existence" (78). She starts her article "What Other are We Talking About?" by stating: "It is through misunderstanding or misjudgment that some people consider me a disciple or inheritor of Levinas's work" (67), and in order to clarify her position, she proceeds to take down the wall Levinas has built around his theory by correcting, not complementing, him: "If the feminine is other for the masculine subject, the masculine is, or should be, also an other for the feminine subject" (71). She criticizes Levinas's "virile universe" (68) because, surprisingly enough for a contemporary reader (and philosopher), he gives much importance to *virility*, a word that appears on every page of the essay as a desirable characteristic of the subject; that is, the end of the subject's control over life is called "the end of virility" (75). He talks about a femininity that is not only unrecognizable because it is other to his subject, but also because it is characterized by the inherent need for remaining silent and hidden, away from the philosophical experience he calls 'the light': "What matters to me in this notion of the feminine is not merely the unknowable, but a mode of being that consists in slipping away from the light. The feminine in existence is an event different [from] that of spatial transcendence or of expression that go toward light. It is a flight before light, hiding is the way of existing of the feminine" (87). For Irigay, here lies a huge problematic for women's self-definition and also their visibility in any context; so she continues by responding to Levinas's definition of femininity as alterity: "It is not in itself that the other remains invisible. It is invisible for me insofar as I cannot perceive the world in which it stands" (73).

According to Irigay, the historical invisibility of women is a result of the historical monopoly of the representation of women *by men*, who are unable to experience and, therefore, represent womanhood fairly. Irigay argues that the feminine of the philosophers is an attempt at keeping women out of the cultural space (Sarup: 121). Consider the following quote:

> If the light evoked by Levinas corresponds to the so-called natural light of Western reason, how could the feminine not stand back from it, since we know that it is founded

> through the exclusion of the feminine from its logic– be it as nature, as her or Her. It suffices to reread the philosophers, in particular the pre-Socratics, to be convinced of this and to follow the evolution of such a process. (Irigay: 75)

Więckowska agrees with Irigay that “A woman is or has always been represented as an artwork, as a text written by a masculine self who attempts to top her eternal retreat” (185). Thence many female writers fight for the deconstruction of the tradition of the levinasian feminine. For example, Cixous or Kristeva have worked on men writers who tried to speak for women like Mallarmé, Lautreamont or Joyce. However, Irigay considers, on the other hand, that these writers tried to speak *like* a woman, because speaking *as* a woman would imply “not simply psychological positioning, but also social positioning” (Sarup: 121). She is also interested in how philosophers like Nietzsche, Hegel or Derrida relate identity and femininity:

> According to the above scenario we are left in a rather odd position; men, writers and philosophers who want to write like women, are better at being women than women are! But as Irigay points out one should not confuse identification with identity, and therefore women should never accept the imposition of meaning over them by men; they should find “a language of their own” (Sarup: 121).

With all this in mind, let us now return to the novel and see how this discussion helps us clarify a little bit more about Nicola as a character and as a woman in *London Fields*.

Nicola is a very complicated character because she does not speak as or like a woman; furthermore, she *wants* to have her story written down by a man. In this sense, Nicola is not a woman, she is a literary construction by Martin Amis, a man. Furthermore, in the book we can never quote Nicola directly, not in the first nor in the second level of the fiction; everything about her passes through the filter of Samson Young. In fact, she uses both Asprey and Young to write and publish her biography as a female fantasy; and in order to *be* this fantasy she always resorts to male-invented arts, for example by wearing the scandalous dress she wears towards the conclusion, she makes a statement: “The dress was man-made, drulon, trexcett, man-made in every sense, made by men with men in mind” (456-457). Nicola does not exist in real life, that is a fact, but the ideas she incarnates most definitely exist in cultural (not only male) imagery: “The feminine within this

economy is thought on the basis of the needs or desires of the masculine subject and not on its own basis" (Irigay: 75). Under this perspective, Nicola embodies an entity to be attacked or looked down upon, even by feminists, and Amis is clearly presenting her for that reason: she is a stereotype as full of flaws as the male stereotypes in the novel, all of whom are Amis's satirical creations.

From what has been said, Nicola fits into the levinasian description of the feminine perfectly, because darkness is her territory. We never get a very detailed description of her nor her background, first because she avoids giving up information and second because the narrator focuses only on certain facts and features: she is an eastern European woman in her early thirties, beautiful and voluptuous and with dark hair and skin. This physical darkness deviates from simple skin tone to a halo of total darkness: "her darkness" (61), "the dark of her waist" (74); a black hole (76); this denotes a way of being that escapes permanently from the light and apprehension by the male subject. Fot example, black is the color she is wearing the first time she goes into the Black Cross to drink black coffee and smoke black tobacco (22); even a blackbird flies the first time she ever speaks[39] (21). So, if whiteness in the *Trilogy* was related to the Stillmans, a symbol of western patriarchal tradition– "Everything about Peter Stillman was white" (15)–, certainly blackness in *London Fields* stands for the total alterity of the woman who opposes this tradition. De Certeau says propriety is diurnal and transgression is not tolerated in the daylight while the night is obscure, "an irrepressible interrogative buzz: who is doing what?" (18-19); this is why the mysterious Nicola, in the darkness, closely related to the nocturnal, maintains the constant attention of Samson Young and Guy, who take the image that they want to have of her as an excuse for the escapism they crave; they pursue the achievement of a fantasy, which is why Nicola will perform differently for each of them. Nicola knows in her fictional bones the theory we have been discussing here; she knows "how deeply enmeshed we are in the network of hidden factors that constitute our cultural

39 Note that the raven, in particular, is a bird of ill omen and announcing, usually, death. With Nicola, Amis is always dealing in literary commonplaces and types.

identities"; she is aware "that our actions are determined by an almost infinite number of forces beyond the range of our consciousness" (Wurgaft: 68), and therefore she will use this against the other characters, swindling them into progressively abandoning their previous lives and getting lost in her lies.

Moreover, Nicola's mission –a very quixotic one, according to the last chapter– seems to involve proving that individuals are less important than the "symbolic significance of role-filling" (Pristed: 29), and so she will satisfy the type she has to play for any of her particular goals, lying to inexplicable extremes and making all of them believe. Hence, there must be no doubt that what Amis is putting on paper is the male fantasy and not the representative for females or femininity, something that becomes obvious when she herself clarifies to the narrator, "I *am* a male fantasy figure. I've been one for fifteen years. It really takes it out of a girl". In this affirmation, she clarifies that reality or the girl she might have been once has been substituted by the fantasy she has become, but she also lets the readers know what it is that she really stands for. This statement is then followed by the enumeration of some names men have applied to her type: "Sexpot, Hot Lay, Sack Artist, Mata Hari... Femme Fatale", then concluding with Nicola's definition which is, simply: "I'm a Muderee" (260). From this, we appreciate that she is a fantasy, one that has been configured by men throughout history, but in this case she is also designed to disappear; she must be killed by the those who invented her: she must be murdered by men. Therefore although she might be considered too extreme to be put into words, the same society that disgusts Nicola co-exists with the images of 'woman' she represents, as they come at us from everywhere in the System. She impersonates what Baudrillard calls a simulation, embodying the confusing moves of what he describes as 'seduction'; she constitutes an entity that has no referent in the real but only within the System, and therefore exists and is real within the only realm possible.

In order to develop something that was touched on earlier, it should be noted that, originally,

'seduction' did not refer directly or exclusively to sex; seduction is contrary to production, deviating the value of things into the domain of appearances: "its symbolic interchange does not only affect the interchange between sexes" (Baudrillard *C*, my translation: 29). But it is a fact that all fields of human experience have been absorbed and reinterpreted by the System, which has transformed every aspect of our lives into the kind of script de Certeau describes, including the notions of sexual gender and sexual relationships. As Grossberg argues, preconceived personal practices place people within the 'regimes of the person': "character, personality, identity, reputation, honour, citizen, individual, normal, lunatic, patient, client, husband, mother, daughter...." (131). Therefore, as we have been arguing all along, identities feed from these unnatural sources in order to hold on to a category of being. A woman who looks for traces of a possible self in the existing conventions involving gender and female sexuality is ultimately going to find total alterity, nothing more than images created to seduce (women and men at the same time). Given this state of affairs, a woman will never be able to define herself other than by alterity, which some reject: "From a psychoanalytic perspective it is therefore vital that alterity remain abstract and nonspecific, that it not be reduced to the social differentials of gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity" (Dean: 919). However, for rebellious reasons, Nicola will find a way to bring this fantasy, this alterity, to life, suppressing any original features she might have had from birth, as her whole life seems to be manufactured from the orphanage to the trips around the world, always resembling fictions or a film.

We can never see any shade of reality behind the images that Nicola projects as she will always wear a pre-calculated outfit, a *mask* –a concept that Latin captured with the word *persona.* Related to this, Amis makes use of again "The metaphor of masquerade (the dislocation between subjectivity and role) [which] has been used primarily in recent years to theorize the experience of being a woman in a man's town" (Dugay: 185). Nicola can play very extreme and very different

roles and effectively *be* several different people in order to empower herself over men. Therefore we also see Nicola being different people just as we saw multiplicity in Quinn or Fanshawe from the Trilogy. All of her masks are in one way or another related to sex. Consider for example that, only within the category of kisses, she uses a variety of types depending on the reaction she is searching for in her 'victim', and the narrator offers a catalogue of them (although we do not know if Young names the types or if Nicola did it herself):

> Many subheads and subsections, many genres and phyla-chapter and verse, cross-references, multiple citations. [...]The Rosebud, the Dry Application, Anybody's, Clash of the Incisors, Repulsion, the Turning Diesel, Mouthwash, the Tonsillectomy, Lady Macbeth, the Readied Pussy, Youth, the Needer, the Gobbler, the Deliquescent Virgin [and] the Jewish Princess. (186-187)

Nevertheless, we must clarify that moments of actual sex are not that numerous in *London Fields* in spite of how it must seem from all the criticism. Nicola eventually has sex with Samson, but as readers, we never get to know much about these encounters because for him, Nicola behaves as if she were not playing any role at all: "What was she wearing? I can't remember. No outfit or disguise of depravity. Just clothes. And she wasn't made-up either; she wasn't drunk, and she wasn't mad. Very much herself, was, herself, fraying but shiny like worn velvet, extreme, aromatic, nervous, subtle" (391). This way he feels comfortable outside of the action of his book although, in fact, she is doing to him the same as she does to every man she takes control over through sex; that is, the kind of sex any man likes and wants: "She really did a number on him. What was the number? It was Six. Six. Six" (96).

Even so, and in spite of the foregoing, the most vivid sexual images in the book come along with the sex that *does not happen*; hence we must go back to Ellison, the feminist critic who denounced that *London Fields* was about *sex.* She continues as follows: "[*London Fields*] is awash with sex, sleazy, nasty sex, involving lots of black stockings, panties and things too dreadful to mention here" (in Tredell: 97). However, here, we believe that Ellison must be referring to pornography in the book, not to sex: *of course*, the pornographic passages where Nicola films

herself on video do involve a lot of clothes and classic stereotypes from many genres of pornography: “Nicola disliked pornography, but it was easy to do. It stank of money” (191). For Keith, she knows porn is what will work because Keith is so absorbed by the TV screen that real sex for him has been substituted by porn: “In the days after their first meeting, the image of Nicola Six began to work on Keith's mind. It worked like television” (55). This is where the much criticized stockings come into play. The problem with Nicola's transgression is that these images do not correspond to propriety whatsoever and are not supposed to be exposed in the open. Although sex is the natural way by which we reproduce, and although there is a possibility for connection between the sexes as opposite others, all of which is a constitutive part of humans' societal behavior, there are some contradictions in “[t]he Status of the discourse on sexuality, [dominated by] double meaning and other figures. The sexual life of the neighborhood (the language as well as the practices) is not locatable in a systematic place that would reveal full social transparency to us. On the contrary, it only manifests itself there in brief sparks, in a twisted way, obliquely, as if through the looking glass” (de Certeau: 26). De Certeau talks about an early sexualization of human beings, while they still do not have the code necessary to understand, because of the exposure to images of highly sexualized content: “the adult world is entirely infiltrated with unconscious and sexual significations to which adults themselves do not have the code” (126-127). In Amis, the looking glass is the camera and the actions of Nicola belong to that code invented by the System for the regulation of sexual relationships that is not based on natural sex, as no simulation is: “This wasn't the real thing. Just a mannequin, on the remote” (*LF*: 269). The “events themselves disappear behind the television screen” and it is no mirror anymore, it is simply a mode of escapism and disappearance for the masses (Baudrillard "The Masses...": 213). Therefore pornography is yet another way of escapism, another consumer product that the System offers to *men* disenchanted by the emptiness of available relationships: “We do in fact live among pure forms, in radical obscenity,

which is to say visible and undifferentiated, among figures that were previously secret and distinct (…), the social [is] obscene and empty” (Baudrillard "On Seduction": 162). Therefore porn is a commodity “more real than the real”; it is one of the top enchanting simulations, “more false than the false, and the secret of appearances” (154).

Baudrillard denounces how in our society the sexual act is shown openly and directly to the sight for its consumption (through pornography), to be ‘devoured’: “There the game does not exist, nor the dialectic nor the distance, but a total termination of the elements” (my translation, *C*: 36). Hence the world we live in and the one Amis tries to capture in his novel are too obscene, which is why Nicola uses the System's Achilles's heel for seducing men on her behalf, this way empowering herself by playing by the forbidden rules of the sexual games. Amis, through the narrator, is conscious that Nicola is heavily politically incorrect: “But Nicola is heavy stuff. Nicola is *heavy.* I guess I could tone it down, if there's time. But tone it down to what?” (78). That is a problem, but not only for the narrator, because in the real world porn does exist, taking more and more power over the internet, where filters are basically impossible to impose on the content: “Nowadays the main issue in criticism on the media revolves around tolerance limits” (Baudrillard *C*, my translation: 37-38). But even so, if the issue is porn in literature written by men, there are also many other examples of people who have used explicit sex in contemporary novels such as Jeanette Winterson, W. H. Smith, Julie Burchil, Sally Bauman, Shirley Conran or Judith Krantz: “What do all these fat volumes have in common? Yes, lots of passages of pornographic sex. And they're all written by women. [...] Women cannot complain about their treatment in male fiction when it is women themselves who write those trashy, livid blockbusters just to earn themselves a vast publisher's advance” (Jane Ellison in Tredell: 99). Therefore there are some women taking advantage of the preconceptions on femininity and sex, just as Nicola does in the novel. Ellison says sex represents one paragraph to every five pages, although it might be less, but we agree with her

that it is not written purely to keep the reader "salivating (it is far too nasty for that)" (99). The main problem we find is that pornography in this novel is outwith propriety; Amis knows that and partly denounces that the representation of sex has been reduced to pornography and made invisible, while at the same time it has become very visible, but only outside of propriety: "Everybody masturbated all their lives. On the whole, literature declined the responsibility of this. So pornography had to cope with it. Not elegantly or reassuringly. As best it could" (67).

Anyway it is not just hardcore porn that Nicola successfully performs; for Guy, she dresses as a puritan to fake virginity and purity; "Again the word pornography came to mind: to Guy's mind, where there wasn't any— where there wasn't any pornography" (215). He remains unable to satisfy his sexual arousal with her no matter what, but it is this (fake, impossible) purity Clinch dreams about in his philanthropic existence, although he feels guilty for being unfaithful to his wife: "What kind of man was this? How unusual? Guy gave money to charity. For every other man in his circle, charity began at home. And ended there too. Or not quite: charity continued for a mile or so, into the next postal district, and arrived at a small flat with a woman in it" (87). But thanks to his good intentions, he will be easy to con by Nicola and her faithful helper, Samson: "the second definition of *infatuation* is 'inspired with extravagant passion'; but the first definition is 'made foolish'. Guy asked my advice about Nicola. I gave my advice (it was bad advice), and with any luck he'll take it" (101). And he did, forcing himself into a very dramatic romance where sex will conveniently be the biggest taboo, in order to respect the moral code of this very *modest* woman. In order to highlight his infatuation (he is the fool, the foal, the fall guy after all), we also get long and very detailed passages in the novel of this painful affair: "Keith said, 'What do you do with Guy then?' 'What do you think I do?' said Nicola. 'I tease his fucking cock off' " (330). When embodying this virginal character, Nicola hides from the light towards what the male subject sees as a good woman: "this fact of hiding is precisely *modesty*" (Levinas: 87); so modesty is just another

commodity for men that Nicola knows how to impersonate. She pretends she does not know anything about sex so she can be guided by Guy, a knight in a shinning armor that really sparkles with the super sun as something obsolete: “You could imagine Nicola, someone like Nicola, someone in her position, someone so placed, so cloistered, at the end of the nineteenth century or at the end of the eighteenth century or any other century that had a number. But not the twentieth century, which must leave its mark on everyone. Not the twentieth century. Not looking like she looked” (330). This way, she tricks Guy into following her every step, believing every lie, looking for imaginary friends internationally on her behalf, leaving his wife and son, and, most of all, she tempts this chivalric side of men we have seen all over both the Trilogy and *London Fields*, which must certainly be outdated because it always implies confusion and deviation from a better path.

Apart from this, however, there is yet another mask Nicola wears, a layer under the puritan or the porn star ones, and that is the *femme fatale* mask she wears in every situation of her life. As a woman interested in luxury and fashion Nicola is, at all times, what she *wears*, thence *clothes* and *make up* are very important for her success. Nicola has her value system very clear, and it places the emphasis on perfection in clothing at all times:

> Nicola was consternated by how few women really *understood* about underwear. It *was* a scandal. If the effortless enslavement of men was the idea, or one of the ideas (and who had a better idea?) […] They wanted the female form shaped and framed, packaged and gift-wrapped, stylized, cartoonified, and looking, for a moment at least, illusory pure. They wanted the white lie of virginity. Men were so *simple*. But what did that do to the thoughts of women, to the thoughts of women like Nicola Six? Never, in her life, not ever, had Nicola decisively discarded any item of clothing. The flat's large second bedroom had become a supercloset– it was like a boutique in there, the suits, the party dresses, the theatrical costumes and disguises, the belts, the scarves, the hats. (71)

Moreover, Nicola undergoes this everyday transformation because she wants to forever send a message of power, and power for a woman in the System goes with her physical appearance. Guy Clinch reflects on how different in fact it is for him to get dressed in the mornings: “His closet was a City of business suits– but on most days his clothes no longer needed to *say* anything. The outer man was losing his lineaments. Soon there would just be an inner one, palely smiling” (86); and he

compares this to women's clothing: “The vaults and galleries of female clothing, their catholicity of cut and colour, surprised and impressed him. Compared to this, men went around in uniform. But then... but then, just now (and in a sense it had been this way for half a century): we are all in uniform” (419). The underlying truth is that women feel a stronger urge in the System to perform a variety of different roles that, although sometimes contradictory, must remain in harmony with the picture she wants to project above all, which is certainly not an easy task; it takes a lot of effort but Nicola knows she must be “Actress like. Real pro: knows what she's doing. The others: amateurs” (289). Even de Certeau, when speaking about propriety and the meaning imposed on darkness and night cannot but refer to women's clothing and their meaning as an example for clothes as a fundamental support for the social message proffered: “i.e. The clothing of a woman who is ‘dressed to go out’ ” (16). And this is a very concrete example that does not need to be explained, because we all know what a woman dressed to go out can mean in cultural imagery and Nicola consciously chooses what to wear for ‘horrornight’; she is dressed for rape and she is dressed for death: “‘Do You think this dress is sufficiently disgusting?’ she called out. […] ‘Let's stop it. Let's abort...Oh, wear a coat Nicola’ ” (455); although, ironically, Keith “has never seen her looking quite so beautiful” (458).

Nicola assumes her role as a fictitious character beyond the fiction although the narrator reminds her several times that she is a real person: “‘But you're not in a story. This isn't some hired video, Nicola.’ She shrugged. ‘It always felt like a story’ ” (118). The real Nicola would not like all this paraphernalia if she could come out somehow: “the mirror hours, the looking glass. Nobody could seriously stand there and expect anybody to be forever having to do with all *this* shit” (195). She knows she is a slave to this code and as she is growing older, she knows it carries an evanescent power:

> Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Which is fun for the beholder; but what about the owner, the tenant? Nicola wondered whether she'd ever had a minute's pleasure from it.

> Even at sixteen, when you're excitedly realizing what you've got (and imagining it will last for ever), you're still noticing what you haven't got, and will never get. Beauty's hand is ever at its lips, bidding adieu. Yes, but bidding adieu in the mirror. (127)

Nicola, the illusion, wants to be eliminated but this way the real Nicola also will be able to escape from the constraints of this distorted femininity. The lacanian and levinasian figurative mirrors reinforce the fear that the actual mirror symbolizes for Nicola, beyond the decay of beauty. She will not get older anymore. This frustration caused by the System that she feels as a female leads her to kill herself in order to be able to kill the impersonal image that resembles her. Więckowska so accurately and sadly describes this levinasian frustration:

> Her face, distorted, presents her inability to signify: even in touching her, one does not reach her, but searches for something which is beyond her, not yet existing […]. In her passivity, or because of the passivity ascribed to her, the woman is immersed in a present that can take on nothing and thus, like an object of art, she becomes an impersonal and anonymous instant. She retreats into shyness, eludes herself and the lover who touches her; therefore, she is not herself. But resembles her own image. (184)

With all this in mind, in her total darkness, Nicola becomes a symbol of a levinasian female subject in need of an escape from the theory that reflects the reality of women in and according to the System. Irigay says:

> Perhaps it would be more correct to say that the feminine is not satisfied with the light sought by the masculine subject, that it aspires to another light [...]. This light does not correspond to its constitutive necessities. And what the feminine tries to escape is rather the fact of being submitted to an economy not its own while its own goes unrecognized. The violation with respect to the feminine is firstly the imposition of a world inappropriate to it, which deprives it of a return to self, especially in the relation to the transcendental and to light. (76)

And Nicola seems to have this purpose; in her need to escape from all these social impositions over women, she has a goal which is the actual origin of her *self*, which resides outside of her body: “Her project had been to get through men– to get to the end of men” (189), and she finds only one way to do so: death. Curiously, or ironically, Levinas calls death “the end of virility”; in his theory “death becomes the limit of the subject's virility, the virility made possible by the hypostasis at the heart of an anonymous being, and manifested in the phenomenon of the present, in the light” (74). Therefore

Nicola wants to symbolically finish with both the conception of the male subject in the System, and the image that has been imposed on women too; and because she seems to find no other option to escape from them, suicide presents itself as a powerful move against the absurd, as Levinas himself contemplates in his theory: “a notion of being without nothingness, which leaves no hole and permits no escape. And this impossibility of nothingness deprives suicide, which is the final mastery one can have over being. One is no longer master of anything –that is, one is in the absurd. Suicide appears as the final recourse against the absurd. [...]The power to die is still a triumph over fatality (50)”. For this rebellious act, she needs to die on her own terms, which Baudrillard (among others) considers an effective move towards freedom from the System. Our characters' ideas of escapism throughout both novels have in common that they seek for disappearance in one way or another. According to Baudrillard, “The object, the individual, is not only condemned to disappearance, but disappearance is also its strategy” ("The Masses...": 213). Nicola is a player and she is used to winning; she also at all times takes extreme positions, being an extreme simulation in a hyperreal world: “Things have to be pushed to the limit, where everything is naturally inverted and collapses”; therefore she needs to die to make a symbolic move and really win the game by effectively leaving the System: “ The play of simulation must therefore be taken further than the system permits. Death must be played against death. A radical tautology. The system's own logic turns into the best weapon against it” ("Symbolic...": 123).

Nicola might be searching for affirmation through negativity as a woman, which some female characters by feminist writers such as Toni Morrison, Angela Carter, Octavia Butler, or Donna Haraway have used before: self destruction for freedom (Berger, J: 391), a relationship we find beyond feminism too:

> Negativity is the negation of identity. Human beings are truly free or really human only in and by effective negation of the given real. Negativity, then, is nothing other than human freedom. The freedom which is realized and manifested as dialectical or negating action is thereby essentially a creation. What is involved is not replacing one

> given by another given, but overcoming the given in favour of what does not (yet) exist. (Sarup: 21)

And here is a clue that could be helpful in order to clarify Amis's intentions, because, as we will see, Nicola is not sacrificed for any other women in the novel, but in favor of the only being that inspires hope for mankind in Young; the baby: “The eyes of certain faces, children's faces, made him wonder whether this whole adventure of his, so agitated and inspired, and so climactic, wasn't just a way of evading the twentieth century or the planet or what the one had done to the other” (430). Therefore, towards the end of the chapter, we will consider whether Kim Talent might constitute a *creation* out of Nicola's death.

But against this hopeless situation for womanhood, we must remember that many other women remain alive in *London Fields* after Nicola's and Young's death as apparently the apocalypse does not occur on the expected date: ‘real’ women exist in the novel although their voices are almost never heard and they do not intervene in the story (real in that they do not embody or correspond to male fantasies about women, as they are all neverthelesss fictitious). ‘Real’ women in Amis are nevertheless under the constraints of other social stereotypes for women, like for example Hope Clinch, a classic preppy gold digger: “She liked [Guy's] curly-ended fair hair, his house in the country, his shyness about his height, his house in Landsdowne Crescent, his habit of hooding his eyes against a low sun, his title, his partiality to cherries (specially ripe ones), his large private income” (87). All of the female characters are defined by their relationship with a male referent, an idea that even Auster briefly reflects upon in the Trilogy: “whatever future [Sophie] might want to build for herself would be tainted by the role she had to play: the official widow, the dead writer's muse, the beautiful heroine in a tragic story. No one wants to be part of a fiction, and even less so if that fiction is real” (221). In order to avoid this list of female stereotypes, Nicola rejects any kind of deep relationship with men and she is categorically designated by the tag: “nobody's babymamma” (173). She has escaped every type of relationship with men beyond her sexual business and every

opportunity of being a mother by having practiced seven abortions on herself (192). Relationships are summed up by a bunch of undesirable possibilities for her: “He Refuses To Make A Commitment. She Has A Problem Giving Him The Space He Needs. He Is Too Focused On His Career At This Time. They Think They Love Each Other But Given Their Temperamental Differences, How Will They Ever Connect?” (281). By all this labeling we can see Levinas's point that it is impossible to ever obtain a successful connection with the other through relationships, most of all for women:

> Can this relationship with the other through Eros be characterized as a failure? Once again, the answer is yes, if one adopts the terminology of current descriptions, if one characterizes the erotic by ‘grasping’, ‘possessing’, or ‘knowing’. But there is nothing of all this, or the failure of all this, in eros. If one could possess, grasp, and know the other it would not be other. (90)

Nicola is, however, not the only beautiful woman in *London Fields*; at the beginning the narrator identifies two very beautiful women among all he has met in London: “They both turn heads, these girls I squire. Lizzyboo by day. Nicola by night. They both embody whatever it is that men *have* to look” (283). Because Lizzyboo is a real woman who keeps herself in ‘the light’ she soon changes her attitude towards one of total defeatism, and she also finds “a strategy for getting to the end of men. Her strategy is this: Weigh two hundred pounds” (325) as “she eats too much when she is unhappy” (262). Lizzyboo (whose name kind of sounds like ‘lazy bones’) is Nicola's counterpoint in the novel, but the fact that she is real and not a simulation has her frustrated– remember a woman is unable to self-identify under those terms–, and it has her ignored by the narrator and the other males. But there is a feeling that motivates men to turn to simulations over women. Let us see Irigay's proposal: “Levinas makes the feminine bear this alteration of the self that the voluptuous entails, but he challenges it for himself. He doubtless fears losing his ego in it. Or he fears entrusting the safeguard of his ego to the feminine?” (79).

Because of this ancestral fear towards alterity, the subject has ultimately taken control of the other by taking control of the representation of her: “Within a patriarchal society, woman becomes

represented as the Other, necessary to the constitution and recognition of identity, but always threatening to it. Sexual difference is thus locked into a structure of power where difference, or otherness, is tolerated only when represented" (Cixous in Sarup: 110). Amis no doubt reflects the fear of the feminine in each and every one of his male characters. These men deeply fear real women in their imperfection and natural strength and alterity, a reality they try to ignore at all times: "I was afraid of her body and its vigour, of her flesh, of her life. […]. Actually the nails on her big toes are beginning to lose symmetry, she has a stepped-sided mole on the back of her neck, and generally her skin (when compared to someone like Kim Talent) is definitely showing signs of wear, of time, of death" (232); this is why they turn to the fantasy. But as it turns out, a fantasy that transgresses the level of the imagination is also uncontrollable and ultimately scary to the male subject: "it wasn't desire that Nicola Six aroused in Keith Talent. Not primarily. I would say greed and fear came first" (23); so much so that Keith does not even wish to rape her –"There was no money in rape. [...] But there was money, it seemed, in Nicola Six" (169). Nevertheless, the male mind is always trying to figure out new ways of taking possession of the other, which historically has led to atrocities such as human trafficking: "He wandered if there was any way he could *sell* her to Guy Clinch" (110).

This is no doubt the perfect scenario for the death of love, which Irigay blames on the exclusively male philosophical tradition at the bases of our civilization and, as we said before, she advocates a new vision of femininity, yet to be constructed. Taking Levinas as a referent, she explains:

> No place remains available to permit an encounter between two who do not simply form a whole, even if the duality of kinds constitutes the unity of the human species. There is a pre-given, natural unity, but whose accomplishment between two subjects escapes, is still and always to be constructed, and cannot be won through a complementarity, since duality would thereby be annulled. (72)

By having her own self terminated, as a 'redemptor mulieris', Nicola symbolically sacrifices herself for the opportunity of this new female philosophical subject that Irigay and all feminist writers

would like to see represented: a more natural and fair vision of womanhood, one that is built by women themselves. Amis is a satirical writer, though, and has a liking for the grotesque and black humor, therefore it is difficult to obtain this message, so noble among so much disarray. We cannot say for certain that Amis has any hope in the future of mankind whatsoever, but we can say that this hope is manifested by Samson Young himself, and Amis puts it in him: after killing Nicola in cold blood, he turns to the baby for hope in the future. We have seen that although Keith believes "Babies, infants, little human beings: they're a skirt thing. The only blokes that love babies are transvestites, hormone-cases, sex-maniacs" (80). However, Young is empathic to kids naturally. He reflects on why this is the case throughout the book, concluding that the best of kids is their purity, a purity that resides in them not being *corrupted* by the rules of social interactions: "Only babies frown and flinch. The rest of us just fake with our faces. […] She laughed. No she didn't. We laugh about twice a year. Most of us have lost our laughs and now make false ones" (241), which is something Lacan himself observed: "unlike the child, the adult merely translates his old translations, so to speak, turning out 'rehashes' of them" (in Laplanche: 160). Therefore, what Young sees is that the baby can still be given a different education and lead a different life. He believes that the System can be changed, but that it only admits one way out: "the idea of absolute peace is the idea of absolute violence" (Hägglund, 49), which is why he has killed Nicola.

As we commented at the beginning of the chapter, not only the actions of Nicola and her murder are shocking for the critics of the book, but so is this apparently paradoxical paternalistic move by Young at the end. A last letter by Samson Young is included in the novel; he writes it on his deathbed and it is addressed to Kim Talent, Keith's baby girl: "With fingers all oily from being rubbed together, in integration, vigil, glee, fear, nerves, I cling to certain hopes: hopes of you. I hope that you are with your mother and that you two are provided for. I hope your father is around – controllably. Your beginning has been hard. Your continuation, not so hard. I hope" (469). Amis

here, in a Dickensian move, humanizes the narrator, who aspires to a better life for the child. To ensure the girl's upbringing, he has Guy Clinch take care of the baby after he dies: he will economically and emotionally support her. This way the idea of a possible future through progeny is introduced in *London Fields*, a last glimpse of hope that Young shares with Levinas, but always with a twist. The Subject experiences frustration over total alterity, unable to self-define because he is unable to grasp the other half of human experience, the other sex; as we have seen, sexual and emotional relationships are mediated by pre-conceived ideas which lead only to frustration. The subject is also doomed by the certainty of a meaningless death, figuratively and literally, but Levinas himself presents an escape: "The meaningful continues beyond my death. It is still necessary to call this non-in-difference of responsibility for the Other by the name *relationship"* (116). Levinas sees connection between the sexes as impossible, although there is one relationship he contemplates as truly revealing: the subject can see *himself* in *his* offspring, while Young sees a representative for all the human race in a child that is not even his own: "Nevertheless, I ask you to survive me" (469).

In a twisted game of logic, Levinas's philosophical subject, who is unable to connect with the mother, can nonetheless expect a grasp of self-recognition in the *son* –however, a possible daughter is never mentioned, as the language used is always markedly masculine both in the original in French and the translation:

> This can happen only in one way: through paternity. Paternity is the relationship with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is myself, the relationship of the ego with a myself who is nonetheless a stranger to me. The son, in effect, is not simply my work, like a poem or an artifact, neither is he my property. Neither the categories of power nor those of having can indicate the relationship with the child. Neither the notion of cause nor the notion ownership permit one to grasp the fact of fecundity. I do not have my child: I am in some way my child. (91)

Of course, Irigay criticizes this absolutely biased idea, insisting on the conscious undermining of the mother as an essential element in fecundity; she has to be the carrier of the son as well as being the other half of it genetically! The feminine must be present in him too, and the statistics say he could

be a she too, which Levinas simply omits (70). By this second negation of the feminine, woman is literally left out of the philosophical experience and the immemorial journey of self-definition: woman is the darkest other. Here, we can again establish a parallelism between the theory and the plot of *London Fields*, because Amis is, like Irigay, deconstructing it and substituting it for a new scenario where the *son* is not a desirable successor: “Oh, the little boy was perfect in every way. And he was a monster” (28). Marmaduke is the only child Guy has with his wife Hope, but paradoxically he is absolutely unable to see himself in the child. He finds it difficult to love him as he knows the boy does not love him. Marmaduke is described as the closest to Keith actually, who he almost sees as a paternal figure because he also presents the symptoms of an extreme and violent masculinity:

> Turn your back for ten seconds and he's in the fire or out the window or over in the comer, fucking a light socket (he's the right height for that, with a little bend on the knees). His chaos is strongly sexual, no question. If you enter his nursery you will usually find him with both hands down the front of his diaper, or behind the reinforced bars of his playpen leering over a swimsuit ad in one of the magazines a nanny has thrown in to him. (158)

Nevertheless, (this is an aside) the narrator insists that he has struggled to soften Marmaduke, the character: “Of course I keep trying to tone Marmaduke *down*” (158); which implies his behavior is so extreme that not even Amis wants to be so politically incorrect as to portray a child as unscrupulously as he does with Nicola. On the other hand Kim Talent is described as an intelligent, calm, pure and loving being:

> Little Kim was asleep, seated more or less upright on her mother's lap. The baby's powerful face, fully formed but in miniature, with its collection of glassy roundnesses, its crescents and half-moons, lolled forward on the white trim of her jumpsuit. The cheeks broadened at the base, pushing out the lower lip, as brightly succulent as a slice of sushi, the likes of which neither Keith nor Kath had ever seen. (107)

Of course for Keith it is impossible to connect with his daughter as for him femininity is the darkest thing: “There was something wrong with the baby, something seriously wrong. The trouble with the baby was that it was a girl” (7). He does not connect with the daughter as he could with Marmaduke

and he struggles even before her birth, which sometimes creates hilarious situations like him trying to figure a female version of his name to give to the baby: Keithette, Keithene, Keitha, Keithinia (7). Nevertheless, contrary to the levinasian/derridian/lacanian approach to paternity, Samson Young is able to naturally empathize with the creature, which gives him the only last ray of hope for mankind and the future. Like looking in a lacanian mirror, which were the eyes, he is captured by the eyes of this other and reaches a hint of meaning, but this happens despite two facts that imply, theoretically, an impassable amount of alterity: she is female and on top of that, she is neither his daughter nor his relative:

> What impresses and stays with me is the power of the baby's face– the power. It is knit tight like a tautly prominent navel, chockful of possibilities, tumescent with potentiae, as if the million things that could happen to her, the essences of the million Kims there might one day be out there, are concentrated in this powerful face... But I wonder. Nicola's face is powerful too. The very thinness of the skin that coats her closed eyes is powerful. Perhaps with her the effect is reversed or diametrical. Because Nicola's face, Nicola's life, contains only one future, fully shaped, fully designed, toward which she now moves at steadily climbing speed. (138)

Young, who sees two completely different female others in Nicola and Kim, decides, as a man, that the power of Nicola, the simulation, must be suppressed so that Kim and the other "million Kims" have a chance to develop a new language of the feminine, so that a female philosophical subject has the opportunity of actually empowering herself over all the man-made images that dominate the imagery of society. As Young will not survive, it is Guy Clinch who assumes a huge deal of what paternity (and maternity) means (as Young had been doing before), therefore also connecting with his needs for love and philanthropy towards the poor; also it complements perfectly with his hope for the future, represented by this early dream that he first mistakenly related to Nicola: "In his dream Guy Clinch edged closer to the bare body of a faceless woman. For a moment of dream time she turned into a thirteen-year-old baby, smiling, crooning, then once more became a woman without a face. Not even a baby face. This wasn't a sex dream. It was a love dream, a dream of love. He edged towards an oozing *yes*..." (82). Marmaduke is not completely lost either, as he totally

changes his attitude the moment Guy Clinch is forced to leave his household. He has rejected his male role-model since birth, but accommodates smoothly with his mother now, having improved in every sense:

> Marmaduke stepped aside, with some formality, and Guy entered the room. The little boy followed, and then moved quietly past his father to the side of the bed, where Hope lay, on her barge of pillows.
> ‘Where is everyone’ For the house was eerily staffless.
> ‘All gone. There's no need. He's different now.’
> ‘ What happened?’ ‘It was quite sudden. The day after.’ (450)

Therefore there is hope in the people that remain alive in *London Fields:* when we get to this point, it is Hope who survives to raise her child alone; she is a woman who has left behind her dependence on men. Of course, Nicola dies (she has to) but she is not the only female stereotype that does so; Faith, who was the president's wife and a symbol for the System will die as the ‘last lady’, a passive token used by males in power, in government and the media to gain votes or to blurry the reality of the affairs of the world:

> Two main stories [on TV]. The first is all about Faith, the First Lady: a remarkably full account, in fact, of her recent activities. I was baffled; but then I remembered the speculation earlier in the summer about Faith's health. Presumably all this stuff about hospice world, White House redecorations and anti-pornography crusading is offered in courteous rebuttal. And as reassurance. Everybody knows how totally the President loves his wife. He campaigned on the issue. (163)

Therefore, both metaphorically and literally H/hope in a new future remains while F/faith in the system is dead in our times. Nicola herself knew her death was a sacrifice; she “felt death in its full creative force” (195), and this creative force stays through Kim Talent and a new kind of woman yet to grow, yet to be built on her own terms and with the help of the people around her. Certainly Nicola or, better yet said, the *images* that she embodies, would project a horrible representation of femininity if that was Amis's intention; nevertheless we truly hope to have thrown a new light over this issue in order to clarify Nicola's being a symbol not for femininity, but for the grotesque and stereotypical monster that the System has created and imposed over women; this vision is male, thence the critique is on male fantasies, not on actual women. That there is a future for womanhood

and therefore for mankind constitutes Young's only expectation and his death wish; Samson Young believes there is an alternative and maybe Nicola did too; but we do not know about Amis himself, as this is how he expresses his point of view on hope and the way it is not present in his novels:

> I have strong moral views, and they are very much directed at things like money and acquisition. I think money is the central deformity in life, as Saul Bellow says, it's one of the evils that has cheerfully survived identification as an evil. Money doesn't mind if we say it's evil, it goes from strength to strength. It's a fiction, an addiction, and a tacit conspiracy that we have all agreed to go along with. My hatred for it does look as though I'm underwriting a certain asceticism, but it isn't really that way: I don't offer alternatives to what I deplore. (Groes: 181)

Although Amis professes that he does not offer alternatives to what he deplores (and it is suggested that it is this grotesque image fabricated by society that he satirizes), he makes it clear that woman is other and Kim Talent offers the hope that Society might one day come to accept that. With all we have said about Nicola as the "darkest other" it should now be clear that, just as with all other identities and with the notion of authorship in all the novels we have considered, both Auster's and Amis's, as readers we are only aware that these are other than they appear to be, always displaced, always deferred, always beyond our reach.

5. Conclusion

We know that Auster and Amis are occasionally mentioned together when contemporary postmodernist novelists are cited and have even been the object of study in order to consider, for example, their use of the strategies of the *roman noir* in some of their novels. But here and throughout this study we have seen how these two authors, rarely compared in any depth, also coincide, in particular, with regard to their representation of identity and, as it has been shown, how, for both of them, the individual subject has ceased to be something fixed or stable but can only be understood in terms of alterity. We have seen that both share a strong interest in bringing to the page the inevitability of alterity as the only postmodern alternative to earlier notions of 'self', and they do so throughout their literary careers, as we pointed out in the second chapter. However, both achieve distinction by presenting characters whose identities inevitably remain inaccessible and that are beyond both their own and the reader's reach. Both present characters who are obsessed with discovering and taking control of who they and others are. We have seen how detectives take on the job of following and keeping watch on others; others puzzle over the enigma of who someone (like Fanshawe or Nicola) is. As we can see here and elsewhere in the novels, the characters often find themselves involved in this kind of search to discover who the *other* is and it almost inevitably turns out they are other than what they had believed, even what the narrator believes and even what the reader understands by who they are. In this kind of search there can be no sense of discovery or arrival as truth and identity are always displaced, always deferred, always other than we think. More than that, during their search for the other, they begin to doubt and even lose their sense of self. While they seek something to relate (themselves and the other) to, to discover what is true, which is required for a stable idea of their (and others') identities, their attempts show that some Romantic notion of an essential self is now out of the question; certainties have disappeared. Even so, we have seen how they all, conventionally, attribute themselves, and one another with *characters*,

apportioning a role for each and every one (sometimes this is done even by the narrator himself in *London Fields* or by 'chance' in the Trilogy) but the truth of their characters will remain elusive to the point that they even lose sight of themselves (this is true also for the reader and the *author* that has assigned them their role, too), for, as often as not, they are unaware of the role they have been assigned. This search leads to the discovery that a sense of self does not come from within ourselves but requires another to present that self to, to put their identity to the test, even to discover that self in the other. After all, for many of the characters their sense of self depends on the recognition of others; they can only see themselves as they think others see them. Alternatively, as is the case with Blue, he finds that by looking into himself he is able to anticipate, to know what Black is going to do; in this case the notion of the other derives from his notion of self, although, significantly, in the end, Blue attempts to destroy this shadow, this dark reflection of himself.

These detectives, following or keeping watch on someone, begin to see themselves reflected in the other, or, unexpectedly, with so much time on their hands and nothing outside themselves to relate to, they begin to look within themselves. However, even their given identities are not enough; identity is elusive, escaping the individual. Nationality, their city, their class, all identify them at some point, but some will intuit that they are not like that; others will remain oblivious to the role they have been given (the murderer, the foil/fall-guy). Others play their part to perfection but still without knowing who they are because they do not know the other. Authors/narrators and even we, as readers, apportion roles to their characters but the characters slip out of their roles, away from them and us. We also considered towards the end how, for both Auster and Amis, *Woman* is elusive; the 'darkest other' remains unknown to these narrators and that is why they present us with stereotypes: Auster's female characters are almost inevitably someone's wife (or future wife in the case of Blue) and conveniently disappear from the narrative; Amis assigns stereotypically literary feminine roles to Nicola Six only to murder her and all the false notions of female identity that she

represents. From all of this, it has become clear that the one and the other are always beyond our reach.

Even so, our authors have reflected the prevalent notion that in postmodernity and, up to a point (or perhaps never), in their novels, identity is discovered in or through the other/s (mirror images/reflections/dark reflections); as Thomas Docherty has put it,

> [Postmodern character] moves the assumed homogeneity of identity [...] towards an endlessly proliferating heterogeneity [;] identity is deferred and replaced by a scenario in which the "character" or figure constantly differs from itself, denying the possession of and by a self and preferring an engagement with otherness. (63)

However, in these novels the subject cannot be found in the other, just as it cannot be found within; these characters seek identity in the other but the other also eludes them just as identity does. Even the construction of the self as discourse fails as when the pages run out and the ink runs dry, so too do our protagonists. In these novels, the end of the story is the end of identity/everyone. At the heart of the matter, there is nothing; hence, perhaps we are dealing with a theory of identity, not only based on alterity, but on absence.

In order to lead us into these cul-de-sacs (which is precisely where Nicola Six is murdered), we have pointed out how Auster and Amis have revisited and revised existing modes of categorizing the self, making use of, but at the same time contesting our notions of identity and, under the prism of postmodernism, they aim for the representation of fragmented subjects in fragmented settings and times. They show their awareness of predecessors like the Modernist or Romantic writers, but are also deeply influenced by the overall intellectual discomfort shown by specialists in all the fields of human knowledge from philosophy to physics, not forgetting psychology, anthropology, even religion, all of which struggle to find a reconciliation among the different spheres of experience and experimentation, awareness and understanding of the self, as we have seen in each of our chapters. One of the main points that can be extracted from this study is therefore that identity, as it is generally understood , as a stable homogeneous self, is inaccessible to

the characters in our novels —just as it is for the postmodern *person* as well. However, this is not restricted to current times at all, as we saw in chapter two, where even the earliest definitions of identity refer to and are dependent on the other; there is no identity without diversity; it is a feeling humanity manifests throughout history; see how uneasy Thomas Carlyle sounds when he reflects on this issue in the 1800s:

> With men of a speculative turn, [...] there come seasons, meditative, sweet, yet awful hours, when in wonder and fear you ask yourself the unanswerable question: who am *I*; the thing that can say 'I' ...? The world with its loud trafficking, retires into the distance; and, through the paper-hangings, and stone walls, and thick-plied tissues of Commerce and Polity, and all the living and lifeless integuments (of Society and a Body), where with your existence sits surrounded, —the sight reaches forth into the void Deep, and you are alone with the Universe, and silently commune, as one mysterious Presence with another.

It is striking here that Carlyle could easily be referring to the characters in our novels as they also turn speculative and ask themselves the same question;

> Who am I; what is this ME? A Voice, a Motion, an Appearance; some embodied visualized Idea in the Eternal Mind? *Cogito ergo sum*. Alas, poor Cogitator, this takes us but a little way. Sure enough, I am; but lately was not: but Whence? How? Where-to? The answer lies around, written in all colours and motions, uttered in all tones of jubilee and wail, in thousand-figured, thousand-voiced, harmonious Nature: but where is the cunning eye and ear to whom that God-written Apocalypse will yield articulate meaning? (39)

Sartor Resartus takes some time to give voice to an answer to these questions —"Whence? How? Where-to?"— , but Carlyle eventually turns to (N)ature, which is exactly what our characters do in the novels. But for Carlyle, behind Nature he finds God; however, in a postmodern world where the ultimate logos is the 'word' perhaps Nature will not provide the answers we seek.

"In my beginning is my end…. In my end is my beginning". And so, we inevitably return to the beginning of this study, where we contemplated the sky and argued that the contemplation of the sky is present almost always in these novels as a trigger for self-contemplation (or the other way around). When left without a definite answer, characters look at the sky in the hope for connection with their true nature. For instance, this happens to Fanshawe, a character who has lost and rejected

his identity but is nevertheless “preoccupied by the landscape, and he keeps returning to it, endlessly watching it. Endlessly recording its changes. His patience before these things is never less than remarkable, and there are passages of nature writing in both the letters and the notebooks as luminous as any I have read” (*NYT*: 272). Hence, the landscape, and particularly the sky, gives Fanshawe a bit of connection with himself and *meaning*, just as it does to Quinn, who discovers in the alley that he always missed this contemplation before: “He spent many hours looking up at the sky [...] and as the days passed he began to take pleasure in the world overhead. He saw that, above all, the sky was never still. Even on cloudless days, when blue seemed to be everywhere, there were constant little shifts” (114). For these characters, as for Carlyle, Nature (or what's left of it anyway) is the only “world overhead” because they cannot find any answers within. However, we have noted in the Trilogy that Auster’s characters find nothing stable overhead, only a sky that is continually shifting and changing (just as there is never any stable or fixed notion of who they are). For the characters in *London Fields* though, there is not even nature to escape to as “the sky was falling” (394). For Amis’s narrator, Samson Young, the sky presages the Apocalypse, the end of everything. Therefore, as Carlyle and many of the authors referred to in this paper suggest, ‘Who am I?’ is bound to be an unanswerable enigma; it only brings in more questions, and they are not easy to respond to either. For the authors, who have certainly revisited similar sources to the ones we have, some of these inevitable questions which can spring from the matrix ‘Who am I?’ are basically, never mind the order or the concrete words: ‘What is reality?’ and ‘What are the others?’

The narrators and the characters of our novels inevitably have to broach these questions but, to begin with, each character seems sure of who they are, and who everyone else is, too; at the outset, their roles are given, inherited, or assumed and, of course, accepted. But at the same time, the messages that they read in the sky begin to take on significance as everything begins to shift and change and, eventually, some will even come to the end of themselves; this is marked initially by

how their roles and situations and even their names change. At first, one might think that the authors fully believe that 'I' is a construct, that 'I' is *nothing*, but can later reconsider the bigger picture of 'self' that they are creating: duplication, bifurcation and deception are experienced by the subject in both the Trilogy and in *London Fields.* The authors compromise characterization, plot, the figure of the narrator, and their very agency as authors in the novels, as we have seen, while all the time doubting language itself as a safe carrier of meaning, which, ultimately, is a call for a new kind of literature, as we will conclude; but let us not anticipate. All *meaning* is assumed as preexisting or pre-imposed in the atmosphere that these authors create in their novels, and we find, as we have discussed previously, characters that are always reenacting preexisting and pre-imposed roles, which, according to the sociologist Stuart Hall, applies to people in society just as much:

> Individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions''to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, antagonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves. (Hall "The Question...": 14)

Therefore what we *are* is never ourselves but the roles we perform; Laclau calls this process "articulation" (Hall: 14). We, like our characters, depend on how others see us, which is why you will find us, like them, performing in accordance to these outer rules.

We have seen that 'Who am I?' has no easy answer, nevertheless 'What is the Other?' is the main question that Levinas, Lacan or Derrida, among many others quoted here, identify as one of the most important in the process of self-definition and their own answer to it, as we have argued before, is inconclusive to say the least, as their discourse tends to reduce the other to a dark entity that is impossible to grasp, which again means the actual self, who needs others to self-identify, is an unreachable concept too. This is Derrida's *différance*; identity derives from difference but is ultimately and always deferred. We have seen how Auster and Amis take this implication to the

literary flesh through the representation of characters that are at once other among themselves *and* other to themselves, Nicola Six being the most extreme of the examples, as she is nothing but a dramatic representation of various male-made female roles, as we saw in chapter 4.

From this, then, it has become clear that we are nothing but what others perceive, and we perform by rules that come directly from without, although we still live in a social context that operates through and for the people in 'real life'. The space that we have left for relationships with others and the origin of these rules are the same: our identity and self depend on our interactions with the rest of the System; this took us in chapters 2 and 3 to bring in such authors as Baudrillard, Mumford, Foucault, Debord and others in order to bring an ideological frame to what our characters experience as a complete detachment from a System that, once they look closely, is neither related to nor based on nature. According to such thinkers, fragmentation and incoherence prevail while, ironically, the intention of globalization never recedes. This shows Auster, Amis, and many contemporary postmodernist authors, as well as their characters, and their readers, that we must be subject to some greater scheme, a construct we have been assuming as natural since nobody remembers when, but which reveals itself as more and more artificial as we, as human beings, try to unravel the secret mechanics of reality. Because nature is not accessible to the characters in our novels anymore, they find themselves wondering: what is the nature of the world we are forced to contemplate? What kind of reality do we face and, for that matter, and more importantly, what is reality? They learn reality is not real, but a game, which some embrace as players and others reject, as hermits.

Pure alienation from the System is the seed from which our postmodernist Waldens and Quixotes ultimately blossom. Hegel first reflected on alienation as a problem of modernity: *Men* have created a society that they no longer belong to, not based on true needs or intuitions, which takes them to utter alienation, even from God. Marx related this idea to the alienation from the

product of our own labor, and so on. So the answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ which is asked directly or indirectly an insurmountable amount of times throughout our novels, is always deferred. It always takes us to other distressful questions we do not have answers to in the present; this is basic for the uncomfortable and infinite or spiral ending of our novels: in the Trilogy, neither the narrator nor any of the characters satisfy their apparent quests and are left literally in the dark, while death reigns at the end of *London Fields*, with the narrator entrusting a doubtful future into the hands of the baby girl, who is nevertheless the product of generations of human decay and the decay of nature under the pressure of the endless city without fields: “since it will not matter where this center is, the last reason for the great city's existence will vanish at the very moment that it takes the form of a boundless conurbation. At that point the stage will be set for ‘Post-historic Man’ ” (Mumford: 554).

Even so, some characters do live in the novels, and we also continue to survive as a species, and we will have to cope with the reality we have left to experience, be it a simulacrum or not. According to Mendilow, the fact is that “The twentieth century’s pace of living is menaced by disintegration constantly” (6), which is a difficult situation for a stable self to assume. Somehow though, we have managed to overcome apocalyptic fears: “Millennial feeling, for the first time, was almost entirely severed from apocalyptic urges and fears [...] the apparent prosperity created by global capitalism has made the millennium seem irrelevant” because “apocalypse has, in some sense, already happened [...]. We know how the end of the world looks like” (Berger, J.: 377-388). In both novels this is true; in the Trilogy, the narrator's experience with Fanshawe in the closing pages symbolizes a micro-apocalypse, the end of both characters' identities, while in *London Fields* death takes Young and Nicola the day of the apocalyptic eclipse:

> Will it reach the conclusion it appears to crave —will the Crisis reach the Conclusion? Is it just the nature of the beast? We'll see. I certainly hope not. I would lose many potential readers, and all my work would have been in vain. And that would be a *real* bitch. (*LF*: 64)

This is the world as Young, Clinch and Talent *imagined* it would end, because it basically never existed outside TV, literature and their own invention. There is certainly no place left for the kind of realist fiction the narrator had in mind: M. A., Nicola, and the System itself took control from his hands. If there is no such thing as "Progress, or Providence or Manifest Destiny" —Meeter says — (216), or in Cohen's words, the project of the Enlightenment and such concepts as the greater good "are fake" (103), then "The finalities have disappeared; we are now engendered by models. There is no longer such a thing as ideology" (Debord: 120), and there is no place for the Truth. This is a philosophical position that many criticize as it "leads to moral and political nihilism" and "no notion of project" (Sarup: 167-168), but that does not make these affirmations any less convincing for us.

Some characters against all odds survive, so does literature and even a certain notion of identity remains inevitably a part of our everyday-life experience (how could it not?). Moreover, it is the notion of identity as alterity that allows this to continue to happen, in our opinion. Levinas proclaims, after walking right into his own theory's trap, that we must embrace alterity as the only mode of identity: "The novelty of the modern is not, to be sure, the end of everything unknown, but an epoch where the un-known to be discovered can no longer surprise thought with its new alterity. Thought is already fully conscious of itself and of all the dimensions of what is reasonable in reality" (127). Along these lines, Lyotard coins the term 'post-history', which "urges dispossession of rules, of identities, of simple opposition, of blind affirmation", a revision of History based on referents for self-definition that do not come from radical opposition with the other but characteristics and common perceptions (Cohen: 104). Hall also calls for other ways; he rejects the term identity for "identification" (6) [40] and we believe this is exactly what our novelists have shown;

40 Hall proposes 'identification', a self-proclaimed construct, always in the making, supported "on the back of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation". Identification is not passive, it implies the subject to participate and self-define according to the options given. ("The Question...": 2-6)

they explore new possibilities regarding identity and agency in the novel, even if it implies killing a good bunch of stereotypes with the viciousness Young kills Nicola.

To finish with this argument, we would like to add that, clearly, these novels do not represent the death of the novel, the author, character or subject, author or plot whatsoever, but constitute a rebirth, entirely based on alterity as the only constant possible. Auster and Amis, through their baroque interweaving of story lines that end up in inconclusive nothingness, unbearable for some readers and critics, give us no apparent moral opinion on the facts they describe in their fictions (particularly in the case of Amis and his Nicola), and above all, they give the characters (or the reader!) no definite resolutions for the forever sought answer to the question: 'Who am I?', a question that spirals into itself like these fictions do. A stable self can only be inside one's own brain; it is a creation of the subject even if it can only be a fiction or a construction, a characterization, as our authors have suggested. That is certainly an intricate logic that results in the self-referentiality we find in our novels, a grotesque and alienating picture that nevertheless resembles our experience of the world. According to Thiher, there is a need for postmodernist literature to incorporate alterity as a fundamental part of its natural renovation:

> The jubilant energy of postmodern fiction arises, in a nearly dialectical fashion, when the postmodern accepts this contradiction as a challenge, and pursuing his alienation, hyperbolically assumes the otherness of language, its schizoid structure, and its pop dementia. By assuming these voices in their most grotesque and delirious forms, he can attempt to explode language from within —and with language the limits of selfhood that humanism has assigned as the limits of reason since at least the Renaissance. In this way arises the postmodern alternation of voices, of silence and madness, loss and jubilation, deadpan realism and irrational exaltation. Within this oscillation one finds nearly all the voices that make up the range of contemporary fiction. (Thiher 154)

We have seen clearly that our authors are in tune with this. Therefore, although detached from our experience as they might feel, these novels do create an original and honest picture of the world (with its climatic, consumerist, emotional issues) in order to introduce the reader to today's biggest paradox without conditioning their interpretation:

> This is a necessary function of modern literature. We *must* wipe out the irrelevant answers, and, at this point, we have no new ones. The school of the absurd, the styles of black humor and pop art, and even the existence of our empty technocratic society, all combine to demonstrate abundantly that, on a real plane, man at this point on his way to his ultimate destiny, doesn’t know what that destiny is. (Wood: 149)

We believe that these novels do represent a situation that is unbearable to our hidden, now forgotten nature, and, as a consequence, we are bound to have seen a series of behaviours and images that have perhaps disgusted and confused the readers; but we do not believe any of them constitute an apology of the way of life at the end of the twentieth century in any sense. However, they have given us no real hope or solution, no clues as to how we might be able to reverse the process that we can observe in the novels and all around us. But among the disarray, and although words are to be distrusted, we can still write, we can still represent our experience through texts. Our authors, as part of a bigger movement that could be called postmodernism, although not necessarily, try and succeed in innovating by creating a new kind of novel, as the narrator of the Trilogy acknowledges in *The Locked Room*:

> If words followed, it was only because I had no choice but to accept them, to take them upon myself and go where they wanted me to go. But that does not necessarily make the words important. I have been struggling to say goodbye to something for a long time now, and this struggle is all that really matters. The story is not in the words; it’s in the struggle. (287-288)

We can infer that the thing he is trying to say goodby to is *identity*, and all certainties, answers and truths must be dismissed along with it. After all, the work that prevails as the most praised within the whole Trilogy is Fanshawe's: “He had answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again” (307), and this is precisely one of the characteristics that makes the Trilogy such an ingenious work, the inconclusiveness and self-referentiality that Auster builds from nothingness. The same thing goes for Samson Young and his intentions as a writer; he begins by stating: “I must have the truth. There just isn't time to settle for

anything less than the truth" (43) but ends up admitting: "Her story worked. Mine didn't. There's really nothing more to say" (466). He knows now that this is Nicola's/Asprey's/Amis's story, not his, and they do not care for the truth; they do not believe in it.

Summing up, in this study we have accepted the literary challenge we believe the authors present to the readers, which is to question the disposition of preconceived identification categories (that are supposed to be representative) but that have given way to a more open disposition of the facts, identities, and, ultimately, words themselves. Auster and Amis invite us to open our eyes and look through the glass to see the implications of the city as a way of living, as symbol and System disconnected from true nature, and the horrible consequences of giving in to its simulations (and the consequences of trying to escape from them). They invite us also to take a close look at the characters who inhabit it, who have, similarly, become disconnected from any clear notion of who they are (or anyone else, for that matter). These novels are a call for change but towards which direction? That is for the reader to decide, as our authors believe they have no authority to impose meaning on the fiction or facts within the fiction that they invent. As Mark Asprey proclaims, "You don't understand, do you, my talented friend? Even as you die and rot with envy. It doesn't matter what anyone writes any more. The time for it mattering has passed. The truth doesn't matter any more and *it's not wanted*" (452).

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