

Bachelor Thesis English Language and Culture

“THE DAY OF THE GREAT WRITER IS GONE FOR EVER”

Author surrogacy in Martin Amis’s *Money* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Summertime*

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Abstract

This study focuses on the use of author surrogacy in the novels *Money: A Suicide Note* by Martin Amis and *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life* by J.M. Coetzee. It addresses the connection between their use of author surrogacy and their comments on what scholars classify as the postmodern cultural condition. Both authors have written themselves into their novels with a different purpose but both used strikingly similar themes to incorporate this purpose, although the stress on these themes varies. Authorial power, the distinction between the real and the imagined, and the fading line between high- and lowbrow culture are examples of the topics discussed in this study with regards to author surrogacy and the postmodern cultural condition. This study concludes that, through their use of author surrogacy, J.M. Coetzee mainly aims to critique, while Martin Amis satirises postmodern culture.

Keywords: Amis, author surrogacy, authorial power, Coetzee, fact-fiction distinction, high- and lowbrow culture, postmodern cultural condition

Introduction

This thesis will investigate the novels *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984) by Martin Amis and *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life* (2009) by J.M. Coetzee and their relationship to what scholars classify as the postmodern condition. The authors of these novels have included themselves, or a fictional version of themselves, in their novels. This concept is called ‘author surrogacy’ and even though it has not been clearly defined, one could describe it as “a fictional character based on the author”. The term has been used with this meaning in works such as *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000) by Sally Robinson, *Authorizing Fictions: José Donoso’s “Casa de Campo”* (1992) by Marie Murphy and *Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T.S Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust* (1998) by Colleen Lamos. The use of an author surrogate is a postmodern literary technique. “American literary critics ... [brought] the term postmodernism into circulation in the 1960s and early 1970s” and Garry Potter and José López argue that after the year 2000, postmodernism is in decline (Bertens 4; López and Potter 4). However, as with all –isms, it is debatable when the postmodern era started and when it has ended, if it has, and some even classify the contemporary era as post-postmodern (Kirby).

The assumption of this thesis is that *Summertime* is postmodern, as we will see in chapter 2. *Money* is an early example of postmodernism and *Summertime* a late example, *Money* having been published in 1984 and *Summertime* in 2009. Even though they deal with different themes, both authors have written themselves into their novels and in this way make use of the postmodernist rejection of “the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ art” and question the notion of the author as a godlike entity (Barry 81). This thesis will therefore deal with the question: how does author surrogacy function in the novels *Money* and *Summertime*? As this study will show, although Amis and Coetzee use different techniques, their use of author

surrogacy serves a similar purpose.

Postmodernism is associated with deconstruction of structure, language and authorship and it is the latter that this thesis will particularly deal with. In his book *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (1998), Seán Burke gives an overview of the development of the general consensus about the existence and importance of authorship. In his 1967 essay, “The Death of the Author”, Roland Barthes argues that as soon as the thoughts of an author have been written down, the author loses ownership of these thoughts. The contemporary author, according to Barthes, “is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*” (Barthes 145). Barthes claims that a text’s unity “lies not in its origin but in its destination”, in other words, the meaning of a text lies with its interpreter, the reader, and not with its creator, the author, and it is therefore that to ensure the birth of the reader, the author must die (148). In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), Roland Barthes introduced the terms *lisible* and *scriptible*, translatable to *readerly* and *writerly* (Burke 51). The deconstruction of authorship is a typically postmodern characteristic, as postmodern texts are *readerly* rather than *writerly*, meaning that instead of solely writing with the purpose of his or her readers’ enjoyment in mind, an author tries to involve them in his process of writing and in this way assigns them an active rather than a passive role.

Since the use of author surrogacy is a postmodern tool and the novels that will be analysed in this thesis are postmodern novels, the concept of postmodernism desires further explanation. In his 1979 book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard defined postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Walton 194). He suggests that the “Grand Narratives of progress and human perfectibility... are no longer

tenable, and the best we can hope for is a series of ‘mininarratives’” (Barry 83). Lyotard used the term postmodernism to signify the deconstruction of the main idea of the Enlightenment, namely “the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject” (qtd. in Barry 83).

In 1981, another French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, published a book called *Simulations* in which he uses the term ‘hyperreality’ to explain his view on the postmodern era and the new ways of communication it generated. He suggested that culture no longer has access to reality but only to a simulation of reality. He explains this in his essay “Simulacra and Simulation” (1981). Simulacra are different stages of the representation of reality and Baudrillard claims that in the postmodern era we have reached the simulacrum in which simulation of reality has replaced representation of reality (Barry 84). What this means for postmodern literature is that the distinction between what is reality and what is illusion has faded. In a more concrete sense, this means that authors can seamlessly make the transition between reality and the imagined in their works and write themselves into their novels while blurring the line between themselves as an author and the fictional character based on themselves.

Postmodernism is not limited to the world of art and literature but is a cultural phenomenon that can be regarded as “a corollary of the changed nature of western capitalism” (Bertens 10). In this representation, postmodernism is regarded as a “superstructure of the current socio-economic order” which represents “the ever-increasing penetration of capitalism into our day-to-day existence” (Bertens 10). The distinction between the economic and the cultural has been obliterated and these concepts now “create and feed each other”. A more concrete portrayal of this entanglement between the economic and the cultural is consumer culture, which plays an important role in *Money*. Consumer culture has come into existence after industrialism and has flourished since the Second World War. Mass production made products available to a large group of consumers and the increase of the purchasing power added to this. A rise in “sites for

purchase and consumption” made mass products widely available to consumers (Featherstone 13). Widespread advertising contributed greatly to inform consumers about available products, made them aware of new trends and “[attached] images of romance, exotica, desire, beauty, fulfilment, communality, scientific progress and the good life to mundane consumer goods such as soap, washing machines, motor cars and alcoholic drinks” (Featherstone 14).

Fredric Jameson describes the ways in which postmodern culture expresses capitalism in his 1983 essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Culture”. He states, “[this] new moment of capitalism can be dated from the postwar boom in the United States in the late 1940s and early '50s” and has led the way to postmodern culture (qtd. in Bertens 162). Bertens exemplifies contemporary capitalism as “new consumption patterns, by an even faster turnover in the areas of fashion and styling, by planned obsolescence, by the ubiquitous presence of advertising and the media, the explosion of suburbia, by the demands of standardization, by the arrival of the automobile culture, and so on” (162). Baudrillard suggests that consumption entails “the active manipulation of signs” (Featherstone 15). He states that signs are what signify a commodity. In a postmodern consumer culture, the link between sign and commodity has disappeared and a sign can now be regarded separately from the commodity it used to signify. This enables one commodity to be represented by a multitude of signs through the media and this causes the distinction between image and reality to fade, which we will see in both *Money* and *Summertime*.

Featherstone exemplifies this fading distinction as he states, “the consumer society becomes essentially cultural as social life becomes deregulated and social relationships become more variable and less structured by stable norms” (15). This “liquefaction of signs and images” results in “an effacement of the distinction between high and mass culture” (Featherstone 15). Furthermore, according to postmodern theory it means that “consumers no longer consume products for their material utilities but consume the symbolic meaning of those products as

portrayed in their images; products in fact become commodity signs” (Elliott 112). This fading distinction between highbrow and popular culture is especially visible in *Money*.

Martin Amis’ *Money* contains multiple representations of its author and Elie A. Edmondson states that Amis “employs the postmodern technique of involution, the inclusion of the author as a character within the text, as a method of distancing the readers and as tacit admission of the author’s lack of control over himself” (149). Amis has admitted that he wants to “[fuck] around with the reader” (qtd. in Edmondson 147). He does this by fading the line between reality and illusion, which results in the distancing of his readers, but at the same time he draws them in by making his novel *readerly* rather than *writerly*. Apart from aiming to make the reader work to make sense of the novel, Amis also criticizes society and especially consumerism and materialism. This is in line with Baudrillard’s ‘hyperreality’, as postmodern culture involves buying into an idea of reality rather taking part in it.

Previous research on *Summertime*, such as Dominika Szwajewska’s essay “Counterfactual Model of the Self in J.M. Coetzee’s *Summertime*”, has mostly focused on the fact that it is a work of autofiction. The novel is a fictional biography, most notably so because the fictional J.M. Coetzee in the novel is deceased. Szwajewska states, “postmodern poetics also involves a break with the practice of tightly patrolling the borders of fact and fiction. The metafictional play of the author the ‘real’ comes to exist only as a point reference for the narratively recontextualised subject though it has no grounding, no centre, and no organising principle per se” (287). This is in line with the theme of authorial uncertainty present in *Money*. There is no single realisation of the author to fall back on in the form of an all-knowing author, but there are several representations of the author, which makes it difficult to distinguish fact from fiction.

The first chapter of this thesis will investigate *Money* by Martin Amis and the ways in

which Amis has made use of author surrogacy and shows how the depiction of consumer culture and the distinction between highbrow and popular culture, or lack thereof, play a role in this novel. The second chapter of this thesis will consider the novel *Summertime* by J.M. Coetzee and the ways in which Coetzee has made use of author surrogacy to depict a deceased, fictional version of himself and in this way created a fictional biography. The chapter will explore Coetzee's use of voyeurism, which can be regarded as a characteristic of the postmodern cultural condition and blurs the distinction between highbrow culture and popular culture. The concluding chapter of this thesis will compare both novels with regards to author surrogacy, the power of the author and the border between highbrow and popular culture.

Case Study 1: *Money: A Suicide Note*

This chapter will provide a case study of the novel *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984) by Martin Amis. It will investigate the function of author surrogacy and its purpose in the novel. *Money* evolves around John Self, a Brit who works in commercial advertising and makes commercials for fast food products, like the Hamlette. John is overweight, suffers from tinnitus and is an alcohol, junk food and pornography addict. He travels back and forth between London and New York in a perpetual drunken state to realise the creation of his first feature film, which he either wants to call “Good Money” or “Bad Money”. He works on this film in cooperation with a producer called Fielding Goodney, who later in the novel turns out to have framed him. Self is in a relationship with both Selina Street and Martina Twain, who represent low- and highbrow culture respectively. The novel starts with a letter from one M.A. that starts with “[this] is a suicide note” in which the reader is directly addressed (Amis prologue). John Self is mentioned in the note and therefore he could not have been the person who wrote it. However, M.A refers to John’s death, which would mean that M.A. is the same person as John Self, since the topic of the note is his death.

Next to M.A., it is possible to identify John Self as the second representation of Martin Amis in the novel, since Amis and Self share their obsession with the twentieth-century. Amis’s fascination with contemporary urban life becomes apparent not only from *Money*, but also from his other works such as *London Fields* (1989), and the more recent *Lionel Asbo: State of England* (2012), which deal with dark, urban London city life and modern working-class life in Britain respectively. Next to John Self, there is a character that shows an even more obvious resemblance to his creator, namely writer Martin Amis. Lastly, there is Martina Twain, arguably Amis’s female counterpart, the fictional Amis that is, since they share the same highbrow interests, which

forms an opposition between them and John Self. Hereafter Martin Amis the author of *Money* will be referred to as Amis, whereas his fictional namesake will be referred to as Martin.

Money is undoubtedly a postmodern work, as Amis actively confuses the reader with regards to authorial power, reality, and high- and lowbrow culture. First of all, the novel refers to itself as a work of fiction. Hans Bertens identifies a discourse of art that since the mid-1970s “engaged in an interrogation of representation, of language, of the subject, and the underlying liberal humanist ideology in general” (Bertens 71). This discourse, which is one of the characteristics of postmodernism, implied that art no longer had to represent anything other than itself but could be anti-representational, meaning that the “emphasis ... [shifted] to its interrogation of the discourse of art itself” (Bertens 71). As a consequence, in literature that is classified as postmodern, authors often chose to include an element of self-reflexivity in their writing. A concept often associated with postmodern literature is metafiction. According to Patricia Waugh, metafiction is “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (2).

Amis uses the first-person narrator John Self as a tool for metafiction in *Money*. Self addresses the reader directly and in this way breaks the fourth wall. For instance when he informs the reader of his smoking habits: “Unless I specifically inform you otherwise, I’m always smoking another cigarette” (Amis 13). Later, when he attempts to read novels to impress Martina Twain, his second girlfriend, he comments on the process of reading and his feeling that “[towards] the end of a novel you get a floppy feeling. It may just be tiredness at turning the pages. ... For how long do you immerse yourself in other lives? Five minutes, but not five hours. It’s a real effort” (Amis 331). In this way Amis, hints that at this point of the novel the reader might be feeling fatigued, and at the same time he comments on John’s limited attention span.

Since the novel is written from a first-person perspective, Amis pulls his reader in and allows him the same information as his protagonist. On the other hand, he distances his reader by denying him any additional information, such as what happens when John suffers from blackouts. The self-reflexivity he uses has a similar effect. By addressing the reader directly, the latter becomes part of the story but simultaneously notices that he is reading a work of fiction, which complicates the process of immersing himself in the novel.

Amis's obsession with the postmodern cultural condition is not only visible through his other works and his style of writing, but also from the themes he uses in *Money*. Its title is apt, as 'money' is probably one of the nouns most used in the novel. In the beginning of the novel Amis hints, "John Self will no longer exist" at the end of it (Amis prologue). Self states that "money is a suicide note" by which he points at the risks of having a large amount of money. He also comments on the fact that it is difficult for him to determine whether people feel loyal towards him, because of his money, when he says, "[at] least, this human being loyally follows me around the place, keeps tabs on me and rings me up the whole time. No one else does. Selina's never there. All the others – it's just money. Money is the only thing we have in common" (Amis 111-112.) In this passage Amis uses irony in two ways. First of all, the person who keeps ringing John up is Fielding Goodney, who later turns out to be spying on him and causes him to lose all his money. Secondly, it is only when John *loses* all his money that he really writes a suicide note and tries to commit suicide, which means that ultimately *not* having money is the greater risk.

Amis also uses irony to point out that his protagonist tends to misinterpret the situation. John's obsession with money changes as he devotes himself to spending money the larger part of the novel and the last chapter trying to obtain it. The subtitle of the novel, *A Suicide Note*, therefore not only refers to John's view of money but Amis's as well, as he uses irony to show its destructiveness. When M.A. states, "[by] the time you lay this aside ... John Self will no longer

exist”, he not only refers to John’s suicide attempt but also to his loss of his sense of identity (Amis prologue). John has based his identity on his father, Barry Self, who owns a bar called The Shakespeare. John’s strong sense of identity on the basis of the name ‘Self’ is ironic, as ‘Self’ is an embodiment of everyone and can therefore hardly be linked to an individual identity. He does not identify with the name John and states, “I hate my name. I mean, you have a kid, a little baby boy, and the best you can do with it is to name it John? I’m called John Self. But who isn’t?” (Amis 97). Near the end of the novel, John is informed that he is not Barry’s son but the son of Fat Vince, one of his father’s employees. John Self no longer exists, as he becomes Fat John and is therefore left with the part of his name he identifies with the least. John also identifies with having money and his loss of identity is therefore strengthened by his loss of money. John’s favourite pastime is spending money and since he is the representation of ‘everyone’, because of his last name, Amis seems to suggest that he is the embodiment of twentieth-century consumerism in the novel.

Next to money, John is also obsessed with pornography and uses this term not only to refer to his sexual escapades but to everything in which “[the] element of lone gratification is bluntly stressed” (Amis 67). His interests include “[fast] food, sex shows, space games, slot machines, video nasties, nude mags, drink, pubs, fighting, television, [and] handjobs” (Amis 67). This list shows the chaos that is John’s life as many of these occupations are of a sexual nature, but these are not grouped together and neither are “fast food” and “drink”. It is also striking that “drink” and “pub” are almost at the end of the list, since alcohol is nothing less for John than a way to survive. Amis seems to suggest that John is a representation of twentieth-century indulgence, and in this way points out that this can be regarded as a characteristic of the postmodern cultural condition. John drinks such large amounts of alcohol that he loses hours, sometimes days, of his memory and since he is the first person narrator, so does the reader. In this

way, Amis keeps the reader in the dark about certain elements that later turn out to be all-important. John thinks in terms of money and since he works in advertising, he is concerned with selling products. In other words, his life is a constant cycle of selling products, making money and spending money.

The impact of consumer culture on John's life is visible through modern media as well. Not only does John occupy himself with the creation of television commercials, television also plays a large role in his personal life. He states that "[the] television [is] on. The television is always on" (Amis 162). This intrusion of modern media can be regarded as a representation of consumption when we look at Baudrillard's definition "the active manipulation of signs" (Featherstone 15). By watching television, Self consumes signs rather than the real world. The same goes for his sex life, as even though he occasionally has sexual relations with women, he buys into most of his sexual experiences in strip clubs or through pornography. Self's obsession with money means that he believes that money can solve everything, and even equals happiness. This implies that he is the agent in the novel since he is the person who spends money. The character of Fielding Goodney problematizes this. If John ever had reservations about the amount of money he spent, under the influence of Fielding this disappears, as the latter encourages John to spend even more money, for instance when he persuades John to travel first class rather than economy. In this respect, it could be argued that Fielding buys John, the person who previously seemed not to be for sale.

Amis also uses the character of Fielding to satirise the way in which consumer culture has blurred society's view of what is important in life. To John, Fielding is the representation of money and since his life evolves around money, for a short amount of time, he even believes he is in love with Fielding. In this way, Amis shows that John has become blinded by money and that he cannot distinguish between money and love, which can be further exemplified by John's

on-again-off-again girlfriend Selina Street. Their relationship is mostly sexual and she expects John to give her money. Her surname is therefore apt, as she borders on being a prostitute. In other words, it could be argued that even the element that comes closest to love in his life is something he bought.

It is uncertain whether Amis blames John or society for John's behaviour. Amis seems to suggest that John cannot help thinking that using money will get him closest to love, because society tells him life evolves around money. On the other hand, Amis seems to poke fun at John for being ignorant. The character of Fielding complicates this again, as it turns out he was spying on John all along and calling him up on the telephone whilst commenting on his spending. He says, "Money, ... 'Always money, the money'" (Amis 31). In one of their telephone conversations Frank the Phone, or rather Fielding, criticizes John's behaviour towards women when he says, "[you] just take women and use them. Then you toss them aside like a salad" (Amis 112). In this way, Amis introduces another postmodern element to the novel in the form of voyeurism. John is both agent and subject to voyeurism. Fielding follows him dressed up as a woman, which is significant because he knows John will never regard a woman as a serious threat, since he does not respect them. He calls John up when he is in New York and threatens him. Fielding makes use of the fact that John has blackouts to frame him and in this way John becomes a victim of voyeurism.

Throughout the novel, however, it is mostly John himself who is the voyeur. As mentioned, his television is always on and he spends much of his time in strip clubs. Concepts often associated with voyeurism are fear and shame, fear of being watched and shame for what people might see. According to Elie A. Edmondson, fear and shame are John's primary emotions: "fear that he will not have any money; shame at what he does to get it, and what he does with it once he has it" (147). Edmondson further states, "Martin Amis, in both the style and plot of

Money, demonstrates that postmodern man is delusional” (148). Even though John feels shame at his own actions he believes he can get away with them. John acts like a voyeur and is afraid of being judged but when he is actually being watched, he does not see the threat this poses. Through the character of John, Amis therefore seems to satirise the postmodern man, as he portrays him as delusional.

Amis uses consumer culture and voyeurism as tools to satirise postmodern culture and in this way also blurs the line between highbrow and popular culture. He has introduced his reader to both his fictional namesake and his female counterpart, Martin Amis and Martina Twain. These characters form a pair and can be regarded as a representation of highbrow culture, especially in comparison to John. We observe these characters through John’s eyes and he seems to be far removed from their highbrow lifestyle. Martin tries to warn John about the consequences of his behaviour. The form this warning takes is a narrative: “The distance between author and narrator corresponds to the degree to which the author finds the narrator wicked, deluded, pitiful or ridiculous. I’m sorry, am I boring you?” (Amis 229). While his fictional counterpart claims that he wants to distance himself from John, Amis has stated he aimed for the opposite:

I’ve been hanging around the wings of my novels, so awkwardly sometimes, like the guest at the banquet, that I thought I might jolly well be there at last. Also, every character in this book dupes the narrator, and yet I am the one who has actually done it all to him.
(qtd. in Haffenden 11)

Martin lets slip that an author is free to do as he pleases with his protagonist, and that he “is not free of sadistic impulses” (Amis 229). This is relevant to this study for several reasons. First of

all, Amis uses author surrogacy to warn his protagonist about his fate and therefore also his reader. Second of all, even though he seems to do John a favour, he merely tells him a negative outcome is inevitable since this is what the author has in mind for him. Lastly, it shows John's disinterest in highbrow culture, since it seems that the reason he does not understand Martin's comment as a warning might well be because it is in the form of a narrative.

John is not on the same wavelength as Martin, which becomes clear from the first time they meet. When John sees Martin approaching he states, "who should sit down opposite me but that guy Martin Amis, the writer. He had a glass of wine, and a cigarette - also a book, a paperback. It looked quite serious. So did he, in a way" (Amis 85). John seems to construct Martin's identity on the basis of his profession. He is a writer, a highbrow profession, and therefore John is quite suspicious towards him, which is strengthened by the fact that Martin is reading a "serious" book, even though it could be argued that every book seems highbrow to John. According to John's logic this can only mean that Martin is a "serious" person.

There is a stark contrast between the two men, as one is a writer who likes to read and the other claims, "I don't know what it's like to write a poem. I don't know what it's like to read one either" and "[not] reading - that's where I put my money" (Amis 44). Especially the last quotation explains once again that John defines everything and everyone he encounters with money. It therefore seems apt that he does so with Martin as well. He cannot believe the latter is not spending as much money as he could be and lives in a "student gaff full of books [John] can't read" (Amis 248). He feels that Martin disparages him and feels highly competitive when Martin challenges him to a game of chess. Winning the game would feel like revenge to John and he states, "I'll fucking show him, I thought, the little smirkebag, the student, the abstainer, with his facetiousness and his degrees" (Amis 343). John disapproves of characteristics that most people would praise in the same way others might use to oppose *his* values. Through this example, Amis

seems to suggest that in postmodern culture, lowbrow has become the norm and this can be interpreted as a way to point out that postmodern man is delusional about the importance of highbrow culture.

Amis has used pairing as a tool to incorporate the contrast between high- and lowbrow culture into *Money*. Next to John, Martina, too, can be argued to form a pair with Martin, which embodies highbrow culture and creates a contrast between them and John. Selina Street and Martina Twain form another pair that represents the high- and lowbrow distinction, but unlike Martina and Martin, they do not contrast with John, but with each other. Selina represents lowbrow culture and the vulgar, while Martina embodies the highbrow and the pure. Above all, Selina values money, which creates a contradiction between her and John, and Martina. John wants to meet with Martina but she insists that he should read a book first. This results in John trying to struggle his way through *Animal Farm, 1984* and a book called *Money*, which is about the history of money, and which to no surprise John finds to be “full of interesting things” (Amis 263). Through John’s “ridiculously literal reading of *Animal Farm*” it becomes apparent that giving up on reading might have caused John to fail as a consumer of culture (Duggan 93).

Shakespeare is another cultural institution that John does not seem to grasp. Amis has incorporated a phenomenon called “big-time Shakespeare” into the novel, which means that “the cultural capital of the Bard is exploited to sell commodities” (Duggan 91). Barry Self’s bar is called The Shakespeare and John uses Shakespeare’s legacy in his advertisements to sell products like the Hamlette. The Hamlette is a “kind of flash-friable pork-and-egg bap” for which John shot a commercial in Stratford (Amis 70). The commercial was shot on a stage and even though it featured an actor dressed in black holding a skull and globe, John added “a big bimbo wearing cool pants and bra stroll” because all his commercials feature a woman like this (Amis 70). John promotes a lowbrow culture product by adding a vulgar picture to a high culture reference and in

this way seems to discard high culture all together. He seems to be aware of this himself.

While John resents Martin for being educated, Martina Twain ensures that he makes an effort to appreciate high culture. To impress her, he accompanies her to several art shows but he claims that spending a period “being exposed to high culture by Martina Twain” has caused him to be “in a state of high-culture shock” (Amis 301). Strikingly, John uses the word ‘exposed’ like he has been exposed to radiation or a terrible virus, which is ironic, as he has probably been exposed to serious diseases through his lowbrow culture pastime with prostitutes. The influence of pornography on his life is once again exemplified, as John cannot look at classical nudes in marble form without thinking they would look more appealing had they been wearing “stockings and garter-belts, G-strings and ankle-strapped shoes” (Amis 302). John explains that the main reason he cannot consume art is that “[his] mind just razzes [him] about money”, which makes him unable to distinguish whether the show Martina takes him next is by “Monet or Manet or Money” (Amis 302). Amis uses irony to satirise the consumption of art, as his protagonist is unable to consume art even though all he does in life is be a consumer. In this way, Amis comments on the blurring distinction between highbrow and popular culture, which can be argued to be a characteristic of the postmodern cultural condition.

Like many postmodern authors, Amis activates his readers to make sense of his novels. The distinction between high- and lowbrow culture is not the only one he blurs to create this effect. He makes use of author surrogacy to create an authorial uncertainty, which makes the reader work to distinguish fact from fiction. As Amis has opted for a first-person narrator, he has deliberately kept all-important information from his reader. This poses a problem, since John does not know as much as he thinks he does and also deliberately keeps information from his audience. At an early stage of John’s cooperation with Fielding, Doris Arthur, the woman who is writing the script for their film, warns John about the fact that Fielding is framing him. It is

unclear whether John was blacked-out at this point or whether he simply does not want to believe what she says, as he states, “[then] her face changed and she told me something so terrible, so strange, so annihilating that I can’t remember a word she said” (Amis 176). Near the end of the novel, however, John claims that his suicide-attempt caused a blackout so severe, he “had full access to all the hidden things”, which suggests that he truly could not remember what had happened. (Amis 355).

John’s blackouts create misdirection, not only because John fills in the blackouts with the wrong interpretation, but because the reader does so as well. We are aware that John can never have it right but what happens during his blackouts is unpredictable to such an extent that we are bound to miss the mark too. Amis thus makes us work to fill in the blanks even though he knows we will fail. Near the end of the novel, Martin admits to John that he is “the author of his destruction” and we realise that Amis is the author of *our* destruction (Duggan 86). The uncertainty with regards to the fact-fiction distinction therefore reaches its climax, when the author surrogate claims its role. The only reason Fielding could frame John is because he was enabled by Martin, just like Amis enables his novel to frame us.

Amis uses author surrogacy with the main aim to satirise elements of postmodern culture. He uses his authorial power to both engage the reader and distance him and manipulates him in the same way Fielding Goodney and Martin manipulate John. Through the character of John he suggests that consumer culture has made postmodern man delusional about what his priorities should be. John can be interpreted as the embodiment of twentieth-century consumerism and Amis uses him as a tool to satirise postmodern man’s consumption of art. By creating a failing protagonist who only values the commercial, he seems to critique the commercialisation of art and the blurring distinction between highbrow and popular culture.

Case Study 2: *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life*

Like chapter one, this chapter will provide a case study. It will explain the function of author surrogacy in *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life* (2009) and give an insight into the ways J.M. Coetzee has used author surrogacy and which purpose this concept has in the novel. With *Summertime*, J.M. Coetzee completes a trilogy he started in 1997 with *Boyhood* and continued with *Youth* (2002). All three volumes share the subtitle *Scenes from Provincial Life*. Like *Summertime*, the previous volumes of the trilogy are “fictionalised memoirs”, but only in *Summertime* does J.M. Coetzee step away from third person narration and shapes his novel to the form of a mock biography on the basis of interviews (Kossew 9).

In *Summertime*, a number of authorial layers can be identified. Firstly, we can identify the layer of the real J.M. Coetzee, the author of the novel and the creator of all the characters, including his fictional self. The second layer is the character of J.M. Coetzee in the novel, which hereafter will be called John. Since John is deceased, the reader knows for a fact he is similar but cannot be identical to J.M. Coetzee. This layer also includes the notebook entries at the beginning and the end of the novel, written by John. The third layer is Mr Vincent’s, an English academic who is creating a biography of the fictional Coetzee by making use of the notebooks entries and interviews with five people who were a part of John’s life in the 1970s. These people include Julia, a woman John had an affair with; Margot, John’s cousin; Adriana, with whom John was briefly in love and to whose daughter he was a tutor; Martin, a former colleague of John’s; and Sophie, a French colleague of John’s from the University of Cape Town with whom he also had an affair. This chapter will deal with the way Coetzee has used this structure of interviews and notebook entries to strengthen the effect he has achieved with the use of author surrogacy.

As mentioned in the previous chapter of this thesis, the distinction between the real and

imaginative tends to get blurred in postmodern works. In *Summertime*, Coetzee has used self-reflexivity as a tool to incorporate a metafictional paradox. The novel refers to J.M. Coetzee's previous works, such as *Boyhood*. It takes a work of fiction from the same trilogy and assumes that the information included in that work of fiction is to be interpreted as factual information, even though the present work of fiction shows that this cannot be the case. The word 'proof' is even used to describe the truth value of *Boyhood*, when Sophie, one of the interviewees, states "[for] proof you have to turn to the book I mentioned, *Boyhood*, where you find a palpable nostalgia for the old feudal relations between white and Coloured" (Coetzee 240). Mr Vincent acknowledges both other novels from the trilogy in his first question to Martin and this way further obliterates the connection between the real and the imaginative. He suggests that the notebook entries and John's comments, which are included in the novel, were in fact the first stage of a third part to the trilogy he began with *Boyhood* and *Youth*. This is an example of self-reflexivity in the novel, since the current work of fiction can be argued to be this third part.

Mr Vincent also refers to a similarity in the style of writing between the previous novels in the trilogy and the notebook entries, as he states "[as] you will hear, he follows the same convention as in *Boyhood* and *Youth*, where the subject is called 'he' rather than 'I'" (Coetzee 205). In the present work, however, J.M. Coetzee does not follow the same convention and this widens the gap between the present work and John's unfinished novel. On the other hand, the present work seems to be self-referential, but in fact refers to a fictional version of *Boyhood* and *Youth* and thus fades the line between J.M. Coetzee creating *Summertime*, and John creating a third part to the trilogy. In this way, Coetzee both enlarges and complicates the distinction between the present novel and the unfinished novel, which makes it difficult for the reader to distinguish fact from fiction.

In contrast to *Boyhood* and *Youth*, according to Dominika Szwajewska, "facts taken

directly from real-world Coetzee's life are also introduced into the fictional context" of *Summertime* (285). This creates a paradox in which on the one hand *Summertime* is more 'real' than *Boyhood* and *Youth*, but on the other hand the difference in form between the novels keeps the reader at a greater distance.

The fact-fiction distinction is further problematized by John's notebook entries. They are written in the same style as *Boyhood* and *Youth*, and do therefore seem more realistic. On the other hand, since these novels are not associated with events from J.M. Coetzee's life, the notebook entries can therefore barely be expected to contain truthful information either. Also, the notebooks form a striking opposition with the rest of the novel, as they deal with different themes. They concern Coetzee's past in South Africa while the interviews deal with different parts of his personal life, such as his loves and his job. They cope with his opinion on the Apartheid regime but according to Sophie "he was not political at all. He looked down on politics. He didn't like political writers, writers who espoused a political programme" (Coetzee 228). Furthermore, when thinking about John's notebook entries, which according to Mr Vincent were the beginning of a novel, we need to take into consideration that the novel we are reading might be in a similar stage, ergo unfinished and not the final product Mr Vincent had intended on publishing.

Similarly, in Margot's chapter, it is striking is that Mr Vincent has interviewed her, written up her answers as a story and is now reading this story to her. The fact that we are supplied with more information than would be included in the eventual product, suggests that the novel we are reading is still in production, similar to John's notebooks. In a way, the notebook entries seem to meet Coetzee's readers' expectations for receiving information about his life, but on the other hand they further mystify him because of their association with novels that have little validity. Furthermore, the way Mr Vincent manipulates the story makes us question whether anything we read can be interpreted as reality. Since it is clear that we are not supplied with

information from a trustworthy source, it is perhaps this fact rather than John's demise, which makes us question the truthfulness of the novel.

Another element of the novel that makes us question the similarity between J.M. Coetzee and John is the fact that Coetzee seems to be self-deprecating with *Summertime*. Initially, the reader might think that the interviewees put in to words Coetzee's feelings about himself, even though none of them are truly positive about him. Another way of looking at it is to conclude that John represents Coetzee's rejection of culture's need for a powerful author figure. John is weak, a failure, a mediocre lover and above all, a mediocre author. It might even be argued that he is not the protagonist of the novel, since he does not play an active role in it. Julia's comment on her relationship with John is telling, as she says, "I *really* was the main character. John *really* was a minor character" (Coetzee 44). In his own biography he is diminished to a minor character but this is significant in itself since it poses the question of how this can lead to a well-rounded view of him when most minor characters are only flat characters.

Dominika Szwajewska comments on John's dullness, as she states, "[one] by one, fictional Coetzee's world mates pass a crushing critique of his literary endeavours. At best, he is seen as a skilled craftsman, fluent with words, but never as a true artist" (288). She concludes that "such is the degree of ineptitude the character demonstrates in all his endeavours that his reality becomes exaggeratedly normal, normal to the point of boredom, making thus the confrontation between factual and fictional Coetzee even more flamboyant" (289). These statements show the core problem the interviewees find with John. He was not bad at what he did but, perhaps even worse, he was not perfect either and therefore quite meaningless. As Szwajewska explains, the fact that John is regarded as boring by the interviewees enlarges the distinction between J.M. Coetzee and John, since Coetzee is a very successful writer.

It also seems Coetzee wants to promote "The Death of the Author" by making his

protagonist a mediocre, boring, and unimportant flat character. The paradox this poses is that Coetzee simultaneously introduces a failing fictional counterpart and shows that he has the authorial power of being able to represent himself in every way possible and lead the readers' view of him. In other words, the use of the fading line between fact and fiction, which is unclear to the reader but as clear as night and day to the author, might allow him more authorial power after all. He also problematizes it for himself again, by writing a *readerly* novel, which takes away from his position as a godlike entity, as the reader takes an active part in coming to grasp with the meaning of the fiction-reality distinction in novel, in particular with regards to the author surrogate.

Through the use of author surrogacy, *Summertime* seems to raise the question of why the world should be interested in John's life. We do not know much about J.M. Coetzee since he lives a reclusive life and whilst he won the Man Booker Prize twice, he never collected these prizes. He seems to be wary about his fame and taking into account Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author", Coetzee seems to promote the idea that his work should be regarded without the context of the author's personal life. *Summertime* seems to comment on the perception of the public that they have the right to know about the personal life of well-known people, such as Coetzee's. This is illustrated by Mr Vincent, who states in his interview with Sophie "[a] great writer becomes the property of all of us", and since John is deceased, this means that he has now become everyone's property. According to Sophie however, John would say, "[the] day of the great writer is gone for ever" (Coetzee 226). This is not the only instance in which one of the characters opposes Mr Vincent's curiosity about John's personal life. Martin opposes the strategy Mr Vincent employs to create the biography and questions whether it will be "anything more than women's gossip" (Coetzee 218). Sophie is surprised that Mr Vincent uses second-hand knowledge about John. She asks, "What of his diaries? What of his letters? What of his

notebooks? Why so much emphasis on interviews?" (Coetzee 225). J.M. Coetzee seems to hint that by focusing on John's personal life, Mr Vincent is giving importance to an unimportant part of his life.

Furthermore, in his interview with Adriana, Mr Vincent asks her how her daughter is doing. Adriana had previously told him about her daughter Maria Regina, and Mr Vincent asks Adriana: "[do] you have a picture of her that I could perhaps use in the book?" (Coetzee 173). This is significant to this study for two reasons. First of all, the present work does not contain pictures and this could either mean Mr Vincent changed his mind about using pictures or that the present novel is not the finished product that Mr Vincent had in mind. Secondly, it is quite curious that Mr Vincent should be interested in Adriana's daughter since he came to see her about Adriana's involvement with John. Coetzee suggests a postmodern sense of inadequacy through the character of Mr Vincent, as the latter desires ever more information. He came to Adriana to ask her about her relationship with John but according to her this was only a "brief, one-sided infatuation" from John's side and therefore he loses interest and immediately shifts focus to Maria Regina. This passage is an example of how Coetzee comments on being interested in people's personal lives rather than their achievements and this can be regarded as an element of the postmodern cultural condition, which makes society insatiably hungry for information but at the same time too quickly distracted.

By questioning the importance of a famous person's personal life, J.M. Coetzee does not only critique Mr Vincent but also postmodern culture. He provides a reflection for the reader by confronting him with his need for personal information about others. Through the use of author surrogacy he provides a mirror for the reader who in this way is made aware of his voyeuristic behaviour. John is a fictional version of J.M. Coetzee but since information about the latter is withheld from the reader, he will search for this information elsewhere, namely in his fictional

autobiography. Due to the fact that John is deceased, the reader is aware that it is not J.M.

Coetzee about whom he is gaining information. Still, because the interviews conducted by Mr Vincent seem so personal he cannot help but taking the information he is given as fact.

In *Boyhood* and *Youth* J.M. Coetzee already distanced himself from the reader by using the third person rather than the first person to describe his fictional alter ego. In *Summertime*, he takes this even further because of the form he has chosen for the novel. His fictional self is now described by a second party in the form of the interviewees, and the information they give is slanted as they are merely answering Mr Vincent's questions. Furthermore, Mr Vincent first interprets the information and only this is what we will read. For instance, after he interviewed Margot, he writes up what she told him as a story rather than a list of questions and answers. She accuses him of having changed the tone of her story when she says, "I don't know. Something sounds wrong, but I can't put my finger on it. All I can say is, your version doesn't sound like what I told you" (Coetzee 91). Through this passage we learn that our knowledge of John is not even based on what Coetzee tells us about him and neither is it based on Margot's story. J.M. Coetzee points out his reader's voyeuristic habits as he makes him aware that even though the validity of the story has disappeared, the reader keeps searching for clues about J.M. Coetzee.

The use of the name 'John' is another way in which Coetzee uses author surrogacy to emphasise the stress on the personal. His fictional counterpart is continually referred to as 'John', while the author is rarely referred to in this way. The name that appears on his novels is J.M. Coetzee and in this way it is not only unclear what his first name is, but even whether he is a man or a woman. The use of the name John is much more personal, as the reader is immediately on first name basis with this character and in this way is drawn into, or rather intrudes into, his life. On the other hand, it distances the reader from J.M. Coetzee, as it widens the gap between the real and the fictional Coetzee.

When the reader becomes aware of the fact that the validity of the novel has proven to be non-existent, both by the death of John and the subjective supply of information, he feels caught, cheated and perhaps ashamed. These feelings point towards voyeurism, a concept that can be argued to be an element of the postmodern cultural condition. Spying on someone to gain information about his personal life is essentially what the reader is doing when he is reading *Summertime*. On the other hand, the reader is also the one who is being watched, as Coetzee points out his behaviour. In this way, Coetzee shows that voyeurism has a price, namely that when you have the possibility to watch others, you are more than likely being watched yourself and perhaps even worse, judged.

Through his fictional counterpart Coetzee points towards society's habit of critiquing others. As mentioned before, John is not portrayed favourably in the novel, as the women he sleeps with think he was a cold person, his former colleagues think he was only "an adequate academic" and Sophie states that he "[lacked] ambition" as a writer (Coetzee 212; 242). It is highly probable that they share this information more easily because Mr Vincent has asked them to observe their relationship with John after his demise. Furthermore, Mr Vincent scrutinizes his interviewees as well as John. When Adriana shares her idea about the difference between boys and girls with him, she specifically says, "[but] I will tell you one thing, *entre nous*, which you must not repeat in your book" (Coetzee 172). If we are indeed reading Mr Vincent's finished product, he has not kept his promise to Adriana and has exposed her personal views without her permission.

Thus, Coetzee makes his reader aware of the threat that voyeurism can form as he shows that in postmodern culture, we are forced to observe each other. By introducing the concept of voyeurism to his readers, J.M. Coetzee uses a highbrow product, his novel, to critique a mass culture phenomenon that is often associated with the vulgar. Through the use of author surrogacy,

Coetzee critiques postmodern culture and voyeurism in particular. He reveals the voyeuristic behaviour of his readers and simultaneously makes them aware that they are subject to the voyeuristic habits of others as well. By focusing on John's private life, he comments on society's urge to give importance to the unimportant and consume art through its context. This can be viewed as a comment on a postmodern overload of information but also on the fading distinction between high- and lowbrow culture, as postmodern society tends to focus on the lowbrow while consuming a highbrow product.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of *Money* and *Summertime*, this study has provided in depth insight into the ways Martin Amis and J.M. Coetzee have incorporated author surrogacy into their novels, and with which purpose. This chapter will compare and contrast the use of author surrogacy in both novels and discuss the purpose with which author surrogacy was used. Both authors tend to problematize the importance of the artist within the process of art consumption. Their novels provide unreliable information but whilst in *Money* the first person narrator causes this effect, in *Summertime* it is the fact that we only receive indirect third-hand information. In neither of the novels is the author assisting us in our understanding and thus it could be argued that the authorial power is absent in both cases.

However, whilst Coetzee clearly comments on authorial power this is not the case for Amis. Amis, even though he does not assist us, does play a prominent role as both John's adviser and swindler. He seems to stress the importance of the author, as Martin claims that John's fate is inescapable because of what the author has planned for him. As mentioned before, Amis made a deliberate choice to step into the story and influence the protagonist. The fact that he does this openly, stresses the importance of the author and pulls the reader out of the story to ensure he does not forget who made it possible for him to read *Money*.

Coetzee, on the other hand, deliberately portrays his author surrogate as boring and even though this shows the hand of a skilled author, it is highly probable that it is part of his critique on society's focus on the personal life of the author. He uses the name 'John' to stress the personal, and to create a distinction between the author and the author surrogate. This is in contrast to *Money*, in which John Self could just as well have been named John Doe. Coetzee created a fictional counterpart who is uninteresting to his peers to ensure that his readers' desire

to read an exciting story about his personal life, remains unsatisfied. This can be interpreted as a comment on authorship in general. Coetzee created an uninteresting author figure to make the reader aware how little an author matters. He may even want to convey that it is better not to know anything about an author, as he might turn out to be boring like John and the disillusionment caused by this might influence the reading experience.

It is striking that while both authors have used an author surrogate as a tool to fade the distinction between fact and fiction, they seem to have a different purpose in mind. Promoting limited authorial power serves Coetzee's main goal, namely critiquing the consumption of art through its context. Contrastingly, Amis mainly uses author surrogacy to confuse his readers and to satirise postmodern society.

In both novels, the author surrogate is closely linked to the authors' aims to confuse the reader regarding the fact-fiction distinction. This theme is key when we try to understand the authors' motivation for their use of author surrogacy. Both authors' comments on postmodern culture rely greatly on the fact that the reader looks for representations of the author in their novels.

To this effect, Amis has incorporated elements from his own life into his novel. For instance, in a conversation with Martin Amis John Self says, "Your dad, he's a writer too, isn't he? Bet that made it easier", which is a referral to the fact that Martin Amis' father Kingsley Amis was a writer as well (Amis 86). Martin responds, "Oh, sure. It's just like taking over the family pub", which alludes to the fact that John thinks he can easily take over his family pub, while in fact this becomes impossible when John turns out not to be Barry's son (Amis 86). Amis uses factual information from his own life to satirise the notion that talent is simply transferred from generation to generation and to poke fun at the fact that John tends to be misinformed, which an attentive reader might interpret as a warning not to trust him as a narrator. Subtle hints like these

and John's unreliable narration supply us with too little information to make a clear distinction between fact and fiction.

In contrast, in *Summertime*, personal information about Coetzee's life mainly includes the author's places of residence and the fact that Coetzee has had to leave the United States. In this case, these facts could just as well be made-up but they happen not to be. They provide a factual framework to an otherwise fictional story to make it unclear to the reader exactly what information should be interpreted as true and what should not. It could be argued that one of the reasons the fact-fiction distinction is blurred is because *Summertime* contains simply too much information. The sum of the notebook entries, Mr Vincent's questions, the interviewees' answers and the interpretation of those answers by Mr Vincent create an abundance of information. It is possible to conclude that in this way Coetzee comments on the overload of information postmodern society has access to, which makes it impossible to distinguish the important from the unimportant.

This is striking, as Amis and Coetzee use the opposite strategy to the same effect. They both influence the credibility of the story and make the reader guess either what information is important, or what information is missing. Both authors comment on an excess of information, which could be argued to be a characteristic of the postmodern cultural condition. They seem to suggest that this abundance leads to society's inability to differentiate the important from the unimportant. However, while Amis aims to satirise postmodern culture, Coetzee seems to criticise it.

Another characteristic of postmodern culture that both Amis and Coetzee have incorporated into their novels is voyeurism. Like a reader of *Summertime*, John Self is both voyeur and a victim of voyeurism. Through John's voyeuristic habits, Amis points out that postmodern culture has resulted in a society of sign consumers. We buy into an idea rather than

experiencing reality, just like John does through television, pornography and alcoholism. John's primary emotions are fear and shame but he seems to believe himself invincible and is surprised to find out he is being watched. Through the character of John Self, Amis points out that while sign consumption seems to have replaced the consumption of reality, this does not mean that the threat of unlimited consumption has become less realistic as well and postmodern society is delusional for thinking that it is.

In *Summertime*, voyeurism plays an even more prominent role. Coetzee comments on both the characters' and his reader's voyeuristic habits. In other words, through the voyeurism in the novel, Coetzee points out voyeurism that is happening outside the novel. He seems to have incorporated a warning to his readers to be aware that if they have unlimited access to information about others, other will have access to information about them too. Amis mainly aims to satirise postmodern man's conception that money makes him invincible, while Coetzee uses voyeurism as a way to critique society for thinking that every amount of information is inadequate. Furthermore, where Amis points out societies flaws, Coetzee makes the reader aware of his own postmodern behaviours. *Money* therefore stimulates the reader to look critically to cultural phenomena around him, while *Summertime* promotes a more inward view.

The first chapter of this thesis elaborately discussed the role of author surrogacy in relation to the distinction between high- and lowbrow culture in *Money*. Through Amis's multiple author surrogates he has created an opposition between the characters, which is representative for the distinction between highbrow and popular culture. Many ironic references to highbrow phenomena such as Shakespeare, Monet and nudes in marble form add to the satirising nature of the novel.

Even though *Money* much more clearly comments on this particular characteristic of what scholars classify as the postmodern cultural condition, it has been incorporated in *Summertime* as

well. Coetzee focuses on the private life of his protagonist and at the same time critiques giving importance to the vulgar, the commercial and gossip. This can be viewed as a comment on a postmodern overload of information but also on society's desire to consume art through background information about the artist. In other words, Coetzee critiques the fading distinction between high- and lowbrow culture as it leads to the consumption of art through its context, rather than through the art itself. A quite similar comment can be found in *Money*, but Amis focuses less on the consumption of art through its context and more on the commercial consumption of art and the use of highbrow products for lowbrow purposes.

Through the use of author surrogacy, Martin Amis and J.M. Coetzee seem to comment on elements that are arguably part of the postmodern cultural condition. This is relevant for this study since *Money* and *Summertime* are an early and a more recent example of postmodern literature respectively. Even though the tone of both novels differs greatly, they deal with similar themes and both authors seem to have broadly the same purpose in mind, namely either satirising or critiquing the commercialisation of art consumption and society's delusion that consuming art through its context is in any way similar to the real experience.

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