

THE COMIC ANTI-HERO: JOHN WAIN'S HURRY ON DOWN
AND KINGSLEY AMIS' LUCKY JIM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I.	INTRODUCTION: THE ANTI-HERO IN PROSE FICTION	1
II.	JOHN WAIN'S <u>HURRY ON DOWN</u> : FROM ALIENATION TO ACCOMMODATION	15
III.	KINGSLEY AMIS' <u>LUCKY JIM</u> : AN ARCHETYPAL ANTI-HERO	36
IV.	CONCLUSION	58
	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	67

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE ANTI-HERO

IN PROSE FICTION

It has been claimed in recent years that there are no longer any real heroes in everyday life or in fiction. The truth of this claim may be demonstrated by the nature of the heroes in recent films as well as in fiction. In the mid-sixties, a film entitled The Graduate attracted widespread attention of the movie-going public. The young "hero" was not handsome, nor did he possess any of the usual attributes of a Hollywood matinee idol. He was not even the usual alternative--a rugged Western type such as John Wayne or Steve McQueen. His primary problem--now that he was a university graduate--was what to do with his life. His agony was evident in his frequent audible "gulps" as he confronted his parents, the seductive Mrs. Robinson, and the Establishment. From that time, the anti-heroic type has been encountered on the screen as well as in fiction. Many persons were unaware at that time that this "new" hero has made his first appearance in England as early as 1953. He has been with us now for over twenty years, and he has, in fact, almost totally displaced the traditional hero.

Although the twentieth-century archetypal anti-hero did not emerge until the decade of the fifties, the picaro, a prototype of the anti-hero, was introduced by the picaresque novel in the sixteenth century. The picaro was popularized by a novel entitled La Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de Sus Adversidades in 1554, and Miguel de Cervantes perpetuated the picaro in Don Quixote in 1605. The French continued the tradition in Le Sage's Gil Blas in 1715. The first picaresque novel in the English language was The Unfortunate Traveller, published by Thomas Nash in 1594. Moll Flanders, the story of a female picaroon by Daniel Defoe, gave importance to the type in the eighteenth century. Although the picaro as a character-type fell out of favor during the nineteenth century, he re-emerged in the guise of the anti-hero in the twentieth century.¹

The term "anti-hero" came into use during the decade following World War II. Prior to that time, the word "hero" had seemed adequate to describe the protagonist of a literary work with whom the reader is supposed to identify. Although the protagonist is often termed "anti-hero," he is also referred to as the alienated hero, the contemporary hero, or simply the new hero. Who, then, is this emerging anti-hero? According to C. Hugh Holman, he is "the protagonist of a

¹C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, 3rd. ed. (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1972), pp. 391-92.

modern play or novel who has the converse of most of the traditional attributes of the hero. He is graceless, inept, sometimes stupid, sometimes dishonest."² Such a simplistic definition gives only a partial picture of this new kind of hero. Ihab Hassan shows a more composite picture of this man with a thousand faces: "In fiction the unnerving rubric 'anti-hero' refers to a ragged assembly of victims: the fool, the clown, the hipster, the criminal, the poor sod, the freak, the outsider, the scapegoat, the scrubby opportunist, the rebel without a cause, the 'hero' in the ashcan, and the 'hero' on the leash."³

Understanding man's dilemma, Lionel Trilling, in Freud and the Crisis of our Culture, states that "in its essence literature is concerned with the self, and the particular concern of the literature of the last two centuries has been with the self in its standing quarrel with culture."⁴ This self in embittered conflict with society has culminated in the figure of the anti-hero.⁵ In fact, the predominant characteristic of the anti-hero is his awareness of self. Hassan gives this explanation:

²Ibid., p. 32.

³Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 21.

⁴Cited in Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence, pp. 20-21.

⁵Hassan, p. 21.

Deep in his constitution the hero incarnates the aboriginal Self. So long as it was possible to mediate between Self and World, the anarchy in the heroic soul remained covert; the hero appeared as a hero. But the World, in our time, seems to have either vanished or become a rigid and intractable mass. Mediation between Self and World appears no longer possible--there is only surrender or recoil.
 . . . ⁶

Armed with a new awareness of self, the contemporary hero faces an encounter between self and world in the modern novel. This confrontation of the new hero with experience assumes the form of either initiation or victimization. According to Hassan, "Initiation can be understood . . . as the first existential ordeal, crisis, or encounter with experience in the life of a youth. Its ideal aim is knowledge, recognition, and confirmation in the world, to which the actions of the initiate, however painful, must tend."⁷ On the other hand, victimization may occur upon this first encounter with adult reality, and renunciation is its result.⁸

At this juncture in his confrontation with life, the hero usually becomes either the successful initiate or the victim. Like the anti-heroine Daisy Miller, the initiate affirms his stance even if it ultimately ends in defeat. He is a hero in "the guise of the rebel, rogue, or the self-inflating alazon of Greek drama. He enjoys considerable

⁶Ibid., p. 327.

⁷Ibid., p. 41.

⁸Ibid., p. 35.

freedom, and gives the illusion of escaping from necessity."⁹ The hero who becomes a victim, however, resembles the self-deprecating eiron of Greek drama. Hassan explains: "He enjoys a limited degree of freedom, and makes an uneasy truce with necessity."¹⁰ If the anti-hero becomes victim instead of initiate,

. . . he is in anguish to the point of despair because his life, which he deems of value, evokes only indifference or hostility; his interminable misery implies, in fact, his insignificance, even his irrelevance. . . . The anti-hero is predicated as beaten from the first; he is either too will-less or too feeble to translate his will, his personality, into a viable pattern of action.¹¹

However, another type of anti-hero cannot be labeled merely "victim"; his rebellious behavior demands that he be called "rebel-victim." He does not accept his victimization without a fight. In a sense his personality attains a duality: "the rebel denies without saying No to life, the victim succumbs without saying Yes to oppression."¹² Hassan explains this duality: "The figure of modern man, when he chooses to assert his full manhood, always bears the brave, indissoluble aspects of Prometheus and Sisyphus--the eternal rebel and the eternal victim."¹³ Man, not satisfied to play

⁹Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Alan Friedman, "Bernard Malamud: The Hero as Schnook," Southern Review, 4 (October 1968), 929.

¹²Hassan, p. 31.

¹³Ibid.

only the role of eternal victim, asserts his dignity by eternally rebelling.

The dual nature of the rebel-victim evades the confines of conventional tragedy or comedy. Consequently what may be called a new literary genre has evolved. Kingsley Amis has called it serio-comedy--a mixture of seriousness and humor.¹⁴ Within this milieu, the contemporary hero is "too much the victim to be considered tragic, but he is also too much the rebel to meet the requirements of comedy." As a consequence in the contemporary novel comedy may even become "a sign of both anger and desperation." Hassan explains that "laughter, in our time, is sickly, savage, demonic, or at least self-ironic." This type of black humor is akin to that of the theater of the absurd.¹⁵

Does the anti-hero remain alienated from the society which has claimed him as victim? Marcus Klein claims that the contemporary hero moves from alienation to a type of accommodation. These heroes discover that "their destiny lies not in isolation, but rather in joining the social battle in a somewhat existential mode of engagement."¹⁶ Klein describes

¹⁴R. B. Parker, "Farce and Society: The Range of Kingsley Amis," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 3 (1961), 28.

¹⁵Hassan, p. 119.

¹⁶Harry T. Moore, Introduction to Contemporary American Novelists (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), p. xx.

the hero's act of accommodation as "adjustment to the social fact."¹⁷ The anti-hero, in his freedom of self, finds that he is isolated, or alienated. He then involves himself in social engagement only to discover that he has sacrificed his identity. In the process of eliminating the distance between self and society, he finds "the perpetual necessity of killing adjustment--accommodation. The anti-hero manages, by exercising his wits, to live within his dilemma."¹⁸

Without a doubt the cataclysmic events of World War II precipitated the emergence of the twentieth-century anti-hero. Indeed, a totally new kind of hero has emerged in post-World War II fiction. Alan Friedman describes him:

He is not a classical tragic hero whose suffering is magnificent because of grandeur of character and the height from which he falls; on the contrary he is a poor schnook distinguished only by misery and his sense of victimization. But because he embraces these, and because . . . he finds something in himself and in his life to affirm, he becomes a paradigm of a new kind of hero--one who, given the context of his meaningless, arbitrary world and his own feebleness, even irrelevance, when confronting it, triumphs because he endures.¹⁹

Moreover, the emergent anti-hero seems to be the focus of an entirely new literary movement started by Britain's so-called "angry young men." Marcus Klein verbalizes its essence: ". . . it has been called variously . . . the new nihilism,

¹⁷Marcus Klein, After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1964), p. 17.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁹Friedman, p. 934.

poetic naturalism, radical innocence, a new concern for final matters, the rule of personality, the disappearance of manners . . . the age of accommodation."²⁰ Regardless of what it may be called, Klein defines it as "large, exciting, and peculiarly serious."²¹ The label "angry young men" gained popular use in connection with John Osborne's Jimmy Porter in the play Look Back in Anger (1956), but it had appeared in 1951 as the title of Leslie Allen Paul's autobiography, Angry Young Man. The phrase was then used to describe the protagonists in the literary works of John Wain, Kingsley Amis, John Braine, and John Osborne. In some way the misnomer became attached to the writers themselves, who supposedly formed a "school" for presenting the problems of the socially underprivileged. These young men were thought to represent "a cohesive movement to purge Britain of both the lingering injustice of class stratification and, almost in direct contradiction, the dull sterility of the Welfare State."²²

Kingsley Amis and John Osborne attained the status of "angry young men" because they "each had written about a disgruntled young man named Jim."²³ The fact was ignored "that

²⁰Klein, p. 14.

²¹Ibid., p. 15.

²²James Gindin, "The Reassertion of the Personal," Texas Quarterly, 1 (Winter 1958), 129.

²³Rubin Rabinovitz, The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 38.

Amis' Jim was amusingly, and not angrily disgruntled," and if Amis was angry about anything, he was keeping the matter to himself.²⁴ Consequently a literary furor developed in which critics began to deny that certain novelists belonged in the category of the "angry young men." Perhaps the only obvious link between the novelists was a chronological one; Amis, Wain, and Angus Wilson belonged to a group of novelists whose first novels appeared between 1952 and 1955. Frederick Karl claims that "the protagonists of these novelists are not really angry."²⁵ He qualifies his statement with this explanation:

They are, however, disgruntled--with themselves, with their social status, with their work, with their colleagues, with the shabbiness of daily life, with their frustrated aspirations for self-fulfillment, with the competitive spirit, with the inaccessibility of women and drink, with all the small activities whose pursuit takes up their depleted energies. If we want genuine anger, we must turn to the continental novel.²⁶

Kenneth Allsop captures the essence of the Angry-Young-Man phenomenon: "The important thing is that, with justification, the phrase illuminated for large numbers of people a new state of mind in Britain of the nineteen-fifties. Look Back in Anger, arriving at that particular moment, caught and

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Frederick Karl, The Contemporary English Novel (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962), p. 221.

²⁶Ibid.

crystallized a floating mood."²⁷ Allsop explains that the Jimmy Porters have no interest in man's political dilemmas such as the ideological cold war between East and West. The new hero even ignores his own lack of spiritual direction; his chief fear seems to be that man is now faced with problems which have no solutions. He also feels a loss of identity and freedom. As a result, Allsop explains, "the Jimmy Porters simmer and lacerate themselves with self-doubt. They are angry at having nothing they dare to be angry about."²⁸

What, then, were the real causes of all this floating disquietude? Rubin Rabinovitz pinpoints the major social changes in postwar Britain as a disquieting factor. The Labor Government came into power despite Churchill's great personal popularity. Young men without Eton educations moved into government careers and into positions as chairmen of corporations. The most important social changes, however, were the "socialization of medicine and certain industries and a comprehensive social welfare program, factors which to some degree changed the life of every Englishman."²⁹ Undeniably, this social upheaval made a tremendous impact on the postwar English novel. Stereotyped roles were reversed. The protagonist, formerly "the profligate, gentlemanly, party-going

²⁷Kenneth Allsop, The Angry Decade (New York: The British Book Centre, Inc.), p. 16.

²⁸Ibid., p. 21.

²⁹Rabinovitz, p. 22.

scholar had now become the stereotyped minor character."³⁰ Emerging as the main character was the serious-minded scholarship boy who had been a minor character in the earlier university novels.

Thus, education became a factor in breaking down the class structure, and the recipients of university grants in postwar England's welfare state became the "new heroes" in the literary works of Amis, Wain, and Osborne. These young men move from their lower-class, or lower middle-class, origins into "a society in which they have no clear function or class designation."³¹ Education has made these young men different from their fathers. According to James Gordin, "education has become both the instrument for helping to break down the class structure and the focal point of conflict between the old allegiances and the new skepticism."³²

Many contemporary British novels and plays deal with the dilemma which the student faces when he leaves the university:

Kingsley Amis' first two novels Lucky Jim and That Uncertain Feeling concern recent university graduates facing a society they could have known only dimly had they not studied on university grants; . . . John Wain's Hurry on Down is a statement of the possibilities

³⁰Ibid., p. 23.

³¹James Gordin, Postwar British Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 93.

³²Ibid.

open to a young graduate committed to nothing but a rejection of the society he knew before he entered the university.³³

The scholarship boy undergoes a "crisis of conscience" when faced with the choice of retaining his old class standards or sacrificing personal relationships for material gain.³⁴

Hence, these novels, followed by P. H. Newby's The Picnic at Sakkara and Dylan Thomas' Adventures in the Skin Trade, "offer a fascinating, if somewhat unsettling view of the postwar intellectual climate in England."³⁵

The "poor sods," or anti-heroes, in these novels are so strikingly similar that they merge into a type--a "post-war Everyman."³⁶ He is young, is a recent college graduate, and quite often is in a mediocre academic job for which he is ill-suited and unenthusiastic. Sam Hynes describes him:

. . . the Poor Sod is neither successful nor competent; he is, in fact, quite the opposite--fumbling, insecure, poor, harassed, and guilty. His aspirations are simple, but unelevating: to get a better job (or keep the one he has), to revenge himself upon his oppressors, and to manage the price of a pint. He is amorous, but inept; he desires love, but is astonished when he finds it, and he does not distinguish very carefully between love and his natural lechery.³⁷

³³Ibid., p. 94.

³⁴John D. Hurrell, "Class and Conscience in John Braine and Kingsley Amis," Critique, 2 (Spring-Summer 1958), 41.

³⁵Sam Hynes, "The 'Poor Sod' as Hero," Commonweal, 64 (April 13, 1956), 51.

³⁶Ibid., p. 52.

³⁷Ibid.

His most obvious characteristic is his intense self-consciousness. He seems to have a multiple set of selves which results in a fragmented being. In fact, the dust jacket of Hurry on Down pictures a series of paper-doll figures with the hero revealing his several personalities which accord with his several occupations.

Ultimately, "it is only in the Sod's unreasonable determination to remain his own private, disorganized self that he can be said to triumph."³⁸ Often the poor sod's mode of escape against the "combined forces of bureaucracy, conformity, and mediocrity" is merely running away, and in Amis' That Uncertain Feeling, the hero's wife asks:

"Don't you feel you're running away, though?"
 "Yes, I do, thank God," he replies. . . . "You want to forget about 'running away' being what people say about armies retreating and deserters and so on. This isn't like that. Our kind of running away was a stroke of bloody genius. It's always the best thing to do in that kind of situation, provided you can do it."³⁹

This attitude shows why the poor sod is anti-heroic although he possesses a great amount of common sense. When all else fails, he merely thumbs his nose--not a heroic gesture, but in a way it is enough. Furthermore, the anti-hero's strategic withdrawal in the face of insurmountable odds accounts for the picaresque quality in many of the "poor sod" novels. But it is the emergence of the anti-hero himself in postwar Britain

³⁸Ibid., p. 53.

³⁹Ibid.

that provides the focus for the body of this thesis. C. Hugh Holman states that "the first clear example may be Charles Lumley in John Wain's Hurry on Down (1953)."⁴⁰ In 1954 this British anti-hero was followed by a similar character, Jim Dixon, in Kingsley Amis' Lucky Jim. The scope of the thesis will be limited to an exploration of the anti-hero as he is depicted in these two novels. Chapter Two will analyze Charles Lumley, a picaro-type anti-hero, and Chapter Three will investigate a similar anti-hero, Jim Dixon. The concluding chapter will assess the value of the anti-hero as an agent of social commentary.

CHAPTER II

JOHN WAIN'S HURRY ON DOWN: FROM ALIENATION TO ACCOMMODATION

John Wain's novel Hurry on Down was published in America as Born in Captivity. According to Sam Hynes, the reader may infer from these titles that the anti-hero is "trapped by nature in a prison which is partly the welfare state, and partly his own social and psychological situation."¹ Charles Lumley, the "poor sod" anti-hero in Wain's novel, finds himself in embittered conflict with society as a young university graduate unprepared by education to earn a livelihood. Clarifying Lumley's condition of captivity, Hynes explains: "His progress through the novel is through a series of ludicrous and usually humiliating prat-falls to a resolution that is either a cynical submission to the prison rules, or a kind of victory via escape--which may in itself seem a defeat."² As Lumley searches for his role in life by constantly changing jobs, Wain employs the anti-hero as an agent to satirize various classes of British society. More important to an understanding of the anti-hero, however, is the fact that Lumley, in the course of the novel, passes through important crises of the self in relation to society:

¹Hynes, p. 52.

²Ibid.

confrontation with new experiences, initiation into society resulting from a satisfactory first encounter with adult reality, alienation from society as the distance widens between self and the world, and finally accommodation to the social fact.

Lumley's initial confrontation with society occurs soon after he has "come down" (a provincialism for "graduated," hence the title Hurry on Down) from the university. Not prepared for any specific vocation, he picks a town at random from a list suggested by his friends and begins his picaresque wanderings to find a place to "pitch his tent."³ Ensconced in a run-down rooming-house, he is suspected by his landlady, "a recurrent symbol of malevolent authority,"⁴ who believes that he has no prospects for employment. With his last few dollars, Lumley decides to take a train home to visit Sheila, his fiancée. Since she is away, he visits her sister, Edith Tharkles, and Edith's stuffy husband, Robert, who represent the petty middle class. In a scene in which Robert expresses the family's disgust with Lumley's "haphazard approach to life"⁵ and the shirking of his responsibilities, the reader is made aware of the smug self-satisfaction of the middle class.

³Allsop, p. 69.

⁴Hynes, p. 52.

⁵John Wain, Born in Captivity (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1953), p. 15.

Although even they are not aware of their reasons, Robert and Edith dislike Lumley not because of his lack of success but because of his apparent indifference to it. Their main objection to him is that he does not dress appropriately. If Lumley had "worn the uniform of a prosperous middle-class tradesman, like Robert, they would have approved of him. . . . In their world, it was everyone's first duty to wear a uniform that announced his status, his calling, and his ambitions: from the navy's thick boots and shirtsleeves to the professor's tweeds, the convention of clothing saw to it that everyone wore his identity card where it could be seen."⁶ But Lumley has always been unconventional. Even as an undergraduate he had failed to announce his status; he had not worn the usual colored shirts and corduroys nor smoked a pipe. Lumley has always failed to measure up to Robert's picture of propriety. Being a candidate for the hand of the younger sister, Lumley is quizzed about what he intends to do and what his prospects are. He responds with evasive and facetious answers. Obviously, Lumley does not belong to their world, and "after a perfunctory attempt to fit him into their prim, grey jigsaw puzzle, they had disliked and rejected him."⁷

Edith and Robert continue their offensive against Lumley, berating him for disappearing after taking his final

⁶Ibid., p. 13.

⁷Ibid., p. 14.

examinations without even telling his father where he had gone. Although Lumley tries to be oblivious of them, "the smug phrases, the pert half-truths, the bland brutalities ripped down his defenses."⁸ Finally, Edith's statement "You never seem to want to repay any of the people who've tried to help you"⁹ brings him to his feet in a burst of anger. Lumley can think only of all those people whose misguided "guidance" has stifled his life. Now he begins his counterattack. He focuses on Robert's stiff brown moustache which supposedly gives dignity to his face, but which, in actuality, "looked as if it had been clipped from the face of an Airedale."¹⁰ Lumley suddenly blurts out, "I was just wondering why no one's ever found it worthwhile to cut off that silly moustache of yours and use it for one of those brushes you see hanging out of windows next to the waste pipe."¹¹ Edith begins an hysterical tirade while Robert adopts an attitude he deems appropriate under the circumstances. When Robert vigorously shakes him, Lumley realizes that the situation has deteriorated hopelessly. He eludes Robert's grip, lunges across to the sink, and hurls the greasy dishwater at the surprised pair. This disastrous conclusion to his visit is symbolic of Lumley's wish to besmirch the smug middle class with its self-righteous airs.

⁸Ibid., p. 16.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹Ibid.

Following this incident, Lumley gets drunk in a pub and becomes wretchedly ill. He has reached a turning point in his life; like the body ridding itself of the cause of its nausea, he will "cast up and be rid of his class, his milieu. . . ."12 This first confrontation with life is described as Lumley's first death and rebirth. Instead of feeling a sense of victimization which often assails the anti-hero, Lumley has met his first decisive confrontation with society and has emerged as an initiate. He feels a sense of victory over his first adult ordeal. Although the outcome often ends in defeat, the initiate has the feeling of having vanquished his oppressors. In Lumley's situation his decision to rid himself of offending relationships has affirmed his stance, and he now imagines himself to be outside the class structure. He senses a new freedom, and like the self-inflating alazon of Greek drama, he has the illusion of escaping from necessity.

Lumley's first occupation--window cleaning--shows his independence from bourgeois society and its pursuit of the material, but his experiences lead to alienation. After outfitting himself with a pail, chamois, and cloths of the finest quality, he also acquires a working partner, Ern Ollershaw, who is mysteriously secretive concerning his past. In order to acquire "clients," Lumley visits his former grammar school headmaster to obtain the school window-cleaning contract.

12Ibid., p. 30.

This episode provides the central focus of the novel--the fact that education often fails to provide a means for earning a living. Charles opens the interview with his former headmaster, Scrodd, who has a remarkably Dickensian appellation, with the whimsical appeal, "I thought you might be so kind as to help me professionally, sir."¹³ The headmaster, interpreting the appeal as a request for employment as a teacher, replies that his staff is complete. With the realization that Lumley, now a college graduate, is trying to contract for the school window-washing, the headmaster summarizes the entire crux of Lumley's predicament:

I can only conclude, Lumley, that you felt some kind of grudge against me that impelled you to come back and waste my time with this foolish joke. Window cleaning! I suppose the implication is that your education has unfitted you for anything worth doing, and you seek to drive the point home with this foolish talk about having turned artisan. You need not have spoken in parable.¹⁴

Lumley, in a succinct summation of the failure of education to prepare one for a career, replies, "Why not in parable? I spent eight years here being taught to think metaphorically."¹⁵ Lumley has implied that education makes ineffective substitutions; for example, learning often occurs by observation rather than by participation.

Lumley is further alienated from society by his encounter with his new house-mates--Edwin Froulish and Betty,

¹³Ibid., p. 36

¹⁴Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁵Ibid.

the slatternly woman who supports him. Froulish, a former university classmate of Lumley's, imagines himself a Bohemian-style writer. In keeping with the Bohemian flavor of their lifestyle, Froulish and Betty have rented the upper floor of a shed formerly used as a builders' yard. The lower floor of one large room had provided storage for the lumber, and the upper room had been offices. For this makeshift apartment, which is scarcely fit for human habitation, Betty pays one guinea a week. Froulish, who fancies himself a novelist, is being "kept by a woman." Lumley has found a new home: "He, who had rejected and been rejected by both the class of his origin and the life of the 'worker,' might find the classless setting of his dreams in sharing a roof with a neurotic sham artist and a trousered tart."¹⁶ Now offering to pay a portion of the rent, he feels incredibly lucky to have stumbled upon a "ready-made ménage."¹⁷ Although the apartment is neither comfortable nor clean, it answers his needs--a place to store his few possessions, to eat his meals, and to sleep.

The bourgeois belief that a home is to be respected and sacrificed for is no longer important to Lumley. In this déclasse setting, Lumley feels clearly the wisdom of his new policy of taking life as it comes. The quality of that life, however, may be depicted in a grubby table scene. When Betty asks Lumley to set the table for supper, he merely spreads

¹⁶Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 53.

clean newspaper on an upturned packing case. Lumley realizes that Betty's request is the first verbal communication by anyone since he returned one hour before. The three of them have dispensed with conversation. Froulish, occupied with his novel-writing, speaks only when his grievances become aroused. Betty is too tied to her femme fatale manner to be normally conversable. Lumley is too physically tired from his window cleaning to share his thoughts with his companions. Betty's cooking is unbelievably simple; she merely mixes in one saucepan any kind of food available. She sits on a soap-box opposite Lumley in baggy slacks and a flowered smock peering at the upside down newspaper under her plate. Although Froulish and Betty have almost no contact at meals, Lumley knows that they are happy together. He doubts, however, that they are really in love: Froulish is too self-centered and Betty is too bovine.

Since the town has an ample supply of window cleaners who have cornered the profitable markets, Lumley has financial problems. But worse than a shortage of contracts, Lumley has a feeling of being an outlaw. He is aware that workers belong to unions and that anyone who works with his hands without being a union member is in a dangerous position. Consequently, he dodges whenever he sees another window cleaner. He makes no plans, however, to join a union or to make his position official. To Lumley "that would have meant official enrollment

as a member of the working class, and his aim is to be outside the class structure altogether."¹⁸

Lumley now sinks further into his deepening alienation from society. His need for a better paying job arises when he yearns to pursue a lovely girl named Veronica who lives with her well-to-do uncle, Mr. Roderick. Through his shady partner, Ollershaw, Lumley gets into what he believes to be a car-theft racket which is lucrative. In reality, it is a heroin-smuggling operation which leads Lumley into criminal activity.

The scene in the Oak Lounge where Lumley first spies the lovely Veronica is a striking contrast to the plebeian life he has been living with his Bohemian friends. Deciding to cast off his winter doldrums, Lumley looks for his dark suit, which he had been wearing when he had renounced middle-class life. Although his shoes are shabby, he has a shirt and tie which he has scarcely worn. Dressed once again in the uniform of the class he has renounced, he appraises himself in the mirror. He notices that he is acquiring the heavy-shouldered carriage of the manual worker. The only class badge he retains is a match-stick-length haircut which is not too conspicuous. Although he has occasionally cleaned the windows of the Grand Hotel, he now pushes through the swinging doors to enjoy an evening in the Oak Lounge. Settling down

¹⁸Ibid., p. 56.

luxuriously near the log fire, he sips a glass of sherry and opens a package of expensive cigarettes.

Suddenly the door of the lounge swings open, and a plump man of about forty-five walks in. He is wearing a well-cut dark suit, a bow tie, and horn-rimmed glasses which give him the prosperous appearance of a businessman. Holding the door open with a gentle hand, he escorts a girl into the lounge:

. . . She was small and dark, miraculously neat, with tiny fragile bones and an oval face. Her clothes were expensive and simple, with the kind of simplicity that carries with it a hint of the extravagant. Huge dark eyes smiled up at the smooth man. Charles knew that he would never get that smile out of his mind again.¹⁹

By frequenting the lounge where Mr. Roderick and his niece often dine, Lumley manages to meet Veronica and to have a brief romantic fling.

The criminal episode is heightened by a frantic Grade-B-movie chase which lands Lumley in the hospital. In order to halt Lumley's pursuit of Veronica, her "uncle" visits him in the hospital to tell him that Veronica is his mistress, not his niece. Lumley now decides he must reject Veronica, and with that rejection comes "his decision to sweep the violent and senseless elements from his life."²⁰ At this point Lumley begins his climb out of the abyss into which he had fallen. He is now rejecting violent crime and an

¹⁹Ibid., p. 83.

²⁰Ibid., p. 192.

undeserving woman whom he could not afford. This episode is described as his second death and rebirth.

Having passed through the lowest point of his alienation from society, Lumley now has an occupation as hospital orderly. After his bout with crime, the controlled hospital environment provides a "badly needed refreshment for his rudimentary social conscience."²¹ In addition, "there could be no false pretensions, for rank, prestige, and privileges were settled automatically."²² In this protected womb of society, he finds the obscurity which he now desires. But even in this working-class setting Lumley cannot escape contact with those bourgeois elements he detests and rejects. Although Lumley tries to "resist any of the badges of status by which Englishmen recognize one another,"²³ there are other characters in the novel "who commit themselves to class, who judge others and define themselves by the class structure."²⁴ Burge, a young doctor whom Lumley knew at the university and who now berates Lumley for taking such a menial job as a hospital orderly, directs a vicious attack against Lumley:

That sort of work ought to be done by people who are born to it. You had some sort of education, some sort of upbringing, though I must say you don't bloody well behave like it. You ought to have taken on some decent job, the sort of thing you were brought up and educated to do, and leave this bloody slop-emptying

²¹Ibid., p. 125.

²²Ibid.

²³Gindin, Postwar British Fiction, p. 129

²⁴Ibid.

to people who were brought up and educated for slop-emptying. . . . It's necessary, and so is emptying bloody dustbins, but there are some classes of society that are born and bred to it, and ours isn't. If you take a job like that, you're just . . . letting the side down.²⁵

Embittered by such experiences, Lumley desires separation from that bourgeois world and thus succumbs to the simple-minded appeal of Rosa, a hospital worker, since her world is free of middle-class restrictions. She is a member of the hospital's coffee-time circle. Wain characterizes this circle:

The women themselves were an interesting sociological study. Though their work was cleaning and dishing up food, few of them were the ordinary char-woman type; mostly they were obviously welcoming the chance to earn a little extra money by plying the only trade they knew, yet would have starved rather than become a 'lady help' to another woman with the personal relationship it would involve.²⁶

Rosa enjoyed the work at the hospital because it is "more like life--you could meet more people and get to see and hear more."²⁷ Her fascination for Lumley was that "she lived in a perpetual state of wonderment, bordering on excitement, that people and things were so various."²⁸ Lumley now enjoys a period of tranquility after his initial phase of revolt against society. After "walking out" with Rosa several times, he takes her to a country fair one Sunday afternoon.

²⁵Ibid., p. 130.

²⁶Wain, p. 196.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 197.

It is a perfect afternoon for an outing. In this bucolic setting, "years dropped from him, reducing all three or four lifetimes he had endured to the simple chronological total of his twenty-three years."²⁹ Following the fair, they are to go to tea at her parents' home. At first this occasion seemed like an ordeal, but now he welcomes the opportunity to pass the test.

At five o'clock they are met at the door by Rosa's mother. There is no front entry-way, and they pass into a museum-like parlour. In the room at the back, Rosa's father is in his chair by the fire with his newspaper, and he is fast asleep. After chatting for a while, Lumley likes Rosa's father, but he does not like her brother Stan who is trying to better himself by rising above the world of manual work. When he attains his father's age, Stan will probably "have neither the massive good humor nor the genuine dignity of his father, and already he was immersed in learning the technique of cheap smartness."³⁰ Rosa finally comes in dressed for the cinema. Charles feels that at last his search is over. This cozy situation will do. His demands from life have diminished, and this working-class environment will provide all that he now desires.

After a week of seeing Rosa almost every evening, he welcomes a respite. To Lumley, "such repeated doses of

²⁹Ibid., p. 216.

³⁰Ibid., p. 219.

affection and domesticity, with nothing to balance it, could become a bit oppressive. He needed it, like bread, but one can be surfeited with bread."³¹ In order to give himself a change of pace, Lumley goes to a bar for a few drinks. He mulls over the wealthy Mr. Braceweight's offer of a job as a chauffeur and the secluded room over the garage--a quiet retreat. He now realizes that Rosa is only a stage in his recovery. He really does not want Rosa nor the peaceful domesticity to which he has almost succumbed.

Lumley, always an outsider looking in, next becomes a chauffeur for the millionaire, Mr. Braceweight, whom he met in the hospital. Now employed as a mere observer at the top of the social spectrum, he encounters a former classmate, George Hutchins, who is employed as a tutor for the millionaire's son Walter. The irony of this situation is that Hutchins had once hidden his working-class parents in his college dormitory room rather than expose his lower-class background by introducing them to his friends. Now he and Lumley are both, in a sense, menials in an upper-class world. Lumley's adventures as a chauffeur provide the farcical humor often characterizing the anti-hero who feels himself somehow aloof from the class structure and an escapee from necessity.

Lumley's sense of freedom from class restrictions is suddenly halted, however, by an amusing but catastrophic

³¹Ibid., p. 224.

incident during the time he works as chauffeur. Braceweight's son is "interested only in motorcycles, differentials, and valve sets."³² Without his father's permission, Walter has created a grotesque junk-heap which he now intends to test-drive in the driveway. As Walter dons a steel crash-helmet, Lumley wonders: "Did everyone get into these farcical situations? Or was there something about him that attracted them?"³³ With a sudden insight into his place in the world, Lumley reflects:

The people he belonged with were ill, disgusting, comic, but still alive, still generating some kind of human force. This expensive bucolic setting had offered him nothing more than an escape down a blind alley. . . . As ever, the serious point had emerged through the machinery of the ludicrous. His life was a dialogue, full of deep and tragic truths, expressed in hoarse shouts by red-nosed music-hall comics. . . .³⁴

But it is already too late to be mulling over his apparent role as a modern court jester:

He heard a vicious spluttering as the engine moved into second gear, and then the grotesque junk-heap flew past him round the sharp bend, flinging pebbles into the air. It was a fantastic sight; the engine was placed behind the driver, giving a nightmare impression that the machine was going backwards. The four naked jets were pouring black smoke. . . . Bouncing wildly, Walter aimed himself like a torpedo towards the second timing strip, and, beyond it, the garage doors.³⁵

The hilarious result of the incident is that the hideous invention crashes through the garage, coming to rest against

³²Gindin, p. 130.

³³Wain, p. 261.

³⁴Ibid., p. 266.

³⁵Ibid., p. 261.

an expensive Daimler automobile. As Wain suggests, "no chauffeur could let that happen to a Daimler and keep his job."³⁶ Consequently, Lumley writes a respectful letter of resignation to Mr. Braceweight.

After his brief observation of the upper-class world, Lumley's alienation is intensified by experiences as a nightclub bouncer for the Golden Peach Club. In his quest for his place in the world, he has served in many lowly capacities, and now he is discussing his future with Mr. Blearney, a show promoter and director of the Golden Peach Club. With the peculiar self-awareness characteristic of the anti-hero, Lumley feels his consciousness detach itself from his body and pick out the allegorical elements in his life:

The young man (Hopeless) breaks out of the prison of Social and Economic Maladjustment; he carries on his back a hundredweight of granite known as Education. After a skirmish with the dragon Sex, in which he is aided by a false friend, Giant Crime, he comes to the illusory citadel called Renunciation of Ambition.³⁷

A depressingly miserable scene awaits Lumley at the Golden Peach Club. The patrons, however, are too weak physically to cause him trouble--"genuine night-prowlers, drug-addicts, dipsomaniacs, and mental cripples of various kinds."³⁸ As a matter of fact, it seems to be a policy of the club to create the illusion of covert activities that

³⁶Ibid., p. 265.

³⁷Ibid., p. 278.

³⁸Ibid., p. 280.

are not actually there. Regarding the attractions which actually draw the customers, Lumley averts his attention from the more sordid. Lumley will, finally, "develop a hard shell to cover what remained of his moral and aesthetic sensibilities, or even shed these sensibilities altogether."³⁹ Until that time, however, he is paid to watch out for obnoxious behaviour. It is, in general, a depressing spectacle, watching people failing to enjoy themselves at this rock-bottom level of society.

At the moment when Lumley feels that this job as night-club bouncer is to be his permanent niche in life, he is saved by his friend from post-graduate days, Edwin Froulish. Now sporting expensive clothes, although they look as if he has slept in them, Froulish tells Lumley about his new position. He is now employed by Terence Frush, the biggest name in gag-writing business. Frush has a team of joke-writers who write scripts for the top-ranking radio shows. It is Froulish's week to be dirty-joke man, he explains. He has to sit in sleazy clubs such as the Golden Peach Club to collect appropriate material. The plan is to make submerged references in each radio script to a current dirty joke. As Froulish explains,

You get a big laugh because the ones who know the joke feel flattered at being told how worldly-wise they are.

³⁹Ibid.

The point is that the technique works best with jokes that are up-to-the-minute--makes it more flattering. I suppose you don't know any really recent ones? he said, taking out a notebook.⁴⁰

Lumley answers with the most obscene joke he had ever heard. He had not forgotten it since the age of eleven. Often during his adolescent years he had puzzled over its meaning. Froulish now informs Lumley that he has been assigned to find a seventh man for the writing team. That man is Lumley.

Lumley, who has been alienated from society to various degrees since his college graduation, now moves to a final stage of accommodation. Rather than remaining outside the class structure, he finds his slot in the role of gag-writer. Not only does this position suit his abilities, but it pays well. Gindin describes this final episode:

From an exterior point of view, in fact, the job established Charles as part of the commercial middle-class to which, because of his training and education, he honestly belongs. But Charles' journey and acquired insight, rather than an automatic or inherited designation, have earned him the right to keep the job and to win the expensive prize woman.⁴¹

Veronica, his chic "prize woman," returns to him now that he is being rewarded financially. She explains, "At one time it just looked as if our . . . thing hadn't got a chance. . . . But things have altered, altered so strangely."⁴² Lumley mentally translates the explanation into: "You're rich now,

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 287.

⁴¹Gindin, p. 131.

⁴²Wain, p. 299.

you're doing as well as Roderick. And you're fifteen years younger."⁴³

Here is his new cage--a fine new one complete with air-conditioning and commanding a good view with all the modern conveniences. Veronica is snapping the lock; he is still a captive. But she is beautiful, and since he was born in captivity anyway, he now accepts her willingly with catastrophe in the same packet.

This surprisingly sentimental ending is typical of works by the recent British comic writers. Their novels often end with the anti-heroes acquiring desirable prizes--often the beautiful girl--or "asserting a kind of personal dignity or worth."⁴⁴ Although today's sophisticated world hardly expects fairy-tale endings, it is a refreshing change from the comic novels of a generation ago which stripped away all possibilities of success for the hero. Gindin believes that "the happy endings of many recent novels are . . . a return to the tradition of British comedy in which the happy resolution of the plot wraps up the novel and warns us not to take its meaning too seriously."⁴⁵ Gindin maintains that the endings are "merited by the issues of the particular novel itself."⁴⁶ Furthermore, the return to the happy ending

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Gindin, "The Reassertion of the Personal," p. 126.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

"does not indicate that all is well in this best of all possible worlds, for only after the possibilities for the hero have been severely limited can he claim any material reward. . . ."47

Throughout the novel Lumley epitomizes the perennial outsider. He is a comic outsider whose suffering is minimal, but he is an outsider nevertheless. He spends his time observing how the other half lives. At the end of the novel, however, he discovers his niche in life. Lumley tells Blearney at the Golden Peach Club: "I never rebelled against ordinary life; it just never admitted me."⁴⁸ To Lumley's question "What do you think I want?" Blearney replies, "Neutrality." This simple reply comes as a revelation to Lumley. Later, when alone, he ponders its truth: "Neutrality: he had found it at last. The running fight between himself and society had ended in a draw."⁴⁹ As Harry T. Moore has explained, "their destiny lies not in isolation, but rather in joining the social battle. . . ."⁵⁰ In eliminating the distance between self and society, Lumley has reached his final state of accommodation to middle-class society. More importantly, he has regained his lost identity.

Other than the fact that Wain has been credited with being the first to create a "new hero," one might question

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Allsop, p. 66.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Moore, p. xx.

the importance of examining a novel as obscure and as in-artistic as Hurry on Down, but its importance lies in the fact that it influenced other novelists and moved out of "conventional environments."⁵¹ Allsop stresses its unique quality:

This journeying with a central character through a sequence of picaresque events, with the staccato omnivorousness of a cinema newsreel, stimulated a fashion that still continues. . . . But Hurry on Down set a new cycle . . . of the intellectual rebel without a cause wandering through the desert and jungles of the post-war world trying to find a place to pitch his tent.⁵²

Although critics and reviewers sensed that Wain's novel pointed to new directions in the British novel, they "did not perceive a composite figure [of the anti-hero] until Wain's Lumley had been joined by Amis' Jim Dixon and Iris Murdoch's Jake Donahue."⁵³ Wain's weak characterization of the new hero needed the intensity which Kingsley Amis gave to Jim Dixon in order to establish the anti-hero as a character-type.

CHAPTER III

KINGSLEY AMIS' LUCKY JIM: AN ARCHETYPAL ANTI-HERO

An archetypal anti-hero, Jim Dixon, in Kingsley Amis' Lucky Jim protests against a world of genteel academic sham. As a result, he remains a perennial outsider. Charles Shapiro depicts the milieu of this anti-hero:

. . . a world of outs rather than ins, a world in which the outs can neither lick them nor join them. Having no very strong drives toward success in any sense, the Amis [anti-] hero is not in the traditional position of pressing his nose against a windowpane; rather he finds that someone is always shoving a windowpane up to his nose.¹

Like Charles Lumley in Wain's Hurry on Down, Dixon, in attempting to break from England's traditional class structure, undergoes crises of the self in relation to society. Unlike Lumley's situation, however, Dixon's perpetual alienation does not take him to such extremes within the social spectrum, and his accommodation is merely pretended until a final fiasco which outwardly shows his rejection of the academic world. But like Lumley, as William Van O'Connor points out, Dixon has a special talent for recognizing sham:

Jim Dixon has an unerring eye for the pretentious, for the phoney, in institutions, in his colleagues . . .

¹Charles Shapiro, Contemporary British Novelists Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press, 1965), p. 9.

and in himself. He 'belongs' neither to the world of his childhood nor to the new world he inhabits thanks to his university education and profession. He lives a strange fantasy life, and his frustrations sometimes cause him to be 'quick off the mark' and sometimes a hopeless lout.²

Jim's strange fantasy life reveals the peculiar self-awareness which characterizes the anti-hero. This life manifests itself in the strange set of "faces" which Jim surreptitiously assumes as a reaction to the people and events which he encounters. Sam Hynes claims this is the only outlet Dixon has for expressing "his hostilities, resentments, and occasional joys. . . . In the course of the novel he runs through a considerable repertoire--his shot-in-the-back face, his tragic-mask, Chinese mandarin, crazy peasant, Martian invader, Eskimo, lemon-sucking, mandrill, and Evelyn Waugh faces."³ For example, a situation in which Dixon reacts with an assumed face concerns a student named Michie, "a moustached ex-service student who'd commanded a tank troop at Anzio."⁴ He is harrassing Dixon concerning a syllabus on his special subject, "Medieval Life and Culture." Michie had asked for the syllabus before Dixon had completed it. In fact, "Mitchie was . . . able to make a fool of him again

²O'Connor, p. 140.

³Hynes, p. 52.

⁴Kingsley Amis, Lucky Jim (New York: The Viking Press, 1953), p. 29.

and again without warning."⁵ Now as Michie is seeking him out again, Dixon "made his Eskimo face, which entailed, as well as an attempt to shorten and broaden his face by about half, the feat of abolishing his neck by sucking it down between his shoulders."⁶ Because he must mask his true feelings in order to keep his job, Dixon reacts covertly to his frustrations. For example, during a particularly irritating conversation with Professor Welch, his department chairman,

He pretended to himself that he'd pick up his professor round the waist, squeeze the furry grey-blue waistcoat against him to expel the breath, run heavily with him up the steps, . . . and plunge the too small feet in their capless shoes into a lavatory basin, pulling the plug once, twice and again, stuffing the mouth with toilet paper.⁷

In this manner, Jim, as Hynes explains, reveals the inner emotional life through "subjective responses to events, rather than with the events themselves."⁸

But Jim's basic confrontation is with the academic world--the society with which he must now contend as a lecturer on medieval history in a provincial university. The novel opens with Jim's suffering various forms of harassment from his superior--Professor Welch of the history department. Having specialized in medieval history because "the medieval

⁵Ibid., p. 31.

⁷Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁶Ibid., p. 99.

⁸Ibid.

papers were a soft option in the Leicester course."⁹ Dixon is now being pressured by Professor Welch to submit an article to a learned historical journal. Upon being asked by Welch the exact title of the proposed article, Jim reveals the dreadful irrelevance of his academic endeavor: "Let's see," he echoes Welch in a pretended effort of memory: "Oh yes; The economic influence of the developments in ship-building techniques, 1450 to 1485."¹⁰ Amis succinctly identifies the accusations often hurled at scholarly articles: "It was a perfect title, in that it crystallized the article's niggling mindlessness, its funereal parade of yawn-enforcing facts, the pseudo-light it threw on non-problems."¹¹ Welch insists that the only way to tell the worth of the article is to gain acceptance of it by an historical journal. Dixon, however, feels that he can adequately assess the worth of the article: "the thing's worth could be expressed in one short hyphenated indecency; from another [viewpoint], it was worth the amount of frenzied fact-grubbing and fanatical boredom that had gone into it."¹² In addition to harassment concerning the article, Professor Welch informs Dixon that the history department has been asked to provide the evening lecture at College Open Week at

⁹Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 16.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 17.

the end of the term. Welch confronts Dixon with the responsibility: "I thought you might care to tackle the evening lecture the department's going to provide, if you could."¹³ Dixon, knowing that others in the department are better qualified, nevertheless manages to hide his chagrin with the compromising reply: "Well, I would rather like to have a crack at a public lecture if you think I'm capable of it."¹⁴ Welch even chooses the topic: "I thought something like 'Merrie England' might do as a subject. Not too academic and not too . . . not too . . . do you think you could get something together along those sort of lines?"¹⁵

Aside from his academic predicament, Dixon is suffering a more serious predicament--a romantic entanglement with Margaret, a female lecturer at the university. The anti-hero is notoriously inept in his dealings with women, as this involvement illustrates. Amis aptly defines Jim's vulnerability: "He'd been drawn into the Margaret business by a combination of virtues he hadn't known he possessed: politeness, friendly interest, ordinary concern, a good-natured willingness to be imposed upon, a desire for unequivocal friendship."¹⁶ He has accepted Margaret's invitation for coffee at her flat, and now he is thought of as the man who is "going around" with her. But Margaret's more

¹³Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁶Hurrell, p. 47.

serious involvement with a character named Catchpole ended when he "had thrown her over, right over on to [Jim's] lap."¹⁷ Since this jilting led to Margaret's attempt at suicide, Jim is now afraid that she will make another attempt if he breaks off their relationship. Now he is trapped into continuing a half-hearted pursuit of an unattractive, neurotic girl--a type Martin Green claims "we have all had to deal with though we scarcely realized it until he (Amis) described the problem to us."¹⁸

Because the Welches have taken Margaret into their home since her suicide attempt, Professor Welch keeps Jim committed to the unwanted involvement by making him feel a sense of responsibility. He feels it naturally, however, "and responsibility for other human beings--especially another lame duck like himself--is part of his code of conduct."¹⁹ Jim, then, is chained to this relationship until he later discovers that her suicide attempt was staged for dramatic effect.

Jim's initiation into society occurs at Professor Welch's "arty" week-end, an event which provides a broad satire on the academic world. Margaret tells Jim what is

¹⁷Amis, p. 13.

¹⁸Martin Green, A Mirror for Anglo-Saxons (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), p. 122.

¹⁹Hurrell, p. 47.

in store: "Part-songs. A play-reading. Demonstration of some sword-dance steps. Recitations. A chamber concert."²⁰

Jim recognizes his upcoming initiation for what it really is:

Look, Margaret, you know as well as I do that I can't sing, I can't act, I can hardly read, and thank God I can't read music. No, I know what it is. Good sign in a way. He wants to test my reaction to culture, see whether I'm a fit person to teach in a university, see? Nobody who can't tell a flute from a recorder can be worth hearing on the price of bloody cows under Edward the Third.²¹

Jim's initiation into the cultural atmosphere of the academic world begins with the singing of madrigals. Welch explains that the music is not intended for an audience; each person has his own tune to sing. Dixon quickly runs his eye along the line of "black dots" and assures himself that everyone is singing simultaneously. He has been caught off-guard twenty minutes earlier in a Brahms piece "which began with some ten seconds of unsupported tenor--more accurately of unsupported Goldsmith, who'd twice dried up in face of a tricky interval and left Jim opening and shutting his mouth in silence."²² Jim silently wonders why Welch had not "had the decency to ask him if he'd like to join in, instead of driving him up on this platform arrangement and forcing sheets of paper into his hand."²³

²⁰Amis, p. 25.

²¹Ibid., p. 26.

²²Ibid., p. 39.

²³Ibid.

A second madrigal has five parts instead of the customary four. Jim notes that the third and fourth lines of music from the top have "Tenor I" and "Tenor II." Goldsmith suggests: "You'd better take first tenor, Jim, . . . the second's a bit tricky."²⁴ The madrigal begins, and Jim, of course, fails to sing the proper tenor part. Welch stops directing with the admonition: "Oh, tenors . . . I didn't seem to hear" ²⁵ A knock at the door stops the disastrous madrigals.

A complicating factor--in the form of a beautiful girl--now enters the picture. Welch's pacifist artist son Bertrand arrives for the weekend with his pretty and uncomplicated girl friend Christine. Within a few seconds Jim has assessed her charms: "the combination of fair hair, straight and cut short, with brown eyes and no lipstick, the strict set of the mouth and the square shoulders, the large breasts and the narrow waist, the premeditated simplicity of the wine-coloured corduroy skirt and the unornamented white linen blouse."²⁶ Christine seems to be out of Jim's class--unattainable:

The notion that women like this were never on view except as the property of men like Bertrand was so familiar to him that it had long ceased to appear an injustice. The

²⁴Ibid., p. 40.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

huge class that contained Margaret was destined to provide his own womenfolk.²⁷

Dixon soon becomes involved in a confrontation with Welch's son Bertrand. The conversation turns to the subject of Britain's present policy of "soaking the rich." Jim ignores a warning frown from Margaret as he reasons: "If one man's got ten buns and another's got two, and a bun has got to be given up by one of them, then surely you take it from the man with ten buns."²⁸ Bertrand, however, wins the battle of wits: "The point is that the rich play an essential role in modern society. . . . I'm not going to bore you with the stock platitudes about their having kept the arts going. . . . And why do I like them? Because they're charming, . . . because they've learnt to appreciate the things I like myself, because their houses are full of beautiful things. That's why I like them and that's why I don't want them soaked."²⁹ Dixon and Bertrand now exchange unpleasantries until they are almost ready to exchange fisticuffs.

Jim's attempt at accommodation to Welch's enforced culture finally erupts. Although he has been able to control the tension caused by his continual compromise, he finds an outlet by deserting the musical week end to spend the evening drinking at a pub. Upon returning to the Welch's, he falls

²⁷Hurrell, p. 47

²⁸Ibid., p. 52.

²⁹Ibid., p. 53.

asleep in a guest room. With a lighted cigarette he burns gaping holes in the sheets and blankets. Discovering the charred bedclothes upon waking, he frantically seizes a razor blade from the bathroom and tediously cuts away the burned edges of the holes. Why he does this he cannot explain except that the operation destroys evidence of the cigarette burns.

While deciding what to do about the bedclothes and charred bedside table, Dixon goes downstairs for breakfast where Bertrand's girlfriend Christine is the only guest filling her plate from the chafing dishes on the sideboard. Jim is amazed at Christine's heaped plate of fried eggs, bacon, and tomatoes. Over this mound she pours ketchup. Suddenly he is relating to her the incident of the burned bedclothes, and she agrees to help him hide the evidence. As a defense against Christine's charm, Jim now starts inventing reasons to dislike her: "she seems arrogant and she moves awkwardly."³⁰ According to Hurrell, the breakfast scene is structured by Amis to contrast the differences between Margaret and Christine:

Jim deliberately intensifies his northern accent; he picks up a fried egg in his fingers; he tells Christine about his drunken mishap. But she refuses to be either shocked or impressed. She continues eating a large, ungenteel breakfast, covering her bacon and eggs with ketchup. Jim notices that her

³⁰Ibid.

fingers are 'square-tipped, with the nails cut quite close,' and that her front teeth are slightly irregular. She is clearly neither unattainable nor pretentious.³¹

In contrast to Margaret's pretenses, Christine is candid. She behaves in a most un-middle class manner: stubbing out her cigarettes in a saucer and speaking with a faint cockney intonation. In Jim's estimation, modest social origins are allied with moral integrity, and it is not until he can place Christine in a class background that he can decide whether to love her or to despise her. He is finally convinced that she is really quite unsophisticated by her admission: "I look as if I know all about how to behave, and all that. . . . But it's only the way I look."³²

After breakfast, Jim and Christine sneak upstairs to assess the damage and to decide how to minimize the consequences. Christine offers a solution: "I think the best thing would be to remake the bed with all this mess at the bottom, out of sight."³³ With that task accomplished, the charred table is now the only evidence of Jim's mishap. Jim has discovered a junk room at the end of the hall full of broken furniture and rotting books. They decide to stash the table behind an old screen with scenes of floppy hats and banjos. Christine comments: "I must say that's an

³¹Ibid., pp. 47-48.

³²Ibid., p. 48.

³³Amis, p. 74.

inspiration. With the table out of the way nobody'll connect the sheets with smoking. They'll think you tore them with your feet, in a nightmare or something."³⁴ With Jim's reply, "Some nightmare, to get through two blankets as well,"³⁵ they are convulsed with laughter. When Christine beckons to him outside the bathroom door that the coast is clear, Margaret spies them as she opens her bedroom door. Her voice rings out accusingly, "What do you imagine you're up to, James."³⁶

The incident of the burned bedclothes forces Jim to cater to the Welches through later events of the novel. He attempts to avoid the consequences of his actions even though unconvinced that he has been morally wrong. Although the incident seems to be merely a bit of farce, "it is Jim's natural, though involuntary reaction to a situation in which he is forced to participate for economic reasons in a social event he despises and where he cannot speak his mind openly."³⁷ Hurrell maintains that the reason Jim is involved in so many clashes with the Welch family is that he is actually trying to be dismissed from his position, since dismissal will give him "freedom from compromise."³⁸

³⁴Ibid., p. 75.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Hurrell, p. 45.

³⁸Ibid.

Providing relief from his constant harassment, a promising situation from Jim's viewpoint has been developing. During the "arty" week end Jim had spotted Bertrand in an embrace with Carol Goldsmith, the wife of a colleague. What bearing this entanglement might have on Bertrand's future relationship with Christine is paramount in Jim's mind. At the summer dance, Carol enlightens Jim on the situation. Her object, of course, is to get Jim involved with Christine so that Bertrand will be unencumbered. Her initial revelation frightens Jim: "I suppose you've guessed I've been sleeping with our friend the painter [Bertrand], haven't you?"³⁹ She continues her informative chat: "The only thing to settle now is what you're going to do about Christine, Jim."⁴⁰ Jim counters with the remark, "She's a bit out of my class, don't you think?"⁴¹ Carol continues her barrage with her formula for love:

You sound as if you're in love with her. . . . Your attitude measures up to the two requirements for love. You want to go to bed with her and can't, and you don't know her very well. Ignorance of the other person topped with deprivation, Jim. You fit the formula all right, and what's more you want to go on fitting it. The old hopeless passion, isn't it?⁴²

With this parting shot, Carol leaves: " . . . you've got a moral duty to perform. Get that girl away from Bertrand; she wouldn't enjoy an affair with him."⁴³

³⁹Amis, p. 126.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 127.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 128.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 129.

Carol's revelation concerning herself and Bertrand emboldens Jim, however, and he now begins to unshackle himself from circumstances imposed by other people. The "affair" with Margaret must be terminated: "he remembered Carol's phrase about not throwing Margaret any life belts. Well, he'd thrown the last one."⁴⁴ Consequently, he confronts Margaret with the truth:

. . . I've had enough of being forced into a false position. Get it into your head that I've quite lost whatever interest I may have had in you as a woman, as someone to make love to or go to bed with. . . . As I said, the sex business is all finished, if it ever got started. . . . And I can't say I'm sorry because you can't say you're sorry for what you can't do anything about, and I can't do anything about this and neither can you.⁴⁵

Margaret's counter-attack strikes at his most vulnerable spot: "You don't think she'd have you, do you? A shabby little provincial bore like you."⁴⁶ She now becomes hysterical and requires several slaps on the face to be revived. Jim has at last asserted himself by rejecting the main offending entanglement in his life that needed to be eliminated.

Meanwhile, Jim has managed to maneuver himself into escorting Christine home by taxi. She falls asleep on his shoulder, but he believes it is merely a strategy to arouse his desire with no purpose but to feed her vanity. When

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 163.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

they arrive at the Welches' house where Christine is staying, they must sneak in by the French window since the door is locked. Here he presses his advantage: "he had no charts for these waters, but experience proved that it was often those without charts who got the furthest."⁴⁷ He makes a date to take her to tea at a hotel restaurant just as the Welch's car arrives home. After a fervent good-night kiss, he escapes through the French window at the same moment the Welches open the front door.

Jim's tension provoked by continual compromise increases as the novel progresses. Jim now faces his final crisis--his public lecture on Merrie England. He settles down to working his notes into a speech. From one page of notes he has only one page and three lines of script. The total time of his lecture so far is eleven and a half minutes. He must somehow produce forty-eight and a half minutes of "some sort of pabulum"⁴⁸ to speak for his required sixty minutes. A minute would be required for his introduction; another minute could be consumed for "water-drinking, coughing, and page-turning, and nothing for applause or curtain calls."⁴⁹ With what could he fill the remaining time? Ah, yes . . . he could have Barclay supply him with

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 154.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 170.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 171.

a book on medieval music. He could spend at least twenty minutes on that, with an apology for "having let my interest run away with me."⁵⁰ He knows that Welch will be impressed by his enthusiasm for medieval music. A friend, Alfred Johns, promises him some notes on Chaucer. This promise of assistance brightens Jim's outlook; if he waits long enough he may be able to fabricate a lecture entirely from other people's efforts.

Having obtained the book on medieval music from Barclay, Dixon bolsters his prospects with a book from the library on medieval costume and furniture. As he is leaving the library through the revolving door, he confronts Professor Welch, who asks if he has completed preparations for the lecture. Dixon hides the books which he has just checked out for his lecture notes, and suddenly he is overcome with an urge to "bundle Welch into the revolving door and whirl him round in it till lunchtime."⁵¹

Nearing the end of his probationary period, Jim is facing a moral crisis. The conflict which he faces is whether to continue making compromises in a job he detests or to extricate himself. Throughout the year, Jim has been forced into a false position: "he must pretend to expert knowledge that he hardly possesses, in a subject whose importance he questions, and at the same time he must toady to

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 177.

a man for whom he has no respect."⁵² Consequently, he is in a constant moral crisis because he needs the job for economic reasons, but since he is not a hypocrite he has a sense of guilt for clinging to a position requiring "so much deceit for so little purpose."⁵³

A resolution to Dixon's conflict of principle and self-interest comes swiftly at the public lecture as Jim finally ceases his accommodation and almost consciously causes his own dismissal. Hurrell maintains: "Lucky Jim is not a novel about a young man whose attempts to succeed in his profession meet with constant frustration. It is about a young man who instinctively tries very hard, and not always sub-consciously, to be dismissed, since dismissal gives him freedom from compromise."⁵⁴ The evening lecture will provide Jim with the opportunity to make his exit from the academic world in which he is a misfit.

Prior to the evening lecture, the principal gives a sherry party to which Christine and her uncle, Mr. Gore-Urquhart, among others, are invited. Jim, now on his fourth glass of sherry in addition to a half-dozen measures of his colleague Bill Atkinson's whisky, no longer worries about the lecture, which is scheduled to start in twenty minutes. Gore-Urquhart, a successful businessman, engages Jim in

⁵²Hurrell, p. 44.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 45.

conversation. He is the only person, besides Christine, with whom Jim can speak honestly. Urquhart snatches two more glasses of sherry from a tray as he quizzes Jim on the merits of teaching history. Jim confesses that bad teaching is mainly at fault--not bad students. The topic of their conversation turns to the issue of boredom, and Jim launches a truth concerning himself which sets him up later for a job as Urquhart's private secretary:

I'm the boredom detector. I'm a finely tuned instrument. If only I could get hold of a millionaire I'd be worth a bag of money to him. He could send me ahead into dinners and cocktail parties and night clubs, just for five minutes, and then by looking at me he'd be able to read off the boredom coefficient of any gathering. . . . Then he'd know whether it was worth going in himself or not. He could send me in among the Rotarians and the stage crowd and the golfer and arty types talking about statements of profiles rather than volumes and the musical. . . ."55

From this revealing self-divulgence, Gore-Urquhart notes that he recognizes a fellow-sufferer.

Glancing around the room, Jim notices Barclay, the music professor, who is undoubtedly urging on the professor of English the "necessity of voting for Dixon's removal when the college council met at the end of the following week."⁵⁶ The sherry party is attended by "economists, medicals, geographers, readers in Germanic and comparative philology, lektors, lecteurs, lectrices. He felt like going round and notifying each person individually of his preference that

⁵⁵Amis, p. 220.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 218.

they should leave."⁵⁷ Shortly before the group adjourns for the lecture hall, Gore-Urquhart produces a flask of whisky from beneath his clothes with the admonition: "Have a swig."⁵⁸ Then, in an undertone, Urquhart whispers, "No need to worry; to hell with all this."⁵⁹

Later, at the lectern, Professor Welch with his "preludial blaring sound,"⁶⁰ introduces Dixon. Unaware of how he manages to do it, Jim suddenly produces a perfect imitation of Welch's sound. After several sentences, Jim realizes that in an attempt to make the material acceptable to Welch, he has adopted favorite Welch tags: "integration of the social consciousness," "identification of work with craft."⁶¹ Rising noises from the gallery assure him that these strange Welch affectations are being appreciated. He can hear Welch's "characteristic intonation clinging tightly round his voice."⁶² To his chagrin, he notices that Carol Goldsmith and Christine are leaving the hall. Feeling himself almost possessed, he realizes he is now impersonating the principal. Aware that he must stop these imitations, Dixon now regresses into his exaggerated northern accent which will at least be unlike an impersonation. Now halfway through his speech, Dixon resolves to salvage something from

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 227.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 225.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 226.

⁶²Ibid.

this fiasco. He will at least let those persons present know his true feelings toward his topic. Earlier in the novel, Amis has revealed Jim's feelings concerning the cultural importance of the middle ages:

Those who professed themselves unable to believe in the reality of human progress ought to cheer themselves up, as the students under examination had conceivably been cheered up, by a short study of the Middle Ages. The hydrogen bomb, the South African Government, Chiang Kai-shek, Senator McCarthy himself, would then seem a light price to pay for no longer being in the Middle Ages. Had people ever been as nasty, as self-indulgent, as dull, as miserable, as cocksure, as bad at art, as dismally ludicrous or wrong as they'd been [then]?⁶³

In order to retain his job, Jim obviously must state opposing opinions now. No longer accommodating, however, he suddenly negates the meaning of his words by his style of delivery: "He began to infuse his tones with a sarcastic, wounding bitterness. Nobody outside a madhouse, he tried to imply, could take seriously a single phrase of this conjectural, nugatory, deluded, tedious rubbish."⁶⁴

Having arranged beforehand that a colleague, Bill Atkinson, will stage a fainting scene if Jim pulls his ears with both hands, Jim now unthinkingly places both hands over his ears to drown out the noise from the gallery. Interpreting this gesture as his signal, Atkinson collapses into the aisle. Consequently, twenty or thirty students bear Atkinson out of the lecture hall. Dixon, in his natural

⁶³Hurrell, p. 45.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 46.

voice, hears himself conclude: "What, finally, is the practical application of all this? Listen and I'll tell you. The point about Merrie England is that it was about the most un-Merrie period in our history."⁶⁵ Feeling Welch's arm around his shoulders, Dixon knows that he has finally sealed his doom as he passes into a drunken oblivion.

The next morning a note from Welch is in his pigeon-hole informing Dixon that he will be unable to recommend retaining him on the staff. Advising Dixon to leave as soon as possible, he will provide recommendations for Dixon to secure a new job if it is outside the city. Jim, however, incredibly lucky, is immediately offered a job as a private secretary to Christine's uncle, Gore-Urquhart. The job is the one Urquhart had intended for Bertrand. As Urquhart explains: "It's not that you've got the qualifications, for this or any other work, but there are plenty who have. You haven't got the disqualifications, though, and that's much rarer."⁶⁶

Jim now has Bertrand's job; what he feels he does not possess is Bertrand's girl. But that complication is soon resolved. A meeting with Catchpole assures Jim that Margaret had staged a fake suicide just before they were both due to arrive. As Amis suggests, it has been luck

⁶⁵Amis, p. 231.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 238.

that "freed him from pity's adhesive plaster."⁶⁷ Now that the "Margaret business" is finished, luck engulfs him again in a visit from Christine. She tells him that the reason she and Carol Goldsmith left his lecture was that Carol told her of the affair with Bertrand. Now, however, Carol is involved with Gore-Urquhart. Christine reveals that she is finished with Bertrand. Suddenly Jim is sorry that his repertoire of faces expresses only rage or loathing. The only one which will fit the present circumstances is his Sex Life in Ancient Rome face. Having rejected what in his estimation is pretense and fraud, "lucky" Jim has now closed the gap between himself and society. Like Lumley in Hurry On Down, he has discovered the niche in life "for which he has the most talent, as a spotter of the phoney."⁶⁸

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 247.

⁶⁸O'Connor, p. 140.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

An underlying assumption of the thesis--that the anti-hero is an emerging archetype--is supported by critics in attesting to the "Lucky Jim type." Accounting for the interest in Lucky Jim, William Van O'Connor cites not only the superb characterization and clever dialogue but the fact that "he [Jim] is almost archetypal."¹ Is Jim Dixon, in fact, truly archetypal? First, the term "archetype" must be clarified. In one sense, "the term refers to the original model or pattern from which something develops."² In another sense, however, "the literary critic applies the term to . . . a character type that occurs frequently in literature, myth, religion, or folklore and is, therefore, believed to evoke profound emotions in the reader because it awakens a primordial image in his unconscious memory and thus calls into play illogical but strong responses."³

In the same manner in which a debater prepares an argument for both sides of a question, one might argue first that the "lucky Jim type" or the anti-hero is an original

¹O'Connor, p. 87.

²Holman, p. 41.

³Ibid., pp. 40-41.

model from which other protagonists have evolved. After all, he is constantly referred to as the "new" hero, and that phrase would imply his originality. The second sense of the word archetypal, however, might be more appropriate--that the character type has occurred often enough in literature to evoke at least a glimmer of recognition from the reader. To bolster this side of the argument, Frederick Karl cites what he calls "distant literary ancestors"⁴ of the type:

Their protagonists, [Amis and Wain's] along with Joe Lampton of Braine's Room at the Top, find their distant literary ancestors in Julien Sorel of Stendhal's The Red and the Black, Rastignac of Balzac's Pere Goriot, Frederic Moreau of Flaubert's A Sentimental Education, and are related to every British and American young man on the make or on the run from Butler's Ernest Pontifex to Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths and Saul Bellow's Augie March. In the immediate background are the disillusioned young men of Aldous Huxley, Waugh's Basil Seal, Anthony Powell's Nicholas Jenkins, and William Cooper's Joe Lunn.⁵

Certainly, this impressive assortment of literary relatives, in addition to the earlier picaresque ancestors, lends credence to the latter definition of archetypal--that our new hero is new only in the sense that he has acquired new characteristics. He is archetypal, then, not so much as a new model or pattern but as one who, through his various metamorphoses, has always been present in the collective unconscious of the human race.

⁴Karl, p. 228.

⁵Ibid.

What, then, are these newly acquired characteristics which give the "lucky Jim type" the impact that it has had on contemporary novels? Perhaps the most significant of the anti-hero's new characteristics is his acute self-awareness. Hynes depicts this quality of the anti-hero:

The Poor Sod is also, and this is perhaps most characteristic of him, intensely self-conscious. This is not, however, the solemn introspection of the earlier novels of sensibility, once described as the 'young-man-sick-in-basin school.' The fundamental difference is not that he is less introspective, but that the anti-hero's inward glance reveals a vacuum with perhaps a toad in it, and the Poor Sod himself shares with the reader sufficient detachment to see that introspection in such circumstances is in itself rather farcical.⁶

In addition to intense self-awareness, the anti-hero displays self-interest. V. S. Pritchett claims in an article significantly titled "These Writers Couldn't Care Less" that "Self, not society, marks the work of a new group of English novelists."⁷ Like the novelists themselves, the anti-heroes in their novels have ignored what their fathers fought for. Pritchett continues his explanation: "What has all this to do with the English novel? Simply that there has been a switch from 'idealism' to a doctrine of 'self-interest.'"⁸

⁶Hynes, p. 52.

⁷V. S. Pritchett, "These Writers Couldn't Care Less," New York Times Book Review, 28 April 1957, p. 38.

⁸Ibid.

The third newly-acquired characteristic of the anti-hero is his basic honesty. J. D. Scott upholds his character:

In Lucky Jim the hero is an honest man, and it is the villains who are using their culture to establish their superiority. Jim, of course, isn't a very heroic hero; if going along with the phonies will help him to keep his job, he'll go along. But since in his heart he repudiates their phoniness he isn't very good at it. The real Jim may not be anything very wonderful, but at least he is himself. . . .⁹

In a Time magazine review of the book the writer said, "They have a fierce as well as flabby honesty . . . it is the phony to which his nerve ends are tremblingly exposed, and at the least suspicion of the phony he goes tough."¹⁰

In fact, the acute sensitivity of the anti-hero to the excesses and pretenses of human affairs makes him an ideal agent to satirize society in the comic vein. Gindin stresses the importance of comedy as a satiric device:

Comedy is . . . an important element in the contemporary British novel. As an instrument, comedy can exaggerate the folly of pretense and demonstrate the shaky basis on which posture rests. Comedy serves as a reforming function, making the reader aware of the pretense of others and, perhaps, of similar pretense within himself. An apt means of social criticism, comedy is ultimately on the side of the reasonable and the balanced.¹¹

⁹J. D. Scott, "Britain's Angry Young Men," Saturday Review of Literature, July 20-27, 1952, p. 10.

¹⁰"Lucky Jim and His Pals," Time, May 27, 1957, p. 111.

¹¹Gindin, "The Reassertion of the Personal," p. 133.

Gindin further points out that while the pretenses could be attacked in a tragic vein, these writers wisely choose the comic mode because "comedy as the instrument of reason and balance, attacks a folly precisely to the extent that the folly deserves attack."¹² For example, Room at the Top, a novel by John Braine with a tragic anti-hero, does not convey its satiric message with as much force as do works of the comic writers. Joe Lampton, the young anti-hero, drowned in a mass of "cataloguish detail,"¹³ tries, by marrying the daughter of a manufacturer to "reach the top." Realizing that he has cast aside the ideals of his working-class parents, he alternately basks in his success and wallows in self-recrimination. He fails to resolve the conflict, and, consequently, he cannot cope with his success. Joe Lampton, while facing a crisis of conscience, has "succumbed to the lure of success, and his tragedy is that he has exchanged his humanity for a set of social symbols."¹⁴ In Lucky Jim Amis presents an anti-hero with a similar problem, except that he employs a satiric mode. In an article on satire which Amis wrote for the New York Times Book Review section (July 7, 1957), he depicts the background for his first three novels:

Post-war changes in Britain have been quick to reflect themselves in satire which next to caricature has always proved the most socially sensitive of the arts. The welfare democracy, with its internal shifts in the

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Hurrell, p. 42.

balance of power, is a satirical arena. . . . New kinds of privilege are in the ascendant, each battling for mastery; at this stage the vices and follies of the social climb and the economic rat-race offer themselves for deflation. Until the new society is simplified and stabilized, which may not be for decades, we are in for what I have called a golden age of satire.¹⁵

Lucky Jim is often termed a satire on provincial university life, and the anti-hero, himself, is viewed as a typical "scholarship boy" who cannot hope to succeed because he is in an alien world. Braine treats as tragedy, then, Joe Lampton's desire to be master of his own destiny, with his achievement costing him his integrity. On the other hand, Amis treats the same striving in Jim Dixon as comedy but allows his anti-hero to "achieve success without losing his sense of proportion."¹⁶

While Jim, with his lower middle-class background, "mocks the snobbery of his middle-class associates . . . the protagonist of Wain's novel Hurry on Down is less concerned with his class background than with the fact that his university education, designed to train middle-class gentlemen, has not really prepared him for the world he encounters when he leaves the university. In these novels, rather than being cowed by the social structure, the protagonists have enough self-confidence to satirize and criticize it."¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Rabinovitz, p. 23.

Amis, in Lucky Jim and Take A Girl Like You, is striving for a new mixture of farce and social comment. Although he maintains that the purpose of Lucky Jim is primarily to amuse, he is quoted as saying:

I think one of the important things we are approaching is real serio-comedy. We are getting to the point of mixing humour and seriousness much more thoroughly. . . . An attempt at a mixture of fantasy, clowning and social comment--that would be great.¹⁸

As further evidence of the attempts of these writers to approach social commentary, Gindin maintains that "the sensitive, aware, often silly, always self-conscious heroes of Amis and Wain . . . were not created to confess but to register what might have some limited value in a chaotic world."¹⁹ What, then, does the anti-hero register or reflect that has value? R. B. Parker believes that "to reflect certain social aspects is not really to comment on them."²⁰ He believes that the Amis characters are "not typical enough for real social comment."²¹ The Amis heroes belong to what he terms "quasi-intellectuals" (teachers, librarians, journalists) who, in his opinion, do not constitute a substantial or even influential social class. He maintains, further, that "the obvious arguments about education as a class solvent or the economic

¹⁸Parker, p. 28.

¹⁹Gindin, "The Reassertion of the Personal," p. 133.

²⁰Parker, p. 35.

²¹Ibid.

displacement in England after the war are deductions, read out of Amis rather than in him."²²

Although these novels of the anti-hero may not have a secure social context and therefore cannot be called true social commentary, their reflection of a changing society, however, is valuable. J. D. Scott summarizes this attitude:

. . . any change in the class structure of a country so class-conscious as England is bound to be painful to a lot of people. They and their fathers worked so hard to become gentlemen, and now here are a bunch of people who could become gentlemen and aren't even going to bother! This is the myth of the Lucky Jims and the angry young men. The noise we are hearing about them isn't based on any accurate understanding of books or plays; it is the screaming noise made by the stiff joints of England on taking another painful step toward social equality.²³

That this reflection of a changing society has value, then, gives the novels their validity as important social satire.

Whether or not the "lucky Jim type" is archetypal in every sense of the word, it is a fact that he has become a pattern or model for later anti-heroes. Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956) attracted even more attention to the type. He was followed by Braine's Joe Lampton in Room at the Top (1957). Amis added to his repertoire of anti-heroes with John Lewis in That Uncertain Feeling (1956) and Patrick Standish in Take A Girl Like You (1960).

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

America has created its own genre of anti-heroes. Saul Bellow created Augie March as a character in a short story in 1949 although The Adventures of Augie March was not published until 1953. J. D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield in Catcher in the Rye appeared in 1951. In America, however, the anti-hero has emerged chiefly as a rebel-victim rather than as merely an outsider. For example, Bernard Malamud's "Jewish victims are not simply realistic, they are naturalistic almost to the point of predetermined misery."²⁴ Frank Alpine in Malamud's The Assistant (1957) best illustrates the typical American anti-hero. Joseph Heller's Yossarian in Catch-22 (1961), however, is perhaps the most unheroic of all the American anti-heroes.

The character-type continues right up to the present. A frightening version of the anti-hero in The Word-Child appeared in 1976. Larry L. King and Larry McMurtry provide some delightful anti-heroes among a whole genre of Texas "schnooks." In fact, the anti-hero or lucky Jim type, which emerged in postwar Britain, has appeared with enough frequency and has generated sufficient interest to have earned a small niche in the history of English and American literature.

²⁴Friedman, p. 931.

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