

## Comic Vision and Comedic Devices in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*

Kingsley Amis'in *Lucky Jim* Romanında Mizah Anlayışı ve Komedi Unsurları

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the comic vision and comedic elements in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*. As a post-war realistic novel, *Lucky Jim* implements various techniques of comedy to ridicule and satirise personal and social flaws, focusing on the critique of the phoniness of the academic world. Amis employs parody, farce, irony and satire to deride affectation, rigidity and social flaws. The novel depicts the absurdity of the condition of the anti-hero in an alien society through the use of comedy, showing the incongruous coexistence of the serious and the comic, the lofty and the vulgar in a grotesque, carnivalesque manner. It can be argued that humour functions as a weapon to cope with antagonistic forces in post-war existence and helps the individual to overcome repressions and preserve self-respect in the face of a ridiculous and duplicitous reality. Laughter is remedial in the novel, which subverts the monolithic, and aims to satirise and correct social imperfections. This article will explore *Lucky Jim* by investigating and applying theories of comedy and humour, focusing mainly on the ideas of Bergson, Freud and Bakhtin.

**Keywords:** Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*, Comedy, Contemporary British fiction, Humour

### Öz

Bu makalenin amacı Kingsley Amis'in *Lucky Jim* adlı romanında mizah anlayışı ve komedi unsurlarını incelemektir. İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası romanı olarak *Lucky Jim*, bireysel ve toplumsal kusurları özellikle akademik dünyanın sahteliğinin eleştirisi odağında yermek ve alaya almak için birçok komedi tekniği kullanır. Amis, yapmacıklık, katılık ve toplumsal kusurları alaya almak için parodi, fars, ironi ve hicivden yararlanır. Roman anti-kahramanın yabancılaştığı toplumdaki absürd durumunu komedi aracılığıyla, ciddiyle komiğin, asil ile vasatın uyumsuz beraberliğini grotesk, karnavalsı bir biçimde göstererek ortaya koyar. Mizahın romanda, savaş sonrası varoluş içinde yer alan karşıt güçlerle başa çıkmak için kullanılan bir silah işlevi gördüğü ve bireyin baskıları ortadan kaldırmaya ve anlamsız ve aldatıcı gerçeklik karşısında kendine olan saygısını korumasına yardımcı olduğu düşüncesi ileri sürülebilir. "Gülmece" kavramı romanda, tekdüze olanı yıkması ve toplumsal sorunları yermesi ve düzeltmesi bakımından iyileştirici bir özelliğe sahiptir. Çalışma, *Lucky Jim* romanını komedi ve mizah teorilerini inceleyip uygulayarak ve özellikle Bergson, Freud ve Bakhtin gibi düşünürlerin görüşlerine odaklanarak irdedecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*, Komedi, Çağdaş Britanya Romanı, Mizah

## Introduction

*Lucky Jim* (1954) is a realistic post-war novel which reflects the absurd and fragile reality of humanity in the mirror of comedy. Kingsley Amis projects a faithful as well as a bitter image of society through his boisterously comical tone, his grotesque and carnivalesque humour. He derides both personal and social flaws by juxtaposing the dignified and the common, the serious and the comic, the official and the unofficial, the nice and the nasty and by turning hierarchies and conventions of truth inside out. Amis applies comedic devices such as parody, farce, juxtaposition, exaggeration, inversion, repetition, carnivalesque humour and satire to disclose as well as rectify the topsy-turvy reality of contemporary society. Amis ridicules and thereby satirizes the monolithic aspects of society through the parody of the phoney life of the academe. This article will investigate the comic vision and the comedic devices in *Lucky Jim* mainly through the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud concerning the comic. It will examine the ways in which comedy relates to such concepts as mechanism, inhibition, repression, and affectation.

Comedy is concerned with monoliths, rigidity, inhibition, deviation, incongruity and inelasticity, which has a social aspect. As Glen Cavaliero puts it, comedy aims to “disrupt” and thereby “correct” the monolith: “Comedy exposes the fallacy inherent in every monolithic interpretation of human experience; it refutes exclusiveness, points out inconsistencies, and harmonises them in a renewed pattern of relationships. It deconstructs the monolith in order to breathe life into it” (4).

In his essay *Laughter*, Bergson defines the comic as “that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life” (87). The laughable or “imperfection” can be both individual and social. Laughter, for Bergson, is derision of rigidity or mechanism: “something mechanical encrusted on the living” (37). As Bergson puts it, “Society will therefore be suspicious of all inelasticity of character, of mind and even of body” as it is a deviation from the common (19). Laughter thus has a “corrective” function in Bergson’s vision as he considers the comic as the corrective of “rigidity” (21).

In *The Labyrinth of the Comic*, Richard Keller Simon examines comedy and comic theory and argues, in a Bergsonian manner, that comic theory and literature have a “labyrinthine” aspect. In his vision, comedy is like a labyrinth in both its “complexity” or difficulty but also in its “order” and “control”: “a labyrinth is not only a tangle of contradictions and inversions, of paths that go nowhere and threads that disappear, but it is also an order” (8). Simon is particularly concerned with the “self-conscious” aspect of comic literature in that comic works are not only “comic” but they are also “about the comic,” demonstrating both the practice and the theory of comedy in a “reflexive” manner (3-4). Simon emphasises the “interdependence” of comic theory and comic literature: “Comic theory derives from comedy, makes its generalisations on the evidence supplied by comic drama and comic fiction, but comedy also derives from comic theory, builds its structures on the ideas supplied by comic criticism” (6).

An investigation of the comic vision and comedic devices in *Lucky Jim* involves not only individual vision and style of Amis but also the social/historical conception of comedy. Therefore, a brief introduction to the theories and practices of comic fiction in the twentieth century might throw a light on this study. Unlike the 18<sup>th</sup> century novels, most of which ridiculed individuals and characters rather than social issues, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century novels that mainly ridiculed institutions and social issues, the twentieth century saw a change in the perception of comedy and laughter due to radical changes taking place after the World Wars. In this period, the previous institutionalized elements in society lost their validity, as new norms were born. In parallel with this process, comic fiction lost its material when what was monolithic once was no longer valid (Cavaliero 15-20). Post-war comic fiction was marked by an “erosion of social absolutes” or “breaking of monoliths,” which demanded the “redefinition” of the comic (20). In comic fiction of the period immediately succeeding the Second World War, Cavaliero says, there was “a trend towards individual experience and a discarding of any socially prescriptive standard of moral measurement,” which resulted in the development of both “social and psychological consciousness” in the writers as well as the public (18-9). There was also a tendency towards reflexive aspects of comedy, the theoretical aspect of the comic as well as its practice, which was seen particularly in late twentieth century fiction (19). Cavaliero also comments on the comedic process of *Lucky Jim* and notes the farcical and parodic aspects of the work and its “mordant” ridicule. However, to Cavaliero, “the comedic work” in *Lucky Jim* “is obstructed by the absolute lack of generosity towards the people and the institutions anatomised, and by the absence of any underlying moral conviction beyond a seedy scorn,” although it is characterized by “a robust and unsparing comic process” (20).

As Richard Bradford puts it, “the post-war novelists were involved in a counter-revolution against both the modernists and the classic realists” (8). Bradford argues the post-war realistic novels were “unconventional” not in form but in “manner and outlook” (7). He further states that *Lucky Jim* is among the contemporary novels “embodying a new wave of post-war realism- intelligent, reflective of contemporary mores and habits, amoral and contemptuous of the class distinctions and ethical norms that the likes of Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell had carried forward from the nineteenth century” (8).

Bakhtin’s idea of “carnival” denotes an alternative and temporary life of folk culture “outside officialdom,” which differs from “the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials” and shared by all people (5-6). Carnival refers to the ridicule and the cessation of the status quo and of social barriers. As Bakhtin puts it, “carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (10). Laughter and festivity are intrinsic to carnival as “carnival is the people’s second life, organised on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life” (8). Bakhtin calls carnival “a parody of the extracarnival life, a ‘world inside out,’” that involves “numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings” (11). Bakhtin accentuates the positive aspect of the carnival, referring to its affirmative parody: “We must stress, however, that the carnival is

far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humour denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture.” Bakhtin also expresses the ambivalent aspect of the carnival which is simultaneously serious and gay, constructive and destructive: “[Carnival] laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives” (11-2). Distinguishing between carnival and official festivities, Bakhtin stresses the element of laughter which is peculiar to carnival and lacking in serious official ones (9). For Bakhtin, carnival festivities “were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” (9). Compared with official feasts, which sanctify the conventional, serious, permanent and the past, carnival champions the unconventional, unofficial, change, laughter and future. Bakhtin refers to the Saturnalias “as an escape from the usual official way of life” (8). He identifies three main forms of folk humour: (i) Ritual spectacles: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace; (ii) Comic verbal compositions: parodies both oral and written, in Latin and in the vernacular; (iii) Various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons (5).

Laughter, in its forms of grotesque realism such as parody, in Bakhtin’s vision involves derogation or lowering of the high and the lofty by stressing the elemental and physical aspects through grotesque realism: “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (19-20). The debasement of authority involves destruction and regeneration, death and rebirth. “Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect but also a regenerating one” (21). Bakhtin adds:

Not only parody in its narrow sense but all the other forms of grotesque realism degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh. [...] The people's laughter which characterized all the forms of grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked with the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes. (20)

At the heart of grotesque realism lies the binary opposites of imagery representing world views of the “the folk culture of humour” and “the bourgeois conception of the completed atomized being” and of “class society” (24). The grotesque body relies on unfinalizability and on the unity with the outer world through exceeding its boundaries “in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation” (26). Bakhtin also draws attention to the language of the grotesque, which is “abusive” (27). Masquerade, which is inherent in the grotesque, is among the basic tenets of Bakhtin’s idea of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin elaborates on his idea of the mask and masquerade by arguing that the mask is concerned with change, the ludic, nonconformity, non-closure, contingency and difference:

Even more important is the theme of the mask, the most complex theme of folk culture. The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries,

to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles. [...] Let us point out that such manifestations as parodies, caricatures, grimaces, eccentric postures, and comic gestures are per se derived from the mask. It reveals the essence of the grotesque. (39-40)

Regarding the use of the grotesque in modern literature, Bakhtin says, "A new and powerful revival of the grotesque took place in the twentieth century" (46). Bakhtin identifies two main forms such as "the modernist form," which is related to the Romantic and existentialist lines and "the realist grotesque," connected with realism, folk culture and carnival (46).

In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud elaborates on his idea of the comic. The comic is social in Freud's view: "The comic arises in the first instance as an unintended discovery derived from human social relations" (189). To Freud, the comic resides in the release of the repressed elements in the unconscious due to inhibition or social constraint: "In laughter, therefore, on our hypothesis, the conditions are present under which a sum of psychical energy which has hitherto been used for cathexis is allowed free discharge" (148). Comedy also arouses "the feeling of superiority" and "empathy" (196). Freud compares comedy to "childhood" and "infantile" in that laughter is the recovered naiveté of childhood (226).

Freud accounts for the part the comic plays in the relief of the inhibitions in the psyche as a return to the "preconscious" or infantile stage of childhood. He relates repression mainly to civilisation, which he considers culpable for inhibition of the previously acceptable and enjoyable:

It is our belief that civilization and higher education have a large influence in the development of repression, and we suppose that, under such conditions, the psychical organization undergoes an alteration (that can also emerge as an inherited disposition) as a result of which what was formerly felt as agreeable now seems unacceptable and is rejected with all possible psychical force. The repressive activity of civilization brings it about that primary possibilities of enjoyment, which have now, however, been repudiated by the censorship in us, are lost to us. But to the human psyche all renunciation is exceedingly difficult, and so we find that tendentious jokes provide a means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving what was lost. (101)

The comic, as Freud conceives of it, involves the "degradation" and defiance of authority or the lofty:

The joke then represents a rebellion against that authority, a liberation from its pressure. The charm of caricatures lies in this same factor: we laugh at them even if they are unsuccessful simply because we count rebellion against authority as a merit. If we bear in mind the fact that tendentious jokes are so highly suitable for attacks on the great, the dignified and the mighty. (105)

Freud mentions mimicry, caricature, parody, travesty and unmasking among the “sources of comic pleasure”. The mechanisms of parody, travesty, caricature and unmasking “bring about degradation” of the sublime: “Caricature, parody and travesty (as well as their practical counterpart, unmasking) are directed against people and objects which lay claim to authority and respect, which are in some sense ‘sublime’” (200).

### **Comic Vision and Comedic Elements in *Lucky Jim***

*Lucky Jim* implements various comedic devices to achieve its end, which is to instruct and entertain. The novel is primarily concerned with and satirizes monoliths or institutionalized values and behaviours. It attacks uniformity and certainties, and champions such concepts as spontaneity, sincerity, amiability, flexibility, playfulness and relativity. Thus, excessive and mechanical qualities are ridiculed in the novel. Pretentious and rigid aspects of life are criticised and derided through the use of comedic elements of farce, parody, irony, and grotesque and carnivalesque humour.

To David Lodge, *Lucky Jim* is “a classic comic novel”; however, he also notes it is not a continually comic novel (2). Lodge maintains that serious and comic tones coexist in the novel. Comedy, as Lodge puts it, mainly derives from “situation and style” in the novel, through the “violation of a polite code of manners” and “the element of farce”:

Comedy of situation is exemplified by such memorable scenes as Jim’s accident with the bed-clothing at the Welches’ and his efforts to conceal the damage, his attempt to deceive Mrs Welch and her son Bertrand on the telephone by disguising his voice, his hijacking of the Barclays’ taxi after the College Ball, and his drunken lecture on ‘Merrie-England’. (2)

The characters in the novel can be regarded as foils in terms of their morality. While Jim Dixon, his beloved Christine Callaghan, his friend Carol Goldsmith, Christine’s uncle Julius Gore-Urguhart, and Dixon’s friend Bill Atkinson are morally sanctioned characters, Ned Welch, his son Bertrand, his wife Celia, his spy Johns, and his colleague Margaret Peel represent the pretentiousness of society. To Dale Salwak, “Gore-Urguhart functions as a mediator between common sense (Jim) and excess (the Welches), providing the norm by which to judge other frequently unstable personalities” (64). Dixon’s innate goodness and sense of honour help him survive in a false society, thereby leading him to his final decision to leave the affected world of the Welches for genuine human relations with people like Christine and Gore-Urguhart. Dixon is lucky at the end due to Urguhart’s benevolence in offering him a job and getting the girl he loves.

Jim Dixon, the protagonist of the novel, is a junior lecturer of history, in his mid-20s, working at a provincial university. He is also known as a former R.A.F corporal in western Scotland. The reason for his choice of academic profession is a financial necessity. He gets his job through a degree in Medieval History. He admits being lazy and reading very little. Being a lower-middle class person, Dixon rises to the higher class of the academe and feels like an outsider as he realizes not only the affected manners of society but also of doing a job he does not like.

Although he considers his job and colleagues to be boring, he endures them through playful ways. He struggles in vain to fix his position in the department and continues enduring his professor to secure his job. To Don Nilsen, Jim Dixon “is a prototypical anti-hero,” who “represents the lower-middle class drive to become part of the higher-class social system, and the guilt and self-contempt that results from abandoning one’s own class” (346). Dixon represents the well-educated, provincial and underprivileged class in the Welfare State. Nilsen notes that the four elements of traditional comedy, including “the use of festivity, “the playful tone or mood” “the pervasive use of comic irony” and “the happy ending” can be found in *Lucky Jim* (347).

Dixon is a vulnerable angry man, which is typical of the post-war condition. His life is distinguished by uncertainty, dissatisfaction, anxiety, absurdity, discord and estrangement. He is anxious for financial, emotional and social reasons. His sense of insecurity partly results from his temporary position at the university. He is employed there for two years; however, he cannot be assured of his future, as he may be dismissed as well. For this reason, he tries to treat Welch nicely hoping that he might be of help in this matter, though he hates him and the phony institution he represents. The War is a major factor in the insecure position of not only Dixon but others as Welch says to him in Chapter 8: “Yes, I know a lot of young chaps, find some difficulty in settling down to their first job. It’s only to be expected, after a war, after all” (Amis 5).

Lodge maintains that although the Second World War, or “the People’s War,” the victory of the Labour Party in the General Election of 1945, and the founding of the Welfare State, and “free secondary and tertiary education” had truly “democratized British society” and “got rid of its class divisions and inequalities,” a majority of the young population growing up in the post-war period, despite the 1944 Education Act, still suffered from the inequalities between the privileged upper classes and the underprivileged (9). Lodge states that humanities graduates like Dixon, chose educational careers because “entry to the other liberal professions – administrative civil service, the foreign service, law, publishing, etc. was still controlled by the public-school-Oxbridge-old-boy network” (9-10).

Dixon’s discontent with his condition is manifest in his thoughts concerning his relationship with Welch. In Chapter 8, “He was tired of being blackmailed” (Amis 3). Dixon feels anger due to his social depravity, as he considers himself impoverished and unlucky in contrast to the wealthy and privileged such as the Welches. In Chapter 18, Dixon embodies “rage” at the opportunities conferred upon Michel, the Welches’ “effeminate writing” son living in London, which contrasts sharply with his own lack: “Why hadn’t he himself had parents whose money so far exceeded their sense as to install their son in London? The very thought of it was a torment. If he’d had that chance, things would be very different for him now” (5-6). The chapter also manifests a critique of the Welfare State by contrasting Welch’s British outlook with Mrs Welch’s Continental view in that Welch regards his view rather conservative or “backward-looking bias” in comparison to the more progressive outlook of his wife (3). Mrs Welch’s “attitude towards the Welfare State,” Welch says, is “a great advantage” as it enables them “to view that problem in what you might describe as a wider perspective.” In Chapter 19, following his meeting with Christine, Dixon meditates on the

importance of luck in an uncertain existence: "It was luck you needed all along; with just a little more luck he'd have been able to switch his life on to a momentarily adjoining track, a track destined to swing aside at one away from his own" (20).

The main monolith the novel criticises and ridicules is the phoniness of the academe. The pretentious arty-weekend meeting of the Welches illustrates this aspect. Amis employs parody, farce and satire to ridicule the phoniness of academic life. The affectation of the Welches is manifest, for instance, in their imitation of the French, as it is seen in Bertrand's name. In Chapter 8, Welch's imitation of the French is criticised by Dixon (8). Bertrand's use of language also displays affectation and pompousness as it is seen in Chapter 4 (7). In Chapter 4, Dixon's comment on the French play they perform at the arty-weekend party reveals Welches' affectation as he criticizes them for not choosing an English play (11).

Hypocrisy and vanity in the academic life are mainly demonstrated through Professor Welch and Editor Dr. Caton. Through Welch's inefficiency in his profession, Amis criticizes and ridicules the academe. In Chapter 1, Dixon's views concerning Welch shows not only his professional incompetence but also his dependence on him to guarantee his position at the university, which emphasizes Dixon's insecurity and Welch's abusive exercise of power. Dixon thinks to himself

How had he become Professor of History, even at a place like this? By published work? No. By extra good teaching? No in italics. Then how? As usual, Dixon shelved this question, telling himself that what mattered was that this man had a decisive power on his future. (3)

It is observed that Welch abuses his authority by letting his personal life and relations intrude into his professional decisions and relations. His decision about Dixon is affected by personal reasons, including Dixon's relations with his family. Dixon associates Caton with Welch as he considers both men phoney, rigid and mechanical and ridicules them. In Chapter 19, when Dixon calls Caton to assure that Caton will publish his article soon, he is disgusted with Caton's elusive answers and mocks his repetitive mechanical words such as "Things are very difficult" which have a comic effect. Dixon compares Caton's evasion to Welch's evasion: "A rival to Welch had appeared in the field of evasion technique, verbal division, and in the physical division of the same field this chap had Welch whacked at the start" (8). Repetition, parody, grotesque imagery, and farce produce the ludicrous in this scene. Dixon searches for ways to control his anger, being denied a satisfactory answer by Caton:

nothing answered him except the metallic tapping. [...] 'Things are very difficult, things are very difficult, things are very difficult', Dixon gabbled into the phone, then mentioned a few difficult things which occurred to him as suitable tasks for Dr. Caton to have a go at. Still devising variations of this theme, he went out muttering to himself, wagging his head and shoulders like a puppet. (7)

Dixon's critique of his own article demonstrates his dissatisfaction with his work and ridicules academic pretentiousness and fallacy. In Chapter 1, Dixon considers his unpublished article "niggling mindlessness," "yawn enforcing," "worse than

most[articles] in its air of being convinced of its own usefulness and significance” (11). He regards himself “more of a hypocrite and a fool” as he has not destroyed it” (11).

Laughter serves as a means of censuring inertia, uniformity and stagnation in the novel. The novel champions change and novelty as it ridicules rigidity and stasis. Characters who are inflexible and rigid are laughed at and criticised whereas those who are resilient and innovative are endorsed. In Chapter 13, Dixon examines his present condition and realises, with pleasure, that his life has changed for the better in contrast to the last eight months. Departing from the Summer Ball, he is confused and excited about the prospects of his life as he realises his love for Christine. The progress in his life is particularly due to his spontaneity or freedom from restraint in his thoughts, actions and expressions. The comic acceptance of the world in its absurdity and the value of adaptation to this world to survive are demonstrated through Dixon’s struggles in a sham world. His remark about his plight, having lived for eight months in an alien society, echoes Amis’s stress on the value of adaptation, although Dixon’s state shows the difficulty of adaptation as the ending justifies. Laughter functions as an antidote to an absurd existence as Dixon realises at some point in his struggle. In his search for contentment in a chaotic and absurd existence, Dixon, the anti-hero, like Prometheus, tries to adjust himself to new conditions by finding new ways of coping with them:

What was he doing here, after all? Where was it all going to lead? Whatever it was leading towards, it was certainly leading away from the course his life had been pursuing for the last eight months, and this thought justified his excitement and filled him with reassurance and hope. All positive change was good; standing still, growing to the spot was always bad. [...] The one indispensable answer to an environment bristling with people and things one thought were bad was to go on finding out new ways in which one could think they were bad. The reason why Prometheus couldn’t get away from his vulture was that he was keen on it, and not the other way round. (2)

Comedy functions as a means of emotional or psychological relief for the protagonist whose restrained and unexpressed thoughts and feelings find an outlet through his imaginary world, which is opposed to absurd and nasty reality. Dixon contemplates imaginary farcical scenes where he freely utters what he desires to the antagonistic forces in his existence. Dixon resorts to masquerade and farce to cope with his anger and to relieve his true views and feelings. In other words, comedy is the weapon for Dixon to fight with his opponents. It is a tool for him to defy the authority of Welch. In the Bakhtinian and Freudian sense, comedy aids the degradation of the authority as Dixon lowers Welch’s status through instruments of grotesque humour. He fancies, for instance, using “obscurity,” billingsgate, parody and grotesque imagery in a carnivalesque manner to fight not only with Welch but also with the society and reality represented by him, which he abhors (7-8). To illustrate, in Chapter 1, Dixon derides Welch’s vanity, by thinking “No other professor in Great Britain [...] set such store by being called professor” (2). In Chapter 8, in the conversation between Dixon and Welch, Dixon becomes frustrated by Welch, whom he considers indifferent, eccentric,

incompetent, absentminded, vain, boring and annoying. He envisions mimicry, making faces that express his true feelings concerning Welch at that moment. He even imagines beating Welch. He also criticizes his affectation of French and his management of the department through farce. Dixon thinks he “felt real, overmastering, orgiastic boredom, and its real companion, real hatred” (7). Degradation of the authority through mimicry contributes to comic effect in the scene where Dixon’s humming the Welch tune, through which he tries to relieve his fury against Welch secretly. He suits words to a piano rondo tune formerly played by Welch, which he names “the Welch tune” and sings it to himself in the Common Room: “ ‘You *ignorant* clod, you *stupid* old sod, you *havering* *slaver*ing get ...’ Here intervened a string of unmentionables, corresponding with an oom-pah sort of effect in the orchestra” (10).

The scene of Dixon’s dream vision partakes of both the carnivalesque aspects and the Freudian reaction to the repressed desires. On the one hand, the lavatory is a carnivalesque image which reveals the true self of Dixon, without his disguises. (11-2). It signifies the unofficial, light and liberating aspects of carnival. When faced with a situation or reality which he dislikes and wants to avoid, Dixon dreams of a fantasy world of escape. To illustrate, Dixon’s hate towards his job as well as his difficulty in warding off Margaret’s pressure on him causes Dixon to try to escape from reality through dreaming another space and an alternative reality. Dixon recurrently has the dream vision of being in London. In Dixon’s dissatisfaction with his life can be seen the magnitude of his repression of his true self as he has a pressing need to leave his present space and not return. However, he returns out of “economic necessity,” “call of pity” and “fear”: “More than ever it was the moment to dart into the street and fail to return” (12). On the other hand, Dixon’s vision may be considered a psychical mechanism that helps articulate his unconscious desires in a repressive society. The image gives expression to the innermost reality of his being that involves the kind of life he aspires to with the kind of girl he could love. It is observed that the dream vision, for Dixon, serves as a refuge from the world of the Welches and Margaret, or from a false society.

As he stood in the badly-lit Jakes, he was visited again, and unbearably, by the visual image that had haunted him ever since he took on this job. [...] The image was not purely visual, because he had a feeling that some soft unidentifiable noise was in his ears, and he felt with a dreamer’s baseless conviction that somebody was going to come into the room where he seemed to be, somebody he knew in the image but not in reality. He was certain it was an image of London, and as just certain that it wasn’t any part of London he’d ever visited. He hadn’t spent more than a dozen evenings there in his life. Then why, he pondered, was his ordinary desire to leave the provinces for London sharpened and particularized by this half-glimpsed scene? (12)

The festivities in the book such as the madrigal get-together at the Welches function as the opposite of the carnivalesque festivities. The kind of festivity represented by the Welches is the official, monolithic, hierarchical, repressive order, enforced by Welch, while festivities such as Dixon’s festive vision, are carnivalesque being unofficial, universal, derogatory, renovative, playful, flexible and emancipative. The drawing room of the Welches and the Common Room at

the university signify the claustrophobic, labyrinthine social system contrasting with the carnivalesque space.

Humour has a “therapeutic function” in Dixon’s case, as his “strong sense of humour,” as Salwak puts it, “enables him to make light of much of very real distress and disaster” in his picaresque journey (65). Salwak states that Dixon “resorts to a comic fantasy world in which he can express rage or loathing towards certain imbecilities of the social group the Welch set represents, “in order to maintain self-respect” (65). The tricks the anti-hero plays to cope with an alien and senseless world are justified and contribute to comedy. Dixon’s tricks such as the fire, the taxi, and the Evening Post business illustrate the ways to survive in such a world.

Dixon makes faces or mimics to deal with some sort of deviation or eccentricity. Both masquerade and mimicry, as tools for humour, afford an opportunity for a sense of superiority and victory over the antagonistic forces in the protagonist’s life. Such comic devices help him to maintain his self-confidence and self-esteem. Masquerade and mimicry yield an alternative to the dissonance and senselessness of reality. In Chapter 17, for instance, Welch’s idiosyncrasies or accidents as he first pushes the wrong door to leave the library and then hits his head on the panel, makes Jim Dixon make his monkey-face, looking at Welch by “allowing his mandrill face full play” (Amis 14). In other words, humour endows Dixon with the ability to survive in an incongruous existence. Dixon then mimics Welch, which he thinks, helps him to tolerate the nasty reality and people: “Dixon went away, beginning to whistle his Welch tune in a solemn, almost liturgical tempo. He felt that it was things like this that kept him going” (14).

Dixon’s ways to keep his sanity in an absurd existence represent the healing power of comedy in the twentieth century. While playing the role of an agreeable and obedient member of the staff, Dixon relieves his anger and boredom through the comic world of his imagination. The comic fantasy world Dixon dreams of is a temporary escape from the society in which he is an outsider and pretends to comply with it in order to survive. In other words, it is only when Dixon wears faces/masks that he returns to his true self. Confronted with continuous orders of his professor, he expresses his feelings of rage or boredom silently and privately. Considering Welch unfit for his profession and his personality dull, he imagines playful solutions to suppress his anger. To illustrate, in Chapter 1, when Welch evades his invitation of Dixon to his house by changing the topic of the conversation, Dixon gets very angry and fancies fitting Welch into a lavatory basin (5). In Chapter 8, for instance, being fed up with Welch’s evasion regarding the decision over his becoming a permanent staff, Dixon fancies he would ask Welch how an “old cockchafer” like him “can run a history department” (8), yet when their conversation ends, he thanks Welch sincerely out of obligation without manifesting his true feelings to him. After that, he goes to the Common Room and sings swear-words by imitating Welch’s intonation, under his breath.

Mimicry and masquerade perform the function of an outlet for Dixon to express his repressed desires, feelings and thoughts. He imitates a variety of faces. However, it is often when Dixon faces someone or something undesirable or nasty that he makes faces. For this reason, when he encounters someone or something really nice, he is at a loss to express his feelings. In the last chapter, Dixon is very

happy for he is offered a job in London and learns that Christine separated from Bertrand, which will enable him to attain what he desires: getting the job he desires and marrying the girl he loves; however, he does not know how to express his joy as the previous masks/faces articulated his dissatisfaction. Dixon's lack of faces to express his happiness also demonstrates that happiness is accidental or rare in contemporary existence. "He thought what a pity it was that all his faces were designed to express rage or loathing. Now that something had happened which really deserved a face, he'd none to celebrate it with. As a kind of token, he made his Sex Life in Ancient Roman face" (6).

Laughter has revolutionary, empowering and contemptuous aspects in Dixon's case. In Chapter 9, for instance, laughter is anarchic as Dixon, through masquerade, deludes and thereby triumphs over his opponents, including the Welches, Celia Welch and Bertrand Welch in particular, and regains his power and self-assurance through the laughter following his masquerade. Dixon deceives Bertrand being disguised as the *Evening Post* and manipulating and mocking his vanity and authority by feigning that the newspaper will publish an article on him. The object of laughter in this scene provides the agent, namely Dixon, with superiority: "Before making any move, however, he threw back his head and gave a long trombone-blast of anarchistic laughter. [...] The campaign against Bertrand he'd fantasized about at the Welches' had begun, and with a dazzling tactical success" (17).

It is "nasty" things and people which are the targets of criticism and ridicule in the novel. In Chapter 14, as Dixon answers Callaghan's question concerning the appropriateness of a possible marriage between Bertrand and her, the central motto is "nice things are nicer than nasty ones" (10), which he reiterates in the penultimate chapter, with the sudden twist of his fate and luck (11). Categorising people as nasty and nice, Dixon labels people like Bertrand and Welch as boring and nasty, which is seen in his words to Christine Callaghan: "It means each of you belong to the two great classes of mankind, people I like and people I don't. [...] Bertrand is a bore, he's like his dad, the only thing that interests him is him" (14).

Role-playing is a major mechanism in the novel, which serves different functions. For one thing, the characters have recourse to role-play to survive in a false, mechanical society. Dixon's epiphany after playing various roles in a corrupt society is his motto, which is truth to oneself as the proper role that the individual must play, as it is observed in Chapter 14. Sense of security amidst post-war discord is achieved through sincerity and doing what one wants to do. Mainly with Christine Callaghan's influence on him and his love for her, Dixon becomes aware of the absurdity of his existence, goes through a change and tries to resist his plight via sincerity and humour:

More than ever he felt secure: here he was, quite able to fulfil his role, and, as with other roles, the longer you played it the better chance you had of playing it again. Doing what you wanted to do was the only training, and the only preliminary, needed for doing more of what you wanted to do. (18-9)

Yet, although Dixon is hypocritical, the reader sympathises with him, as he is aware of his hypocrisy unlike the Welches. He replaces his pretentiousness with

self-respect when he is honest with himself, as he awakens to his true self, and leaves the job and space he dislikes and moves to London.

Another major comedic device in the novel is the disruption of the serious by the comic or incongruous. James Gindin relates this to Amis's acceptance of contemporary existence in its incongruity, namely, the disruption of the serious by the irrelevant or trivial from daily life. He also relates this use of the comic to the absence of moral instruction in Amis's novels. Gindin expresses this conception of the comic as follows: "The comic acceptance of the contemporary scene, along with the verbal texture of incongruous image and reference, provides whatever unity exists in Amis' fiction" (49). Considering the "social and political attitudes of Amis's characters" to be "essentially conservative," Gindin argues there is "a comic and tolerant acceptance of the power structure of the contemporary world" (49).

An instance of the interruption of the serious by the trivial is manifest in Dixon's tea-date with Christine Callaghan in Chapter 19. While talking about the future of their relationship, Dixon has a digressive moment and starts to think about the waiter. The comic quarrel between the waiter and Dixon over the tip, interrupting the latter's thoughts concerning his relationship with Christine after leaving her reinforces the comic effect by underlining the discordant nature of things as a source of the comic. The greengages and rhubarb comparison is another instance of the suspension of the serious through a comic image. In Chapter 14, in the scene where Callaghan tells Dixon about her difficulty in deciding whether she is in love with Bertrand or not, Dixon likens the act of decision of love to the deciding if you like greengages or rhubarb (Amis 15-6). The juxtaposition of the serious and the comic accentuates the discordance in contemporary existence.

Dixon's relationship with Margaret is another source of ridicule, as Margaret's hypocrisy, neurotic excess and pressure on Dixon arouse contempt and disgust in him. In Chapter 16, Dixon has an imaginary vision of "rush[ing] at her and tip[ping] her backwards in the chair, to make a deafening rude noise in her face, to push a bead up her nose" (5). Lodge contends that "Her [Margaret's] claims on Jim's emotional loyalty is analogous to the university's claim on his professional allegiance" (11).

The role of chance and the sense of contingency dominate the novel. The precariousness of existence in post-war society is depicted through the lens of comedy. Dixon's ludicrous experience and acceptance of life provide a notable example of post-war predicament. Dixon reflects on the power of chance in life, which is also justified through the happy ending. However, the ending is ironic, as it is through certain values and humane ways such as sincerity, honesty, and decency that Dixon attains happiness and success. Dixon defeats his antagonists and cures his sickness with his environment including the university, its members and the Welches in particular, through his satirical lecture, entitled "Merrie-England" in Chapter 22. Dixon feels sick, due to intoxication, nervousness and irritation. However, his vertigo feeling is emblematic of his nausea or disgust due to his meaningless existence as well. The language provides a comic effect in this scene. Although Dixon detests Medieval History and has difficulty in keeping up with the university life, being drunk, he turns his lecture into a parody of the language used by Welch and ends with a note on the failure of that period. Dixon lampoons institutional and social ills in his speech by changing his intonation,

estranging his accent and parodying through mimicry the speech of the persons of authority, such as the Principal and the Head of the department. His derisive speech aids him to demonstrate the bitter truth to the audience and serve to correct the wrongs in society. The lecture is a crisis point in Dixon's coming to self-awareness. The crowd's laughter makes him aware of the absurdity of his own plight and the futility of the idea of Merrie-England. Far from merriment, Dixon shows his audience, that the history of England ironically involves the opposite: "What finally, is the practical application of all this? [...] The point about Merrie-England is that it was about the most un-Merry period in our history" (Amis 8). Dixon's lecture epitomises the Bakhtinian carnivalesque which is derogative, denunciatory, affirmative and regenerative:

Gradually, but not as gradually as it seemed to some parts of his brain, 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. [...] Almost unconsciously he began to adopt an unnameable foreign accent and to read faster and faster, his head spinning. [...] He began punctuating his discourse with smothered snorts of derision. He read on, spitting out the syllables like curses, leaving mispronunciations uncorrected, turning over the pages of his script like a score-reader following a *presto* movement, raising his voice higher and higher. (6-7)

In Chapter 23, after the Merrie-England lecture, Dixon is dismissed from his position at the university, and decides to look for another job in another place. Moreover, as he learns that the article he submitted to a journal to enable him to secure his post as a permanent staff at the university has been plagiarised and published by another one, he resorts to shrill laughter to express the absurdity and painful reality of his condition rather than curse it: "At a loss for faces, he drew in his breath to swear, then cackled hysterically instead" (3). Dixon's anger yields to laughter in this scene, which accentuates the remedial function of humour. Through laughter, Dixon attacks the corrupt aspects of the academe such as the unethical conferment of academic positions: "So that was how people got chairs, was it? Chairs of that sort anyway" (3).

The ending of the novel underlines the value of honesty and the therapeutic function of comedy in postmodern life. Dixon eventually learns how to deal with a nasty world: by not taking nasty people and things seriously but by facing them and laughing at them. It is worth noting that it is humour which helps Callaghan and Dixon to cope with the antagonistic forces in their life, as they laugh together at them. In the last chapter, Dixon faces the Welches, and he does what he wants and derides them thereby triumphing over them. Amis mocks the inhumanity of the Welches through caricature. The exchange of the hats Welch and Bertrand wear strip their individuality, and they become interchangeable. Dixon squeezed Christine's arm encouragingly and walked up to them. "Excuse me," he said in a fruity comic-butler voice. [...] The incident was almost closed when he saw that not only were Welch and Bertrand both present, but Welch's fishing hat and Bertrand's beret were there too. The beret, however, was on Welch's head, the fishing-hat on Bertrand's. In these

guises and standing rigid with popping eyes, as both were, they had a look of being Gide and Lytton Strachey, represented in waxwork form by a prentice hand. Dixon drew in breath to denounce both, then blow it all out again in a howl of laughter. [...] With Christine tugging at his arm he halted in the middle of the group. [...] The Welches withdrew and began getting into their car. (7)

## Conclusion

Investigating the comedic aspects of *Lucky Jim*, it can be concluded that comedy serves as a carnivalesque critique and parody of the grotesque reality of the post-war society, attacking its monoliths, cults and inhibitions, thereby having a therapeutic and affirmative effect. Humour does not only save the hero and the heroine of the story, but it mainly has a cathartic impact on the reader, thereby effecting a relief in society and a Freudian outlet for the repressed desires and inhibitions. Comedy, as the novel evidences, has an ambivalent aspect, being both constructive and abusive, light and dark, playful and serious. As a satirical work, the novel ridicules the moral deficiencies, the grotesque inhumanity and hypocrisy of the bourgeois, while it aims to correct the shortcomings of society through the elastic order and vision of the carnivalesque humour of Amis. As Jim Dixon's example reveals, comedy serves as a powerful weapon to battle with and thereby reform and remedy society, its monolithic minds and institutions.

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