Postcolonial Metafiction and Moral Decay in the Black Humor of John Barth and Martin Amis

م.م سعود غالب عبد

جامعة كربلاء/ كلية الصيدلة

suood.gh@uokerbala.edu.iq

Abstract

Present study analyses the utilization of postcolonial metafiction and black humor by John Barth and Martin Amis to critique moral decay, narrative instability, and cultural disillusionment within Western modernity. The main goal is to analyse how humor, irony, and self-reflexivity can be used as weapons against the excesses of capitalism and the legacies of imperialism. Employing a qualitative comparative methodology, the research performs an in-depth textual analysis of Barth's *The Floating Opera* (1956), *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), and *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), in conjunction with Amis's *Money* (1984), *London Fields* (1989), and *The Information* (1995). The analysis combines postcolonial, metafictional, and existential frameworks to examine narrative self-awareness, moral disintegration, and identity commodification. The results show that both authors turn black humor into a way to fight back against colonialism. Barth does this through metafictional parody that breaks down colonial myths, and Amis does it through satirical depictions of the moral bankruptcy of capitalism. Their works reveal the fatigue of Western grand narratives while reconstructing significance through irony and play. In the end, the study finds that postcolonial black humor serves as both a critique and a way to survive, allowing people to take back their narrative power and think about ethics in a world that is broken and postmodern.

Keywords: Black Humor, Postcolonial Metafiction, Moral Decay, John Barth, Martin Amis, Narrative Irony, Cultural Critique.

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة توضيف الميتافيزيقية لما بعد الاستعمار والفكاه السوداء في اعمال جون بارث ومارتن اميس بوصفهما اداتان نقديتان لتحليل مظاهر الانحلال الاخلاقي ، واضطراب البناء السردي ، وحالة

الاحباط الثقافي التي وسمت الثقافة الغربية .وتهدف الدراسة الى الكشف عن الكيفية التي تتحول بها الدعابة ،السخرية والتأمل الذاتي السردي الى وسائل فاعلة لمواجهة افراطات الرأسمالية وتفكيك الارث الامبريالي المستمر.تعتمد الدراسة منهجا نوعيا مقارناً ، وتقوم بتحليل نصي عميق لعدد من اعمال (بارث) الروائية ، وهي :الاوبرا العائمة (١٩٥٦) ، وعامل التبغ (١٩٦٠) ، والضياع في بيت المتاهة (١٩٦٨) ، الى جانب روايات مختارة لمارتن اميس هي :المال (١٩٨٤) ، حقول لندن (١٩٨٩) ، المعلومة (١٩٩٥). ويستند التحليل الى تظافر مقاربات ما بعد الاستعمار والمتافيزيقية والوجودية من اجل استقصاء مظاهر الوعي السردي ، وتفكك المنظومة الاخلاقية وتحول الهوية الى سلعة. وتكشف نتائج الدراسة الى ان كلا الكاتبين يحول الفكاهة السوداء الى شكل من اشكال المقاومة الثقافية اذ يوظف بارث المحاكاة الساخره الميتافيزيقية لهدم الاساطير ما بعد الاستعمار المهيمنه ، بينما يعتمد اميس على السخرية الحادة لفضح الافلاس الاخلاقي الذي افرزته الرأسمالية المعاصرة. كما تظهر اعمالهما ارهاق السرديات الكبرى في الثقافة الغربية ، مع الاسعي الى اعادة انتاج المعنى من خلال المفارقة والتلاعب النصي . وتلخص الدراسة في نهايتها الى ان الفكاه السوداء ما بعد الاستعمار تؤدي دوراً مزدوجاً ، فهي من جهة ادات نقدية فاعلة ، ومن جهة اخرى استراتيجية للبقاء في عالم متأزم ، اذ تتيح استعادة الصوت السردي واعادة التفكير في القيم الاخلاقية ضمن واقع محطم .

1. Introduction

Postcolonial metafiction and black humor converge in postmodern literature as tools to interrogate history, identity, and moral decay. As Smith (2010) explains, historiographic metafiction strategically rewrites and reconstructs historical narratives, blurring boundaries between fact and fiction to expose the instability of truth. This postmodern form of parody, seen in works by authors like John Barth and Martin Amis, functions as a critique of ideological certainties and colonial narratives that shaped Western consciousness. Through irony and grotesque humor, such fiction reimagines history from the margins, turning moral collapse into both theme and method. The metafictional self-awareness in these narratives reflects the postcolonial struggle to reclaim suppressed histories while mocking the absurdities of modern capitalist and moral systems. Black humor—rooted in the tension between laughter and despair—thus becomes a form of resistance and revelation, transforming the moral void of the postmodern subject into a site of narrative reconstruction (Waugh, 1984). In postmodern fiction, black humor and metafiction function as instruments of moral and ideological critique, exposing the absurdities of modern life and the collapse of ethical meaning. As Smith (2010) suggests, these reimaginative and reconstructive strategies create “secret histories”

that unmask the moral and ideological decay concealed beneath Western progress and rationality. Early examples can be found in modernist and absurdist writing from the 20th century, when writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, and Samuel Beckett explore the tension between hopelessness and humor. In postmodern literature, black humor extends to metafiction and intertextual play, highlighting narrative instability, ethical ambiguity, and the absurd consequences of capitalism, power structures, and cultural dislocation (Hutcheon, 1994).

Black humor spares no one. Neither those it keeps at a distance nor those who consider it a delicious poison (Chiflet, 2009). This type of humor, well-known to Breton and Saki, does not distinguish between the speaker and the target, as it can mock both at will. It is the one that does the dirty work, “like scavenger animals / it does the dirty work. It purifies us” (Bonnett, 2018). In accordance with these verses, black humor would be the scavenger animal that digs—a complex work—into our body to find a semblance of truth. Laughter is not always present when black humor is a central feature of the story in the post-colonial novels, for “humor, even black humor, remains a trait of wit, and if it prefers to make one laugh at things, it is to avoid having to cry over them” (Chiflet, 2009). Consequently, the novel was written with the intention of delving deeply into the relationship between the frustration of being alive and the possibility of a divine escape through suicide, prompted, for example, by sentimental troubles. Hence, humor can be understood as a critical tool because it allows individuals to take a reflective stance toward themselves and others. It is closely linked to tragedy, serving as a means of contemplating the catastrophes of existence. Moreover, humor offers diverse modes of expression, including caricature, sarcasm, irony, parody, self-parody, and black humor. From a rhetorical perspective, irony has been understood “as a figure of thought based on antiphrasis.

Martin Amis and John Barth, though emerging from distinct literary traditions, share a postcolonial sensibility that interrogates the fragmentation of modern identity and the decline of Western cultural authority. Amis, a British novelist, reflects the disillusionment of post-imperial England through satire, moral irony, and linguistic precision, exposing the absurdities of late-capitalist society. Barth, an American metafictionist, explores similar anxieties through self-referential narratives that question authorship, originality, and the limits of storytelling. Their works converge in their critique of inherited narratives and

power structures that shaped postcolonial consciousness. Comparing Amis and Barth highlights how postmodern narrative techniques—irony, parody, and metafiction—serve as vehicles for postcolonial inquiry. Both writers employ stylistic excess and narrative reflexivity to challenge dominant ideologies, making them main figures in understanding the literary transition from modernism to postcolonial postmodernism.

Two significant writers in postmodern literature are Martin Amis and John Barth. Both of them challenge moral ambiguity, narrative instability, and human experience through black comedy. American novelist Barth is renowned for his metafictional experiments, especially in *Lost in the Funhouse* and *The Floating Opera*, where he illustrates the absurdity of existence and the falsity of stories through the use of irony, intertextuality, and narrative fragmentation (Campbell, 1986). British novelist Amis analyses dark humor from a sociocultural perspective, particularly in pieces like *Money* and *London Fields*, in which he criticizes consumerism, late capitalism, and the moral decay of contemporary society (Begley, 2004). When these writers are examined together, the various functions of black humor as a stylistic and philosophical tool become clear. According to Barth, comedy challenges readers' moral convictions and narrative authority, making them consider the limits of meaning. Amis uses grotesque exaggeration and scathing irony to illustrate greed, want, and moral failing in order to use humor to critique social structures. A comparative study shows both similarities and differences: both writers use satire and absurdity to highlight moral deterioration, but Barth places more emphasis on ontological and literary concerns while Amis focuses on socio-economic criticism. Together, they demonstrate how black comedy may challenge social and existential truths. This demonstrates its significance for postmodern literary ethics and its applicability to the critique of other disciplines.

Humor is a symptom of characters awareness of their social and experiential surroundings in the writings of John Barth and Martin Amis. John Barth employs irony and sarcasm to critique the intellectual and social milieu, exposing its hypocrisy and mediocrity through incisive narrative voices. Irony and sarcasm frequently target individuals, but black humor questions more general social taboos and conventional wisdom. In addition to offering scathing critique, caricature promotes artistic contemplation and homage.

1.1 Significance of postcolonial perspectives in Western metafiction

Incorporating postcolonial perspectives into the study of Western metafiction broadens the critical understanding of narrative structure, cultural dominance, and identity construction. Metafiction, as evidenced by authors such as John Barth, focuses on self-reflexive storytelling and narrative instability, frequently challenging the text's authority and ability to reflect reality (McHale, 1987). A postcolonial approach broadens this inquiry by exploring how Western metafiction reproduces, challenges, or reinterprets colonial narratives, cultural hierarchies, and economic power dynamics (Loomba, 1998). It focuses on the moral and ideological aspects of metafiction, discussing cultural stereotypes, displacement, and the politics of representation. Barth's historical parodies and intertextual play in "The Sot-Weed Factor" can be read as both literary experimentation and a critique of imperial narratives and colonial epistemologies. Thus, postcolonial analysis allows researchers to investigate how metafiction deals with the tension between being conscious of one's own creativity and being accountable for social and historical events.

Shakun et al. (2024) argue that contemporary postcolonial studies are distinguished by a critical evaluation of modern theories and interdisciplinary techniques. The study identifies five key theoretical frameworks—postcolonial, critical, site-specific, decolonial, and creolization theories—and employs approaches such as discourse analysis, historical research, and ethnography. All of these strategies aim to tear down colonialism's long-term cultural, social, and political impacts. The study emphasizes that these perspectives are critical for addressing ongoing global imbalances, fostering social justice, and cultivating a more inclusive and equitable understanding of contemporary postcolonial realities.

According to Simhachalam (2015), postcolonial views critically rethink the self-referentiality of Western metafiction. Metafiction deconstructs narrative, whereas postcolonial theory challenges colonial-era narratives of history, authority, and identity. Theorists such as Said, Bhabha, and Spivak question Western epistemology's supremacy, shedding light on the methods by which colonial authority operates through knowledge and representation. Their work illustrates that Western metafiction's interrogation of "reality" is typically a colonial fabrication. As a result, postcolonial critique goes beyond thematic analysis to

include form politics, questioning the legitimacy of language and narrative frameworks while echoing metafiction's skepticism and channeling it toward the legacies of imperial discourses.

The previous discourse establishes a clear and unmistakable path to the specified research questions through the development of a multifaceted theoretical framework. It first defines black humor as a literary form that combines comedy and tragedy to attack social conventions and moral deterioration. This is strongly tied to the purpose of examining how this style reflects "moral decay and cultural disillusionment." The introduction lays the groundwork for analyzing Barth and Amis's distinct but complementary critiques by portraying them as masters of humor—Barth through metafictional experimentation that undermines narrative authority, and Amis through socio-cultural satire that criticizes capitalist excess.

This study considerably expands on the existing basis by introducing a postcolonial viewpoint, arguing that Western metafiction may be reinterpreted to examine colonial histories and power dynamics. This theoretical shift immediately supports the first study investigation into the "critique of postcolonial modernity." It contends that the authors' use of black humor and metafictional tactics goes beyond philosophical or artistic issues, instead addressing the specific cultural dislocations and moral deficits caused by the legacy of empire. since a result, the current analyses naturally lead to these questions, since they carefully investigate the hypothesized convergence of story form (metafiction/irony), tone (black humor), and thematic concern (moral degradation) within a newly adopted critical framework (postcolonial modernity).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Postcolonial Theory: Postcolonial theory provides a critical lens for analysing the cultural, social, and psychological legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), deconstructs the Western discourse that constructed the "Orient" as a static and inferior *Other* to justify domination. Building on this, Homi Bhabha introduced concepts like hybridity and cultural ambivalence, which describe the complex, often contradictory, identities that emerge from the interaction between colonizer and colonized, challenging fixed notions of culture and power (Bhabha, 1994). This framework is essential for interrogating representations of identity and authority in literary texts.

In postcolonial and postmodern contexts, parody operates as both a narrative strategy and a philosophical critique of identity and authority. Traditionally viewed as a secondary or inferior imitation of an original, parody—like the psychological "double"—has evolved into a means of resistance against imposed identities and dominant ideologies. In postcolonial fiction, the "double" no longer signifies merely a fractured self but becomes a symbolic site of liberation from imperial or patriarchal constructs. This doubling extends to the novel itself, where metafiction exposes the hidden layers of narrative meaning. Once the realist framework collapses, parody ceases to mimic and begins to generate meaning, transforming moral and aesthetic exhaustion into creative renewal. By destabilizing mimetic realism, contemporary metafictional parody redefines moral perception, mocking the nostalgia for lost unity between art and reality. Rather than pure formal play, it becomes an ethical engagement—revealing the moral ambiguities of modernity through humor, irony, and self-reflection. Thus, parody and metafiction act as postcolonial tools that reimagine identity and critique moral decay embedded within historical and cultural discourses.

2.2 Metafiction and Postmodernism: Metafiction, a dominant mode of postmodern literature, self-consciously draws attention to its own constructed nature, thereby questioning the relationship between fiction, reality, and historical narrative. Linda Hutcheon's concept of "historiographic metafiction" describes works that are both intensely self-reflexive and deeply engaged with historical events, using parody to contest official histories without dismissing them entirely (Hutcheon, 1988). This aligns with John Barth's earlier exploration in *The Literature of Exhaustion* (1967), which considered how writers could create new, vital art by overtly confronting and recycling the forms and tropes of the past.

2.3 Black Humor and Moral Philosophy: Black humor employs satire, irony, and grotesquery to expose the absurdity and horror of existential predicaments, often functioning as a form of philosophical and political resistance. This mode is deeply intertwined with moral philosophies such as existentialism and nihilism, which grapple with a universe devoid of inherent meaning or moral absolutes. By provoking laughter in the face of suffering and moral chaos, black humor does not necessarily endorse nihilism but can instead serve as a vital coping mechanism and a tool for critical engagement, forcing a confrontation with the ethical ambiguities

of the human condition. Black humor in literature functions as a mode of philosophical inquiry, interrogating ethical and existential questions. Rooted in existentialism and nihilism, it reveals human absurdity, moral decay, and the contingency of meaning (Waugh, 1984). Satire, irony, and grotesque exaggeration allow authors to critique societal norms, cultural hypocrisy, and personal failings while simultaneously entertaining. In the works of Barth and Amis, black humor challenges both narrative authority and ethical frameworks, offering a lens to examine moral degradation, human folly, and the failure of traditional values. It positions literature as a space for resistance, reflection, and critical engagement with life's absurdities.

The theoretical frameworks of postcolonialism, metafiction, and black humor converge significantly in the works of John Barth and Martin Amis. Their fiction utilizes postmodern metafiction—congruent with Hutcheon's historiographic framework and Barth's concept of "literature of exhaustion"—not solely as formal experimentation but as a postcolonial tactic to deconstruct Western historical and cultural narratives. They use black humor, which is based on existential and nihilistic ideas, to make fun of the moral decline of post-imperial societies. They do this by using irony and grotesque images to show how ridiculous and morally empty things are after colonial certainties have fallen apart. So, their dark comedy is both a formal and philosophical way of fighting back against the failure of big stories, which is linked to the breakdown of society and spirituality today.

3. Literature Review

Previous academic studies of John Barth's metafictional techniques and absurdist tendencies demonstrate a persistent focus on the disintegration of narrative authority and moral certainty. For example, Campbell (1986) describes Barth as "the ironic existentialist," saying that his early works show characters who deal with absurdity through self-reflexive narrative and an awareness of their own limitations. Similarly, Mahoney's (1978) examination of authorial self-consciousness illustrates how Barth's characters progressively perceive their worlds as constructs, thereby challenging the demarcation between fiction and reality. More recently, Hyles (1989) looks at how Barth uses absurdist techniques like parodic plots and surreal digression to challenge the ideas of classical

continuity and realism. These analyses indicate that Barth's fiction presents not only narrative play but also ethical and ontological disintegration: characters traverse realms where "existence, not only precedes essence... it rather defies essence" (Barth, 1958/1988). Thus, through irony, narrative fragmentation, intertextuality and satire, Barth's metafiction becomes a site of moral degradation and absurdist critique.

Scholars have long studied how Amis's ironic and satirical view of capitalism is closely related to moral decay. Jon Begley, for instance, says that Money: A Suicide Note shows "a carnival of post-modern capitalism" in which the flow of money between the US and Europe becomes a way to criticize morals and culture (Begley, 2004). His research underscores the convergence of consumerism, celebrity, and power in the degradation of the individual. Roberto del Valle Alcalá has recently examined Money in the context of the decline of Fordism and the emergence of neoliberal capitalist culture, illustrating how Amis employs satire to reveal the disintegration of identity and the deterioration of ethics in late capitalism (del Valle Alcalá, 2019). These studies collectively emphasize Amis's utilization of satire not solely for comedic purposes but as a means of moral and economic analysis.

3.1 Comparative Studies on Black Humor in Postmodern Literature

Black humor in postmodern literature has been extensively examined as a narrative technique that integrates comedy with existential despair, moral disintegration, and the absurdity of contemporary existence. Scholars like Kuehl (2015) and Morrison (2003) contend that black humor serves as a literary reaction to cultural disillusionment, particularly in Western capitalist contexts. John Barth and Martin Amis, in particular, use dark humor to criticize consumerism, moral decay, unstable narratives, and the futility of human life. Barth's metafictional works, lost in the *Funhouse* and The *Floating Opera*, utilize irony and narrative fragmentation to unveil meaninglessness, whereas Amis's *Money* and *London Fields* illustrate the convergence of humor with violence, greed, and psychological disintegration (Begley, 2004). Both authors deconstruct narrative authority while employing satire to critique societal moral deficiencies.

Although there exists considerable scholarship on black humor and postmodernism, there is a conspicuous lack of studies that integrate postcolonial

theory with metafictional black humor in the works of Barth and Amis. Current scholarship focuses on existentialism, capitalism, and metafiction, yet seldom investigates the intersection of black humor with themes such as cultural imperialism, identity displacement, or colonial power dynamics (Hutcheon, 1994). Barth's employment of historical parody in The Sot-Weed Factor and Amis's depiction of global capitalism indicate neglected postcolonial aspects. Moreover, there is a scarcity of comparative research that unites both authors to examine the interplay of irony, satire, and moral decline with postcolonial concerns, including cultural stereotyping and economic imperialism. This gap presents a productive arena for interdisciplinary exploration that connects postcolonial critique, narrative theory, and black humor.

The examination of moral decay in literature has primarily concentrated on Western realist traditions, highlighting social critique within confined national and historical frameworks. However, postmodern and postcolonial narratives expand this exploration by portraying ethical collapse in fragmented, globalized, and metafictional frameworks. Writers like John Barth and Martin Amis write about characters whose morals break down because they don't know what to do with their lives, they have too much money, and they feel out of place in their culture. This goes against traditional realist ideas (Hutcheon, 1994; Begley, 2004). Investigating moral decay beyond Western realism enables scholars to explore the interaction among narrative form, historical power dynamics, and ethical ambiguity within a broader, transnational literary framework.

This literature review establishes a solid groundwork for the proposed study, "Postcolonial Metafiction and Moral Decay in the Black Humor of John Barth and Martin Amis," by distinctly outlining the current scholarship and, importantly, pinpointing the significant gap this research intends to address. The review demonstrates that researchers have meticulously examined the distinct elements of this thesis: Barth's metafictional absurdism and Amis's satirical critique of capitalist moral decay are extensively documented, as is the overarching role of black humor in postmodern literature to convey existential despair. Nonetheless, it persuasively contends that these components have not been integrated through a postcolonial perspective. The recognized lack of research linking Barth's historical parody or Amis's depiction of global capitalism to cultural imperialism and economic dependency directly substantiates the focus of the title. This research

situates the portrayal of moral degradation not merely as a symptom of existential or capitalist crises but as a possible outcome of unresolved colonial power dynamics and cultural dislocation. It links the established themes of narrative play and ethical disintegration to the underappreciated framework of postcolonial critique, thereby providing a novel interdisciplinary interpretation of both authors' works.

4. Methodology

4.1 Analysis of John Barth's selected novels

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach to examine thematic and stylistic intersections between Barth's and Amis's novels. Textual evidence was selected based on the recurrence of postcolonial motifs—such as moral decay, metafictional irony, and narrative instability. Texts were analyzed through close reading of recurring motifs of irony, moral collapse, and narrative instability. Analytical categories (language, tone, irony, and metafiction) were coded manually to ensure comparative consistency between authors.

John Barth's fiction represents a hallmark of American postmodernism, characterized by metafictional play, irony, and an acute consciousness of narrative limits. Across *The Floating Opera*, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and *Lost in the Funhouse*, Barth explores the instability of meaning, the collapse of moral structures, and the fragmentation of human experience. These novels, though distinct in narrative style and setting, collectively deconstruct the idea of storytelling as a vehicle of truth and instead present it as an intricate game of illusion, irony, and self-awareness.

The Floating Opera explores existential skepticism and moral uncertainty through its protagonist, Todd Andrews. The narrative is non-linear, shifting between present reflection and fragmented memories, mirroring the protagonist's disillusionment with life and logic. Todd's contemplation of suicide is treated with a paradoxical lightness and irony. He comments, "Nothing has intrinsic meaning; meaning is what we assign to it" (Barth, 1956/1988, p. 72), revealing a worldview grounded in relativism. Barth employs satire to criticise social conventions, legal systems, and rationalist philosophies. The novel reflects moral degradation not as corruption, but as an erosion of faith in absolute values. Todd's confession, "Good

and evil are inventions; we do what we must, and then we justify it" (Barth, 1956/1988, p. 91), epitomizes the text's dismissal of moral certainty. Though lacking the overt metafiction of Barth's later works, this novel lays the philosophical groundwork for his postmodern themes—life as spectacle, narrative as performance, and truth as irretrievably fragmented.

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth turns to historical parody to satirize colonial America and literary ambition. The novel reimagines the life of Ebenezer Cooke, a naïve poet who declares himself "Poet Laureate of Maryland" despite admitting, "I had not written a line worth saving" (Barth, 1960/1997, p. 54). This self-aware irony highlights the absurdity of artistic pretension. Rich in intertextuality, the novel borrows from Augustan satire, mock-epic structures, and colonial travel narratives. Barth uses narrative digressions, letters, and fabricated documents to fragment the linear plot, blurring the boundaries between history and fiction. Moral degradation permeates the text not only through depictions of corruption, slavery, and betrayal in colonial society, but also through the erosion of ideals. As Ebenezer discovers the duplicity of the world, his innocence dissolves into disillusionment. The novel mocks imperialism, Puritan morality, and the pursuit of "truth," suggesting instead that narratives are elaborate constructs. Barth uses irony to expose how history itself is a narrative performance, crafted rather than discovered.

Lost in the Funhouse represents Barth's most radical experiment in metafiction and narrative fragmentation. Consisting of short stories interconnected by the character Ambrose, the text constantly disrupts storytelling conventions. The narrator breaks the fourth wall, commenting on narrative devices: "This story is a series of events deliberately broken and rearranged" (Barth, 1968/1986, p. 12). The famous line, "For whom is the funhouse fun? Perhaps for lovers. For Ambrose it is a place of confusion" (Barth, 1968/1986, p. 97), epitomizes the theme of alienation. The "funhouse" becomes a metaphor for both adolescence and the labyrinth of narrative itself. Irony and intertextuality are central, with references to myths, literary structures, and even to the reader's expectations. Moral degradation is subtle but present in Ambrose's emotional detachment, insecurity, and inability to belong. The text mirrors the disorientation of modern existence, where identity is unstable and narrative coherence is impossible. Barth uses fragmentation to

force readers to confront the artificiality of fiction, asking not only how stories are told, but why.

Collectively, these novels illustrate Barth's shift from existential skepticism to full-fledged metafiction. While *The Floating Opera* questions life's meaning, *The Sot-Weed Factor* questions history's truth, and *Lost in the Funhouse* questions narrative itself. Irony, intertextuality, satire, and fragmentation serve as tools through which Barth critiques moral degradation and the collapse of narrative authority in modern life.

4.2 Comparative analysis of Martin Amis's selected novels

Martin Amis's fiction is marked by black comedy, moral decay, postmodern irony, and an unflinching critique of late 20th-century capitalism. In *Money*, *London Fields*, and *The Information*, Amis crafts worlds where desire, failure, and cultural disillusionment shape human identity. Through fragmented narration, satire, and metafictional awareness, he explores themes such as greed, death, betrayal, and the erosion of ethical values. As Norman (2011) observes, Amis's novel subverts both literary and genre conventions by merging high aesthetics with mass-market detective fiction, thereby unsettling the cultural hierarchies that separate "serious" from "popular" literature.

Money centers on John Self, a hedonistic director addicted to pornography, alcohol, fast food, and excess. The novel is narrated in a chaotic, fragmented first-person voice, mirroring his psychological disintegration. The narrative is deeply ironic—material abundance leads not to freedom but enslavement. Self-remarks bitterly, "Money doesn't talk, it swears" (Amis, 1984, p. 45), highlighting how money becomes both language and master. Amis satirizes late capitalist culture, where morality is transactional and identity is commodified. The metafictional insertion of a character named "Martin Amis" further destabilizes the boundary between fiction and authorial control. As Self says, "I am my own fever and pain," (Amis, 1984, p. 238) the novel exposes the hollowness of consumerism. Moral degradation is not just personal—it is systemic, embedded in society's celebration of greed and spectacle.

In *London Fields*, Amis uses a dystopian London on the brink of disaster to explore fate, manipulation, and moral corruption. Nicola Six, a clairvoyant femme

fatale, anticipates her own murder and consciously orchestrates it. The novel is narrated by Samson Young, an American writer dying of writer's block, who exploits the characters' lives for literary material. Nicola states, "I have a sickness of the soul… I know how I'm going to die" (Amis, 1989, p. 102), reflecting existential fatalism. The structure is fragmented, shifting perspectives between Nicola, Keith Talent (a violent darts player), and Guy Clinch (a passive romantic), creating narrative instability. Amis satirizes gender relations, class conflict, and urban decay. London itself functions as a metaphor for moral collapse—polluted, violent, and spiritually exhausted. Irony permeates the narrative: characters seek meaning in a world already devoid of it. As Samson confesses, "There is no plot. There is no solution. Only entropy" (Amis, 1989, p. 310). Thus, *London Fields* portrays a world in which morality is obsolete and human life becomes a performance of doom.

The Information revolves around two writers—Richard Tull, a failed novelist, and Gwyn Barry, a commercially successful but mediocre author. Their rivalry becomes a meditation on envy, futility, and the death of literary authority. Richard's obsessive sabotage of Gwyn is both tragic and darkly comic. He admits, "Envy never comes to the rescue… it only burns" (Amis, 1995, p. 87). The novel critiques the commodification of literature in an era where "information" replaces meaning. Fragmentation is evident in its looping narrative and metafictional reflections on writing. Richard's existential despair reflects broader cultural decay: "The universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose" (Amis, 1995, p. 213). Here, moral degradation is interior and intellectual—ambition becomes a disease. Amis uses satire to expose the emptiness of literary celebrity and the erosion of authentic creativity. The novel concludes without redemption—failure becomes a permanent, philosophical condition.

Across these novels, Amis critiques modernity through satire, irony, and dark humor. While *Money* explores consumerism and self-destruction, *London Fields* envisions apocalypse and moral vacuum, and *The Information* examines envy and intellectual decay. All three employ unreliable narration, fragmented storytelling, and metafictional techniques to emphasize the instability of identity and truth. Moral degradation appears as a shared theme—rooted in capitalism, nihilism, and ego. Amis's characters are driven by desire yet haunted by futility, trapped in

systems beyond their control. His work argues that modern life, like narrative itself, is chaotic— "a game without rules, only consequences."

In contemporary literary studies, particularly within postmodern fiction, the tools of analysis such as irony, intertextuality, narrative fragmentation, satire, and moral degradation serve as essential frameworks for interpreting thematic depth and structural innovation. Irony functions not only as a stylistic device but as a philosophical lens through which authors critique the instability of truth and human motivations; it exposes the gap between appearance and reality, often revealing societal contradictions (Hutcheon, 1994). Intertextuality, a hallmark of poststructuralist thought, situates texts within a network of literary and cultural references, suggesting that meaning is not original but constructed through echoes of prior narratives, myths, and genres (Kristeva, 1980). Narrative fragmentation disrupts linear storytelling, employing shifting perspectives, metafictional commentary, and temporal disjunctions to reflect the fractured nature of modern consciousness and the impossibility of absolute truth (McHale, 1987). Satire, deeply rooted in moral critique, uses humor, exaggeration, and parody to expose the absurdities of human behavior, capitalist excess, political corruption, and social hypocrisy (Griffin, 1994). These techniques converge to highlight moral degradation, a recurring theme in postmodern literature where traditional ethical frameworks collapse, leaving characters in existential uncertainty, driven by desire, greed, or nihilism. Together, these analytical tools allow readers to decipher complex textual strategies that challenge narrative authority, moral certainty, and cultural ideologies. They reveal how postmodern authors transform fiction into a site of critical inquiry rather than mere storytelling. Thus, irony, intertextuality, narrative fragmentation, satire, and moral decay collectively form a comprehensive lens for interpreting the tension between meaning and meaninglessness in modern literature.

4.3 Postcolonial interpretative view

A postcolonial interpretative framework enhances the comparative analysis of literature by highlighting the influence of identity, power dynamics, economic imperialism, and cultural stereotyping on narrative significance and character development. Postcolonial theory posits that identity in literature is frequently fragmented, hybrid, and constructed as a reaction to colonial domination and

cultural displacement (Bhabha, 1994). Characters grapple with self-identity and externally imposed identities, reflecting the broader conflicts between colonizers and the colonized. The issue of power is fundamental; it functions through language, knowledge, and institutional authority, facilitating hegemonic dominance while sidelining subaltern perspectives (Said, 1978). Economic imperialism, a significant facet, illustrates how capitalist exploitation perpetuates the colonial legacy by commodifying bodies, land, and culture under the pretense of progress or globalization (Loomba, 1998). This material dominance frequently converges with cultural imperialism, wherein Western norms are enforced as superior, resulting in psychological colonization. Cultural stereotypes bolster hierarchies by portraying the "Other" as irrational, exotic, violent, or inferior, thereby legitimizing systems of domination and obliterating genuine cultural narratives (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002). In literary narratives, these postcolonial issues are shown through irony, satire, and stories that don't follow a clear path, which show how wrong things were in the past and question the ideas that are most common. When used with tools like moral degradation, intertextuality, and narrative fragmentation, the postcolonial lens shows how literature can be a place to resist, negotiate, and redefine identity. Consequently, postcolonial interpretation not only critiques historical oppression but also reclaims narrative agency and presents alternative frameworks for comprehending self, nation, and power.

5 Discussion

John Barth's *The Floating Opera*, *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Lost in the Funhouse* collectively mark his evolution from existential modernism to experimental postmodernism. *The Floating Opera* presents Todd Andrews, a lawyer reflecting on the futility of existence and moral relativism, revealing Barth's early fascination with philosophical absurdity and irony. *The Sot-Weed Factor* transforms history into parody through the misadventures of Ebenezer Cooke, exposing the illusions of truth, purity, and authorship within colonial and literary narratives. Finally, *Lost in the Funhouse* dismantles narrative conventions entirely, as Ambrose's fragmented identity mirrors the disintegration of storytelling itself. Through metafiction, parody, and dark humor, Barth critiques the limits of meaning, authorship, and moral coherence in a self-reflexive literary universe where life and art intertwine (Barth, 1956, 1960, 1968).

Similarly, Martin Amis's *Money*, *London Fields*, and *The Information* extend Barth's postmodern inquiry into the moral vacuum of late-capitalist Britain. In *Money*, Amis's grotesque protagonist John Self becomes a symbol of consumerist addiction and the collapse of selfhood, narrated through a metafictional lens that mirrors Barth's authorial play. *London Fields* portrays apocalyptic London through Nicola Six's fatalistic seduction, blending black comedy and moral despair, while *The Information* explores literary rivalry and futility amid cultural superficiality. Both authors merge irony, metafiction, and black humor to reveal how modern individuals—whether American or British—are trapped in moral decay, existential confusion, and linguistic games. Their works share an obsession with the instability of truth and identity, using satire and self-awareness to interrogate the postmodern human condition where storytelling becomes both mirror and critique of societal collapse (Amis, 1984, 1989, 1995).

Both Martin Amis and John Barth employ postcolonial metafiction and black humor to expose moral decay in Western culture. Amis's novels, notably *Money*, reflect a post-imperial disillusionment where materialism replaces morality, and irony becomes a tool for ethical critique. His use of black humor highlights the absurdity of capitalist excess and the erosion of human empathy. Similarly, Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* uses metafictional structures to reveal the exhaustion of cultural narratives and the emptiness beneath modern identity. Through self-reflexive storytelling, Barth turns postcolonial fragmentation into a metafictional mirror, reflecting the collapse of meaning in a commodified world. Both authors converge in transforming humor into a mode of resistance—Amis through moral satire and Barth through narrative play—demonstrating how postcolonial metafiction can interrogate ethical disintegration within Western modernity.

In *Money*, *London Fields* and *The Information*, Martin Amis portrays the moral and existential decay of postmodern Britain through biting satire and dark humor. His protagonists—John Self, Nicola Six, and Richard Tull—embody the postcolonial subject fractured by greed, media spectacle, and intellectual disillusionment. In *Money*, Self's confession, "I spent money to make myself feel real" (Amis, 1984, p. 45), exposes a society hollowed out by consumerism. *London Fields* continues this critique through Nicola Six's manipulative nihilism, reflecting a culture obsessed with destruction as entertainment. *The Information*

deepens Amis's exploration of envy and failure, where the literary marketplace mirrors the moral emptiness of the postcolonial West. Similarly, John Barth's *The Floating Opera*, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and *Lost in the Funhouse* use metafiction and irony to deconstruct meaning, authorship, and morality. In *The Floating Opera*, Todd Andrews's admission that "Nothing is intrinsically valuable; the value of everything is assigned" (Barth, 1956, p. 108) echoes Amis's moral skepticism. *The Sot-Weed Factor* reimagines America's colonial beginnings as a parody of empire and human folly, while *Lost in the Funhouse* transforms narrative itself into a metaphor for cultural and ethical collapse: "For whom is the funhouse fun?" (Barth, 1968, p. 74). Both writers reveal postcolonial moral disorientation through black humor—Amis through social realism and psychological satire, Barth through metafictional play and philosophical irony. Their works converge in depicting Western modernity as a collapsing spectacle of language, power, and desire, where laughter becomes the last refuge of critique.

In *Money: A Suicide Note*, Martin Amis exposes moral collapse through the cynical voice of John Self, who admits, "I was born in a puddle of piss and have been after money ever since" (p. 22). This grotesque honesty exemplifies Amis's postcolonial critique of consumerism, portraying a society where, identity and morality dissolve into greed and self-indulgence. Similarly, in John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*, the narrator confesses, "He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has" (p. 97), symbolizing entrapment within artificial narratives and moral ambiguity. Both passages illustrate how black humor and metafictional self-awareness expose the existential emptiness of postcolonial modernity. Amis's realism mocks moral decay through satire, while Barth's metafiction turns narrative collapse into a reflection of cultural exhaustion. Together, their works reveal postcolonial anxieties about meaning, authorship, and ethical disintegration in the postmodern world.

5.1 Metafiction and Narrative Self-Awareness

John Barth's fiction exemplifies metafictional experimentation and narrative self-awareness that dismantle traditional notions of authorship, originality, and narrative authority. Across *The Floating Opera*, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and *Lost in the Funhouse*, Barth constructs elaborate narrative loops and self-reflexive commentaries that parody both literary form and the author's role as meaning-

maker. In *The Floating Opera*, the protagonist Todd Andrews reflects on his own philosophical impotence, noting, "Nothing is intrinsically valuable; the value of everything is assigned" (Barth, 1956, p. 108), signalling a metafictional awareness of the arbitrary systems underpinning not only moral values but narrative meaning itself. This epistemological uncertainty marks the beginning of Barth's lifelong interrogation of narrative reliability. In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth parodies the historical novel and the colonial adventure narrative by intertwining the picaresque journey of Ebenezer Cooke with the absurdities of America's mythic past. Through exaggerated prose and intertextual mimicry, Barth exposes the instability of historical "truth," suggesting that storytelling is an act of invention rather than representation. The novel's playful revision of colonial history functions as both parody and critique—mocking the imperialist grand narrative while celebrating the creative act of rewriting it.

Barth's most radical experimentation appears in *Lost in the Funhouse*, where narrative self-awareness becomes the text's subject and structure. The story "Lost in the Funhouse" literalizes metafiction as the narrator comments on his own storytelling process, questioning narrative conventions: "For whom is the funhouse fun? Perhaps for lovers. For Ambrose it is a place of confusion and loss" (Barth, 1968, p. 74). Here, the "funhouse" symbolizes both the text and the postmodern condition—an infinite labyrinth of self-referential mirrors where the distinction between author, narrator, and character collapses. Barth intrudes authorially, disrupting the illusion of fiction to foreground the artificiality of narrative, exposing its mechanisms of construction. This technique transforms the act of storytelling into a metaphor for the exhaustion of literary tradition—a hallmark of what Barth later termed "the literature of exhaustion." His looping narratives and ironic self-commentary render fiction both an act of deconstruction and regeneration, where parody becomes a tool of survival for the postmodern author. Through metafictional reflexivity and narrative self-awareness, Barth critiques literary authority, demonstrating that in the postcolonial and postmodern age, meaning emerges not from authorial control but from the reader's engagement within the text's playful, self-referential labyrinth.

John Barth's fiction epitomizes metafictional innovation and narrative self-awareness, positioning him alongside other postmodern novelists such as Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, and Italo Calvino, who similarly blurred the boundaries

between author, narrator, and reader. Across *The Floating Opera*, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and *Lost in the Funhouse*, Barth constructs narrative loops and self-reflexive structures that parody literary authority and expose the mechanisms of storytelling itself. In *The Floating Opera*, the protagonist Todd Andrews's existential detachment—"Nothing is intrinsically valuable; the value of everything is assigned" (Barth, 1956, p. 108)—mirrors Vonnegut's ironic fatalism in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), where moral and narrative certainties dissolve amid absurdity. Both writers employ humor and irony to confront meaninglessness, yet Barth turns this confrontation inward, making the narrative's form a site of philosophical struggle.

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth reimagines colonial America as a grotesque parody of epic origin myths, echoing Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) in its labyrinthine structure and critique of history's unreliability. Through his mock-heroic prose and deliberate anachronisms, Barth deconstructs the imperial narratives that shaped Western literary authority, transforming historical fiction into metafictional self-commentary. Like Calvino in *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979), Barth foregrounds the instability of authorship and the reader's complicity in creating meaning. Both writers employ narrative recursion to challenge the illusion of authorial omniscience, suggesting that storytelling is an act of infinite reinvention rather than revelation.

Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* takes this reflexivity to its peak, collapsing distinctions between fiction and criticism. The narrator's intrusion— "For whom is the funhouse fun?" (Barth, 1968, p. 74)—becomes a metafictional meditation on artistic exhaustion. Like Pynchon's narrative entropy or Calvino's self-conscious structuralism, Barth's work acknowledges the "death of the author" while reanimating fiction through parody and play. His looping narratives, footnotes, and textual interruptions reveal that meaning no longer resides in plot or moral resolution but in the reader's awareness of narrative construction itself. Thus, Barth's metafictional practice, situated among his contemporaries, represents a critical evolution of postmodernism—transforming irony and self-awareness into tools of cultural and literary renewal in an era skeptical of grand narratives and stable truths.

5.2 Amis's narrative unreliability, self-conscious storytelling

Martin Amis's fiction, particularly *Money*, *London Fields* and *The Information*, demonstrates a sustained engagement with narrative unreliability and self-conscious storytelling that mirrors the moral and cultural instability of the postmodern, postcolonial world. In *Money*, the unreliable narration of John Self—both vulgar and oddly self-aware—creates a fractured narrative that constantly questions its own authenticity. Self admits, "I spent money to make myself feel real" (Amis, 1984, p. 45), a confession that reveals both character delusion and authorial commentary. The metafictional twist intensifies when Amis inserts himself into the novel as "Martin Amis," blurring boundaries between author and narrator. This intrusion destabilizes narrative authority, reminding readers that storytelling itself is an act of manipulation and illusion. Such self-reflexivity aligns Amis with contemporaries like Salman Rushdie and Julian Barnes, who similarly deploy unreliable narrators to expose the contradictions of postcolonial and postmodern subjectivity.

In *London Fields*, Amis amplifies this narrative play through the writer-narrator Samson Young, who exploits his characters for literary gain. Young's manipulation of events—culminating in the premeditated murder of Nicola Six—serves as a metafictional allegory for authorial control and moral decay. The narrative oscillates between irony and self-doubt, producing an atmosphere of epistemological uncertainty similar to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), where storytelling becomes inseparable from fabrication. Amis uses this narrative unreliability to mirror the disintegration of ethical and linguistic coherence in a world obsessed with spectacle.

The Information (1995) extends these concerns into the literary marketplace itself. Richard Tull, the embittered novelist, becomes both subject and object of narrative irony; his jealousy and failure reflect a meta-commentary on authorship, competition, and creative futility. The narrator's self-conscious digressions on the nature of storytelling—mocking pretension while indulging in it—turn the novel into an exercise in critical irony. Like John Fowles in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Amis foregrounds authorial intervention as a means to reveal fiction's contractedness and its moral implications.

Through these novels, Amis transforms narrative unreliability into an ethical lens, where irony and metafiction expose not just the instability of storytelling but

the corruption of postmodern consciousness itself. His self-conscious narrators—trapped between cynicism and self-awareness—embody the modern writer's struggle to find authenticity in a culture saturated with artifice.

5.3 Postcolonial rewriting of history and narrative instability

Both Martin Amis and John Barth engage in postcolonial rewriting of history and narrative instability, though they do so through distinct cultural lenses and aesthetic strategies. Barth, writing from postwar America, dismantles the authority of historical and literary grand narratives through metafictional parody, while Amis, emerging from a post-imperial Britain, uses irony and narrative unreliability to critique the moral and cultural decay that followed the collapse of empire. In *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), Barth reconstructs the colonial past of America through the absurd journey of Ebenezer Cooke, exposing the ideological fictions embedded within the historical record. His mock-epic tone and labyrinthine narrative loops parody the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel, suggesting that history itself is a text open to manipulation. Similarly, *Lost in the Funhouse* transforms the act of narration into a metaphor for postcolonial dislocation, where meaning is endlessly deferred and authorial control fragmented. This aligns Barth with other metafictional historians such as Thomas Pynchon and Robert Coover, who rewrite history through irony and self-reflexivity.

Amis's historical and cultural revisionism takes a more satirical and psychological form. In the selected three books, he critiques the moral vacuum of late-capitalist, postcolonial Britain, where imperial authority has been replaced by consumer spectacle and narrative instability mirrors cultural exhaustion. His characters—John Self, Nicola Six, and Richard Tull—navigate a world where truth is negotiable, and storytelling becomes a form of deception. Amis's self-conscious narrators expose the constructed nature of narrative just as Barth's metafictional characters expose the artificiality of history. Both writers thus transform postcolonial anxiety into aesthetic play: Barth's parody of colonial origins dismantles the myth of Western progress, while Amis's unreliable narration reveals the ethical emptiness of the imperial aftermath.

Their works converge in their treatment of narrative as an unstable construct shaped by ideology and desire. Barth rewrites history as a comic fiction of beginnings, while Amis rewrites contemporary reality as a tragicomedy of endings.

Together, they exemplify how postcolonial metafiction turns the instability of narrative into a critique of power, authorship, and cultural identity, transforming historical rewriting into an act of creative resistance.

5.4 Moral Decay and Postcolonial Cultural Crisis

5.4.1 American capitalism & decadence in Amis's *Money* and *London Fields*

In *Money: A Suicide Note* and *London Fields*, Martin Amis portrays moral decay and cultural crisis as symptoms of postcolonial disillusionment and American-style capitalism's encroachment on British society. In *Money*, John Self embodies the spiritual emptiness of consumer culture—driven by greed, lust, and self-destruction, he represents a moral void where material excess replaces ethical meaning. His confession, "I spent money to make myself feel real" (Amis, 1984, p. 45), epitomizes how capitalist desire transforms identity into a commodity. Amis uses black humor and unreliable narration to critique a transatlantic moral collapse in which post-imperial Britain imitates the deca dence of the American dream. In *London Fields*, the apocalyptic tone and manipulative characters reflect a culture desensitized to violence and cynicism. Nicola Six's self-conscious pursuit of death mirrors the moral exhaustion of a society addicted to spectacle and self-interest. Through these narratives, Amis situates postcolonial Britain within a global capitalist crisis, where ethical integrity and human empathy are eroded by consumption, competition, and nihilistic pleasure.

5.4.2 Collapse of ideals, existential crisis in Barth's *The Floating Opera*

In *The Floating Opera*, John Barth explores the collapse of moral and philosophical ideals through the existential crisis of his protagonist, Todd Andrews. Set in postwar America, the novel reflects a world disillusioned by the failure of traditional belief systems—religious, ethical, and rational. Todd's detached narration and sardonic wit reveal a consciousness grappling with meaninglessness; his declaration that "nothing is intrinsically valuable; the value of everything is assigned" (Barth, 1956, p. 108) encapsulates the novel's moral relativism. Barth uses irony and philosophical skepticism to expose the futility of absolute ideals in a society governed by chance and self-interest. The "floating opera" itself, a literal and symbolic spectacle of performance without purpose, mirrors the human condition as a series of meaningless acts staged to mask

existential emptiness. In this sense, Barth anticipates postmodernist self-awareness, portraying the individual not as a moral agent but as a performer within an absurd world devoid of transcendence or stable truth.

5.4.3 How black humor exposes moral bankruptcy in Western modernity

Black humor, as employed by writers like Martin Amis and John Barth, functions as a critical lens through which the moral bankruptcy of Western modernity is exposed. It transforms laughter into an act of revelation, unveiling the ethical decay underlying capitalist ambition, political corruption, and cultural emptiness. In Amis's *Money*, John Self's self-destructive indulgence and grotesque cynicism turn humor into moral critique—his excesses provoke laughter tinged with discomfort, forcing readers to confront the vacuity of consumerist desire. Similarly, *London Fields* uses dark irony to depict a decaying society where human relationships have become transactional and apocalyptic anxieties pervade daily life. Barth's *The Floating Opera* and *Lost in the Funhouse* employ absurdity and irony to mock the existential void of modern consciousness; humor becomes both coping mechanism and critique. Through parody and self-reflexive wit, Barth dismantles philosophical and moral pretensions, showing that Western progress rests on hollow ideals. In both authors, black humor destabilizes comfort—it unmasks the grotesque comedy of moral collapse, exposing how postmodern and postcolonial societies, stripped of faith and meaning, continue to laugh at their own ruin.

5.5 Postcolonial Black Humor as Resistance

5.5.1 Humor as defiance against grand narratives and imperial ideologies

Postcolonial black humor operates as a powerful form of resistance, transforming laughter into a weapon against grand narratives and imperial ideologies. Both Martin Amis and John Barth employ irony, satire, and absurdity to undermine the cultural myths and moral certainties inherited from Western modernity and colonial history. In Amis's *Money* and *London Fields*, humor becomes a means of exposing the hollowness of post-imperial Britain and its imitation of American capitalist excess. His grotesque exaggerations and moral cynicism ridicule the lingering superiority of Western civilization, revealing it as a performance built on greed and moral decay. Likewise, Barth's *The Sot-Weed*

Factor reimagines America's colonial origins through parody, transforming the epic of conquest into a farcical spectacle of human folly. Through this inversion, Barth destabilizes the authority of imperial history, showing that "civilization" itself rests on deception and exploitation.

For both writers, black humor rejects the solemnity of grand narratives—religious, imperial, or moral—and replaces it with playful subversion. Their laughter is not nihilistic but liberating, a form of cultural rebellion that exposes the absurdities of power, progress, and historical legitimacy. By mocking the rhetoric of empire and the myths of modern rationality, Amis and Barth transform humor into an act of intellectual and ethical defiance—one that asserts the freedom to question, reinterpret, and rewrite history from the margins of postcolonial consciousness.

5.5.2 Deconstructing colonial myths (*The Sot-Weed Factor*)

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, John Barth deconstructs colonial myths by transforming the American origin story into a parody of imperial ambition, moral hypocrisy, and historical fabrication. The novel, set in the early eighteenth century, follows Ebenezer Cooke, a naïve poet who travels to Maryland to become "Poet Laureate of the Colonies." Through this absurd quest, Barth exposes the false heroism and ideological posturing that underpin colonial history. The title itself—borrowed from an actual satirical poem by the historical Ebenezer Cooke—signals Barth's intent to rewrite history as farce. The colonial enterprise, depicted through deception, greed, and sexual corruption, becomes a grotesque theatre of human folly rather than a tale of enlightenment or progress.

Barth dismantles the myth of America as a land of purity and promise, revealing it instead as a site of chaos, exploitation, and narrative manipulation. His mock-epic tone and intricate metafictional design highlight the artificiality of historical storytelling, suggesting that all "official" narratives of empire are literary constructions shaped by self-interest. In this way, *The Sot-Weed Factor* functions as postcolonial historiographic metafiction—it uses parody to critique the moral contradictions of colonization and to assert that history itself is an unstable, authorial invention rather than a fixed truth.

5.5.3 Satire of late capitalism, power, and identity commodification

Martin Amis's fiction, particularly *Money: A Suicide Note*, *London Fields*, and *The Information*, stands as a biting satire of late capitalism, exposing the commodification of power, identity, and human experience in a morally hollow society. In *Money*, John Self epitomizes the consumer-driven self—his desires, emotions, and even self-worth are mediated through money and media spectacle. His admission, "I spent money to make myself feel real" (Amis, 1984, p. 45), crystallizes how capitalism transforms authenticity into a purchasable illusion. Amis weaponizes humor and irony to reveal how capitalist culture, once a system of economic production, has evolved into a totalizing ideology shaping personal identity and ethical perception.

Amis's engagement with postmodern decadence, characterized by stylistic excess and moral exhaustion, mirrors the disillusionment of late capitalist society, where ethical certainties disintegrate into irony and spectacle. Through self-reflexive narrative play and grotesque humor, Amis dramatizes the collapse of meaning in a world oversaturated with mediated violence, transforming the detective story into an allegory of cultural decay. His parody of the American noir tradition and critique of simulation evoke a broader postcolonial sensibility — one that exposes how globalized cultural production commodifies both morality and identity.

In *London Fields*, this commodification extends to sexuality and morality, with Nicola Six's self-aware manipulation of her own death turning human existence into entertainment. The novel's apocalyptic tone reflects a society numbed by excess, where power operates not through politics but through consumption and image. Similarly, *The Information* satirizes the literary marketplace itself, as Richard Tull's professional envy and failure parody intellectual competition under capitalism. Across these works, Amis critiques a postcolonial Britain seduced by American consumerism, where identity and morality are reduced to marketable performances. His satire exposes late capitalism's deepest paradox: a system that promises freedom yet leaves individuals spiritually bankrupt and existentially adrift.

Martin Amis and John Barth employ black humor not merely for comic effect but as a philosophical interrogation of modern moral collapse. Amis's grotesque satire in *Money* and *London Fields* exposes the absurdity of greed and self-

destruction, while Barth's ironic detachment in *The Floating Opera* transforms existential despair into dark comedy. Their humor dismantles ethical certainty, revealing the hypocrisy of Western rationalism and moral superiority. In both, laughter becomes a form of moral awareness—a recognition that absurdity and immorality coexist within modernity's cultural and ideological frameworks.

Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* and Amis's *The Information* use metafiction to expose the collapse of storytelling as a reflection of the disintegration of Western identity. Their self-reflexive narratives parody the author's role as a moral or cultural guide, highlighting fiction's inability to provide stable meaning. By blurring the boundaries between author and narrator, both writers dramatize the exhaustion of Enlightenment ideals of progress and coherence. Metafiction thus becomes a critical mirror for postcolonial disillusionment, revealing that the narratives once used to justify power and empire have lost their ethical and philosophical authority.

In Amis's *Money* and Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, moral decay emerges as the inevitable outcome of late capitalism and postcolonial exhaustion. Amis portrays individuals consumed by greed and spectacle, while Barth satirizes the moral corruption embedded in colonial foundations. Both reveal how capitalism commodifies ethics, transforming identity into performance and truth into narrative construction. Their shared cynicism reflects a postcolonial awareness: the old moral frameworks of empire and modernity have crumbled, leaving irony and self-reflexivity as the only tools for critique in a disenchanted cultural landscape.

For Amis and Barth, humor functions as both rebellion and renewal. In *London Fields* and *The Floating Opera*, laughter resists despair by transforming chaos into creative defiance. Their dark comedy undermines ideological authority while affirming the resilience of consciousness amidst absurdity. Barth's philosophical irony and Amis's moral satire demonstrate that humor, far from nihilistic, is a means of surviving the collapse of belief. It reconstructs meaning through play, irony, and self-awareness, turning postmodern uncertainty into an act of intellectual freedom rather than paralysis.

6. Conclusion

This paper posits that the postcolonial metafiction and dark humor of John Barth and Martin Amis transcend mere stylistic preferences; they serve as formidable instruments for philosophical and ethical critique. Their work reveals a moral and cultural void in the postmodern West, directly attributing it to the detrimental consequences of capitalism, the enduring effects of empire, and a widespread fatigue with conventional narratives.

Barth's metafictional methods and Amis's harsh realism turn laughing into a way to fight back. It questions strict ideologies and the old power structures that came from colonialism. Examining Western postmodern authors through a postcolonial lens demonstrates that their use of irony, parody, and unstable narratives transcends mere criticism of cultural decline; it challenges the foundational structures of knowledge and power entrenched in colonial ideology. Both authors demonstrate how laughter becomes a coping mechanism within the postcolonial and postindustrial condition — a “benign violation” of order that simultaneously critiques it. Through parody and pastiche, their metafictional humor dismantles historical grand narratives, transforming laughter into an act of resistance against ideological conformity and moral decay.

This study shows that black humor is a powerful way to fight colonialism because it makes people laugh and think about their morals. It stresses the importance of looking at how Western writers, who seem to have nothing to do with postcolonial conflicts, talk about issues like cultural displacement, commodification, and broken identities. In the future, scholars should embrace a more expansive global perspective and analyze the relationship between satire and metafiction across diverse literary traditions to deconstruct power, identity, and history. Linking decolonial stories to global satirical and metafictional trends shows how modern fiction is always changing the way we talk about resistance and moral exploration in a world that is connected but often disappointed.

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