

LUCKY JIM, A CAMPUS NOVEL

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Abstract: Lucky Jim is an incisive critique against mediocre provincial academia and human hypocrisy in general. The novel's protagonist, Jim Dixon, became one of the most controversial, recognisable and enduring characters in British fiction and also Amis's most celebrated creation and his most defining one, especially in the readers' eyes. Ironically, it was the character that made him a celebrity and established him as a talented writer of comic novels that would also trigger much of the reservations about Amis's efforts at investigating new themes and trying to distance himself from a predominantly comic tone in his work.

Keywords: academic life, ironic feelings, mechanical emotions, anti-modernist, bestseller

On March 3, 1953, six years after graduating from Oxford University, Kingsley Amis wrote to his friend Philip Larkin, informing him that he had chosen a title for his newest novel. He dropped the initial title "Dixon and Christine" and opted for a more suggestive title given by the novel's main character and his development – "*Lucky Jim*". Twenty-seven days later he sent another letter to Larkin, this time containing the information that the manuscript was completed. By mid-April, Amis had dispatched the novel to another Oxford acquaintance, Hilary Rubinstein, who was employed at the publishing house of his uncle, Victor Gollancz. In his cover letter Amis emphasized what he saw as the novel's primary accomplishment: "As you'll see serious-comedy is the formula really, though, if it gets by at all I imagine it'll get by chiefly on the score of the comic angle." (Gavin 2003:101) Gollancz's reaction however was not immediate and conclusive and at this point, given that Amis clearly was dealing with the prospect of not being able to find a publisher, he was contacted by John Wain, another Oxford graduate and also his friend. The content of Wain's letter to Amis would prove pivotal for *Lucky Jim*'s publication. Wain had been commissioned by the BBC to edit a radio series called *First Reading* which would introduce Third Programme listeners to extracts from the work of new writers. Having read parts of the novel, Wain decided to use an excerpt from it in the opening broadcast which was aired on 26 April. Amis sent him the passage in which Jim wakes up hung-over in the Welches' spare bedroom, has to listen to Neddy humming Mozart in the bathroom next to his room and also decides with the help of Christine how to take care of the cigarette burns on the sheets, blankets and bedside table. He also had written to Rubinstein and told him of the forthcoming reading. Rubinstein and some of his colleagues listened and the overall reaction to it was that they liked what they heard and consequently Amis signed a contract with the publishing house by the end of May.

Lucky Jim was published on January 19, 1954 and immediately catapulted Amis to literary notoriety. Six weeks after publication the novel had gone into its fifth impression: there were about 7,500 copies in print and they were disappearing as fast as they could be sent to bookshops. By the end of the

year 12,000 copies had been sold. Also, BBC had inquired about radio adaptations and the Boulting brothers had offered 200 pounds for the film rights. Foreign publishers were already bidding for translation rights and despite the novel's modest success in America it nevertheless established Kingsley Amis's reputation as a solid and original writer.

Amis enjoyed his fame as a successful writer as well as the changes it brought in his life not only in terms of financial gain but also in regards to the sudden adulation coming from his readers and friends. During February and March Amis was flooded by fan mail. An acute feeling that his life had made an irreversible turn for the better was taking shape in his mind, as shown by his confession to Larkin: "I feel in a sense 'that they can't stop me now'." (Bradford 2001: 99)

The majority of reviews of *Lucky Jim* were favourable. Sean O'Faolain of the *Observer* announced that Kingsley Amis had made "the gayest of bricks with the most common straw". (O'Faolain 1954) Walter Allen described Amis in his article published in the *New Statesman* as being a novelist of "considerable and uncomfortable talent"; (Allen 1954) John Betjeman compared the book to "a Harold Lloyd film or a Buster Keaton film in prose"; (Betjeman 1954) Anthony Powell praised the novel's "energy", "form", and "real power"; (Powell 1954) and Edmund Fuller drew comparisons to the work of P.G. Woodhouse, praising Amis for writing in the "cool, detached, sardonic style which is the trademark of the British satirical novel." (Fuller 1954)

John Wain played a major role in helping Amis to get his novel accepted by a publishing house, due to the fact that several months before *Lucky Jim*, his own "*Hurry On Down*" came out. He also played a significant role in emphasizing *Lucky Jim*'s originality and uniqueness. This was very much achieved by contrasting the two literary works - very much to the detriment of Wain's novel. Most reviewers were immediately sensitive to the discrepancy in quality and originality between the two novels and would acknowledge Amis's superiority as a writer. In his *New Statesman*'s review, Walter Allen pushed Charles Lumley, the protagonist of *Hurry On Down*, into the background and considered Dixon as a character without an obvious precedent, an assembly of paradoxes. Allen asks: is he "the intellectual tough or the tough intellectual?" (Bradford 2001:101) Walter Allen also writes that Jim Dixon was "a symbol ... a figure to be identified with ... an archetypal figure, the hero of a generation in the everlasting battle between the generations." (Walter 1964:280) For a while *Lucky Jim* and *Hurry on Down* were coupled together by most reviewers and there was also a tendency to emphasize similarities between the two even if this often meant drawing strained parallels between the main characters and ignoring fundamental distinctions in these works of fiction. This was in part due to the media's attempt at edifying a new literary movement and consequently a new literary hero with the intention of reviving the rather arid literary landscape of those times. These would eventually lead to the Movement and subsequently to the Angry Young Men phenomenon. Understandably, this situation irritated Amis who at one point openly complained about "certain alleged parallels between features of Mr Wain's work and features of my own, observing in deadpan fashion that in each case Mr Wain got it first." (Leader 2006:362)

Kingsley Amis seems to have enjoyed *Hurryon Down*. In a letter sent to Wain in 1953 he says that he "thoroughly enjoyed" it and "read it whenever I had a free moment till I'd finished it. It is very funny in parts and does succeed above all in getting across a grotesque and twisted view of life [which is what I try to do, though it's not the same view - this I think is where we're similar], which is the main point as far as I'm concerned." (Bradford 2001:102)

Whether or not Amis was honest in his estimations of the novel at that time remains open to debate. However, four decades later in his *Memoirs* he wrote something very different in regards to Wain's first published work: "It seemed to be of a certain banality of conception and style [but] this could

not in the nature of things be the case, with John being so well up on everything, and that therefore the novel I had myself written must all be on some dismayingly wrong ... track.”(Amis 1991:42-43) Kingsley Amis’s positive reception of the book in 1953 could in part be motivated by an undisguised appreciation of the novel at that time but also by his gratefulness for Wain’s valuable help in getting his own *Lucky Jim* published. However, after 1954 the relationship between Wain and Amis became a sequence of insults and rebukes that lasted their entire lives.

Close readings of the two books reveal that Lumley and Dixon do share deep similarities, but also that any effort to establish substantial correspondences between the two characters and what they embody leads to forced interpretations. A fertile direction is in depth analysis of the most significant discrepancies:

Jim Dixon and Charles Lumley are lower middle class, bored and irritated by the cultural and social pretensions of their peers; both succeed in getting the women they want and jobs that provide them at least with an alternative to their previous lives – Lumley become a radio gag-writer. But the similarities are superficial. Lumley embodies a political mood, a feeling of dissatisfaction with an outdated English social structure. There is humour, but it is of the submissive, stoical type which invites the reader to sympathize with the hero’s sense of alienation. Jim embodies nothing in particular – for him people with ‘ideas’ about class and social inequality are as pretentious and boring as their privileged, disinterested counterparts. Jim, assisted by his narrator, uses comedy as a triumphant act of revenge against the people who annoy him and frustrate his ambitions. Jim’s anarchic, dismissive attitude to his world seems to prefigure, even justify, his successful escape from it.(Bradford 2001:100)

Although innovative in his novel, Wain’s fiction nevertheless owed much to tradition. *Hurry onDown* belonged to a comfortably established genre of British fiction; anti-modernist and involving the ideas, conditions and idioms of contemporary life.” (Bradford 2001:100) While *Lucky Jim* managed to leap beyond these borders and edify itself as an original work without any real precedence:

Lucky Jim at once extended and broke with this tradition. It was satirical, in the sense that it dismantled a range of social and intellectual pretensions, but its only alternative seemed to involve making fun of people and having a good time. It was realistic. The university setting, the character’s backgrounds, the way they behaved and talked, were lifted from England and Wales circa 1950, but it used this naturalistic framework as the basis for a fairytale, an achieved fantasy. Jim is frustrated and irritated, but he is never offered as a means of diagnosing contemporary states of angst or alienation. He wants the pretty girl and the good job in London; his ‘luck’ gets him both, and he is happy.(Bradford 2001:101)

When *Lucky Jim* was published, few people had ever heard of Amis, but through 1954 and 1955, as the book became a bestseller, it was attended by interviews with and profiles of its author, and the parallels between Jim and the junior don at a provincial university who had created him raised questions, which on 17 February 1956 were addressed by J.G. Weightman in the *Times Literary Supplement*:

Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* has spread the impression that Redbrick is peopled by beer – drinking scholarship louts, who wouldn’t know a napkin from a chimney – piece and whose one ideal is to end their sex starvation in the arms of a big breasted blonde ... If the book were directly autobiographical, as

many people assume it to be, Amis would presumably have long since lost his job, and rightly so.(Bradford 2001:92)

In Walter Allen's 1954 review on Amis and Wain, it becomes obvious that he regards their respective heroes, Jim in particular, as lenses for their author's cynical, sardonic perceptions of contemporary life. Writing in the 26 June 1954 issue of the *New Statesman and Society*, J.B. Priestley was among the earliest reviewers to voice his discomfort with the new zeitgeist that Kingsley's novel portrayed.(Priestley 1954) Priestley was not, of course, the only spokesman for an earlier generation to criticize the new fiction *Lucky Jim* epitomized. For William Van O'Connor as well, such developments represented a cultural conflict: the traditional "gentleman's world [of] Oxford accented culture" contrasted sharply with the emerging class of university – educated who refused to be embraced by that world. Similar sentiments, varying in tone, can also be found in the writings of Leslie Fielder, V. S. Pritchett, and Stephen Spender, to name only a few.(Gavin 2003: 106)

However, the most famous assessment of Kingsley Amis's novel came nearly a year after its release. In an annual retrospective entitled "Books of the Year – I", published in the *Sunday Times* on Christmas Day, 1955, W. Somerset Maugham issued an ideological call against *Lucky Jim* and emphasized the biographical layer that permeates through the novel. Amis is Jim and in this sense reflects a whole new generation of iconoclasts who desire to do away with the old establishment and its representatives:

They do not go to university to acquire culture but to get a job and when they have got one scamp it. They have no manners and are woefully unable to deal with any social predicament. Their idea of a celebration is to go to a public house and drink six beers. They are mean, malicious and envious. They will write anonymous letters to harass a fellow undergraduate and listen to a telephone conversation that is no business of theirs. Charity, kindness, generosity are qualities which they hold in contempt. They are scum. They will in due course leave the university. Some will doubtless sink back, perhaps with relief, into the modest class from which they emerged; some will take to drink, some to crime, and go to prison. Others will become schoolmasters and form the young or journalists and mould public opinion. A few will go into Parliament, become Cabinet Ministers and rule the country. I look upon myself as fortunate that I shall not live to see it.(Bradford 2001:111)

"All my heroes", Amis wrote, "start from me and in a sense stay with me."(Jacobs 1995:150) The most obvious resemblance between Jim and Amis is that both lecture at a provincial university college. Nevertheless, Amis had thought of this job for his hero long before he became a lecturer himself. And he gave Jim other characteristics that were not his own. Jim lectures in history, Amis in English; Jim comes from Lancashire, Amis from London; Jim is single, Amis married; Jim hates Mozart, while Amis adores him.

Old school and Oxford friends of Amis had another reason for thinking they recognized him in Jim. Jim's talent for pulling faces matches Amis's; indeed, the two share much the same repertoire, including a Chinese mandarin face, a crazy peasant face, Martin – invader, lemon – sucking, Eskimo, Edith Sitwell, Evelyn Waugh, lascar, mandrill – even a Sex Life in Ancient Rome face. However, Amis and Jim pulled the same faces for different reasons. Amis's faces were for entertaining his friends. Dixon's are mostly behind people's backs and act as "the covert protests and tension – reducers of a man in enemy territory without effective allies."(Jacobs 1995:150)

Where Amis is present in the novel it is often in ways at least likely to be recognized by his readers. He is there in Dixon who struggles to keep inside his smoking ration and wonders how he is going to make 3 pounds last the nine days until pay – day. He is in Dixon who worries about “the awful business of getting on with women.”(Jacobs, 1995:151) He is very much in Dixon who regards himself as “boredom – detector ... a finely – tuned instrument” so that the “boredom co-efficient of any gathering could be read off him.” (Jacobs 1995:151)

As even the preliminary notes suggest, Amis was concerned not with levelling class and culture in general, but with deflating only its wrongfully contorted forms: “University shags. Provincial. Probably keen on culture. Crappy culture. Fellow who doesn’t fit in. Seems anti-culture. Non-U. Non-Oxbridge. Beer. Girls. Can’t say what he really thinks. Boss trouble. Given chores. Disaster. Boring boss [a] so boring girl [b]. Nice girls come but someone else’s property. Whose? Etc.” (Jacobs 1995:154) Kingsley Amis was himself too cultured to reject culture outright. Essentially what motivated his satire was the way culture is appropriated and misused by self-inflated people. He explains:

Culture’s good, but not the way the Welches did it. Education is good, but ... it’s self-defeating if it isn’t done properly *Lucky Jim* is about being bored by your boss. On top of that, it’s about being bored by your girl, and you’re too nice and/or cowardly ... to tell her to fuck off. And then, wrapped around all that, it’s about that deadly provincial background.(Salwak 1992:63)

He may have found himself, like Jim Dixon, living in the provinces and teaching at a small university college, but while he was working on *Lucky Jim* it had become perfectly clear that – for part of him, for one of the contradictory components which made up Kingsley Amis – this was a terrible mistake. “You know what I should like to see?” he asked Philip, rhetorically, on 13 January 1953:

I should like to see a bit of life. Almost any sort. Drinking, or sex, or fine talk, especially [I don’t know why I should pick that] that. I don’t want to talk about the unemployment at Llanelly, or the next meeting of the Gower Riding Society, or Dylan Thomas, or how many of the Finals class we shall be able to push through, especially not that.(Leader 2000:306)

Lucky Jim would not have existed without Amis’s friendship to Larkin. *The Legacy* “only got written in response to your suggestions”, he says, and without *The Legacy* Amis thought he would have written no more prose.

Also, dear man, I have to thank you for stopping me from being a shit and encouraging me to be funny in the right way and getting me interested in modern po [all this in various intangible ways] ... Today, you are my “inner audience”, my watcher in Spanish, the reader over my shoulder, my often-mentioned Jack, and a good deal more. I feel it’s a shame that our friendship only began after we’d stopped seeing much of each other. [Again you were largely responsible for beginning it. [do you remember “6477599 Fuc. P.A. Larkin, Excrement Boy, 1st B.U.M., Mond’s Lines, Shatterick Ramp, Forks”? – I have just laughed like necrophily, writing that].] But I’m very glad we’ve got it now. I felt I had to get this said some time, and hope it hasn’t embarrassed you.(Jacobs 1995:142)

Larkin had played the part of “inner audience” to the full. He had made many proposals, some of which Amis accepted, others not. It was Larkin who suggested that Margaret should have another admirer

besides Jim Dixon. This became Catchpole, who was able to clear up Dixon's suspicions about Margaret's supposed suicide attempt, which she had made in order to win the sympathy of both Catchpole and Jim, the discovery that she had not been serious about it giving Jim the justification he needed for abandoning her for Christine. And Larkin had helped Amis to get rid of some surplus characters and put greater emphasis on others. He thought Amis was too soft on Bertrand, Professor Welch's artist son, and persuaded him to make Bertrand even more hateful. Less tangibly, Larkin's continuing interest and support had helped Amis to keep working on his story when he might otherwise have run out of conviction and the steam to carry on. Larkin had earned his recognition as *Lucky Jim's* dedicatee. Nevertheless, in helping Amis to launch his career as a novelist he had done something else: he had helped to secure Amis's independence as a writer. After this first novel, Amis never again needed so active an "inner audience" to guide him. *Lucky Jim* was the only novel he was to show in draft form to a third person and ask for advice.

The letters exchanged between Amis and Larkin, with their self-consciously farcical style, supplemented by their occasional, booze-fuelled meetings, were the originators of the dynamic relationship between Jim's public and private personae and between Jim and his alter ego narrator. In fact, Amis's initial intention was to write a novel about Larkin himself and Larkin's girlfriend, Monica Jones. In time, Larkin disappeared from the story, the only faint whiff left of him being the name Dixon, taken from Dixon Drive, the Leicester Street where Larkin had lived. Aspects of character of his girlfriend Monica Jones seemed more appropriate to the plot than any aspects of Larkin's personality. Margaret Peel, Jim's pretentious girlfriend, is a transparent version of Monica Jones, the university lecturer in English Larkin had met in Leicester in 1946 and who remained as his regular, if not his only partner until his death in 1985. Margaret looks like Monica, both in terms of physical appearance and in her taste in clothes and casual jewellery. Every time Jim meets her or even thinks about her, the passage involves a precise description of what she is wearing, often supplemented by a comment on her posture or physiognomy. She wore "a sort of arty get-up of multi-coloured shirt, skirt with fringed hem and pocket, low-heeled shoes, and wooden beads", (Amis 1992:76) and in the next chapter "She was wearing her arty get-up, but had discarded the wooden beads in favour of a brooch consisting of a wooden letter 'M'". (Amis 1992:88) No one else in the book receives anything like the attention to physical detail given to Margaret. "As if searching for a text he examined her face, noting the tufts of brown hair that overhung the earpieces of her glasses, the crease running up the near cheek and approaching closer than before to this eye socket [or was he imagining that?] And the faint but at this angle unmistakable downward curve of the mouth." (Amis 1992:20)

Margaret's face, hair, spectacles, her taste in clothes and jewellery, would show anyone who knew Monica Jones, and knew Larkin's friendship with Amis, that Margaret was based on her. And there were also parallels between their quasi-radical attitudes to culture and their verbal habits, so much so that Larkin was prompted to ask Amis if "you weren't actually there taking notes [of our conversations], were you?". (Jacobs 1995:146) Margaret is selfish, potentially vicious, a liar and an emotional charlatan. Monica Jones was nothing like this, and neither was Larkin's attitude towards her anything like Jim's view of Margaret. Their backgrounds, family histories and related anxieties were similar, and they shared an enthusiasm for literature, particularly in their admiration for Hardy, Yeats and Lawrence.

When Amis wanted to name the character Monica Jones, Larkin manifested his disapproval since his girlfriend's full name was Margaret Monica Beale Jones. Although Amis eventually dropped the name this created another in-joke between them in which Amis would tell his Swansea friend Margaret Aaron-Thomas that he was "cutting at" a girl in Leicester, while Larkin could tell Monica that Amis was really

getting at a girl called Margaret in Swansea. Nevertheless, Larkin rejected so obvious an identification. In the end they settled for Margaret Peel, which sounds like the Beale in Monica's name but was in fact the name of a man in Leicester Larkin had known and disliked.

The idea for *Lucky Jim* came to Amis a year before he went to Swansea; during a visit he paid Philip Larkin at Leicester University, to which Larkin had moved from Wellington and where he had become assistant librarian. They spent half an hour in the senior common room, and Amis was fascinated by the unreality of the setting and its characters.

I looked around and said to myself, "Christ, somebody ought to do something about this." Not that it was awful – well, only a bit; it was strange and sort of developed, a whole mode of existence no one had got on to from the outside, like the SS in 1940, say. I would do something with it. (Amis 1991:56)

There is an obvious connection between Amis's new life and the setting that provided *Lucky Jim* with much of its irreverent energy, but it would be wrong to regard the novel as simply a satirical attack on Swansea, its environments and university. Amis always claimed that Swansea, town and university, was not the setting for *Lucky Jim*, which was true in the sense that none of his new friends and colleagues were remodelled as characters. Many of the characters of the book were drawn from Amis's pre-Swansean experiences, and the more absurd events and circumstances of Jim's world were largely invented. Despite being poorly paid and overworked, Amis enjoyed teaching English literature and he quickly made friends in Swansea, both inside and outside the university. However, the protocols and mechanisms of a provincial university would become the framework for the novel.

However, Amis drew inspiration from his new environment and his colleagues even if this did not come in the form of borrowing characters he knew, or basing situations from the book on real events that occurred at Swansea University. When Jim Dixon had to be provided with a subject for an academic paper which he is writing, in the hope that L.S. Caton will publish it in a new journal, Amis asked his friend Esmond Cleary, an economics lecturer at Swansea, if he could think of a suitably dim and dreary topic. Cleary came up with "The Economic Influence of the Developments in Shipbuilding Techniques, 1450 to 1485" – "a perfect title," Jim thought, for the way it "crystallized the article's niggling mindlessness, its funereal parade of yawn-enforcing facts, the pseudo-light it threw upon non-problems". (Jacobs 1995: 149) After the novel's publication, the reaction at Swansea was positive, proving that indeed the academic environment and the academics satirised and ridiculed in the book weren't based on Amis's experiences as a lecturer at that university. When Journalist Daniel Farson visited Amis for an interview, one lecturer told him, "We're awfully lucky to have this young man with us, but of course I disagree with everything he stands for." (Salwak 1992:62)

Professor Welch, head of the history department that employs and torments Jim Dixon, has more complex origins, as does the professor's family. Bardwell is the family name of Amis's wife Hilly, so her father and mother became known as Daddy B and Mummy B, while Amis's were by similar logic Daddy A and Mummy A. Daddy B was "a townsman by birth and a countryman by adoption", according to himself. An eccentric character he was keen on folk-dancing and had learned three languages which had nothing in common except the fact that they were spoken by very few people – Welsh, Swedish and Romansh.

Amis had very powerful ironic feelings towards his father-in-law. He thought he must put him in a book, if only to stop himself from murdering the old man. After spending six days at his Harwell home in January, Amis wrote to Larkin:

I have jotted down a few notes for my next book about Daddy B; I don't see how I can avoid doing him in fiction if I am to refrain from stabbing him under the fifth rib in fact. I have been thinking of a kind of me-and-the-Bardwells theme for it all, ending with me poking one of Hilly's brother's wife as a revenge on them all. I heard a hell of a lot more about Sweden, some anecdotes twice, and a hell of a lot more about folk dancing and folk culture, and a hell of a lot more about the language of the Romanschi, and a hell of a lot more about all his friends in London. The best time was when I was lying in a partially filled bath with him in the room underneath accompanying on the piano, his foot regularly tapping, folk tunes which he was playing on the gramophone, there being a difference in pitch between the two sources of sound of approximately one-3rd of a full tone. As one vapid, uniformly predictable tune ended and another began I found that the top tap was now dispensing cold water, and, getting out of the bath, began drying myself.(Jacobs 1995:148)

In July Amis returned to his ironic theme. "My hatred of Daddy B has reached a new high," he told Larkin. He and Hilly had been with friends to a carnival at Eynsham and they returned to Marriner's Cottage for tea when:

The old ape-man turned up – he had "come to see the country dancing" ... without the ape we should have been a merry party, but the ape went on sitting about and grinning and spoiling everything by his presence and not realising it and doddering about and missing his bus so that he stayed till seven bugging things up for six people just by being there. I hate him; I hate him; I hate the old ape's bastard. I have almost stopped being amused by hating him; too ... I shall swing for the old cockchafer unless I put him in a book, recognisably, so that he will feel hurt and bewildered at being so hated.(Jacobs 1995:148)

Amis needed to make his Professor Welch keen on something similarly awful to Daddy B's folk-dancing but thought it should be at least a little different so as to avoid making the character to recognisable. So he made Welch a fan of madrigals instead. The arty flavour of the Welch household resembles that of the Bardwells' too. Amis described the Whitsun weekend he spent there in 1949 to Larkin:

We had a nice Whitson, I hope you did, wasn't the weather marvelous, we went over to the Mrs' people over at Harwell, proper scream the old boy os osod is with his folk-dancing, and old Bill [Bardwell, Hilly's brother, a composer] with his concertos and sympathies, little Marion Partin[g]ton [Hilly's niece] was their two. I had all the usual kicks, an account of a blind fiddler, over eighty he is, at Adderbury, a meritless short story shown to me by mummy b-, a talentless and flavourless sonatina played me, gratuitously, by Wm. ... Bill B. has given himself the shits by his own filthy French cooking – that'll teach him, with his I'm-more-at-home-in-France-than-in-England balls – Yes, you stab rad [bastard], you ARE, you star dab.(Jacobs 1995:148)

Larkin sometimes helps Amis involuntarily, providing the writer with new ideas to incorporate into his character. In a letter to Amis in July 1946 Larkin responds to Amis's early reports on Hilly's relatives and says:

I hate anybody who does anything unusual at all, whether it's make a lot of money or dress in silly clothes or read books of foreign words or know a lot about anything or play any musical instrument [menstruin] or pretend that they believe anything out of the ordinary that requires a lot of courage, or a lot of generosity, or a lot of self-count-roll, to believe it – because they are usually such sodding nasty people that I know it is 1000-1 that they are showing off – and they don't know it but I know it.(Jacobs 1995:88)

This closely resembles Jim's first public disclosure of his inner world. At one point Amis experienced professional uncertainties very similar to Jim's. In November 1950 he travelled from Swansea to Oxford for his B.Litt. to find that the senior examiner was his ex-supervisor, Lord David Cecil. Cecil failed the thesis, and his reasons for doing so were not academic. When he had sought advice on the direction upon his thesis, Cecil could hardly ever be found. Amis asked if he could change supervisors and F.W. Bateson agreed to take him on. Cecil signed the appropriate form without comment, but his reappearance as vengeful examiner indicates that the sensitive aristocrat had been offended. Although Leonard Bardwell was the model for Neddy Welch, Cecil played a part in the latter's construction. Like Cecil, Welch treats his professional environment as a "fiefdom" and cares very little about the future prospects of his juniors. When Jim attempts to speak to his boss about his article, Welch always seems to have something else to do, not unlike the indifferent attitude of Lord David to his graduate student. Also Jim's dependence on Welch for a job and for the security of his future is obviously a reflection of Amis's dependence on Cecil for the promotion of his degree and while the latter chose to fail him it fortunately did not have a negative impact on Amis's position inside the university.

Amis's other satirical stab at academia involved a man he would never meet but who was known to everyone who studied or taught English: F.R. Levis. In his 1948 book, *The Great Tradition*, Levis proposed an ideal English canon and the criteria for selecting the great authors. The best novelists and consequently the ones worth teaching in universities were those who in some way preserved the moral positions that underpinned English culture. These positions advocated "openness" in the face of life, a commitment to the value of traditionally English folk ways, an approval of a natural, organic mode of existence and a mistrust of modern, post-industrial and metropolitan culture. Amis loathed the view that literature should be used or interpreted as a vehicle for moral, political or philosophical ideals. He must have been particularly annoyed by Levis's opinion that Tom Jones did not belong in the canon because it seemed to endorse the immoral, directionless urbanity of its eighteenth-century readers especially since Fielding was and remained Amis's favourite pre-twentieth-century novelist and influenced his work to a great extent. Neddy Welch's obsession with folk culture was partly a borrowing from Leonard Bardwell and as these two passages demonstrate, one taken from Jim's Welch inspired lecture on the joys of medieval England and the second is from one of Levis's essays on the same topic partly from *The Great Tradition*:

Amis: What, finally, is the practical application of all this? Can anything be done to halt, or even hinder, the process I have described? I say to you that something can be done by each of us here tonight. Each of us can resolve to do something, every day, to resist the application of manufactured standards, to protest against sham architecture, to resist the importation into more and more places of loudspeakers relaying the Light Programme, to say one word against the Yellow Press, against the best-seller, against the theatre organ, to say one word for the instinctive culture of the integrated village-type community. In that way we shall be saying a word, however small in its individual effect, for our native tradition, for our

common heritage, in short, for what we once had and may, someday, have again – Merrie England.(Jacobs 1995:110)

Levis: This strength of English belongs to the very spirit of the language – the spirit that was formed when the English people who formed it were predominantly rural ... And how much richer the life was in the old, predominantly rural order than in the modern suburban world ... When one adds that speech in the old order was a popularly cultivated art, that people talked [so making Shakespeare possible] instead of reading or listening to the wireless, it becomes plain that the promise of regeneration by American slang, popular city idiom, or invention of transition cosmopolitans is a flimsy consolation for our loss.(Jacobs 1995:110-111)

Perhaps the most enduring feature of Jim Dixon's, and the one that makes the reader sympathetic towards him despite his hypocrisy and mediocrity, is the fact that under no circumstances does he take himself seriously, a quality that both helps him to oppose the most unpleasant people in the novel and adds to *Lucky Jim's* comic tone. Bradbury points out that while Jim is "the traditional comic hero," he is also "the man who is pleasantly attuned to the present in its plainest forms".(Salwak, 1992:65) Thus, Jim is both realistic and reasonable, and his reasonableness makes up for his shortcomings.

Despite being lazy and cynical he looks at everyone including himself with a sane, critical good sense, devoid of pretence or self-delusions. Dixon is aware of his limitations and under no circumstances does he attempt to hide them under an artificial and carefully crafted outer persona, something he opposes and ridicules in the case of some of the other characters especially the Welches. David Lodge points out:

Temperament and circumstances impel him to present a false appearance to the world: he pretends to be a keen young scholar and university teacher, when in fact he detests his subject and despises his colleagues; he pretends to be sympathetically attracted to Margaret when in fact he finds her plain and tedious. What makes us value Jim above the other shams in the novel is the fact that at least he admits he is a sham, chiefly to himself; and that his deceptions – as in the case of Margaret – can reflect a kind of moral decency as well as a kind of moral cowardice.(Salwak 1992:65)

Jim refuses to identify with those characters who deny their own hypocrisies and whose perceptions of reality are distorted by various degrees of egotism. Consequently, his aversion towards Professor Welch is understandable not only in terms of the power relations between the two but also in terms of a fundamental difference between their views on how people should behave and relate to themselves. In the novel, Welch is presented in certain key scenes as a caricature to the point of dehumanisation. For example, Welch's state of mind is characterized by a disrupted disjointed communication, so that the supposedly learned and eminent university professor appears to suffer from a form of incipient senility. Furthermore, his behaviour at work and in various social settings seems programmed.

Two scenes stand out as pertinent illustrations of Welch's mechanical motions and emotions, the results of a carefully crafted routine. In one scene Jim tries to remind the professor of a promised afternoon at the Welches' home. Welch's speech patterns are suggestive of the character, but also produce a comic moment:

“Ah, just caught you,” Dixon said convivially. “Thought you’d gone without me, Professor,” he added, nearly too late.

The other raised his narrow face, distorted with wonder. “Gone?” he asked. “You’re ...”

“You’re taking me home for tea,” Dixon enunciated. “We arranged it on Monday, at coffee time, in the Common Room.” ...

Welch had been flicking water from his hands, a movement he now arrested. He looked like an African savage being shown a simple conjuring trick. He said: “Coffee-time?”

“Yes, on Monday,” Dixon answered him, putting his hands into his pockets and bunching the fists.

“Oh,” Welch said, and looked at Dixon for the first time. “Oh. Did we say this afternoon?”(Amis 1992:11-12)

Another relevant scene and one of the funniest in the novel occurs when Welch, the ill-made human machine, drives another machine, his car:

“A minute later Dixon was sitting listening to a sound like the ringing of a cracked door-bell as Welch pulled at the starter. This died away into a treble humming that seemed to involve every component of the car. Welch tried again; this time the effect was of beer bottles jerkily belaboured. Before Dixon could do more than close his eyes he was pressed firmly back against the seat, and his cigarette, still burning, was cuffed out of his hand into some interstice of the floor. With a tearing of gravel under the wheels the car burst from a standstill towards the grass verge, which Welch ran over briefly before turning down the drive. They moved towards the road at walking pace, the engine maintaining a loud lowing sound which caused a late group of students, most of them wearing the yellow and green College scarf, to stare after them from the small covered-in space beside the lodge where sports notices were posted.”(Amis 1992:11-12)

Inflexible and inefficient both in thoughts and actions Welch is portrayed as a detestable and artificial figure. He is pathetic in the sense that he allowed himself to be consumed by his fabricated persona to the point of dehumanisation, thus becoming an automaton.

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