

THE POWER OF MONEY IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE AS SEEN THROUGH JOHN SELF IN MARTIN AMIS' MONEY: A SUICIDE NOTE

Bossoun Koumabe, Adissa Mikael & Gnonlonfoun Jean-Marc

Research Scholar, Benin Public University, Benin, Edo State, Nigeria

Received: 26 Aug 2019

Accepted: 22 Oct 2019

Published: 31 Oct 2019

ABSTRACT

This article explored the effects of money in our lives in today's world through the lenses of John Self, the protagonist in Martin Amis' Money A Suicide Note. Based on extracts from the novel, it has been shown that money has led to the rise and fall of the protagonist. Indeed, with money gained from immoral sources, he was used to smoking, drinking, eating junk food, and enjoying nude magazines. Disillusioned later on, he has learnt how to use money to give meaning to his own life. This clearly depicts how, through the power of money, contemporary man has indulged in addiction, overdrinking, and pornography. It is hoped that the warning of Amis will be understood worldwide so that money will no more be considered a predominant factor of power's homogenization of the individual.

KEYWORDS: *Martin Amis, Money, Immorality, Modern World, Money a Suicide Note*

INTRODUCTION

Today, the role of money in people's life is of paramount importance. Indeed, with money, a much more effective and harmonious life can be lived. As such, property and/or wealth are so valued that people are ready to get money at any cost. This may explain the general loss of cardinal life values and moralities (solidarity, truthfulness, honesty, love, etc.) among people. As a consequence, we appear to be trapped in a spiral of property without knowing how we are threatening with it.

A contemporary British writer, Martin Amis, in his novel *Money a Suicide Note*, has drawn readers' attention to the moral crisis through his presentation of the life story of John Self, the main protagonist of the said novel. Indeed, through him, Amis attacks violently the capitalist society in the last two decade of Britain, in which he demonstrated how people's life has twisted together. Furthermore, he showed how people are determined in situations that rooted in a magic of money. Moral deviation in the life of the protagonist, which is based upon the central position of money in his life, is conceptualized and characterized by Amis.

Summarizing the Novel through the Main Protagonist

In *Money: A Suicide Note*, Amis portrays the life of John Self, the protagonist, to show how his life get formed and deformed by the power of money. Indeed, the debasement of values in John's life is caused by the weight of money and the counterintuitive internal relationship of money. The embodiment of the protagonist, who is proud of himself for being a TV commercial, has been under investigation of some critics. Having experienced hard times due to the lack of money, who has experienced hard times in his childhood and especially in his teenage as an orphan, considers money as having a very substantial role in life.

In his teenage period, he had to work in a striptease pub due to the lack of money and for survival in his life. Such an experience seems to be one of the reasons why John Self in his adulthood tries to get money at any price. The greed of getting money in the mind of the protagonist was the only way to get out of his misty and sad life. His background taught him money brings power and success. In this way, John's life little by little surrounded by alcohol, pornography and other types of addictions commonly observed in contemporary societies.

The greed of getting power through property or money leads to the different subdivisions in the life of the protagonist. He trusted his friend without the knowledge of the conspiracy that the former had arranged for him. As a consequence, he had to escape to London and he decided to commit suicide to avoid the risk of poverty. However, he survived. Though moneyless, he decided to start a new life. By depicting the protagonist's life in such a way, Amis insists on the value of material and financial concern among people these days. Perhaps, the deterioration and destruction of John Self's life is to be found in his unrestrained narcissistic life due to the power of the money he had.

John' Redemption

The world of John is the world of pornography and money, which encompasses his life. Perhaps, the unrestrained self and narcissism in the life of John Self contributed to the delusion of his life. The dominance of materialist aspects in people's life is intolerable. As can be observed throughout the novel, John was seduced by the allegorical power of money which appears to him as being the only salvation. Perhaps, Martin Amis, in his novel, attempts to verify the great shift, which is occurring or it has already occurred. Amis depicts the world where the transcendental entities are changed; the power of wealth is the power of God. Benyei, in her article, attacks such a materialistic world when she states that people tend "to insure [themselves] with the wealth. material salvation is the only salvation, [and] what salvation is God. Hence money is God" (Benyei NP). Progress and growth by money with no regard for ethics and moralities is the most important motive underlying of John's fall from his situation. Possibly, the author advertently creates such a stupid, mutilated, poor and narrow-minded character to represent the delusion in modern life under the reign of money. Martin Amis, by creating such character, makes an effort to confirm the delusional life of people in postmodern era, which leads to corruption. Eli A. Edmondson believes: "In *Money: A suicide note*, Amis explores the miasma of post modern reality by investigating the strange life and fast uniquely fragmented character, the narrator, John Self" (Edmondson NP).

Undoubtedly, 'the suicide note' in the title of the novel represents a kind of intellectual suicide. Such a suicide happens twice in the novel: the first time when John realizes that he fails in his life and the second when he finds out that his real father is a very poor man. John lost his financial, physical, and especially emotional dreams with Selina. He found out the true character of Selina when he told her he falls in love with her and proposed her for marriage, but she answered: "I'm not capable of true love. It isn't true. I truly love money. Truly I do. Oh, money, I love you. You're so democratic: you've got no favourites. You even things out for me and my kind" (80). This clear-cut position has the advantage of seemingly having opened John's eyes to the darkest reality he has been living in but seemingly did not want to acknowledge.

John's New Life

John' immersion in the world of money placed his life in unstable position. He is unconscious about the conspiracy has been arranged to him. Not only, he is not in his process of self-development, but also he is in his process of self-degradation and destruction under the control of money. It was very late when he became conscious about his inadequacy

and incapability of his work. The only way to get out of his imaginary world is to redeem him of that. By the power of money, which portrays in his mind, not only he doesn't capture any power but, he ends up with moral transgressions. He concludes his project without any redemption.

The result of self-appraisal of the protagonist against standing his moral transgression in his imaginary world made him to come out from such viciousness world and start new sense of pleasure in the real world. Carlos Silva Companon approves the idea, with his statement: "Aesthetic and moral delights are the spontaneous outcomes of such intellectual exchange" (Companion 95). He encounters a chance of a new life without the greed of money. The excessive desire of money not only gives him failure and frustration but also gives him new conception. Again the dirty nature of money reveals to John when he finds that most of their friends get away from him because they were under debts. He had a lot of experience and get different idea about the power of money.

He whispered: "Maybe money is the great conspiracy, the great fiction. The great addiction too: we're all addicted and we can't break the habit now... you just can't kick it, that junk, even if you want to. You can't get the money monkey off your back" (127). The true meaning of love appeared when he gets familiar with his new girlfriend Georgina. She loves him not because of money like Selina, his previous girl friend. The passion of new life for him emerged with her and he decides to forget his rogue memories, especially when he realizes that still he can enjoy his life without greed of money. He expresses: "I want money again but I feel better now that I haven't got any. There are these little pluses. You, they can't do much to you when you haven't got any money" (130).

CONCLUSIONS

Upon reading and analyzing the novel under study, it appears that most of our lives, in this modern world, consist in looking fiercely for money. Unfortunately, money has become of paramount importance. The pervasive influence of materialism has led to a profound distortion of human values. Therefore, as John Self eventually comes to learn, the true value of life lies in the balance of using money and not the power of money.

REFERENCES

1. Amis, Martin. *Money A Suicide Note*. London: Vintage. 2005
2. Ayres, Jackson. *Confirming the new orthodoxy? Martin Amis's Money and Thatcherism*. *Twentieth Century Literature*. Spring 2014. Web. 20. Sep. 2015.
3. Campañón, C. S. (2004). *Through the Looking Glass: America in Martin Amis's Money: A Suicide Note*. *Atlantis*, 26, 87–96.
4. Benyei, Tamas. *Allegory and Allegorsis in Martin Amis's Money*. 2001.
5. Brown, Richard. *Martin Amis Overview*. *Literature Source Center: Copyright 2007 Gale*. Web. 15/08/2015. P tint.
6. Companon, Carlos, Silva. *Through the Looking Class: American in Martin Amis's Money: A Suicide Note*. *University Autonoma de Barcelona: Atlantis 26.2 2004*.
7. Edmondson, Elie. *Martin Amis Writes Postmodern Man*. *Critique 42.2 (2001): 145–54*.

8. Freitas, ElaSimoen Lucas. *Lessons in humiliation in three Mystery Novel's Money, the Information and Night Train*. http://www.bookrags.com/criticism/amis_martin_1949_crit/6/web.
9. McCulloch, Jamie. *Creating the Rogue Hero: Literary Devices in the Picaresque Novel of Martin Amis*, Richard Russo, MichealChabon, Janathan Safran Foer, Steve Tesich. *International Fiction Review*. Jan 2007. Web. 20 Sep 2015.

AUTHOR PROFILE



BOSSOUN Koumabé holds various degrees including a Masters in Religious studies and a Doctorate Degree in English Literature from Benin public university. He is the author and co-author of five research papers on different aspects pertaining to the topics aforementioned. He is member of several research teams and foundations among which PeBCO Bethesda.



ADISSA Mikael holds a Masters in British Literature and Civilization as well as Afro-American studies and comparative studies from Benin public university. He is the author and co-author of three research papers on the issues of religion as depicted in literary works. He is member of the CEFRESSH center. In addition, he is a religious leader in the Christian community.



GNONLONFOUN Jean-Marc is a teacher in secondary school as well as in private institutes in Benin. He has earned a Doctorate degree in TEFL at one of the Beninese public universities. He has written seven scientific papers on different subjects including Teacher education, technologies applied to instruction, etc. His areas of interest in research include instruction and learning, vocational studies, Foreign languages and social studies. He is a prominent member of several research teams including ARS/SAR, CEFRESSH, LARPET/ENSET, CEFSM, PAY, etc.