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SENTIMENTAL COMEDY IN MARTIN AMIS'S "STATE OF ENGLAND" AND "THE COINCIDENCE OF THE ARTS"

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Although Martin Amis has been a well-established writer since the publication of *The Rachel Papers* in 1973, his latest work of fiction *Heavy Water and Other Stories*, released in 1998,¹ has attracted surprisingly scarce critical response. This is partly due to the fact that this collection, comprising nine short stories culled between 1975 and 1997, appears somewhat fragmented when compared to *Einstein's Monsters*, Amis's first attempt at short fiction, which deals with the nuclear threat. Yet, while this might be regarded as a structural flaw that explains the paucity of critical texts, some of the unflattering comments made by reviewers remain unjustified. For instance, in her scathing review entitled "Fat Men, Thin Lives", Natasha Walter finds fault with the supposed grossness of most stories, the ludic component of which allegedly fails to elicit the reader's involvement: "You know these tales aren't about you, really; and though you can sit down and spend an hour playing some game with them, you know that, in the end, it's exactly that: a game" (Walter 1998: 82). The only compliment paid to the collection concerns Amis's style, an opinion shared by Thomas Smyth in *World Literature Today* ("Language here is Amis's strongest suit" [Smyth 2000: 155]) or by Tom Shone in *The Times Literary Supplement*. "when he is writing well, his sentences appear to have written themselves" (Shone 1998: 21).

Such slightly disparaging analyses do not however do justice to the contents of this collection. Since it is impossible, given the restriction of space, to examine the nine

stories, this article will attempt to explore "State of England" and "The Coincidence of the Arts"—the longest and arguably the most complex texts of the collection—with a view to presenting the similarities and differences these stories bear with regard to the conventions of sentimental comedy, which will enable us to shed light on the aesthetic and ethical choices that underlie Amis's recent production.

In *Sentimental Comedy: Theory & Practice*, Frank H. Ellis describes sentimental comedy as a hybrid subgenre which "rouses the comic 'sympathy and ridicule' plus the sentimental reaction" (Ellis 1991: 22) by depicting antagonistic and funny—though sometimes painful—situations which, while eliciting laughter, also favour sentimental reactions through the representation of pathos and empathy with the plight of others. The "sentimental reaction", Ellis argues, is grounded in the representation of "a spectrum of attitudes reaching from pity for a non-existing object at one extreme to pity for all humanity at the other", intermediate attitudes including "pity for the poor", "pity for slaves", "pity for self", or "pity for dead father" (Ellis 1991: 4-5). In *Sensibility: An Introduction*, Janet Todd, who uses the terms "sentimentality" and "sensibility" as synonyms, states that the paramount criterion for sentimental literature is that it "buttonholes the reader and demands an emotional, even physical, response" thanks to the "arousal of pathos through conventional situations, stock familial characters and rhetorical devices" (Todd 1986: 3). Pathos is also elicited through the spectacle of undeserved distress undergone by victims "whose misery is demanded by their predicament as defenceless women, aged men, helpless infants or melancholic (sic) youths" (Todd 1986: 3). Although sentimental literature is oftentimes discarded on the grounds that it suggests "an indulgence in and display of emotion for its own sake beyond the stimulus and beyond propriety" (Todd 1986: 8), the connection between sentimental comedy and "overt moralizing" (Ellis 1991: 20) is manifest: "In all forms of sentimental literature, there is an assumption that life and literature are directly linked, not through any notion of a mimetic depiction of reality but through the belief that the literary experience can intimately affect the living one" (Todd 1986: 4).

If Martin Amis has been unanimously lauded for his comic talent,² is it at all possible to reconcile the features of sentimental comedy with Amis's supposedly cynical fiction?³ To try to demonstrate that "State of England" and "The Coincidence of the Arts" are informed by sentimental comedy, we will first analyse the comic vein of these texts before assessing how sentimental victimisation foregrounds eschatological concerns. We will finally appraise the paradoxical patterns of reconciliation federating both stories.

Penned in demotic language, "State of England" is a proletarian comedy that depicts the sexual, racial and social humiliation of Big Mal, a lumpen bouncer who feels *déclassé* and alienated in a multi-ethnic England while attempting to come to terms with his estranged wife, Sheilagh, his Asian mistress, Linzi, and his son, Little Jet. For instance, the insight which Mal and his "mate" Bern give into the game lost by their sons is couched in hilarious slangy journalese: "They agreed it was small fucking wonder their boys had taken a caning: nine-nil. The defense was crap and midfield created fuck-all" (37). Because of the subversion inherent in terms of abuse, Mal's excessive second-hand harangue,⁴ targeted at nobody in particular and as such harmless, reinforces the bonds between Bern and Mal, thereby fostering a harmonious sense of working class connivance,⁵ further consolidated by Bern's degrading anecdote about the Queen's supposed sexual intercourse with an intrusive commoner: "They reckon he fucked her. Reckon he gave her one" (37). By decrowning the emblem of the British monarchy, Bern's Rabelaisian distancing from the establishment, what Ward Parks would call an "other-oriented attack" in an "inter-societal context" (Parks 1986: 445), contributes to transforming "State" into a "condition of England" comedy in which the proletarian point of view that is privileged relentlessly satirises the other half of the nation, i.e. the aristocracy.

Although Rodney Peel, an English baronet adrift on the New York art scene, is the focaliser of "Coincidence", this story lampoons the aristocracy too. "Coincidence" satirically relates the artistic and racial rivalry which pits Sir Rodney against Pharsin Courier, a Black janitor and part-time novelist.⁶ The vicarious class war breaks out when Pharsin vilifies Rodney's procrastination: "This is a farce, man. Have you read my novel yet?" (78). The story's beginning *in medias res* immediately links Pharsin's pent-up anger with a literary genre eliciting laughter on the part of the reader, a connection phonetically reinforced by the very name of the enunciator. The climax of "Coincidence" is moreover constituted by the confrontation between the cuckold husband and Rodney, a coup de théâtre dramatised by Pharsin's explosive anger: "OPEN THIS FUCKING DOOR RIGHT NOW" (105). The countdown fosters a sense of danger made more explicit by Pharsin's physical threat: "YOU GOT ONE MINUTE. THEN I RIP THIS DOOR OFF THE FUCKING WALL. SIXTY. FIFTY-NINE. FIFTY-EIGHT" (105). Yet the paroxysmic fight between a descendant of David and a Goliath of a man is bathetically defused by Rodney's extolling but hackneyed comments on Pharsin's artistic mastery, which eventually strengthens comedy. It is when the paroxysm of *agon*, with mock physical violence, is reached that Amis's satirical comedy reaches its apex, or, as Ronald Shusterman has demonstrated with reference to a Monty Python sketch, "a world of utter contradiction, filled with insults, frustration, linguistic aggression [...]" may give rise to a joyous aesthetic experience (Shusterman 2002: 123).

In "Coincidence", Martin Amis therefore pens a "condition of America" story that evinces the conflicting existence of two nations separated both by monetary status and racial differences. Antagonism is further materialised by Pharsin's *ad hominem* attacks launched against Rodney: "What's the fucking title?" (83); "Bullshit!" when Rodney is unable to tell him the correct title (86) or "I keep hearing about these goddamn wines you got" (103) when Rodney patronisingly promises to discuss Pharsin's novel after a Platonic banquet or *comissatio*. Because they function as cathartic mechanisms of retaliation that delay brawls, the agonistic dialogues of "Coincidence" are akin to what is known in Afro-American folklore as "the dozens"⁷ especially since Pharsin, a black American, is infuriated by what he perceives as Rodney's deliberate scorn:

'Well what the fuck's the story, Rod? You read my novel yet or what? [...] Now this is basically some *rude shit* we're looking at here. Why the contempt, Rod? What's your answer?' (93).

Resorting to the rhetorical device of the *quaesitio*, Pharsin's oral belligerence contrasts with Rodney's equanimity grounded in "a *strategy of cool*" and "a *strategy of measured response*", typical of "the dozens" (Garner 1983: 51). Amis comically adapts tools characteristic of US fiction, which throws into relief the persistent American filiation of his prose.⁸

Nonetheless, Amis's comic portrayal of class war does not univocally sympathise with proletarians, thus refusing to endorse wholeheartedly the "pity of the poor" typical of sentimental works. Indeed, proletarians also are caricatured, as is instanced by Mal's and Sheilagh's domestic quarrel:

'Now give me my fucking money.'

'Whoff fucking money?'

'Whoff fucking money? *My* fucking money' (33).

Thanks to the almost mechanical repetition of the phrase "fucking money", their verbal parrying, based on epiphora and heightened by stichomythia, causes the reader to laugh at the expense of the characters. *Agon*, instrumentalised to reveal the existence of sharp social contrasts, serves comedy and Amis's satirical intents which are directed at the class system since both the aristocrats and the proletarians are laughed at. This condemnation is aesthetically heightened by Amis's creativity illustrated by the deviant spelling mirroring Mal's and Sheilagh's substandard pronunciation. The adversarial dialogue between Mal and Sheilagh provides an embryonic example of "flyting", a term that designates, according to Ward Parks, "an exchange of insults and boasts between two heroes in some public setting, such as the mead-hall or the battle-field" (Parks 1986: 441). On account of the

inarticulateness of both debaters, the "flyting", frequent in epic narratives, is necessarily reduced to a minimum and transposed to the modern arena of the sports field. The generic ambiguity of "State" is thus manifest since it is a comedy which transposes the serious subgenre of "condition of England" novels onto which are grafted, via the "flyting", mock epic modalities which are more in accord with what has been called the postmodern condition. Furthermore, the double geographical setting in "Coincidence" eventually allows Martin Amis to broaden his scope and deliver a piece of short fiction comically describing the "condition of the Western world" at the end of the millennium, which further evidences continuity since it confirms Karl Miller's intuition that "Martin Amis is the latest of Anglo-American dualistic artists" (Miller 1987: 410).

Yet these stories are problem pieces in that the themes tackled by Amis — social alienation, artistic rivalry and marital infidelity — are far from being intrinsically hilarious. It proves that Charles Highway's paradoxical motto in *The Rachel Papers* ("The nastier a thing, the funnier it gets" [Amis 1973: 88]) still provides the starting point of Amis's recent fiction — but the starting point only. It is indeed impossible to contend that the dominant tonality in "State" and in "Coincidence" is comical insofar as the surface mock violence cannot totally conceal gloomier cases of physical violence. When laughter occurs, it is always in the dark.

The tenuous borderline between verbal duelling and violence is indeed blurred whenever agonistic dialogues are wedded to physical action, which transforms the victim into a teratological creature: "With fights and fighting, this was ancient knowledge. When you received a wound, you didn't just have to take it, sustain it. You didn't just have to bear it. You also had to wear it, for all to see, until it healed" (35). The deictic pronoun "you" establishes a phatic link with the reader, thus encouraging a process of identification with the victims. Mal's gnomic reflections are programmatic of Mrs Pharsin's stigmata in "Coincidence", which are caused by a nascent domestic conflict ("Soon afterwards he started to find the bruises. / Nothing florid or fulminant. Just a different kind of dark beneath the dark" [101]), the proportions of which increase daily: "the nether lip all smudged and split, and the right cheekbone loudly marked, as if swiped with a hot daub of rouge" (104). The cosmetic metaphor triggers off the reader's pity by foregrounding Mrs Pharsin's outraged femininity. If marital violence is more latent in "State" since Fat Lol's aggressiveness at his virago of a wife remains verbal ("Shut it!" [52, 53]), Fat Lol's son, Vic, ironically predestined by his name to be a victim, fears that he might get beaten up ("his son flinching when either parent made a move for the vinegar or the brown sauce" [52-53]), a case of child abuse that is condemned by the text as a vice perpetrated against a defenceless victim, a *topos* of sentimental works.

Yet the texts avoid Manichaeism since aggressive characters are simultaneously depicted as victims. Although it could be interpreted as an instance of carnivalesque poetic justice, Mal's "laceration on the side of his face", after he has been mugged by a group of opera goers (31), is in fact exploited to reinforce the reader's anxiety at the portrait of Great Britain's violence. Metonymically evidenced by Mal's groan of pain ("A!") whenever he jams his phone into his sore ear (31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 49, 56, 57), Mal's *corpus dolens* symbolises his *angst*: "A! Always it was with him, every hour, like an illness, like a haunting" (34). Mal's pain heralds Pharsin's self-pity: "It's not just me who's hurting-it's everyone around me" (103). Pharsin's weakness, analogous to the tragic hero's *hamartia*, imbues "Coincidence" with sentimental overtones since the pity of the reader for the aggressor is reinforced by the fact that Pharsin himself seems to be the victim of the mad impulse personified by the Greek goddess *Ate* ("Come on, man. This is getting insane" [82]), which tones down his responsibility. Such ambivalence symbolises the multi-faceted demands made on the readers by Amis's texts that refuse simplistic formulae.

This microcosmic violence is strengthened by the dystopian traits of contemporary society. New York City indeed sounds more and more like a roaring Bedlam, the white noise of which thwarts human communication ("The city was getting louder every day: even the sirens had to throw a tantrum, just to make themselves heard" [78-79]) or truncates street conversations ("But Pharsin's monosyllable was quite canceled by city stridor—someone detonating a low-yield nuclear weapon or dropping a dumpster from a helicopter" [84-85]). The use of hyperbole shows that harmful commodities turn Amis's urban landscape into an uncanny waste land on the brink of nuclear holocaust. Such rhetoric underscores continuity in Amis's fiction since it illustrates that nuclear weapons—which are, as the author points out in his introduction to *Einstein's Monsters*, "biblical in their anger" (Amis 1987: 2)—constitutes a remanent preoccupation.

If "Coincidence" features a world menaced by nuclear apocalypse, a sense of doom is also recurrent in "State" since natural elements have themselves degenerated into wrathful avengers, recalling the Nemesis of Greek tragedies or the jealous God of the Ancient Testament, as if the Day of Judgement, or *Dies Irae*, was imminent: "The sun was neither hot nor high just incredibly intense, as if you could hear it, the frying roar of its winds. Every year the sun did this, subjecting the kingdom to the fiercest and most critical scrutiny" (40). The world thus dangles perpetually on the brink of apocalyptic chaos, which is not surprising since eschatology constitutes another traditional Amisian theme embodied for instance by "the Crisis" which serves as the backdrop of *London Fields* or by the apocalyptic hints of climate malfunctioning that saturates *The Information*. Contrary to eighteenth-century sentimental works which promote "cosmic optimism" (Ellis 1991: 11),

"State" and "Coincidence" harp on about cosmic pessimism by bringing to the surface so much underlying violence that it eventually cancels out the jovial impression initially conveyed. Faithful to the definition of sentimental comedy, the polytonality of Amis's texts, which juxtaposes two rivalling moods, keeps the reader off balance because he / she knows that, at any time, laughter may erupt from social comedy or else horror and desperation may be produced by a random instance of wanton violence.

Nevertheless, claiming that "State" and "Coincidence" promote either sophisticated laughter or apocalyptic melancholy would fail to take into account the endings of both texts.

Indeed, "State" and "Coincidence" transcend nasty comedy and nihilistic violence by sketching patterns of reconciliation. Marital conflicts are for instance solved since Mal and Sheilagh's marriage is patched up in a highly pathetic scene: "By now Mal had both his arms round his head, like a mouth-organist. Because he was talking into his phone and crying into his sleeve" (55). Metonymically symbolised by Mal's tears, the reconciliation between Mal, presented as the quintessential fin-de-siècle male, and Sheilagh, abbreviated as She (33, 36, 49, 51), stands for the coming together of masculine and feminine allegories. Mrs Pharsin, who no longer exhibits signs of domestic abuse ("her face and her long bare arms were quite free of contusion" [112]), also participates in this renewed lust for life, all the more so since she has given birth to a boy called Julius (112). Generation tensions are moreover eased by Mal's optimistic—if ambiguous—motto based on binary rhythm, alliteration and epizeuxis ("to continue with the next fuck or fight, to continue, to continue" [61]), which is materialised by his agreeing to run for his son in the Fathers' Race. Such unexpected *dénouements* have strong affinity with sentimental works which, for the most part, "function through a plot of sudden reversal" (Todd 1986: 4), especially since Jet stops abusing his father and switches from "You're a crap sprinter" to "You're a *sad* sprinter" (61-62), a *correctio* that is emblematic of how "State" ultimately instrumentalises pathos to stage a degree of optimism that strikes a surprising note in Amis's usually more lugubrious fiction.

Furthermore, both stories finally stage social and racial concord, best dramatised by the serene ending of "Coincidence", the locus of resolution being a London café where Mrs Pharsin, a commoner, and Rodney, an aristocrat who no longer uses his title (111), gently converse, thus symbolising the erosion of the class system and the restoration of communication. Based on stichomythia, their civilised sociolect, which functions as a "bond-producing interaction" (Parks 1986: 449), is linguistically heightened by multiple echoic devices:

'So the rain held off.'
'Yeah. It's been nice.'

'Thought it looked like rain earlier.'
 'Me too. Thought it was going to piss down.'
 'But it held off.'
 'Yeah', she said. 'It held off' (113).

The final epiphora suggests consensus, which is reinforced by the circularity of this dialogue conveyed by epanalepsis. Cosmically blessed by the improving weather conditions, their reconciliation echoes the meteorological simile that embodies racial harmony in "State": "he [Mal] had felt wonderfully evolved, like a racial rainbow, ready to encompass a new world" (39). Reminiscent of Miranda's wonder in *The Tempest*, Mal's euphoric sense of integration in a utopian brave new world characterised by multi-culturalism is conveyed by the image of the rainbow, as if the *Homo Cosmopolitanus* constituted the last and perfect stage of the Darwinian chain of evolution.⁹

The social *entente cordiale* between Mrs Pharsin and Rodney also has a strong racial component since it crowns the renewed communication between Blacks and Whites. The pact is sealed off by Rodney's money and phrased in such a way as to suggest that what is at stake is race: "'Take it as...' he searched for the right word. Would 'reparations' answer?" (113). The noun may be construed as a kind of moral repayment to make up for the persecution endured by the black community in pre-abolition times, as expressed by the ambivalence of Mrs Pharsin's grievances that Rodney recounts to Rock: "It was me. I put those marks on her" (110). Such racial overtones are intensified by the reference linking Rodney's and Rock's family fortune to the slave trade: "But the Peels and the Robvilles alike had flourished at a time when every English adult with cash or credit owned a piece of it: a piece of slavery" (88). The "pity for slaves", a hallmark of sentimental literature, is aroused by Amis's delaying technique that is grounded in the cataphoric use of the pronoun "it", a linguistic trick akin to anaphorical petition. In fact, the ethical imperative underlying Amis's sentimental comedy is univocal in both "State" and "Coincidence" and is arguably more manifest than in his earlier writings, thus evincing a trend towards what may be called lay wisdom literature.¹⁰

Nevertheless this militancy is buttressed by an exacting aesthetic experience for the reader, which elevates Amis's fiction above mere politically correct propaganda:

They had a dog called Nigger. Their little black dog, their unofficial mascot, who dies, was called Nigger. You couldn't do that now. No way. In a film. Call a dog *Nigger*? No way, no day. Times change. Call a *black* dog Nigger? No shape, no form. Be down on you like a ... Call a dead black dog Nigger in a film? No way José (45).

Mal's jerky interior monologue is based on hypophora, as is evidenced by the three questions that he asks and answers, and on homoioteleuton since José, the Hispanic

Christian name which suggestively ends Mal's reflections on race, rhymes with "way", which itself rhymes with "day". The reader's aesthetic experience, brightened by the euphony and heightened by the passage's streetwise style reminiscent of *skaz*, is yoked to the ethical imperative based on racial reconciliation.

Furthermore, "State" and "Coincidence" eschew simplicity inasmuch as the moments of relative plenitude staged at the end of both stories are constructed through the repetition of negativity, as in this dialogue between Sheilagh and Mal:

She said, 'If you come back —don't do it if you don't mean it.'
 'No way', he said. 'No way, no day. No shape, no form...' (60).

Stability is felt to be ephemeral or, to use the oxymoronic title of chapter 47 of *Dead Babies*, "A Bit Permanent" (Amis 1975: 164-166) because *eiros* is attained via agonistic negativity. This device is duplicated in "Coincidence" since reconciliation is sealed by Mrs Pharsin's negative interrogative clauses ("... So you're not going to murder me? You're not going to slag me off?") which are immediately met by Rodney's repetitive denials: "What? Oh no. No no. No" (111). "State" and "Coincidence" reach reconciliation and harmony through conflicts and negativity, which illustrates Ronald Shusterman's critical stance resting on "what should be a relatively obvious distinction between the *represented content* of a work of art and the *total experience* it provides" (Shusterman 2002: 81-82). Amis's apparent rhetorical negativity in fact mirrors the devices of sentimental literature which, through the frequent use of negative adjectives such as "ungenerous" or "unkind", "emphasize the goodness they negate" (Todd 1986: 5).

To round things off, both "State" and "Coincidence" are based on the conventions of sentimental comedy, as defined by Frank H. Ellis, insofar as Amis's short stories blend the satirical portrait of the declining Western world at the end of the millennium and eschatological issues pathetically emphasised by the representation of defenceless victims. The comical and eschatological veins underline the continuity of Amis's canon, even though and an evolution towards sentimentality becomes manifest. Finally, cosmic pessimism is superseded by a degree of harmony which further underscores the parentage between these texts and sentimental fiction. Aesthetically, Amis's predominantly agonistic style, reminiscent of sentimental literature's partiality for negative rhetoric, is dovetailed with a patent ethical imperative buttressed by the emotion undergone by the reader that prompts him / her to action.

These short stories thus prove that Martin Amis is no doom-laden prophet of gloom advocating nihilistic negativity via totally negative form and apocalyptic portents,¹¹ nor a novelist promoting good sentiments by blending irenic language and euphoric content. It is then the constant discrepancy between form and

content which federates these two short stories and obliges the reader to be perpetually on the alert insofar as he / she is alternately asked to laugh at agonistic dialogues, fear apocalyptic violence and wistfully smile at the spectacle of momentary and fragile serenity attained through negativity. Admittedly, the reader has always been solicited in Amis's texts as David Lodge has noted apropos of *Money's* literary tricks and stylistic vividness: "After many pages of this sort of thing you might fall asleep from exhaustion, but not from boredom" (Lodge 1992: 60). Yet, the engagement between the reader and Amis's texts has changed. Indeed, one witnesses a qualitative evolution in Amis's fiction thanks to a kind of incremental repetition since, on top of the ever-present comic and apocalyptic veins of his earlier writings, Amis incorporates an unusually large amount of sentimentality in his most recent fiction, which eventually provides the unity of *Heavy Water and Other Stories*. And that is what is new in Amis's fiction.

Notes

1. This paper does not take into consideration Martin Amis's latest novel entitled *Yellow Dog*, which is due to come out at the end of 2003.

2. In a review dedicated to Amis *père* and *filis*, Geoffrey Wheatcroft asserts that Martin Amis is well-equipped as a comic writer since he possesses "an anarchic sense of the absurd, an eye for human folly, a pitch-perfect ear for speech" (Wheatcroft 2000: 115).

3. The adjective "sentimental" sounds surprising when applied to Martin Amis's fiction which is supposed to represent only negativity and encourage cynicism on the part of the reader, what Natasha Walter calls the "fixed leer" (Walter 1998: 81). Moreover, David Lodge in *Consciousness and the Novel* facetiously concludes his discussion on Philip Roth's apocalyptic fiction by asserting that "[e]ven Martin Amis admitted to being shocked" (Lodge 2002: 249).

4. By having an illiterate character repeat journalistic sports commentaries, Amis

recycles a device exploited at length in *London Fields*, thus showing that Big Mal is a distant cousin of Keith Talent.

5. Walter completely misses out what is at stake in this passage which she misconstrues as emblematic of Mal's subnormal intellect. In her own terms, it shows that Mal is "breathtakingly inarticulate." (Walter 1998: 82).

6. Martin Amis resorts once again to the literary device lengthily exploited in *Success* via Terence and Gregory or in *London Fields* via Keith and Guy which consists in setting proletarian against aristocratic characters. This tendency has been noted by Amis himself in the "Letter to My Father" enclosed at the end of *Koba the Dread*: "you wrote, very largely, about the bourgeoisie in your fiction, i.e. the middle classes—a category seldom seen in mine, where I make do with the aristocracy, the intelligentsia, the lumpenproletariat, and the *urkas*" (Amis 2002: 272).

7. Thurmon Garner defines "the dozens game" as "an obscene folkloric speech event", based on "a pattern of interactive insult" which can be appraised as "a valve for aggression" (Garner 1983: 47).

8. Victoria N. Alexander has synthesised the stylistic and thematic influences of Amis's surrogate literary fathers, Saul Bellow and Vladimir Nabokov, in her seminal essay entitled "Martin Amis: Between the Influences of Bellow and Nabokov", *The Antioch Review* (Fall 1994): 580-90.

9. The image of the rainbow prepares the reader of *Heavy Water and Other Stories* for the eighth short story, entitled "Straight Fiction", which deals with homosexuality.

10. Amis has univocally asserted his political opinions about sexism and racism

in his non-fiction writings: "Sexism is like racism: we all feel such impulses. Our parents feel them more strongly than we feel them. Our children, we hope, will feel them less strongly than we feel them. People don't change or improve much, but they do evolve. It is very slow." Martin Amis, *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971-2000* (London: Vintage, 2002) 9.

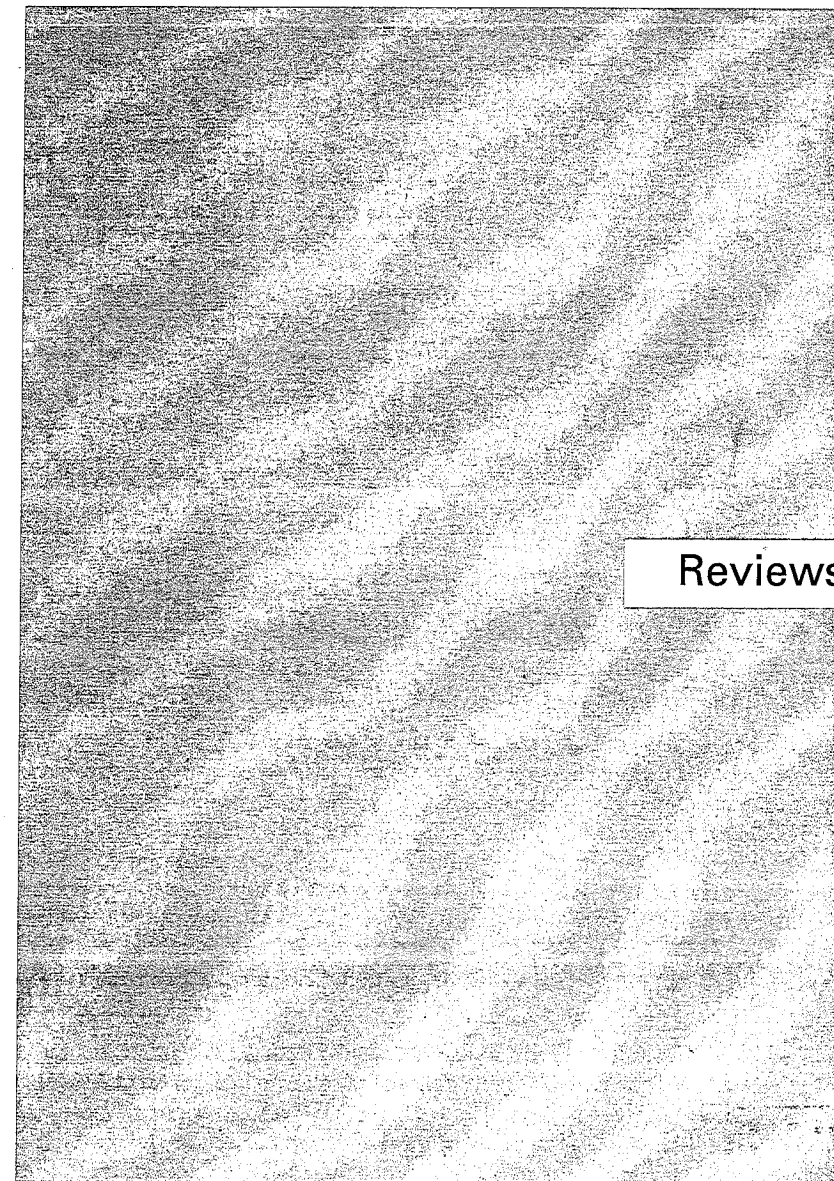
11. Without falling into the trap of the biographical fallacy, *Experience* is here illuminating, especially when one thinks of the controversial dialogue between Martin Amis and Salman Rushdie apropos of Beckett's style, noteworthy for its "maximum ugliness" which can be easily lampooned by using "lots of negatives" such as "'Nor it the nothing never is.' 'Neither nowhere the nothing is.' 'Non-nothing the never—.'" Martin Amis, *Experience* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000) 82.

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