

Campus Fiction: A Comparative Analysis of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* and Radwa Ashour's *Specters*

Dr. Ramadan Al-Azzawi
Lecturer of English Literature
Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Suez Canal
University

Abstract

This study delves into the genre of campus fiction, offering a comparative analysis of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* and Radwa Ashour's *Specters* to explore the portrayal of academic life in British and Egyptian contexts. Through satirical narratives, the novels critique institutional flaws, exposing themes of corruption, bureaucracy, and the personal struggles of academics. The research highlights the protagonists' contrasting journeys: Jim Dixon's rebellion against cultural pretension and Shagar's and Joseph's relentless yet disillusioned efforts to reform their societies. By blending satire, realism, and autobiographical elements, these works shed light on the challenges and absurdities of academic life, bridging cultural divides while reflecting broader societal concerns. This paper underscores the enduring relevance of campus fiction in addressing contemporary issues of integrity, power dynamics, and intellectual freedom within academic institutions.

Key Words: Kingsley Amis- Radwa Ashour- Satire- Campus Fiction- Lucky Jim- Specters.

مستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة أدب السرد الجامعي من خلال تقديم تحليل مقارنة لرواية "جيم المحفوظ" لكينجسلي أميس ورواية "أطياف" لرضوى عاشور، لاستكشاف كيفية تصوير الحياة الأكاديمية في السياقات البريطانية والمصرية. عبر السرديات الساخرة، تسلط الروايتان الضوء على العيوب المؤسسية، متناولاً قضايا الفساد والبيروقراطية والصراعات الشخصية التي تواجه الأكاديميين. ويركز البحث على الاختلافات في مسارات أبطالهما: حيث يتمرد جيم ديكسون على التظاهر الثقافي، بينما تكافح شجر ويوسف في جهود دؤوبة ولكن غير مثمرة لإصلاح مجتمعاتهما. من خلال المزج بين السخرية والواقعية والعناصر الذاتية، تكشف الروايتان عن تحديات وعبثية الحياة الأكاديمية، مع تجسير الفجوات الثقافية وعكس المخاوف المجتمعية الأوسع. تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية السرد الجامعي كأداة أدبية لمعالجة قضايا معاصرة تتعلق بالنزاهة وديناميكيات السلطة والحرية الفكرية داخل المؤسسات الأكاديمية، ما يجعل هذا النوع الأدبي مرآة نقدية تعكس تعقيدات الواقع الأكاديمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كينجسلي أميس - رضوى عاشور - السخرية - السرد الجامعي - جيم المحفوظ - أطياف.

Satire in Academia: A Comparative Analysis of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* and Radwa Ashour's *Specters*

Dr. Ramadan Al-Azzawi

Lecturer of English Literature

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Suez Canal University

The 1950s was a period of buoyant confidence in literary criticism - 'the Age of Criticism' as Randall Jarrel called it - and it is no accident that most of the movement writers made their living as critics and lecturers in English literature. Their criticism has an intrinsic interest, reflecting the influence of Leavis, Empson, and the Anglo - American 'New Critical' school. It also sheds light on poetry and fiction.

—Blake Morrison, *The Movement*

Introduction

This study examines the development of British and Egyptian academics through the lens of two iconic literary works: Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* and Radwa Ashour's *Specters*. By focusing on the evolution of their protagonists as academics, literary critics, and novelists, the paper offers a comparative analysis that bridges cultural and geographical divides. These novels serve as models to explore how academic life is portrayed, critiqued, and navigated in distinct sociopolitical contexts. Through a technical analysis of the protagonists' journeys, this study aims to shed light on their perspectives toward academia, revealing the challenges, aspirations, and contradictions inherent in their roles. In doing so, it seeks to uncover broader insights into the academic experience as reflected in British and Egyptian literary traditions.

Campus Fiction

Theoretical Background

The genre of campus fiction emerged in the mid-20th century, with Kingsley Amis (1922–1995) recognized as a pioneering figure, particularly with the publication of *Lucky Jim* (1954). This work introduces Jim Dixon, an anti-hero whose unremarkable appearance, talents, and achievements are overshadowed by his biting internal commentaries. Through Dixon's sardonic observations of those around him, Amis critiques the stifling traditions and decaying structure of academic institutions. Dixon's knack for subverting language and exposing the absurdities of his peers is emblematic of Amis's satirical approach. For example, when Welch utters the clichéd exclamation "My word," Dixon wryly counters internally, "Quickly deciding on his own word, Dixon said to himself" (), thus turning Welch's words against him in an act of quiet rebellion.

Campus fiction, as a genre, is typically comic or satirical, set within the cloistered world of universities and other academic institutions. It critiques the rigidity of academic life, often exposing its contradictions, pretensions, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Emerging as a subtle form of protest, campus novels resonate particularly as critiques of middle-class values and cultural decline. Through engaging narrative techniques, these works highlight everyday challenges in academic settings, presenting themes ranging from personal ambition to systemic failures:

The recent development of the English novel in recent times has been significantly influenced by the groundbreaking works of academics such as Mary McCarthy, Kingsley Amis, Iris Murdoch, Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, Helmi Al Qaud, and Radwa Ashour among others. These authors have taken great pleasure in satirizing the quirks and absurdities of

academia in their fiction. Their novels tackle important issues, including the contradictions of liberalism in the 1950s, the academic advancements in America during the 1950s, and the pretentiousness and jargon of the mid-seventies. In addition, these literary works primarily focus on English and moral traditions, the exploration of social life post-World War II, and the intricate relationship between academia and industry. These authors demonstrate a deep familiarity with both modern fiction and critical debates, showcasing a rich tapestry of themes and insights in their writing. (Ashraf Zidan, 2024, 3)

The genre's sardonic tone underscores a pervasive disillusionment with institutional structures, reflecting a world where humanity is often devalued, and cultural stagnation looms large. The narratives typically feature uniquely crafted plots and vivid characters, ranging from professors and administrators to assistant lecturers and students, each embodying diverse perspectives and struggles. These stories delve into the intricate dynamics of academic life—rivalries for administrative positions, plagiarism scandals, power struggles, and personal discontent—while also addressing broader political, social, and economic concerns.

While grounded in academic settings, campus fiction frequently transcends the confines of university life, tackling societal themes and reflecting the ethos of the 20th century. It captures attitudes such as impatience with tradition, irreverence, vulgarity, and a sense of frustrated discontent. These works serve as both entertainment and intellectual critique, inviting readers to explore the tensions between personal aspirations and institutional constraints.

Distinctive elements of campus fiction include its innocent yet perceptive protagonists, exaggerated secondary characters, and sarcastic tone. Popular satire features prominently in these narratives, offering a blend of humor and seriousness to provoke critical laughter while emphasizing societal flaws. Through its sharp focus on the frustrations and contradictions of academic life, campus fiction illuminates the broader challenges faced by individuals in navigating the modern world.

Zidan (2024) has also added the following characteristics of campus fiction, that can be summarized as following: "a truthful depiction of reality, exploring class conflict, role of women, discussion of literary theory, emphasis on sexual relationships both within and outside the campus environment, decline of academic brilliance and the pursuit of scientific knowledge, [highlighting] conferences, public lectures, and parties within university settings, intertextuality, mutual exploitation among academics and students, fall of secular, liberal, and leftist characters, success of Jewish characters, and depiction an atmosphere of strangeness (10-15).

Applied Study

Both Amis and Ashour (1946) have satirized British and Egyptian ways of life, contributing enduring and humorous figures to post-war fiction. However, notable differences exist between British and Egyptian academic novels. The British protagonist is often naïve, driven more by a desire to adapt to society than to reform it, and tends to display selfish tendencies. Despite this, they often achieve a form of triumph by the novel's end.

In contrast, the Egyptian protagonist is portrayed as serious and hardworking, striving to bring about societal reform, though these efforts are ultimately futile. This character is frequently doomed to endure suffering (Zidan, 2015, 76). In essence, the British protagonist resembles a self-centered hero, while the Egyptian protagonist takes on the traits of a mythological figure.

This paper offers a comparative analysis of Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) and Ashour's *Specters* (1999). It explores the idea that academics can also be creative artists, encompassing roles such as poets, dramatists, critics, novelists, and esteemed public figures. The study highlights the flaws, absurdities, and contradictions of modern academic life with sharp precision. Additionally, it examines the distinctions between confessional and autobiographical literature while portraying the tensions arising from conflicts among academics, teacher-student dynamics, and the political issues prevalent in both England and Egypt.

Modern campus fiction tends to focus more on professors, particularly when authored by academics themselves. However, it may also shift its attention toward students, delving into their experiences alongside those of professors. These novels highlight and explore key distinctions in class, manners, and politics. Contemporary novelists, whether academics or not, have shown a growing interest in this evolving academic landscape, finding in it a rich source of inspiration and a dynamic framework for examining the complexities of academic life.

The researcher has selected these novelists for several reasons. First, their chosen works draw heavily from their personal experiences with British and Egyptian campus life, portraying middle-class characters, manners, and conflicts within contemporary intellectual circles. They bring sharp critical insight into their own profession. Second, they are renowned for their satirical critiques of political and social corruption, earning them recognition as revolutionary writers. Third, they employ traditional narrative styles to depict characters and themes, often with a touch of severity. Their writing features precise and seemingly straightforward narrative voices, using both direct and indirect freewriting techniques. Fourth, their novels function both as engaging works of fiction and as literary criticism. Fifth, they value transparency—not as a simplistic disregard for form but as a means of skillfully merging form and content, ensuring that the message is accessible to the average reader. Sixth, both novels show a deep respect for history and autobiography, with their main characters specializing in history, thus rejecting the "death of the author" notion. Seventh, these works blend satire, black humor, vivid realism, comedy, fantasy, and compassion seamlessly. Finally, both authors began their careers as committed communists but eventually grew disillusioned with ideology. Amis later became known for his conservative critiques of contemporary life and society. He once remarked, "If you can't annoy somebody, there is little point in writing":

You'll find that marriage is a good short cut to the truth. No, not quite that. A way of doubling back to the truth. Another thing you'll find is that the years of illusion aren't those of adolescence, as the grown-ups try to tell us; they're the ones immediately after it, say the middle twenties, the false maturity if you like, when you first get thoroughly embroiled in things and lose your head. Your age by the way, Jim. That's when you first realize that sex is important to other people besides yourself. A discovery like that can't help knocking you off balance for a time. (*Lucky Jim* 124 -5)

For any writer, it is challenging to turn away from their own life, as it often serves as both the source of inspiration and the foundation for their creative work. Shokry Ayyad (1921–1999), an Egyptian academic and critic, suggests that confessional literature emerges as a radical response to the writer's intense psychological conflicts, whether internal or external. Such conflicts not only tarnish their literary reputation but also impact their personal lives, often leading to social isolation. In an effort to regain societal trust and restore their self-respect, these writers express themselves through an inner monologue, revealing their

secrets as a way to overcome doubts. This process requires both the ability and the courage to confront themselves as a form of self-defense. Autobiography, on the other hand, tends to accuse and judge its authors, creating a space where they can unburden themselves and seek self-satisfaction through writing. However, recording an autobiography is a challenging and audacious endeavor, particularly in societies marked by social instability, as is often the case in the East. Writers may feel compelled to omit details to avoid social ostracism and exile, relying on implication to navigate these sensitive boundaries (47-48).

Corruption has deeply infiltrated the institutions tasked with nurturing minds, enhancing critical thinking, and shaping future generations. As a result, chaos and moral decay have become prevalent features of academic life. This issue is particularly pronounced in Egypt compared to England. In Egypt, many academics find themselves unable to implement reforms, constrained by both visible and hidden forces. They often become victims of moral or psychological erosion. Success rates are expected to reach at least 85%—but how is that realistic? Teaching effectively might even be perceived as a transgression, with the risk of expulsion for offering genuine help. While education is the cornerstone of progress and prosperity in the West, Egyptian teachers struggle to make ends meet. Living in such precarious conditions, they are like patients enduring their hardships with resilience—hardly in a position to foster growth or innovation.

Some academics in the Arab world face dismissal from their positions due to their philosophical ideas. For example, Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah (1904–1983) submitted a PhD thesis in 1947 titled *Technical Narration in the Holy Qur'an (Al-Fann Al-Qassasi fi Al-Qur'an Al-Karim)*. He was accused of atheism and was ultimately forced to abandon his dissertation to regain his academic status. This reflects a systemic opposition to innovation and creativity in the Arab world. Another notable example is Taha Hussein (1889–1973), who nearly lost his position over his controversial book *Pre-Islamic Poetry* (1926). However, he was fortunate to receive support from Saad Zaghloul's cabinet, a coalition liberal government. In contrast, Sheikh Ali Abdelrazeq faced harsher consequences. His certification was revoked due to his book *Islam and the Foundations of Governance (Al-Islam Wa Usul Al-Hukm, 1925)*. Unfortunately, the minority cabinet led by Ziwar Pasha (1864–1945) responded with extreme intolerance. In summary, politics wields a domineering and destructive influence, distorting every aspect of life to maintain power. Politicians often prioritize their positions above progress, even at the expense of innovation and intellectual freedom. This suppression of scientific research and critical thought leaves nations in a state of ignorance and stagnation, making some academic easier to control and exploit.

Lucky Jim and *Specters* address a range of issues within academia, including administrative corruption, persistent rivalries among academics, restrictions on publishing, plagiarism, challenges in promotion, dissertation supervision, curriculum design, inappropriate relationships, exam cheating, arrogance, academic pretentiousness, and arbitrary decisions by department heads. The protagonists in both works share an interest in history. Jim, the main character in *Lucky Jim*, is a lecturer in medieval history at a provincial university, likely modeled after Swansea University. Similarly, Joseph and Shagar, the central figures in *Specters*, are majored in History, working at Ain Shams University.

Both British and Egyptian universities rarely enjoy the American privilege of hosting writers on campus. David Lodge observes that Amis captured an enduring image of absent-mindedness, vanity, eccentricity, and practical ineptitude that academic institutions often tolerate and even foster among their junior staff (*Lucky Jim* viii).

Ashour, born in 1946, is a prominent and reflective figure in Egypt's intellectual and artistic landscape. An influential public intellectual and artist, she played a key role in establishing the Higher National Committee for Writers and Artists in Cairo in 1973. A professor of English literature at Ain Shams University, she is also an accomplished author, producing novels, short stories, and critical studies. Her work reflects a deep engagement with history and language, often exploring themes of personal experience, identity, and heritage. She regards *Specters* as her finest novel, stating that it blends fact and fiction, embodying the qualities of empiricism, courage, and adventure inherent to art. As she explains, "The result may be either pleasing or depressing" (Marwa Kamel 2009).

Specters is set in the University of Ain Shams and weaves together memoirs, diaries, imagination, and factual accounts. The novel delves into a cultural crisis fueled by oppression, torture, and imprisonment, while also addressing social issues such as hypocrisy and the widespread prevalence of cheating in colleges. Cheating has become a pervasive phenomenon in some Egyptian universities, with inspectors acting more like janitors—guarding students and warning them of approaching academic supervisors. The narrative highlights human vulnerability, particularly when those who are academically less capable manage to achieve higher marks through dishonest means. This prevalence of cheating reflects the erosion of academic integrity. The novelist questions:

Has corruption become the norm? Why does she find herself, after leaving the room, absolving her students of responsibility? Is she excusing them from accountability? Does she care for them so deeply that she overlooks their mistakes, much like a mother who believes others are always to blame for corrupting her children? Should this situation be seen as melodramatic, akin to an overly emotional scene in a poorly made film, where a son weeps on his mother's chest, and she forgives him with unwavering kindness, leading to an unrealistically happy ending? ... Sadly, the dean has refused to allow the exam to be retaken. (*Specters* 142-3)

She is not exempt from mockery, but hers takes the form of self-mockery, reflecting the character's attitudes toward themselves.

Ashour introduces a cast of characters who grapple with the realization that they are not truly free but are constrained by their own limitations, societal pressures, and natural forces. Their initial rebellion fades over time, leaving them disillusioned and devoid of confidence due to political regimentation. Among these characters is Shagar, a fictional figure who is not a direct representation of Ashour but complements her perspective. Shagar specializes in history, while Ashour's expertise lies in modern English literature. Together, they provide a multifaceted view of their experiences. Both dream of complete freedom, yet their struggles have left them scarred, with more hardships still to endure.

As Youssef Rakha notes in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Ashour's autobiographical novel, *Specters*, introduces Shagar as her double. Shagar's life parallels and diverges from Ashour's—she is an unmarried university professor specializing in modern Egyptian history and living in Manial, across the river from where Ashour once lived. These details represent alternative paths Ashour's life might have taken. The novel blends lyrical, self-referential passages with reflective reconstruction, forging a link between autobiography and history. It seamlessly transitions between memory and reality, past and present, vividly interweaving the historical and physical dimensions of the setting, particularly evoking Ashour's own childhood.

Universities have often adopted discriminatory attitudes toward bearded and veiled students, disregarding objective evaluation criteria. These students are denied their rightful opportunities for appointments and are pressured to either change their appearance or align themselves with security forces. This reflects a deep sense of grief and ingratitude within the system.

Khalil, an exceptional student, is entitled to an academic job (TA). However, his beard and traditional *jellabiya* make it nearly impossible for him to be accepted as a demonstrator unless he conforms to societal expectations. The dean/department head has considered sending him abroad for postgraduate studies as an alternative. Khalil's fortune changes thanks to the intervention of Dr. Shagar, who assists him in some capacity. Meanwhile, other highly capable individuals are left to languish, unable to achieve their potential:

Did you see Khalil? I spoke to him about the gown issue and explained that it would be impossible for him to be appointed as a TA at the university while wearing such attire and maintaining his beard. I had a lengthy discussion with him, and by Allah's guidance, he listened and accepted the advice. Today, she saw him at the faculty wearing trousers and a shirt, with a neatly trimmed beard. (*Specters* 244)

Dr. Joseph, a history lecturer, is portrayed as an innocent liberal hero navigating a strange and often hostile world. He embodies a strong moral and philosophical stance. The novel's satire is sharper, the atmosphere more foreboding, and the conclusion more despairing, dominated by themes of alienation and nihilism. He shares similarities with Beesley from *Lucky Jim*, an English department lecturer. Both characters are diligent and dedicated to their colleges, prioritizing their work and the well-being of their students over frivolities.

Specters highlight the significance of scientific research alongside the integrity of certain professors. Unfortunately, some professors prioritize supervising numerous PhD students to serve personal goals rather than advancing knowledge. They often neglect to thoroughly review or appreciate their students' efforts, making it challenging to produce high-quality academic papers in Egypt. Universities have consequently suffered degradation and distortion. Additionally, some academics in Egypt have been involved in plagiarizing entire papers to secure promotions or participate in international conferences.

In *Specters*, Shagar and Joseph initially rebel against the false values and codes internally before eventually expressing their dissent outwardly. However, their rebellion is ultimately sidelined. This struggle is depicted with both dramatic intensity and keen insight. They confront the dean to address various aspects of academic corruption:

The matter is as clear as day, Your Excellency! The scientific committee was formed, and the dissertation was reviewed by external examiners. Both examiners informed the supervisor that the paper was too flawed to be evaluated. To avoid embarrassment and protect their colleague's literary reputation, they communicated this orally rather than in writing. However, the supervisor ignored their advice. Instead of returning the thesis for revision, he falsely informed the faculty leadership that the two professors had declined to examine the paper due to other commitments. As a result, a new committee was formed, which accepted the thesis and awarded it first-class honors. Does this make sense? Where are we headed, Doctor? What direction is the university taking, Mr. Dean? (*Specters* 249)

Dr. Joseph fiercely mocks the dean's distortion of moral principles and ethical commitments. He could not tolerate the dean's dismissive response to incidents of plagiarism, nor his active role in the university's decline. Using satire to its fullest extent, Joseph underscores his deep sorrow and aims to enlighten readers. He demonstrates an acute awareness of pressing social issues such as rootlessness, infidelity, and exploitation. In his confrontation with the dean, he asserts that

This is not merely a point of view; we are actively contributing to the destruction and collapse of the university (250). I can see the coffin and the mourners; I am fully aware that it is the university lying in that coffin. It's a nightmare that unfolds daily—not in the darkness of night but in broad daylight, Your Excellency! (253). A professor has published his late colleague's book under his own name and has been rewarded for it. [Regrettably, this has become a widespread practice, particularly in developing countries]. (*Specters* 251)

Dr. Joseph ultimately succumbed to absent-mindedness and arrogance, unable to free himself from the turmoil and contradictions of Egyptian academic life. His fragmented state contributed to his demise. Similarly, other academics faced harsh consequences, including losing supervision roles, office spaces, or even being dismissed entirely.

In *Lucky Jim*, Jim's article is plagiarized by L.S. Caton, a dubious academic figure who never directly appears in the novel. Caton secures a prestigious position as a department chair in Argentina despite his unethical actions:

There could be not doubt about it; this article is either a close paraphrase or a translation of Dixon's own original article. At a loss for faces, he drew in his breath to swear, then cackled hysterically instead. So that was how people got chairs, was it? Chairs of that sort, anyway. Oh well, it didn't matter now. But what cunning old... That reminded him. One of the things he'd got to do today was to see Johns and abuse, or even assault, him for his latest piece of treasury. He went out and down the stairs. (*Lucky Jim* 229)

Both Welch in *Lucky Jim* and the dean in *Specters* bear significant responsibility for the deterioration and destruction of educational institutions. While they are not inherently malicious, their incompetence and lack of awareness make them poor leaders. Despite their esteemed positions within the faculty, they fail to recognize the gravity of critical academic issues. Welch, for instance, lacks the ability to assess Dixon's article independently, relying instead on external validation:

He felt this more keenly when Welch went on: 'If I were you, Dixon, I should take all the steps I possibly could to get this article accepted in the next month or so. I mean, I haven't the specialized knowledge to judge...' his voice quickened: 'I can't tell, can I? What it's worth. It's no use anybody coming to me and asking "what's young Dixon's stuff like? Unless I can give them an expert opinion of what it's worth, is it now? But an acceptance by a learned journal would... would... you, well you don't know what it's worth yourself, how can you?' (*Lucky Jim* 15)

This nightmare unfolds relentlessly, day and night, becoming an inescapable part of people's destiny. It vividly portrays the tension stemming from the conflict between conscience and materialism. We face humiliation on political, academic, social, and economic fronts. The false notion of the superiority of academic life is depicted with stark realism, enhancing the reader's critical and literary understanding. It also reveals the complete lack of

communication between academic representatives and the government, as chaos and Machiavellianism prevail in every aspect.

In *Specters* and *Lucky Jim*, the prevailing patterns of contemporary society are thoughtfully embraced, often at the expense of the values rooted in older, more localized traditions.

Specters stands out for its moral depth, narrative power, and seamless blend of reality and fantasy. Radwa Ashour employs a range of techniques—including black comedy, satire, coming-of-age fiction, historical commentary, and allegory—to explore Egyptian and Arab themes. Her novel focuses on the revival of the human spirit within her characters, who strive to find their place in the world while making a conscious effort not to harm others. In *Lucky Jim*, the prank Jim plays on Bertrand, like most of his jokes, is entirely harmless:

'What phone business?'

'You know, me pretending to Bertrand that I was a reporter.'

'Oh, that. I'd sooner not discuss that, if you don't mind.' (*Lucky Jim* 115)

The language of dialogue, according to Raouf Abbas, among some academics reflects a troubling mix of disrespect, arrogance, brutality, materialism, triviality, ignorance, and psychological dysfunction. Sadly, many of these individuals are now willing to deceive, cheat, murder, or exploit others to serve their selfish interests. It has become increasingly difficult to find fulfillment in such an academic environment. Neither academics nor governments show genuine intent to reform or improve the education system, as the political establishment appears content with the rampant corruption. In contrast, Japanese educational institutions are focused on the pursuit of science and knowledge, leading to significant advancements across various fields. In Egypt, however, many academics neglect their lectures, prioritizing the sale of their books to students over genuine teaching. Scientific discussions are rare, as humor and gossip dominate their gatherings. Research is often conducted not to benefit society but to secure promotions and higher positions, allowing them to wield power over others. Qualified academics find this toxic atmosphere unbearable, often feeling compelled to either emigrate, resign, or face imprisonment. Professors' loyalty lies with their personal ambitions and influential connections, rather than with their educational institutions or students (152).

Elaine Showalter observes that the academic novels of the 1950s portray a society governed by its own rules and traditions, largely isolated from the outside world. However, these novels focus on collective entities such as the college, faculty, or university, rather than individual departments (17). *Lucky Jim*, for instance, offers a satirical look at the pretentious academic culture of a redbrick university, as experienced through the perspective of its protagonist, Jim Dixon, a young history lecturer attempting to navigate his career. Writing for the *Times Literary Supplement*, J.G. Weightman remarks:

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 blond... (February 17, 1956)

Some have argued that even Plato's *Dialogues* could be classified as "collage novels," as they ultimately address the concept of academic freedom. Similarly, *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387) by Chaucer has been praised for portraying "two kinds of students." The 12th century romance between Heloise and Peter Abelard is often cited as a classic example of a

romantic and sexual relationship between a male professor and a female student. However, these works lack any genuine depiction of an academic environment (Charney 10). While many novels nostalgically recount college days, the campus novel, in its modern form, traces its origins to the 1950s.

Dixon's character stands in stark contrast to those of Joseph and Shagar in several ways. He rejects the social and cultural values of the university, favoring pop music over Mozart, pubs over drawing rooms, and non-academic companionship over scholarly circles. Constantly nervous and out of place, Dixon is both personally and academically unconventional. His interests lie more in drinking, smoking, casual friendships with trivial male peers, and romantic pursuits than in high culture. Throughout the novel, his pretense, laziness, and deceit become evident, shedding light on the broader characteristics of academic culture. He exhibits an aggressively dismissive attitude toward many aspects of high culture, demonstrating his defiance by referring to "filthy Mozart" and feigning ignorance of cultural knowledge he possesses. Shaffur highlights that much of the novel's humor derives from its situational context and style, emphasizing Amis's skillful pacing and structure: "Amis's flawless sense of timing—the way he develops an action or sentence to create a blend of surprise and logic—is at the core of the comedy" (50).

Second, Dixon consistently tries to ingratiate himself with Professor Welch. He endures Welch's tedious parties, conducts library research on his behalf, and ingratiates himself in the hope of securing a job he knows he won't enjoy. Ultimately, he finds himself ensnared by Welch's influence. There is a notable disparity between Dixon's thoughts and his words—while he responds to the professor with brief, insipid remarks, his internal thoughts are far more extensive, sharp-witted, and mocking, targeting both Welch and his preferred subject of conversation: amateur music recitals:

After no more than a minor swerve the misfiring vehicle of his conversation had been hauled back on to its usual course. Dixon gave up, stiffening his legs as they reached, at last, the steps of the main building. He pretended to himself that he'd pick up his professor round the waist, squeeze the furry grey-blue waistcoat against him to expel the breath, run heavily with him up the stairs, along the corridor to the Staff Cloakroom, and plunge the too-small feet in their capless shoes into a lavatory basin, pulling the plug, twice, and again, stuffing the mouth with toilet-paper. (*Lucky Jim* 9-10)

Furthermore, Dixon finds himself trapped in a relationship with Margaret Peel, who is both shrewish and manipulative. His lower middle-class status has led him to associate with her, leaving him alienated and struggling to assert his identity. Unlike the men of the 1930s who proved themselves in the Spanish Civil War or those of the 1940s who triumphed over Hitler, the young men of the 1950s had no grand causes to validate their worth. However, Jim ultimately succeeds in aligning his inner desires with his external actions. He escapes the chaos of academic life by securing a new job in London, the place he longs to be, and wins the affection of Christine, whom he has been pursuing. His journey involves standing up to Bertrand, whom he defeats in a fight, candidly expressing his true thoughts about the Middle Ages and "Merrie England," and finally freeing himself from Welch's influence. In doing so, Jim critiques the hollow and pretentious aspects of academic life in England and carves out a more authentic and fulfilling path for himself.

Lodge observes that the moment when Dixon's fortunes hit rock bottom is also the first time his thoughts align with his actions. Instead of merely harboring scathing opinions about Bertrand in silence, Dixon finally voices cutting insults and even physically confronts

his rival, knocking him down. This turning point is further highlighted by the arrival of Michie, who now shows a newfound respect for the triumphant Dixon—something absent in their prior student-teacher interactions. However, there remains uncertainty about whether Michie will prove to be a better employer than Welch:

It was clear that Dixon had won his round, and, it seemed that, the whole Bertrand match. He put his glass on again, feeling good; Bertrand caught his eye with a look of embarrassed recognition. The bloody old towser- faced boot- faced totem pole on a crap reservation, Dixon thought. 'You bloody old towser- faced boot- faced totem-pole on a crap reservation,' he said (*Lucky Jim* 209) ... Dixon resolved not to mind what he said to that man. 'No. well taught and sensibly taught, history could do people a hell of a lot of good. But in practice it doesn't work out like that. Things get in the way. I don't quite see who's to blame for it. Bad teaching's the main thing. Not bad student, I mean.' (*Lucky Jim* 214)

Third, both Joseph and Shagar are serious characters, focused solely on reconciling and reforming their Egyptian society. Their narratives lack sustained comedic elements, inviting neither laughter nor smiles, as they approach university life with a serious tone. In contrast, Jim is more self-indulgent than politically driven, seeking to reconcile with his society without attempting to reform it. Unlike Joseph and Shagar, Jim is classified as a comic character. However, as Lodge notes, his comedy carries a serious tone and significant meaning:

Comedy of situation is exemplified by such memorable scenes as Jim's accident with the bed-clothing at Welches' and his efforts to conceal the damage, his attempts to deceive Mrs. Welch and her son Bertrand on the telephone by disguising his voice, his hijacking of the Barclays' taxi after the Collage Ball, and his drunken lecture on 'Merrie England'. All these episodes involve the violation of a polite code of manners and contain an element of farce; they belong to a tradition of British comic writing which goes back through Waugh, Wodehouse, Dickens and Fielding to Restoration and Elizabethan comedy. (vi)

Dixon is both hypocritical and overly proud. He pretends to be a competent scholar and lecturer despite secretly despising his job and colleagues. He views his teaching as a mutual waste of time and effort, believing he gains nothing from his students, nor they from him. Similarly, he feigns emotional attraction to Margaret, despite finding her plain and uninteresting. Yet, Jim acknowledges his own insincerity, primarily to himself. While he is deceived by Margaret, this highlights his moral decency as well as his cowardice. By the end of the novel, Dixon abandons his hypocrisy and is ultimately rewarded for his transformation.

Finally, the novel reaches its climax during Dixon's lecture titled "Merrie England." In this pivotal moment, Dixon triumphs over the pretentious hypocrites who hold positions of social, moral, or sexual authority, achieving a victory against the establishment. As a medieval historian, he is expected to glorify England's past, aligning with Welch's disdain for modern popular culture. However, he defies expectations, delivering a lecture that reflects the alignment of his inner thoughts with his outward actions. Instead of praising the past, he boldly challenges it:

'What, finally, is the practical application of all this?' Dixon said in his normal voice. He felt he was in the grip of some vertigo, hearing himself talking without consciously willing any words. Listen and I'll tell you. The point about Merrie England is that it was about the most- un-Merrie period in our history. It's only the

home-made pottery crowd, the organic husbandry crowd, the recorder-playing crowd, the Esperanto... (*Lucky Jim* 227)

Dixon's triumph demonstrates that an ordinary, decent person can overcome pretentious hypocrites, even those in positions of power. His ability to keenly observe and analyze the tone, mannerisms, and speech patterns of others—especially those he dislikes—becomes his key strength. By exercising this talent, Jim reclaims his individuality, which had been overshadowed by his college peers. Securing a job with Gore-Urquhart represents a significant victory: a triumph over the Establishment, a win for the common man against privilege and snobbery, and a validation of provincial life over metropolitan elitism:

'Well, what are your plans, Dixon?

'I was thinking of going in for school teaching.'

'Are you right set on it?'

'No, not really.'

'Good. I've got a job for you. Five hundred a year. You'll have to start at once, on Monday. It'll mean leaving in London. You accept?'

Dixon found he could only breathe, but talk. 'What job is it?'

'Sort of private secretarial work. Not much correspondence, though; a young woman does most of that. It'll be mainly meeting people or telling people I can't meet them. We'll go into the details on Monday morning. Ten o'clock at my house in London. Take down the address.' He gave it, then asked: 'are you all right, now?' (*Lucky Jim* 233-4)

However, this ordinariness and decency present several challenges, as highlighted by Jenkins in his article *Why Jim Turned Right – An Obituary of Kingsley Amis*:

First, there's the question of reaction against artistic pretentiousness: Jim's notorious comment about 'filthy Mozart' might be excused in the context but points to a strand of philistinism which remains unchanged from within the novel. Secondly, there is what one might call Jim's view of the world. He counters Bertrand's right wing attacks on soak the rich policies with the comment, 'if one man's got ten buns and another's got two, and a bun has got to be given up by one of them, then surely you take it from the man with ten buns'. ... This redistribution remains politically vague... Jim's philosophy is summed up in his theory that 'nice things are nicer than nasty ones'. This is certainly true; but it is crushingly banal. It is also completely abstract. Individuals are always social individuals, for whom 'nice' and 'nasty' vary according to class positions. As a world view it doesn't help decide what side one is on in the pursuit of the 'nice' in preference to the 'nasty', given that they mean different things to different classes. Anyone holding to such a position could easily swing- as Amis did- from left to right". (15-16)

The crisis of faith experienced by both Dixon and Joseph is a recurring theme throughout the novels. They come to realize that the academic life they have chosen has failed to meet their ambitions or expectations. Disillusioned with their universities, they feel a sense of spiritual and ethical decline.

Amis and Ashour have crafted contemporary characters rather than modern ones, demonstrating their belief in the power of straightforward prose to reflect life. Their focus lies more on people's actions than abstract, subjective, or elusive complexities. This approach has

led them to revive narrative techniques that modernists had abandoned: plain language, linear time progression, an integrated omniscient narrator, stylistic clarity, concise dialogue between characters, and the careful presentation of related facts. They have skillfully harnessed the linguistic possibilities of the language, occasionally transporting readers into poetic realms. By revisiting history from philosophical standpoints, they effectively bring historical truths to life with vibrancy and immediacy, creating memorable personas in their fiction. Their lucid style delves into the psychological effects of daily existence, highlighting the passage of time on ordinary individuals while portraying the intellectual's sense of alienation in both England and Egypt. Nonetheless, some critics have taken issue with the coarse language and immature behavior of certain characters, particularly in Amis's work. However, these criticisms overlook a significant point: Ernest Hemingway, known for his coarse style and blunt realism, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Ashour titles her novel's chapters to provide illustrations of their central events, reflecting their content. In contrast, Amis uses numbered chapters, creating a stronger sense of continuity that encourages deeper engagement with the narrative and a clearer progression of time.

This is a brief exploration of academic life in both England and Egypt. Traditionally viewed as embodying chastity, purity, and wisdom, this world instead leaves us feeling shocked, deceived, and disillusioned. The novels under discussion serve as the anguished cries of those deeply wounded, aiming to inspire change and reform. As such, they stand in clear contrast to the writings of the Angry Young Men. While the latter rebelled against societal divisions of class and belief, they lacked a coherent philosophy of social change and progress. Their focus was more on destruction than construction, offering poor political analysis and remaining self-absorbed, unaware of their own injustices. In *Look Back in Anger*, for instance, neither Jimmy nor Osborne demonstrates interest in the public affairs of their country or engages in political activities.

Although *Lucky Jim* and *Specters* are set on college campuses, students make only rare appearances. Both novelists aim to emphasize that these campus novels do not explore the follies and absurdities of students. Instead, it becomes quickly evident that the satire is directed at the coarse language and immature behavior of academics and faculty members. These novels follow a conventional structure, employing third-person narration and a chronological plot. The style blends dialogue and conversation, with sharply defined characters. The narratives are rich in verbal wit, comic gestures, and lighthearted satire.

Conclusion

Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* and Radwa Ashour's *Specters* stand as seminal works in the campus fiction genre, offering incisive critiques of academic life in distinct cultural settings. While *Lucky Jim* employs humor and satire to depict the pretentiousness and stagnation of British academia, *Specters* adopts a somber tone to illuminate the systemic corruption and socio-political challenges faced by Egyptian academics. Both novels expose the absurdities of academic institutions, revealing how personal ambitions, institutional flaws, and societal pressures converge to shape the academic experience.

Through a detailed analysis of the protagonists' struggles and triumphs, this study reveals the contrasting attitudes toward reform and adaptation in British and Egyptian contexts. Amis's Jim Dixon ultimately achieves personal fulfillment by rejecting academic conformity, while Ashour's Shagar and Joseph find their reformist aspirations thwarted by systemic resistance. Together, these narratives underscore the complexities of academic life, blending personal introspection with broader cultural critique.

Ultimately, this research affirms the enduring relevance of campus fiction as a literary lens through which to examine the intersection of individual agency, institutional power, and societal transformation. By bridging the gap between personal experience and collective reality, *Lucky Jim* and *Specters* not only entertain but also provoke critical reflection on the values and vulnerabilities of academia.

References

- Amis, Kingsley. *Lucky Jim*: Intr. by David Lodge. London: Penguin Books, 1992. ISBN0-14-018630-1
- Ashour, Radwa. *Specters*. Dar Al Hilal Novels Ser. 602. Cairo: February 1999. ISBN 977-07-0625-6
- Ayyad, Shoukry. *Jumping on Thorns*. Dar Al Hilal Book Ser. 586. Cairo: October 1999. ISBN 977-07-0678-7
- Bradford, Richard. *Kingsley Amis*. London: Edward Arnold, 1989. ISBN0 - 340-49309-7
- Charney, Maurice. *Comedy: A Geographic and Historic Guide*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood publishing group, Incorporated, 2005. ISBN0- 9780313327148
- Jenkins, Gareth. "Why Jim turned right'- An Obituary Kingsley Amis". *International Socialism*. Issue 70, March 1996.
- Kamel, Marwa. "Radwa Ashour: My Novels combine Fact and Fiction: An Interview". Cairo, Al- Shorook Newspaper, 6 April, 2009.
- Lodge, David. *Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1984. ISBN0 7102-0238-6
- Morrison, Blake. *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. ISBN 0-416-30250-5
- Rakha, Youssef. "Radwa Ashour: As one long prepared." *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Cairo, Issue No. 466, 27 Jan. - 2 Feb. 2000.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*. Oxford: oxford university press, 2005. ISBN 10-0-19-928332-x
- Sinfield, Alan. *Society and Literature 1945-1970*. London: Methuen & CO LTD, 1983. ISBN 0-416-31760- x
- Zidan, Ashraf. *Academics and Novels: A Study of Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, and Mary McCarthy's Fiction*. Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2024.
- . "Reflections of Egyptian Society in the Campus Fiction: A Study of Radwa Ashour's Atyaf [Specters] (1999)". *English Language and Literature Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2015, pp. 70-87,