Illness Narrative and Temporal Reversal in Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*

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Abstract In *Time's Arrow*, Martin Amis crafts a labyrinthine and surreal portrayal of the Holocaust through the reverse narrative of the soul of Odilo Unverdorben, a Nazi physician. Unlike the conventional academic focus on the narrative form, this paper delves into Unverdorben's double identities as both a perpetrator and a psychological victim of the Holocaust, and explores his post traumatic stress disorder characterized by heightened vigilance, recurrent re-experiencing of the genocide, avoidance behaviors and psychic numbing. It concurrently illuminates the intricate interplay of environmental and psychological mechanisms that underpin this suffering, thereby revealing the banality of evil and the profound distortion of humanity and morality within the Holocaust framework. Furthermore, this paper uncovers social criticism and humanistic concerns embedded in Amis's postmodern realist narrative, through scrutinizing the interconnection between temporal reversal and the manifestations, metaphorical depth, and broader implications of this illness. Not only does this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological complexities of the individual involved in the Holocaust, and of the nature of his crimes, but it also innovatively explores the way the temporal reversal serves illness narrative, in which Amis's proposition for postmodern realism is embodied.

Keywords Martin Amis; *Time's Arrow*; post traumatic stress disorder; the banality of evil; temporal reversal

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Introduction

Martin Amis, the Godfather of British Literature, has been criticized as a "bad boy" by some critics, feminists in particular, for the recurring themes of death, violence, and sexual promiscuity in his works across various stages. As Kiernan Ryan asserts, this negative literary reputation stems from Amis's profound fascination with societal morbidity (212). Indeed, societal morbidity not only reflects significantly the contemporary culture but also provides a unique perspective from which Amis observes, ponders on and portrays illness. For instance, the climactic mass murder in *Dead Babies* is committed by Johnny—the split personality of Quentin. Likewise, the brutal violence *in Lionel Asbo: The State of England* embodies Lionel's symptom of anti-social personality, while Self's ruthless exploitation of women in *Money: A Suicide Note* is closely linked to his inability to identify emotions, a manifestation of alexithymia[1].

In his illness narratives Amis delves deeply into society, culture and history, particularly scrutinizing the intricate relationship between "individuals and the lingering shadows of the twentieth century history" as Richard Bradford notes in *Martin Amis: The Biography* (40). Varieties of illnesses in Amis's works, such as the time perception disorder in *Einsteins Monsters*, the trauma in *London Fields* and the paranoia in *The Zone of Interest,* have become the media through which he reflects on the distortion of humanity and moral decay in the haze of nuclear war and the Holocaust: "a central event of the twentieth century" (Bellante 16). *Time's Arrow* emerges as a notable example. With temporal reversal as a unique narrative technique, it is hailed as "Amis's most ambitious technical achievement to date and, indeed, one of the most extraordinary narrative experiments in existence" (Brown 121), garnering nominations for the Booker Prize and the Pulitzer Prize for Literature. Furthermore, as " a prototypical novel for the literature and medicine canon" (Marta 43), *Time's Arrow* addresses profound questions concerning the identity and professional ethics of the Nazi doctor Unverdorben, as well as his troubled psychological and spiritual ecology. However, despite the academic focus on the temporal reversal, the illness narrative and its underlying profound

1 Despite that alexithymia, a focal point of medical research in recent years, is not an independent mental disorder, it significantly impairs individuals' health and life. Its primary symptoms include difficulty in identifying feelings and describing feelings, extroverted cognitive style, and constricted imagination. The protagonist Self in *Money: A Suicide Note* by Martin Amis exemplifies alexithymia. See Philip Tew, "Alexithymia and a Broken Plastic Umbrella: Contemporary Culture and Martin Amis's *Money,*" *Textual Practice,* vol. 26, no.1, 2012, pp.99-114.

implications unfortunately have not gained the attention they deserve.

This lack of attention may stem from Amis's consistent style in illness narratives. Illness, a pivotal motif in literature, assumes multifaceted landscapes across diverse works. In contrast to the overt descriptions of illnesses —such as cholera, epidemics, and tuberculosis by George Eliot, Abel Camus, and Thomas Mann; the psychiatric disorders delineated by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Edgar Allan Poe, and Virginia Woolf; and the contemporary scrutiny of medical ethics concerning euthanasia and organ transplantation by writers like Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro—Amis deliberately refrains from explicitly labeling illnesses, thus largely cloaking his patients in a veil of normalcy. For instance, the pervasive emotional estrangement in contemporary society greatly shrouds the alexithymia of Self in *Money* and the depression of Jennifer and Mike in *Night Train*; likewise, the omnipresent sense of doom amidst the haze of nuclear war clouds the psychological trauma and paranoia of Nicola in *London Fields*. In *Time's Arrow*, the temporal reversal cleverly transforms the Holocaust into a life-miracle, thus eradicating Unverdorben's sufferings and expunging the label of his mental illness. This avant-garde postmodern narrative experiment not only challenges readers' perceptions but also garners considerable criticism. McCarthy, for example, contends that "any reader expecting revelations about the nature and origins of the evil committed by the Nazis will be disappointed" (295). However, as indicated by the subtitle: "the Nature of Offence," this paper argues that it is precisely through Unverdorben's mental illness that his complex identities (both a perpetrator and a psychological victim) and the corresponding humanity and ethics are unveiled, thereby delving into the core of the nature and origins of evil in the Holocaust. Moreover, the technique of narrating illness embodies humanistic care and social critique, resonating with Amis's proposition that style is morality.

This paper undertakes a comprehensive exploration of *Time's Arrow* from the illness perspective. Initially, it identifies and elucidates the textual manifestations of Unverdorben's illness and reflects on Martin Amis's stance towards Holocaust literature. Subsequently, it delves into the banality of evil embedded within the illness, excavating the roots of the atrocities. Ultimately, by focusing on the interplay between illness and temporal reversal, this paper uncovers the critical and humanistic dimensions in Amis's postmodern realist narrative.

The Nazi Doctor Afflicted with PTSD

With the progression of psychology and modern medicine in the twentieth century, trauma has emerged as a significant research field and a prominent medium for

contemporary writers to explore human psychology, contemplate sufferings, and articulate a profound concern for humanity. As a fundamental component of trauma studies, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) garners escalating attention due to its complexity, scientific nature and distinctive psychological perspective. Originally termed "shell shock" or "war neurosis" in medicine, PTSD was perceived to be associated with the mental disturbances experienced by veterans following World War I. In 1980, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Third Edition) officially delineated PTSD as the delayed onset and persistent mental disorder that may arise after an individual experiences, witnesses, or confronts actual or threatened death, serious injury, or a threat to their physical integrity (American Psychiatric Association 1980). Over the past half-century, extensive research into this disorder has brought about revision and refinement in diagnostic criteria, thereby encapsulating its core clinical manifestations: recurrent re-experiencing of trauma, persistent hypervigilance, avoidance behaviors, and psychic numbing (American Psychiatric Association 2022).

In *Time's Arrow,* the disturbed psychology and behaviors displayed by the Nazi doctor Unverdorben conform strikingly to the clinical manifestations of PTSD. Not only is Unverdorben hyper-vigilant to everything around during his escape, frightened at the slightest movements in the train carriage like a startled bird, but he also persists in monitoring the environment with suspicion and caution, wary of each approaching individual, even in a safe haven far removed from Germany. The persistent restlessness and tension have become his constants. And his actions—incessant changes of addresses, meticulously crafting every hiding place as a "fortress of safety" and the use of fictitious names and identities—bear witness to a profound insecurity. These elements collectively construct a stress response dominated by fear, further underscoring his hypervigilance.

There is no doubt that the heightened vigilance Unverdorben exhibits has an inextricable link to his participation in the Holocaust, a past that emerges every night from his subconscious, transforming into nightmarish visions: dark terrifying cabins that symbolize gas chambers where Jews are ruthlessly poisoned; bald women walking helplessly who represent those shaved and toyed by the SS; and the long line of numerous souls trapped beneath white coats and black boots, evoking the genocide carried out by Nazi doctors in uniform within Auschwitz. Manifested in the form of nightmares, these traumatic memories, or the return of the repressed, compel him to "revisit" repeatedly the scenes of the genocide, rendering him "a big depositor in the bank where fear is kept" (Amis 54).

Due to the profound fear, Unverdorben finds himself incapable of maintaining

eye contact with others, fearing that such a gaze may unlock the memories of the eye wall, a grim reminder of his criminal harvesting living organs during the "human experiments" conducted in Auschwitz. He endeavors to avoid the sound and smell of fingernails being burned into flames, as they evoke the harrowing spectacles of Jewish cremations. Rather than gaze into a mirror, he prefers to groom himself by touch alone. And he even burns medical texts, prescription pads as well as his medical license. In essence, everything associated directly or indirectly with Auschwitz is shunned deliberately, Unverdorben himself included. Moreover, with his passion for medicine waning, he transforms into a ruthless onlooker of patients' suffering and demise, accepting their impending deaths without compassion. Burdened by the unspeakable past, he "cannot feel, won't connect, never opens up" (Amis 52), so that he is not only alienated both from others and from his family, but also rejects all forms of emotional interaction, even showing no care to anyone. As the psychologist Robert Jay Lifton observes, "psychic numbing is a form of dissociation characterized by the diminished capacity or inclination to feel" (13). It is conceivable that Unverdorben has suffered from psychic numbing, driven out of the world of feelings and emotions.

From the analyses above, it becomes unequivocally evident that Unverdorben does not live a normal life as some critics have contended (Glaz 111), but is deeply afflicted with PTSD. Indeed, The portray of Unverdorben serves as a conduit through which Amis conveys his stance on Holocaust narratives in literature. Firstly, *Time's Arrow* effectively counters those questioning the legitimacy of Holocaust fiction. Theodor Adorno once contended, "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (Bach 78), and some critics have questioned the authenticity of Holocaust narratives due to the fictional nature of novels. However, Holocaust narratives should not be confined solely to the testimonies of survivors or onlookers; novels, as a literary genre, have the power to unveil truths, thus counteracting the oblivion of the Holocaust in unique ways. In fact, since the second world war, Holocaust novels have evolved significantly and become an indispensable part of the twentieth century literature. By examining and portraying Unverdorben's PTSD from the perspective of psychiatry, Amis not only infuses scientific authenticity into *Time's Arrow*, but also firmly advocates for the legitimacy of writing on the Holocaust. Secondly, the trauma narrative concerning the Nazi doctor aligns with the latest trend in Holocaust novels—perpetrator narratives, which have emerged in the last two decades following the dominance of victim narratives and bystander narratives. Transcending the demonization of perpetrators prevalent in the other two types, perpetrator narratives in novels—such as *The Reader* (1997), *The Kindly Ones* (2009), and *The*

Dark Room (2007)—primarily explore the motivation behind their participation in the Holocaust and ethical and psychological dilemmas confronted when their crimes are exposed. By portraying the Nazi doctor, *Time's Arrow* without doubt shares some commonalities with perpetrator narratives; however, its uniqueness lies in the fact that Unverdorben is concurrently a psychological victim of the Holocaust. Through this dual lens, *Time's Arrow* not only discloses the intricacies of trauma, deepening readers' understanding of humanity, but also enhances the profundity of the novel, leaving ample scope for introspection on pivotal issues linked to the Holocaust, including history, ethics, and human nature. In this sense, *Time's Arrow* pioneers a new direction for Holocaust novels.

The Banality of Evil Embedded in PTSD

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Hannah Arendt examines the motives of Adolf Eichmann[1], a notorious Nazi perpetrator, and contends that it is not hatred or malice towards Jews but an absence of independent thought that drives him to commit abominable crimes. She defines this phenomenon as "the banality of evil,"[2] which refers to individuals in totalitarian regimes submitting blindly to authority and participating unwittingly in atrocities, devoid of any reflective thought. The Nazi doctor Unverdorben exemplifies this banality of evil. As a member of SS, he "does what everybody else does, good or bad, with no limit, once under the cover of numbers" (Amis 157), holding the steadfast belief that "I am a healer, everything I do heals" (Amis 77). Being convinced that he is one of the "children of God, empowered to destroy and kill on behalf of their higher calling," as noted by Robert Lifton (449), Unverdorben not only harvests living organs in Auschwitz but also remains engaged in "his invasion, his conquests, his quiet annexations" (Amis 53) far removed from Germany. Even during intimate encounters with his girlfriend Irene, his mind is filled with words of aggression. Essentially, his actions mirror both the logic of war and the omnipresent power dynamic, in which he abandons independent thought, and blindly succumbs to the Nazi regimes, unaware of the crimes he has committed.

It is noteworthy that despite participation in the Holocaust serving as the immediate trigger for his PTSD, Unverdorben unexpectedly avoids contemplating

1 Adolf Eichmann, a senior official in Nazi Germany, played a pivotal role in the Holocaust. By organizing and implementing systematic expulsions and killings, he directly caused the deaths of thousands of hundreds of innocent Jews. During his trial, he denied his guilt and claimed that he merely carried out military orders, irresponsible for the genocide.

2 See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2006, pp.20-36.

it, thereby creating a striking discrepancy with his medical identity and expertise. This resulting tension propels readers to reassess the absurd Holocaust world crafted in the inverted time, reversing "the arrow of time" once again, and reordering the facts in a logical sequence. It is precisely in this intricate process that readers garner "one partial glimpse into the complexity of the perpetrators" (Lothe 138), achieving upon introspection "the (re)discovery of horrors we already know but must acknowledge yet again" (McCarthy 302). These horrors extend beyond death tolls to encompass both the banality of evil embedded within PTSD and the underlying mechanisms fueling the Holocaust.

In the context where "National Socialism is nothing more than applied biology" (Amis 150), Unverdorben resolutely joins the SS and becomes a Nazi doctor, which reflects to a certain extent a dimension of Nazi ideology. The German populace, including Unverdorben, blindly adheres to Hitler and the Nazi regime, and perceives "Jews as the bacillus and ferment of social decomposition" (Fisch 349). This perception of "social decomposition" suggests that Jews are considered destructive and subversive to German society, thereby equating the eradication of the "Jewish toxins" with the purification and self-preservation of the German nation. In this way, the acts of killing are "sublimated into a sacrificial paradigm for the good of the race" (Virdee 241) and doctors, convinced by such an inverted ideology, feel duty-bound to eliminate Jews.

Provided that Unverdorben's violation of the Hippocratic Oath stems from the fact that "the perpetrator's individual will is supplanted by that of the regime and race" (Badrideen 65), then the pseudo-medical milieu further impairs his reasoning and judgment. In Auschwitz prisoners, regardless of their health status, are designated as patients, while the camp facilities adopt the nomenclature and practices of a hospital system. The entire Auschwitz is disguised as a central hospital, with gas chambers labeled as showers, and the laboratory for human experimentation posing as the Institute for Health Research. Having fabricated the semblance of a medical environment, the Nazi regime deliberately conceals and erases the traces of the Holocaust and the atrocities. Furthermore, this pseudo-medical milieu penetrates into their daily work and personal life. Nazi doctors' duties in Auschwitz mirror their routine responsibilities in a real hospital—evaluating substances to be applied, calculating dosages, administering injections, observing patients, and documenting data. Outside of work they can pursue hobbies and interests, and take vacations to visit family; everything seems to go as normal as before. In summary, what they experience in Auschwitz is cloaked within the guise of medical research and daily life, as if having nothing to do with the Holocaust.

It is undeniable that Nazi ideology, coupled with its illusion of a medical milieu, can numb individuals to some degrees. However, in the face of inhumane atrocities, the immense psychological shock that most individuals may experience in similar circumstances has the potential to propel Unverdorben towards deep contemplation of these atrocities. Regrettably, such a shock never occurs and the potential for introspection is suppressed by a psychological split that develops unconsciously. On one hand, Unverdorben is a considerate and responsible husband and friend, yet on the other hand, he transforms into a ruthless and reckless executor trampling on lives in Auschwitz. The split selves vividly illustrate, in a literary form, Robert Lifton's finding that Nazi doctors usually exhibit a psychological pattern of doubling—the Auschwitz self, who kills mercilessly and mindlessly, and the original self, who possesses a common conscience and conscientiousness. As Robert Lifton asserts, the psychological pattern of doubling is "the doctors' overall mechanism for participating in evil" (417), through which Unverdorben becomes accustomed to and turns a blind eye to the atrocities in Auschwitz, devoid of any inclination to explore the truth behind them. Moreover, the doubling, to some extents, diminishes Unverdorben's introspection on his personal responsibility during the Holocaust, as it implies a cognition that the original self which is inherently good is extraneous to the killings, while the Auschwitz self merely fulfills tasks assigned by military superiors.

In his interviews with Nazi doctors, Lifton further uncovers that "the Auschwitz self depends upon radically diminished feeling, upon one's not experiencing psychologically what one was doing" (442). This underscores the crucial role of psychic numbing in allowing the Auschwitz self, despite functioning as "a working machine" and existing as "a walking dead," to keep a comparatively stable spiritual equilibrium and endure the Holocaust. In *Time's Arrow,* what the weeping babies in gas chambers elicit from Unverdorben is not his compassion, a normal response for any individual with a conscience, but rather great concerns about the potential disruption of carbon monoxide absorption and the success of the experiment. The eyes of individuals of various races that occupy the entire wall do not invoke his fear; rather, he focuses coldly on studying their colors, dissecting their features, and even crafting new human forms with them. For Unverdorben, prisoners in Auschwitz have become thoroughly dehumanized, reduced to mere subjects for his "scientific research." It is in this understanding that he successfully avoids guilt, "maintaining that internal sense of numbed habituation in order to fend off potentially overwhelming images of its relationship of guilt, death and murder" (Lifton 446). To put it simply, Unverdorben has forgone any introspection on the nature of his crimes, cloaked in a veil of psychic numbing.

As evident from the preceding analyses, a multitude of factors have resulted in the banality of evil embedded within Unverdorben's PTSD. On a superficial level, his banality of evil seems to be the consequence of "rationalization" nurtured by national bioengineering ideology and the pseudo-medical milieu. However, upon deeper introspection, it is not difficult to find that this "rationalization" has deliberately misinterpreted and abused medicine, or in a broad sense, scientific rationality—a cornerstone of modernity since the Enlightenment. Undeniably, scientific rationality, which thrives in the realms such as technology, medicine and economy, has significantly promoted societal prosperity and advancement. Yet, when it expands to all domains or goes to an extreme, becoming a societal hegemony, its excessive emphasis on science and logic, coupled with a disregard for values and emotions, can bring about dire consequences and even catastrophic disasters. The Holocaust is indeed a poignant exemplification. Doctor Unverdorben, who should have healed the wounded and preserved life, transforms into an indifferent and insensitive executor of state machinery, disregarding ethics and morals. Given his moral and intellectual conviction before the Holocaust, Unverdorben would have fiercely resisted participating in the Holocaust, without the forceful propaganda and infiltration of the biomedical engineering that closely aligns with the scientific rationality embedded in medical beliefs. Through the portrayal of the banality of evil in *Time's Arrow,* Amis critiques the hegemony of scientific rationality, resonating with the profound insights of social criticism. Having examined the mechanisms underlying the Holocaust from various perspectives, scholars in the field of social criticism assert that the hegemony of scientific rationality is a crucial impetus for the occurrence of the Holocaust. Zygmunt Bauman, a renowned critical sociologist, elucidates in *Modernity and the Holocaust* that the Holocaust is the other side of modernity (265), revealing that scientific rationality, as an integral aspect of modernity, bears an inescapable responsibility for such heinous atrocities.

Furthermore, *Time's Arrow* elucidates individual responsibility in the Holocaust through the description of Unverdorben's psychology and mental states. Both the psychological pattern of doubling and psychic numbing, as previously analyzed, exhibit the morbidity that is intertwined with Unverdorben's forfeiting independent thought, moral judgment, and fundamental humanity during the dehumanization of Jews. If he had been able to counteract the forces of doubling and numbness, the acts of killing might not have unfolded so smoothly despite the ideology's potent influence. In Amis's narrative, the occurrence of the Holocaust is not only driven by the Nazi ideology but is closely linked to individual responsibility. This resonates

profoundly with Hannah Arendt's contention that perpetrators are not the "cogs"[1] forced by national machinery but rather the ones accountable for their crimes in the Holocaust. Moreover, the banality of evil discloses the chilling essence of the Holocaust—any individual, regardless of their malice, could potentially relinquish their critical thinking and moral judgment, becoming a ruthless killer in similar circumstances. In this way, the Holocaust, transcending the confines of the Nazi regime and perpetrators, extends to any ordinary and benevolent individual, thereby reminding readers to uphold their capacities for independent thought to prevent such atrocities from recurring.

PTSD and the Temporal Reversal

In literature, narrative experiments with time have increasingly been associated with the theme of violence. For example, in stream of consciousness—a prominent narrative style of the twentieth century—writers utilize the stagnation, compression, and dilation of time as pivotal tools to deconstruct the world wars. In postmodern literature techniques such as the temporal fragmentation, collage, and looping are often employed to examine the profound interconnections between violence, power, and politics. Following this trend, *Time's Arrow* explores the paramount social issue of the twentieth century, the Holocaust, through a radical reversal of time—a technique once considered improbable in literature narrative by Vladimir Nabokov and numerous other novelists and critics. With all the events and actions unfolding in an inverted sequence, Unverdorben's life is depicted from death to birth, like a videotape played in reverse. Despite that temporal reversal in war narratives is not unfamiliar to modern novelists—Kurt Vonnegut, for example, portrays a bomber attack on a base in reversed temporal order in *Slaughterhouse-Five,* enhancing the effect of black humor—it remains a significant and adventurous challenge for Martin Amis to employ the radical temporal reversal throughout *Time's Arrow*. Unsurprisingly, this narrative strategy has garnered widespread attention from scholars at home and abroad, among whom some argue that it is "wholly appropriate to the subject matter" (Bentley 68), while others criticize it as "a blasphemous way for Amis to profit from the horrors of the Holocaust" (Will 144). Regardless of these different interpretations, the academic debate itself highlights the significance of temporal reversal in understanding *Time's Arrow*. This paper contends that temporal reversal not only exposes the banality of evil embedded within Unverdorben's PTSD, as discussed in the preceding chapter, but also

1 See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Dilemma of modern Ethics*. New York: Penguin, 2019, pp. 55-56.

resonates with illness narratives, reflecting to a certain extent the manifestations, metaphors, and broad implications of this mental disorder.

Situated in a backward world since the outset, Unverdorben's soul, the narrator of *Time's Arrow,* finds itself deeply ensnared in confusion when confronted with something inexplicable, such as illogical conversations in which answers precede questions, the reverse reading order adopted by traditional Japanese readers[1], and Unverdorben's astonishing transformation from decrepitude and frailty to youthful vitality. The temporal reversal underlying these "inexplicable" phenomena has significantly created a profound chaos within the soul. Likewise, chaos plagues Unverdorben, who suffers from PTSD. He repeatedly "revisits" the scenes of the Holocaust in the guise of nightmares, experiencing inexplicable fears of eyes, flames, and babies even in his waking hours. This indicates his inability to discern between dreams and reality, or the past and the present, leading to his disarray. As Shoshana Felman observes, the narratives of PTSD patients seem to "be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of frames of reference" (5). Unverdorben similarly exhibits disordered perceptions of time and causality. In this sense, the chaos experienced by the soul in temporal reversal mirrors one aspect of Unverdorben's PTSD symptoms, thereby illustrating a manifestation of this disorder.

Nicolas Tredell argues, "The soul's futile attempts to make sense of experience fail, therefore, because without the crucial knowledge that time is running in reverse, all of its theories or perceptions prove incorrect[...]" (131). Indeed, the soul misinterprets all movements as their diametric opposites, leading to a radical reversal of causality. For instance, "Forward, unwrapping, and cleaning" are perceived as "backward, packing, and soiling," while donating transforms into taking money from a charity box, purchasing medicine into withdrawing drugs from patients, and giving birth into a farewell between mother and child. Owing to causality reversal, morality is inverted as well. In Amis's words, "Almost any deed, any action, has its morality reversed, if you turn the arrow around" (DeCurtis 147). In Auschwitz violence, destruction, and killing are disguised as benevolence, creation, and healing. Consequently, the soul concludes that the preternatural

1 The traditional Japanese are accustomed to reading from right to left, whereas other peoples read from left to right. In the case of temporal reversal, the sequence of reading that the soul has witnessed in traditional Japanese culture shifts from "right to left" to "left to right," which is distinctly different from the order the soul has observed in non-Japanese cultures.

objective is " to dream a race. To make a people from the weather, from thunder and from lightning. With gas, with electricity, with shit, with fire" (Amis 120). Evidently, the soul's perception reflects the inverted Nazi ideology, which transforms the Holocaust—an endeavor aiming at the annihilation of the Jews—into a righteous pursuit for national and racial rejuvenation. Brian Finney notes, in *Time's Arrow* "the dual reversal of chronology and causality perfectly portrays the Nazi's reversal of morality" (Keulks 107). Similarly, Harris Greg asserts, "by progressing backwards, the narrative style in and off itself comments on the Nazi's paradoxical version of 'progress'—that is, the revitalization of archaic myths in the name of national renewal" (489). Through this logical and moral reversal in inverted time, Amis satirizes the Nazis' distorted ideology, which, as analyzed in the preceding chapter, is a contributing factor for Unverdorben's abandonment of independent thought, his engagement in the banality of evil, and his subsequent affliction with PTSD.

Notably, while the soul is capable of perceiving Unverdorben's subconscious, it remains unable to decipher the implications, particularly when entangled in the terrifying visions of nightmares. As Gavin Keulks states, "deprived of life experience, driven to a symbolic limbo from which to view his alter-ego's life in reverse" (110), the soul is repudiated and excluded from Unverdorben's thought. In this context, the repulsion encountered by the soul reflects the Nazi ideology which excludes and eliminates Jewish others. Furthermore, in stark contrast to the Nazi ideology, the soul holds diametrically opposite beliefs and values, embracing "unconditional love for others" (Diedrick 141), demonstrating profound empathy for their sufferings and opposing Unverdorben's prejudices and indifference towards minorities. In essence, this dichotomy between the soul and Unverdorben underscores the latter's psychological self-division. The soul largely embodies the ethical and moral facets of Unverdorben—a "healing angel in white" before participating in the Holocaust—while the Nazi doctor Unverdorben is cold and numb, regardless of ethics and morality. Self-division, as discussed before, serves as the psychological mechanism that nurtures the banality of evil, while the banality of evil is deeply embedded within the protagonist's mental disorder. From this perspective, the split between the soul and Unverdorben within the inverted time establishes a subtle connection with PTSD.

As John Dern elucidates, "joining bodies and souls back together is the purpose of inverted time in *Time's Arrow*" (200). Despite the great divergence, the soul persists in striving for fusion with Unverdorben. Ultimately, it reverts to the womb—a cozy and nurturing home—where a nascent life is being conceived, liberated from Nazi ideology and rejuvenated with ethics. This narrative embodies

Amis's aspiration to undo the Holocaust and subvert historical narratives in a sense. It is noteworthy that in the inverted time, the soul's journey is actually not moving away from but progressively approaching the Holocaust. Instead of experiencing dread, it witnesses a renaissance of the victims, as though the genocide had never taken place, thereby poetically undoing the notorious Holocaust in form. As Amis states, with time's arrow running in the opposite direction, what readers encounter is an absurd and regressive world, where the atrocities of Auschwitz are thus symbolically undone (DeCurtis 146).

Regardless of Amis's aspiration, history is not mutable, nor is truth deniable. James Diedrick observes, "in his descriptions of breathing life back into the victims of Nazi genocide, the narrator effects a poetic undoing of the Holocaust, all the more poignant for the reader's knowledge that it can never be undone" (134). Indeed, this "knowledge" is profoundly reinforced in the narrative of temporal reversal. In the face of the absurd Holocaust in a backward world, readers in the post-Holocaust era are compelled to deeply engage with the text, and to "deal with all the morality because these horrific events are presented as philanthropic" (Reynolds 21). They are called on to do the moral reordering, and "constantly supply all the tragedies" (Diedrick 134). In this endeavor, while reconstructing the meaning, readers foster a profound reflection, thus becoming acutely aware of the perverted Nazi ideology and the brutal atrocities committed against humanity. Furthermore, through the lens of temporal reversal, readers garner insight into "how the minds of young doctors like Unverdorben are warped by Nazi ideology; otherwise they might have approached patients with compassion and humanity" (Tang 78). In other words, by shedding light on the psychological trauma inflicted on the protagonist, the temporal reversal in *Time's Arrow* prompts readers to recognize the paramount importance of upholding independent thinking and judgment.

Last but not least, in temporal reversal the soul's journey toward what it perceives as future paradoxically transforms into a regression to the past in which the Holocaust unfolded. In this regard, Amis artfully establishes an effective equivalence between the future and the past, implying that individuals in the post-Holocaust era are likely to confront violence, slaughter, or even extinction. This grim destiny echoes the potential plight of humanity under the threat of nuclear war. Nurtured in the aftermath of the Cold War, Amis harbors a profound anxiety about nuclear annihilation, which not only constitutes a central theme in his literary oeuvre, but also serves as a conduit for his warnings to humanity. As McCarthy elucidates in his commentary on *Time's Arrow*, "the Holocaust of the Second World War and the fear of nuclear destruction seem to come together in Amis's

imagination around the metaphor of time: both represent the disappearance of hope, of belief in the future" (310). Through this temporal metaphor, Amis strives to evoke contemplation on the Holocaust and to forestall the descent towards the brink of nuclear catastrophe.

Conclusion

When questioned about the creative motive of *Time's Arrow*, Amis responded, "I am writing about the perpetrators and they are brothers, if you like" (Wachtel 47). Rather than depicting perpetrators as cold-blooded monsters as most writers usually do, he makes them patients with mental disorders. By delving beneath the textual manifestations of Unverdorben's PTSD—recurrent re-experiencing of the genocide, persistent hypervigilance, avoidance behaviors, and psychic numbing, Amis discloses how an ordinary individual, deceived profoundly by the Nazi bioengineering ideology, abandons independent thought and moral judgment in a state of psychological division and numbness. This "brother" unknowingly transforms into an agent of the banality of evil, becoming a psychological victim, unable to escape the grip of the Holocaust. In this regard, Amis's exploration of Unverdorben's dual identities and morbid mental states transcends the stereotype of perpetrators in traditional Holocaust literature, thereby endowing his character with depth and complexity.

Amis noted, in an interview discussing the temporal reversal in *Time's Arrow*, "I am pretty sure [...]. I have got something to say with it" (Morrison 99). Through the inverted narrative, he crafts an illusion of a benevolent Holocaust, addressing both the banality of evil and the nature of offence, which resonates strongly with contemporary scholarly researches on this subject. Furthermore, *Time's Arrow* invites readers to transcend the barrier of inverted time, participate actively in reconstructing meaning, and reflect deeply on the underlying mechanisms of the Holocaust. With readers contemplating the text, the inverted Nazi ideology, the nature of offence embedded within PTSD, Amis's aspiration of undoing the Holocaust and concerns for humanity emerge in their minds to varying degrees. In this way, Amis infuses the temporal reversal—a quintessential postmodernist technique—with authenticity, critical insight, and humanistic concerns, thereby fulfilling a realist function to a certain extent. This approach, as Catherine Bernard notes, "reaffirms the necessity for fiction to shoulder reality" (122). Through the temporal reversal narrative, Amis proposes a version of postmodern realism, which seeks to restore the connection between literature and reality, and to re-endow literature with depth and meaning by compromising between realism and

postmodernism. Such postmodern realism sheds the excessive nothingness often associated with postmodernism, and represents the latest trend in contemporary literary creation, serving as a pivotal technique for Amis to explore and critique society. As the Marxist Fredric Jameson asserts, "while postmodern culture struggles with its isolation from history, it seeks out its style in an attempt to create an identity that is new and independent even as it is anchored to some sense of historical authenticity" (17). In *Time's Arrow*, Amis successfully combines historical authenticity with postmodern style. Through the lens of PTSD and temporal reversal, he not only uncovers the nature of the Holocaust, but also explores the potential of postmodern realism to forge a new path for postmodern literature.

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