

## The Double-Headed Arrow of Trauma: The Morally Traumatized Perpetrator in Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*

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Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* (1991) gave rise to much controversy when it came out, for this novella revolves around a traumatized Nazi doctor exiled in the US whose life is narrated in a disorienting reverse chronology by what would seem to be his own dissociated conscience. Despite the abundant academic publications on this experimental narrative, such as those that read it as a posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) piece of fiction, the origin of the protagonist's damaged psyche and the diverse symptoms he suffers from have not yet been explored from the viewpoint of perpetrator trauma, a moral-related syndrome distinct from PTSD that affects victimisers haunted by remorse. Drawing on trauma theory and the recently developed concepts of perpetration-induced traumatic stress (PITS) and moral injury, this article aims to contribute to the scholarly conversation on Amis's novella by arguing that its narrative voice, backwards temporality, intertextuality and recurrent motifs perform the perpetrator/protagonist's moral-based trauma provoked by an acute sense of shameful guilt and the fear of being discovered. The article concludes by suggesting that, through this staggering work, Amis gives readers not only an opportunity to actively remember and reflect on the Nazi genocide but also an insight into trauma from an unusual but necessary perspective.

Keywords: perpetrator trauma; moral injury; shameful guilt; traumatic dissociation; unspeakability; Holocaust fiction

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La doble flecha del trauma:  
el perpetrador moralmente traumatizado en *Time's Arrow*,  
de Martin Amis

*Time's Arrow* (1991), de Martin Amis, suscitó mucha controversia tras su publicación, ya que esta novela corta se centra en el trauma de un doctor nazi exiliado en EUA cuya vida es narrada en sentido inverso por parte de lo que parece ser su propia conciencia disociada. A pesar de la abundancia de publicaciones académicas sobre esta narrativa experimental, entre las cuales se encuentran las que la analizan en términos del trastorno de estrés postraumático (TEPT), el origen y los síntomas de la dañada psique del protagonista todavía no han sido explorados desde la perspectiva del trauma del perpetrador, un síndrome distinto al TEPT y relacionado con la moral que afecta a victimarios afligidos por el remordimiento. Basándose en la teoría del trauma y los recientes conceptos de estrés traumático inducido por perpetración (ETIP) y lesión moral, este artículo pretende contribuir a la conversación académica sobre esta obra de Amis argumentando que su voz narrativa, temporalidad invertida, intertextualidad y motivos recurrentes representan el trauma moral del perpetrador/protagonista provocado por un agudo sentido de culpa vergonzante y miedo a ser descubierto. El artículo concluye sugiriendo que, con esta novela tan impactante, Amis proporciona al público lector no solo una oportunidad para recordar y reflexionar activamente sobre el genocidio nazi, sino también una visión del trauma desde una perspectiva inusual pero necesaria.

Palabras clave: trauma del perpetrador; lesión moral; culpa vergonzante; disociación traumática; indecibilidad; ficción del Holocausto

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust was such an atrocious event that its narrativisation has always raised aesthetic and moral problems. In 1949, Theodor W. Adorno famously asserted that “to write poetry after Auschwitz [was] barbaric” since, for him, it was impossible to represent such an unspeakable crime in aesthetic terms (1967, 34). Although Adorno did recognise that art is the only means by which “suffering can find its own voice [and] consolation” without being betrayed ([1962] 1982, 312), the difficulty of representing the Holocaust has remained a constant preoccupation in critical thought. For this reason, Ann Parry has referred to the Shoah as a “caesura” or “radical break” that requires “a re-thinking of the relation between past, present and future” and “completely reconstitute[s] ideas about evil and what it is to be human” (1999, 249).

Notwithstanding the ongoing debate around the representation of the Holocaust, the numerous autobiographical accounts and autofictional works written by survivors like Primo Levi, Jorge Semprún and Elie Wiesel have contributed to a better understanding and remembrance of a historical event that should never be forgotten. In contraposition, Holocaust fiction by nonsurvivors has been questioned far more (Martínez-Alfaro 2011, 129), and the controversy has been especially intense when the genre has dealt with Nazi perpetrators rather than victims. In fact, the representation and study of perpetrators has always been polemical and, therefore, limited. According to Jenni Adams, the reason for the scarcity of research on perpetrators is due to scholars’ “doubts concerning the risk of obscuring or de-emphasising victim perspectives and experience,” as well as identification with perpetrators that might lead to the legitimisation or exoneration of their viewpoints and actions, plus the fostering of “more sinister fascinations than that of clean-eyed critical enquiry” (2013, 2).<sup>1</sup>

The existence of scholarly work on victimisers has started to increase in the last few years to the point that perpetrator studies is becoming a promising field of research. For instance, critics like Stef Craps et al. have defended the focus on perpetrators and denied the idea that this approach can downplay the importance of victims’ voices. As they argue, it is rather the sole identification with victims that makes us “effectively deny our own complicity in violent histories and our own capacity for evil” (2015, 916). Interestingly, this statement echoes the important conclusion Hannah Arendt reached after witnessing “the banality of evil” during Adolf Eichmann’s trial, namely, the fact that the frightening nature of genocide perpetrators like Eichmann results not from the “sadistic” atrocities they committed, but from their being “terribly and terrifyingly” normal individuals ([1963] 2006, 276). Arendt’s reflection enabled the concomitant understanding of perpetrators as real figures in lieu of monsters and the realisation of

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<sup>1</sup> Dominick LaCapra notes that testimonies of traumatic events raise the problem of sympathy turning into unethical overidentification. Accordingly, he draws a distinction between texts that promote identification—the listener’s or reader’s unethical act of taking the victim’s place—and texts that promote empathy—an understanding of the experience of victims of a traumatic event that does not entail the listener’s or reader’s appropriation of the experience, but simply their “empathic unsettlement” (2001, 78).

the complexity of human evil. Thus, as Erin McGlothlin observes, the examination of perpetrators' experiences is a necessary step in order to avoid the perpetuation of the pre-Arendt construction of victimisers as "abstract, mythical figures whose actions cannot be accounted for" (2009, 214).

Likewise, Saira Mohamed has argued that perpetrators are a part of the victim-victimiser binary that needs to be focused on so as to better comprehend our history, human evil and trauma (2015). Rachael MacNair (2002) and Sue Vice (2013) have gone further by acknowledging the existence of perpetrator trauma—the idea that victimisers can be psychologically injured by their own wrongdoings or crimes—and by offering a study of the symptoms experienced by these individuals as a result of their guilt. Moreover, the perpetration of violence has latterly been recognised as a cause of trauma by the American Psychiatric Association (2013).

In fictional and nonfictional literature, despite the great ethical challenge posed to writers, readers and literary critics, as María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro observes, perpetrator trauma and the negative influence of a perpetrator's past acts of victimisation on their descendants have lately become themes of interest (2011, 117). For example, some authors of Holocaust fiction such as Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, W. G. Sebald and Rachel Seiffert have written about traumatised Nazi perpetrators or their offspring. In particular, in *Time's Arrow or The Nature of the Offence* (1991), Amis explores the trauma of an exiled Nazi doctor in charge of murdering thousands of individuals at Auschwitz who feigns being someone else while living in the US. Despite the abundance of scholarly work on Amis's novella, like Valentina Adami's insightful exploration of the text as an example of trauma fiction (2008), the origin of the protagonist's damaged psyche and the various symptoms he suffers from have not yet been studied from the viewpoint of perpetrator trauma.

It is true that the psychological condition of Amis's protagonist has been explored as a form of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a psychic affliction experienced by survivors of a traumatic event. However, even though PTSD has long been used to talk about both victims and perpetrators of a violent act, in the last few years researchers in the fields of psychology and law have pointed to the need to differentiate the particular syndrome that affects the latter group, which, although related to psychological trauma, in some ways differs from it. In fact, various experts have proved that the participation of individuals like soldiers and terrorists in atrocious actions that imply the transgression of moral and ethical standards can provoke in them serious levels of anxiety that derive from overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame (Litz et al. 2009; Mohamed 2015; Jinkerson 2016). When this negative self-appraisal "is so intense and persistent" that it interferes with the perpetrator's "ability to live a normal, stable, flourishing life," the wrongdoer can be said to suffer from a moral injury, which Ned Dobos calls "moral trauma" (2015, 151). Thus, the key distinction between PTSD-affected and morally traumatised subjects lies in the fact that whereas the former become psychologically wounded after experiencing a life-

threatening event, the latter are psychologically as well as emotionally, spiritually and socially distressed by their own immoral acts, even to the extent of becoming dysfunctional individuals (Litz et al. 2009; Dobos 2015). For this reason, it is my contention that the analysis of the trauma suffered by Amis's Nazi physician as a syndrome based on a moral ailment that results from his direct participation in the Holocaust can complete and expand former studies on the novella.

Hence, drawing on trauma theory and the recently developed concepts of perpetration-induced traumatic stress (PITS) (MacNair 2002) and moral injury (Litz et al. 2009; Frame 2015; Jinkerson 2016), this article aims to demonstrate that *Time's Arrow's* Nazi protagonist does not suffer from PTSD but, rather, from a traumatic syndrome that specifically affects perpetrators that are haunted by their remorse. As will be shown, narrative voice, backwards temporality, intertextual references and recurrent motifs are used in the novella as performative indices of the main character's moral-related trauma, provoked by his evidently self-induced sense of shameful guilt and fear of being discovered. The article concludes by suggesting that, in spite of having been accused of trivialising and monetising the Holocaust (Bell 1992; Buchan 1991), *Time's Arrow* gives readers and scholars not only an opportunity to actively remember and reflect on the Nazi genocide, but also an insight into trauma from an unusual but necessary perspective that allows for a more inclusive understanding of it.

## 2. PERPETRATOR TRAUMA OR PERPETRATION-INDUCED TRAUMATIC STRESS

Trauma gained official disease status in 1980, when it was included in the third edition of the authoritative *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A decade later, a flood of scholarship arose to examine the cultural implications of trauma, which Cathy Caruth, drawing on Sigmund Freud's early theories, defined as "a wound inflicted [...] upon the mind" (1996, 3) caused by a traumatic event that "is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly" (1995, 5). As Sandra L. Bloom explains, also echoing Freud, a traumatic event can be repressed through psychic dissociation, a defence mechanism of the human brain that allows subjects to cope with it (2010, 200). Nonetheless, when an individual remains stuck in this state and/or the traumatic occurrence is not eventually integrated into the psyche, the repressed consequences of the event belatedly return. At this new phase of repetition compulsion or "acting out" (LaCapra 2001, 66), the subject persistently reexperiences the traumatic occurrence through intrusive flashbacks, recurrent dreams or later situations that echo the original one, which not only disrupt his or her memory but also his or her identity. Although it is difficult to overcome the haunting repetitions of the traumatic experience, the recovery or "working through" of trauma is possible by means of the narrativisation of the traumatic memories (Breuer and Freud [1895] 2000; Freud [1914] 1958) and allows the subject to break the acting-out spiral (LaCapra 2001, 66).

Following the tenets postulated by Caruth, Bloom and Dominick LaCapra, among other trauma experts, literary critics like Laurie Vickroy and Anne Whitehead have studied the representation of trauma in fiction—especially Western texts—and noted a set of narrative techniques used by many writers to convey “the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties” of the acting-out phase (Vickroy 2002, xiv).<sup>2</sup> Common techniques include “textual gaps [...], repetition, breaks in linear time, shifting viewpoints, [...] a focus on visual images and affective states” (Vickroy 2002, 29), plus “intertextuality, repetition and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice” (Whitehead 2004, 84). Nevertheless, these critics, alongside Caruth and other trauma scholars, have studied trauma by focusing on the symptoms and experience of surviving victims of a traumatic violent event and have paid little attention to the other side of the binary, that is, perpetrators.

The study of the effects that violent histories have on perpetrators is still rare as scholars have often adopted an either/or vision of trauma theory. Clearly, there are perpetrators—the agents inflicting pain on other individuals—and victims—who, together with their descendants or other witnesses, play the role of passive receivers of the perpetrator’s violent action(s) and may become traumatised after the vicious event. While seemingly logical, this understanding of the trauma paradigm can be myopic too due to the fallacious premise that all trauma sufferers are victims. As Anne Rothe indicates, “while all victims suffer, not everyone who suffers is a victim, because some forms of suffering are not the result of victimization” (2011, 25), such as in the case of traumatised soldiers or witnesses. Michael Rothberg concurs with Rothe and contends that the disregard of this axiom—which, as he argues, has entailed the historical marginalisation and even denial of perpetrator trauma—is rooted in the mixing of concepts from different discourse areas (2009, 90). As he puts it, whereas *victim* and *perpetrator* belong to the legal and moral fields respectively, *trauma* is a concept from “the diagnostic realm which goes beyond guilt and innocence, good and evil” (90).<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, in order for analyses of the dynamics of trauma to be reliable, the exploration of the ways in which this psychological condition affects the agents as well as the receivers of violence is essential.

Despite the scarcity of studies on the aetiology and symptomatology of perpetrator trauma, in the last few years some scholars have acknowledged its existence and explored the particular symptoms suffered by victimisers, especially those involved in genocides. Of particular note is Rachel MacNair’s 2002 study of the ways in which the commission of violence can have traumatic repercussions for perpetrators, a type

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<sup>2</sup> In the last few years, literary critics like Craps have advocated the decolonisation of trauma studies and warned about the inadequate Eurocentric presumption of a prescriptive modernist/postmodernist aesthetic in all trauma narratives no matter their provenance (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Alan Gibbs sees the blend of PTSD and Caruthian theory as the source of the ethical problems related to trauma. According to this scholar, whereas the notion of PTSD was first studied in relation to perpetrators—Vietnam War soldiers who experienced haunting feelings of guilt and shame—in Holocaust studies, both scholars and survivors were reluctant to acknowledge perpetrators’ traumatic experiences (2014, 18). Thus, for Gibbs, it is the powerful influence of Holocaust studies on trauma theory that has eclipsed “the experience of the perpetrator” for years (19).

of suffering that she denominated *perpetration-induced traumatic stress* (PITS). In this investigation, MacNair concluded that, like victims, perpetrators can be possessed by intrusive thoughts and images, have episodes of psychic numbing and try to avoid any situation that resembles the traumatic event. On her part, Vice has defended the idea that, just as happens with victims, the reactions of the perpetrator following the violent event can take place either immediately in the form of rages, vomiting and other bodily responses, or after a period of latency, when they take the form of intrusive dreams, odd behaviour or substance abuse (2013, 22).

Although the aforementioned symptoms can make PTSD and PITS undistinguishable at first sight, there are three essential differences that must be acknowledged for an effective study of the two syndromes. Firstly, as noted above, various scholars have recently demonstrated that, in contrast to the psychological injury suffered by the victims of a traumatic event, perpetrators tend to experience a moral injury that appears when they perceive their actions as violations of personal and societal moral rules. Such a moral conflict can result in acute and haunting self-induced feelings like guilt, self-disgust, shame and pity for the victim which, if repressed or not confronted, may give way to the damaging of the perpetrator's psyche (MacNair 2002, 129; Litz et al. 2009, 696; Jinkerson 2016, 125). This psychological damage may provoke symptoms that can be similar to those suffered by PTSD-affected victims or more specific ones like deep shame, withdrawal and anger (MacNair 2002; Litz et al. 2009; Jinkerson 2016).

A second disparity between the two traumatic disorders is related to their respective aetiologies. PTSD develops from exposure to a traumatic event that the affected individual perceives as a threat to the self or to others, both at the time of the traumatic occurrence and also later when the subject is exposed to stimuli reminiscent of the terrible experience. On the contrary, the core of perpetrator trauma is not an overwhelming catastrophe that "defies comprehension" (Caruth 1995, 153), but rather the conscious participation in "known-in-advance atrocities" that, at some point, will lead the victimiser to reflect on his or her moral fissures (Morag 2013, 16). Finally, the last difference between PTSD and PITS lies in the contrasting reasons for the victims' and perpetrators' difficulty in speaking about the traumatic event, and therefore, working through it. While the former find it impossible or very difficult to give testimony because remembrance of the traumatic experience entails reexperiencing the dangerous threat associated with it, in the case of perpetrators the impossibility of speaking relates to their fear of creating a confessional account. As Raya Morag explains, perpetrators' confessions "are shaped by [a] wilful introspection" that oftentimes leads to a personal conflict based on "the urge to tell vs. the burden of secrecy" as well as "the need for self-protection vs. self-incrimination" and "the desire for integration and inclusion vs. exclusion" (2013, 20). Hence, whereas PTSD or victim trauma is always related to the past, perpetrator trauma is both "a trauma-in-retrospect" and "a future-

oriented” one (21).<sup>4</sup> The next section examines the moral, self-induced origin of the protagonist’s traumatic syndrome in *Time’s Arrow* with a view to demonstrating that his psychological state is a case of perpetrator trauma or PITS rather than PTSD.

### 3. PERPETRATOR TRAUMA IN MARTIN AMIS’S *TIME’S ARROW*

*Time’s Arrow* is a peculiar narrative owing to the presence of a narrator that is neither heterodiegetic nor homodiegetic (Martínez-Alfaro 2011, 136) and defines itself as a “passenger or parasite” (Amis 1991, 16) within the protagonist’s body.<sup>5</sup> This strange entity is in charge of recounting the life of the protagonist, Tod Friendly, in reverse, starting at the moment when he wakes up from his own death in the US and finishing at the moment of his birth in Germany. As a result, motion and causality occur backwards, as can be inferred from the narrator’s observations: “Why am I walking *backwards* into the house? [...] what is the sequence of the journey I’m on? (14; italics in the original). Although the chronological reversal of temporality is clear for readers from the opening of the story, Amis’s narrator is not aware of the altered flow of time. However, from the very start this liminal narrative voice does have the sense of “starting out on a terrible journey” towards its host’s “terrible secret” (12), an enigma that is solved as the story progresses: Tod Friendly is actually the fake name of Odilo Unverdorben, a Nazi doctor who helped Uncle Pepi—a fictional alter ego of Dr. Josef Mengele—run medical experiments at Auschwitz extermination camp. As is explained in the ensuing subsections, it is this dark truth that Odilo tries to keep from others by repressing it in his mind through a dissociative process that haunts him, as if it were a life-sentence, until the end of his days.

#### 3.1. Avoiding Remorse: Traumatic Dissociation and Time Dislocation

Seymour Chatman has situated *Time’s Arrow* in the late twentieth-century tradition of “antinomy”—meaning “against the rule”—a sort of narrative that, unlike traditional fiction, interrupts the plot with flashbacks and moves continually backwards (2009, 33). Interestingly, these techniques clearly resemble the narrative formulae of trauma fiction put forward by Vickroy (2002) and Whitehead (2004), which confirms that Amis’s novella is indeed a trauma narrative. Moreover, as Adami explains, because the Nazi genocide was such an enormous traumatic experience that it defies language, a postmodern literary representation of the Shoah like that provided in *Time’s Arrow* can “recognize and embody the linguistic, literary and ethical problems inherent

<sup>4</sup> It is important to bear in mind that this clear-cut difference established by Morag works for the experience of perpetrators and direct victims only. The written or oral verbalisation of trauma by witnesses suffering from survivor syndrome—an acute sense of guilt at having survived a tragic event when others did not—may adopt the form of a confession expressing their survival guilt in lieu of a regular trauma testimony.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the article, the ghostly narrator is referred to with neuter pronouns and determiners so as to differentiate it from its human host.



in representing” the incredibly deep trauma of the victimised survivors (2008, 56). Nonetheless, compared to previously published narratives dealing with the Holocaust, the novelty in *Time's Arrow* is that it does not focus on the victims but on the victimisers. In fact, as Amis himself has explained, the novella's temporal reversal aimed at recovering the voice of a Nazi perpetrator and thus cast a different perspective on the atrocious Nazi genocide (1996, 47).

Ironically, the most prominent voice in the story is not the perpetrator/protagonist's but that of the narrator, which turns out to be a separated part of the protagonist himself. Odilo's self's split, which is observable from the very start of the story, takes place in the backwards journey depicted by the narrator at the moment when he wakes up at his deathbed surrounded by “American doctors” (Amis 1991, 11). In this strange awakening the narrator gradually becomes aware of the estrangement between its host and itself and informs the reader of its lack of control over the body it inhabits: “Something isn't quite working: this body I'm in won't take orders from this will of mine. Look around, I say. But his neck ignores me. His eyes have their own agenda” (13). However, even though the narrator has no access to Odilo's memory or thoughts, it is “awash with his emotions” (15) for it can access his affective knowledge. Thus, as Martínez-Alfaro puts it, in a sense this narrative voice could stand for “something close to the protagonist's conscience or soul” (2011, 136).

As Vice (2000) and Adami (2008) note, the gap between Odilo and his conscience is evidenced in the latter's use of personal pronouns that shift from the first person singular “I” to the third person singular “he” throughout the story until Odilo arrives at Auschwitz concentration camp, when the alternation between pronouns stops until it is resumed in the last two chapters. In addition, the conscience's direct references to its estrangement from Odilo demonstrate the protagonist's dissociative process: “We are in this together. But it isn't good for him to be so alone. His isolation is complete. Because he doesn't know I'm here” (Amis 1991, 22). But this detachment becomes all the more evident in Odilo's and his conscience's incapacity to communicate or to “see eye to eye [...] on all issues” (39). A good example of their typical dissent is the conscience/narrator's negative opinion of Odilo's job as a doctor, which, owing to its reversed logic, the former regards as “a war against health” (83) taking place at “atrocious-producing” (102) facilities. Accordingly, it could be argued that Odilo's and his conscience's separation is the product of a process of traumatic dissociation—one of the most recognisable symptoms experienced by perpetrators (MacNair 2002, 33)—that results from the repression in the unconscious of memories, feelings and thoughts that provoke anxiety in the traumatised individual (Bloom 2010, 200).

As has been pointed out by some scholars (Vice 2000; Adami 2008; Martínez-Alfaro 2011), the split between Odilo's self and his conscience goes back to the distinctive form of dissociation experienced by Nazi doctors during the Third Reich, a phenomenon analysed by Robert J. Lifton in his work *The Nazi Doctors*. In this book, which Amis acknowledges as his main intertext in his afterword to *Time's Arrow* (1991,

175), Lifton explains that most of the Nazi doctors had been ordinary practitioners before joining Hitler's party (1986, 4-5). Nevertheless, forgetting their Hippocratic Oath, they played a central role in facilitating the genocide of Jews, gypsies, disabled and homosexual individuals, with the eugenic aim of "improving" the Aryan race. This is precisely the case of Odilo, a German physician leading an average married life and father to a child, who ends up participating in the Final Solution. According to Lifton, in order to commit all these atrocious acts, most Nazi doctors underwent a psychological process of "doubling"—dissociation—in which the self separates "into two functioning wholes" (418): the "Auschwitz self," which enabled these physicians to perpetrate thousands of killings, and the prior self, which allowed them to continue seeing themselves as human healers (419-22).

Significantly enough, and as noted above, in *Time's Arrow* it is when the narrative reaches the protagonist's time at Auschwitz that his two halves merge, and now the conscience/narrator refers to itself as "I, Odilo Unverdorben" (Amis 1991, 124). In fact, unlike in the previous chapters, in this section the conscience continuously uses first-person singular pronouns and determiners that bespeak its agency in the actions it recounts: "I was one. I was also in full uniform. [...] I slipped out of our coarse travelling clothes and emotionally donned the black boots, the white coat, the fleece-lined jacket, the peaked cap, the pistol. [...] My German crashed out of me, as if in millennial anger at having been silenced for so long" (124-25). Thanks to this fusion, everything starts making sense to the thus far confused conscience which, due to the reversal of time, approves of and even praises the medical practices that Odilo carries out at the camp, given that he is involved in what the conscience wrongly believes to be the creation of a people, the Jews: "Creation is easy. Also Ugly. Our preternatural purpose? To dream a race. To make a people from the weather. From thunder and from lightning. With gas, with electricity, with shit, with fire. [...] I or a doctor of equivalent rank was present at every stage in the sequence" (128). Nonetheless, signs like thunder—related to the Germanic god Thor—and the Nazi desire for a pure Aryan race (128) indicate that this conscience-like presence could not be more wrong. Ironically, in contrast to its misinterpretations, readers' knowledge of history allows them to understand not only what is taking place at Auschwitz but also the protagonist's relation to the infamous concentration camp, which demonstrates that he "is [not] innocent" (17) at all: Odilo Unverdorben was a doctor "who personally [installed] the pellets of Zyklon B" (129) with the purpose of murdering "10,000 [Hungarian Jews] a day" (137).

As the change of pronouns demonstrates, the fusion between Odilo and his conscience occurs between the Auschwitz section in chapter five and the time the protagonist spends at Schloss Hartheim—an Austrian castle used as a killing centre by the Nazis between 1940 and 1944—in chapter six. This makes it evident that Odilo's dissociation did not in fact take place while working at the different Nazi camps and centres as was customary among Nazi doctors. However, contrary to what it may seem at first sight, with this move Amis is not necessarily questioning Lifton's theory, but highlighting the possibility that

perpetrators who are very much aware of their atrocities may go through a traumatic dissociative process some time after their victimisation of others.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, and because of the other traumatic symptoms he experiences while living in the US, which are further explored in the following subsection, it is my contention that Odilo's particular post-Holocaust split can be described as a PITS response triggered by his need to hide his involvement in the Third Reich and repress his shameful guilt.

According to the narrator, although ever since his escape from Europe "in the summer of 1948" Odilo was "pretty much on his own out there," his "bifurcation" occurred "in about 1960" (Amis 1991, 107). In chronological order, the first stage of Odilo's inner split—from 1948 to 1960—could respond to the necessity of burying his former identity in order to avoid prosecution in post-Second World War US. Once settled there, the second stage—from 1960 until his death—seems more related to Odilo's overwhelming desire to repress the acute feelings of guilt and shame that he had started to acknowledge in front of Father Duryea—a collaborator of the Nazi regime—before his flight to the American continent: "I'm nothing, I'm dead. [...] I lost my idea of the gentleness of human flesh. [...] I have been to hell. [...] I have sinned" (120-21). Gershen Kaufman notes that feelings of guilt following immoral actions such as collaboration in mass atrocities can provoke an overwhelming sense of shame in the wrongdoer, which may push them to turn their attention inward thereby "generating the torment of self-consciousness" (1996, 17). When this inner scrutiny is so acute that it paralyses the subject and makes them feel "fundamentally [...] defective," they may experience a rupture in the self (18). As a result, Silvan S. Tomkins explains in his article "Shame" (1987), "the self which feels ashamed is totally and permanently split off and rejected" by the other half (quoted in Kaufman 1996, 143). Therefore, because, as his conversation with the priest suggests, Odilo is aware of the immoral nature of his past actions, the "growing" sense of "solitude" (Amis 1991, 69) noted by his conscience from the 1960s onwards evidences a deep shame-related fracture in Odilo's self that shields him from the feelings of remorse and mortification provoked by his moral wound.

In addition to Odilo's split, another narrative technique that seems to represent the fragmentation and time distortion experienced by a traumatised psyche is the novella's reverse narration. As LaCapra argues, "in post-traumatic situations in which one relives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now" (2001, 46). This confusion between past, present and future that takes place in the mind of traumatically dissociated individuals—including

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<sup>6</sup> In chapter seven the fusion between the narrator and Odilo disappears, giving way to an ambiguous mixture of third- and first-person singular pronouns and determiners. It is my contention that the reason for such a peculiar split in the years corresponding with Odilo's youth during the ghettoisation of the Jews is the result of the purposeful mental dissociation that the vast majority of German witnesses underwent at the dawn of the Holocaust as a way to carry on with their lives without any concern whatsoever for the suffering of the Jews. Chapter eight, which revolves around Odilo's first years of life, includes first-person singular and plural pronouns that convey yet another fusion between Odilo and his consciousness except for the moment of Odilo's birth, when the now stranded narrator discovers the unpleasant truth about its owner.

perpetrators (MacNair 2002, 33)—is reflected here through the chronological dislocations in the narrator's account. Because in *Time's Arrow* the arrow of time points backwards, remembering is replaced by forgetting and cause-and-effect relations are turned upside down. As a result, the narrator is convinced that Nazi officials like Odilo create, heal and “channel [the Jews] back into society” (Amis 1991, 149). In this regard, it does not seem farfetched to suggest that the novella's backwards temporality could point, on the one hand, to Odilo's traumatised state, and on the other, to his desperate wish to reverse time so that, by making his crimes appear righteous acts, he can exonerate himself and stop his self-induced feelings of shame and remorse. Yet, as is expounded in what follows, these disturbing emotions keep on haunting Odilo until the end of his days in spite of his efforts to repress them.

### 3.2. The Haunting Shameful Presence of Auschwitz as an Eternal Punishment

In the first part of the novella, the narrative voice portrays four important features of the protagonist—his recurrent nightmares, his deep identity crisis and psychic numbing alongside his inability to vocalise his trauma—that, as is argued in this section, can be ascribed to his PITS-associated feelings of guilt and shame. In relation to the first characteristic, the intrusive reexperiencing of the criminal act through recurrent nightmares and memories is the most common symptom among traumatised victimisers who repress their feelings of self-disgust, guilt and pity for the victim (MacNair 2002, 93; 136; Mohamed 2015, 1163). According to Bloom, although repression and dissociation are psychological defence mechanisms meant to avoid increased tension or displeasure, these defensive responses are only partially successful. At some point in the subject's life, they may fail and give way to various “returns” of what has been avoided in the form of compulsive-repetitive “nightmares, flashbacks and behavioural re-enactments” (2010, 206). In *Time's Arrow*, despite Odilo's repression of his past as a Nazi doctor through the process of dissociation, the conscience/narrator often reports, in a quite naive manner, the repetitive dreams that wake him up in the middle of the night: “I bet they [all the other people around Odilo] don't have the dream we have. The figure in the white coat and black boots. In his wake, a blizzard of wind and sleet, like a storm of human souls” (Amis 1991, 16). Hence, following Bloom's postulates, it can be argued that, in spite of the conscience's inability to interpret the oneiric content of Odilo's dreams, the images in them may be regarded as “mnemonic residues” (Breuer and Freud [1895] 2000, 297) of Odilo's repressed participation in the killing of millions of innocent civilians that make his past as a mass murderer continuously present.

One of the most frequent figures in the protagonist's nightmares is the doctor in a white coat and black boots mentioned above. On the one hand, this image could be interpreted as Odilo's dissociated but actual vision of himself as a powerful, frightening SS physician who uses his knowledge not to cure, but to kill others. On the other hand, it could be related to Odilo's memories of Uncle Pepi, the physician who conducted

genetic and reproduction experiments on Auschwitz prisoners in order to “improve” the Aryan race. In either case, the figure of the Nazi doctor or “biological soldier” (Amis 1991, 36) seems to continuously remind Odilo of his atrocious past in the concentration camp. In addition, Odilo’s dreams include the recurrent image of a baby crying in a dark room who “has the ultimate power of life and death” (54) over the other Jewish people hiding there as, eventually, the noise it makes helps the Nazi officers discover and kill them all. Lastly, although not as frequent as the aforementioned images, the figure of a presumably Jewish, shaven-headed woman forced “to love” (67)—have sex with—a man—who could stand for Odilo himself—also haunts the protagonist when sleeping.

As well as proving Odilo’s unsuccessful repression of his past, these nightmares may also evince a sense of fear, guilt and shame in him, which he never seemed to experience at Auschwitz. Particularly interesting in this respect is the image of the baby, as it could be related to a sense of remorse for having “lost [his] feelings about the human body. Children even. Tiny babies” (120), which Odilo tries to mitigate in his retirement years by purchasing toys for unknown children he sees in the street (22-23). Likewise, the narrator’s constant references to Odilo’s reactions to his bad dreams throughout the first part of the story—corresponding to the last years of his life—are also very revealing. According to Thomas J. Scheff, ashamed subjects’ negative conception of themselves as being deeply flawed or bad individuals leads them to experience a compulsive “replaying” of the shaming scene together with “painful confusion and unwanted physical manifestations” (1987, 110-11). In the light of Scheff’s observations, the fact that Odilo weeps and feels bewildered when he is awoken by recurrent dreams about Auschwitz could be provoked by feelings of shame and remorse about the atrocities he carried out decades earlier, which overwhelm the morally injured protagonist now. Other uncontrollable reactions that can be linked to Odilo’s belated sense of guilt are his rage and violent outbursts. This common symptom among perpetrators who try to camouflage their remorse and shame (MacNair 2002; Litz et al. 2009; Jinkerson 2016) leads the protagonist to throw his medical certificate in the trash (Amis 1991, 32) and even destroy or, as reported by the narrator, “create” and “mend” some of his furniture (63).

Yet another trait associated with PITS that is traceable in Odilo is his evident identity crisis. As the journey recounted by the narrator reveals, when Odilo decides to flee from Europe, he hides his identity to prevent his terrible secret from being discovered by Interpol. To do so, he adopts different names—Hamilton de Souza, John Young and, lastly, Tod Friendly—and changes his place of residence several times—Italy, Portugal, New York and Massachusetts.<sup>7</sup> The problem is that Odilo cannot cope with this forced and sustained change of identity, as can be inferred from two observations made by the narrator: Odilo “never confronts or consults” the mirrors in his house as he cannot stand the sight of his reflection (17) and he loves getting lost in the crowd because, by

<sup>7</sup> The names and locations mentioned here are enumerated in the chronological order in which they really happened in Odilo’s life.

so doing, “he sheds the thing he often can’t bear: his identity” (57). Hence, I would argue that the identity issues Odilo experiences in the US are caused by his haunting sense of culpability and self-hatred. A second reason for the reactions reported by the narrator might be Odilo’s tense situation as an exiled Nazi agent living hidden behind fake identities and with the constant fear of discovery and prosecution. In this sense, his blending into the crowds of an “innocuous,” “melting-pot [...] *America*” (14; italics in the original) allows Odilo not only to hide and escape justice but also to feel invisible and (temporarily) relieved of or free from his shame.

Odilo also ends up becoming a numb or depressed person who “feels nothing” (34) during his life in the US. His on-again, off-again partner Irene, who believes his real name is Tod, thinks “that he has no soul” (62). Given that Nazi doctors diminished “their capacity or inclination to feel” so as to circumvent any sense of guilt (Lifton 1986, 442), and that traumatised subjects are usually unable to feel either former or present emotions on account of their depressive state (Brison 1999, 44), Odilo’s psychic numbing could point to his acute PITS, too. Likewise, because deep shame can provoke withdrawal and inhibit interpersonal relations (Litz et al. 2009, 699; Jinkerson 2016, 126), Odilo’s self-isolation owing to his inability to feel, “connect” or “open up” (Amis 1991, 61) with others could be just another token of the moral injury that his genocidal actions left him with. In sum, in spite of his feelings of guilt and shame, and even though Irene tries “to psych him up” (55) by adopting the role of “understanding listener” (Brison 1999, 46), as the following passage demonstrates, due to self-censorship Odilo is not capable of constructing and telling the narrative of his trauma:

‘Life,’ said Tod.

‘What?’ said Irene.

‘Christ, who cares. It’s all shit anyway.’

‘Why? I just don’t rate, huh?’

‘That’s something you don’t ever talk about.’

‘Were you this nice to your wife and kid?’ (Amis 1991, 45)

Indeed, it is Odilo’s silence or unwillingness to speak up that prevents him from integrating his past in his daily life in the US and thereby work through his PITS.

The main obstacle that seems to prevent Odilo from creating a narrative of his past, and thus a confession of his participation in the Holocaust, could be his fear of being discovered. This terror about speaking up, which so commonly affects victimisers suffering from perpetrator trauma (Morag 2013, 20), is observable in the feelings of anxiety he experiences prior to the arrival of the annual letters that Reverend Nicholas Kreditor sends to inform him of the calm atmosphere around the prosecution of Nazi agents exiled in the US. As the narrator reports, “for nights on end, before the letters come, his [Odilo’s] physiology speaks of alerted fear” (Amis 1991, 24). This dread of being found out and prosecuted is the reason why Odilo never tells his secret to anybody,

including Irene, who ends up learning about it through his sleep talking: “I know your secret [...]. You say it in the night. In your sleep. [...] I know that you changed your name. [...] I know you ran” (29). Moreover, it is suggested through one of the narrator’s comments about Odilo’s routines that Odilo takes refuge in alcohol so as to lessen his trauma symptoms and forget about the heavy moral burden of his barbaric acts: “He’ll sit there by the fire for a long time, with scotch bottle, with alerted chemistry” (65).<sup>8</sup> The consumption of a depressor substance like whiskey, which helps Odilo forget about his haunting past and feelings of guilt and shame, can be considered another sign of his PITS.

Interestingly, at the end of the novella Amis shows the impossibility of fully discarding one’s past and former identity, no matter what repressive mechanisms are used to try and do so. Given that the narrator’s backwards movement leads readers to the protagonist’s birth when, according to the narrator’s understanding, Odilo is dying, the reversed journey could be read as the life reviewing that someone about to die is commonly believed to experience. In this regard, the text’s open ending could be interpreted as Odilo’s dying moment, when he eventually accepts his culpability and feels repentance after reviewing his life’s journey: “Wait. Mistake there. [...] their own selves we taken [*sic*] all away. Why so many children and babies? What got into us. Why so many? We were cruel: the children weren’t even going to be here for very long. I choiced [*sic*] it, did I? Why?” (171).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, because the stage of acting out is a necessary precondition to working through trauma (LaCapra 2001, 71), this momentous episode before Odilo’s death could be understood as the point at which he finally moves away from acting out to actually begin working through his PITS.

Nevertheless, far from providing a positive denouement that could make readers sympathise with the perpetrator, Amis portrays this last moment in Odilo’s life as a too-late, useless epiphany: “When Odilo closes his eyes I see an arrow fly—but wrongly. Point first. Oh no, but then... We’re away once more [...]. Odilo Unverdorben and his eager heart. And I within, who came at the wrong time—either too soon, or after it was too late” (1991, 173). These last words uttered by the conscience/narrator reveal Amis’s intention to remind his readers of the impossibility of undoing history for, as the narrator hints, when Odilo passes away the arrow of time turns around and starts moving in the other direction, the right one. This correct movement—which takes the narrator into the actual journey undergone by Odilo from his conception in Solingen to his death in Boston—unmistakably reveals that redemption and, therefore, healing, is not possible for the former Nazi agent. Indeed, as if it were a punishment for him, the desire to forget and/or change his shaming past, which can be deduced from his conscience’s words, turns

<sup>8</sup> Like many traumatised victims, deeply morally injured perpetrators frequently engage in alcohol abuse during the phase of acting out in order to lessen their physical and mental symptomatology (MacNair 2002, 7; Litz et al. 2009, 697; Jinkerson 2016, 124).

<sup>9</sup> The use of incorrect past tenses at this particular point is very revealing because this is the precise moment when the shield protecting the conscience from knowing about its owner’s terrible past actions collapses. This seems to short-circuit the narrator’s linguistic and thinking capacities to the extent that it can only verbalise its culpability through child language.

instead into a continuous or Sisyphean reliving of it without any possibility of modifying his abhorrent actions and their consequences. In this respect, it can be concluded that, despite Odilo's evasion of international justice, his unresolved PITS and unceasing reexperiencing of his involvement in the Holocaust on account of the shifting arrow of time become the lifelong punishment for this fugitive Nazi doctor, a manifestation of poetic justice that Amis keeps up his sleeve right until the very end of the novella.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Amis is a celebrated but also polemical novelist whose experimental postmodern style and outspokenness have been regarded as shallow, immoral and even as mere marketing strategies (Buchan 1991; Bell 1992). Criticism concerning his writing was all the more pointed when *Time's Arrow* came out on account of the Nazi protagonist and an alleged disrespect for the victims and their descendants. Nonetheless, as the novelist himself has explained, behind the novella there is a serious and genuine motivation: "I'm writing about the perpetrators and they are my brothers, if you like. I feel a kind of responsibility in my Aryanness for what happened. This is my racial link with these events, not with the sufferers but with the perpetrators" (1996, 47).

Moreover, Amis is aware of Holocaust literature functioning as a vehicle of cultural memory that helps us remember the atrocious ethnic cleansing that took place under Hitler's rule and try to prevent similar crimes against humanity from happening again. For this reason, and in order to avoid the desensitisation of present and future generations in relation to the Shoah provoked—in the author's words—by "the passing of time and the abundant information and images of concentration camps and the victims" (Amis 2012), with *Time's Arrow* Amis forces readers to contemplate the nature of the Nazi offence from within. In so doing, as Adami observes, he enables readers to look anew at the horrors of the Nazi genocide so that they are not forgotten and repeated in the future (2008, 92, 99).

Finally, as demonstrated in this article, through this novella Amis also makes a valuable contribution to trauma and violence studies. Although some people, like renowned film-maker Claude Lanzmann, may think that perpetrators should only be studied to find out the facts related to their crimes (1995, 212), as Mohamed explains, recognising the existence of perpetrator trauma can transform the way trauma, crime and victimisers are understood (2015, 1165). Likewise, it can allow us to comprehend the ordinary humanity of perpetrators and scrutinise the choices they made and the paths that led them to commit their crimes (Mohamed 2015, 1165). And last but not least, as I contend, the acknowledgement and exploration of perpetrator trauma promoted by Amis's novella is an essential task for trauma studies in that it allows for the evolution of trauma theory towards a more inclusive approach where all participants and factors involved in the trauma equation can be taken into account. In this respect, the study of the pain affecting perpetrators like Amis's protagonist from the perspective of PITS



and moral injury seems the best method for accurately scrutinising the undertheorised area of perpetrator trauma while avoiding any imprecision and problematic blurring of the victim-victimiser binary. In sum, as my analysis of *Time's Arrow* has attempted to prove, by writing such an experimental work about a morally traumatised Nazi perpetrator, Amis does not trivialise the horrors of the Third Reich for the sake of entertainment or greater sales. Rather, he opens the door for readers and scholars to carry out a reflective exercise that allows for a more nuanced comprehension of trauma alongside human nature and evil.<sup>10</sup>

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