A FICTIONAL INSIGHT INTO THE TRAUMA OF NAZI WAR CRIMES BASED ON MARTIN AMIS’S *TIME’S ARROW*

Summary

The aim of the article is to analyse the trauma of Nazi war crimes portrayed in Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* (1991) with a special focus on the splits which take place in the structure of the novel. The author analyses the splits which appear in the temporality of the novel and in the consciousness of the main character. Subsequently, the influence of Holocaust trauma on the mind of the perpetrators on the example of the protagonist of *Time’s Arrow*, Odilo Unverdorben and his soul or conscience which also displays the variety of trauma symptoms, is analysed.

**Keywords:** Holocaust trauma, Nazi war crimes, Martin Amis, splits, *Time’s Arrow*.

In previous decades, Holocaust literature flooded the market – innumerable testimonies, diaries and novels written by the survivors were published and seemingly exhausted this topic. Although the following generations did not experience the horrors of the Holocaust, they still grew up in its shadow. Their experiences gave rise to second-generation Holocaust literature which, as Erin Heather McGlothlin points out, is written not only by children of Holocaust survivors but also by the children of the perpetrators. One of the most striking examples of this tendency is Martin Amis. The writer did not experience the terror of the Nazi concentration camps, but still he regards the Holocaust as the most tragic event of the twentieth century which influenced his generation. Amis explains his interest in the Holocaust in the following way:


People say, legitimately, in a way, what am I as an Aryan doing with this subject? But 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.

The author of *Time’s Arrow* (1991) once confessed that his lifelong obsession with Auschwitz started in the late 1950s, when he saw a photograph of a concentration camp in a newspaper. Martin Amis was ten years old, and, as a child, was unable to comprehend the meaning of the photograph, still, it had a thought-provoking effect on him. As Marianne Hirsch states, encounters with traumatic photographs may have a tremendous influence because such events change the way a child perceives the world – it leads to the confrontation with the existence of death and evil. In case of Martin Amis, this encounter led to the transmission of Holocaust trauma despite the generational distance.

Martin Amis visited Auschwitz only in the late 1990s (the epilogue of his memoir *Experience* tracks his first visit in the camp) but he has been occupied with the subject of genocide for a very long time. The writer claims that he read numerous books that concerned the topic of the Holocaust between 1987 and 2011, yet, the acquired knowledge did not help him understand the atrocities of Auschwitz, as he puts it: “I might have gained in knowledge, I had gained nothing at all in penetration.”

Interestingly, *Time’s Arrow* is not the only work in which Amis focuses on the Holocaust – *The Zone of Interest* (2014) is also concerned with the topic of Nazi concentration camps.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the trauma of Nazi war crimes shown in Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* with a special emphasis on the splits which take place in the structure of the novel. The following paper is divided into five sections. The first section shows the temporal split in the narration of the novel and discusses possible reasons and consequences of employing this narrative strategy. The second section focuses on the psychological split, which takes place in the mind of the main

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character – the split results into dividing his self into two functioning parts and is crucial to understanding the nature of Holocaust trauma experienced by perpetrators. The following sections address the impact of the trauma both on the main character of the novel as well as his soul or the conscience. The conclusions are drawn in the final section of the paper.

*Time’s Arrow* features the life of Odilo Unverdorben, a former Nazi doctor, who is desperate to break with his past, yet, the repercussions of his actions at Auschwitz have a profound influence on the rest of his life. As soon as Odilo flees Auschwitz, he assumes a few false identities, such as Tod Friendly, John Young and Hamilton de Souza, to avoid responsibility. His story is told from the point of view of an entity which can be described as Odilo’s tormented soul or his conscience. The narrator has no power over Odilo’s deeds, being just a “passenger or parasite”\(^\text{10}\) which can merely observe the world. An extraordinary thing about the story is the fact that it is narrated in reverse, so all the events are told backwards accordingly. The narrator needs to put a lot of effort into comprehending the most basic concepts but still almost all the events presented in the novel verge on the ridiculous – everyday activities, such as consuming or defecation, are to him an insoluble mystery.

The fact that the author decided to perform narrative experiments in the novel that raises such a delicate subject as the Holocaust may seem inappropriate at the first sight, especially if we consider words of Thane Rosenbaum, a Holocaust survivor, who claimed that “[t]he imagination, capable of creating science fiction, is nonetheless ill-equipped when it comes to genocidal fiction”\(^\text{11}\). However, such experiments might be purposeful as well. Laura Wiebe Taylor points out that the story told in Amis’s 1991 novel is set between two catastrophic events that changed the way the humanity perceived itself – the factual Holocaust and “the nuclear Holocaust” that was highly probable at that time. In the face of two imminent disasters, the novel’s narrative heads toward self-destruction both ways. The splits caused by the Holocaust and the nuclear anxiety are reflected by two splits in the structure of the novel\(^\text{12}\). The important point is noted by Valentina Adami who explains that the text itself can capture the fragmentation of the self as well as the fragmentation of the meaning thanks to the use of fragmented narrative voice, temporal and logical distortions, repetitions and intertextuality\(^\text{13}\). Thus, Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* may be seen as an outstanding example of trauma fiction since the complex structure of the novel resembles a traumatised mind.


\(^{13}\) V. Adami, *Trauma Studies and Literature: Martin Amis’s Time’s Arrow as Trauma Fiction*, Peter Lang, New York 2008, P. 73.
The temporal split in the novel

The temporal split is probably best visible at the beginning of the novel. We meet Odilo at the exact moment of his death, so paradoxically the death of the main character marks the beginning of the story. In the course of time, his condition is slowly improving, and the story unfolds as well. After recovering “out of the blackest sleep”14, Odilo finds himself lying on a hospital bed, besieged by doctors. The narrator notices a sudden improvement of his health, claiming that “sensation and all its luxuries returned first to [his] left side […] and then to [his] right”15, which, in fact, is nothing more than a progressive deterioration.

Marco Caracciolo observes that the most disturbing fact about the narrative of Time’s Arrow is the inversion of moral values caused by the time reversal. The result is very unsettling, especially when it comes to the representation of violence, which is completely antonymised. Odilo’s stay at Auschwitz presented in reverse chronology is ridiculous, since a place where people are killed in quantities is presented as their birthplace16. Disturbingly, destruction becomes creation in the eyes of the narrator, who is misguidedly convinced that “[d]estruction – is difficult. Destruction is slow. Creation […] is no trouble at all”17. Deadly Zyklon B is regarded by the narrator not as a poison, but rather as an antidote which helps bring people to life. When the process of gassing is completed and lifeless bodies are carried out of the gas chambers, the narrator remarks that the Jews are “not yet alive”18 and still waiting to be revived.

Gregory J. Rubinson points out that Amis’s use of the inversion is aimed at emphasising the unimaginable monstrosity of the camp. The events which took place there would be rational only in a world where every activity would be antagonized, yet, such a world is a flight of imagination and there is no way to explain Auschwitz19. However, it may also be argued that the moral reversal presented above is Amis’s way of exploring the motivations of the Nazis. With use of this stylistic device, the writer reveals Nazis’ deadly logic that can be abstract for an average reader, who is not familiar with the Nazi doctrine.

The split in the consciousness of the main character

Another split that is presented in the novel is the split between the main character and his conscience – a tragic consequence of Odilo’s service at Auschwitz. It leaves

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14 M. Amis, Time’s Arrow..., P. 11.
15 Ibidem, s. 13.
17 M. Amis, Time’s Arrow..., P. 26.
18 Ibidem, P. 129.
Odilo traumatised, and, as a result, he is unable to establish any kind of connection with his soul or conscience, which is devastating for both parties. The separation between the narrator and the main character is so complete that their processes of thinking are independent from each other. As the narrator claims, “[he] has no access to [Odilo’s] thoughts” and his body has “[its] own agenda”\textsuperscript{20}. To some point, he has no clue even about Odilo’s appearance, claiming that “God knows what [Odilo] looks like”\textsuperscript{21}.

Odilo clearly suffers from a phenomenon called doubling. According to Lifton, this mechanism was developed by individuals who found themselves in “atrocities-producing situations”\textsuperscript{22}. Doubling enabled perpetrators to divide their sense of the self into two parts which were used depending on the circumstances. The first part of their self was responsible for functioning in a hostile environment while the second part let them live ordinary lives. This mechanism was clearly visible in the Nazi doctors who worked in concentration camps – the Auschwitz self allowed them to perform their duties effectively, while their original self let them function outside the camp without feeling any remorse. The avoidance of guilt was possible thanks to the transfer of conscience\textsuperscript{23}, during which the normal self was suppressed by the Auschwitz self and its own moral criteria\textsuperscript{24}.

Doubling in \textit{Time’s Arrow} is strikingly visible when the narrator warns us that “[i]f you ever close a deal with the devil, and he wants to take something from you in return – don’t let him take your mirror. Not your mirror, which is your reflection, which is your double, which is your secret sharer”\textsuperscript{25}. Lifton remarks that, in general, the doctors’ service at Auschwitz can be seen as a Faustian bargain. The Nazi doctors made a contract with the devil – they followed his orders and participated in killings. As a result, they obtained gains such as wealth, knowledge and worldly pleasures, yet, the biggest temptation for them related to the possibility of their contribution to the creation of the perfect human race, which gave them nearly god-like power. The real price was their souls\textsuperscript{26}, which, in Odilo’s case, is irretrievable.

The phenomenon of the gap between Odilo and the narrator seems to be the key to the narrator’s unreliability. We may suppose that the narrator is not able to understand the events which are happening around him because he lacks knowledge about the Holocaust. He confesses: “I puzzle a lot, if the truth be known. In fact, I’ve had to conclude that I am generally rather slow on the uptake. Possibly even subnormal, or mildly autistic. It may well be that I’m not playing with a full deck.”

\textsuperscript{20} M. Amis, \textit{Time’s Arrow}…, P. 13.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibidem, P. 17.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibidem, P. 421.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibidem, Pp. 418–425.
\textsuperscript{25} M. Amis, \textit{Time’s Arrow}…, P. 17.
\textsuperscript{26} R.J. Lifton, \textit{The Nazi Doctors}…, P. 148.
The cards won't add up for me; the world won't start making sense”\textsuperscript{27}. Yet, can we be so sure about the narrator’s unawareness? Caracciolo claims that the narrator deceives the reader on purpose, since, by detaching himself from Odilo, a war criminal, he presents himself as an innocent character and thus a strong bond between the narrator and the reader is established for at least two reasons. First, the narrator is not involved in the Holocaust, at least not actively, unlike Odilo, so the reader is able to empathise with him. Secondly, the aura of mystery that surrounds the story is even more overwhelming thanks to the presence of the narrator who also heads for the unknown and seems to be bewildered by his journey\textsuperscript{28}.

Another important issue that seems to be crucial in case of the narrator’s unreliability is the oppressive atmosphere fueled by the narrator himself. Although he claims that he has no knowledge of Odilo’s deeds from the past, he frequently mentions Odilo’s secret and even forebodes its content, pointing out that “Tod’s cruelty, his secret, had to do with a central mistake about human bodies”\textsuperscript{29}. Right after the revelation of Odilo’s past, the narrator states: “Oh, I’m no saint. God knows”\textsuperscript{30}, which may be interpreted as a confession of some kind.

Another important inconsistency that can be detected in the narrator’s behaviour is the fact that he frequently draws the reader’s attention to the abstractness of the world, pointing out that “this is a world of mistakes, of diametrical mistakes”\textsuperscript{31}. He constantly marvels over the way human beings function. He notes that human actions can be compared to a film that is running backwards, and he is clever enough to observe that the conversations have more sense if he reads them in a reversed order. The frequent use of the prefix “counter-” is also noteworthy. The narrator feels that getting younger with time is “counterintuitive”\textsuperscript{32}, and he uses the world “counterclockwise”\textsuperscript{33} to describe the direction of Odilo’s movement. Finally, when he arrives at Auschwitz, he announces that “the world is going to start making sense”\textsuperscript{34}.

As Caracciolo rightly observes, during Odilo’s service at Auschwitz, the personal pronouns coincide, which suggests that he becomes one entity with Odilo\textsuperscript{35} – “I, Odilo Unverdorben, arrived at Auschwitz Central somewhat precipitately and by motorbike […]”\textsuperscript{36}. Strikingly, the personal pronouns coincide especially when Odilo commits the most heinous crimes. This fact is the most apparent when the narrator confesses: “It was I, Odilo Unverdorben, who personally removed the pellets of

\textsuperscript{27} M. Amis, \textit{Time’s Arrow…}, P. 37.
\textsuperscript{28} M. Caracciolo, \textit{Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction…}, Pp. 114–140.
\textsuperscript{29} M. Amis, \textit{Time’s Arrow…}, P. 48.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibidem, s. 146.
\textsuperscript{31} M. Amis, \textit{Time’s Arrow…}, P. 15.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibidem, P. 31.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibidem, P. 124.
\textsuperscript{35} M. Caracciolo, \textit{Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction…}, Pp. 114–140.
\textsuperscript{36} M. Amis, \textit{Time’s Arrow…}, P. 125.
Zyklon B and entrusted them to the pharmacist in his white coat. With the end of the war, the gap between Odilo and the narrator gradually widens, and this fact is emphasised by the narrator, who recollects: “We sail for Europe in the summer of 1948. […] Well, I say we, but by now John Young was pretty much on his own out there”.

The impact of Holocaust trauma on the main character

With all the observations provided above, it becomes clear that the focus of Time’s Arrow is the influence of trauma on the social construction of self. Matthew Escobar points out that an unusual fact about Odilo’s offence is its duality, since he is not only an offender but also a victim, and thus, the trauma experienced by him has a very complex nature and is manifested in various areas of his life. Interestingly, Odilo is a victim of trauma even before his service at Auschwitz. Our awareness of his early childhood traumas is here crucial as it provides us with an insight into his later behaviour.

The first trauma experienced by Odilo dates to his infancy. He is raised by a domineering father, whom he fears, and a submissive mother, whose affection Odilo craves for. As a child, Odilo has a great power over his father because of maternal love he receives. The father carves for the mother’s feelings as well, but, since Odilo’s birth, he “[does not] have her all to himself [...] He is starving”. The father feels defeated and he frequently resorts to physical violence – the narrator mentions that he “takes the pain away with a rhythmical upward sweep of his rattling hand”, which is an example of physical abuse distorted by the time reversal. Moreover, the narrator claims that his ultimate fear is that “[the father] will come in and kill [him] with his body”.

Interestingly, when Odilo’s wife, Herta, gives birth to a baby girl, and he becomes a father himself, he seems to follow the same pattern of behaviour. From the very beginning, Odilo has a very ambiguous attitude towards his daughter. When he tries to get his wife pregnant, he behaves “as if he’s trying to kill something, rather than create it”. When Herta is finally pregnant, Odilo is astonished by all the changes that come with the process. Her body undergoes a complete transformation to conceive a baby – the narrator points out that “dairy aroma encloses Herta, her shocking new breasts, her ovoid belly”. Yet, it is not only Herta’s appearance that

37 Ibidem, P. 129.
38 Ibidem, P. 107.
40 M. Amis, Time’s Arrow…, P. 172.
41 Ibidem, P. 171.
42 Ibidem, P. 172.
43 Ibidem, P. 158.
44 Ibidem, P. 147.
changes – her attitude towards Odilo also undergoes a major transformation and as a result the baby is in the centre of her attention. Like his father, Odilo is subconsciously jealous of the attention that Herta pays to the baby; he feels that “the baby comes between [them]”\textsuperscript{45}. 

With the above in mind, it can be assumed that Odilo’s biggest fear is linked to children. Certainly, it is not a coincidence that he becomes a doctor and his later service at Auschwitz involves experiments on child subjects. The narrator points out that doctors have the ultimate power over children. They seem to be awesome god-like figures who “can leave the children alone, and [they] can take them away, and [they] can bring them back, if [they] choose to”\textsuperscript{46}. The reason why Odilo has no empathy for babies in the camp may be connected with the traumas from his childhood. Odilo states that at Auschwitz “[he] lost [his] feeling about the human body. Children even. Tiny babies”\textsuperscript{47}. Odilo regards babies as dangerous and he feels empowered by their mutilation. It may be his subconscious way of fighting his childhood traumas. However, Odilo’s way of coping with his traumas does not help him recover in the long term; quite on the contrary, he is trapped in a vicious circle, which leads to the emergence of another trauma, namely Holocaust trauma.

Apart from continuing nightmares that reveal Odilo’s traumas to some degree, he displays many other symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)\textsuperscript{48}. First, Odilo experiences social and emotional isolation. He avoids deeper relationships, his contacts with other people are restricted to the workplace. Odilo feels that he is constantly observed, and he is petrified that someone may know his secret. Despite Odilo’s fear, he seeks crowds because the closeness of others gives him a feeling of complacency – “he is never considered singly”\textsuperscript{49}. Secondly, he is filled with disgust for himself. The feeling of repulsion is so strong that he cannot stand the sight of his own reflection in the mirror – therefore he obsessively avoids mirrors and “grooms himself by touch”\textsuperscript{50}. Thirdly, Odilo has a very violent nature, which may be an effect of his frustration over his situation as he can do nothing to change his past. Yet, Odilo does not hurt people anymore, instead, he expresses anger by destroying the objects in his surroundings.

Moreover, there are a few easily identifiable triggers that can be described as reminders of the main character’s trauma. The first trigger is any information related to the topic of the Second World War, which Odilo obsessively gathers. The second one is the sound of the German language, which seems to have been consciously forgotten by Odilo, and the third one is nail-clipping and the smell that is discharged

\textsuperscript{45} Ibidem, P. 147.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibidem, P. 36.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibidem, P. 120.
\textsuperscript{48} Anxiety and Depression Association of America, Symptoms of PTSD, source: https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/symptoms [1.06.18].
\textsuperscript{49} M. Amis, Time’s Arrow…, P. 31.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibidem, P. 17.
by the nails which are consumed by fire. The fourth trigger is the fire itself. All triggers are linked with Odilo’s service at Auschwitz.

Odilo tried to salve his conscience in numerous ways. He is a frequent guest of emergency centres, where he reaches out to prostitutes, homeless people, single-mothers and female drug addicts. Moreover, Odilo regularly goes to church and puts considerable amount of money in the church offering plate. Interestingly, he seems to be very sensitive to babies’ distress. The narrator notices that Odilo is often visited by devastated mothers with sick babies, although he discourages these night visits, the feeling of sympathy prevails, and he treats them with antibiotics. What is more, the children encountered by Odilo on the street are offered toys and sweets to cheer them up. The narrator concludes that “[Odilo] seems to need it, the social reassurance”\(^{51}\), yet, every attempt made by the main character provides only a temporary relief because the only thing that can liberate him is the truth.

As previously mentioned, Odilo’s traumas have an enormous impact on his relationships, and this results in his inability to form emotional bonds with women. His marriage to Herta is toxic almost from the very beginning. During the process of courtship, Odilo is astonished by his future wife. The narrator observes that “[the narrator and Odilo] hardly dare look at [Herta] now, the tiny typist, such power does she wield”\(^{52}\). He needs “hours of snivelling entreaty”\(^{53}\) to receive any affection. Yet, as soon as Odilo conquers Herta, his more violent nature, fueled by sexual frustration, rises to the surface and Herta becomes a victim of a sudden change of power relationship. Odilo’s dominance is secured by the wedding, after which the abuse of Herta intensifies. To entertain her husband, she is forced to “do the housework naked, and on all fours” or “lie still and show no signs of life”\(^{54}\). Odilo’s job as an SS doctor does not improve their relationship, quite on the contrary, it contributes to its steady deterioration. Even though Odilo and Herta are newly married, he is unable to perform sexually. The narrator confesses: “I am omnipotent. Also, impotent. I am powerful and powerless”\(^{55}\). As it can be observed, the more power is wielded by Odilo in the camp, the more impotent he is in his private life – both sexually and emotionally.

After the failure of the first marriage, Odilo tries to build relationships with women numerous times, but his untreated traumas cause him major difficulties. The most significant woman after Herta is Irene, Odilo’s cleaning lady. From the very beginning, she takes good care of him and soon becomes his lover. The most important factor that attracts Odilo to Irene is the feeling of safety. There are frequent phone calls and long visits – Irene is the one who gives Odilo emotional support while he is having nightmares. Odilo needs Irene because she seems to be his bridge

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\(^{51}\) Ibidem, P. 23.

\(^{52}\) Ibidem, P. 162.

\(^{53}\) Ibidem, P. 162.

\(^{54}\) Ibidem, P. 159.

\(^{55}\) Ibidem, P. 148.
to recovery. In fact, he is the only one who benefits from the above-mentioned relationship, while Irene “is blinking with neglect”\(^{56}\).

Odilo’s interactions with women in the brothels of Auschwitz also leave a mark in his mind, and it is reflected in one of his traumatising nightmares. In this dream, Odilo and the narrator take the shape of a bald woman, they are observers as well as partakers. The woman is close to a man who has a great power over her. The narrator confesses: “He can harm us, of course. But he can protect us, if he likes. On his protection we gingerly rely. We have no choice but to love him, nervously”\(^{57}\). The situation probably shows Odilo after a sexual intercourse with a prostitute. The intercourse takes place at Auschwitz, since the woman is bald, and the pronouns denoting Odilo and the narrator are coincident. This fragment shows us the power relationships at Auschwitz – the prostitute is at Odilo’s mercy, she is defenseless in comparison to him. Like Odilo’s other dreams, this one also presents a distorted form of reality: although in the dream Odilo and the narrator are the bald woman, in reality they belong to the opposite sex.

Odilo’s traumas result in a perverse approach to women’s bodies. In general, he takes a strong interest in women – as the narrator states, “to [Odilo’s] glands, the world is a woman”\(^{58}\). Yet, it is women’s dead bodies that seem to be especially attractive to Odilo. This may be so because of the power that he wields over them. His interest is not purely sexual, but “the fatal, the mortal, the life deciding”\(^{59}\). The satisfaction of burning sexual desire and the feeling of power are two things which Odilo thirsts for, so he “attends both [alive and dead kinds of bodies] with his animal parts thickened”\(^{60}\). It is noteworthy that, taking into consideration their roles, Auschwitz and hospitals seem to be complete opposites, yet there is one thing that invariably links them – ubiquitous eroticism. The narrator indicates that hospitals are “blood and bodies and death and power”\(^{61}\). The hospital is a place where Odilo’s promiscuity and power flourish; the same can be said of Auschwitz. The equivalent of the nurses in the hospital are the prostitutes in a brothel of Auschwitz. Yet, the eroticism that shrouds Auschwitz is much more violent in its nature.

### The impact of Holocaust trauma on the soul or conscience of the main character

Escobar argues that Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* depicts two strikingly different tendencies that can be found in the process of memorisation – the perfect memory of the

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\(^{56}\) Ibidem, P. 95.

\(^{57}\) Ibidem, P. 67.

\(^{58}\) Ibidem, P. 56.

\(^{59}\) Ibidem, P. 87.

\(^{60}\) Ibidem, P. 89.

\(^{61}\) Ibidem, P. 87.
inhuman narrator and the failing memory of Odilo, a human being. Odilo suffers from the trauma precisely because he can understand the meaning of his, and he is emotionally involved in the whole process. Yet, human memory is elusive; even though traumatic memories flood back, they are often fragmented. On the contrary, the memory of the narrator is prodigious. He claims that “to remember a day would take a day. To remember a year would take a year”\(^62\), but he lacks any kind of comprehension and emotional involvement and thus, according to Escobar, he is not prone to trauma\(^63\).

However, it can be argued that Odilo’s soul suffers from a severe trauma. In fact, the narrator seems to be even more tormented than Odilo himself, and he cannot prevent his trauma in any way. The narrator does not have anything of his own except his thoughts – he is like a “passenger or parasite”\(^64\) confined in Odilo’s body. The narrator hungers his own body because not having a body at all would enable him to regain control over the course of events. Moreover, the soul’s opinions differ significantly from Odilo’s, which becomes clear when we compare their attitudes towards Irene. As explained before, Odilo’s approach is generally rather carefree, while the narrator states: “I can’t stand the way [Odilo] treats her. […] I burn for her”\(^65\). Odilo suppresses the voice of his conscience so effectively that he is being accused of “[having] no soul”\(^66\) by Irene. The isolation between Odilo and the narrator is at this moment at a very advanced stage, the narrator points out that Odilo is not even aware of the soul’s presence. The narrator feels alienated – “the solitude is growing around [him], under [him], but he is unable to walk away”\(^67\). When Odilo tries to escape from his past, the narrator remarks: “I didn’t get away from it. I came too close, I spent too long with suffering and its foul chemical breath”\(^68\). At the same time, the narrator must face the consequences of Odilo’s deeds, which, together with his vulnerability and his feeling of powerlessness, results in a severe trauma.

It is obvious that the narrator’s trauma is linked to Odilo’s work at Auschwitz, yet, his hatred towards them is rather surprising, especially taking into consideration his supposed unawareness of the events at Auschwitz. The narrator associates doctors with “trauma and mortification”\(^69\) rather than healing and claims: “How I hate doctors. Any doctors. All doctors”\(^70\). He questions parents’ expected pride in their children’s choice of this profession, asking: “Why not shame, why not incredulous dread?”\(^71\). The narrator’s fright is mixed with a strong disgust – he is not only put

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\(^{64}\) M. Amis, *Time’s Arrow…*, P. 16.
\(^{65}\) Ibidem, Pp. 94–95.
\(^{66}\) Ibidem, P. 62.
\(^{67}\) Ibidem, P. 69.
\(^{68}\) Ibidem, P. 108.
\(^{69}\) Ibidem, P. 11.
\(^{70}\) Ibidem, P. 11.
\(^{71}\) Ibidem, P. 11.
off by doctors themselves but also by all medical instruments and terminology. The narrator’s trauma has a profound influence on Odilo’s performance at his workplace. At one of American hospitals, Odilo is taunted about his oversensitivity by other doctors; yet, as the narrator mentions, they are not aware of the fact that “Tod isn’t squeamish. I’m squeamish. […] Tod can take all this – whereas I’m harrowed by it”.

Just like Odilo, the narrator reacts to triggers that are related to his trauma. The first trigger relates to nationalities – he is attentive to any occurrence connected with Germans. The narrator seems to be proud of his nationality since he overuses the adjective “German”, for example, when Odilo goes to bed the narrator speaks about “the faint dampness of our German feet”. When he describes Odilo’s daughter, he refers to her as “our German baby”, while his wife is called “the German girl”. Odilo himself is seen as a perfect example of “a superb physical specimen. [His] feet aren’t flat. [His] vision is clear. [He] is not club-footed or marxist or nuts. […] [He] is perfect”. However, the narrator’s positive attitude to what is German can appear illusive when we look at another trigger – the sound of the German language. Interestingly, in the narrator’s view, the German language itself can traumatise. The narrator dislikes German, claiming that it is “pushy”. He is not aware of the fact that it is not the quality of the German language in general; his impression is rather connected with the fact that the SS men use raised voices and imperative mood to give orders at the camp. The fourth trigger is related to Odilo’s professional interest. The narrator spots the information about twins and Atlantis in Odilo’s tabloids. To the narrator, even the stars resemble dwarfs and giants, which were in the centre of Odilo’s attention during his stay at Auschwitz. “Trauma” is also a word that is frequently mentioned by the narrator, even in a very casual context. When he talks about the process of repairing of his household appliances, a plumber is seen as a “fat bastard” who “traumatizes them with his tools”.

The narrator is unable to find a way out of his situation. His passivity is one of the reasons for this state of affairs; another problem lies in his inability to understand his trauma. Escobar indicates that the pain felt by the narrator cannot be embraced since it is deprived of any clear moral meaning. Only experiencing traumatic events in chronological order would let the narrator find the source of his pain and decipher the moral meaning of his trauma. Because of an incorrect temporal direction, the

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72 Ibidem, P. 33.
73 Ibidem, P. 126.
74 Ibidem, P. 147.
75 Ibidem, P. 158.
76 Ibidem, P. 36.
77 Ibidem, P. 59.
78 Ibidem, P. 134.
79 Ibidem, P. 19.
80 M. Escobar, The Persistence of the Human…, P. 44.
narrator wrongly assumes that the source of his trauma is linked to doctors and overlooks the real source of his traumatic memories.

The conclusions

Odilo *Unverdorben*, the main character of *Time’s Arrow*, suffers from a severe trauma which resulted in two splits. The first split affects the temporality of the story, which is told in reverse order, mirroring the way a traumatised brain works while the second split, called “doubling” by R. Lifton, divides Odilo’s mind into two functioning selves, namely the Auschwitz self and the normal self. It is possible to conclude that Odilo’s suffering takes the root precisely in doubling, which paradoxically aimed at protecting his psyche while he was working as a camp doctor at Auschwitz.

Taking Caracciolo’s and Lifton’s research into consideration, it can be deduced that Odilo’s Auschwitz self competes with his normal self. It is almost invisible at the beginning since changes in Odilo’s psyche take the form of fissures, which gradually evolve into the full split. Initially, Odilo’s mind is in good condition – two selves are working effectively and do not interfere. However, the Auschwitz self seems to feed on the normal self and achieves the dominant position. However, the power relation changes when the main character leaves the camp – the Auschwitz self is not crucial for Odilo’s survival anymore, what is more, it can be considered useless in the environment that is not hostile. Unfortunately, the process of creating two selves seems to be irreversible and Odilo’s condition deteriorates over the course of the novel.

Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* is abundant in the examples of the consequences which the main character has to face – namely, the traumas which arise from his experiencing the Holocaust. Amis successfully captures both the effects Holocaust trauma exerts on the conscious part of the individual’s mind and, even more importantly, its influence on the unconscious sphere. The novel gives the reader an insight into the traumatised mind from an unusual perspective since it presents not only the mind of a perpetrator but of a victim as well. It is also important to note that although Amis shows the Nazi perspective, he manages to avoid empathising with the main character. This effect was achieved thanks to using the soul or the conscience as the narrator of the story. In this sense, Amis’s novel may be contrasted with *The Kindly Ones* (2006) by Jonathan Littell. The author of the latter used a remorseless Nazi as the narrator of his story and consequently had to face critics’ accusations of sympathising with the perpetrator\(^81\). Nevertheless, Amis’s and Littell’s novels make an important contribution to the market on which works written by Holocaust survivors predominate.

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The last important conclusion is related to Odilo’s passive attitude, which is adopted by many people during the wartime. The passivity of the main character is not an incidental quality – Martin Amis conveys an important moral message which is still valid, especially in the context of the ongoing discussion about the future of Holocaust memory in Germany and other countries. Odilo is an individual who “as a moral being, is absolutely unexceptional”, yet, the author hints that if passivity is performed by “the wrong people in the wrong place at the wrong time”, a person may be capable of horrible deeds.

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83 Ibidem, P. 165.

84 Ibidem, P. 30.


