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## ► To cite this version:

Jean-Michel Ganteau. A "not-knowing knowledge": Narrative Attentiveness and Care(-giving). "Storytelling and Resilience: The Function of Literature in the Overcoming of Trauma", Academia Europaea, Susana Onega, Sep 2017, Budapest, Hungary. ⟨hal-04522600⟩

**HAL Id: hal-04522600**

**<https://univ-montpellier3-paul-valery.hal.science/hal-04522600v1>**

Submitted on 26 Mar 2024

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## A “not-knowing knowledge”: Narrative Attentiveness and Care(-giving)

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I would like to show that contemporary fiction brings in a special knowledge (M.C Nussbaum) that Geoffrey H. Hartman has defined as “not-knowing knowledge,” and that is constitutive of the text’s clinical effectiveness or, at least, care—to take up A. Whitehead’s idea, of the process of “writing with care.” To do so, I will focus on Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* and on the novel’s double temporal structure according to which the character’s resilience is shown in reverse order, while the narrator’s follows chronological time. I will argue that the contradictory or at least paradoxical temporality of such a limit-case fictional narrative duplicates that of Wordsworth’s “Immortality” ode, with its final allusion to trauma (“Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”), and thereby the double temporality of afterwardsness as described by Freud and developed by Laplanche. In so doing, I will address the persistence of youthful resilience in the adult—an insight present in Hartman’s analyses—and the healing powers of afterwardsness that helps revisit the locus and nature of the original traumatic breakthrough so as to help narrativise it and open the way towards healing. Throughout, I shall pay attention to the issue of narrative ethics as encapsulated in the way in which fiction imposes a special, arrested rhythm on reading and addresses a vulnerable reader whose sympathy should not develop into over-identification (Hartman). The “not-knowing knowledge” of fiction guarantees not so much a knowledge as a shared *experience* that elicits a singular response to events caught in their singularity and thereby opens the door to healing.

*Time’s Arrow, or The Nature of the Offence* (1991) is Martin Amis’s seventh novel. It provides his first book-length exploration of the Shoah and thereby announces in many ways, at least thematically, the developments present in his more recent narrative, *The Zone of Interest* (2014). The novel has generated a great deal of critical attention, on account of its contribution to what is known as “Holocaust literature,” and more specifically as regards its development of a sample of postmodern aesthetics (Finney, among others), its treatment of trauma (see for example Lapugean, Rosenfeld, and Martínez Alfaro’s path-breaking article) and its highly singular way of addressing temporal issues (Burgin, Chatman, Phelan, Port, Slater, etc.). I have retained just a few categories through which the novel has been addressed as they are of direct interest for the subject at stake here. The first observation that may be made is that even though Amis’s narrative has been envisaged through the prism of trauma studies, never has resilience been instrumental (or even mentioned) in the critical production that it has given rise to. The second one is that its main thematic and formal characteristic—i.e. the fact that it chooses to reverse the arrow of time so much so that time consistently runs backwards throughout—on which the narrative’s ethics relies, fairly naturally brings to mind the notion of resilience.

*Time's Arrow* is in many ways a quest narrative, as its subtitle makes clear. The eponymous "Nature of the Offence" that it systematically investigates is that of the historical and cultural complex of determinations that led to the conception and engineering of the Shoah. To do so, the novel espouses the entropic potential of reversed narration, inverting even while questioning the Modern myth of progress. It is presented as a first-person narrative that invents some form of split autobiography—or rather a fictional autobiography narrated by part of a split, traumatised subject (Martinez Alfaro 136–37). The narrator, "passenger or parasite" (Amis 1992, 16), seems to be the manifestation of the protagonist's soul ("I am really the soulful type." [50]). Trapped inside the protagonist's body, it has to share the latter's perceptions, which makes him a figure of passivity and exposure. He is thereby embarked on a voyage that he has not chosen, on board a vehicle or inside a host that he has not selected either, and whose trajectory he has to espouse, even though he does not share his feelings and values in the least. Such a poetic choice of course renews the narrative parameters by introducing an ironical perspective right into the heart of the story, which is emphasised by a second radical option, i.e.: temporal inversion.

The novel's most conspicuous trait lies in its consistently pervasive inversion of the arrow of time. The opening lines are devoted to the protagonist's return to life from the depths of "the blackest sleep" (11) to end up with a vision of regression *ab ovo*: "Then eventually our corporeal bond will be tied, with Solingen scissors. When I enter her, how she will weep and scream. That I am gone." (171–2) In these hardly intelligible lines, the umbilical cord is *fastened* by the scissors prior to the baby's invagination, in a paradoxical *in extremis* vision of birth echoing the a-pragmatic original version of death on which the novel opens. The main consequence of the consistent inversion of chronology is that all actions, from walking to ingesting food (and other bodily functions) are seen in reverse, and that, while the novel begins in 1980s suburban America, it ends up in interwar Germany, where the nature of the offence may be approached. The story thereby takes Tod friendly, an elderly GP working in US suburbia, to postwar Portugal and Europe, where he assumes two different identities: John Young and Hamilton de Souza; then on to Poland and Auschwitz-Birkenau by way of the Vatican, among various steps in his continental journey. The bulk of Part Three is devoted to the evocation of Odilo Unverdorben's (his real name) work as a Nazi doctor in the lager where he is seen to create a race from the smoke flying over the crematoria and restore to health some inmates. Of course, the radical irony determining the pragmatic force or the narrative makes the reader rectify the apparent, surface message (he heals patients) and stabilise the implicit one (he experiments on human guinea pigs under Mengele's orders). The rest of the novel concentrates on Odilo Unverdorben's participation in the early, preparatory stages of the Shoah, as he is involved in the euthanasia programme destined to exterminate the invalid and vulnerable at Schloss Hartheim. The last pages evoke the context of the protagonist's childhood conditioning, his infancy and, as already mentioned, his regressive birth.

Admittedly, this briefest of synopses does not do justice to the intricacy of an experimental novel that has fitted form to ethical commitment, producing a narrative that, in the systematicity of its choices and of its reading practice, mirrors the systematicity of the monstrous planification and manufacture of death, the better to provide an experiential evocation of the offence, its nature and consequences. More space would be needed to evoke

the inversion of the dialogues (or rather the fact that they are designed to be read in two ways at the same time, by moving down and up the page); or the palindromic dimension of a narrative that may be read from the beginning and from the end (Morel); or the fact that if the protagonist has a knowledge of his criminal (historical) past that he tries to hold back and partly denies, the narrator has only access to the past situated in the protagonist's future. The narrator and the protagonist thereby stand in a chiasmic relation, as each one does not know what the other has access to, a very efficient way to radicalise textual ironies and to enhance the ethical interrogations with which the novel reverberates. Such a diametrical positioning is also made obvious as regards the feelings experienced by both instances, since Odilo Unverdorben is characterised by a crippled—not to say inexistent—openness to alterity, while the narrator is endowed with a heavy freight of empathy made available to engage with various vulnerable characters.

At the heart of this exacting, experimental narrative lie the issues of trauma and how one moves away from or builds up on exposure to traumatic situations. One of the solutions may be resilience, and I shall argue in the first part that the choice of chronological inversion could well point at the possibility of resilience. I shall then insist that what the novel offers, above all, is a negative presentation of resilience, before concluding on the special knowledge granted by literature, i.e.: the “not-knowing knowledge” of my title.

### **Repairing and living on**

The narrative's double temporal helix does provide a vision of human resilience, and this more particularly in the first part, devoted to the effects of the protagonist's recovery after his ‘rebirth’—or, better said, his return from the kingdom of the dead. Despite the fact that the original, paradoxical birth is dominated by the towering, nightmarish image of the doctor, wielding power over life and death (and announcing the protagonist's function at the heart of the narrative), the beginning is characterised by a fairly buoyant tone. This is certainly due to the fact that the backward movement of the plot, generally productive of a sense of determinism, or at least indicating that one's fate cannot be escaped as the future of the narrative is a past that has already been experienced and expended, allows the rejuvenating protagonist to get a fuller grasp on his bodily functions. That frailest of moments (the hour before death) is made to tie in with an equally precarious instant (that of birth), producing a hyperbolic, paradoxical vision of vulnerability. The *incipit* and following pages are a powerful reminder of the fact that there is such a thing as an “ontological vulnerability” (Maillard 198) that is experienced by all beings, and particularly human beings, at the beginning and end of their lives, in which they experience situations of extreme exposure and have to rely on others to survive.

In fact, the protagonist's situation, in the early pages, is one of total dispossession and passivity, one of the conditions for the experience and practice of an ethics of alterity that the main character is not going to take advantage of. Instead, he concentrates on his own progress and assumption of a limited autonomy, moving away from the total dependence of the opening lines. Some ten pages into the story, the narrator (whose voice provisionally melts with that of the protagonist prior to an eclipse and the use of the third-person in the Auschwitz chapters) enthuses: “Physically I'm in great shape. My ankles and knees and spine and neck no longer hurt all the time — or not all at once, anyway.” (20) Some pages later, the narrator

confirms this impression (with one of the first instances of the split between him and the protagonist):

[...] Tod and I are feeling so damn good these days: physically. I can't understand why Tod doesn't show more gratitude for the improvement. When I think back to how things were [...], man, we were still walking, but only just. It was taking us twenty-five minutes to cross the room. We can bend over now with scarcely a groan, scarcely a knee-crackle. We're up and down those stairs — hey, where's the fire? Occasionally we get some spare bit of our body back, from the trash. A tooth, a nail. Extra hair. (36)

In this powerful vision of *re-memberment*, underpinned by the relentless use of the asyndeton, a hyperbolic figure of resilience powerfully emerges. The narrative backward drive is harnessed to the evocation of that central feature of resilience that Cyrulnik identifies as metamorphosis, as he explains that “[...] history is not fate. Our sufferings lead us to metamorphosis.” (1999, 16; translation mine). He harps on this theme throughout his oeuvre, namely in his next book when he insists that “the scar [left by traumatic experiences] is never safe and can always open up again,” a reality that he associates with the necessity to “work towards an untenable metamorphosis,” compounded of “fragility, as one cannot forget the past but think about it in a way that remains bearable” (2001, 16–17; translation mine). For Cyrulnik, resilience is certainly not synonymous with invulnerability but remains entrammelled in and conditioned by vulnerability and ontological frailty. The subject's metamorphosis that is a defining trait of resilience implies a knitting together or interweaving—to translate one of Cyrulnik's favourite phrases—of various parameters leading to the protagonist's recovery. *Time's Arrow*, in its first part, may be in many ways considered a story of healing and re-building/re-memberment. Fairly literally, it gives a literary figuration of the original, technical acceptance of the term ‘resilience’: in the same way as a piece of metal put under stress may recover its original shape after a shock, the traumatised (in many senses of the terms, as we shall see later) protagonist recovers his lot capacities and goes through some form of empowerment. Resilience is shown to be compounded of vulnerability, or rather to be a modality of vulnerability. Amis's experimental narratives shows resilience as inseparable from vulnerability, as situated in a continuum in which exposure and dispossession may be toned down but never quite completely effaced. This is tantamount to envisaging the positive dimension and powers of vulnerability, a condition and/or situation that dogs both protagonist and narrator and which accompanies them along their paradoxical careering through personal and collective history.

In experimental fiction of the type favoured by Amis here, the contradictory or at least paradoxical temporality may be said to evoke that of Wordsworth's “Immortality” ode. Not only could it be said that the poem's liminal indication “The child is father of the man” is given a new twist here, as childhood problematically lies in the protagonist's future; but also the final line (“Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”) could be envisaged as an allusion to trauma, in its dissociation of thought and affect. One step further, the double temporality at work in the narrative, with the backward movement of the plot that never manages to completely efface the reader's empirical, pragmatic experience of time's chronological flow (this being concretised in passages of hesitation when the narrator glimpses the possibility of time flowing *chronologically*, as for instance on page 91) appears as a structural rendition of the complex temporality of trauma that Freud identified as

*Nachträglichkeit*, a term variously translated as afterwardsness or belatedness.<sup>1</sup> Following in Freud's wake, French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche has devoted a whole study to this notion, in which he pores over the intricacies of the temporal paradox according to which, to create trauma, one needs two violent breakthroughs affecting a subject, i.e.: a first violent occurrence that does not register in the subject's psyche and that is reactivated by a second brutal event (ça c'est Freud) Laplanche 135). This implies a double orientation for the traumatic wound, as the trajectory of trauma may be read in two ways, both chronologically and counter-chronologically. In this respect, the second occurrence allows for moving backwards towards the first one, and thereby for a re-reading of the latter. As has been argued elsewhere (Martinez Alfaro 140–41), I would point out that Amis's experimentation with the double temporal helix is a way of troping the paradoxical time of trauma: in this instance of a perpetrator's trauma, the first part of the novel, with its insistence on getting younger, evokes the temporal paradox of the co-presence of two. In Laplanche's terms, it allows for "the simultaneity of the adult and the child" (171; translation mine). Though present in two different contexts (a Romantic poem and a contemporary, experimental novel), the double vectorisation is used as a heuristic device, based on the creation of an experiential reading, meant to explore possibilities of temporal unhinging and co-presence. In many ways, the novel may be said to illustrate the issue of youthful resilience in the adult and give the reader a glimpse of the healing powers of afterwardsness that helps revisit the locus and nature of the original traumatic breakthrough so as to abet it and open the way towards healing. The metamorphosis inherent in resilience necessarily needs a temporal subtract on which to get initiated and develop.

### **Negative presentation**

Despite the fact that the protagonist gets younger throughout the narrative one cannot say that he ever heals, even if the novel provides the reader with a powerful vision of the possibility of resilience. The trauma inherent in exposure to the perpetration of violence on others (in the two stages of the Holocaust that he participates in), a pathology well-documented by specialists like Robert J. Lifton whose influence is mentioned in the afterword to the novel (175), only heals after he has had his experience of extermination in the chronology of the narrative, i.e.: *before* he has had that experience, in the early 1930s, according to the historical chronology that is always present at the back of the reader's mind. In other terms, the narrative gives an impression of healing that is erroneous, as the only way to dispose of the traumatic condition is simply by not having been traumatised in the first place. Healing is shown to be impossible. Only non-experience or narrative effacement are considered as options. Of course, the persistence of trauma accounts for the two main characteristics of this experimental narrative, that is the paradoxical handling of time to figure out *Nachträglichkeit*, and the splitting (a link to "splitting" in the sense of "clivage" ?of the central "character" into two instances (protagonist and narrator), as seen above. The separation into two instances clearly points at the protection mechanism characteristic of trauma and originally analysed by Freud, Janet or Ferenczi, and later taken up by Lifton in his analysis of the various stages of traumatic development affecting perpetrators exposed to the spectacle and practice of criminal

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<sup>1</sup> On the issue of *Nachträglichkeit* and its translations, see Laplanche 23–24.

acts: numbing, followed by splitting, that he designates through the term “doubling (Lifton 337–83). In the first part of the novel, the central character refuses/is unable to admit to what he did, and appears to be dominated by the necessity to deny. Only in the unique scene of confession to a Roman Catholic priest, in which he evades responsibility for what he did by alluding to the contextual conditioning, does the possibility that he is aware of what he did surface. In fact, after evoking the context of his interventions (““In a situation like that, certain acts suggested themselves. [...] The situation was mad and impossible””), he goes on clinching the matter by unwittingly privileging the principle of production and efficiency as opposed to ethical values, in a sentence that also provides the title to chapter 4: ““You do what you do best, [...] not what’s best to do.”” (120). Only briefly, in the middle of a short confession in which attrition seems to be highly motivated by the need to find help at the hands of what is presented as a Roman Catholic accomplice who is going to help him escape from his pursuers, does an inkling of the character’s humanity or, at least, of his consciousness that he perpetrated horrors emerge. The revelation ““We lost our feelings about the human body. Children even. Tiny babies.”” is followed in the upwards, logical reading of the pages by the ultimate confession, produced in “a deep and distant voice,” as if the character were not all there, i.e.: as if from the hardly bridgeable gap introduced by the traumatic splitting: ““I lost my idea of the gentleness of human flesh.”” (120) Despite the apparent resilient recuperation of his bodily functions, the protagonist’s psyche remains radically affected, and he keeps his dirty secret:

‘You don’t want to know,’ Tod whispers.

She doesn’t want to know. *I* don’t want to know. No one wants to know. (66)

In the early stages of the story, when the aged protagonist, Tod Friendly who has befriended Death? , has a relation with the ethically-named Irene, the narrator does not know yet what happened in the protagonist’s historical past. Only by feeling the pulse of his host’s feeling-tone and through access to his nightmares does he know that something lies in store, whose disclosure will be painful (hence the reluctance to know). If Irene is prevented from knowing by what looks here like Tod Friendly’s refusal to disclose, the soul actually does not want to know, for fear of the oncoming horrors. In these circumstances, the figure that might be most closely associated with resilience—or at least the capacity for resilience—is the anonymous soul, “[p]arasite or passenger” (72), “generally slow on the uptake. Possibly even subnormal, or mildly autistic.” (37) *Time’s Arrow* radical, black irony promotes a negative presentation of resilience, showing what it *could* be, or at least *how* it could be attained.

In fact, the persistence of childhood or youthful traits is more precisely associated with the narrator figure. As already mentioned, he is a figure of complete exposure to the other, the latter being the protagonist whose perceptions and sensations he shares, without knowing anything of his historical past. Entrapped inside the character’s consciousness, the narrator is a picture of passivity and dispossession: his access to perceptions and sensations is limited, and even more so his comprehension of events, biographical and historical. This is suggested by the “slow on the uptake” indication above, an indication that he represents only a part of the split psyche. Thanks to this device that renews in more ways than one the conception of fictional characterisation, the specificity of traumatic states that Cathy Caruth among others has defined as a “crisis of truth” (Caruth 6) or a “collapse of [...] understanding” (7) is fleshed out and given a practical dimension. Far from dwelling on abstractions, what the

experimental novel does is provide an *experience* of a traumatic state from within, so that the reader may have some sort of a concrete apprehension of the sense of splitting. In *Time's Arrow*, then, the reader is granted some special knowledge, or “not-knowing knowledge” that paradoxically puts him/her in a situation of openness to alterity: the otherness of the traumatised victim who, precisely, has no access to the whole of the truth, and whose memories are partly occluded. Still, the anonymous, imprisoned narrator is anything but autistic: on the contrary, he is beautifully equipped to get in touch with others, not only his host, to whom he is permanently attuned, but also the secondary characters, of whom there are not many, who are admittedly few ? admittedly. Still, what accrues through the soul figure is the capacity to feel, and to feel *for* the other, more especially. From this point of view, the anonymous narrator may be considered a protective figure, some avatar of a guardian angel concretised into a figure of care. From this point of view, perhaps the most apposite description is encapsulated at the very end of part one, with the terse self-portrait: “I have a heart but I don't have a face: I don't have any eyes to cry.” (102) The paradoxical formulation that hovers between incarnation (“heart”) and ethereality (no face, no eyes) typecasts the narrator as the seat of appetite for the other. The unlimited powers of the heart bump against the perceptual and sensory limitations. The full capacity for affect associated with the incapacity to act build up a situation in which feelings for the other are pushed to a point of incandescence, turning the protagonist into a block of raw (essentially positive) affects that characterises infant and childhood states, making him closer to Wordsworth's meliorative evocation and turning him into a figure of vulnerability. What I mean here is vulnerability in Martha Nussbaum's sense, as she evokes the way in which classical literary works (tragedy and poetry) present a vision of the good life that is based on positive affect. According to her readings, what makes the human a figure of excellence is his/her fragility in front of fate and others. This she describes in relation to the model of the plant (in contradistinction with that of the hunter):

a kind of human worth that is inseparable from vulnerability, an excellence that is in its nature other-related and social, a rationality whose nature is *not* to attempt to seize, hold, trap, and control, in whose values openness, receptivity and wonder play an important part. (Nussbaum 2001, 20)

In other terms, what defines human worth is the orectic (357) orientation of the individual whose feelings lead him/her to engage with the world and with the other, exacerbating the “needy and non self-sufficient elements of our condition” (357). Through the powerful image of the heart without a face, what accrues is a vision of the narrator as essentially orectic and dependent in his vulnerability, he being the epitome of exposure, if Athena Athanasiou and Judith Butler are to be believed when they aver that “[t]he human is always the event of its multiple exposures.” (Butler and Athanasiou 32). Through his hyperbolic reliance on affects, through his radical exposure, though his capacity to be wounded, hence his ontological vulnerability, the narrator becomes the type of figure whose “wound allows for a sensibility through the wound” (Cyrułnik 2001, 27; translation mine). That constitutive condition of resilience, the capacity to feel, is almost the prerogative of the narrator in the bleak universe of *Time's Arrow*. By contrast with the closed, affectless demeanour of the protagonist, and owing to the radical irony of the narrative that challenges appearances all appearances, the candidate for resilience is certainly not the protagonist, whose plasticity of

mind and feeling cannot be mobilised, but the faceless narrator whose incandescent heart makes him a figure of vulnerability. The capacities and values of resilience are paradoxically incarnated by this disembodied figure.

Furthermore, and even if this may sound as a self-evidence, what characterises the narrator is that, precisely he *narrates*. In his chiasmic relationship with the protagonist's mutism, he is the one who is in charge of telling and voicing, which turns him into a figure of address (Martínez Alfaro speaks about his "garrulousness" [140]). Even if he becomes eclipsed in chapters 5 and 6 (Auschwitz and Schloss Hartheim), when Odilo Unverdorben speaks in the first person, his soul or conscience being numbed in the passages where horror is being perpetrated, the narrator is a fairly loud, chattering one, who strives by all means to make sense of the character's story, thereby giving an account of himself and of the other. In so doing, he manages to voice his exposure that constitutes his singularity (Butler 33), and this he has to do by addressing his account. This is characteristic, of course, of the practice of giving an account of oneself, which is compounded of a great measure of risk-taking ("one has to avow the limits of self-understanding" [82]), has to take into account the failure to narrate fully, and once again entails a great deal of exposure and dispossession. This is all the truer as account giving implies a structure of address that makes reliance on the other (hence vulnerability to the other) unavoidable, and even a necessary condition for existence. Butler insists on this aspect when she comments on "the fact that we cannot exist without addressing the other and even without being addressed by the other, and that there is no wishing away our fundamental sociality" (33). With the proviso, here, that the narrator receives no address in return, which turns him into a fumbling, orotic figure, condemned to address the reader in many ways without being able to get a response, necessarily. The pragmatic force of the text is such that the reader is being called to witness the narrator's strivings and the protagonist's perpetrations without ever being able to achieve contact, once again transforming himself into a figure of tension towards alterity. Interestingly, the structure of address is a feature that Cyrulnik considers as central to resilience and, one could add, as a *condition* of resilience. He repeatedly comes back to this issue in his oeuvre, and this as early as his ground-breaking *Un merveilleux malheur*, where he demonstrates that addressing one's narrative to someone else (possibly but not exclusively what he calls a "tutor of resilience", perhaps an echo of Freud's NebenMensch, as defined in *Project...*) amounts to "making it exist in the other's mind and giving oneself the illusion that one is understood and accepted," which is tantamount to insisting on the "necessity of representation to feel that one is understood" (Cyrulnik 1999, 34; translation mine). Addressing one's narrative is thereby a condition for healing and for resilience, as it implies that the past is remembered but that the subject can develop with this past (as opposed to a past that would be forgotten, non-inscribed or denied). *Time's Arrow's* narrator is clearly the repository of such a capacity for resilience that is figured out contra-pragmatically in this highly ironical narrative: what is not present (the protagonist being but very partly resilient) is evoked implicitly, as if in counter-relief, tapping the powers of a negative presentation to provide an experiential account of the situation.

In the end, the narrator boasts another fundamental trait of resilience : not only does he have the capacities to feel and address, but also, following logically from those, to relate. From Cyrulnik's point of view, this is a pre-requisite for resilient adaptation. In an interview given in 2009, he insisted that "[b]eing is being together." (Martin, Spire and Vincent 39;

translation mine) This of course is a reference to an idea that he had developed in his earlier publications, i.e.: that of knitting relationships with one's environment or milieu (the latter word being used in the French original [1999, 16]). In the same way as narrating implies the presence of an addressee and that resilience, even if it involves internal dispositions or capacities, relies on meeting tutors that help the subject work through his/her trauma and develop, the narrator has to be able to rely on both internal and "external resources" (2001, 31; translation mine). And once again, the diametrical opposition between the closed protagonist, entrapped in his denial, and the open, orrectic narrator, always eager to reach out towards the other, stabilises the novel's axiomatic programme. In his sympathetic evocation of various victims of the protagonist's medical activities, in his systematic antiphrastic testimony to the other's pain, in his spontaneous way of siding with the vulnerable and those who *care*, the narrator supplies the ethical compass of the narrative. This is particularly the case with the character of Irene, the longest-standing of the protagonist's girlfriends, who, as indicated by her name, is the repository of the values of peace and caring, a figure of help and healing who is driven to commit suicide by his callousness. All things considered, the anonymous, faceless narrator, endowed with the qualities of the heart asserts the values of vulnerability for the other, hence of relationality, when he formulates the possibility of the eclipse or invisibility of the human: "Is it that the human being is secretly nothing without others? He disappears." (71) Being for the other, and being endowed with the capacity and urge to relate, is what characterises the narrator in the limitations of his perceptions and comprehension that bolster up his straining towards the other and his attentiveness to the other.

### **Literature's knowledge**

The literary—more specifically experimental—presentation of resilience brings along an apprehension of the notion close to what critic Geoffrey H. Hartman has called a "not-knowing knowledge" (Hartman 544) akin to the representational and epistemological specificities of trauma. First, it is a type of information only available circuitously, through its effects more than thanks to some direct presentation: "It can be inferred from certain effects and symptoms, including a repetitious imagery that veils, without effacing [...]" (539). Whether it veils without effacing or ostentatiously underlines, the non-knowing knowledge provided by the novel "combin[es] insight and blindness" (544) so as to bolster up the imaginative powers of the fictional text. In *Time's Arrow*, the conflation of the ironical, circumlocutive presentation of resilience allows for the emergence of a "negative narrativity" (548) that evokes the reality of trauma circuitously (as the protagonist is split, he has no access to part of his psyche, which requests a narrative doubling though the means of the narratorial instance), even while the resilient capacities, apparently manifested by the protagonist, are in fact available as potential in the narrator. This aspect of literature's knowledge is all the more efficient as it is diffuse and haunting, nowhere to be placed and hovering all over the text. More importantly, it is an affective, experiential, practical type of knowledge that puts the reader at the heart of the narrative and solicits his/her active participation, thereby effecting a better appropriation of the special knowledge.

What the novel fosters is a development of the reader's perceptive qualities. Intrinsicly relying on the presence of a narrator, the story is by definition focussed. It

thereby determines a zone of focus and perception relating to elements that are not directly visible or accessible. The singling out of historical and psychological (even psychiatric) events and the protracted dwelling on such information creates the conditions for a greater concentration. Through its in-built resort to focalisation, fictional narrative in general and such a specifically focussed, experimental novel as *Time's Arrow* in particular develop and train the reader's capacity of perception that Nussbaum, in the wake of Aristotle and Henry James, sees as an "ethical ability" (1990, 37). Perception is here the prime condition of the *reconnaissance* of the hidden or occluded, of that which is generally kept away from general recording and acquaintance. By focussing on the inaudible and the invisible, by getting the reader to access the two sides of the split consciousness of a protagonist suffering from perpetrator's trauma, by calling forth a supplementary instance—i.e.: the innocent, ethically unsullied narrator—, what the novel does is provide an ethical apparatus that is indexed on the singularity and powers of perception.

What pointed perception allows for, in turn, is the exercise of the reader's attentiveness. In fact, when looking for "The Nature of the Offence," keen focalisation and the consideration of the least accessible or palatable both reveals and activates the reader's attentiveness to specificities of a historical, psychological and ethical type. From this point of view, Amis's experimental narrative seems to reflect in more ways than just one Aristotle's conception of the good life as interpreted and rehearsed by Nussbaum when she considers literature as allowing for "a sense of life that leads us to build into the overall procedure an *attention to particulars*, a respect for the emotions, and a tentative and non-dogmatic attitude to the bewildering multiplicities of life" (1990, 27; emphasis added). Of course, as we are reminded by other critics, attention is certainly not egalitarian and cannot be squandered or at least applied indiscriminately and profusely (Foley Sherman 145). This is exemplified in a novel that makes it emphatically clear that the only possible perception is through the protagonist's eyes and senses, which the narrator repeatedly assesses in terms of limitations and entrapment. Still, the narrator's attentiveness to the protagonist's mood shifts and emotional tone, his constant empathy with the exposed and the suffering, his incessant wonderings as to some of the aspects of the protagonist's medical practice, for instance, all this associated with the radical antiphrasis that seizes hold of the whole of the text train the reader's attentiveness as s/he share's the narrator's consideration of details and, one step further, strives to learn to decipher the real meanings behind the apparent ones.

By privileging affect (either of the violent or positive type), perception and attentiveness, all meant as instrumental in promoting a sense of the good life, novels in general and *Time's Arrow* in particular tend towards the practice of an empirical, experiential knowledge. In Nussbaum's terms (still following on Aristotle and James), the knowledge of literature is empirical "in that it is based on and responsible to actual human experience; it aims to elicit an 'intelligent report,' as James put it, of that experience—that is, of 'our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social beings.'" (1990, 173) And as historical, ethical beings, I would add. And what seems to me even more to the point is that the empirical dimension opens the door to an *experiential* knowledge of a type inherent in the nature of fictional representation, based as it is on mimesis, i.e.: the "imitation" of an action through repetition, a rehearsal that allows for the reader to participate in and almost re-enact the reconstituted 'original' action. Such an experiential opaqueness is dependent on the

structural and poetical nature of the literary text that captivates the reader and makes him/her share in the focalisation and rhythms of the narrative, implicating him/her through his/her senses and soliciting his/her perception, attentiveness, physical and affective response. Such a soliciting of sensation, affect and emotion fosters an exposure to the representational contents, and an openness to the represented other that is figured out not through the abstraction of other types of literature (Nussbaum's example being philosophical discourse) but through a distinct concreteness and incarnation. When the focalisations, modulations and rhythms of the literary text espouse those of the reader (or *vice versa*, more specifically), a common ground of percept and affect makes for an experiential knowledge that in many ways seems to be specific to the narrative of fiction, and to such a novel as *Time's Arrow*, more particularly.

In the end???, the special knowledge that fiction promotes is above all a *practical* knowledge "in that it is conducted by people [artist and reader] who are themselves involved in acting and choosing and who see the inquiry as having a bearing on their own practical ends" (Nussbaum 1990, 173). This is tantamount to suggesting that the negative presentation of resilience provided by the novel gets the reader to be involved and, in other terms, to *care*, i.e.: to consider him-/herself as affectively dependent on subjects and situations outside him-/herself, which is a means of underlining the reader's exposure to and accountability for the unsuspected other brought into visibility and within reader's remit by the novel. The end of such a knowledge would then be "practice, not just theory" (Nussbaum 1990, 173). Interestingly, the foundation of this practice could be a consciousness of one's limitations, hence a greater understanding and tolerance of the other's flaws and imperfections. From this point of view, the common ground of such a presentation of resilience could be the discovery of a form of anthropological vulnerability characterising all subjects and revealing their inherent dependence on others, interdependence with others, hence responsibility for others. Fiction, and *Time's Arrow* most emblematically, fills in a practical ethical purpose by training the reader's attentiveness and responsiveness, hence responsibility.

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