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Amis, Martin
Time's Arrow

Genre
Novel

Keywords
Caregivers, Empathy, History of Medicine, Individuality, Literary Theory, Narrative as Method, Ordinary Life, Physician Experience, Professional Surgery, Time, War and Medicine

Summary
Tod Friendly awakens from death, rejuvenates, and becomes a surgeon. In New York he becomes John Young. He travels to Lisbon and a privileged existence as Hamilton de Souza. He leaves Lisbon for Salerno, then Rome. As Odilo Unverdorben he travels north to Auschwitz Central where he resumes his career and conducts research. Through this time he has a series of affairs until he joins his wife. Their daughter dies, they marry, then court. Odilo works then attends medical school. He joins a youth organization and lives with Father and Mother. Finally, he enters Mother.

Commentary
A series of literal and figurative awakenings, renamings, and reinventing Time's Arrow is an extended international Bildungsroman in reverse. A technically brilliant accomplishment of Nabokov's challenge, "Nobody can imagine in physical terms the act of reversing the order of time. Time is not reversible," its extension of the story of the development of one's self (traditionally told up to young adulthood) to the full course of a lifetime, and its emphasis on that development as a response to changing events in one's life and in the broader socio-historical context, dramatizes identity as created, as created through narrative, as constantly re-created, and as ipse (similarity to one's self over time) not idem (identicalness outside time).

In Time's Arrow time, voice, and perspective are constructed individual combination such that the novel can be read analogously to a thorough self-conscious, unruly reflection of the disorderly and opaque narrative medicine. Moreover, the difficulty of reading "backwards," as opposed of watching a film in reverse, engraves the experience in the reader's mind the very literariness of Time's Arrow becomes its greatest value to literature.

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