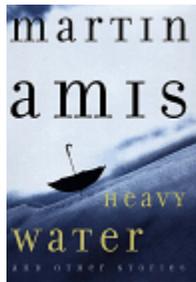


# Heaviosity

## Navigating *Heavy Water*



from The Amis Discussion Web, 1998-99:

### Re: Denton's Death

**From:** Samuli K.  
**Category:** Category 1  
**Date:** 12/14/98  
**Time:** 3:53:45 AM  
**Remote Name:** 192.98.1.211

I think you could look at "Denton's Death" in two ways. One: it is nothing more than a short experiment in style, very reminiscent of J. G. Ballard's short stories, both stylistically and thematically. Remember that Amis has, especially during the Seventies, often cited Ballard as a major influence on his work. It resembles one very early Ballard short story (written in the Fifties, don't remember the name) in which a person gets trapped in a tightening time loop (he lives the same minute over and over again).

Two: in one way the brief story could be seen as a whimsical testrun of *Other People*. As Amis has himself explained, *Other People* is about the afterlife: because lives are so different, why should death be alike for everyone. So *Other People* tells of a hell specifically designed for Amy Hide. Being reborn as Mary Lamb is a punishment for everything she did as Amy Hide. So Denton's Death tells of a one other possible hell. Denton has to experience his death over and over again as some sort of cosmic punishment - and in the story the death isn't the worst thing but having to wait for it. The short story also shares its bleak tone with *Other People*.

**Now, I'm just amused...A janitor's janitor.**

**From:** Brooklyn  
**Category:** Category 1  
**Date:** 12/11/98  
**Time:** 2:59:04 PM  
**Remote Name:** 207.238.28.10

As a defender of the baser elements of the site I thought some type of Amis related opinion would be in order. I haven't buckled down and bought the book (I'm an e-commerce virgin) but did read "The Janitor on Mars" and "The Coincidence of the Arts" which came out in the *New Yorker* and *Granta*. I'll tell you, a lot of people have commented on the Coincidence... but it just didn't stick with me, I think I need a second go-round.

Now the "Janitor on Mars" was a different story-it blew me away. I don't recall anything packed with such concentrated disgust (as Julian Barnes noted of *Dead Babies*) since DB. The ending was Johnny-esque. Just when you thought there might be some hope-MA dashes it away. As for a previous thread concerning "fave lines", I loved the line where the earthling janitor notes that his martian counterpart is a "Janitor's janitor...alertness to the threat of effort". I haven't looked at a janitor in the same way since, or some of my slacker workmates.

## Waiting for the end of the world

**From:** Doctor Luther's Assistant  
**Category:** Category 1  
**Date:** 12/14/98  
**Time:** 12:55:52 PM  
**Remote Name:** 198.79.246.135

Thanks for the response and perceptive observations, Brooklyn! Good man. Respond often. I loved 'Janitor', too.

I, too, have encountered the "alertness to the threat of effort" on many occasions, particularly in some sales clerks I've dealt with, as I go about my delightful and rewarding Christmas shopping. What did I like about "Coincidence of the Arts"? you may ask. OK you didn't, but here goes anyway:

It had for me all the great Amis themes: class, money, art, race, all wrapped up in a tidy, ironic, extremely humorous package. I loved the intricacy of the story: how great, how just that the mime ended up being the greatest 'artist' of all of the contestants. How fitting, how perfect that the reason she kept silent with the artist was that she knew he'd reject

her for reasons of class prejudice if he heard her speak. As for favorite lines, I at least have some favorite passages from the collection. I don't have my copy of "Heavy Water" handy (I loaned it to Xenophile.

No, I'm not making some pissy, clever jab. I really loaned it to Xenophile.) , so I can't quote verbatim, but there were several passages in "State of England" that reached out and grabbed me. I loved the opening bit about Big Mal's wound, how what was startling about it was the recency of it, the way it seemed to be actively suppurating as one watched... (I'm not doing it justice of course, but please check it out. It's a riotously funny passage.) There's also another great passage where Mal is lamenting the fact that, although all the other ways of looking down on people were no longer politically correct: race, poverty, disabled-ness, etc., it was still perfectly acceptable to look down on him (on the basis of class). Mal really is MA's most sympathetic yob character yet. (I may have the name wrong. Don't pounce on me, "trainspotters."

By the way, I realized after I sent off my last post that the expression in question was "exhaustion of working-class culture", rather than of "the working classes", although I'm sure they're exhausted! A verbal glitch. (What can I say, folks? It happens.) Later pilgrims, DLA

## Re: Heavy Water

**From:** Forrest Collman

**Category:** Category 1

**Date:** 12/19/98

**Time:** 4:23:36 PM

**Remote Name:** 207.136.253.33

Amis draws a parallel between the pedophile's violating the young boys and the janitor revealing the doom to earth. "The pedophile for some reason, wants carnal knowledge of the carnally ignorant: a top-heavy encounter, involving lost significance." The janitor on Mars wants knowledge of earth's art. This is the only thing unique or interesting about the planet, but even the genius robot doesn't know why.

The imagery/metaphor of "top-heavy" runs through the story. The other unique thing about earth is our widespread belief in God. The robot describes our belief in God as "top-down" where as Martians see him as "bottom-up." Meaning top-down as best things hidden, whereas Martians see all bad things right away. He talks of how Mars handles realizing they are insignificant in the universe. They attempt to fight back. Mars' view is flipped from being on top to on the bottom. Mars is violated with knowledge, and now the janitor violates earth with knowledge.

The only hope is that lost meaning of art and human understanding it would seem, because as the astronauts are thrown out of Mars, rejected, and worthless, Pop bends over Timmy as Timmy reveals his rapist, an image which on the surface can seem comforting, but the final words and movement of Pop suggest that whatever has kept Pop from violating the boys is gone because all hope is gone and the world will end.

In this way Pop violates Timmy two-fold, because Timmy was hiding the knowledge of the rape from himself, and Pop brings it out. In the ending sequence Pop takes on the metallic voice of the robot, which is consistent with the theme, and connects the plots together.

P.S. I just wrote this very quickly and didn't edit it, they are just my thoughts, and they aren't very well organized.

## **Martinian millennialism (or, Yeats's "Second Coming" as *Night Train* subtext)**

**From:** Sammy Davis Jr.

**Category:** Category 1

**Date:** 1/11/99

**Time:** 6:59:54 PM

**Remote Name:** 129.219.247.73

Well hi there, dahlings! It's me again. Sammybaby. And I'm back for an exegetical encore. With a song in my heart and Vegasoid pedantry out the wazoo. Ya know, I've been sitting here on Cloud Ten in my gold lamé Nehru jacket and my B'nai B'rith medallions and my white belt & white loafers, schlocking up the place with my insufferable low-camp cheeziness. And ya wanna know something? My obnoxiousness is enough to give even ME the dry heaves. But I WILL say ONE thing in my favor. I have NEVER sunk so low as to name-drop Stephen Hawking the way Martin did. And I have NEVER slung any of this pseudo-scientific happy horseshit about redestructionism & post-Andrewmodernism & semiotic homoeroticism. But I DO have a cross-referential long-shot literary theory that I'd like to share with you.

As you know, Martin likes to play around with names. Ed & Diedrick once explicated the Richard Tull/Tantalus Press joke. "Tull" suggests "total nullity". "Gwyn" contains "win". "Mike Hoolihan" sounds vaguely like "black hole". The medical examiner is "Dr. No". "Trader Faulkner" was a real-life actor who appeared with Martin in a movie called "A High Wind in Jamaica". But the name "Faulkner" implies an additional referent (albeit nothing to do with William Faulkner). And none of you chuckleheads managed to decipher the name "Rockwell". Nobody

considered the possibility that her name's referential meaning might be a clue in regard to her motivation. Xenophile recently touched on the answer when she referred to some hineyhead's millenarianism. Ian Nicholls mentioned an Amis quote in a NY Times book review. Where Martin said that "London Fields" is set in 1999. And Ed mentioned Martin's prefatory note to "London Fields". Where Martin said that he considered using the title "Millennium" instead. So that's more grist for my Martinian millennialist mill. (Old mills grind slowly--but exceedingly groovy.)

Here is the answer to "Night Train": The name "Rockwell" is a cryptonym. "Rockwell" is a punning allusion to a line from a poem. Here is the line: "but now I know that twenty centuries of stony sleep were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle". It's from "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats. Here's the entire poem:

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre/  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

"Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of 'Spiritus Mundi'  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

Jennifer Rockwell is the falcon and Trader Faulkner is the falconer. Yeats had his own personal theory about the Second Coming. Here is an annotation I found which explains it: "Fused with the Christian conception of Christ's return is Yeats' private conviction that a regular historical cycle of 2000 years was nearing its end, to give birth to a new era, not necessarily better than the preceding.".....Well here we are at the very end of a 2000-year cycle. And what better way to celebrate the Yeatsian bimillennium than with a crypto-novel with a heavy-handed bit of Yeats for its subtext. An annoying Irish cop and an annoying Irish poem. O joy. (And I can say that cause I'm Irish.)

Yup. That's right. It's come to this. Martin Amis turns out to be Joan Didion in reverse-drag. I knew it all the time. After Joan moved to Los Angeles and mastered the exquisite sigh, she once wrote the following

sentence: "This book is called 'Slouching Towards Bethlehem' because for several years now certain lines from the Yeats poem which appears two pages back have reverberated in my inner ear as if they were surgically implanted there.".....Boy ya know, ya talk about your major obnoxious. There's nothing like Joan's custom-crafted high-minded catatonic neurasthenia to set my teeth on edge and send me screaming into the night.

I'm the first to admit that the "Rockwell" & "Faulkner" puns are pretty thin reeds to go on to support this Yeatsian millennialist proposition. (But then again, at least give me credit for not pulling a Leslie Fiedler and hypothesizing about a menage-a-trois subtext involving Mike & Jennifer & Huckleberry Finn.) I respect Frank Seaver for providing ample proof to bolster his child-molestation theory. But I'm not gonna bother to go thru "Night Train" again to find more evidence to buttress this Second Coming shtick. Because even if this theory is true, it still doesn't explain Jennifer's motivation. Why would Jennifer be subject to millennialist dread? How does millennialist dread relate to astronomical dark matter & superstrings? Do wormholes function as more nihilistic information that comes in the night-sky? Remember the last few pages of "The Information"? With the bits about the colliding galaxies and the Man in the Moon? Ya notice how that segues straight into the next novel about the astronomer? What's it all about, Martybaby? Is the Y2k bug a satanic plot? And is Truman Capote indeed the Antichrist?

## Re: SAMMYGRAM FOR: StephenP

**From:** StephenP (Durham University individual darts champion 1988)

**Category:** Category 1

**Date:** 1/19/99

**Time:** 12:44:44 PM

**Remote Name:** 195.171.125.1

For you, my dear William, self-deprecating irony is just something that happens to other people, isn't it.

Yeats is in the background, alright, and the bar's name is no coincidence. Names in Amis are always significant. But "Faulkner = falconer and therefore Jennifer = falcon" is just too long a shot for me. Nobody would be more happy than I were I to be wrong. However, my championship semi-final included a 13- and a 14- darter, including two bottled at double eight on match point, so think on't. DARTS. What's your best outshot, one-eye?

## SAMMYGRAM FOR: StephenP

**From:** Sammy Davis Jr.  
**Category:** Category 1  
**Date:** 1/19/99  
**Time:** 12:25:10 PM  
**Remote Name:** 129.219.247.69

"Good darts", Stevybaby. Or the supreme accolade: "Darts". So you're the 1988 Durham Uni solo darts champion, huh? O frabjous day. Callooh. Callay. I can barely contain my enthusiasm. Remind me to faint sometime. I haven't been this impressed since Beryl Bainbridge & Ruth Rendell beat the crap out of Jackie Collins & Kitty Kelley in the 1993 Random House Tag-Team Mud-Wrestling Finals at Wembley.

Hey Mister Pee: You're gonna rue the day you ever pooh-pooed my "Second Coming" theory. Because I just found a piece of clinching evidence. I am absolutely positively 100% semi-certain that Martin subtexted "The Second Coming" into "Night Train". I refer you to page 41 (American version) where Mike sez: "One night, near the end, a big case went down and the whole shift rolled out to dinner at Yeats's.".....Don't even THINK of telling me that "Yeats's" is a mere coincidence. It's a mere coincidence like my butt chews gum.

## **Martin References Kingsley**

**From:** Bill J.  
**MartinAmis:** Amis's Works  
**Date:** 4/10/99  
**Time:** 2:33:27 PM  
**Remote Name:** 129.219.247.70

### **FROM "THE COINCIDENCE OF THE ARTS":**

"Rodney was staring at her with a pang of recognition, although he knew she was a stranger. He thought he had seen her before, in the neighborhood. But never fully seen her. Because she was the woman on the street whom you never see fully, sent here to elude you, always turning away or veering off, or exactly maintaining parallax with mailbox or tree bole, or vanishing forever behind the burning glass of a phone booth or under the black shadow of a truck. Indignant poems have been written about these women---about these \*desaparacidas\*."

### **FROM "SIGHT UNSEEN" BY KINGSLEY AMIS:**

As I was waiting for the bus / A girl came up the street, / Detectable as double-plus / At seven hundred feet.

Her head was high, her step was free, / Her face a lyric blur; / Her waist  
was narrow, I could see, / But not the rest of her.

At fifty feet I watched her stop, / Bite at a glove, then veer / Aside into  
some pointless shop, / Never to reappear.

This happens every bloody day: / They about-turn, they duck / Into their  
car and drive away, / They hide behind a truck.

Look, if they knew me, well and good, / There might be cause to run; /  
Or even saw me---understood; / No. Not a peep. Not one.

Love at first sight---by this we mean / A stellar entrant thrown / Clear  
on the psyche's radar-screen, / Recognized before known.

All right: things work the opposite / Way with the poles reversed; / It's  
galling, though, when girls omit / To switch the set on first.