

time's arrow

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 04 Sep 1998

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Paul C Duggan — 04 Sep 1998, 09:05

I heard Martin Amis interviewed when his book came out. He made the interesting point that morality can be defined by whether or not an action is different when run in reverse or not. Two billiard balls hitting looks the same no matter which way you run time. Poisoning a man looks very different the other way around.

Apparently some people accused Amis of trivializing or glorifying the holocaust by using such moral terms for it's opposite.

"I am an impure thinker. I am hurt, swayed, shaken, | paul + | + elated, disillusioned, shocked, comforted, and I | --|-- have to transmit my mental experiences lest I die." | + | +
-- Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy | pduggan at world.std.com

Michael Straight — 04 Sep 1998, 10:19 · follows Paul C Duggan

On Fri, 4 Sep 1998, Paul C Duggan wrote:

I heard Martin Amis interviewed when his book came out. He made the interesting point that morality can be defined by whether or not an action is different when run in reverse or not. Two billiard balls hitting looks the same no matter which way you run time. Poisoning a man looks very different the other way around.

I'm not sure I understand. Is it because backwards it would look like you are sucking the poison out of a man and bringing the dead back to life?

But almost everything except two billiard balls hitting looks different when run in reverse: typing a letter, changing clothes, eating a cheeseburger, building a fence. How does that help us define the morality of these actions?

ObWolfe: Someone mentioned "In Looking Glass Castle" as a story featuring a backwards-living character, but I don't see that at all. That's the one featuring the world where there are no men and the scientist with a man hiding in her house, isn't it? What am I missing?

-Rostrum

William H. Ansley — 05 Sep 1998, 00:31 · follows Michael Straight

Rostrum (Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu>) wrote:

ObWolfe: Someone mentioned "In Looking Glass Castle" as a story featuring a backwards-living character, but I don't see that at all. That's the one featuring the world where there are no men and the scientist with a man hiding in her house, isn't it? What am I missing?

(To the tune of "Little Orphan Annie".)

Who could it be

but Robert Borski!

Who said:

As for Gene Wolfe, "In Looking Glass Castle" is a shorter work of his where a character lives life backwards and thus remembers the future--clearly modeled here on Lewis Carroll's White Queen, who does the same. In this case, however, it's Daisy McKane, who, although she's naturally confused, remembers her own drowning.

I am with Rostrum on this one. I don't see how Robert can get "experiencing time backwards" out of this story. But then again, I haven't understood how Robert came up with many of his interpretations of other Wolfe stories, either.

While I will bow to no one in my admiration for Lewis Carroll, as I have demonstrated elsewhere on this list <g>, his White Queen is a pretty feeble model for living backwards in time. The scene where she screams and bleeds

before pricking her finger is the only real example of this in _Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There_. Perhaps that is why I haven't noticed the backwards aspect of "In Looking Glass Castle".

William Ansley