

The Weird

We read stories and so often miss the fact of how peculiar they are, take 'Gulliver's Travels' as an example, we discount its strangeness as an adult because we know it is satire. How about 'Pilgrim's Progress' and think it is a religious allegory, what of the comedy novels of P. G. Wodehouse and E F Benson there we except the strangeness that is in them as humour and laugh or smile at it and occasionally admire the sharpness of observation of human foibles and follies. Children's stories are full of the weird, the literal minded hate them, some proclaiming them ungodly - this applies to believers of all faiths, regardless of the fact that religious books contain allegories so contain the weird. The Alice stories are full of the weird, but this weirdness hides the fact that it is full of 'Oxford' in jokes known to the children word play, and puzzles. Take the opening of 'The Walrus and the Carpenter'

"The Sun was shining on the sea,
Shining with all his might:
He did his very best to make
The billow smooth and bright –
And this was odd, because it was
The middle of the night."

But of course this is not odd because it happens every summer north of the arctic circle and every winter within the ant-arctic circle. Because the Alice books are so rich there are many different annotated volumes; one that comes to mind is 'The Philosopher's Alice'

There are so many children's authors who us the odd and weird to entertain. For example Gorge MacDonald's 'At the Back of the North Wind' and many of his other children's stories along with his adult novels such as 'Lilith', J R R Tolkien's 'The Hobbit',

C S Lewis's 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'. But this is a very small sample which has been true of since the first children's story was written and goes back to the first stories told by a storyteller before the first written word.

The same is true for stories written or recorded for adults, three examples 'Beowulf', and 'The Adventures of Baron Munchausen', and 'Froth on a Daydream'. But of plays and films the list is extensive, from the pen of one author and playwright J B Priestley, 'Time and the Conways', 'An Inspector Calls', and 'They Came to a City'; from J M Barrie 'Dear Brutus'; from Robert Ardrey 'Thunder Rock'; from Vane Sutton 'Outward Bound', not forgetting the 'The Thin Man' films starring William Powell and Myrna Loy. The list goes on but I will stop there and not even touch upon any more films for all there will be is a list and that incomplete. But if you all know of many of these and can add your own examples. So how should consider them? As examples of the weird, but then if having got this far it is time to define weird and not make any assumptions about the words meaning.

Adjective—

weird(comparative *weirder*, superlative *weirdest*)

- Having an unusually strange character or behaviour.
- Synonyms: odd, oddball, peculiar, strange, wacko,
- Deviating from the normal; bizarre.
- Strikingly odd or unusual.

The problem arising from this dictionary definition is that 'weird' all too often becomes a term to describe something that deviates from what is beyond the experience of an individual, so what is ordinary to one is strange differing from another. So, if we consider the main character in Philip Larkin's novel 'A Girl in Winter' here experience of visiting England for the first time as a sixteen year old was for her a journey into the weird.

Perhaps a better word would be – **outré**

An adjective

unconventional, unusual, strange, odd, extraordinary, eccentric, weird,
bizarre, shocking, outrageous.

Just to add to the confusion that is already there one should also consider the novels of –

- Gustave Meyrink
- Charles Williams
- Ian Banks
- G I Gurdjieff
- Mary Shelly
- Laurence Sterne
- Flann O'Brien
- Karel Čapek
- August Strindburg
- Jane Austen
- Margaret Cavendish
- Dornford Yates
- John Buchan
- Barbara Pym

This random list could go on and on with authors from all across the world and from every generation. It from the satires of Aristophanes to A. Valliard's 'The City of Lost Intentions' published in May 2024. But the how do we avoid the weird and outré for if a book of fiction contained nothing but the ordinariness of an everyday life in the present day set in a street near you then you would lose interest in it very quickly may be if it were set in another country with differing social norms you would read it because it would contain sufficient differences to make it sufficiently weird to hold your interest. A question is raised about the health of someone who assiduously seeks out and will only read about that which is familiar, or avoids books altogether because they contain the strange, and for that

matter almost all television, theatre, and films. But even if you open a cookery book you are likely to find at least one of the recipes which is odd to you in some way and some which on first reading seem downright weird.

One final thought, taken from the outré short story by Jorge Luis Borges 'The Secret Miracle' –

“..... Hladík was anxious to redeem himself from his equivocal and languid past with his verse drama, *The Enemies*. (He favoured the verse form in the theatre because it prevents the spectators from forgetting unreality, which is the necessary condition, which is the necessary condition of art.)”

An idea which has been expressed in many forms and not only applies to fictional works.

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