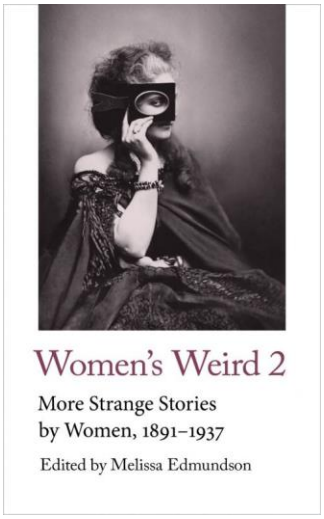

Women's Weird 2: More Strange Stories by Women, 1891-1937,

Edited by Melissa Edmundson.

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Continuing to present weird short fiction authored by women, a project begun with her first edited collection *Women's Weird*, *Strange Stories by Women, 1890-1940* (Handheld Press, 2019), Melissa Edmundson's *Women's Weird 2: More Strange Stories by Women, 1891-1937* explores terrifying tales by writers primarily associated with other mainstream genres. This collection not only includes British and North American authors, like its predecessor, but also those from New Zealand, India, and Australia. Available for purchase in both paperback and e-book, the latter of which boasts a seamless scrolling capacity and intuitive navigation, *Women's Weird 2* flies by whether pages are being turned or swiped. Appropriately, given the superstitious theme, it contains thirteen short stories, chronologically presented and demonstrating a breadth of literary and cultural interests, with notes on the stories by Kate Macdonald. Tales include sci-fi offering "Roaring Tower" (1937) by Stella Gibbons, best known for Neo-Gothic rural parody *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932), and chilling ghost story "The House Party at Smoky Island" (1935) by Lucy Maud Montgomery, author of the *Anne of Green Gables* series (1908-1921).

Performing vital remedial work in her introduction, Edmundson explains that the limiting term "female Gothic" obscures formulative uncanny productions by women published since 1800, arguing instead for using the more expansive definition "Weird." Consequently, this collection illustrates how "Women's Weird" continued to evolve after 1900, as WWI imbued the Victorian ghost narrative with additional complexity and cultural baggage. As Edmundson soberly observes, "For writers who had witnessed world war, the devastating effects of imperialism, first-wave feminism, and economic depression, the supernatural story could never be the same" (18). Now all the psychological traumas defying articulation manifest in the form of the supernatural or eerie. Thematic linkages emerge across the collection that, within the specified period, illustrate uniquely feminine interests in resilient courage, gender swapping, independence, and imperial and domestic legacies of oppression.

In contrast to stories by male authors like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Lord Dunsany, which, with few exceptions, generally require masculine action to preempt paranormal evil, the majority of these tales contain brave women capable of resolving otherworldly crises. Melding detective fiction with the supernatural, "Twin-Identity" (1891) by Edith Steward Drewry is narrated by a French female police-agent who daringly cross-dresses and obdurately pursues an elusive murder suspect across Europe to England. Miss Erristoun finds her scientific disbelief challenged in Lettice Galbraith's "The Blue Room" (1897) but exemplifies immense courage in the aftermath. The New Woman as supernatural heroine locates and dispels the evil forces, or bravely accepts

fate, as in "The Green Bowl" (1901) by Sarah Orne Jewett. Liberated by "the days of bicycling," her New England heroines are rural sojourners, announcing, "We start off boldly and just say that we are going up the country and then let fate or fortune choose the way" (145). After exercising new geographical liberty, it feels only natural that they should inherit a witchlike power with unknown potential.

Another strand evidencing within multiple stories reflects the twentieth century loss of security within the British home, not merely as the result of WWI, but as retaliatory justice on behalf of the colonized or domestically exploited. A deserted home in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, India is "let at last!" (271) to a British military family in "The Red Bungalow" (1919) by Bithia Mary Croker, ironically echoing Jane Austen's famous opening to *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), only for the Fellowes to discover it contains a malignant "Thing" targeting their children. Another unseen reckoning intrudes past civilized boundaries as an injured soldier experiences a demonically charged atmosphere, the result of feudal tyranny, in Bessie Kyffin-Taylor's terrifying "Outside the House" (1924). Major John Longworth reflects that he is not fearful of "things, not of this world", but that "the horror lay in the suffocating fog, and in the apparent wish to haul me into some abyss" (348). As he recently experienced in WWI's gas-filled trenches, true horror derives from exposure to unswerving, and in this case justified, malignancy.

Reflecting rising interest in the subject of weird fiction curated by Edmundson and others, James Machin, author of *Weird Fiction in Britain, 1880-1939* (Palgrave Gothic, 2018), has also published *British Weird* (2020) with Handheld Press, containing fiction by classic British authors. Within this genre, it is important to focus, as does Edmundson, on how overlooked women writers used the inexplicable to illustrate challenges for their gender and respond to each other's innovations, as evident in certain parallels and aberrations between stories. For instance, "The Hall Bedroom" (1905) by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman recalls Charlotte Perkins Gilman's patriarchal oppression in "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), but pictures a male invalid beset by interdimensional elements within a chamber, endangered not only by his landlady's control but also by his own stubbornness. By rendering these literary conversations more accessible, *Women's Weird 2* justifies its call to look beyond the "female Gothic" to scrutinize possible meanings of varying but analogous views by women writers into the unknown.

Admittedly, one absence might concern readers interested in the editorial methodology of recent collections restoring "Weird" fiction by women to the literary record, like *Weird Women* (2020) from Lisa Morton and Leslie S. Klinger. In the introduction, Edmundson does not clarify her selection process or explain why these particular authors and stories were chosen among the plethora of forgotten "Weird" stories composed by women between 1891 and 1937. A conventional explanation might also have provided tantalizing clues as to the possible focus of a further volume. However, the deeply engaging qualities of every single tale in the volume will appeal to those keen to acquire insight into the "Weird" literary genius of women writers in recent centuries, or simply to experience an eerie prickle at the back of their necks as they ponder the ambivalent nature of reality and those brave enough to explore it.

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