

Elements of the Weird Story

According to H.P. Lovecraft

Four Distinct Types of Weird Story:

1. One expressing mood or feeling
2. Expressing a pictorial conception
3. Expressing a general situation, condition, legend, or intellectual conception
4. Explaining a definite tableau or specific dramatic situation or climax.

Two “Types” of Weird Story:

- I. “...those in which the marvel or horror concerns some condition or phenomenon and...”
- II. “...those in which it concerns some action of persons in connexion with a bizarre condition or phenomenon.”

Five Basic Elements of a Weird Story:

- a. some basic, underlying horror or abnormality (condition, entity, etc)
- b. the general effects or bearings of the horror
- c. the mode of manifestation (object embodying the horror and phenomena observed)
- d. the types of fear-reaction pertaining to the horror, and
- e. the specific effects of the horror in relation to the given set of conditions.

Some notes on tone and atmosphere:

“One cannot, except in immature pulp charlatan-fiction, present an account of impossible, improbable, or inconceivable phenomena as a commonplace narrative of objective acts and conventional emotions. Inconceivable events and conditions have a special handicap to overcome [suspension of disbelief –ed.], and this can be accomplished only through the maintenance of a careful realism in every phase of the story **except** that touching on the one given marvel.”

“This marvel must be treated very impressively and deliberately—with a careful emotional ‘build-up’—else it will seem flat and unconvincing. Being the principal thing in the story, its mere existence should overshadow the characters and events.”

“[T]he characters and events must be consistent and natural except where they touch the single marvel. In relation to the central wonder, the characters should shew the same overwhelming emotion which similar characters would shew toward such a wonder in real life. **Never have a wonder taken for granted.**” [Emphasis added. –ed.]

“Atmosphere, not action, is the great desideratum of weird fiction. Indeed, all that a wonder story can ever be is **a vivid picture of a certain type of human mood.**”

“Prime emphasis should be given to **subtle suggestion**—imperceptible hints and touches of selective associative detail which express shadings of moods and build up a vague illusion of the strange reality of the unreal. Avoid bald catalogues of incredible happenings which can have no substance or meaning apart from a sustaining cloud of color and symbolism.”

All quotes pulled from “Notes on Writing Weird Fiction” as presented in *Collected Essays Vol. 2: Literary Criticism*, edited by S.T. Joshi. Hippocampus Press, 2004. 1st. edition.