



Hawkwood Books Blog : November 2019

Odd Socks

A blog concerned mainly with the written word shouldn't be musing over odd socks, but there you are, everything is connected.

About seventy-five percent of the time I remove clothes from my washing machine, there are an odd number of socks. This alone is not newsworthy, but an even number go in, and that's a mystery worthy of Poirot. If it happened once or twice, then fair enough, mistakes happen, but it's more than that.

I have various explanations. One is that the sock is spun into a different dimension, the other is that gremlins steal the socks for their own malign purposes. I often retrace my footsteps from dirty pile of clothes to washing machine, expecting to find the missing sock skulking in a corner, lodged between steps, hidden behind chair legs, stuck to furniture, and I often do, proof that the rational world is more powerful than the imaginative world.

But sometimes, I don't.

Over the years, a number of missing socks have never turned up. They might one day when I move home, but at present they are missing in action, or rather inaction, and worrying proof that the imaginative world can be more powerful than the rational world.

How does this affect day to day life? At the lowest level, it's frustrating because one remaining sock is of no use, unless I want to endure a single cold foot. At the fantasy level, it allows me to imagine any number of reasons that the banal can suddenly become meaningful.

It could be that I've discovered the existence of Dark Matter, that the mysterious material searched for by scientists is all around us, part of us, invading in mundane ways, adding puzzlement and confusion to an otherwise unchanging world. Margaret Mahy wrote a fantastic book for young adults about this in *The Haunting*, so did Nicholas Fisk in many books, and for fully grown adults there are any number of horror stories and films where the banal suddenly turns deadly.

Writing and publishing fiction, it seems masochistic to question the validity of fiction itself, but the conflict of fact and fantasy is fascinating. In an age of rational explanations, there is, I feel, a backlash of almost medieval levels of blinkered thinking, and I really don't want to add to that. Yet, for some reason, the world without fancy would, for a lot of people, be unbearable, just as for rationalists, a world dominated by belief alone would be dangerous.

Not that I expect my missing socks to wreak a terrible revenge, but it's interesting how easy fantasy can replace rationality or imagination overpower observation. And not necessarily in a harmful way. It doesn't hurt to suspend disbelief for a while and take a step out of the ordinary. Four hundred years have passed since Horation spoke those oft quoted words, but there are still many more things in heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in our philosophies.