

## **Hawkwood Books Blog: October 11<sup>th</sup> 2019**

### **Amazing!**

I can't tell you how much I dread hearing this word – but that's what I intend to do. I've tried counting the number of times I hear it in a day, but I lose track, and am aware that for each time I hear it, there are more times I've missed it. I would hazard a guess that it is used close to two hundred times daily on the main channels and perhaps a thousand if you include the shopping and other entertainment broadcasts.

Why does it cause such irritation? Mainly because it shows the power of the media over our minds, the way we speak, the way we think, perhaps even the way we feel. So much is watered down to nothing and made a fuss of, as if it's everything. If all the things that are said to be amazing truly were so, then we should all be walking around goggle-eyed, awed and, drat, amazed. But we aren't. We simply don't seem to know how to express surprise, joy, astonishment and the like without resorting to a dull, overused, meaningless adjective.

And it truly is meaningless. It diminishes the wondrous and raises the banal. If all things beyond the normal are amazing, then nothing is amazing at all. It's like bashing every glorious moment with a hammer or placing every ordinary experience on a plinth.

Not that it's necessary or wise to scour the thesaurus to find alternatives. Ideally, we should all have a working vocabulary that let's us express personal responses to the unusual. It isn't easy. It's much simpler when, for example, seeing a precious item restored on 'The Repair Shop', cleverly recycled waste on 'Money for Nothing' or asked how you feel in the face of anything out of the ordinary, to resort to a tried and tested banality.

You can, of course, say it in different ways. Emphasis offers variety, even if it is vacuous variety. There's 'a-MAY-zing', 'a-may-ZING', 'A-MAY-ZING' and even a dull as ditchwater 'a-may-zing'. But whichever way you spin it, it kills personal expression. There are many hours to fill on many channels, so there's bound to be some repetition - not everything is going to be a literary masterclass, but there are limits, and when I hear this gormless word repeated ad infinitum, that is the limit.

There's a short story by Philip K Dick about a girl who somehow breaks a divine barrier separating Earth from the angels. In so doing, she heralds the end of individuality. Gradually, all around her start talking and behaving in the same way. More than that, they *are* the same. No longer are there individuals, just an amorphous humanity looking, feeling and speaking identically. It's a nightmare vision, and although the overuse of 'amazing' won't break any mystical barriers between us and the gods, it does threaten something similar.

If you see someone dance beautifully, surely you can find your own word to describe them. If your ancestral family heirloom is brought back to life with incredible skill and artistry, it isn't just – you know what.. You get the gist. Finding the right word is an art, and if it were mastered by all, all the time, literature would die a death, but it's worrying to hear the same empty exclamation from even the brightest minds. Is it some kind of televisual telepathy, implanting the word in all our heads so we know no other way to react, making emotions understandable with the lowest common denominator?

If we all had the right words, we would all be great writers, and clearly that's not the case. But we can at least make an effort to surprise. For all that Boris Johnson is criticised, he has a wonderful turn of phrase and a never ending fund of surprising linguistic expressions. I would be saddened if he ever reacted to anything of note by resorting to the banal. Well, he's the Prime Minister, he could do something about this, perhaps by making it illegal to use the word in public, with punishment by imprisonment in the Tower of London.

Now that would be truly amazing.