



Beyond the Door

Philip K. Dick

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"Did you ever wonder at the lonely life the bird in a cuckoo clock has to lead --" wrote the editor of "Fantastic Universe" in January, 1954, blurbing this tale "-- that it might possibly love and hate just as easily as a real animal of flesh and blood? Philip Dick used that idea for this brief fantasy tale. We're sure that after reading it you'll give cuckoo clocks more respect."

But certainly Doris Thomas respected the clock. She went to it after the little bird came out to do his thing. She bent over the little door, her lips close to the wood. "Do you hear me?" she whispered. "I think you're the most wonderful cuckoo in the world." She paused, embarrassed. "I hope you'll like it here."

You've got to know he did. . . .

Beyond the Door Details

Date : Published (first published 1954)

ISBN :

Author : Philip K. Dick

Format : Kindle Edition

Genre : Short Stories, Science Fiction, Fiction, Fantasy



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From Reader Review Beyond the Door for online ebook

Asti says

I'm quite torn between appreciating the story but not really liking it.
I sympathize with Larry, who was a bit the antagonist in the story (or was he not?).
But then I decided to simply tribute my torn feeling as a Philip K. Dick thing.

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Tim Pendry says

An uncharacteristically weak Dick story from 1954. It is in the fantasy genre rather than his usual science fiction territory. It is 'low fantasy' in which a cuckoo clock intrudes into a troubled marriage and becomes an actor in a drama that is essentially about a male bully.

Once again we see Dick's 'simpatico' attitude towards women but, although the characterisation is good, the plot hangs on a thread because Dick is not good at the atmosphere, required in a fantasy story, that would permit the suspension of belief necessary to allow a wilful cuckoo clock to exist.

Good science fiction requires plot and characterisation and above all 'ideas'. Fantasy needs atmosphere which science fiction does not. Fantasy is certainly rarely about 'ideas', being much closer to the Wildean world of art for art's sake.

Not a 'bad' story (Dick would find it hard ever to be bad) but sadly rather dull and I, for one, am grateful that he stuck as far as possible to science fiction and then allowed the fantastic to come through his 'visionary' side rather than attempt to create fantasy from reasoning out his tales.

Gary says

The strangeness of ordinary. Things.

Mehjabeen Choity says

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Anna says

again, not comparable to his grand later works, or other short stories of his such as 'The Second Variety' (which, ironically, was published in 1953, one year before 'Beyond the Door').

overall rather flat storyline, not engaging or thrilling at all, doesn't really leave the reader guessing (other than "ok, why did I just read that?")

to be fair, I read this as a free ebook, so nothing's lost by reading it, other than maybe ten minutes of my life. it's not THAT bad either, in the grand scheme of bad literature, but quite frankly not what I've come to expect from K. Dick.

Shubhi Nigam says

Quite qUiRkY!

Nikiforos Rigas says

Truly and simply remarkable!

Dylan Gelbard says

I piss on these reviews. This was a fun, creepy, and interesting short story about a possessed cuckoo clock.

Eman says

I got this short story for free in my e-book reader application. I think even short stories are ought to be well written. This one failed to satisfy my taste. The language is poor, the end is predictable, and the characters are lame (well, except for the cuckoo in the clock which had a more interesting character). However, I've read worse before.

Tiffany Lynn Kramer says

I do wish a few things had been flushed out a little more but over all I found this to be an enjoyably creepy tale. The use of the cuckoo clock was superb and I definitely look forward to reading more work by Philip K. Dick.

Doreen says

one is a psychopath and the other is a sociopath. or is it vice versa? or are they both a combination of the two?

Bill Kerwin says

First published in *Fantastic Universe* (January, 1954), this strange little story about a bad marriage, an adulterous liaison, and a little birdie who lives in a cuckoo clock and just may have a mind of its own, is just—for want of a better term—kinda “dumb”. Dick, who by this time had become an accomplished professional hack, develops the idea well, but I doubt if the idea was worth developing in the first place. Taken as a whole, it feels like a third-rate episode from a half hour 50’s anthology TV show: *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, or maybe *The Twilight Zone*.

Still, I have to admit I enjoyed it. Dick—who sometimes sincerely believed household objects were conspiring against him—gives this story a genuinely paranoid atmosphere.

Terence Blake says

The cuckoo clock is the object of a struggle between two régimes: the mechanical and the machinic (in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari's "desiring machines"). Larry embodies the mechanical régime: the clock is an object of consumption, the acquisition made in a favorable economic transaction. It has a job to do, and should respect its specifications, or be coerced into doing so. For Doris the clock is an experience tied to memory ("like my mother had") and to desire. Larry's expectations are prosaic, the clock should tell the time correctly, and Doris should be glad to have got what she wanted. Doris's approach is animistic, she immediately has an emotional reaction, begins to fantasize, personifies the cuckoo, desires to associate Bob with the experience.

As the clock is an antique and Bob is interested in antiques (and in Doris) perhaps Larry was not being totally utilitarian in his choice of present, perhaps the clock was part of an erotic contest with Bob to win Doris's desire. Bob seems to be younger ("that young punk"), to have lots of free time (he accompanies her to

the stores while Larry is working) and to have an expensive hobby ("antiques") and a time consuming one ("books"). Larry works hard, including doing overtime, and would like to be admired for his business acumen in acquiring the clock "wholesale".

The playing out of the plot seems to be a repetition of a preceding triangle. Doris's mother had such a clock "when Pete was still alive". Larry sees his wife, Bob, and the clock as forming a triangle of desire: "They would be quite happy together, Bob and Doris and the cuckoo". Larry too has begun to fantasize around the cuckoo.

Doris is not innocent in all this. She does not regret that Larry works to much, but is upset that he sometimes breaks routine by calling to see if everything is alright. She flirts with the cuckoo just as she flirts with Bob, and puts up no protest when Larry kicks her out, presumably just moving in with Bob. The cuckoo fulfils her wish of being rid of Larry, just as her mother (perhaps) got rid of Pete. So Doris has a cuckoo aspect too, in that the cuckoo female is alleged to change its mates frequently. When Bob, at the end, wonders if Larry's death was not an accident but "something else", we automatically think that the missing term is deliberate (i.e. murder), but another antonym to accident could well be "law". In which case he should beware of what happens next. Doris may be following a law of her nature even more stifling and imperious than Larry's mechanical routine, and more dangerous;

Doris feels her reactions are fair self-defence against Larry's patriarchal monologue: "After all, she couldn't keep listening to him forever without defending herself; you had to blow your own trumpet in the world".

The cuckoo too couldn't listen to Larry's threats forever, and "defended" itself.

The title phrase "beyond the door" is associated with the behaviour of the cuckoo, remaining inaccessible and aloof: "someplace inside the clock, beyond the door, silent and remote". This inside space it withdraws to connotes domesticity, whereas Larry is subject to the law of the outside, of the workplace, which involves renunciation and compromising of desire: "But it isn't fair. It's your job to come out. We all have to do things we don't like." The cuckoo, like Doris, does not wish to bend to this law. Doris wishes to defend herself and to "blow her own trumpet in the world".

Tristram says

But Then You Have to Spoil It All by Saying Something Stupid Like Cuckoo

Beyond the Door is an eerie-sounding title, whisperings of realms yet undiscovered abounding, and yet this little story, published by PKD in January 1954, never leaves its domestic setting. It is based on a tongue-in-cheek idea when Larry gives his wife Doris a German cuckoo clock as a present to patch up the fissures showing on the veneer of their relationship, and when we later find out that Larry is actually a cuckold. The dialogue at the beginning of the story establishes the characters well: Larry, a no-nonsense, down-to-earth man is gullible enough to reveal to his wife that he bought that present, which has long been one of her heart's wishes, wholesale so that she needn't worry about the price, and Doris, of course, reacts as most people would do, by feeling hurt and disappointed. Which leaves Larry clueless because after all, Doris got what she wanted, and shouldn't she be happy?

You already see that the characters may be drawn from real life and that their problems are such as every reader might have experienced themselves, to a stronger or lesser degree. However, the story soon starts becoming absurd, or downright silly, if you ask me, when we learn that the cuckoo inside the clock has some kind of life of its own. But then maybe it hasn't and we are just being led up the garden path by Doris's childish anticipations with regard to that wooden bird and by events that can be explained as accidents.

All in all, by PKD standards I find *Beyond the Door* rather disappointing and inane even though the

characters are cleverly and promisingly drawn.
