

Tomorrows Never Written and Subsequent Unrehearsed Memory

by strannikov

Piles of pages of centuries of tomorrows have been written and sit stacked awaiting their turn. Our memory is orderly. The temptation to rebuke memory for its lack of novelty remains strong, nevertheless. Recipes, carpets, paints, and computers (e.g.) retain their names whole decades at a time, convenient until we once complain of that lack of novelty to which memory has accustomed itself.

The standing complaint that memory helps enslave us, however, is on the very verge of toppling over, for this is the day we begin brushing our teeth with “tar”. (“Toothpaste” loses its novelty very quickly, it was determined long ago, when the ADA expects us to brush at least once a day.) Brushing teeth with tar brings requisite novelty to dental hygiene and puts things into fresh perspective right away: teeth can stay black and shiny! No amount and no brand of old “toothpaste” wherever manufactured will hence be found to undo the charm of blackened teeth. The difficulty in praising blackened teeth arises only from lack of experience and passes but quickly. A new aesthetic thus rises from a simple change of terms and practice, once memory is “defanged” (ha-ha). When we successfully renominalize “toothpaste” as “tar”, all benefits are realized, instantly if not quickly. Examining a loved one's blackened teeth will require more lighting, perhaps, but the only proper time to visit any dentist is during daylight hours, and every fear of eating spinach will soon subside. (Spinach is eaten with utter impunity by those with black teeth, clinical trials show.)

No doubt, some few artists among us will not remain long impressed favorably and will consent only to use tar to paint stripes

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on their remaining teeth. For some, a vertical pattern will evoke prison bars, for others, product bar codes. Striped teeth, it strikes me only now, may in turn achieve as celebrated a reception among us as “merely” blackened teeth. Popular pursuit of blackened or striped teeth may in fact harm sales of “toothpaste” (the old stale kind, that is) and tooth whiteners. Attaining a new dental aesthetic, however, must come at some kind of assessed cost.

In this one instance, at least, the lack of novelty intrinsic to memory will be discovered to have been overcome to great acclaim. How unfettered the future becomes as we lose our dire dependence on stale memory! You watch: wholesale calendar reform all by itself will hasten the advent of even more numerous and more substantive kinds of novelty! Our perception of the new will sharpen of itself, even should we encounter temporary pauses as we find new names for everything. (The future will remain unfamiliar, though, as decades of SF literature have amply demonstrated.) Why, one day entirely new languages will emerge spontaneously without debt to memory, languages with no grammars or dictionaries, without codified syntax or attesting semantics. In that happy day we will change our own names as often as we change our clothes! (Strictly speaking, though, it is impossible to know that clothes and names will retain their respective appeals indefinitely, now that we know just how the anomalocaridids cavorted completely naked.)

I remain a staunch and steadfast realist, of course. I know well that the success of these many endeavors will transpire only after we have established a new orbit for this horrid old planet! These stale orbits year after year are distressing in the extreme and perhaps can be said to form the physical basis for the utter lack of novelty we suffer from: same star, same moon, same boring ellipses since the dawn of astronomy. The galaxy's full, surely we can find a new star with a different color? And can't it “rise” in the west or from the south for a change? The planet yearns for a new sun! And that horrid moon! Always the same, always, month to month! That impertinent charade of “phases”! Couldn't we at least apply some spin to it? Who can't remember what that face looks like?

But courtesy of that very moon, an unfamiliar memory began to arrive one recent evening. The memory was bulky, I had to sit at the kitchen table for hours awaiting its complete arrival. Finally, it settled within as a dragon complete with thick sharp talons, glistening scaly wings, a thick barbed pointed tail. (Funny, I'd never personally seen any dragon, but upon its arrival this one looked eerily familiar.) This arrival of memory, I mean, this memorable arrival did not make rising from the kitchen table hours later exactly easy. The dragon lay coiled in a deep dark recess behind the stove that had grown and deepened to accommodate it, and the dragon settled itself into a deep sleep. It hissed as it slept. It somehow smiled as it hissed as it slept. I did not dare move my chair but crouched and crept away as lightly as I could, barely breathing.

Now, many months since, I'm fine just as long as I stay quiet in the kitchen and remember not to use the stove.

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