

The First Word of the World

Theo, the wizard's apprentice, sat by his master's bedside. The master wizard had been horribly wounded by the undead lich Lazgoth during the day's battle and would likely not survive the night.

"Come here, I have one last thing to teach you," said the master.

"It doesn't matter anymore," said Theo. "They're invincible, those creatures of darkness. Lazgoth is the very incarnation of the hatred of men. Not even you could defeat him."

The master took a talisman from his pocket and held it out weakly to his student. "We are not powerful, the world is," began the master. "We are but channels. This here is the source of my power, but it interacts differently with each person. You, my disciple, have much more potential than I did. There is still hope."

Theo took the talisman and immediately the master began to weaken. He bent down to hear what his master wanted to say to him.

"To activate it, you must say the first word of power," said the master.

"Words have no power, they are illusions."

"No there is one word that was at the beginning of time, a universal note, and is the key to linking this physical world and the land of the immaterial, spiritual world. Then you will find power. But beware of channeling it; it can consume you." With that the master whispered the word into Theo's ear and died.

I wake up. A body sprawls beside. I gasp in horror.

Memory comes to me: a troop of undead hemmed us in. Us? Master and I. Spell cast, Master collapsed. We retreated.

Master is the body. Lazgoth is outside.

The underground chamber is protected by Master's last chant, and its effect is dwindling away. The talisman is in hand yet what is the word – the first word of power that I must say?

A feel of Master's exhalation still lingers about my ear. The feeble whisper, the obscure syllable, the more I concentrate the more slippery is the recalling of the word.

Once remembered, things won't be forgotten, they just haven't been called to mind. I need a trigger, a moment to recover that wispy stretch of memory. So I head towards the cubicle of our library and bury myself in words: books, myths, plays, novels, and books. I've to be exposed to as many linguistic stimuli as possible so that if I'm fortunate enough, I can come across the word again.

The whole process is rather painful. My eyeballs are aching. My mind is deteriorating. I'd rather only perceive the visual signifier and simulate its sound. But the signified constantly intrudes and arbitrarily generates meanings in my mind. I don't have time. I don't want to understand. I just need the form.

King James II plotted the abduction of his own son in person. Gwynplaine, his legitimate heir, was sold in his infancy and mutilated by the child-buyers. His ankles were pierced and tied up. The boy was supposed to have his feet swollen to death. But eventually, the infant Oedipus was adopted. He lived a happy life in Corinth until informed of his fate: committing patricide and incest with his mother. In order to escape the fate, he left home and set off for where lived his birth parents – the king and queen of Thebes. Here and now, he didn't know whom he would kill by mistake. At the royal castle, he visited his real mother. In the queen's bedchamber, upon hearing a noise behind a tapestry, Hamlet stabbed wildly and killed Polonius, the father of his lover. The king, Claudius, worried about his safety, sent Hamlet to England with a sealed letter requesting his immediate execution. But his company left him and cast off. Ironically, the ship lost in the storm and sank in the English Channel, with all hands. The prince miraculously returned and reunited with his loyal friend Horatio. They secretly attended a burial only before Hamlet realized that Ophelia, his lover, was the dead. He revealed himself, proclaiming his love for her. He then walked, as though in a trance to the edge of the ship, speaking to his lover, and throws himself into the water.

I think I still haven't encountered the word. No sound can ring a sparkle in my mind. And I cannot help but keep interpreting the useless nonsense of a lunatic prince's revenge before everyone gets killed. Or of an idiotic prince's avoidance of killing his father and wedding his mother exactly makes him do so. Or of a disfigured prince dies together with his one and forever love who has never seen his face.

I don't know, I can't see the difference, I cannot remember. Sometimes I feel writers are really a pack of fools, especially those well-known ones. They usually get into ecstasy while others hold their pen. Occasionally, we are able to pick up some good originality. But even if they are good, they are of limited goodness, measurable goodness, and well-known goodness. The importance, therefore, lies in those writers who are beyond measurement. The worth of their writings has infinite possibility, inconceivable volume. What is rich and crucial remains unknown.

Whenever we know something, we name it. Names and words are representatives of the known, eclipsing our anxiety of the unknown. Words are not just illusions; they are limits. The first word of the world is the first try of creating boundaries.

I start to skim a pile of scholarly works, which seems to respond to what I have read earlier. Their words make me angry and amused. On the one hand, I only need the forms but the meanings keep flooding in. On the other hand, their analyses are so funny that I nearly enjoy myself. In order to make their critiques unbreakable, either they never assert anything or they never make sense. It's highly productive yet

largely void. I don't bother. When people use language, they are always using a language only they know anyway.

Now I know I am going to die. I am so preoccupied. Lazgoth and many others have broken in, in front of me. I won't recall the word.

I, in fact, cease to see the difference. This word or that word, I die or others die, this second or the next second.

We live in repetition not progress. We value the unknown rather than the known. Tomorrow cannot be plotted as better because once you know it is better, it loses all the possibility of but better. Tomorrow is random. The future is unknown therefore preserves its essence and importance. The next second is bound to deviate from the previous in an angle that is forever uncertain. Someday accidentally, the course of a second meets or doesn't the next; the history recurs or doesn't.

I doubt whether Master has said anything. I think he says none.