

## **On a paradox of the unnew**

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*Abstract.* In this brief paper, I present a paradox of the unnew, derived from nineteenth and early twentieth century fiction, and consider an obvious solution.

*Draft version:* Version 1 (11th August 2022).

*I have written a novel: do not scorn*

—*By the name of “Death in the Early Morn.”*

Certain works of nineteenth and early twentieth century fiction suggest a paradox, which I describe as a paradox of the unnew (Rossetti 2005 [1870]; Wharton 1990 [1905]). The paradox is an incompatible set of propositions:

- (a) For something to merit my interest, it must be new.
- (b) This merits my interest.
- (c) There is nothing new about this.

Now just about anything is new in some ways but sometimes insignificant ways; and the judgment that something is “nothing new” may be made with the intention of setting aside these insignificant ways. For example, consider this dialogue:

*Critic:* Novel E2 is nothing new. Look at novel E1.

*Critic of critic:* Well, there is a difference between E2 and E1. E2 was published later. And if there is a difference, then your argument fails. E2 has something new about it – a later publication date.

*Critic (irritable):* No, I am not accepting that.

This dialogue suggests a solution. Something can be nothing new according to a standard of newness which ignores certain qualities, but one of the ignored qualities merits interest. For example, a short story is sufficiently like a nineteenth century Russian fiction to say that it is nothing new, but there is this other quality, which merits interest: it was written in twenty-first century Manchester. According to various theories, you cannot even produce that in this context.

### **References**

Rossetti, C. 2005. *Commonplace*. London: Hesperus Press.

Wharton, E. 1990. *The House of Mirth*. London: Virago Press.