

THE FLIGHT OF THE MIND: WRITING AND
THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION
CONFERENCE PAPER

John Masefield's Attic

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'This is curious,' said M'sieur Pierre. 'What are
these hopes, and who is this saviour?'

'Imagination,' replied Cincinnatus.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*.

In a letter to an American friend last year I wrote the following: "I'm struggling to move my novel forward. It's giving me a hard time at the moment. But they always make us pay our dues sooner or later. So this is not really unexpected. After all, I've been having a good run with it for quite a while. Now for some deeper probing. The problem with the book is my own doing. I can't bear to take the material for granted; and having written a draft, I have to begin questioning it and erasing it. I don't seem to be able to do it any other way. I'm not as persistent as Giacometti in erasing my works in progress, but I do understand Giacometti's visceral reluctance to believe in what he had created until it had begun to shine for him with a kind of light that was not his own. Without this sense of surprise about what we have done there is no mystery in what we do. And I happen to agree

with the spirit of Lorca's, *Only mystery makes us live*. So here I am again this morning attacking what I've done so far with this book as if it were the work of my deadly enemy and I were determined to tear it to pieces."

We are all born with an imagination. Imagination is not the preserve of a few. Sidney Nolan's muse and mentor, Sunday Reed, reminded us that "Childhood means creativity."¹ And it was Coleridge—in T. S. Eliot's view the greatest critic of the imagination—who said in his Ode on Dejection, "What nature gave me at my birth/My shaping spirit of imagination". The image of children in a kindergarten sitting on the floor surrounded by their creations is not new. "Behold the child among his new-born blisses," Wordsworth wrote, " ... See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies."²

What happens to the imagination in adulthood—the degree to which, in a sense, we are unable or unwilling to forget our childhood liberties—is crucial to our mature creativity. For most adults their imagination is no match for the onslaught of the demands of daily life; or its relatively mild demands are satisfied by daily life, by having a career or a family and making a home. The imagination of the writer or artist, however, persists into adulthood and continues to demand the major share of the individual's attention and energies. It's not surprising therefore that we often recognise something rather childlike in the petulant and rather self-centred world of the artist, the poet, the novelist. Creative people often seem compelled to strive to become their own universe, even though they know such a state is not achievable. They have an idealised inner world that demands expression. It is as if their childhood imagination grew up with their body to have large adult ambitions, and became the dominant mode of their existence. The

¹ Janine Burke, *The Heart Garden, Sunday Reed and Heide*. Vintage 2004

² William Wordsworth, *Intimations of Immortality*.

artist's attempts at a modest conventional life often fail in the face of the demands of the imagination combined with ambition and ego. Nolan abandoned his first wife and child to live at Heide, where for his daily needs he was as dependent on the Reeds as the child they themselves did not have, and where his creativity was given by them an absolute value. It was just too good an offer to pass up and the conventional morality had to give way to it. At Heide Nolan became the indulged child, his only remaining responsibility to create his art.

In his *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*,³ in which he elaborates ideas that were to become the contested critical landscape of the English romantics—the critical landscape of Coleridge and Wordsworth in particular—the German poet Schiller makes the point that in dealing with a subject such as aesthetics, "one is compelled to appeal as frequently to feelings as to principles." Beauty, aesthetics, art, the products of the creative imagination, depend in great part on our education and cultural bias, even though they are often manifestly in dispute with it. But most deeply our creative products depend for their effects, as Schiller suggests, on our emotional response. Education is essential in matters of the imagination, but a search for critical or theoretical objectivity in art is, I believe, misplaced. Adrian Lawlor's debate with Sidney Nolan on Nolan's painting *The Boy and the Moon*, in which Lawlor claimed Nolan's painting was not art, famously led Lawlor, and I quote Richard Haese,⁴ "into the impossible position of having to demonstrate what is *not* art." Given the deeply subjective nature of any appreciation of what the creative imagination does, I've chosen to make this address a personal meander rather than attempt an argument for a particular aesthetic.

³ Friedrich Schiller, *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*. P.2. Kessinger nd.

⁴ Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*. P. 69. Penguin 1988.

The word meander, the dictionary tells us, has its meaning from the name of a river in ancient Phrygia, now part of modern day Turkey. The river was noted by the Greeks for its winding course. Many of the most suggestive and fruitful ideas that strike our imagination, and which have a durable currency in our cultural reference, are based on observations of nature. In referencing nature there is a feeling that we are touching on truth. Nolan once again expressed this need to stay in touch with reality when he said, "There is an unbreakable reality of situations; a need for some immersion in reality to escape the trivial, fanciful and obsessive."⁵ And in his *Letters to a Young Poet*,⁶ the German poet Rilke eschews advice but offers the observation, "If you will stay close to nature, to its simplicity, to the small things hardly noticeable, those things can unexpectedly become great and immeasurable." It was also Sidney Nolan's early response to the Australian rural landscape, to the natural world and not the world of the urban landscape of his upbringing in suburban Melbourne, that gave him his material for the rest of his life. The human imagination, even in a digital post-modern world, finds sustenance in the assurance of nature's reality. In even the most fanciful of work there must be a bedrock of reality from which the imagination takes its flight.

There is a kinship between nature and the human imagination and it is deep, enduring and real. This kinship is an aspect of our humanity and extends beyond nature to the facts of human history and culture. Nancy Underhill, in her collection of Nolan's writings,⁷—for Nolan was also a prolific writer as well as a painter - speaks of Nolan's imagination activating "the ambiguous space between history and myth."⁸ This is almost always what serious novelists attempt. To see

⁵ Nancy Underhill, *Nolan on Nolan*. Penguin 2007. Page 234.

⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans Joan Burnham. P. 33. New World 2000.

⁷ Nancy Underhill, op. cit.

⁸ Ibid. p.5

the familiar face of their life and times as unfamiliar. And in this the response of the creative person is necessarily inward. For the artist and the writer address *themselves* finally in the act of creation.

To meander is seen as close to delirium, to be in a waking dream, to be led without apparent purpose or linkage of cause and effect from one thing to another. In meandering it is not the end but the going that is important. The joy of the meander is the hope of happy accidents and chance encounters, where connections previously unsuspected may be revealed. To meander is to evade the conventional grid of responsibilities. One meanders in hope of being surprised by the familiar. The purposeful direction, on the other hand, knows its end before it sets out and is unsettled by surprise. The meander is its own purpose. There is no destination.

The novel, no matter how realist its manner, is not a blueprint for "real" life but is artifice. Fiction is finally invention, no matter how realistic or "truly" historical its claims to represent reality. The novel is a work of the imagination. Movement in art and literature is never forwards or backwards but is always towards a centre. Art seeks the center not the end. Each age not only encourages and celebrates certain forms of art and literature but also suppresses regions of the psyche and the imagination. In its seeking our imagination is never wholly free from the fashionable forms of representation. Creative autonomy is a myth. Perhaps an ideal. But no matter how "original" a work, it is always of its own time and the passage of time reveals its complex dependency.

Forms of representation are as fundamental to literature as they are to the visual arts. The greatest critic to have discoursed at length on this is Erich Auerbach in

his magisterial work, *Mimesis, The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.⁹ "Dante," Auerbach says, "used his language to discover the world anew." That is, Dante did not create a new world but revealed the unfamiliar in the familiar world. Writing a novel is re-writing; it is revisiting a familiar place time and again and seeing it anew each time. Beginning the writing of a novel is entering a puzzle, a maze whose centre is unknown to the author. In the beginning the novelist's material is without form. This does not mean the novelist is without subject, or is without something to say, but only that the novelist cannot know what he or she is going to come across before the intricacies of the work have been witnessed and it has assumed its final shape. With a novel, as with the exploration of a maze or a labyrinth, it is not a matter of reaching a conclusion, but of finding the centre. It is the centre that satisfies us. When it is reached the novel is abandoned. It may look finished. But that finish is artifice. Craft.

So you want to write? You want to make art? But what is to be your subject? How are you to know your material? When I was a young would-be writer I felt I had a statement to make, but what was my statement to consist of? Having the desire to be a writer but not knowing what to write *about* is the principal dilemma of many young would-be writers. But what does the imagination have to do with knowing your material? It was all a mystery to me. When I was a young aspiring writer I thought that if my desire to write was authentic then I ought to know what it was I wanted to write about. If I were going to write, I believed I should not only have something to say, but should know what it was I wanted to say. All the great novelists whose works I was reading, Dostoyevsky, Iris Murdoch, Proust, Doris Lessing, Patrick White, and so on, seemed to have known what they wanted to write about from the beginning. This of course was my misunderstanding of the

⁹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*. Trans Willard R. Trask. Princeton, 1953.

process. *The Grass is Singing*,¹⁰ that astonishing first novel by Doris Lessing. It read—and we all read it—as if it had been written in her heart before she attempted to set it down on paper. What did I have to say, I asked myself, that might correspond to such a work? I stared at the blank page and saw nothing written in my heart, except a yearning to write. Was I really a writer? The question tormented me. I needed an answer.

On the perennial debate about the death of the novel it's worth remembering that the novel is just another way of telling our stories. It is story telling, not the form of the novel, that is the permanent aspect of our human endeavour in writing novels. As human beings we will always find ways to tell our stories, if not through the form of the novel then through other forms yet to be imagined. I grew up in a family where story telling—though not story writing—was a nightly delight. Telling a story is an improvisational form, like jazz, and the form the story takes on depends on the venue and the nature of the audience. The written story is the product of reflection, like written music. Although it may contain long passages of spontaneous composition, the written story, especially the long narrative form, is essentially the product of endless re-writing and reconsidering.

From early childhood I had been a story teller, but as an adult it took me a long time to find my material as a story writer. I discovered it wasn't a matter of simply deciding what to write *about*. There had to be some addition or the written work lacked a life of its own. As Simone de Beauvoir rightly said, "We cannot arbitrarily invent projects for ourselves: they have to be written in our past as requirements." The reason we can't simply invent projects for ourselves is that the imagination is ignited by something other than our conscious decisions. I think of writing as a

¹⁰ Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*. Michael Joseph 1950.

conversation with the unconscious; being open, that is, to the prompts of the imagination. Like Klamm in Kafka's novel *The Castle*, no matter how hard we try we are never going to meet the elusive entity of the unconscious face to face, but we know its influence rules our lives. Its prompts, however, are not always forthcoming. "My work is resisting me at the moment," I wrote to a friend who had asked how things were going. "I dwell with it in a kind of anteroom of the imagination. I know it's down there but I can't force it." Craft will often suffice to get us by, but the imagination will not be coerced.

Not everyone who is not a writer understands that a writer's material can be elusive. It took me years to find my authentic material. One of my English tutors at Melbourne university in the early sixties was the English academic David Moody. I admired David and he and I became friends. Later I visited him at Oxford, where he had gone to take up a tutorship and where he lived with Pippa, his wife, herself some kind of Medievalist, I believe. I liked Pippa but I never understood what it was that she did, and I think there was something of the Oxford spirit about this generous vagueness; the encouraging sense that motives and intentions didn't have to be clear or well-planned to be interesting. I had not encountered this before. It was my first inkling of the importance of the spirit of the meander: an openness to the unexpected prompt from the imagination.

David and Pippa were living in John Masefield's cottage. Pippa told me the attic was filled with old stuff that had been accumulating for generations. One afternoon she suggested she and I explore the attic. David, with his New Zealander's cautious excess of propriety, wouldn't permit it. I am still fascinated by thoughts of what Pippa and I might have discovered together in John Masefield's attic—Klamm retains his fascination for us so long as we don't come

face to face with him. Instead of exploring the attic, David reminded us that T. S. Eliot was reading *Burnt Norton* on the BBC that afternoon. There was some discussion about where they had put the wireless since they'd last used it. Eventually the wireless was brought out of its cupboard, where it had been found under some blankets. This took quite a while and the moment for Eliot's reading was drawing close. At last the radio was plugged in and switched on. When it had warmed up David was able to get only a hissing sound from it. Pippa reminded him that he needed to set up the ariel. But where *was* the ariel? Another search of the house. I suggested I look in the attic for the ariel and was politely ignored. Eventually the ariel was found and David attached it and tried various positions for it. Hissing and sounds of voices in distant rooms. A cryptic chord or two of Wagner, was it? Then, suddenly, the clear upper class English voice of the announcer telling us that Mr Eliot would read his poem *Burnt Norton*, the first of his great "Four Quartets."

So Eliot's sepulchral tones began to enunciate the exact perceptions of his arresting lines, 'Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future ... ' even then he seemed to read to us from the tomb. Like Coleridge a hundred years before him, Eliot was greatly impressed by Schiller's ideas of aesthetics, but although to the end of his life Eliot ranked Coleridge with the greatest literary critics, he was not a Romantic himself but was a modernist symbolist who believed the artist should engage with the political actualities of his or her day. But like Rilke, Proust, and Sidney Nolan, Eliot was also possessed of that same complex humility that acknowledges the debt his own work owes to the work of others. The perception that his imagination was not autonomous. Coleridge, he says, "was rather a man of my own type, differing from myself chiefly in being immensely more learned, more industrious, and endowed with a more powerful

and subtle mind."¹¹ Like Nolan, Eliot believed in "the need for some immersion in reality." Eliot also believed in the need to know history. Facts and accurate observation, in play with imagination, provided the material of his social philosophy as well as of his poetry. Sunday Reed, speaking of Nolan's Wimmera paintings, recognised that the strength in Nolan's new work, "was because it was beginning to root itself in fact."¹² Imagination alone, Nolan was discovering, as all writers and artists discover sooner or later, is not enough to render our imaginative creations convincing to others.

We three sat in front of the wireless, which was positioned on the hearthrug in front of the fire. We sat in reverent silence, our hands clasped, our heads bowed, and we listened to the great man reading to us. I'm no fan of Eliot's social criticism but the force of his poetry is not to be withstood. After the reading Pippa and I began to toss out hints about the attic again, but David insisted we all go out into the field behind the cottage, with Eliot's *Burnt Norton* ringing in our minds, and imagine Coleridge's great friend, Wordsworth, being inspired to write about daffodils. The sloping field behind Masefield's cottage was, David informed us, the very place where Wordsworth had been inspired to write his famous poem. David wished to remind us we were in the kingdom of the great English romantics, those beneficiaries of Kant and Schiller, and eventual inspirers of Abrams' great book on romantic theory and the critical tradition, *The Mirror and the Lamp*,¹³ itself the inspiration for many of the wonderful essays in Harold Bloom's *Romanticism and Consciousness*,¹⁴ particularly those on Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, and of course Mary Warnock's books on imagination, and a

¹¹ Roger Kojecky, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*. Faber 1971. P.19.

¹² Janine Burke, *Op. Cit.* p. 207.

¹³ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Oxford, 1953.

¹⁴ Harold Bloom, *Romanticism and Consciousness*. Norton 1970.

thousand others. There is a library of such books and their derivatives, and some of them are even fun to read. But no one has read them all. The creative imagination, as an idea, has a library to itself. We stood in the field behind Masefield's cottage staring at the grass doing our imagining—it was the middle of summer and too late for daffodils. I saw only grass and the emptiness of my own imaginative nest.

David knew I was reading English and history in order to become a novelist. He knew I was at the university not so that I could qualify for a job in the real world but because I wanted to have some knowledge of the history of the culture to which I belonged, and of the great works of literature that had been written within and preserved by that culture. After a long meditative silence in the field, which yielded me nothing but grass, he turned to me and asked what it was that I wanted to write *about*. I dreaded this question from him. It exasperated David that I couldn't answer it. If I'd been familiar enough with Nabokov at that time I might have quoted from *Bend Sinister*, Nabokov's first novel written in the USA; "I might start writing the unknown thing I want to write;" Nabokov said, "unknown except for a vague shoe-shaped outline, the infusorial quiver of which I feel in my restless bones."¹⁵ What I did say, helplessly, not even inspired enough to lie, was, 'I don't know.' Pippa smiled at me and that made me feel a little better. Pippa never asked me what I wanted to write about. She was an Oxford person and seemed to understand that it was as important to *not* know some things as it was to know some other things. Pippa was the first person I had ever met who seemed to think it perfectly proper and authentic of me *not* to know what I wanted to write about. *Life*, I might have said if she had asked. But she didn't. Not knowing, however, made me fear I was a charlatan. Especially with Eliot, Wordsworth and John

¹⁵ Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*. Penguin Classics, 2001. P. 135.

Masefield all singing their enchantments in my ears in the field of the famous *Daffodils*. I just wanted to find a pub for the afternoon.

The discovery of one's material and the awakening of one's imagination are indivisible. It is Proust, in his final volume, *Time Regained*, who most beautifully deals with this complex event in an inspired passage of something more than a hundred pages. I would like to quote the whole of it here. I will quote a short passage: "And then a new light, less dazzling, no doubt, than that other illumination which had made me perceive that the work of art was the sole means of rediscovering Lost Time, shone suddenly within me. And I understood that all these materials for a work of literature were simply my past life; I understood that they had come to me, in frivolous pleasures, in idleness, in affection, in unhappiness, and that I had laid them up in store without divining the purpose for which they were destined or even their continued existence ... And I began to perceive that I had lived ... without ever realising that my life needed to come into contact with those books which I had wanted to write and for which ... I had been unable to find a subject."¹⁶ Proust's frivolous meandering has brought him unexpectedly, and by means of a brilliant prompt of the imagination, to a realisation of his material and at once his imagination is ignited and his lassitude and boredom are forgotten. That the novel is about the intimate lives of us holds true from Proust to Joyce to Georgette Heyer. The novel may be about everything else as well as us, but at its heart it is about us and the trivial intricacies of our private lives.

It was through other writers, Peter Mathers and the Melbourne poet and bookseller Kris Hemensley among them, but in particular my friend Max Blatt,

¹⁶ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol X11, trans. Andreas Mayor. P.267. Chatto & Windus, 1970.

that I eventually located a confident sense of my own material and began to know the joy of writing fiction. Max was a Central European intellectual of the kind J. P. Stern and W. G. Sebald write about with such beautiful nostalgic elegance and familiarity. I was studying history and English at Melbourne when Max and I became friends. He interpreted modern European history to me in ways I was not encountering at the university and we became firm friends. His confidence that my desire to write was the sign of an authentic vocation despite my confusions about my material, was critical to me. It saved me from despair. Some years later I bought a farm in the Araluen Valley in NSW in order to make a living in a way that would enable me to write more or less full time. While I was on the farm, and over a period of years, I wrote three pre-novels. Max used to catch the train to Goulbourn, then a taxi the last hundred miles or so from Goulbourn to my isolated farm. He would stay with me for a week or two at a time. I had other friends and visitors, but I looked forward to Max's visits with a special kind of joy and dread. The dread was that my writing would not please him.

He arrived one wintry day and soon asked me about my writing. I had just finished the four hundred page ms of a novel. He asked to see it. As I handed him the great wad of A4 sheets I knew this was not a novel Max Blatt would admire, and I felt a sense of failure and dismay. I had spent the previous two years working on the book ten hours a day six days a week, virtually without a break, and largely in isolation. For the rest of the day and well into the evening Max sat on the closed-in back verandah reading my novel. Pacing up and down the kitchen, unable to put my mind to anything, I thought I would never hear the last page being set beside his chair. Max was thorough. He read every word. My anxiety exhausted me and by the evening I was slumped at the table with my head on my arms.

I was woken by the thump of the four hundred pages landing beside my head. I sprang up. Max was lighting a cigarette. With a mixture of disappointment, frustration and regret, he said, "Why don't you write about something you *love*?"

And here is Proust again: "It is sometimes just at the moment when we think that everything is lost that the intimation arrives which may save us." It was as if Max had opened a door in my kitchen that I had not noticed before, and had revealed to me the vast landscape of all that I loved waiting for me to get on with the job of writing about it. I had been writing for years about what I thought I *ought* to be writing about. Max could not understand why I was so overjoyed with his angry dismissal of my book. For the first time in my life I knew myself to be at liberty to write about the most precious and intimate things in my life and in the lives of those I cared about, instead of being required to write about the important social issues of my day. It was a huge relief. Why did I believe Max? I *did* believe him, that's what's important, not *why* I believed him. Why did he believe in me? These are questions without answers.

Visitors arrived later that day and there was a lively discussion around the kitchen table about anti-Semitism. When the visitors had gone, Max told me the story of his escape from an anti-Semitic attack in Poland at the beginning of the war. He told me the story so that I would understand that anti-Semitism had not been for him a matter for idle intellectual debate in his youth but had been a matter of daily survival. He had not taken part in the discussion. He told me the simple bones of the story in a few sentences. I did not sleep that night but wrote the story in detail and in the morning I gave it to him to read. This time, when he took the pages from me, I knew he would like it. I loved Max and had written through the night with a feeling of intense joy. When he had finished reading it, he said with feeling,

"You could have been there." and he embraced me. I gave this scene to Max Otto in my recent novel, *Landscape of Farewell*. Max makes Dougald's great grandfather's story his own in the process of elaborating it imaginatively for Dougald. My Max Blatt story was published in *Meanjin* with the ironic title, *Comrade Pawel*.¹⁷ It marked my beginning.

But what was it that enabled me to write that story convincingly? The setting, a trench in Poland at the beginning of the Second World War, was outside my experience. I had no references for the detail, and yet the story is filled with detail, even to the type of woollen cap worn by the men. And what did Max mean, You could have been there? Empathy, the ability to put oneself in the place of another, is the measure of one's imagination. I took Max to mean—and am confident he did in fact mean—that my account of the events that had happened to him when he was a young Communist in Poland at the beginning of the war, was for him an authentic account, an account that recalled to him the truth of his experience.

It was the first time I had written above myself, and my surprise and gratitude were great. I had yet to understand Paul Valéry's remark that "Every individual is inferior to his most beautiful work." Why did I believe, and why do I still believe, that this story was mine? What made it mine? The short answer, and a good one, to this question, was given by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, quoted in Simon Ley's wonderful little book, *Other People's Thoughts*. "As soon as a thing gives me pleasure," Tagore said, "it becomes mine, whatever its origins may be." And Nabokov, in his novel *Invitation of a Beheading*, says memorably of his character Albinus, " ... he made it his own by liking it, playing with it, letting it grow upon him, and that goes to make lawful property in the free city of the mind." The spirit

¹⁷ *Meanjin*, 1 1975.

of amplitude in Tagore's and Nabokov's responses to this question is not to be understood by the literal, but can only be sensed amply. The gift of story, after all, is finally mysterious.

We can't consciously call up the ability to write above ourselves, however, and often the opposite, the lassitude and boredom, prevail. Writing to a friend last year I said, "When I try to think of the work I know I must do on this book there is a total silence in my head and I can find no motivation for doing it. I have experienced this imaginative lethargy before; it is as if the imagination has left and has closed the door and is no longer in the house. A psychologist friend says these empty periods are the precursors of good stuff making its way up out of the dark. I wish I could believe her. It's hard not to panic."

Since *Comrade Pawel* I've continued to write about what I love and have always written to be worthy of Max Blatt's expectations. If you write about what you love, and you love widely, life and people, you will never run out of material to write about. As Christina Stead noticed, "It is an ocean of story." Unlike David Moody, Max Blatt didn't ask me impatiently what I wanted to write *about*, he asked me why I didn't write about what I loved. Enthusiasm, joy, energy and imagination, the vividness of memories, they are necessary to each other and are inseparable from one another in the creative act. And when we look back on what we have written, the best of it I mean, we ask ourselves, "How could I have done that? How could I have written that? It's beyond me." Just as it was beyond Proust when his mood of lassitude and boredom was in the ascendancy. Getting beyond ourselves is what the creative imagination is all about. Wordsworth—whose work is in one sense focussed so much on himself—expressed it when he said, "He waxeth wiser than himself." Wordsworth's whole epic project, as he himself announced loudly,

was to make the growth of the self the new subject of epic. My point is that even someone whose epic ambition was to write the story of the self knew that in order to do it he had to get beyond himself.¹⁸

Inspiration—that igniting of the imagination which enables us to write beyond ourselves, so that our work shines for us with a light that is not our own—is most often an inner response to a stimulus from outside, some trivial event that triggers memory and alters our mood. It is the source of Lorca's mystery. It is what sustains our interest. But when we consciously go in search of inspiration, however, it stubbornly eludes us. I'll let Proust have the last word on this, "one knocks at all the doors which lead nowhere, and then one stumbles without knowing it on the only door through which one can enter—which one might have sought in vain for a hundred years—and it opens of its own accord . . ."¹⁹

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¹⁸ An illuminating discussion of the limits of the autonomy of the individual's imagination is to be found in Rene Girard's 1961, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*.

¹⁹ Marcel Proust, *Time Regained*, trans Andreas Mayer. Chatto and Windus 1972