

Musings of a Bemused Author - Is Writing Planned or Magic?

In this musing I will look at whether writers are aware of how they work. For example, I will examine some writer's explanations of the ways in which inspirations guide their creativity; How they add to these starting points with their knowledge of technique, craft etc., and tell us – as readers and writers – how the texts they have published have come to be written.

The author Robert Weisberg states there is “a long tradition in Western thought [...] that explains creative achievements by assuming that individuals simply serve as vehicles through which divine ideas are expressed” (Weisberg, 1993, p.7). We could describe this divination as a muse. The formal definition of ‘a muse’ is, “a source of inspiration to a poet or other writer, usually represented as a female deity [...] in ancient Greek religion, the muses were nine sister-goddesses” (Baldick, 2015, p.234). As a writer, I struggle with the notion of an *all-delivering-muse* who, when called upon, will provide me with the inspiration and deliver through me. I argue this feels more than a little disingenuous to my skills as a writer. The playwright, Michelene Wandor, proposed an alternative view when she suggests creatives forget about the muse and focus on writing. She says that people, “cling to a romantic notion of the muse [...] Creative writing is like everything else - most people can acquire the skills to do it, but not everyone will do it with the same degree of achievement” (Wandor, 2004b). I agree with Wandor's approach as I consider hard graft and skills development a more valid definition to the craft of writing.

When asked to define creative inspiration, my initial reaction is to say that inspiration can strike at any time, often borne from a simple observation mixing with my knowledge and experience to inspire an idea. While discussing emerging

debates on creativity, Rob Pope, Professor of English at the School of Humanities, Oxford Brookes University re-examined inspiration and influence. Pope states that “Inspiration carries the general sense of being moved or stirred by a powerful force other than oneself” (Pope, 2010, p.91). This statement alone seems to show an agreement of an all-powerful entity which drive all creatives. However, Pope discusses the element of influence; for example, “influence, initially meant a ‘flowing-into’ (rather like the ‘breathing-into’ of inspiration), but now more commonly refers to ‘influences’ in the sense of sources, model and exemplars” (Pope, 2010, p.91). I believe that aspects of my life experiences and my surroundings influence all my writing. For example, in my latest work in progress, *Morphalle Chronicles - Thieves Guild* (Flanagan, 2021), television programmes I have watched, and authors' works I have read throughout my life have influenced me. My technology background and social upbringing also influence the way I write, which includes class struggles and/or leading-edge technological elements.

The American screenwriter, Jack Epps Jr., suggests that we, as writers, should “start with the germ – inspiration then grow it from there. A body on the beach. Why? Who is it? What happened the night before?” (Epps, 2012, p.165). Unlike some of the theories, as an aspect of process, this is something I agree with. Often, I will begin shaping a potential story with a simple observation. The novelist, Stephen King, defines “the most interesting situations can usually be expressed as a What-if question: *What if* a young mother and her son became trapped in their stalled car by a rabid dog?” (King, 2012, p.196, italics in the original). If I take, for example, the initial scene shaped for *Morphalle Chronicles - Thieves Guild* (Flanagan, 2021), this was inspired by observing a thrush in the garden and extrapolating its movements with a ‘what if’ query. This, influenced by television

programmes such as the series, *Manimal* (Bail et al., 1983), gave other guiding images which have gone on to further expansion. From a what-if perspective, I lead the reader to examine the possibility of a thrush, not hunting for food but, what if the thrush was watching the house for potential future actions.

In summary, I argue that achieving an 'agreed definition' of writing processes such as inspiration, influence, etc., is a near impossible task. If I were to ask twenty creatives to define their approach, I argue I would likely get twenty different answers, some of which will be non-committal, and this is before we analyse, deconstruct and argue the differentiation points. As a writer, I stand by my initial definition of creativity inspiration: It is not an *all-delivering-muse*, but can strike at any time, often borne from simple observations mixing with knowledge and experience to inspire and expand upon an idea. However, I will not be allowing this to drive all my creativity, rather it will probably be an interesting discussion point should I be asked about my creativity in the future.

803 Words (excluding title, footnotes and bibliography).

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