



Inspiration

Deborah Bosley

‘**I**F SOMEONE ANNOYS YOU, put them in a book darling,’ was the advice given to me by my old mentor and editor, Anna Haycraft, many years ago. She recognised an important truth; that resentment, as well as anger, passion, joy or any other emotion need never be in vain in the life of a writer because it can always be put to good use on the page. Any experience is grist to the mill. The force of the emotion behind it drives the will to write, but the event itself can sow the seed of an idea; a snippet of dialogue or character, a scene of betrayal or kindness, or just a description of the weather on the day something stirring occurred. ‘Nothing is wasted in God’s economy’ is such a wonderful expression because it speaks to the notion that any experience, however difficult or painful, can be transformed into art.

It is widely supposed that inspiration is a wholly positive phenomenon, that it visits in a great whoosh of uplifting excitement — the muse arrives occasioning a great clattering of the keyboard and perfectly formed paragraphs. I have certainly experienced those moments and truly they’re wonderful when they do occur. But they are rare. More commonly, a writer is driven by heartbreak, fury or the desperate need for money. I have a friend who was so incensed at being sacked from a daily newspaper that she was inspired to write a novel which became a bestseller. ‘It was pure hatred which drove me’, she said.

In a similar vein, Kingsley Amis was adamant that ‘If you can’t annoy somebody with what you write, I think there’s little point in writing.’



Jaundiced spirit or cheerful curmudgeon, Amis makes us laugh because he speaks to a dark mischief inside us that we don't always like to admit to. Grumpy people are frequently very funny and even uplifting because they say and write the things we dare not. Dissatisfaction is a terrific driver in a way that contentment and fulfilment never can be. When we're happy, we're apt to be complacent or lazy. It is the grit in the oyster which makes the pearl.

Reading, particularly fiction and biography, is another constant source of inspiration because it helps me to make sense of life's confusions. I keep a notebook with me constantly when I read and jot down interesting thoughts which I think might prove useful pivots for my own work. The same is true of writing. The act of doing it might start as an attempt to figure something out but more often than not it produces its own treasures.

Some people are inspired by the scale of their ambition, some by love or money. But in the absence of grander motivations, the smallest things can ignite the will to write. I was once so struck by the rotting veg and salad in the bottom of my then mother-in-law's fridge, that I determined it would be the opening scene of my first novel. I felt it was the perfect metaphor for the physical and emotional decay at the centre of the story. Eventually that scene was moved to a different place in the book, but it was the small beginning which set in motion an entire novel. Nothing is too small to be useful.