



Writer's Block

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I HAD JUST WON A PRIZE and decided that now would be the perfect time to do something wild. By wild I meant different. Different and riskier. But what, in a practical sense, did that amount to? In part, it meant looking up. Looking up after years of looking down at the page. I would look up, I would look around, I would try to understand what was going on. And more than that, I decided I would offer myself the possibility of not doing it at all, of stopping. This was exciting! Like walking round with a loaded revolver. I might just sit down and blow my brains out. Probably not but I might. Meanwhile, I turned over various projects, some old, some new. I thought about them. I held them up to the light. Would this one be the new thing, the fresh thing, the new beginning? I made a couple of starts, but after twenty pages, fifty, the work didn't hold me. What does it mean to be original? Could I escape myself, the rat-runs of my own thinking? How is *that* done? And it wasn't just my own efforts I couldn't stay with, it began to be almost everything I picked up. Half way down the first page of a new novel I'd shrug. Nothing wrong with the writing, just that I felt I knew it already, had seen it a hundred times before. Ditto cinema. Ten minutes in and I'd look away. Weeks passed like this, then months. That span of openness I'd hoped to curate for myself took on a different aspect. I began to feel lost. Was this writer's block? Not the absence of ideas, but the inability to engage, to become interested? I tried to shake myself down, aim myself at work again. Enough of this nonsense! I cleared the desk and started on a project I'd been thinking about, on and off, for a couple of years. I thought I could do it. I would be productive, workmanlike. Then, one evening, I flung my pen across the room in disgust.



My little Lepine pen I'd bought in New York! It broke. I fixed it, clumsily. I decided I was in trouble. Strangely, that helped. Not knowing what to do is a free space of sorts. Maybe it was the place I'd been searching for all along. And it was in this spirit – the spirit of not knowing, of being thoroughly lost – that I began to work again. I can't say to what extent the new book answered my questions about originality, if it in any way represented an escape from the labyrinth. But the experience of those months leading up to it was useful and I've tried to keep something of that feeling – a kind of vertigo – alive. To assume as little as possible. To be a passionate amateur of lost. To be ready to leave the path and strike out into darkness.