

“Natural” Creativity Doesn’t Exist

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When I went looking for someone to blame for the whole [creativity-is-a-totally-magical-process](#) idea, I found Romanticism.

Here’s Mark Forsyth in [The Elements of Eloquence](#):

“The Romantics liked to believe that you could learn everything worth learning by gazing at a babbling mountain brook, or running barefoot through the fields, or contemplating a Grecian urn. They wanted to be natural.”

Mark’s adding some sarcasm, of course. He’s English like that. There’s a more stripped-down explanation in [Brittanica](#).

“Romanticism emphasized the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental...[there was also] **a preoccupation with genius.**”

That’s a preoccupation we haven’t shaken. We love geniuses and genius itself — the idea that (at any moment!) we could be struck by a revelation that could change everything. These moments do seem natural, as if the insight dropped out of the sky.

Once in a while, you get a glorious and bright spark of genius.

But after you get the spark... what do you do with it?

Call me when you’re ready to finally write that book.

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