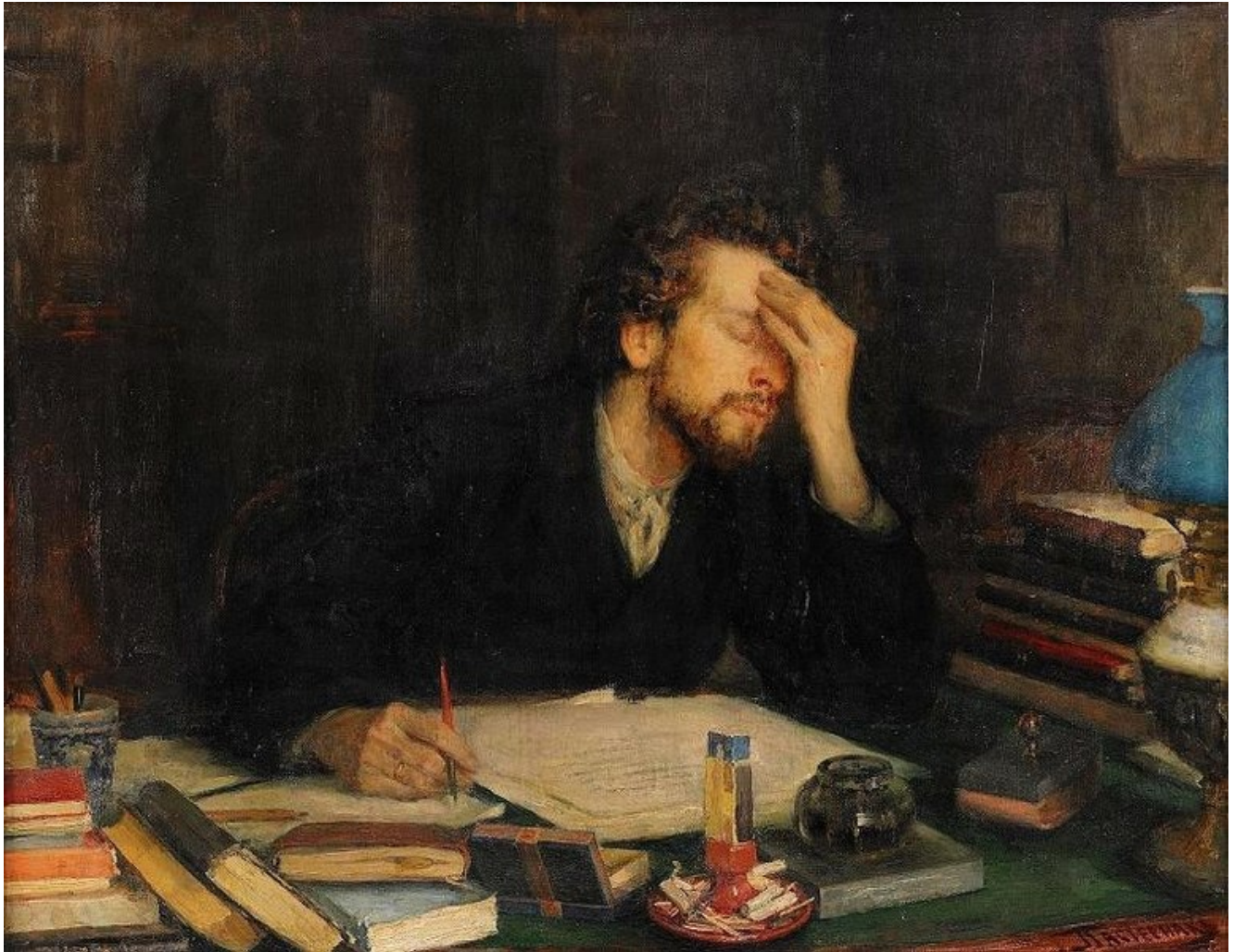


94 and Not Dead Yet: Word Perfect

by [Reg Green](#) (June 2023)



Passion of Creation, Leonid Pasternak, 19th C.

“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning,” Mark Twain said.

Yes, words are sensitive creatures. Even who said them can make a difference.

Thus, when I read this week of John Muir, the craggy Scot and

stern father of the National Parks, saying of one of his hikes, "The winds go to every tree, fingering every lap and branch and furrowed bole," I shivered, remembering the gnarled, ancient trunks and icy gales that I've hiked on desolate trails named for him.

But when I hear exactly the same sentiment ("The wind is so busy, it don't miss a tree") from the gregarious Oscar Hammerstein, I see in my mind leaves fluttering gently on slender aspens on a warm, sunny morning in a make-believe Oklahoma.

More dramatically still, even the most renowned collaborations can be strained by the nuances attached to a single word. A show business story (frequently told and therefore almost certainly make-believe too) has it that when Mrs. Jerome Kern was referred to as the wife of the man who wrote *Ol' Man River*, Mrs Hammerstein protested. "No, *my* husband wrote *Ol' Man River*," she said. "*Her* husband wrote dum di di dum dum dum di di di dee."

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