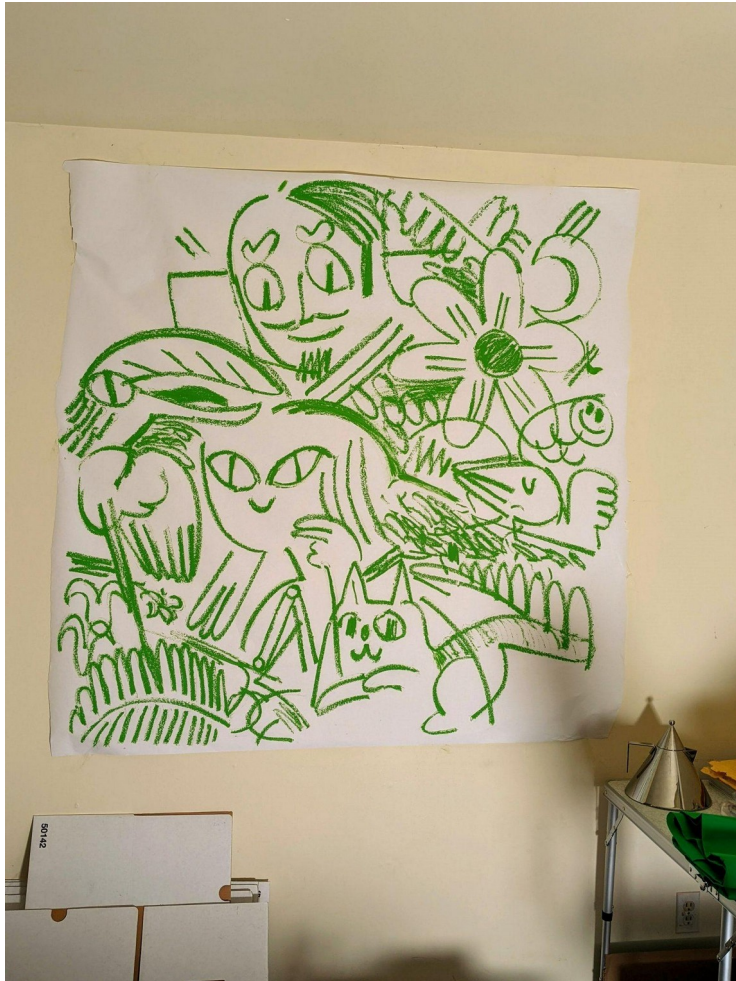


Johnny's Creative Writing (WIP)
by Johnny McIvor



Introduction

I hate creative writing books. And you know what I hate even more? The introductions -- because they're so painfully boring, and you're already struggling before you get to the first chapter. If you're like me, you can't read the book "incorrectly." I *have* to read the introduction, because I feel like I might miss something. But usually the author is just talking about their dog, or trying too hard to be relatable, trying to be meta, and it's basically just a waste of time.

So, I'll be very direct with this introduction: *Is there any point in reading this book?* Well, I can't guarantee that you will like it -- it is extremely autistic, and I mean that in the nicest way possible. But I will tell you that the design is utilitarian, sparing filler and unnecessary anecdotes (That's why it's not very long). So at the very least, I think that you're going to find a few ideas in here that will actually be helpful. Many of these ideas are original, and you will not find them in other books. The text was influenced by a very obscure and revolutionary school of thought called Rational Science -- a system of reasoning that is far ahead of its time.

Now, why did I decide to release an unfinished book? The reason is because I'm a perfectionist and I take a very long time to finish things. This book was supposed to be published years into the future after maybe a decade of research -- but I don't really have time. I have some bad

things going on in my life, and I really need to make money. There are lots of aspiring writers, and I can sell them my book. So, I would like to see what the reception might be.

I would also like to clarify: this is not a comprehensive guide. I am *not* a master of fiction or (yet) a published author. This is better thought of as a collection of notes, or a semi-guide that deals with *some* aspects of the craft. In other words, I believe that I have mastered a *few* elements of fiction, and that I can explain those elements in a semantic fashion. As time goes on, I will release new iterations of the book which will cover more ground, until perhaps someday in the future when it is finished – when I have published all of my current manuscripts, and have understood everything that I care to know about the subject. Ultimately, my intention here is not to raise anyone to the level of a master or to get them to believe in all of my points. It is simply to fertilize your experience, or to get you one rung closer.

I don't really have anything else to say, so I will conclude the introduction. Thank you for purchasing or illegally downloading this book.

Rational Science

I do not want to spend a lot of time on this subject, because Rational Science is a very complicated and narrow point of view. The only reason why I am covering it here is so that you aren't confused about some of the statements I am going to make throughout the text. I am just going to give a brief overview, so if you are confused about anything in this section, it means that it is beyond the scope of the discussion.¹ In any case, you are free to skip this section, because it has nothing to do with fiction at all. I just want you to understand the context of this book, not to sell you on my beliefs about science.

Bill Gaede is an engineer from Argentina. He was a Communist spy who developed a critique of mathematical physics while serving time in prison. It is my opinion that he is one of the most important thinkers in history.

Bill is proposing a replacement to the scientific method, what he calls "Rational Science." Rather than testing and proving theories through experiments, Rational Science is about explaining a cause or mechanism via semantics and visualization. Let me explain what I mean by this.

Suppose you would like to know why a window was broken. A scientific investigation would normally be

¹ I recommend watching Bill Gaede's presentations for further clarity, which are available on YouTube.

concerned with proving or disproving what has broken, and then bolstering this claim with evidence and experiments. For added certainty, we would see if other scientists running the same experiment are able to replicate the findings – what is called replication.

In the Gaedean view, the process is a lot simpler. We simply have to establish our key terms and then visualize what has happened. We start from an assumption and then we arrive at a conclusion. We say, "a brick broke it for X Y and Z reasons," and then we're done. No evidence, no observation, no experiments, no replication. We say "Let us assume that the window was broken." Then we draw or explain what the window is, and then we draw what broke it. Whether people believe or don't believe the theory, its setup, or its conclusions is outside the bounds of science.

So let us use a more pertinent example. The Moon is held to the Earth by some sort of force called "gravity." How does it do it? Well in standard science, we would try to observe, record, and run experiments – we would try to "prove" what mediates these two rocks. In the Gaedean view, we just draw a picture – otherwise our explanation is irrational. Hence, Gaede's Rope Hypothesis: the view that all matter in the universe is physically interconnected with tiny threads – with physical objects that you could draw on a piece of paper.

Now, this idea might sound kind of retarded, or like something hot off the flat Earth forums. But just consider the alternative: warped time, the bending of space,

gravitational waves... This stuff is irrational on its face. And it's irrational because of a fallacy known as *reification*.

To put it simply, reification is when you treat an abstract concept as if it's a physical object. For example, there is this idea that light is a "wave." But "wave" is a verb. Does it make any sense to say that a "wave" is waving, or does it make sense to say that *something* is waving -- for example, *water*.

So the establishment is interpreting the data in an irrational manner. The only way to make sense of gravity, magnetism, atomic bonding, etc -- what are called *action at a distance* phenomena -- is through illustration. It's just that we cannot see or touch the threads, the little objects that make this phenomena possible -- because how are you going to see or touch that which *mediates* see and touch? If light is, instead, the torquing of a tiny rope, how are you going to "see" this? You can only infer it.

So proof and truth, we dispense with those silly notions -- that is subjective, that is religion. Truth is just how you feel about an assumption -- it is a chemical being released (or certain nerves firing) in reference to a statement.² So if you see a mushroom, and you say that it is "true" that there is a mushroom, your body will experience a flash of "truth."

2 Gaede has specifically defined "truth" as "confidence." I am merely extrapolating from his definition.

It doesn't matter how many times you replicate a theory, or predict the outcome of an action (if I let go of the pen, it will fall to the floor) -- it is ultimately just a feeling, a chemical -- when you say that $2 + 2 = 4$ or that "The sky is blue." And are feelings objective? Is science about "how you feel?"

Rationality is objective. Rationality is your ability to illustrate what has happened in the past. Rational explanations define their key terms, and then show you the cause or mechanism as if it were a movie.

I have taken Gaede's approach to physics and extrapolated it to psychology. I like to think of thought as just a bunch of objects moving around. I think that we should be able to draw what is physically appearing in a person's head, whether this is in the so-called "conscious" or the so-called "unconscious." Yu Takagi, a Japanese neuroscientist, discovered that artificial intelligence can extract images from brain activity by training the model on MRI scans. It is quite literally possible to "read somebody's mind," because thoughts are *physically* encoded in the structure of the brain. It is just that these pictures / audio are in a different format, and cannot be read by humans. To use an analogy, there are pictures and audio "stored" inside of computer chips, but these also cannot be read by humans. It is only when they are converted into a readable format that they are comprehensible.

So, when I talk about art or fiction, I'm paying very close attention to the kinds of images that are appearing in my

head, or I'm inferring the kinds of images that are appearing in my unconscious -- the other "mind" that I am not privy to. I also pay close attention to how I feel, and I try to extrapolate the experience of others.

This is a pretty good overview of how I think. I hope that this elucidates some of the reasoning behind the rest of the text. You do not have to believe in or understand this point of view to get a use out of it, but I figure that there are many readers who would benefit.

Perfectionism

Let us begin with the word "perfect." This book diverges from most creative writing books³ in that it promotes, rather than disparages, the perfectionist attitude.

Perfection is unfairly associated with time wasting and a fixation on trivial details. It is one of the most hated ideas in modern, Western society – that something could be better or superior to another. The very concept of "perfect" is, to most people, nonsensical, or a non-starter – some kind of Platonic form or unattainable abstraction. One can never "reach" perfection, because man is "imperfect," or because "perfect" is something in another reality.

However, let us define this word scientifically. *A scientific definition is one that can be used consistently in a rational manner. (Gaede)*

Perfect - That one is satisfied with no objections.

Here I am arguing that perfection is just a feeling that you get about a subject matter. The "quality" that we perceive in a work of art is entirely subjective.

Now, I state for the record that I am not a fan of our culture, with its consumer morality of "Let people enjoy things." I do not like shock art, or the work of Paul

3 With the exception of John Gardner's work.

McCarthy, Damien Hirst – I think that this stuff is garbage and should be kept out of museums. But yes, it is subjective, people have different feelings about things, and whether or not one considers Otto Dix to be a degenerate is just a product of genes expressed in an environment.

Humans have feelings, and these feelings come from evolution. Therefore most people are going to have similar kinds of feelings about similar kinds of artwork. So most people will not like pornographic art, most people will not "get" abstraction,⁴ or have patience for anything putrid or ethically obscene. People will prefer beautiful things, relatable things – anything cute, sensitive, highly technical or complicated.⁵ This consensus among the public is very obvious, and it gives one the impression that, no, quality in this matter is objective. But it's really not, because as Gaede tells us, *objective means that one makes no provision for belief or opinion*. And belief / opinion are very much what we are talking about when we discuss feelings.

So if "perfection" is just a subjective feeling, then why do I care about it? Well, it is my personal preference or recommendation that an author achieve perfection in his work – either for himself or for the general public. He should pay careful attention to his sentences, and try to evoke the most overwhelming emotions possible, however difficult they may be to describe. Perfection is the art of squeezing as much life out of letters as is

4 Which is essentially artwork created by people with autism.

5 Because we find that to be impressive.

theoretically possible -- it is getting *high* off of what one creates. It is not about "getting the book published" or "creating content," starting a business. It is about putting all one's efforts into maximizing feelings -- the creation of a potent "end effect."

From there, art becomes incredibly dramatic and exciting. Perfection is sorcery, and as such it portends a lifelong process of study and development. It is challenging to create something that is perfect, but it is a challenge that diminishes over time -- as one understands what art is and how it works, and how this machinery can be manipulated to produce complicated intellectual highs.

Modern culture is commercial and egalitarian. The currency of relevance is attention, not necessarily quality or the ability to capture significant ideas. It is an oversaturated environment where items are viewed quickly and then forgotten. If you are interested in becoming a famous author, therefore, you would be wise to not participate in efficiency. Only fantastic works of art can stand up in this heat, the rest will never even be seen.

“Just Write”

On Reddit there is a board called r/WritingCircleJerk, a parody of the r/Writing community. There is a meme on this board that goes "Just write." The idea of the meme is that users on r/Writing have inane and ridiculous questions that prevent them from sitting down and actually getting something done.

"{update} I have now purchased 37 keyboards. And a hut overlooking the forest. And a hut overlooking the beach. Why can't I write?"

The implied answer to this question (obvious to anyone with a functioning brain) would be "Just write." I feel that this pithy sentence encapsulates the accumulated wisdom that can actually be derived from books, courses, and seminars. What else can you say about them? Out of 20 notable books that I selected for the subject, only about 3 contained any useful information. Even /lit/'s go to, *Poetics* by Aristotle, was of little value to me -- however significant it might have been at the time of its creation.⁶

Pretty much everything that has been said about creative writing has already been regurgitated on blogs and Top Ten lists. You don't really need to read *On Writing* by Stephen King, because all of the important stuff that he

6 Oddly enough, I even read a book that said reading it is a waste of time.

actually said in the book is available for free in summaries elsewhere.

It is for this reason that most people give up on reading. Why should anyone spend time reading about fiction when the central texts are old news? So writers just write, and then they try their best to edit what they've written, often with notes from friends and family.

But this gets interesting. Because remember, there have always been great authors, and all of them were subjected to equally deplorable education with watery language and irrelevant insights. And these are very sophisticated works, very potent and structurally intricate.. So how exactly did they get so good?

Well yes, *genes are a factor*. Genius does not fall out of the sky; it is -- quite contrary to the hopes of Western individualists -- a matter of chance. But let me call attention to something else -- I'm not here to talk about IQ or the autistic mind.

What great writers actually do it seems, is just copy stuff that they've read. They are avid readers who love literature and consume it regularly. Some of the greatest writers were some of the most voracious and incessant readers. For whatever reason, they really like engaging with the Western Canon. They hear about a book, they read about the context, the author, the biography, themes -- and then they actually read it, the whole thing -- whether it is 300 pages or 3000.

And so this is where we get some real advice. Don't just *write*, that's stupid. You're going to need to *read* as well. How else are you going to write well if you are unfamiliar with what works? And so we say that writing is some kind of evolutionary process, whereby traits are selected from reading material and then perpetuated in the works of new authors. Then, if those new books have traits that allow them to influence *other* authors, then *those* traits will pass on to them. And so on, basic memetics. We will call this school of thought, the Evolutionary School of creative writing. It is reading combined with experimentation and feedback. One spends hundreds or thousands of hours developing an original style, and then slowly perfects the various elements that comprise the work (plot, theme, dialogue, sentence structure) -- sentence by sentence, accident by accident.

But what if you are like me, and you don't like anything from the Canon? What if you don't like Henry Fielding? What if you don't like Russian crime dramas? And what if you find John Updike, and Thomas Pynchon, and Joseph Heller -- to just be a bunch of boring boomers?

Well apparently, you need to keep looking until you find something that you like. *I* haven't found anything. I think that literature is really boring. I don't like sci-fi, I don't like fantasy, I don't like the vast majority of thrillers or romance or horror -- just as I don't like most artwork, or most music.

I like the *idea* of fiction (for the most part). I like my own stories, or if not, one of the 4 or 5 books that I keep

returning to (*Less Than Zero*, *Confessions of a Mask*, *Exhalation*, etc). Often I will *kind of* like a story -- like, I *kind of* liked *Mouchette*. And I *kind of* liked *Bartleby*. It's just that my fantasies are incredibly narrow and specific, so finding a point of reference is very difficult.

You can say that this is a specific case, but I think that it raises some important issues. We are told that "the best artists steal" -- and maybe that's true -- but relying on other works of art to inform one's own is very rigidly limiting, and is a source of persistent blocking. Books influence us and raise our style, yes -- *but to a degree*, and often in very particular situations. It is perfectly fine to stick with this path, and to never open another creative writing book in your life (given enough time, you will be able to write well) -- but this is not very efficient or dextrous. It is a lot like learning how to draw without instruction -- a process that can be done, no doubt -- but that will rob you of many important years of your life. It is a lot easier to just say, "The eyeball is not a perfect sphere; the cornea juts out slightly," and now you are closer to drawing a realistic eye.⁷ Whereas, drawing eyeballs randomly, over and over, you may never even notice this or figure it out.

So there is another school of thought, and it is the school of thought that I am concerned with in this text -- and we will call this the Causal School. The Causal School is about learning the fundamentals of fiction: why and how

⁷ Look into the work of Taco1704 for a good example of high-quality drawing instruction. He teaches principle by principle, as opposed to step-after-step.

various effects are produced. Copying isn't understanding, and so we have a difference of approach. When you copy something, you can possibly replicate it if you practice enough times. When you understand how an effect is produced psychologically or mechanistically, you do not need to copy. You can be more versatile, adroitly implementing the technique on a far greater variety of subject matter.

In the Evolutionary School, we may or may not know why a technique produces a particular effect. But we know that when we yank on a pulley, the box goes up. Therefore, from a Gaedeian perspective it is reasonable to assume that psychological phenomena can be understood mechanistically.

Technique is just how we process and implement a subject matter. We are doing something to our subject matter when we use a technique such as free indirect style or the present tense.

To understand is to master, and to master is to be a sorcerer. To a sorcerer, there is no magic. A sorcerer understands what his lightning is – he could draw it for you, and shatter all your little hopes and wishes about such phenomenon. The true artist, the *master* artist – is a disillusioned nihilist who perfects his fantasies, and then lives in their wilderness.

Completion

One of the most important ideas that I would like to communicate is an idea that I call "completion." Completion explains how art actually works, and once you understand this principle, you will be able to create very potent artworks in any medium and at any skill level.

Completion is a psychological process in which your brain resolves ambiguous pictures, situations, and sounds. For example, you are trying to sleep when suddenly, you hear a noise emanating from the closet. That is ambiguous, because we cannot identify, or visualize the object that has produced the sound.

So the mind begins "filling in the blanks," or introducing a series of propositions or physical interpretations. It generates pictures -- *many* pictures, flashing wildly through one's conscious and unconscious compartments. Killers, monsters, extraterrestrials -- all creatively arranged into the narrow confines of the space. The brain experiments, testing this form and that, until it settles on a range of subject matter -- *An animal, not a spirit ; A person, not a mouse.*

Now, let us consider the pictures which are generated. When we imagine something sexual, are we not breathless, aroused? Very subtly, yes. If we picture, for just a second, that hot teacher we always wanted -- we will get a small, minute flash of virility. And if we spend

much time, thinking long and hard about this same person, we will become very hot.

Or let us consider the example of a cringy memory. We did something embarrassing, we hurt somebody's feelings, somebody hit us, screamed at us. In this case, just a single flash can produce horror, pain, revulsion, etc. You remember that fateful room, that song on the radio -- and you are suddenly hurting in your abdomen, you are frantic for a distraction..

So images are wired to particular feelings. And as we go through completion, as we interpret the Dali painting or the Futurist sculpture -- we get flashes of images, which in concert produce flashes of feelings, a complexity. Each image, a different tone, a different "end effect." All together, an imaginative high.

So art is anything that is intended to manipulate this process. Art is not taste, tradition, or intellect; art is a vehicle for those things. "Great" artists, or should I say, artists who achieve a potent end effect -- they intentionally design ambiguity into their finished product. So putting aside politics, putting aside what you consider to be gross or amoral -- the most potent artworks are planned with ambiguousness in mind. This is the pharaoh's scepter, the play within a play, the Masonic eye -- all flourishes that breathe life into a subject matter.

But ambiguity is not enough. And this is where my draft has some issues. There is another quality that I call "intention," and it is a quality that you are supposed to

juxtapose against the ambiguity in the work. So, you would not just write something that is mysterious to make it "gooder," it would have to also appear as if there is some kind of purpose, meaning, or logic behind it. Unfortunately, I have difficulty defining what this word "intention" means -- so we will have to revisit this subject in future editions. However, I will give you my working definition and then attempt to explain the topic -- it should be apparent what I am getting at.

Intention - That which provokes an investigation.

So let us say that you are examining a minimalist painting. It is a large, blank canvas with a tiny, intricate drawing in the center -- feel free to imagine any kind of scene or subject matter (two dragons fighting, an old woman carrying a basket of sticks, four identical faces, it doesn't matter). For scale, let us say that the canvas is 2.5 meters⁸ by 2.5 meters, and that the drawing is 25 centimeters⁹ by 25 centimeters. Now, this is quite a disparity in size, and obviously your eye is fixed like a bullseye on the center of the canvas. The scene is fixed like a precious jewel -- the center being a premeditated and artificial sort of placement -- a placement that we don't really see in nature.¹⁰ So it gives the sense that there is something very important or significant about it. That is the "intention" in this case.

8 ~ 8.2 feet

9 ~ 9.8 inches

10 Unless it is something like a spider in the center of a web.

Or consider one of the Pink Floyd album covers. Storm Thorgerson designed a particularly striking image for *The Division Bell*. You have these two faces, neatly boxed within the edges of the square, and they both appear to be intentionally doing something -- there seems to be a purpose, meaning, or reasoning to their existence or interaction -- notice that these objects are physically situated in a field, within some kind of "world." There are four lights running between their mouth, and we think that it may have something to do with the album's overarching theme -- *communication* -- but this cannot explain or "complete" every element. This image is ambiguous, as its lore is outside of our experience and comprehension. So we try to fill up this world with possible situations and scenarios -- we try to imagine what is happening outside the boundaries of the square, or behind those lights. Trolls, winged eyeballs, a sea made of glass -- all fantastic and aesthetically related imagery.

I have another example, but you may be unfamiliar with it. There is a game called *Minecraft*. It is a sandbox game where you build houses out of cube-shaped blocks, go on adventures, and let your imagination run wild -- a lot like playing with Legos. There are structures generated in this game for the player to explore, and one of the structures is called the "Woodland Mansions." It is very well designed and is a terrific example of the completion - intention dynamic.

There are many rooms in this mansion with different designs, all filled with monsters who will try to kill you.

But these rooms are very strange; many of them have no identifiable purpose. For example, there is a room with some kind of stone shrine or altar, and in the middle of this structure is a single, potted tulip.¹¹ In another room, we find a giant sculpture of a chicken – a room entirely dedicated to the chicken and nothing else.¹² In yet another room, we find what appears to be a "shelf" decorated with ladders, minecart rails, and a pumpkin.¹³ Now these are mysterious, but they are also *vivid*. And they are *vivid* because they quite authentically appear to be used for some sort of purpose – a purpose which is concealed in unknowable lore.

Lastly, I will use a literary example. Chuck Palahniuk's *Invisible Monsters* is about a model who becomes horribly disfigured in an accident. This woman is insane, and she decorates her head wrap in astonishing jewels.

My gown is a knock-off print of the Shroud of Turin, most of it brown and white, draped and cut so the shiny red buttons will button through the stigmata. Then I'm wearing yards and yards of black organza veil wrapped around my face and studded with little hand-cut Austrian crystal stars. You can't tell how I look, face-wise, but that's the whole idea. The look is elegant and sacrilegious and makes me feel sacred and immoral.

Here the *ambiguity* is the incomprehensible appearance of the outfit, and her purpose or reasoning behind it; and

11 woodland_mansion/1x1_a5 ("White tulip sanctuary")

12 woodland_mansion/1x2_d5 ("Chicken statue room")

13 woodland_mansion/1x1_a2 ("Pumpkin ring room")

the *intention* is the fact that it appears to have a purpose or reasoning in the first place.

And of course, these are just obvious examples. Intention and ambiguity are very hard to discern in most passages unless one squints very hard. But it is of the utmost importance that you are aware of this and that you begin looking for it, and trying to integrate it into the fabric of your work.

What is a Story?

Before we write a story, we must know what a story is. The creative writing literature is deficient here, and a definition is rarely attempted. Everyone has experienced a story, and everyone "knows it when they see it" (at least that's what *they* think).

There have been many attempts at a definition for the word story, and I do not like any of them because they are not consistent or rigorous. Most of the time there are exceptions to the definition, or the definition is circular and constructed out of synonyms (ex: "*Story is a narrative that...*").

Story - A sequence that provokes suspense.

Let me expand upon my definition. *Suspense* is what I call "anticipatory completion." It is when your mind is generating images of what will happen next, provoking all manner of anxious feelings. *Sequence* is a synonym of *motion*, and *motion* is two or more locations of an object.¹⁴ (Gaede)

Many people will object to my definition, because there is a misconception that characters and conflict are

¹⁴ The definition of the word *object* is a complex discussion, but for brevity it is that which has shape ; meanwhile *shape* is a word that cannot be defined, but rather presented or pointed to. (Gaede)

fundamental to story. But let us not confuse *stories* with *good* stories. *Good* stories have a character who changes – but characters have nothing to do with story. Likewise, *good* stories have some sort of conflict.

The essence of a story is an avalanche, or a Rube Goldberg machine. There are no characters, and there is no conflict. A boulder rolling down a hill is not a character; nor is it in "conflict" with whatever inanimate objects it happens to destroy. When you say this, you are simply projecting human characteristics.

Plotting vs. Pantsing

In the Plotting or Planning view, a story should be carefully designed around a structure. In the Pantsing or Improvisation view, a story should (or, more meekly, "can") be written as the author goes along. He creates a "shitty first draft," and then he edits or rewrites that until he is satisfied.

The correct approach is a matter of controversy. Typically bloggers will lay out the arguments, and then close it by acknowledging our differences -- "Everybody works different." But I don't like this answer, it's kind of annoying and condescending, because it's almost pretending that you aren't *aware* of experimental artworks or artworks that have been improvised -- or that some people are not neurotypical and they do things in a way that is unique. It's kind of like if we were to have a debate about whether or not to utilize music theory, and then somebody brings up James Ferraro. As if I'm not smart enough to conceive of an unconventional musical structure.

Planning obviously makes more sense than improvisation -- unless you have severe autism and you intend to make some sort of narrow, philosophical process art. The spontaneous can be planned, so just learn how to plan your work. I'm not saying that you should be excellent at planning from the start, or that you should use notecards. I'm just saying that you should think about the structure and run through all of your options. If you write a

paragraph of beautiful writing and it doesn't work, you now have to painfully tear apart and salvage what you've made. It's not a very smart way to work, and I'm just being real with you when I say that. I mean just think about the fact that all Pantser arguments literally tell you to edit your work afterwards -- that's just planning in reverse! You should plan from the beginning, not plan afterwards, that's terrible advice.

Now, Stephen King has argued very much against plotting, calling it lifeless and constricting.¹⁵ And for the most part, what he writes is improvised. He has some sort of general idea, and then he goes from scene to scene. Writes maybe 1000 pages over the course of three months, and then he edits that and then he's done.

It is actually fascinating how little he revises his own work. I reviewed a page from the first draft of *Bag of Bones*, and then compared it to the finished product -- and he made like three minor corrections.¹⁶ But you have to remember something: he writes about killer clowns. They're gripping stories and for the most part that's it.¹⁷ He implicitly understands suspense and is constantly anticipating the kinds of images that are appearing in the reader's head, especially with regards to "what happens

15 Paraphrase.

16 King has stated in an interview that it was abnormal how little he edited that one, but I have a feeling that this is typical with him. He writes page turners.

17 I am only familiar with his most popular works, and I do not know if he has written anything of a more literary nature.

next." And that works for him, and he's very successful because of it.

I guess it's ok if you're writing about a monster, or you're writing pornography – any kind of simple or unserious fiction (especially genre fiction). But ultimately the best monsters are planned, the best sex scenes are carefully designed – they're artistic. So plan your work, and you can start by taking notes about what kind of stuff you want to have happen, and how you want it to sound. If you're not sure how to write the perfect sentence, then *write about it*. If you get stuck, write about the problem. Don't just write 300 pages or try to beat NaNoWriMo – it'll probably be a mess, and then fixing it will just be more work.

Improvisation, I should note, is typically a trick involving permanent materials and precarious situations. Improv is exciting or commendable when the artist slashes an oil stick across the canvas, and it actually looks good.¹⁸ Or, when he interrupts the song with a jazz solo, an act that could potentially end in failure, and a ruined song. But writing is not permanent or precarious. Text is one of the most easily fixed and rehearsable mediums that exists.

18 See the work of George Condo or Ralph Steadman.

Abstract vs. Concrete

"Show, don't tell." It is common-cited advice, but what does it mean?

Well, it's essentially a technique where the author tries to get you to experience the events, rather than asserting them. So instead of writing something like "*The man was sad,*" the Show approach might be "*The room was hot and smelled like cigarettes. A man stared into space, beer in hand. His eyes were full of tears, and they dripped onto the bar as patrons snuck glances from every angle.*"

The "showing" technique tries to involve the 5 senses¹⁹ wherever possible: *taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing*. Meanwhile, it typically avoids adverbs, state of being verbs, abstract nouns, and judgemental adjectives. I will explain what those are, but they are kind of annoying to think about so don't feel bad if you have trouble with this next section.

Adverbs

These are words that modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, or an entire sentence. They typically end in "-ly," such as "quickly" and "loosely," but not all of them are like this (*well, often, always, very, just, quite*).

¹⁹ It has been argued that there are more than 5. (Light, motion, chemicals, balance, temperature, etc).

Verb: "He slashed desperately at the pirates, swords clattering." ; "The chair crashed explosively down the stairs." ; "He barely sleeps." ; "Turtles are always crawling into the pool."

Adjective: "He was very loud." ; "It is incredibly complicated." ; "The boy was exceptionally gifted." ; "It's unusually warm in here."

Another Adverb: "She stepped very softly through the house." ; "He ate his breakfast quite quickly this morning." ; "They almost always wreck the joint." ; "I'm nearly always broke."

An Entire Sentence: "Unfortunately, the party was postponed." ; "Surprisingly, the thieves had missed the valuables that were strewn about on the dresser." ; "Happily, the cat chewed up the mouse, the parakeet, and the goldfish." ; "Actually, the Earth is not a perfect sphere."

In the Show perspective, you would want to avoid writing something like "*He was always getting into trouble*" -- instead you might write "*In January he was suspended for unscrewing the doorknob to the music room and then throwing it onto the roof. In March he was suspended for slapping a freshman's glasses off. In May he was suspended for dropping an egg down his girlfriend's blouse.*"

State of Being Verbs

These are verbs such as *is, are, were, was, being, been, seem, sound, stay, remain, become, feel, taste, etc.* They basically tell us what a noun is, was, or will be. Example: "He was tall." ; "He is a liar." Or "Her lips tasted sweet." ; "The camel smelled bad." These are vague and they "tell" us about a status without getting us to experience it.

Abstract Nouns

These are nouns like "knowledge," "love," "fear," "anger." As we will see, these are not actually nouns -- but I digress.

In the Show perspective, you don't want to write sentences like "*He felt his fear rising in him.*" You would write something like "*His skin was salty with sweat, and his hands were trembling over the keyboard.*" "*His eyes turned down, and he put the envelope back,*" in place of "*He swallowed his pride.*"

Judgemental Adjectives

These are adjectives that pass judgement onto a character or situation. For example, "*The man was horrible, ugly, and mean.*" You would write instead, "*The man's hair was whipped up into oily, frazzled shapes. His eyes were indifferent and lazy, as if he had been drinking upside-down in a muddy rain barrel. He had green, bristled skin, and a purple scar that rippled down the hook of his nose. He stepped out of the elevator, and walked through a confused 90 year-old man, who spun around like a dreidel and then hit the tile floor.*"

"Show, don't tell" is generally good advice, but I will push back on it -- just a little. In many situations, it is better to tell than to show.²⁰ I also feel that the above digression (adverbs, state of being verbs, etc) is overly complicated and hard to memorize or imagine -- so I will simplify it and make some corrections.

In the Gaedean perspective, there are two possible categories for every word in the dictionary: *objects and concepts*. An *object* is that which has shape.²¹ A *concept* is the relation between two or more objects. (Gaede) Objects tend to be *concrete*, whereas concepts tend to be *abstract*.

Abstract - That which is difficult to visualize or imagine. ;
That which requires more images to achieve completion.

Concrete - That which is easy to visualize or imagine. ;
That which requires less images to achieve completion.

So for example, the word "chicken" will not require much imagination to snap into position. We have seen plenty of chickens, and we have an extensive "chicken" library. But the word "Tesla Murdertron 9000" may require more generation, because we have never seen a "Tesla Murdertron 9000" in our lives. We have seen Tesla cars and we have seen robots -- the generation of a synthesis

20 An opinion which is not entirely my own.

21 *Shape* is presented or pointed to; it is not defined. When we "define" objects we are drawing a picture via description and agglomeration ("A wyvern is a dragon that doesn't have arms.")

requires more effort. At the very end of this spectrum are concepts, which utilize the most disparate and random of images. When you hear the word "transcendent," you can imagine all sorts of things: men in powdered wigs, liminal spaces, a bunch of colorful squiggles.

When you "Show, don't tell," you're trying to write sentences that are concrete -- generally this means more object-words and less concept-words. This is for two reasons. The first is because generating pictures consumes a lot of energy, and abstract language requires much generation to achieve completion. The second is because the generation of pictures interrupts the "movie" (the flow of events from one to another ; the transition or causality from image sequence to sequence). It is a lot like trying to watch a video, only to be interrupted by loading or buffering. Smooth causation affords little diversion -- diverting can be painful and stressful to the reader. He may forget what has just happened, and must reread what he has just read. But when your writing is concrete, it is easy to imagine, and hard to get distracted. One slowly forgets the world outside, and enters a kind of lucid dream.

So what is my objection to this? Well, abstraction has its place, and it can be used to enhance the vividness of the experience through careful and directed interruption. Abstract language is very useful for creating "pop" -- for inducing purposeful states of completion. Refer back to the examples in the chapter *Completion*. It is the difficulty visualizing or imagining that makes the chicken sculpture vivid, the jeweled head wrap vivid. So, one should

emphasize concreteness or abstraction depending on the circumstance. In some spots it is better to tell, to say "He went to the store," "He really felt bad." It is the *end effect*, the vividness of the high that determines this. So pay close attention to the cycling of images in your head, and as well the movement of feelings in your chest. Reread your sentences, try different versions, and pay no mind to grammatical rules.

Dialogue

Dialogue is an element that I have not mastered as of the time of this publication. Dialogue is a little confusing, especially if you're autistic like me. I have considerable difficulty following and interpreting dialogue,²² and even greater trouble discerning between the so-called "good" dialogue and the so-called "bad" or "forced" dialogue. However, I did find a key insight that made it considerably easier for me to understand.

I was reading *On Broken Glass: Loving and Losing John Gardner*, which is by a writer named Susan Thornton. John Gardner of course was an American novelist, and one of the greatest creative writing teachers who ever lived. There's a part where John takes his new girlfriend (the author) to his parents' house out in the country. John's dad was recently disabled by a stroke and needed around the clock care by his wife, Priscilla. At dinner Thornton notes:

Priscilla had an odd gesture; she now had to speak and interpret for her husband, but she had the habit of touching his forearm, plucking at his sleeve. When we were alone, John asked if I'd caught it.

22 I dislike TV dramas because half of the time the characters are hard to hear, or talk too quickly, or do subtle / nonverbal things that make no sense to me. Often I'll miss some very important detail, and that will make the subsequent action nonsensical.

"How come she does that?"

"It's the gesture of the betrayed wife. He was always unfaithful to her. See, it's like, Look, I'm still here, don't forget me."

John was always a teacher. To his apprentice writers he said over and over: show the gesture, your reader will understand the emotion. He drew attention to his mother because this was an example of his thesis, a fine point he wished me to note to enrich my understanding, my ability as a writer. He was also telling me something about his parents.

Now be careful here. This advice is not just telling you to "Show, don't tell." It is common practice to *show the character trembling, instead of telling us that she is sad*. What Gardner is saying here is that the study of dialogue is the study of *kinesics*, or body language. You have to become intuitively familiar with gestures, and to contextualize them in a way that is authentic, congruent, or recognizable. Humans are machine learning algorithms, and they can pick up intimate details before a conversation is ever engaged. For example, did you know that both humans and algorithms are able to predict your political views based on your facial structure? There is a significant body of literature on the subject.²³ There have

23 Look into the following study as an introduction: *Facial recognition technology can expose political orientation from naturalistic facial images* by Michal Kosinski and Yilun Wang, 2021.

also been studies predicting racially intolerant beliefs,²⁴ sexual orientation,²⁵ and even the likelihood of being a serial killer.²⁶

I don't want to get too deep into that subject, as physiognomy is a controversial area of science. The point is that, for the most part, humans can instantly know all sorts of things about a person without a friendly extraction. They either pick up the cues through experience, or they are instinctually hardwired in the person's genes. Unfortunately, much of this nonverbalism is detected unconsciously, and is experienced as a "gut feeling" or "vibe" that is inexplicable or confusing. But there is something there, and you have detected it. It's just that it is was detected by the mind (or minds) that you don't have access to. This is why, for example, John Gardner had an impending sense of doom before his fatal motorcycle accident -- he knew that he was going to die and spoke extensively about it. His unconscious probably detected a connection between his persistent drinking and his precarious method of transportation. Unable to reason what it might be, he not only kept riding his motorcycle but did so intoxicated.

24 *Facial Structure Is Indicative of Explicit Support for Prejudicial Beliefs* by Eric Hehman, Samuel L. Gaertner, and others, 2014.

25 *Deep neural networks are more accurate than humans at detecting sexual orientation from facial images* by Michal Kosinski and Yilun Wang, 2018.

26 *Facing a psychopath: Detecting the dark triad from emotionally-neutral faces, using prototypes from the Personality Faceaurus* by Nicholas S. Holtzman, 2011.

So, all it takes is a seemingly irrelevant or unconscious piece of information to signal what the character is thinking or feeling. But because much of this is unconscious, we must actually study kinesics and not just rely upon what we actually know. *Go beyond stereotypical gestures, and really learn how people move.*