



The Seven Levels of Attention

by Grant P. Hudson

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The Seven Levels of Attention

(A Manual for Writers — or Anyone
Interested in Directing Attention)

by Grant P. Hudson



*'May I Have Your
Please?'*

attention | ə'tɛnʃ(ə)n |

noun [mass noun]

1 notice taken of someone or something; the regarding of someone or something as interesting or important: *he drew attention to three spelling mistakes.*

- the mental faculty of considering or taking notice of someone or something: *he turned his attention to the educational system.*



A fair amount of science has gone into the subject of attention.

There's the **Zeigarnik Effect**, for example. That's what made you pay attention to that question above: 'May I have your _____ please?'

Bluma Wulfovna Zeigarnik was a Soviet psychologist and psychiatrist who discovered the 'Zeigarnik Effect' after a study she completed in the 1920s in which she compared memory in relation to incomplete and complete tasks. Incomplete tasks, she found, are easier to remember than complete ones.

What has this got to do with attention?

Almost everything.

When you create an effective character in fiction you are **not** designing a complete, well-rounded figure whose life is under control and who then sets off on an adventure. I hope not, anyway, because such characters are usually dull and flat. You want your character's life to be full of holes, gaps, threats, missing people or things — in effect, you want your character to be **incomplete**. This has the result, per the Zeigarnik Effect, of gluing your readers' attention to him or her.

The Zeigarnik Effect has a great deal to do with marketing too, as you can read in my [marketing handbook](#).

But Zeigarnik and her work are only part of the picture.

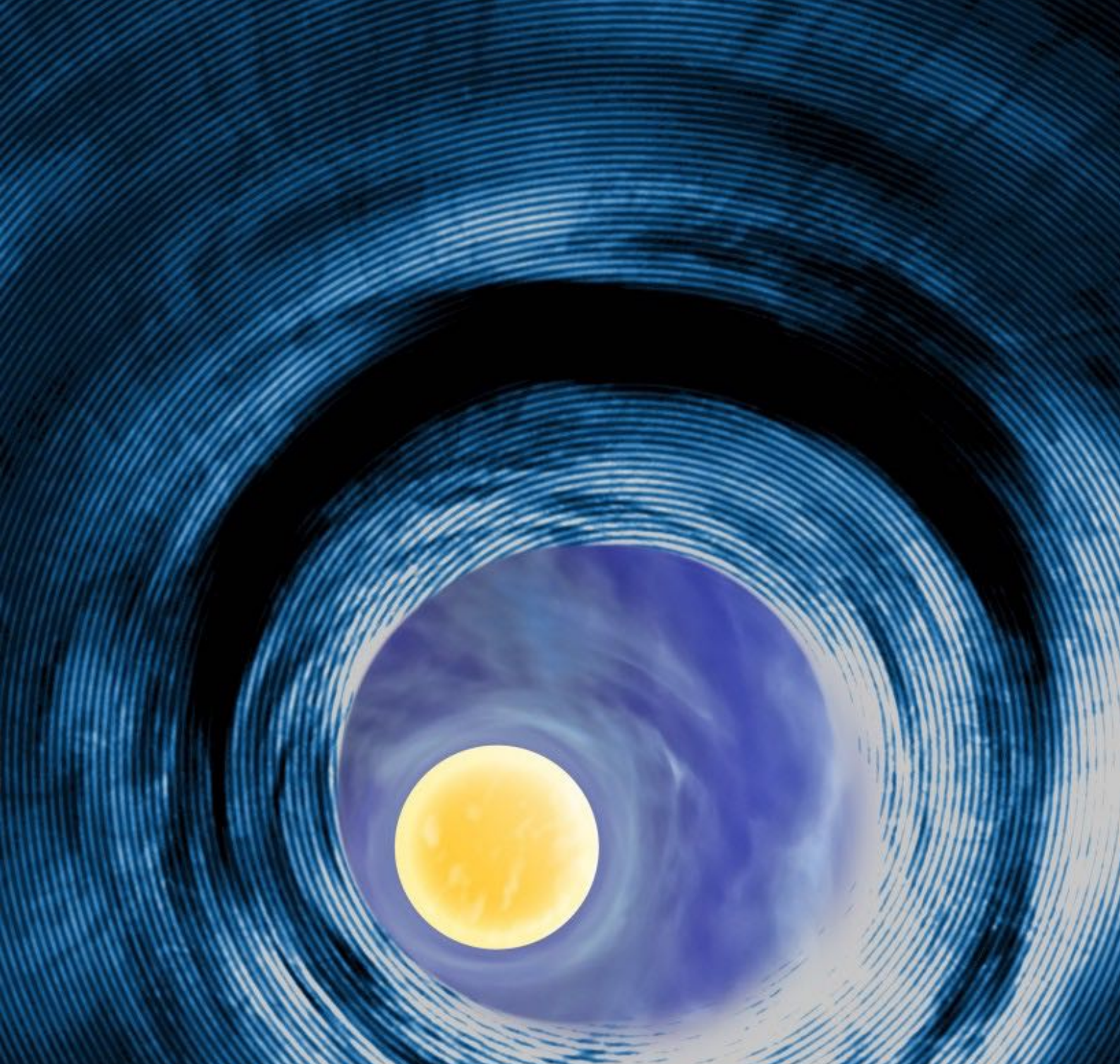
Perhaps the best way to look at attention without becoming too scientific about it is to use an analogy. Readers of my book [How Stories Really Work](#) will be familiar with the idea of thinking about attention as a kind of plasma, surrounding a person and more or less under that person's control. A person could be imagined as walking around surrounded by a vague cloud of 'attention plasma'.

In this analogy, your own act of reading this very sentence could be seen as a stream of your own 'attention plasma' flowing towards the screen.

What's making it flow?



*“A person could be
imagined as walking
around surrounded by
a vague cloud of
'attention plasma'”*



The vacuum between you and the screen, created by your desire to learn what is written here.

If we can accept the idea of attention as a hypothetical airy substance which people generate and to some degree control, then the next step would be to hypothesise that 'attention plasma' is susceptible to all kinds of forces around us.

It's then possible to categorise the types of attention, particularly as they apply to our field of fiction writing. It turns out that there are at least **seven distinct categories**, as follows, upon which I plan to elaborate in this book.

1. Zero Attention.

This means, as you might conclude, the null attention you get from people at large, simply because they **don't know of your existence or are not even remotely interested in your work**. By definition, this appears to you like an airy, unflowing 'cloud' of attention, not disturbed or agitated in any way by whatever you are doing.

Understandably, this is by far the largest body of attention. Later, we'll look at what you should do with this and all the other categories herein described.



2. Momentary Attention.

This is ‘glance-in-shop-window’ type attention — the sort of thing that shows up in web analytics as ‘people reached’. In other words, something of yours has appeared in front of these people but has not caused them to move or do anything, as far as you can tell. To all intents and purposes, this is the same as ‘zero’ above, but it could theoretically include **those who have actually looked**, but not felt like clicking on anything or changing what they were doing.

This is the second largest category, and by definition the hardest to measure because you simply don’t know who has looked and who hasn’t — you can only guess. They sit there like Schrödinger’s cat, either there or not there.



3. Intermittent Attention.

Now you're getting somewhere. The cloud of 'attention particles' surrounding these people has been acted upon effectively by something you have done, with the result that some of those particles flow sometimes towards you and your work. In the real world, this might mean that they have **connected up to you in some casual way**, joined your group on social media, 'followed' you in some fashion. They sometimes see your posts, sometimes get a glimpse of what you are up to.

How did you do that? We'll look at what tools you must have used, knowingly or not, to get this far.

4. Captured or Owned Attention.

Pretty obviously, this is a key point. If you can grab some of the attention of others and hold onto it, all kinds of things can be accomplished. It is when some of the cloud of attention of another person acquiesces to being 'owned' in some way by you that you begin to succeed.

The 'ownership' point is key: just as there's a point at which you possess some of their attention, **this is the point at which they purchase your book**. Owning works both ways, you see.

Huge amounts of material have been written, spoken, and otherwise compiled about this exact stage, precisely because money is involved. If attention can be captured, so can money. Unfortunately, the vast bulk of what has been written about this is incomplete or misguided: it's understanding the various categories of attention as a whole which really opens the door to success, commercially and otherwise.



5. Emerging Attention.

Think of this as the act of reading itself, especially when you are just beginning a book. Your attention has been 'captured' by a variety of methods used by an author, and you have purchased his or her book. Now you open the book and eagerly read, hoping to be entertained, enthralled, guided, amused and perhaps enlightened. A bad author can betray your attention and lose you at this point; a good one knows **the methods by which you can be drawn along**, right to the end.





6. Focused Attention.

Have you ever read a book and lost all track of time and space? And when you put the book down finally, it feels like coming out of a trance? This is the stage where **your attention is so focused on the story that it ceases to be aware of much else**. It is a condition devoutly to be wished by authors.

Oddly, perhaps, it's not the final category in our whirlwind tour.



7. Deep Attention.

Great authors, and works which qualify as scripture — books with a genuine spiritual significance and power — not only entrance us, they have the capability of **changing the way that we look at things outside themselves**, even when we have finished reading and put them to one side.

These works have tapped into something deep within us; they have not only drawn in our attention but something even more fundamental about us. We are rapt in the way that these works absorb us, certainly, but on more than just an imaginative level.

“Deep Attention is the Holy Grail of fiction. Not many will reach it or be able to sustain it.”

These seven levels of attention are a key study for authors, both in terms of putting a story together and in marketing it. In this book, I hope to explore all seven and show you some of their strange and wonderful dimensions.



Zero Attention

In looking at the seven levels of attention, I asserted that the largest category was that of zero attention. I am hoping that this will be self-evident to you as a writer, or indeed as a human being. Basically, it is the claim that, out of all the people in the world, the biggest segment will be **those who are not aware of you or your work at all.**

This might not apply if you are incredibly famous, of course. If you are the Pope, or a worldwide celebrity, or a notorious political figure, it's quite possible that you have attracted enough attention to shrink this category considerably. But most of us are none of those things: most of us wake up each day knowing that one of the clearest and most pervasive indicators of everyday life is that the vast bulk of the population of the planet don't know us and certainly have not read our books.

It's like living inside a cloud: our sphere of visibility is limited, and so are the spheres of visibility of those around us. They cannot see us. If we think of that cloud as a vast mass of floating attention, then it is, in relation to us at least, immobile, inert and opaque.

What should be our response to this?

Unfortunately, the response of many is to try to convert this amorphous mass of particles into full life, all at once, by bombarding it with spam. Whenever people send out thousands of social posts asking for 'Likes' or containing direct links virtually begging people to buy their books, the message gets lost in the giant fog and disappears, leaving the senders exhausted, upset and puzzled. Hardened by their experience, many then charge into the attack again, pelting the fog with even shinier messages in greater and greater volume, effectively (to stretch the analogy) trying to 'seed the cloud' and turn it into rain, to get it moving, to attract it, to create an effect.



It usually has no effect whatsoever. Sadly, if it has a tiny effect, this only encourages further action of this kind, and the assault commences again, in greater force.

The overall result is like someone shouting in a fog. A voice echoes and is lost among other voices.

The startling evidence which confirms this is one's own experience. How many of us receive such messages, sometimes by the dozens or even hundreds, asking for 'Likes', for 'Shares', for purchases? How many of us actually respond to each one? There are so many of them that they become a fog in themselves, something to be navigated through or around rather than paid any attention to directly. We spend minutes of our time deleting them, unsubscribing from them, marking them as spam or just scrolling past them.

They fail to acquire our attention. To them, we are part of the Zero Attention category.

So again, what should we do about this particular category?

The right answer is probably to **ignore** it.

The truth is that we should learn that it is a fact of life. Unless we are about to be made Pope or become the next Dalai Lama or are in line for the British throne, the rest of the world will probably largely remain inert in their attitude towards us. Trying to seed the cloud as a whole is not a workable approach. The few who get results from it by chance or accident in effect make it worse by encouraging others to believe that they can do the same. It's almost a tautology to say that the largest category will always be the one that doesn't respond.

Attempting to get the attention of the world at large is a wrong target.

Let it go.

You don't actually want or need the attention of the whole world to become successful or achieve what you want to



achieve. You only need a proportion of the populus to get to know you and your work.

How do you get their attention? Well, firstly **you have to know more or less who they are**. And secondly you have to be aware that **you are not normally going to get them to make the leap from just finding out about you straight to buying all your books**. It's a graded approach. What you want to look at next is the next largest category of people: those who give you momentary attention. And what makes that tricky and interesting is that they are in a way the most invisible of all to you.

Stay tuned.

Momentary Attention

In one version of the story of Schrödinger's cat, a cat is imagined as being enclosed in a box with a radioactive source and a poison that will be released when the source (unpredictably) emits radiation. According to quantum mechanics, the cat is simultaneously both dead and alive until the box is opened and the cat observed.

I prefer the version in which no deaths are involved: the cat is either there, or not there, much like the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*. The point is that something may be there or not, and we don't know which it is until we look.

This principle applies to the 'glance-in-shop-window' type of attention which we have called 'Momentary Attention.' It is something that we as writers run into all the time: is there or isn't there someone looking at our books, our websites, our Facebook pages or ads? Web analytics try to tell us as much as they can: we can measure visits to pages or sites, amount of time spent on each page, number of pages viewed and all the rest of it. But we don't really know what's going on there — what is the visitor thinking? Are they there by accident or design? What attracted them? What drove them away? And, importantly, how do we get them stay longer?

A huge sub-industry of advertising and split-level testing and all the rest of it has grown up to try to answer those questions.

They are probably the wrong questions.

In the vast Zero Attention category are many millions of people who will never come close to us or our work and whose existence will remain as much an unknown to us as ours is to them. But in the very large Momentary Attention category, the Venn diagram circles have crossed, even if only slightly and fleetingly: someone, somewhere, for some reason, has seen us or our books, possibly. As soon as we try to open the box to see them, they are not there.

What should we do about this?



Well, the easiest way to make sure that a cat is there more often is to leave it a saucer of milk.

If we keep leaving a saucer of milk, the cat will gradually become more confident that **being there is worth it**, and we will convert momentary and hardly traceable attention into the next more visible category, Intermittent Attention — in other words, the cat will come to see our saucer as a reliable food source and will visit regularly. Eventually, we will be able to recognise the cat and introduce ourselves to it.

The equivalent of a saucer of milk in our terms as writers of fiction is some kind of free gift.

Free gifts have gotten a bad name. That's because the internet has become swamped with them. There are so many free chapters, free novellas, free first books, free sets of books, free libraries of material now that whole houses could be filled with the stuff. Making

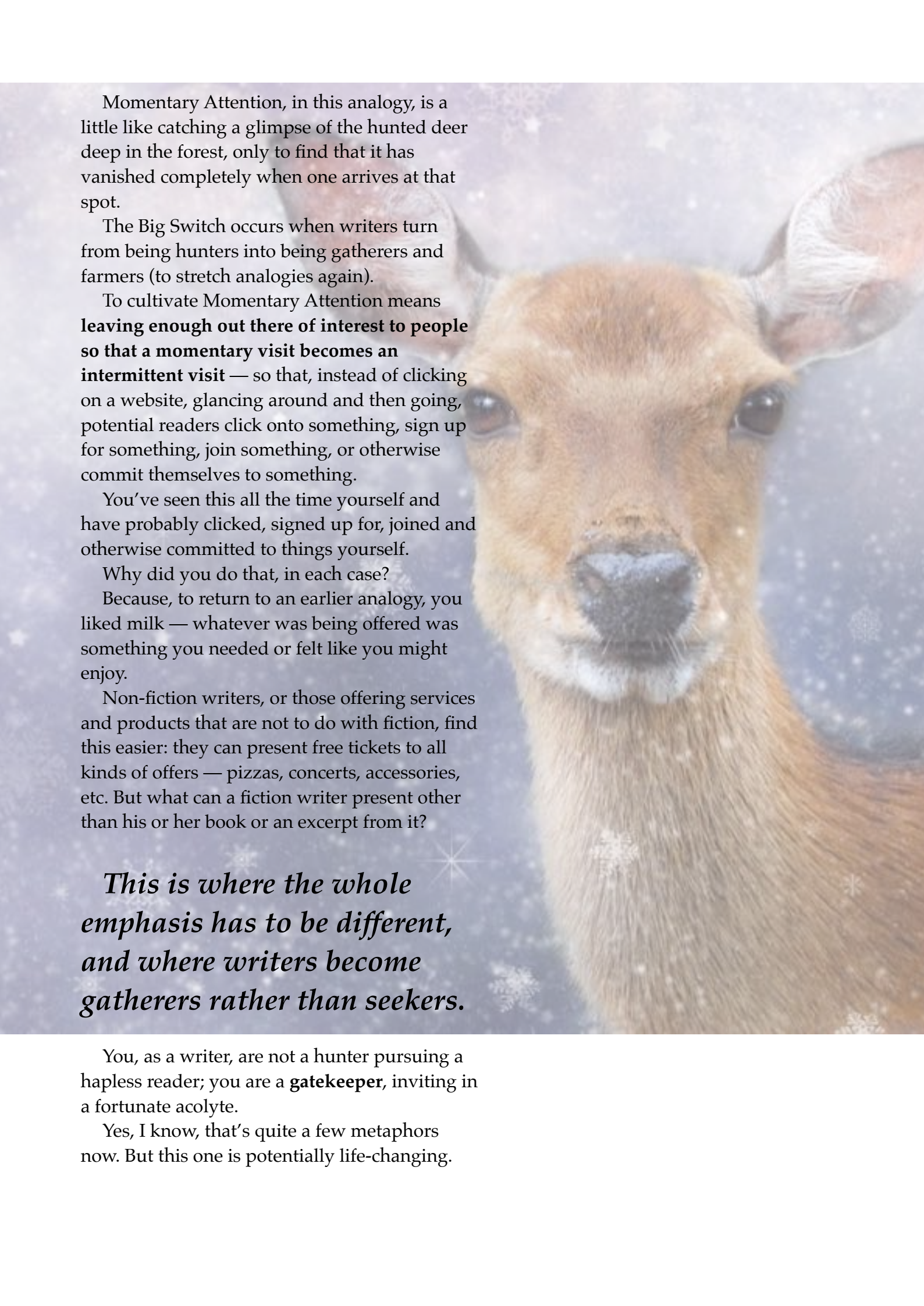
something free of itself isn't the way to guarantee more cats.

If I can stretch the analogy a little further, the reason that the cat comes back is because cats like milk. Any free gift that you put out there as a writer, into the vast void of the world wide web, has to have more to attract attention than just the fact that it is free — **it has to be something that falls remotely within the range of what its audience will like.**

This is where things switch around in an important sense.

Writers often feel that their task is to shout loudly enough or fire off enough messages until they attract the attention of or latch onto enough people to maintain a viable career. They are the hunters, in other words, and the readers, or potential readers, are the prey. Writers often feel that, having written a book and gotten it out into the world in some form, either through a publisher or through their own efforts, they must get up each day and gird their loins with the weapons of reader acquisition, and journey out there, into the marketplace, to do battle with the hordes of ignorance, or whatever mysterious forces are preventing readers from buying their books.





Momentary Attention, in this analogy, is a little like catching a glimpse of the hunted deer deep in the forest, only to find that it has vanished completely when one arrives at that spot.

The Big Switch occurs when writers turn from being hunters into being gatherers and farmers (to stretch analogies again).

To cultivate Momentary Attention means **leaving enough out there of interest to people so that a momentary visit becomes an intermittent visit** — so that, instead of clicking on a website, glancing around and then going, potential readers click onto something, sign up for something, join something, or otherwise commit themselves to something.

You've seen this all the time yourself and have probably clicked, signed up for, joined and otherwise committed to things yourself.

Why did you do that, in each case?

Because, to return to an earlier analogy, you liked milk — whatever was being offered was something you needed or felt like you might enjoy.

Non-fiction writers, or those offering services and products that are not to do with fiction, find this easier: they can present free tickets to all kinds of offers — pizzas, concerts, accessories, etc. But what can a fiction writer present other than his or her book or an excerpt from it?

This is where the whole emphasis has to be different, and where writers become gatherers rather than seekers.

You, as a writer, are not a hunter pursuing a hapless reader; you are a **gatekeeper**, inviting in a fortunate acolyte.

Yes, I know, that's quite a few metaphors now. But this one is potentially life-changing.

A writer is a gatekeeper, someone who presents a work in its most interesting form so that individual readers engage with it, understand it, and contribute to it.

To be able to do this effectively, **you have to know precisely what the most interesting and key simplicities of your work are.** Figure those out, and a connection between the individual reader and your work will be easier to establish. Your 'free gift' won't be just something you've written and offered for free, but a specific construction, a bridge deeper and deeper into the work's heart so that the potential reader comes to know it rather than simply 'know about' it.

This bridge to this deeper knowledge is made by making sure that the work is as interesting as possible, by clearing obstacles out of the way, and by moving forward at the most optimum pace. Making it as interesting as possible means understanding it to its core yourself, first. **Once you know what lies at the story's heart, the bridgework becomes easier.**

Don't expect Momentary Attention to become Captured Attention in one stroke. Your job with these people is create something that they like enough so that they linger a little; you'r not trying to fence them in. Get the momentary visit to become regular: aim for *Intermittent* Attention. Remember, you're not a hunter, you're a gatekeeper; your job is to show them the way, not spear them.

It's hard work capturing a cat, anyway — much better if the cat comes to you of its own accord.

And when it does?



Intermittent Attention

Using quite a few jumbled analogies and metaphors, we have proceeded through the levels of Zero Attention (largely ignoring it as it ignores us) and Momentary Attention (encouraging it to linger with gifts) and arrived at Intermittent Attention.

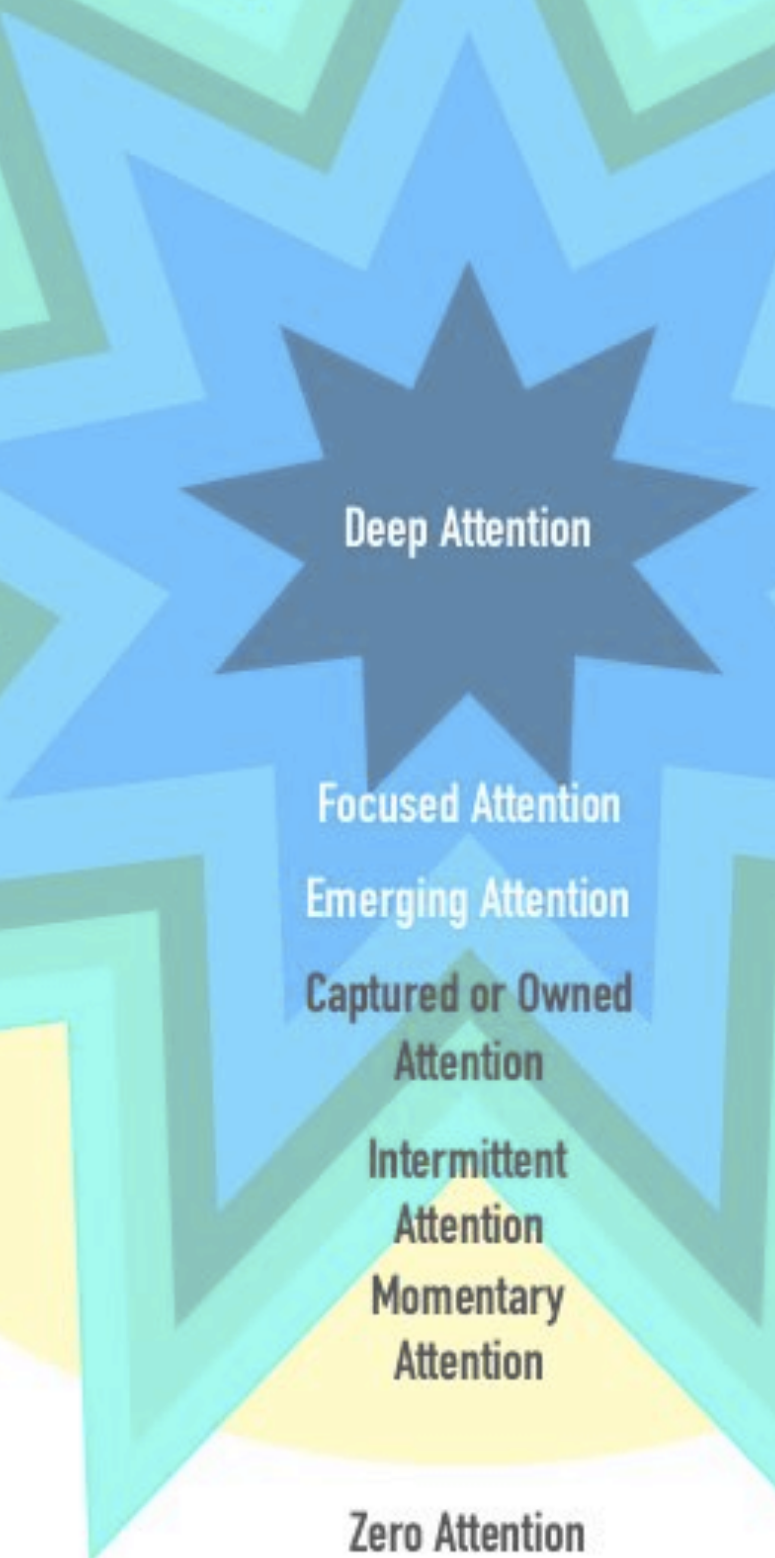
Having largely dismissed those who give us Zero Attention, we have focused on that mysterious shadowy troupe of people who visit us momentarily, and — depending upon which analogy you prefer — we have left out a saucer of milk, lured the cat or the deer in closer, and opened the gate for them to come in.

We've done this through fully understanding what our work is all about, as much as we can, and communicating that in as assimilable a way as possible, through some kind of free gift.

You know the kind of thing — you probably get bombarded with it every day in one form or another. The assumption is that you will download or otherwise acquire something simply because it is free — as though the whole world is waiting to read the item and the only thing stopping them getting it has been the money.

But free gifts that are random first chapters or excerpts or even whole books only work when they have something of a different aura about them: when they suggest something deeper and more worthwhile than just the fact that they are 'free'.

*The world is loaded
with free samples — to
be effective, one must
offer deeper value.*



For fiction writers, this means **Meaning**.

Meaning is a big topic and deserves a deeper study than we can give it here. But if we want to control and guide attention, we had better know something about Meaning.

To really understand this, we need to skip ahead of ourselves briefly and take a look at **Deep Attention**.

Deep Attention is the fount from which ripples move outward, meeting the consciousness of readers at the level of Intermittent Attention.

Perhaps you will understand more of what I am talking about if I use an example.

'The Woodspurge' By Dante Gabriel Rossetti is on the surface a simple enough poem:

*The wind flapp'd loose, the wind was still,
Shaken out dead from tree and hill:
I had walk'd on at the wind's will,—
I sat now, for the wind was still.*


*Between my knees my forehead was,—
My lips, drawn in, said not Alas!
My hair was over in the grass,
My naked ears heard the day pass.*

*My eyes, wide open, had the run
Of some ten weeds to fix upon;
Among those few, out of the sun,
The woodspurge flower'd, three cups in one.*

*From perfect grief there need not be
Wisdom or even memory:
One thing then learnt remains to me,—
The woodspurge has a cup of three.*

This could be summarised as 'depressed and apathetic poet finds his attention momentarily arrested by a simple plant with three cups'.





As we are talking precisely about the arresting of attention, this may not be quite such an obscure example as you may have first thought. The first stanza is reminiscent of the wandering and aimless attention of the masses as a whole; the second and third stanzas narrow this range of attention to a small patch of ten weeds or so, as the poet sits with his or her head between his or her knees. The takeaway experience? The flowering woodspurge makes an impression, draws attention out of the abstract realms of grief and the seeking of wisdom in it, and leaves the poet with a lasting image.

Now, we can interpret this in a number of ways, and people have. But as an example of the progression of attention, what stands out for me is that the poet has emerged from a meandering and meaningless nowhere into a small but defined somewhere. As writers, this poem encapsulates what we are trying to do on a broad scale: **take the wandering, cloud-like waves of attention of our potential readership and have them focus on one bit of it.**

What pulls that bit in? In this case, a flowering plant, but perhaps more than that. Rossetti as a Christian would have been highly aware of the symbolism of the flower: its 'three cups in one' are reminiscent — and would have

been even more reminiscent for readers at the time it was written — of the Holy Trinity.

There's our Deep Attention, right there.

Tap into the Holy Trinity, even symbolically, and you connect up with the whole symbology and profound meaning of the Christian faith. That woodspurge becomes not just a flower but a wellspring into Deep Attention.

That may all seem rather unclear and esoteric to you. But the principle is very simple and one which we should all be working on if we want to attract attention and make it linger.

We need to find the thing in our own work which resonates with the deepest meaning — our own 'woodspurge', if you like. Find it; have it ripple outward; its waves will draw readers in.

It might be a character; it might be an image; it might be an event. If you can isolate that one thing — or there may be several things, which is all well and good — then you have found the wellspring from which Meaning will flow for you and your work.

Tap into that, and those who at first pay only Momentary Attention will stick around. They will sign up, join, linger. You will have moved to Intermittent Attention.

Now's your chance to make real progress, as you will see.

“We need to find the thing in our own work which resonates with the deepest meaning...”

We've been talking about Meaning and its relationship to Attention.

The basic simplicity is an equation: more Meaning = more Attention.

For the most part, as we have seen, the world at large ignores us as writers and as human beings unless we belong to the small class of the super-famous. Even then, the attention given is usually fleeting, or what I have called Momentary.

Much of the energy expended by those trying to attract attention in order to sell something or communicate a message is wasted on this huge category of people who have no attention on us: billions of spammed messages are generated each day of the year in an attempt to 'convert' zero attention into a purchase and/or something received.

The better way to proceed, we have seen, is to do so in stages: ignore the vast grouping we have called 'Zero Attention' and instead concentrate resources on those who give us Momentary Attention, with a view to turning that momentariness into Intermittent Attention — in other words, getting the passers-by to linger a little with us.



With those that then linger, we should attempt, if we want to get our message across to at least somebody somewhere, to progress to the next stage. I've called this 'Captured Attention' but that might be a misnomer. The reason I named it that was, well, to capture your attention. But it rather plays into an image which I am trying not to encourage, and that is the picture of the writer as a 'hunter' and the reader as the 'hunted'. This is a powerful and prevalent idea in the world at large - the notion that the writer's (or seller's) task is to go out hunting for the reader (or customer), as though the writer was a predator and the reader his or her prey.


By far the better picture, I have argued, is one in which the writer is a farmer or a gatherer and the reader comes to see what is on offer of his or her own accord. This is a much more effective and efficient method, just as agriculture turned out to be more effective and efficient for humanity as a whole: instead of wasting time and energy pursuing the reader in the wilderness, the 'farming writer' instead cultivates things which the reader is seeking anyway, and draws attention in.

What is the reader seeking?

The short and simple answer is **Meaning**.

I have suggested that, in the heart of our work — all our work, no matter what our topic or genre — is a core of meaning, which, when plumbed, leads readers into **Deep Attention**, the state in which their desire to read what you have written is transformed into something stronger and more potent, something which can spill over and affect their lives as a whole, beyond the book.

It is of vital importance, if this is true, that writers have some grasp of what that core of meaning consists of for them.



*“What is the
reader seeking?
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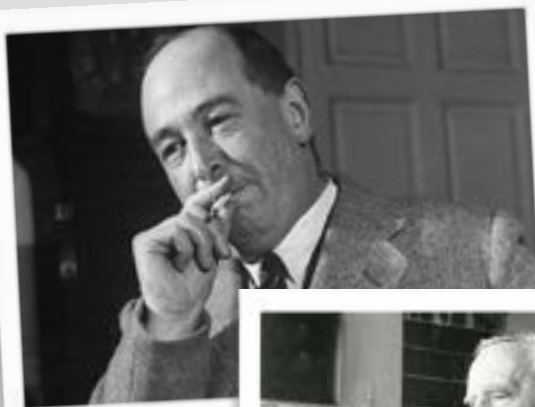


Of course, each writer is different. The core of meaning in the work of Dickens, for example, is quite different to the core of Hardy's novels, or Steinbeck's writing, or the screenplays of George Lucas, or the latest romantic comedy. But in each case, a work is successful both critically and commercially if it knows what its own core is, taps into that core, and communicates it effectively to readers or audiences. Deep Attention, in which readers and audiences are swept up in the work and have their lives changed by it to one degree or another, is the supreme goal.

But how does one isolate what that deep meaning is which results in Deep Attention? And how can the knowledge of that meaning affect those who give us Intermittent Attention so that they come closer to us, buy our books and read what we have to communicate?

In other words, how do we utilise Deep Attention to acquire Captured Attention?

We need to have a closer look at **Meaning**.



Four Kinds of Meaning

Meaning, at least as far as it is concerned with fiction writing, could be said to consist of four fundamental strands or types: sequential, vertical, contextual and embrative.

Without getting too technical, sequential meaning is simply the meaning that the human mind tries to find and likes to see in any sequence. Sequences can be straightforward, like one word following another in a pattern which suggests meaning, like this sentence, or one number following another as in counting or a mathematics puzzle.


In terms of writing fiction, sequences also include paragraphs, scenes, chapters and even whole novels in a series. It's the sequence in something which produces Momentum, forward motion.

Readers of my book *How Stories Really Work* will recognise that a sequence in fiction has much to do with the question 'What is going to happen next?' By carefully leaving gaps of some kind in a sequence, a skilful writer can pull the attention of the reader forward through a sentence, a scene, and eventually a whole story.

Think of a cliffhanger: that's a simple sequential device which compels readers to turn the page to see how things resolve in that particular sequence of action.

Remember, readers want completeness: they want connectedness, they want Meaning. A neat and orderly sequence is one form of that meaning, arrived at after an adventure through the controlled untidiness and disorder which is a well-constructed story.

Next, we'll take a look at other kinds of meaning and see how they not only contribute to an effective story but also help to grab more attention from passers-by.



“Readers want completeness: they want connectedness, they want Meaning.”

The next type of meaning I have termed 'vertical meaning'. Just as sequential meaning relates to Momentum or moving a reader through a story to the end, so vertical meaning relates to Mystery, or engaging a reader's attention by asking the question 'What's really going on?'

Why call it 'vertical'? Because, if we imagine sequential meaning as a straight line, proceeding horizontally through a sentence, a scene, a chapter and so on, then vertical meaning is at right angles, compelling the reader to look closely, observe detail, and seek meaning beneath the surface.

Take as an example this segment of dialogue from Dickens' classic short story, 'The Signalman':

He directed a most curious look towards the red light near the tunnel's mouth, and looked all about it, as if something were missing from it, and then looked it me.

That light was part of his charge? Was it not?

He answered in a low voice,--"Don't you know it is?"

The monstrous thought came into my mind, as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man. I have speculated since, whether there may have been infection in his mind.

In my turn, I stepped back. But in making the action, I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight.

"You look at me," I said, forcing a smile, "as if you had a dread of me."

"I was doubtful," he returned, "whether I had seen you before."

"Where?"

He pointed to the red light he had looked at.

"There?" I said.

Intently watchful of me, he replied (but without sound), "Yes."

"My good fellow, what should I do there? However, be that as it may, I never was there, you may swear."

"I think I may," he rejoined. "Yes; I am sure I may."





Line by line, the story moves us forward by asking us in tiny ways 'What will happen next?', Dickens purposefully leaving out complete answers as we move along.

But there is also vertical meaning here. Dickens creates Mystery by making us wonder what on earth is really going on here: the conversation does not at all proceed through conventional social pleasantries, but leaves so many questions unanswered: 'a most curious look', 'as if something were missing from it', 'part of his charge? Was it not?', 'Don't you know it is?', and the suppositions that the man was not a man at all but a spirit, that he had 'infection in his mind', 'monstrous' thoughts, dread, doubt and unspoken fear. The passage is a good example of a master author using vertical meaning to create Mystery, to glue us to the page even as he moves us forward to some hope of resolution.

J. K. Rowling's chief talent was also the use of Mystery to prompt readers to stay attentive, to seek for the vertical meaning in events, not just what was happening on the surface.

In that way, readers remain entangled in the narrative, all the way to the end, and don't just 'skim read' along the surface. This also means that people who are giving us Intermittent Attention, by being part of our writing group or our email list or in some other way 'hanging out' with us, can be attracted further and more of their attention can be gathered.





Contextual meaning is the next broad category. In this, readers track along with a protagonist or some viewpoint within the story, and are given illusory choices as that viewpoint is presented with moral choices to make. Should Jane Eyre seek out Rochester? Is Luke Skywalker right to try to rescue his friends? Does any protagonist make the 'right' choice?

If this is done properly, using characters that have attracted our attention, then vicariously, we make the same choices as the protagonist, and are therefore involved in the same level of meaning. If the context has been carefully crafted by the author, the choices made by a protagonist reverberate in our own lives: when Frodo fails to destroy the One Ring on the edge of the Cracks of Doom in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, there is something universal about his failure, something that speaks to us about the human condition; when Scout overcomes social prejudice and appreciates another's viewpoint in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we are encouraged to do so too.

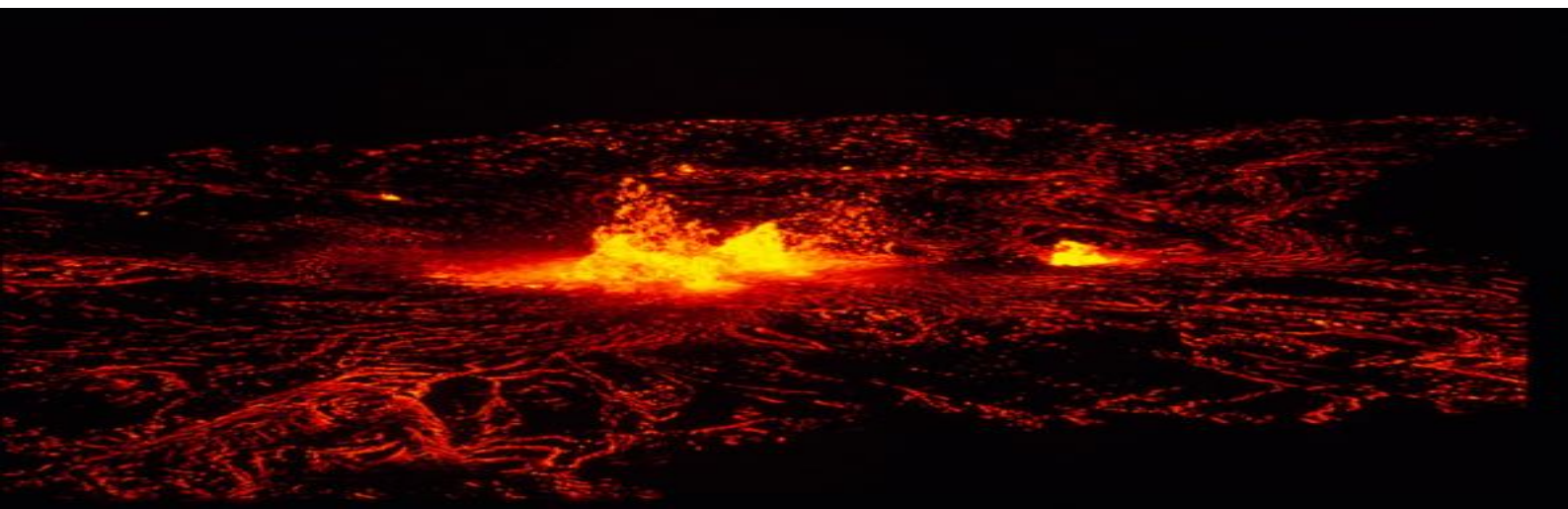
Obviously, whole libraries could be written about these different types of meaning — and probably already have been.

For the sake of simplicity, what we need to keep in mind as writers of fiction is that we are seeking the Holy Grail of Deep Attention. That comes when all of the above kinds of meaning weave together to result in the final sort: embrative meaning.

This is when the reader, only partially conscious of how it has occurred, finds himself or herself affected on a spiritual level by a book: sequential, vertical and contextual meaning have interacted to produce a catharsis of some kind, a revelation, an epiphany

This can be on a grand scale, as in a masterwork of literary fiction, or on a small scale, as in a well-crafted comedy sketch.

What does all that have to do with moving our readers from giving us Intermittent Attention to us capturing or isolating some of that attention in the first place?



Captured or Owned Attention

Human beings seek Meaning. They seek it everywhere they look: in the world at large, in religions, social movements, politics, in groups, in relationships and in themselves. It's a constant and eternal quest in one form or another.

Readers of fiction seek meaning in stories, whether they are completely aware of it or not.

Meaning therefore attracts attention.

To attract attention, one needs to develop Meaning and then find ways of communicating that meaning to a range of types of audience.

We have already looked at the largest of these, the vast audience of the public at large, who swirl by us and around us all the time but who for the most part ignore us. We have also looked at the ones who do 'look in our shop windows' as they pass by; and we have examined those who, attracted by the Meaning that they see displayed in our shop windows, decide to linger a little and grant us partial attention by signing up to our newsletters, joining our groups, hanging around on our websites and so on.

What we have to inspect next is that group of people, a subset of the above, who move even closer to us and who take ownership of part of us — in the case of writers, by buying our books. As soon as the person granting us Intermittent Attention reaches for his or her wallet or purse or clicks 'Go to Checkout', then they have decided to give us something that formerly belonged to them — usually some money — and to take from us something that formerly belonged to us: our book.

Just as they then own the copy of the book, so, it could be said, we now 'own' more of their attention. I've called this Captured Attention, but it might be better to think of it as Owned Attention. Something about our book — something that they could see or hear or feel in some way — prompted them to surrender some of themselves to us in the form of cash. They haven't read the story itself — if they had, they might not bother buying a copy — but whatever was visible, whatever was displayed, whatever was communicated about our book caused them to yield more attention to us.



What is it about a book that could prompt that response? That's clearly the 'golden question.'

Obviously, the things that potential readers can see or hear or feel about a book they haven't yet bought are quite limited. A book has a cover and a blurb on the back of that cover; it may have some other marketing material — a poster, perhaps a book trailer, perhaps some reviews — but this visible profile will be skimpy and fleeting for most of the public who pass by, either physically or electronically. This visible profile has to engage the attention of potential buyers in a split second of time, usually.

What that means is that **the visible profile of a book must be jam-packed full of Meaning.**

Meaning, as we have seen, can be broken down into four components or strands: sequential, vertical, contextual and embrative. Sequential meaning pulls the reader along; vertical meaning hones attention in on layers in the text; contextual meaning gets the reader to associate what is happening in the text with what is happening in life outside the book; and embrative meaning is a composite of all these, producing epiphanies.

In practical terms, this means that your book's cover, your book's blurb, and any other of the external, ephemeral marketing materials you may have associated with your book, have to make the absolute most of these kinds of meaning.

You must use sequences — and the 'hook' of something missing in expected sequences — to draw your reader along. These can be used in blurbs — and usually are. Just read any blurb you like, if you need examples. It can also translate into pictures. Look at some covers.



“This visible profile has to engage the attention of potential buyers in a split second of time, usually.”

You must use vertical meaning to create depth and a sense of something going on beneath the surface. Blurbs, if you haven't noticed, do this all the time by asking questions and hinting at secrets and incompletenesses. This also works in pictures. An effective image, if you like, is a statement of vertical meaning.

Contextual meaning is also vital: how can you make your cover and your blurb and anything else instantly relate to the type of reader you are trying to attract? In such a way that he or she connects what is going on on the cover or in the blurb with his or her personal experiences?

Embrasive meaning, the skilful combination of all these, is achieved when the potential reader, seeing, hearing and/or feeling all of the above, makes his or her move to the checkout and buys the book.

I hope that it goes without saying that all of these strands of meaning had better be continued and developed even further by the tale itself, or the reader will feel betrayed by the marketing and let down by the story.

Further examples of all of these appear below.

In the meantime, go and take a look at book blurbs and covers and see if you can spot all of this working on you.

I think you will find it interesting...

“Embrasive meaning, the skilful combination of all these, is achieved when the potential reader, seeing, hearing and/or feeling all of the above, makes his or her move to the checkout and buys the book.”



Earlier, I suggested that a writer must use sequences — and the ‘hook’ of something missing in expected sequences — to draw readers along, not only in stories themselves, but in the whole marketing process of attracting attention to his or her stories.

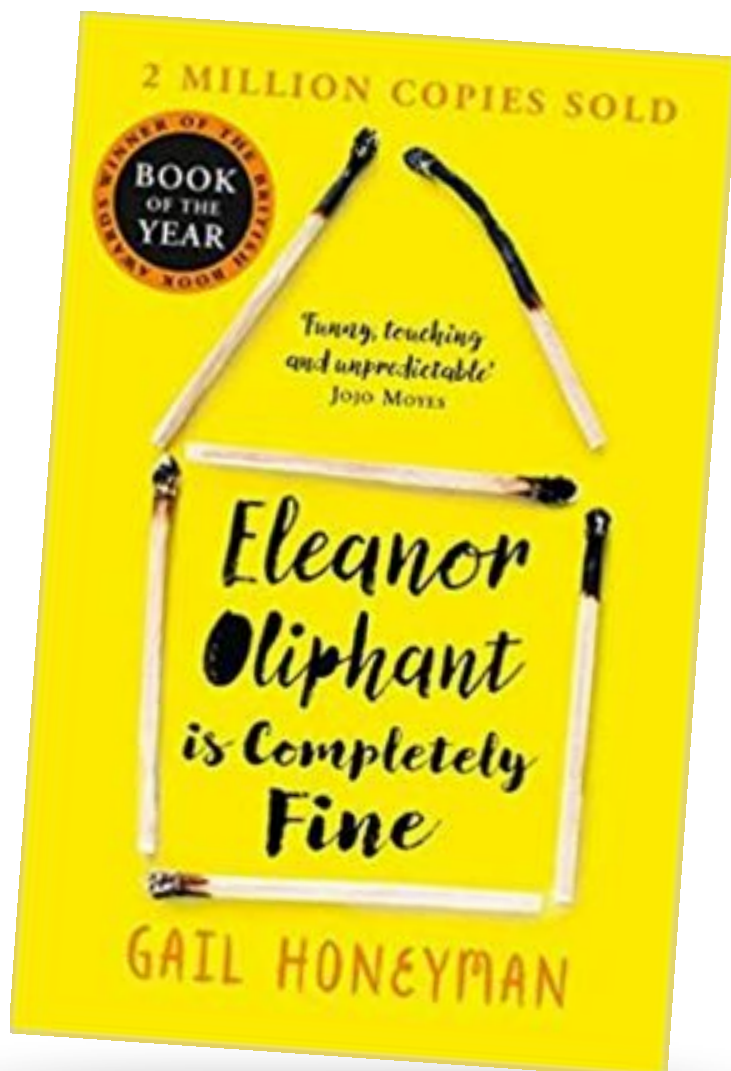
Blurbs are a primary means through which to do this.

Let me give you an example by looking at the blurb for one of the top novels for 2018: *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, by Gail Honeyman. This was a debut bestseller, won the Costa First Novel Book Award in 2017, and is soon to be a major motion picture produced by Reese Witherspoon.

Here’s the blurb:

Eleanor Oliphant has learned how to survive — but not how to live.

Eleanor Oliphant leads a simple life. She wears the same clothes to work every day, eats the same meal deal for lunch every day and buys the same two bottles of vodka to drink every weekend. Eleanor Oliphant is happy. Nothing is missing from her carefully timetabled life. Except, sometimes, everything. One simple act of kindness is about to shatter the walls Eleanor has built around herself. Now she must learn how to navigate the world that everyone else seems to take for granted — while searching for the courage to face the dark corners she’s avoided all her life. Change can be good. Change can be bad. But surely any change is better than... fine? An astonishing story that powerfully depicts the loneliness of life, and the simple power of a little kindness.



We can look at this blurb in the light of any of the strands of meaning that we have been discussing — sequential meaning, vertical meaning, contextual meaning or embracive meaning — but let’s try to stick to sequential to begin with.

What we are looking for, then, is the forward motion through the passage of the blurb, one word at a time. We’re looking for expected sequences which then have something missing or out of place — a sense of missed sequence, in other words. It’s precisely that missed sequence which draws in reader attention, as readers seek meaning.

Meaning equals completeness: if something is missing, the reader's attention is grabbed, hooked, pulled in.

The process begins here in the first sentence, 'Eleanor Oliphant has learned how to survive — but not how to live.' Our expectation is that surviving and living should be equivalent; that they are somehow not is a skipped beat.

We then get a brief description of Eleanor's life which suggests completeness. It's even stated that 'Nothing is missing from her carefully timetabled life.' So far, so good. But the reader is drawn forward by the opposing statement: 'Except, sometimes, everything.' Completeness is juxtaposed with total incompleteness.

The blurb continues with these odd juxtapositions: a 'simple act of kindness' can apparently be shattering; Eleanor must learn to navigate a world which is normal for everyone else.

Then a big pull, as we hear about 'the dark corners she's avoided all her life, before going back to the oxymorons: 'Change can be good. Change can be bad.'

The blurb concludes with a straightforward statement of the book's theme, heavily reliant on adjectives and adverbs to put across some emotional content: 'An astonishing story that powerfully depicts the loneliness of life, and the simple power of a little kindness.' Remove them to see what I mean: 'A story that depicts the loneliness of life, and the power of kindness.'

Attention has been attracted through oxymorons, through the suggestion of dark corners, and only at the end is anything made explicitly emotional. Sequential meaning has been carefully interrupted in order to pull us in.

In effect — and note this vital point — our own desire for meaning is what moves us — a writer only has to causatively leave some gaps in the meaning and a reader will be compelled to read on.

The cover of the book (pictured) is interesting in this respect too. It's very simple: a shape made out of matchsticks. But the simplicity is the key: it's too simple. And the matches are all burned. Imagery playing a role in creating gaps to draw readers in — you will find it everywhere.



What about vertical meaning?

In looking for vertical meaning, we are not seeking things that pull the reader along but which pull the reader closer to the text.

Here, the name 'Eleanor Oliphant' itself draws us in: it's odd enough to be quirky, a little like a made up name for a children's story.

The language of the blurb is simple, unadorned, undramatic: 'same clothes', 'same meal deal', 'same two bottles of vodka to drink every weekend'. Repetition, especially of ordinary language, suggests dullness; dullness possibly leads to seeking escape in alcohol? Eleanor Oliphant's life is 'carefully timetabled', but we discover that she has built walls around herself. Why? Why is she alone? Why has she chosen sameness? What are these 'dark corners'?

Anything that draws our attention closer to the words in the page can be considered vertical in the sense that it is slightly different to the horizontal sequential meaning which pulls us along. Obviously, the two work together: the 'dark corners', for example, pull us both along and in.

Contextual meaning is a highlight here: Eleanor Oliphant's plight, her false and dull

'happiness' which is a façade, her 'carefully timetabled life' which is a delusion, her lack of courage and her dark corners are all powerful suggestions which resonate with the book's target audience. This book is probably ruthlessly aimed at those who suffer the 'loneliness of life' and who are looking for a way of escaping from their own illusions. Reading the blurb in that light, one can immediately see how effective it might be.

By the time that we get to the end of the blurb, the emotive description of theme — 'An astonishing story that powerfully depicts the loneliness of life, and the simple power of a little kindness' — the target readers probably don't need it said: they recognise that same sense of loneliness in their own lives.

Everything adds up to the embrative epiphany of 'I must read this book', and off they go to the checkout. How can I be sure that the effect results in people buying the book? The fact that it was a bestseller, even though its visible profile consisted only of this blurb, this cover and perhaps a few reviews.

Need more examples?

Coming up.



Earlier we established that, to attract potential readers closer and get them to the point where they will actually acquire your book, you must magnify Meaning in those elements of a book which are visible externally — i.e. before buying the book itself. These include the cover and the blurb.

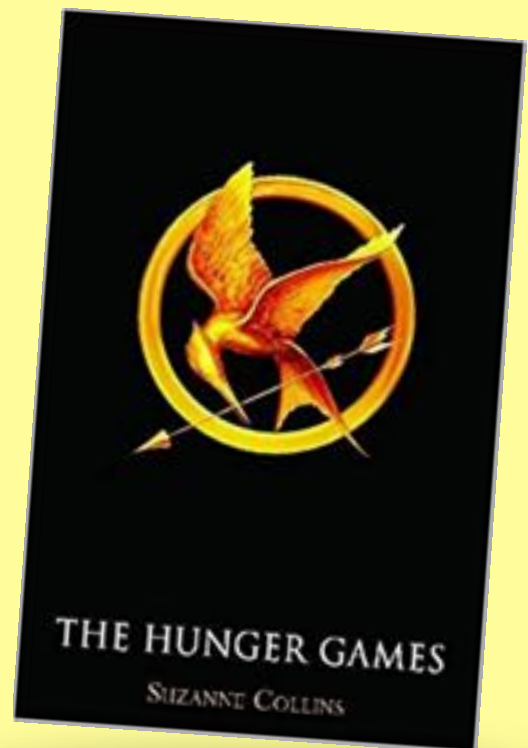
Meaning, as we have learned, is made up of four strands: sequential, vertical, contextual and embrative.

Let's take a look at another blurb to see the four strands of Meaning in operation. This is the blurb for the best-selling book *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins:

In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. The Capitol keeps the districts in line by forcing them all to send one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death on live TV.

Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen regards it as a death sentence when she steps forward to take her sister's place in the Games. But Katniss has been close to death before-and survival, for her, is second nature. Still, if she is to win, she will have to start making choices that weigh survival against humanity and life against love.


This blurb is a mini-story in itself, starting out with quite a plain description of the setting for the book. What pulls us along sequentially is both the fascination of a 'ruined' North America, when this is far removed from the current political and economic reality, and the 'fight to the death' between teenagers, which is also far removed from our cultural and moral expectations. The ruin and the death fight are both 'gaps' or 'holes' or 'vacuums' in our expectations. It is these vacuums which serve to pull us along, just as a normal physical vacuum would.



Heroine Katniss, we are then told, is going to be faced with choices between survival and humanity, life and love. Juxtapositions of opposites like this, oxymorons, are often used in blurbs precisely because of the 'vacuum effect' which they create, drawing attention in as readers seek to complete meaning and fill in gaps.

Vertical meaning is also active in the blurb, sucking our attention into the text at certain points to try to find out what is really going on. In common with many blurbs (and stories themselves, not to mention poetry) vertical meaning is often associated with individual words. In this case, names like 'Panem' and 'Katniss' draw our attention, as well as the mention of a 'shining Capitol' with its outlying districts — even the fact that there are twelve districts has a symbolic resonance (twelve tribes of Israel, twelve disciples, etc.)

Contextual meaning is clear, especially given that the target audience for this book is teenagers. Katniss battling for survival as a teenager in what sounds like a dreadfully hostile world leads readers to look around at their own situations, consciously or unconsciously



Her choices become at least in part the choices of readers, drawing them right into the narrative.

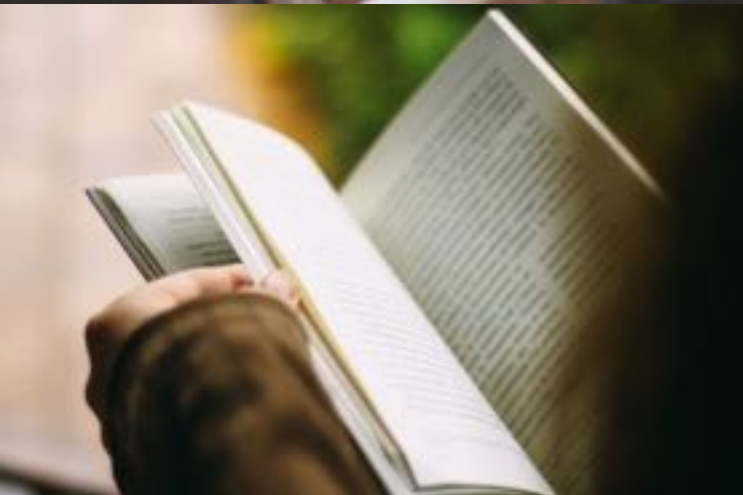
Are these strands of meaning enough to create the embrative effect which should be their aim? Well, the book was a best seller and was turned into a hit movie, so that speaks for itself.

It might seem odd to look at blurbs in this way; it might seem odd to break down Meaning into component elements like this. But it is effective. **There is hardly a blurb, a story, or indeed anything else which does not respond to such an analysis — and not only respond, but respond helpfully, opening our eyes to how our own attention is being manipulated.**

To succeed as writers, the skills involved in using these elements need to be learned, not only for constructing blurbs and other marketing aspects, but for creating a story itself. **We must become more aware of readers' voracious appetite for Meaning, and how to utilise that.**

How do we know that their appetite is so voracious? By examining it in ourselves. We look for Meaning everywhere too, all the time. And we look in sequences, in depths, in contexts and overall.

We look for Meaning everywhere too, all the time. And we look in sequences, in depths, in contexts and overall.



Capturing attention using Meaning moves us forward in our quest to engage readers. Enough Meaning presented to those who give us Intermittent Attention will result in some of them giving us more — they will buy our books and we will ‘own’ some of their attention, usually in the form of money, but hopefully more than that as they begin reading.

But things don’t end there, of course: the next category is Emerging Attention.

Here, the reader, having just bought your book, begins to read it, hoping to be entertained, enthralled, guided, amused and perhaps enlightened. Good authors know methods to keep the reader’s attention all the way to the end. These aren’t new methods — they have been used by master authors throughout history. Nor are they complex methods — they are simply extensions of those things that we have already been talking about.

As a writer, you want to be able to draw readers along, draw readers deeper into the text, draw readers into making connections with their own lives, and, in the end, draw readers into a close affinity with your work as a whole. This comes about when you master the secrets of Emerging Attention and Focused Attention.

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Types of Meaning

Earlier we saw some examples of how to pack as much meaning as you can into those aspects of a book which are visible to a passer-by, so as to entice him or her into moving close enough to purchase the thing and read it. If you can do so, then you will have gained a reader and acquired more attention: it would then be up to the book itself to retain that attention all the way through to the end.

A work of fiction is effectively an attention-capturing and manipulating device.

You may think, ‘This is all very well — but how do I *use* this information? Are you telling me that anyone who writes a blurb sits down at a desk and painstakingly constructs what you have called “sequential meaning”, along with “vertical meaning” and “contextual meaning”, in the hope of achieving overall “embracive meaning”?’

Well, no, not exactly. Some don’t have desks.

What I am asserting is that Meaning can be broken down into these strands.

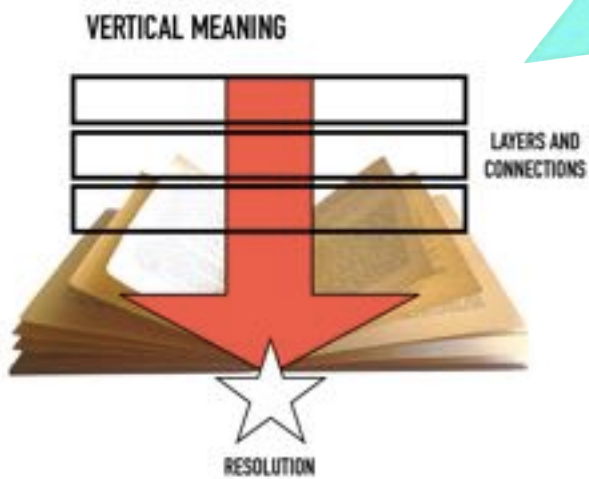
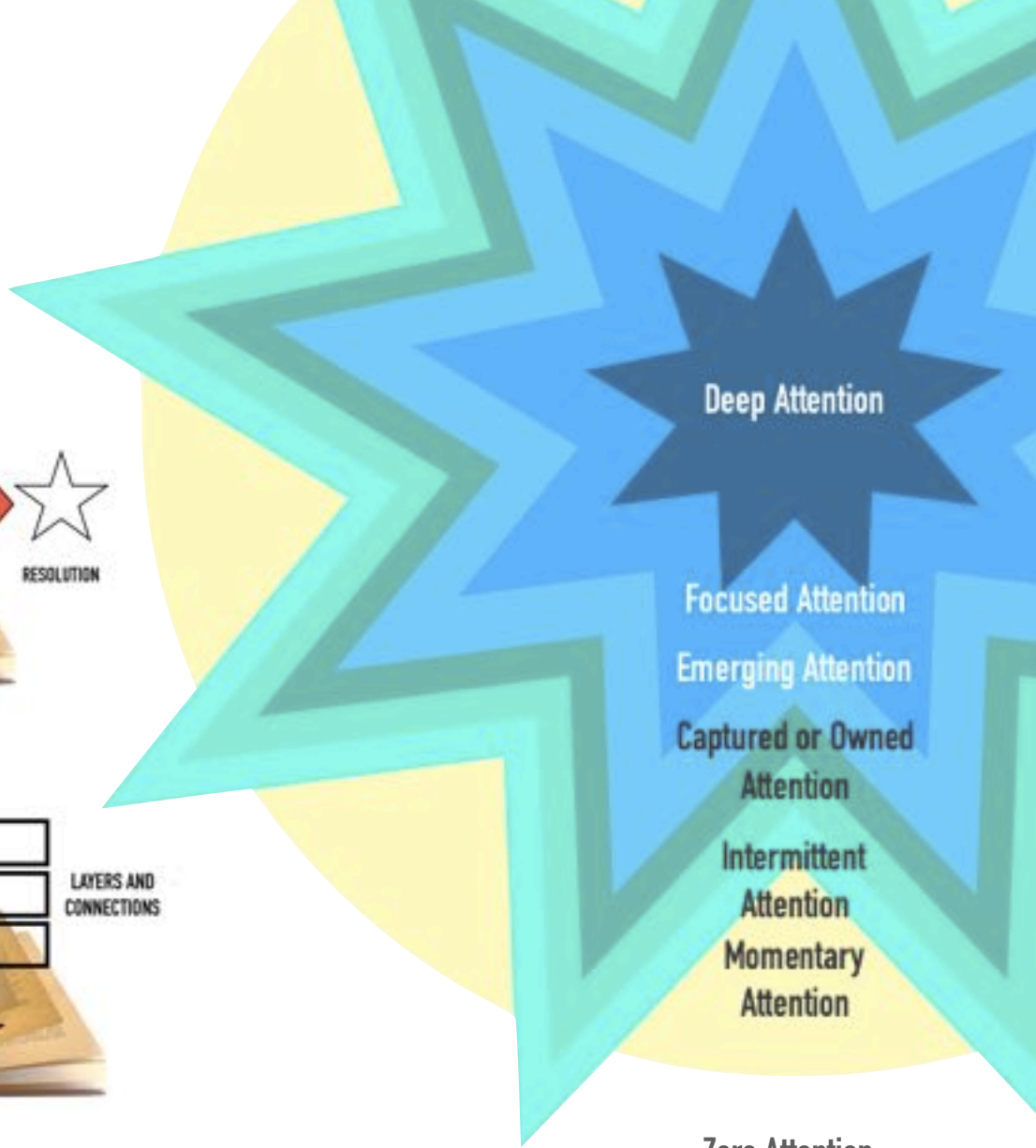
And when it is broken down in such a manner, things appear clearer about how Meaning operates to guide and control attention.

And, if things are made clearer and operations are revealed when this is done, I am suggesting that there is something serious to learn here.

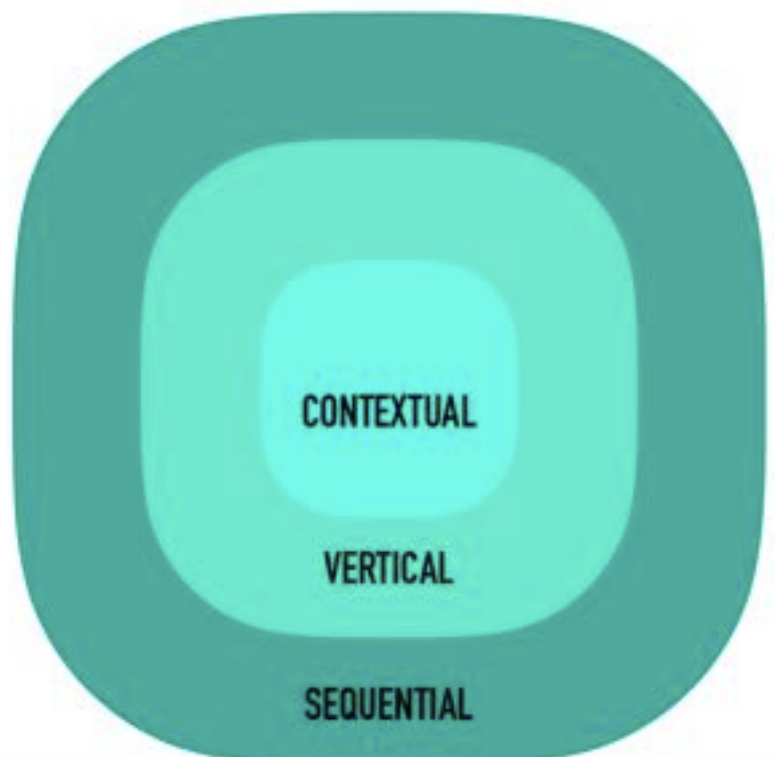
‘Sequential’, ‘vertical’, ‘contextual’ and ‘embracive’ are terms invented to describe aspects of Meaning — but the inventions describe things that are actual. You are reading this sentence pulled along by a desire to know how it ends; the significance of each of the words and the way they are put together, as well as any images or symbolic resonance which they might evoke, pull you closer to the text; the relevance of what you read to your own life and experiences outside the words invites you to apply any lessons to that wider world; and the overall result is that you learn or experience something.

These things happen: how we describe them or what terms we use to delineate them may change, but the phenomena associated with them are not inventions.





EMBRACIVE MEANING



Given that that is the case, it might therefore be wise for anyone wanting to make a success out of writing fiction to learn more about what is going on here.

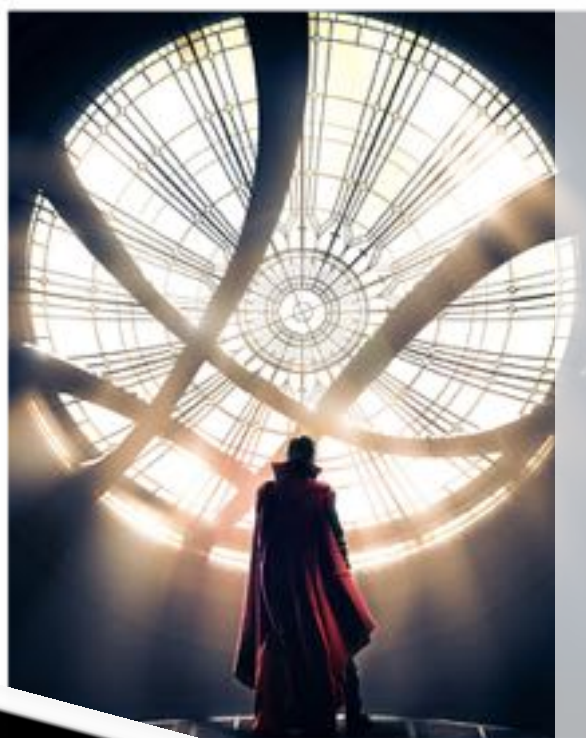
Meaning, of course, applies to everything in Life, not just fiction. And it's an odd fact that the same way of breaking things down into aspects works on any facet of Life, not just fiction. Personal relationships, for example, have sequences, depths, contextual relevance and embrative overall results, as do occupations or group memberships or anything. Take any part of your life and look at it in terms of sequences, for example: where is it heading? How is it getting there? What is pulling you along?

Seeing exactly how these things operate in Life can be a little like seeing the code behind reality as in the film *The Matrix*: you can get some inkling, after a while, of not only how your attention is spread but also why; you can start to perceive, with practice, how actions that you take are guided by these factors in one way or another.

It's all rather fascinating.

But to return to the matter at hand: how do we use what we are learning to improve our lives as writers?

Earlier we examined various groupings of people: the vast body of those who ignore us, the possibly-almost-as-large group of those who glance at us, and the smaller selection of those who pay us more attention. We have discovered how to use Meaning to attract the attention of that last group so that they become customers. The next stage is Emerging Attention: this is the group of people who have become readers and who have started reading your book.



Just about everything you need to know about what to do with these people is described in my book, *How Stories Really Work*. In there, I give a detailed description of how to build convincing characters, develop gripping plots, follow particular sequences, glue the reader's attention to the page, and bring things to a satisfactory resolution no matter what genre you are writing in. Obviously, I recommend that you get that book, study its methods and apply them to your fiction writing. There are no further short cuts really: the book was written to be as direct and practical as possible about all of this.

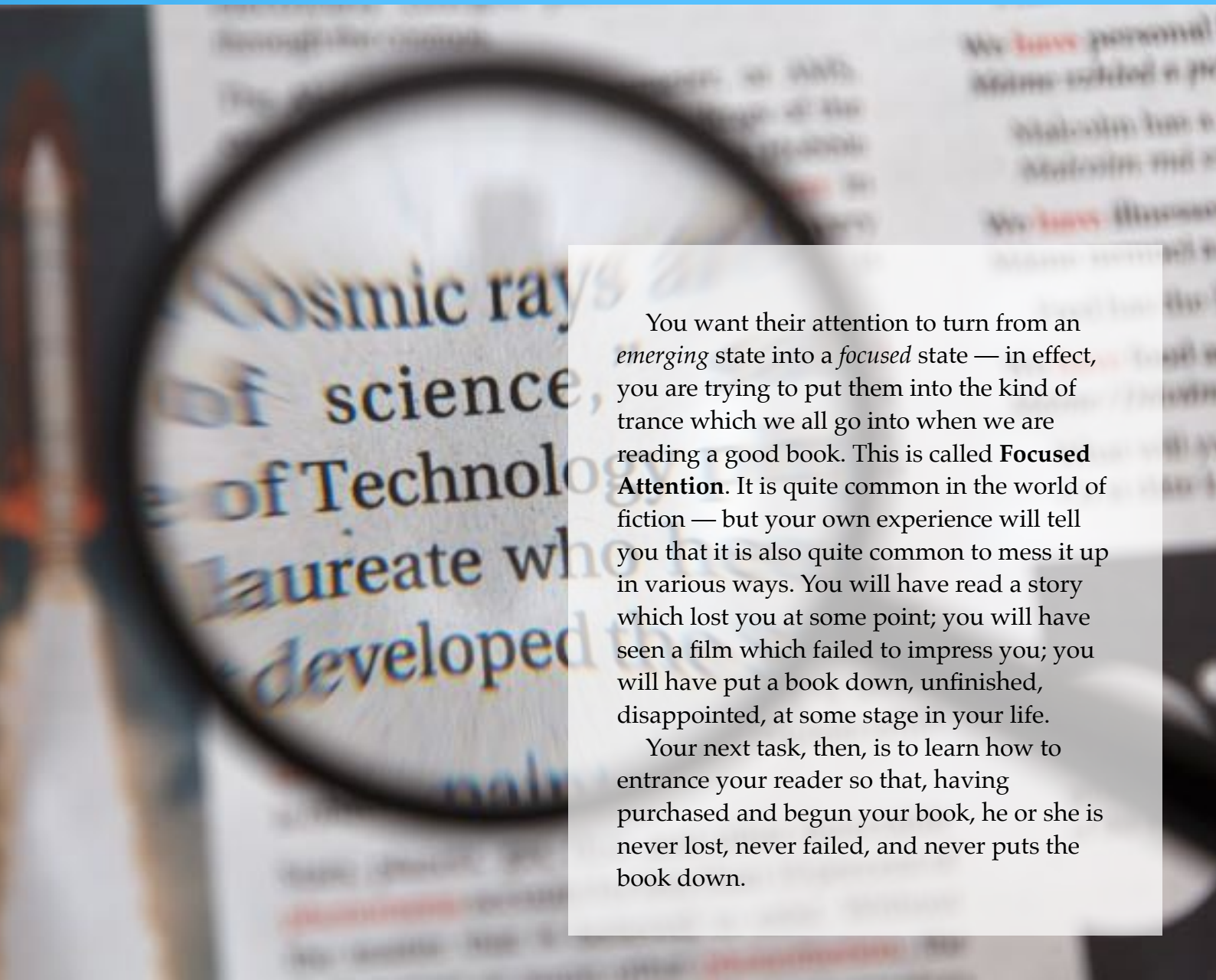
If for some reason you don't have my book or can't acquire it immediately, you can study the master authors of fiction through history, as I did, reading famous classics, bestsellers, and works of note, as well as watching classic films and the latest blockbusters, to see exactly how they

- pulled you along through their stories
 - ensured your attention stuck to each particular page or scene
 - made each part of their stories relevant for you
- and in the end how they
- created an overall effect upon you.

Keep in mind that **all of these things are being done to you, whether you are aware of them or not**: the fact that you are reading this (and have possibly read my book) and have some idea of what is happening when you read a book or watch a film or play means that you will have a much better idea of the mechanics of all this as you go along.

What you are doing with regard to those people who fit into the category of Emerging Attention is drawing them further along and deeper in.

“Your next task, then, is to learn how to entrance your reader so that, having purchased and begun your book, he or she is never lost, never failed, and never puts the book down.”



You want their attention to turn from an *emerging* state into a *focused* state — in effect, you are trying to put them into the kind of trance which we all go into when we are reading a good book. This is called **Focused Attention**. It is quite common in the world of fiction — but your own experience will tell you that it is also quite common to mess it up in various ways. You will have read a story which lost you at some point; you will have seen a film which failed to impress you; you will have put a book down, unfinished, disappointed, at some stage in your life.

Your next task, then, is to learn how to entrance your reader so that, having purchased and begun your book, he or she is never lost, never failed, and never puts the book down.

Focused Attention

What happens to us when we are reading a good story?

Would it be true to say that we enter a half-conscious state characterised by an absence of response to external stimuli?

If a story is gripping enough, it seems to literally absorb our attention. People can speak to us, screens or music can be on in the background, things can be whizzing by (if we are in a car or on a bus or train) and we don't pay them any attention.

That's one definition of the word 'trance'. The word itself comes from the Old French *transir* 'depart, fall into trance', from Latin *transire* 'go across'.

Reading is an odd thing, when you think about it. It's an abnormal state of wakefulness in which a person is not self-aware and is at least partially unresponsive to external stimuli (an official definition of 'trance') but is nevertheless capable of following along what is being read, generating the required mental imagery, and experiencing emotional responses. While we might normally associate going into a trance with such things as hypnosis, meditation, magic, or prayer, it seems clear that something of the same kind happens to us when we are drawn into a really good tale.


Human beings are always filtering the information coming in through their senses. In a trance, it might be possible to argue that a person is altering the way this sensory flow of information is perceived to a more noticeable extent, in effect 'turning down the volume' on the outer world and paying closer attention to an inner one. In reading, it could also be argued that, instead of reducing attention — something which it is said trances normally do — the attention is being *redirected*.

And so we reach that state desired by all authors: Focused Attention. It is the condition in which readers are so absorbed by a book that they pay it more heed than anything else.




I recollect that once, in my youth, I was getting towards the end of the second volume of C. S. Lewis's science fiction trilogy, called *Perelandra* or *Voyage to Venus*. In it, the protagonist Ransom, a humble philologist from Earth (allegedly modelled, by the way, on Lewis's friend J. R. R. Tolkien) has been transported to the world of Venus — otherwise known as *Perelandra* — in order to take part in a titanic struggle to save that world's innocence. Towards the end of the novel, he partakes in a song which turns into a collective meditation in which some of the

other participants are angels, and finds himself moving through other planes of consciousness. I was so focused on these final passages that I kept reading, even though night was closing in. Not wanting to move to switch any lights on, I continued to read, totally immersed in the book. I reached the end of it, only to look up and find that the room in which I was sitting was in total darkness. Somehow, I had managed to read the words on the page even though there was no light.

A dark, atmospheric photograph showing a person's hands holding an open book. The person is mostly in shadow, with only their hands and the pages of the book clearly visible. The book is open, and the text on the pages is faintly illuminated. The background is dark and indistinct.

“Somehow, I had managed to read the words on the page even though there was no light.”



Here's an excerpt from that section of the book:

And now, by a transition which he did not notice, it seemed that what had begun as speech was turned into sight, or into something that can only be remembered as if it were seeing. He thought he saw the Great Dance. It seemed to be woven out of the intertwining undulation of many cords or bands of light, leaping over and under one another and mutually embraced in arabesques and flower-like subtleties. Each figure as he looked at it became the master-figure or focus of the whole spectacle, by means of which his eye disentangled all else and brought it into unity only to be itself entangled when he looked to what he had taken for mere marginal decorations and found that there also the same hegemony was claimed, and the claim made good, yet the former pattern not thereby dispossessed but finding in its new subordination a significance greater than that which it had abdicated. He could see also (but the word "seeing" is now plainly inadequate) wherever the ribbons or serpents of light intersected, minute corpuscles of momentary brightness: and he knew somehow that these particles were the secular generalities of which history tells -peoples, institutions, climates of opinion, civilisations, arts, sciences and the like- ephemeral coruscations that piped their short song and vanished. The ribbons or cords themselves, in which millions of corpuscles lived and died, were things of some different kind. At first he could not say what. But he knew in the end that most of them were individual entities. If so, the time in which the Great Dance proceeds is very unlike time as we know it.



The passage goes on and Ransom's experience grows even richer and more unearthly. I often think of this passage when I ponder Focused Attention and what it means.

But this kind of 'trance' is possible across the range of literature. It is brought about through the concentrated application of Meaning — meaning that leads a reader on, that draws a reader in, that echoes with relevance for a reader — all adding up to a vicarious experience of some kind which becomes part of a reader's own experience.

Here's a small excerpt from Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* as another example:

And the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!", Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down", cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here—I am here—the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will!"

His hands were busy with his garments all this time; turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

"I don't know what to do!", cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoön of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

As this part of this famous story features the moment of epiphany, when Scrooge, having been shown his past, present and possible future, returns to normalcy and encounters joy and happiness for perhaps the first time in his life, we can expect the content of the text to be largely about fulfilment. Here, at the end of the story, there is no great drive to move the reader forward — rather, the emphasis is on the moment. Look at the rhetorical tools used to create ‘vertical’ meaning, to pull the reader into the text: in the first sentence, ‘And the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!’, ‘his own’ is repeated four times; notice how many other repetitions there are in the same passage: ‘on my knees’, ‘not torn down’, ‘I am as’. Repetition, of course, is a rhetorical tool precisely because it creates rhythm, and rhythm, carefully utilised, induces trance.

Dickens also uses description to create a sense of comedy — ‘His hands were busy with his garments all this time; turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance’ — and comedy could be defined as a sense of ‘warm inclusion’.

Apart from being drawn in to the viewpoint of the protagonist by these devices, the passage is full of potential contextual relevance for the reader: Scrooge is a character, but also represents Everyman in his spiritual growth from coldness to revelation.

There is much else that could be said about this passage, but naturally literature is full of many other examples of focus-inducing texts.

We’ll look at some more in forthcoming chapters.



What Happens When We Read

When we read, then, we enter a kind of trance — but this is not the kind of trance which results in an immobility of mind as well as of body. As in other trance conditions — hypnosis, meditation, prayer — physical stillness is part of the package when we read, usually. But whereas in other trances our minds are also emptied and still, when we read something quite different is happening: **we are pulled forward through something; we are attracted closer to something; we are made to reflect upon the contextual implications of something.** And that all adds up to a distinct experience of some sort and quality.

To show you what I mean when I talk about the Focused Attention that results from reading a high quality piece of writing, here are some more famous passages of prose to be analysed.

The first is from Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*:

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.



The extended sentence leads us on until we reach its verb, pulling us forward through half a dozen images to find out what the narrator is getting at. Note that each of these images contains a little 'vacuum', a small negative or departure from a desirable pattern, each of which possesses the same pull of a physical vacuum, in miniature: 'growing grim', 'damp, drizzly November', 'pausing before coffin warehouses', 'the rear of every funeral', 'knocking people's hats off'. These tiny gaps or voids create a momentum, pulling our attention forward to the end of the passage.

In common with other passages we have examined, we find the use of repetition to engage us with each part of the description by creating a diminutive hypnotic rhythm: 'whenever' preceding each clause, and each clause getting slightly longer. The images painted are dark — grim, damp, drizzly, with coffin warehouses and funerals — but also slightly exaggerated, creating a comic effect, until our picture of the narrator 'stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off' is explicitly funny. These factors all have the effect of drawing us closer to the text (comedy being inclusive) in what I call 'vertical meaning'.

Contextually, as the portrait builds up of a narrator struggling with increasing depression, restlessness and disaffection, we as readers recognise something of the same condition, whether or not we are personally subject to it at the time of reading.

Collectively, this adds up to a powerful little passage of prose which produces Focused Attention on our part.

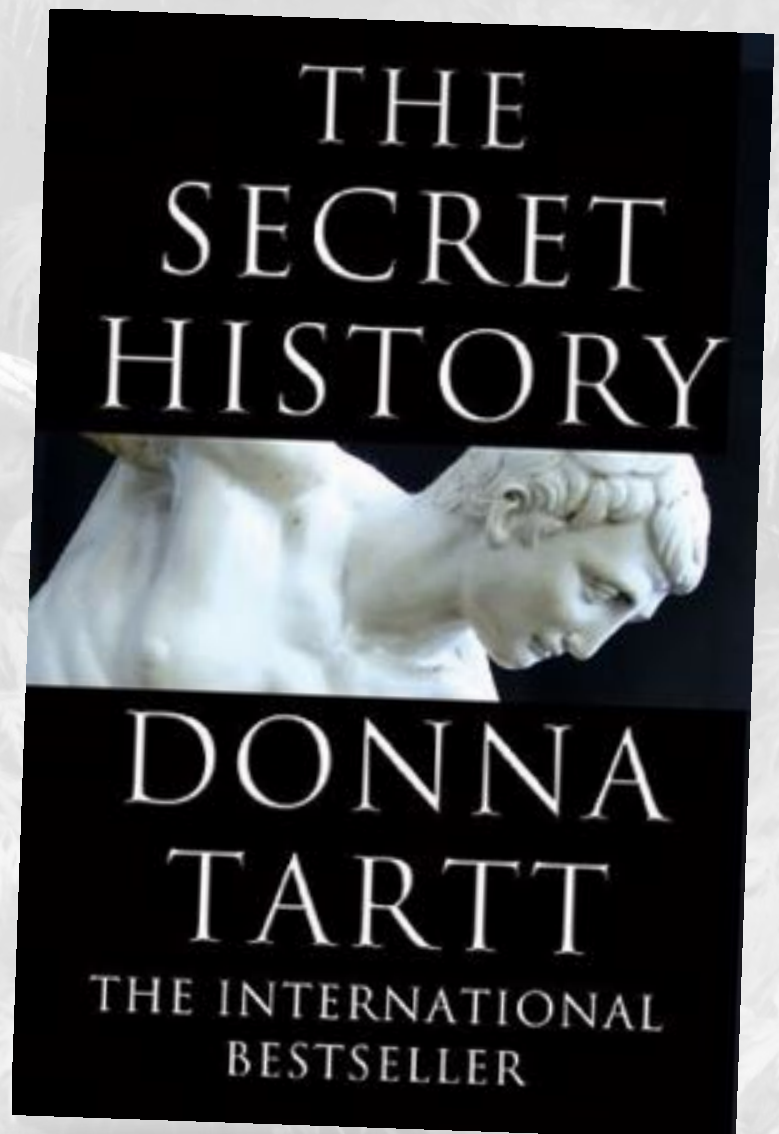


It's not that Melville sat down and constructed this piece in the same way that I have deconstructed it. Few authors work in that way. **The truth is that the creative mind operates multi-dimensionally, blending momentum, mystery and morality to produce meaning on levels which we can hardly plumb in purely analytical language.** Nevertheless, picking apart these strands gets us closer to seeing exactly how our attention is controlled as we read.

Here's another example, this time from Donna Tartt's book, *The Secret History*:

It's a very Greek idea, and a very profound one. Beauty is terror. Whatever we call beautiful, we quiver before it. And what could be more terrifying and beautiful, to souls like the Greeks or our own, than to lose control completely? To throw off the chains of being for an instant, to shatter the accident of our mortal selves? Euripides speaks of the Maenads: head thrown I back, throat to the stars, "more like deer than human being." To be absolutely free! One is quite capable, of course, of working out these destructive passions in more vulgar and less efficient ways. But how glorious to release them in a single burst! To sing, to scream, to dance barefoot in the woods in the dead of night, with no more awareness of mortality than an animal! These are powerful mysteries. The bellowing of bulls. Springs of honey bubbling from the ground. If we are strong enough in our souls we can rip away the veil and look that naked, terrible beauty right in the face; let God consume us, devour us, unstring our bones. Then spit us out reborn.

The emphasis here is on vertical and contextual meaning, by which I mean the



creation of imagery that draws the reader in closer to the text and relates that content to the reader's own condition. It helps that the subject of the passage is beauty itself, as the highest form of Meaning could be said to be beauty. But Tartt achieves her aims in specific ways, firstly by mentioning Greece: 'It's a Greek idea' immediately conjures up for the educated reader the phantom framework of ancient Greece, with its pre-Christian philosophy, poetry and mythology. The passage goes on to evoke the notion of a complete loss of control, 'To throw off the chains of being for an instant, to shatter the accident of our mortal selves'. 'To be absolutely free' is an almost universal concept, something which makes sense to and has an appeal for almost every reader. The impassioned sentences are punctuated with exclamation marks:

But how glorious to release them in a single burst! To sing, to scream, to dance barefoot in the woods in the dead of night, with no more awareness of mortality than an animal!

Vertical meaning has much to do with the creation of mysteries and the question ‘What is really going on?’ Here, Tartt is explicit — ‘These are powerful mysteries’ — before going on to summon up a series of poetic images — the bellowing of bulls, springs of honey bubbling from the ground — images which speak of luxury, rampant sexuality, and abundant passion. By equating Beauty with Terror — a kind of oxymoron, a device commonly used to draw readers in — the author has linked the normally negative sensations associated with fear to the transcendent elevations connected with extreme beauty, the contradictions winding together to make a divine consummation, passionately destructive:

If we are strong enough in our souls we can rip away the veil and look that naked, terrible beauty right in the face; let God consume us, devour us, unstring our bones.

After long, complex sentences, she finishes off the passage masterfully with the short, almost perfunctory, but powerful ‘Then spit us out reborn.’ In the case of this passage, vertical and contextual meaning have carried us forward on a wave to that final moment of rebirth.

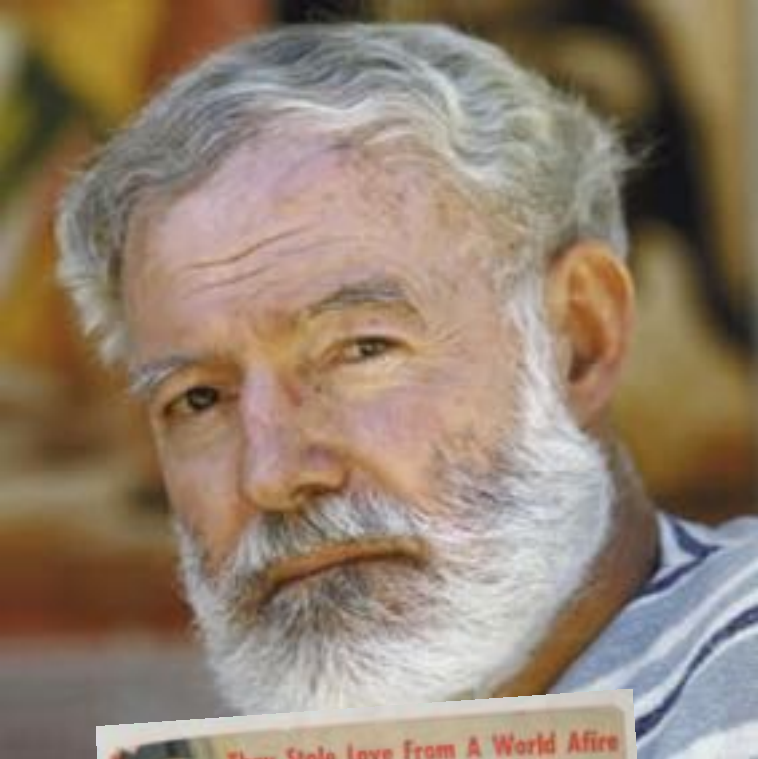
In the act of writing, as with the earlier example, it is not as though Tartt started with the thought ‘I am now going to create vertical and contextual meaning’ and then built things step by step precisely in the reverse order that I have taken them apart above. More likely, starting with the concept she wanted to portray — spiritual rebirth — the images came first, then the

structural connecting of those images, then the punctuation and syntax needed to make her required impressions. Her intention as an author, though, would have been to draw in attention; her constructive actions would have been guided by this need to ‘rip away the veil’ between her idea and the reader.

More examples will follow. In all of them, you will see how to focus attention so that the reader is gripped and entranced.



“Vertical meaning has much to do with the creation of mysteries and the question ‘What is really going on?’”



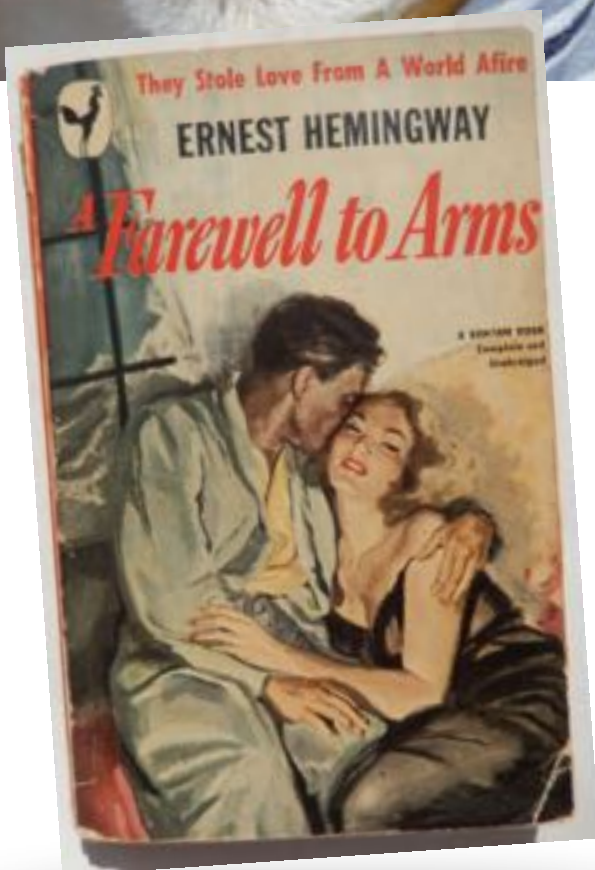
outward into the actual world of the reader. In the first, the reader finds meaning within the text; in the second, the reader finds meaning in Life because of the text. The two work together and overlap, naturally.

Contextual meaning — when meaning is so portrayed in a story that it resonates with a reader in terms of his or her own life, or Life as a whole, bringing about reflections about further meaning, insights, connections, epiphanies — can arise when a reader, pulled into an image or a concept on the page, realises that the concept applies to himself or herself.

Here's an example from Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*:

If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.

Hemingway uses his usual matter-of-fact, no frills style to make a brutal point about Life. Counterpointing 'courage' and 'killing' in the first sentence hooks the reader inward; as he extrapolates on the point, the reader begins to see that there is a universal truth in the sentiment voiced: that the world does indeed seem destructively and remorselessly opposed to what we might consider worthwhile values. By the final sentence, the reader has absorbed the concept enough to evaluate reflectively upon his or her own place in this terrible scenario — is the reader 'very good', 'very gentle' or 'very brave'? Probably not — and so 'the world' doesn't even give priority to that death, which is a condition of affairs likely to be reflected in the reader's own life.



Meaning and Attention

Sequential meaning **pulls attention forward**; vertical meaning **sticks attention downward or inward**; contextual meaning **ripples outward**. If vertical meaning was **centripetal**, drawing attention into the words and images on the page, contextual meaning would be **centrifugal**, spinning meaning



Meaning arrived at contextually doesn't have to be so devastatingly negative, but is by its nature often somewhat revelatory for the reader. In *White Fang* by Jack London, the dog begins to perceive a relationship developing between himself and his master

As the days went by, the evolution of like into love was accelerated. White Fang himself began to grow aware of it, though in his consciousness he knew not what love was. It manifested itself to him as a void in his being—a hungry, aching, yearning void that clamoured to be filled. It was a pain and an unrest; and it received easement only by the touch of the new god's presence. At such times love was joy to him, a wild, keen-thrilling satisfaction. But when away from his god, the pain and the unrest returned; the void in him sprang up and pressed against him with its emptiness, and the hunger gnawed and gnawed unceasingly. "

Again using fairly ordinary language, the author introduces concepts which will ripple outwards into the reader's own life, in all likelihood. Most readers will be familiar with the transition from 'like' to 'love' — indeed, most readers will have some inkling of their ignorance as to what love actually is. London then effectively creates the notion of an emptiness in White Fang's heart — 'a hungry, aching, yearning void that clamoured to be filled' — which almost certainly will resonate with readers as such a thing is part of the human condition (as well as, presumably, that of dogs). White Fang's emotions transform in the presence of his 'new god' and in his absence, a state of emotional fluidity probably familiar to most readers. So what on the page is a description of a dog's feelings towards another character in the book become a kind of allegory of humanity's experiences of love. The same passage, with the alteration of only a few words, could describe any loving relationship.



Deep Attention

Focused Attention

Emerging Attention

Captured or Owned
Attention

Intermittent
Attention

Momentary
Attention

Zero Attention

This kind of epiphany in fiction is what keeps readers' attention focused in that trance-like condition that we looked at earlier: **fiction yields such insights as almost no other art form can, walking readers through sets of experiences, gluing them to images and ideas, and then producing, as if by magic, revelatory insights which pertain to life outside the reading of fiction.**

So in terms of the Seven Levels of Attention, we have proceeded from that null attention we get from people at large, simply because they don't know of our existence or are not even remotely interested in our work, which we have called Zero Attention, to the Momentary Attention we get when someone, somewhere, for some reason, glances our way. Then we moved to Intermittent Attention, in which the cloud of 'attention particles' surrounding these people has been acted upon effectively, resulting in some of those particles flowing towards us less ephemerally — and we have learned how to use the tools available to us to produce Captured or Owned Attention, at which point people purchase our books.

Emerging Attention, the act of reading the book, is when the reader is kept engaged with the story right to the end. This depends on a knowledge and application of the fundamentals of the craft of writing, as outlined in my book *How Stories Really Work*. If those principles are deftly applied, then the result is the kind of Focused Attention we have examined here in Hemingway and London.

But that is not the final category of the kinds of attention we need to examine as writers. The final seventh category is called **Deep Attention**. Focused Attention is a byproduct of great writing — the master authors throughout history have been able to create the condition in which it arises.

That's why they are master authors.

A subset of those authors are capable of producing Deep Attention. This comes about in books with a genuine spiritual significance and power — they put us into the same kind of trance as Focused Attention, but tend to be so powerful that, when we have finished reading them and put them to one side, we are changed in some way.

We'll look at some examples of Deep Attention next.

Deep Attention

The Holy Grail for writers is the final level, Deep Attention, and it's safe to say that not many writers will ever reach this point.

Deep Attention occurs when Focused Attention has been so effective, and possibly prolonged over a whole work — or certainly significant proportions of it — that its contextual meaning spills over and actually transforms the way the reader views life.

It's the kind of level of a religious scripture — something that, once read, changes the way the reader looks at things. Authors able to produce Deep Attention usually have as their themes the meatier topics of literature — the meaning of life, the role of mortality and suffering, and so on. In addressing these things through fiction, they not only focus the reader's attention but create a ripple effect on the reader's life.

This is obviously affected by the condition of the reader to begin with, as well as the conditions under which a book is read. Certain states of mind outside the book or around its reading can clearly influence its impact upon an individual. But in terms of the power of literature to produce such lasting epiphanies, what we are examining here is how master authors create the level of Meaning necessary to grasp, hold and mould attention in readers even beyond the parameters of their work.

It's probably best explained through examples. Here's a passage from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (an aptly named book, given its grand themes):

Just as in the clock the result of the complex action of innumerable wheels and pulleys is merely the slow and regular movement of the hand marking the time, so the result of all the complex human activities of these 160,000 Russian and French — of all their passions, hopes, regrets, humiliations, sufferings, outbursts of pride, fear and enthusiasm — was only the loss of the battle of Austerlitz, the battle of the three Emperors, as it was called; that is to say, a slow movement of the hand on the dial of human history.



Le Soldat Français.

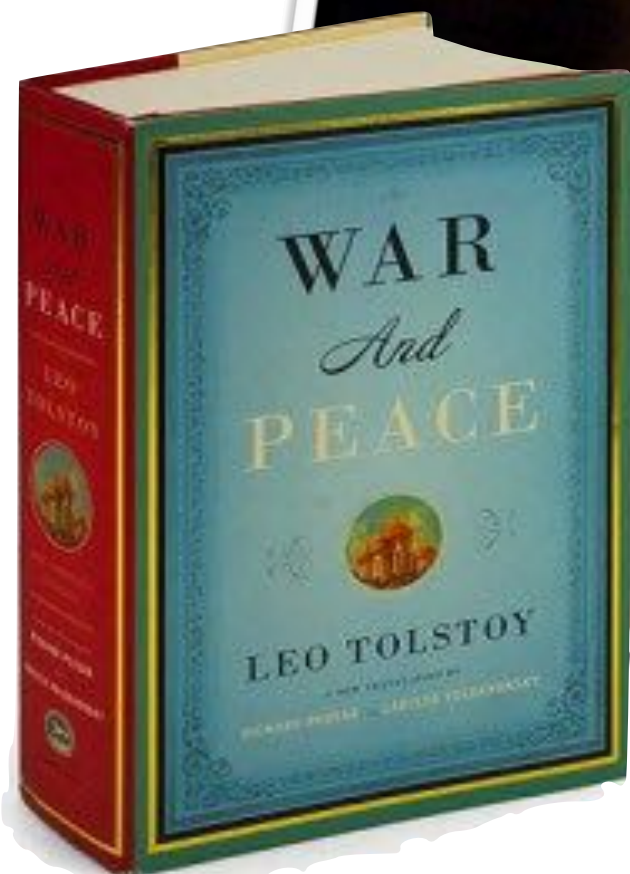
*Si facies illabatur orbis,
impavidus ferient annus.*

The passage sums up a large part of Tolstoy's ideas, and the novel is a composite study of selected individual characters and their adventures during the Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812, as well as a kind of extended essay about philosophy and history. It should come as no surprise, given these parameters, that Tolstoy addresses major concerns about Life in the book. How he does so is exemplified above.

The image of the clock, like most images in fiction, acts 'vertically' to pull the reader into the text. Familiar images — like clocks — often work better, especially when they are used to explain complex subjects, in this case perhaps the most complex subject of all — Life, as we experience it as human beings. As we are drawn into the 'complex action of innumerable wheels and pulleys' and Tolstoy connects it with the 'passions, hopes, regrets,

humiliations, sufferings, outbursts of pride, fear and enthusiasm' of 160,000 people, an epiphany can result, which is obviously the author's intention, made explicit at the end of the passage: 'that is to say, a slow movement of the hand on the dial of human history'.

The cumulative build-up of such passages makes *War and Peace* not only an engrossing work of fiction but also a treatise on reality as we experience it. Through several main characters, all of whom have differing parts to play in the vast drama of the invasion, Tolstoy grasps our sympathies; through the unfolding of dramatic events over a decade or more, he pulls us forward through a lengthy story; but with images and metaphors like this, he creates contextual meaning on an equally grand scale, resulting in Deep Attention on the part of the reader.





Engaging characters, intriguing plots, appropriate settings — these are all tools used by master authors to captivate readers' attention and manipulate it. But when the subject matter is Meaning itself, and when that Meaning is portrayed poetically, the power is such that it can produce lasting effects upon a readership. Take, for example, Shakespeare's masterpiece *Hamlet*.

Seeing a performance of *Hamlet* featuring Simon Russell-Beale I was once struck by how deeply personal and individual the 'message' of the play could be. It seemed to me that the actor was speaking to me alone, in the crowded auditorium, and that what he had to say had significance for me, as though he was confiding something in me personally. Of course, this has something to do with Russell-Beale's acting, but the nature of *Hamlet* is such that moments like that potentially occur throughout the play.

The most famous speech in the play is all about the purpose and meaning of life, and it is worth looking at in terms of sequential, vertical, contextual and embrative meaning, as an example of how to produce Deep Attention.

Shakespeare begins (through Prince Hamlet) making the subject explicit: 'To be, or not to be, that is the question'; but this is obviously not to be a dry philosophical treatise, and so he immediately plunges into metaphor: 'Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them.' The audience is removed from a cold, calculating, rational assessment of life into the tempestuous image of a battle = vertical meaning, designed to draw the listener in.


“Engaging characters, intriguing plots, appropriate settings — these are all tools used by master authors to captivate readers' attention and manipulate it.”

As the rhythm of the speech carries us forward sequentially, the images then vary, equating death with sleep, to make sure we are drawn down further into the meaning: 'to die, to sleep/No more; and by a sleep, to say we end/The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks/That flesh is heir to?' The unanswered and unanswerable question is rhetorical, but also magnetic in terms of attention. When Hamlet says 'Tis a consummation/Devoutly to be wished', the audience is naturally led to agree - but Hamlet develops the idea a little further: 'To die, to sleep,/To sleep, perchance to dream; aye, there's the rub,/For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come,/When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,/Must give us pause.'

Then the speech employs a long list of kinds of suffering — The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,/The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,/The insolence of office, and the spurns/That patient merit of the unworthy takes' — in the form of an extended question, pulling us forward to hear the end of that question and its answer: 'When he himself might his quietus make/With a bare bodkin?', a technique immediately used again in the next lines: 'Who would fardels bear,/To grunt and sweat under a weary life,/But that the dread of something after death,/The undiscovered country, from whose bourn/No traveller returns, puzzles the will,/And makes us rather bear those ills we have,/Than fly to others that we know not of' with the powerfully mysterious image of the 'undiscovered country' at the heart of them.

By now, the astute audience member has related this to his or her own experience of existence — what human being has not considered these issues in some way? — and so Hamlet's concluding remarks are resonant with contextual meaning, meaning that spirals out of the speech into the audience member's own life: 'Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,/And thus the native hue of resolution/Is sicklied o'er, with the pale cast of thought,/And enterprises of great pith and moment,/With this regard their currents turn awry,/And lose the name of action'.





A reflective audience member would consider, albeit briefly, those 'enterprises of great pith and moment' in his or her own life which have lost 'the name of action'. The centripetal force of the images becomes the centrifugal force of contextual meaning, all pulled along by the poetry of the language.

The whole play parallels this speech: Hamlet's supernaturally inspired revenge motive loses its force, and produces the strange, 'inactive' plot line of a protagonist who strives to not do what the whole action of the play is prompting him to do.

The embrasive meaning which is the overall effect of the play is to leave the audience pondering the issues themselves: 'The rest is silence', as Hamlet says before he dies. Such deep subject matter, dealt with by a master author using poetic and dramatic techniques, produces Deep Attention, the kind of attention which has not left this play alone for four centuries.

How can the new writer, the unestablished or relatively unknown writer, hope to reach these celestial heights of wordsmithery and skill?

We will look at some specific takeaway lessons to use in any kind of fiction writing next.

"Such deep subject matter, dealt with by a master author using poetic and dramatic techniques, produces Deep Attention, the kind of attention which has not left this play alone for four centuries."

Some Practical Points

Whether you are a new writer, or one who is seeking to lift your writing to a new level of communication, these seven levels of attention should be of interest to you.

1. Zero Attention.

This is the level of attention you probably get from the world at large, unless you are a celebrity of some kind. You might think of it as a problem — and most of the marketing mistakes made by authors old and new arise because they think of this vast ocean of inattention as a problem. The fact is that, rather than battling against this hugeness as though you had to conquer it in its entirety, you will do better if you just ignore it as it ignores you. This gaseous ‘cloud’ of attention, not disturbed or agitated or affected in any way by you or your writings, needlessly absorbs the time and energy of those who don’t recognise it for what it is: normal.

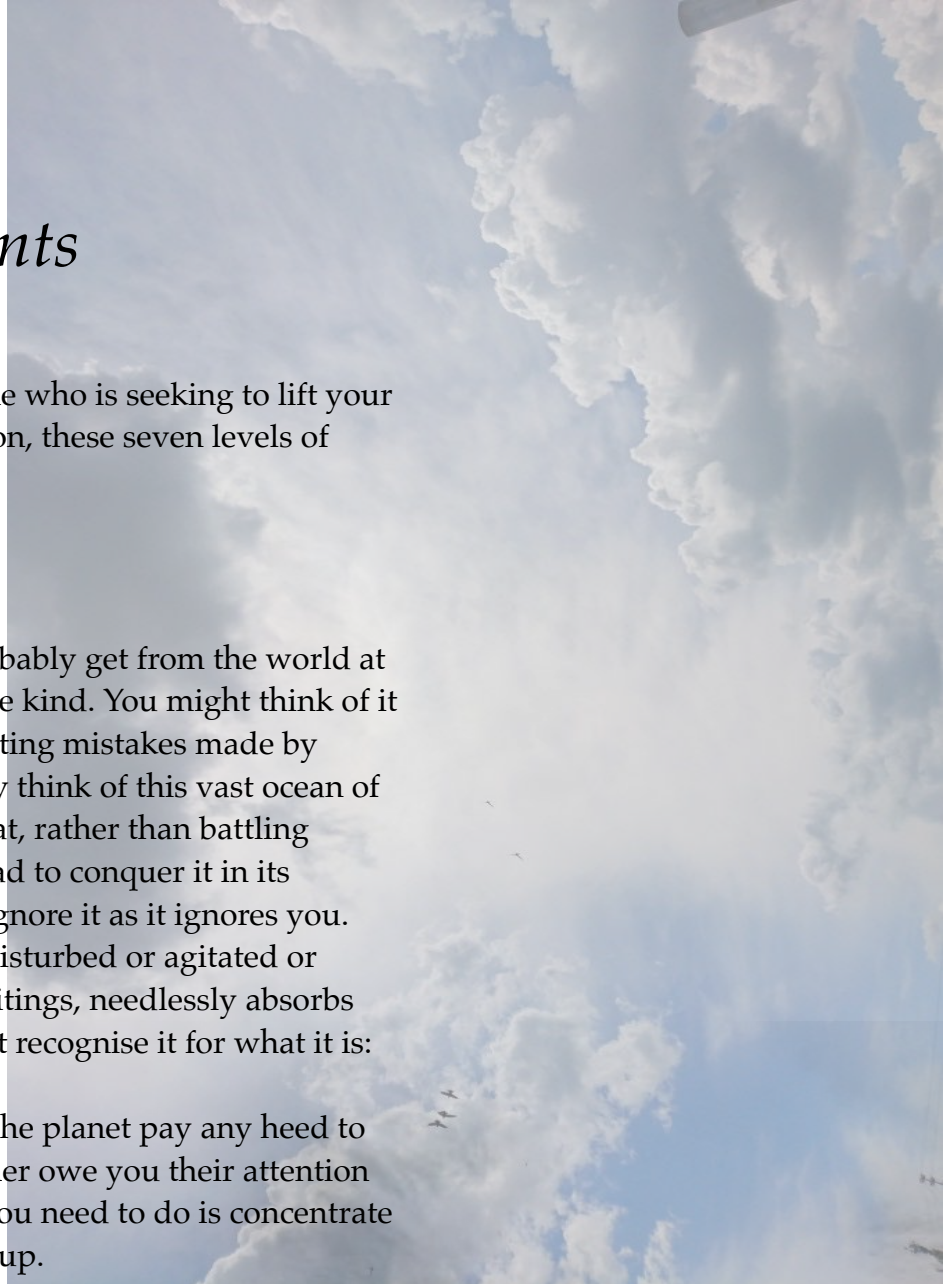
Why should the vast population of the planet pay any heed to you or what you are doing? They neither owe you their attention nor do they owe you any time. What you need to do is concentrate on a much smaller and more lively group.

2. Momentary Attention.

This group is much the same as the ‘zero’ group above: they form the second largest category. They are the people who may or may not ‘glance’ in your direction. They are difficult to count and harder to predict. So don’t waste too much time on them either.

3. Intermittent Attention.

If we assume that every human being has hovering around them a cloud of ‘attention particles’, then this group consists of those who have connected that cloud up to you in some casual way. Perhaps they have joined your group on social media, ‘followed’ you in some fashion, or signed up to your newsletter. You’ll read elsewhere about how valuable these people are — they form the ‘mailing list’ of which you may have heard so much about. You have their attention — to a degree. What you do with it is crucially important.



4. Captured or Owned Attention.

How do you grab and hold the attention of those who have already casually granted you some? The big difference between these people and the 'Zero' or 'Momentary' groups above is that they, by definition, will revisit you. So you have a chance — albeit limited — to capture more of their attention with each visit.

What you are trying to do here is 'own' some of their attention. And that magical moment occurs when they buy and own something of yours. The second that your book is in their hands after a purchase, you possess just as much of them as they do of you.

Bringing about that moment of exchange is the subject of millions of words. But the essence of all those words becomes clear as we look at the remaining levels. The important thing is that the moment of exchange is not as important as what follows.

5. Emerging Attention.

Emerging Attention is what you get when the person who just bought your book starts to read it. A bad author can blow everything at this point; a good one knows and uses the practised methods that have been used for centuries to grip, guide and engage the reader right until the end.

6. Focused Attention.

As the reader reads on, the effect you want to have upon him or her is to create a kind of trance. The reader's attention should be so focused on your book that the rest of the world recedes in importance to one degree or another. It is this mastery of another's attention which leads to more success at capturing the attention in the first place: if you know what you are doing as an author, that knowledge can be used earlier in this sequence to acquire and encourage 'ownership' when the potential reader first encounters your book.

In other, more practical words, those things that you use to attract your readers to your books on websites or in shops, like covers and blurbs, need to be based on the kind of thing that bring about total enchantment once the book is opened. Capture the heart of your story in an image or a few well-chosen words, and you capture the reader who was passing by in your shop or browsing your social media group.



7. Deep Attention.

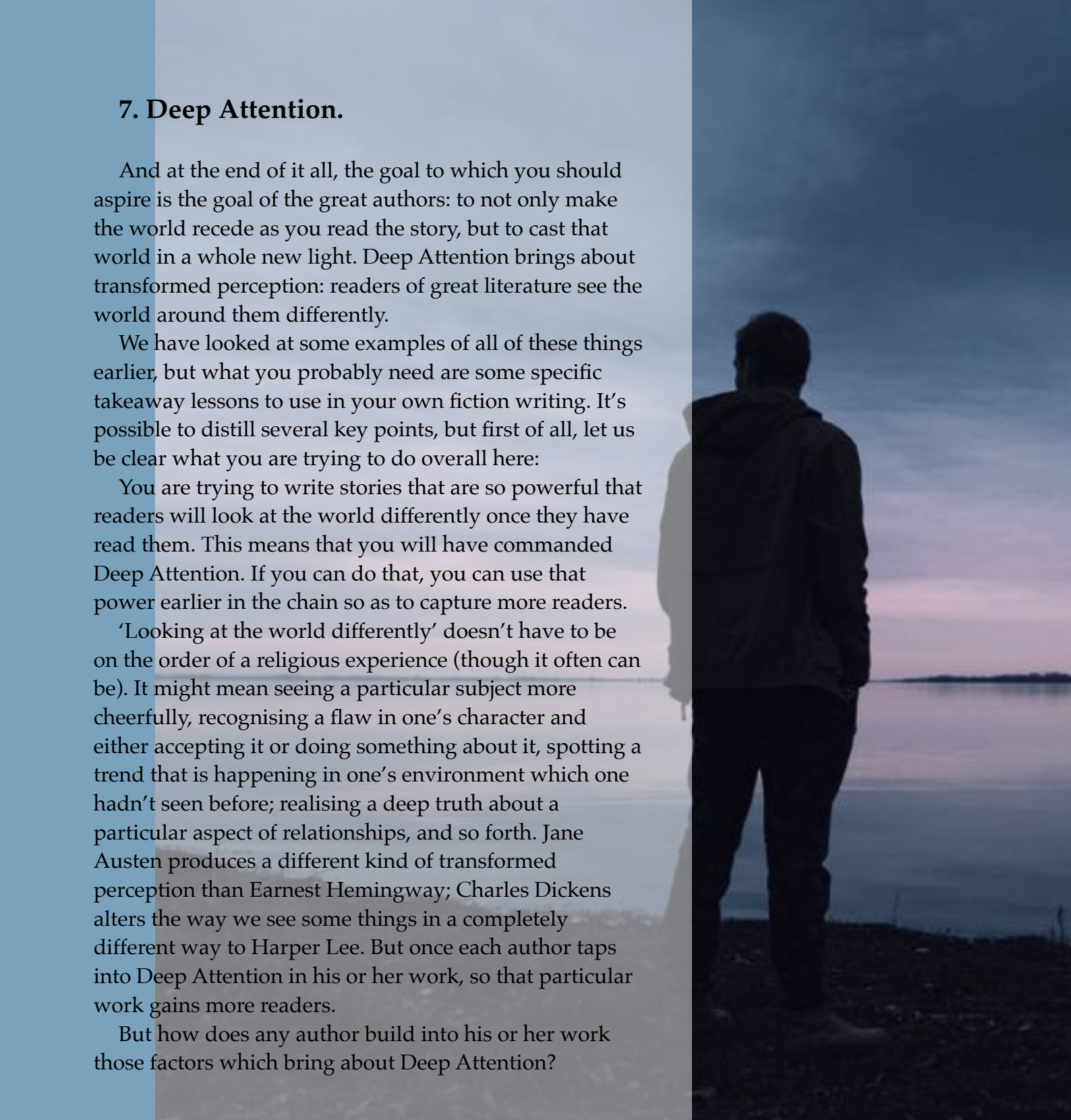
And at the end of it all, the goal to which you should aspire is the goal of the great authors: to not only make the world recede as you read the story, but to cast that world in a whole new light. Deep Attention brings about transformed perception: readers of great literature see the world around them differently.

We have looked at some examples of all of these things earlier, but what you probably need are some specific takeaway lessons to use in your own fiction writing. It's possible to distill several key points, but first of all, let us be clear what you are trying to do overall here:

You are trying to write stories that are so powerful that readers will look at the world differently once they have read them. This means that you will have commanded Deep Attention. If you can do that, you can use that power earlier in the chain so as to capture more readers.

'Looking at the world differently' doesn't have to be on the order of a religious experience (though it often can be). It might mean seeing a particular subject more cheerfully, recognising a flaw in one's character and either accepting it or doing something about it, spotting a trend that is happening in one's environment which one hadn't seen before; realising a deep truth about a particular aspect of relationships, and so forth. Jane Austen produces a different kind of transformed perception than Ernest Hemingway; Charles Dickens alters the way we see some things in a completely different way to Harper Lee. But once each author taps into Deep Attention in his or her work, so that particular work gains more readers.

But how does any author build into his or her work those factors which bring about Deep Attention?

A person is standing on a dark, pebbly beach, looking out at the ocean. The sky is a mix of blue and purple, suggesting sunset or sunrise. The person is seen from behind, wearing a dark jacket and pants. The water is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky.

“You are trying to write stories that are so powerful that readers will look at the world differently once they have read them.”

Here are some tips:

1. Have a Big Theme.

If you're planning to have a big effect, you'll need to have a big theme. If you're writing a romance novel, don't just write about Jill and George and their foibles — write about Love and Romance and Relationships as grand topics within your story about Jill and George.

Jane Austen's classic *Pride and Prejudice* opens with a sweeping, if humorously ironic, statement about life — 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.' Harper Lee's classic *To Kill a Mockingbird* extrapolates upon its title to communicate a universal message about innocence:

Atticus said to Jem one day, 'I'd rather you shot at tin cans in the backyard, but I know you'll go after birds. Shoot all the blue jays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.' That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it. 'Your father's right,' she said. 'Mockingbirds don't do one thing except make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corn cribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.'

Both books are 'classics' for a reason.

No great book is about little things. It might seem to be — but that seeming hides the fact that master authors are skilled in making the small stand in for the large.



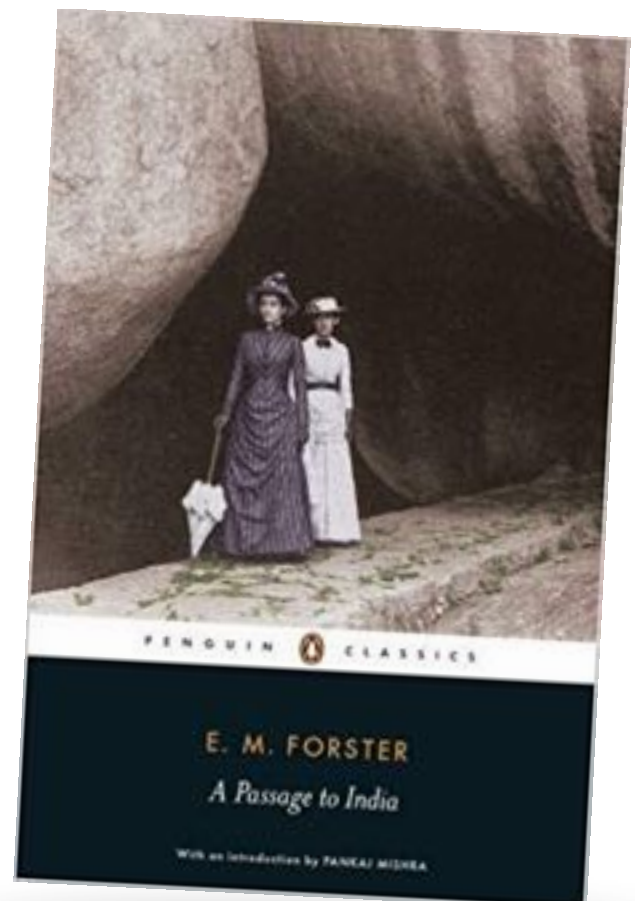
2. State that Big Theme in Various Ways Throughout the Work.

Virginia Woolf can include meaningful statements through characters — ‘Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind’ — but can also have them say humorous, though resonant, things: ‘One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.’

You can turn whole chapters into non-fiction treatises about life and God, as Tolstoy did in *War and Peace*, or you can comment on things as the narrative develops in such a way as to embed your message with readers. E. M. Forster has his character Professor Godbole, in *A Passage to India*, go through a mystical experience:

It was [Godbole's] duty, as it was his desire, to place himself in the position of the God and to love her, and to place himself in her position and to say to the God, 'Come, come, come, come, come.'

*Weaving a grand theme into a work shouldn't be an afterthought: it should be what you are doing as a writer, if you want to create **Deep Attention**.*



3. Have Your Plot Parallel Your Theme.

It's probably not going to work to write a story and then to try to insert the above 'meaningful statements' into it. The whole thing will turn out looking somewhat contrived. But if your overall plot actually mirrors what you are trying to say, the reader will accept your embedded bits of philosophy on unconscious or semi-conscious levels.

In the case of Forster's *A Passage to India*, for example, the author conveys, using the metaphor of the British in India, something of the mysterious nature of the universe. The characters end up perishing or fading or losing their grip or withdrawing from the emptiness at the heart of the world, as it is symbolised in the novel by the Caves at Marabar. But Forster's Godbole, a Hindu, introduced to us earlier, appears in the latter part of the novel to act as a bridge for the reader, and his experiences are an attempt to convey an embracing of the meaninglessness portrayed throughout the book.

The plot, in other words, grows out of the theme, not the other way round.

*“The plot, in other words,
grows out of the theme, not
the other way round.”*

4. Use Language Effectively.

Great books are sprinkled with powerful statements which sum up their themes, either made by characters or asserted by an omniscient author who has gained our confidence. Master authors use language poetically to convey a great deal in a few words.

Here are some examples:

'I know not all that may be coming, but be it what it will, I'll go to it laughing.' —*Moby Dick*, Herman Melville, 1851

'Sometimes we get sad about things and we don't like to tell other people that we are sad about them. We like to keep it a secret. Or sometimes, we are sad but we really don't know why we are sad, so we say we aren't sad but we really are.'

—*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Mark Haddon, 2003

'None of those other things makes a difference. Love is the strongest thing in the world, you know. Nothing can touch it. Nothing comes close. If we love each other we're safe from it all. Love is the biggest thing there is.'

— *Snow Falling on Cedars*, David Guterson, 1994

'Why can't people have what they want? The things were all there to content everybody; yet everybody has the wrong thing.'

— *The Good Soldier*, Ford Madox Ford, 1915



'It doesn't matter who you are or what you look like, so long as somebody loves you.'

— *The Witches*, Roald Dahl, 1983

'Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change.'

— *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, 1818

'We need never be ashamed of our tears.'

— *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens, 1890

'No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.'

— *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1850

'History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.'

— *Ulysses*, James Joyce, 1922

'Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat.'

— *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison, 1952



As you can see, economic use of powerful words to describe universal concepts is something that, if you want to bring about Deep Attention in readers, you will have to master.

You might not want to achieve Deep Attention. Perhaps you are content to sometimes create the Focused Attention that means that readers are really enjoying your story. But if you want readers to emerge transformed after reading your work, and then have the book grow accordingly into a classic, try to work with the above points until your fiction resonates with meaning and has a ripple effect on readers' lives.

We have travelled far on this journey through the Seven Levels of Attention, all the way from the void of **Zero Attention** in which most of us live, through the hard-to-monitor **Momentary Attention** of passers-by, to the **Intermittent Attention** of those whom we have managed to attract a little, then on up to **Captured or Owned Attention** when we have convinced them to buy our book, which leads to **Emerging Attention** as they read it and **Focused Attention** as they are gripped by it, all the way to the Deep Attention which can occur when a piece of fiction changes a reader's perceptions.

Part of the problem of writers trying to get to readers — or of anyone, trying to get anyone to do anything — is that they lack the awareness of all of these levels, or, if they have spotted them, they lack the patience to proceed through each using the methods which work on each level. **It simply doesn't work to expect that you will grab someone's attention at Zero level and suddenly plunge them into the seventh level, changing their lives in an instant.** Such things sometimes occur in Life, but they are exceedingly rare. By far the majority of progress — almost all of it, in fact — is made when, by accident or by design, a reader or a customer or a person is walked up through each of these levels using the tools available, as we have been examining in this book.



But every time you spend time on the internet you can see for yourself the attempts made to 'short-circuit' the above sequence. What we call 'spam' and much else that exists on the communication lines which now buzz in great volume around the planet is an effort to capture your attention immediately and in quantity, so that you will either buy something or support something (usually financially). You

leads you to position all this wrongly. In that analogy, the hunters simply shower the area with arrows in the hope that they will target something. It would be an immense expenditure of energy and incredibly wasteful, but in effect, this is what we see all around us in the world of spam.

A better analogy is that of agriculture. In primitive times, farmers spread rough seed



can imagine right now, as you read this, the billions of signals of one kind or another which are shooting through cyberspace, like a shower of arrows, all with the intention of stabbing enough attention from the masses out there to get some kind of financial or quantitative reward.

I came up with the analogy of a group of hunters seeking food in a vast wilderness, but I'm trying to steer clear of such imagery as it paints the false picture that you, the writer, are the predator and the reader is the 'prey', which

onto rough soil, knowing that a large percentage of that seed would fail and only a tiny number of seeds, relative to the whole, would bear fruit. This is the analogy often used in primitive marketing: the advice is to simply continue to bombard the region with more and more seeds until some take root and yield something. Because it eventually worked for primitive farmers, marketers are encouraged to apply it again and again in trying to sell goods — in our case, books.

Then, thinking that they are making an advance — and paralleling what indeed did happen in farming — marketers are encouraged to endlessly tweak and alter their seeds so that more of them will sprout. Hence the whole world out there of Search Engine Optimisation, keywords, and the like. And of course this all has some workability, just as seed development and soil studies worked in agriculture. Yields can improve with careful management of this kind.

But the real truths about all of this open up when we see everything in terms of the seven levels described above. Instead of throwing seeds out into the void and hoping that some take root, or even modifying what one throws out ceaselessly in the hope of finding the right soil, we would do better to think differently.

If you want something to grow, go where similar things are already growing and note down the successful actions being used there.

In other words, pay less heed to the vast wilderness of Zero and Momentary Attention and instead **concentrate on the much smaller and more manageable zones of Intermittent Attention.**

For writers, this translates like this: already, in sizeable numbers, **there exist out there groups of people who would very much like to read your kind of work.** But to attract them closer, and to capture more of their attention, you need to **a) find out where they already are and b) know your own work so thoroughly, so intimately and on so many levels that you can send out exactly the right signals to those potential readers using precise tools.**

It sounds simple, and it is. But there are a couple of caveats: in learning more about your own work, you will need to go right to its heart in ways that right now you might

not be able to imagine. **Only by having a close-to-complete understanding of what makes your own writing work for readers will you be able to transmit that in a focused way to those people who are your potential readers.**



*“If you want something to grow, go where **similar things are already growing** and note down the successful actions being used there.”*

That journey might sound daunting, but it's actually probably going to be quite breathtaking and perhaps even mystical — it's the quest to the core of your own work which will yield the treasure of greater insight into what you are doing. You will return refreshed, empowered, delighted and energised. And this is necessary, because you need to shine with a strong light to attract others to your work.

Here's the thing: *no one owes you their attention.*

Just because you have slaved to write a book and poured out your life into its pages does not mean that anyone anywhere will pick it up and read it.

Readers pick up and read books because they detect powerful signals emanating from within them. This isn't magical or psychic (though it almost is) — it's a case of your book being placed in the right position, with the right cover and the right blurb, so that someone who has already given you Intermittent Attention will draw closer, choose to grab your book, and be urged — not by chance or the laws of numbers but by direct forces which you can control — into opening its pages.

Those powerful signals then have to continue to be detected in the story itself, all the way through to the end if you want readers' Deep Attention. But at the very least, **the signals need to be maintained until you have captured enough of their attention for the reader to buy your book.**

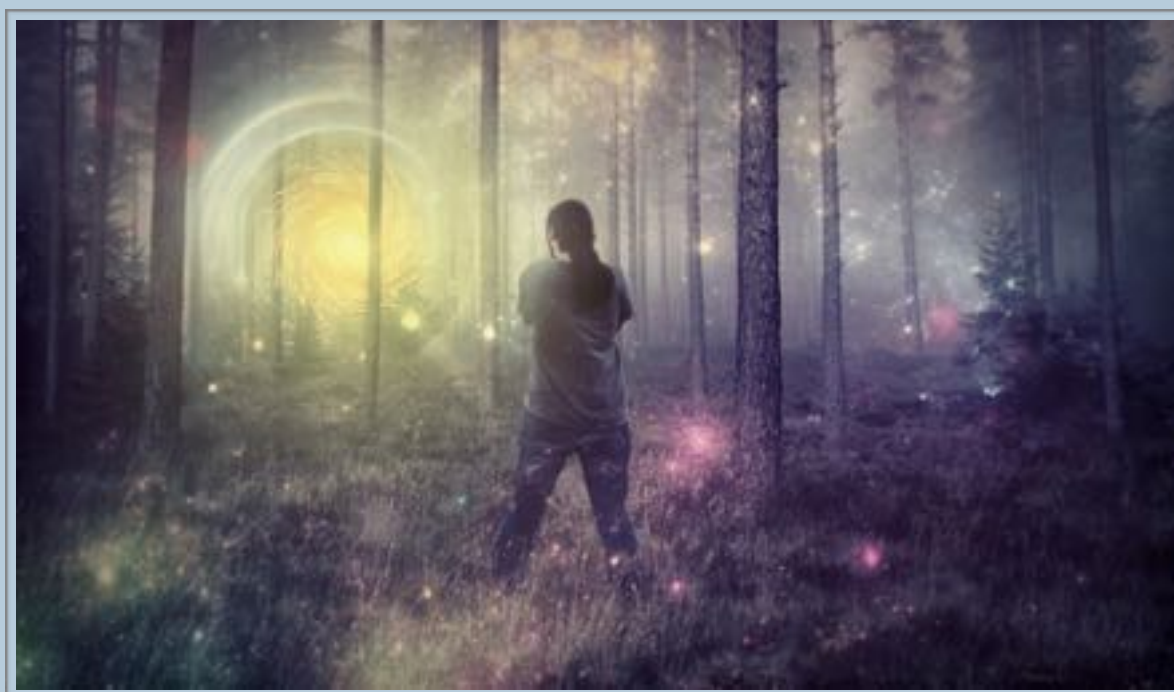
Having an intimate understanding of your own work will also enable you to track down where your potential readers already 'hang out', whether that's a set of Facebook groups or a certain type of shop, or another social media site, or as readers of a particular magazine, or whatever.

If you don't have this intimate knowledge of your own work, you are faced with the bleaker prospect of having to spam the faceless billions in the hope of finding your readers.

To continue the earlier analogy, you are left with the exhausting and wasteful option of showering the wilderness entirely with arrows, instead of the much healthier and easier option of having an enclosure in which your 'prey' is happily contained, feasting on your work and encouraging others to come and feast too.

How do I know that this works?

Because you are reading this.



The Mastery of Attention

Astute readers of the series may note that the 'trick' — if it can be called a 'trick' — of mastering attention has, in the end, not much to do with going out there into the world seeking it.

Billions of units of currency, millions of hours of time, hundreds of thousands of people are engaged in the practice of attention-seeking as you read this. By 'attention-seeking' I mean literally that they are using all their energies and the latest technologies of the internet to scour the landscape, near and far, in search of this strange thing called 'attention'. Most of them are hoping that they can latch onto it with such force that it will convert to money. They want, like the ancient alchemists, to be able to transmute the lead of ignorance into the gold of cash. Like those alchemists, though, they keep missing the point.

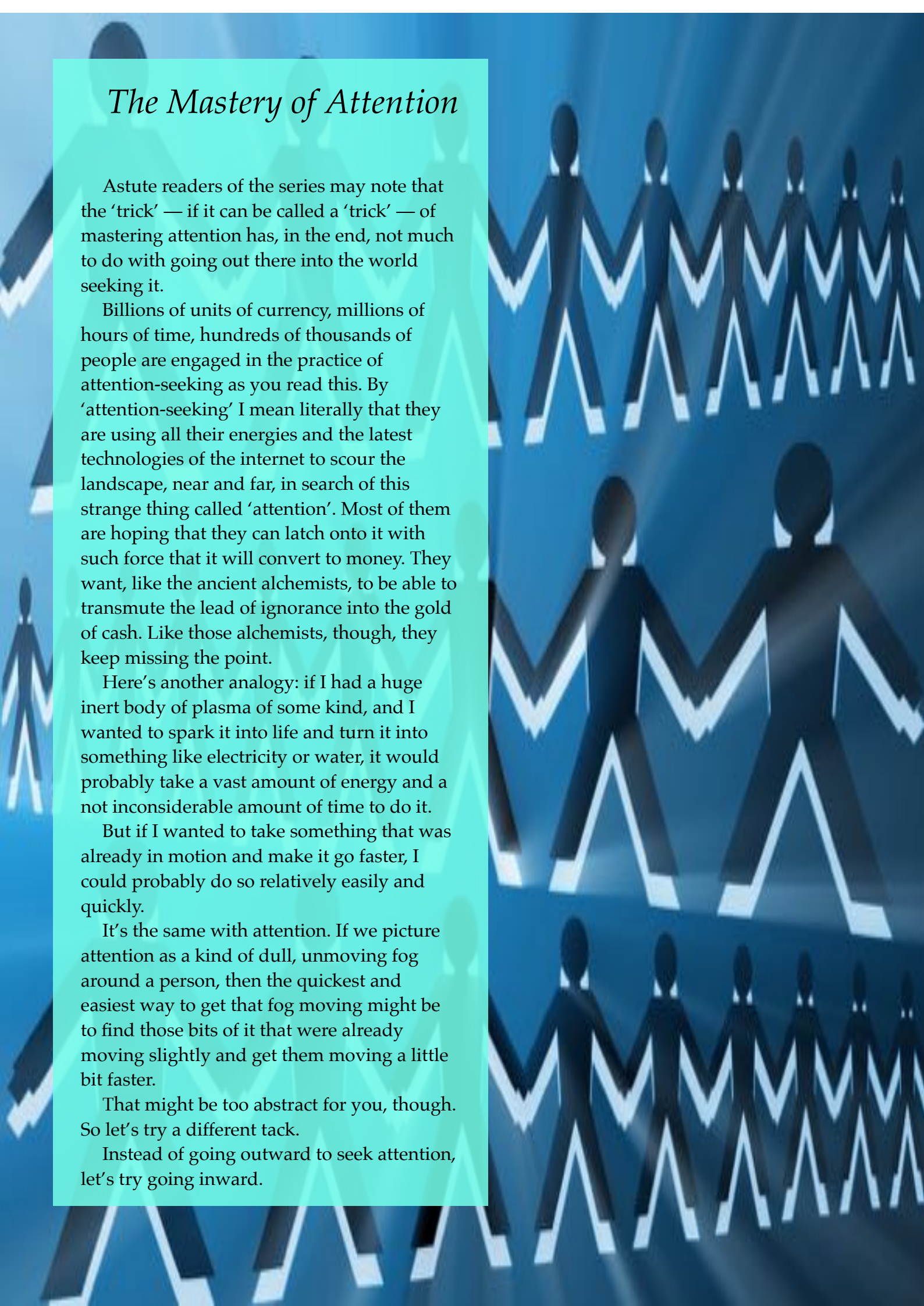
Here's another analogy: if I had a huge inert body of plasma of some kind, and I wanted to spark it into life and turn it into something like electricity or water, it would probably take a vast amount of energy and a not inconsiderable amount of time to do it.

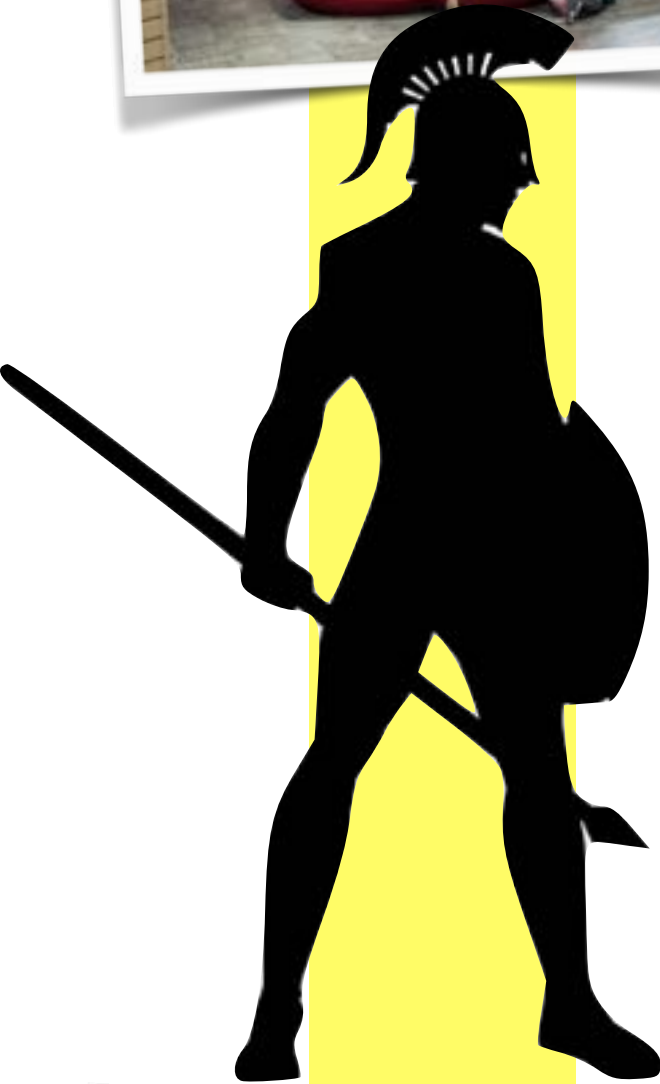
But if I wanted to take something that was already in motion and make it go faster, I could probably do so relatively easily and quickly.

It's the same with attention. If we picture attention as a kind of dull, unmoving fog around a person, then the quickest and easiest way to get that fog moving might be to find those bits of it that were already moving slightly and get them moving a little bit faster.

That might be too abstract for you, though. So let's try a different tack.

Instead of going outward to seek attention, let's try going inward.





Take a piece of work that you have written at some point, new or old. What is it about that piece which attracts readers? The first thing to clarify is probably 'Which readers?' A short science fiction story is not particularly going to be of any interest to a reader seeking a Western family saga. So narrow down in your own mind the kind of reader you are picturing picking up and reading your book.

Once you have some idea of that, look again at the work. Look particularly at the cover (if it's got one) or the blurb (if you've written one), or, in the absence of those, read the opening page. **What does that page contain which might 'hook' the reader's attention?**

Get more specific. Look at your protagonist. **What is it about him or her which is drawing attention inwards from the reader?** What are you doing with your protagonist to make sure that the reader sympathises with him or her?

What happens in the first few pages to make sure that the reader is completely glued to your piece?

Now read on a bit. **What is this piece 'about'?** I don't mean that it's about the robot invasion of Earth in the year 2025, or the story of the Reeve family in Oklahoma in the 1890s — I mean what is its **theme**? By 'theme' I mean an idea that recurs in or pervades a work of art or literature, from Latin *thema*, from Greek, literally 'proposition'; related to *tithenai* 'to set or place'. It might be about 'growing up', or 'the evils of pride', or 'the nobility of courage' or 'the power of compassion', or 'prejudice' or any number of things. If it's not really about anything, then it is probably doomed right there. **The theme is an expression of the well of Deep Attention that lies at the core of a work.**

What if it is a light-hearted piece about, say, a group of university students and their mis-matched relationships? What if you can't see what the 'theme' would be in a piece like that? Well, to be successful, a piece about a group of university students and their mis-matched relationships would need to touch on universal truths about relationships, youth, and perhaps going to university. They don't have to be 'universal truths' as accepted by anyone else, but they have to be true for you (which is why 'writing from the heart' is both advocated and often successful — when you pour yourself onto the page to some degree, some truths sometimes rub off).

Right. So you have some notion of your piece's theme. **How is that theme being communicated?** Look at **character**, at **dialogue**, at **images** being used (especially repeated images and motifs); look at **specific statements** in the work, look at the **setting**, look at the use of **language and individual words**.

If you were writing a piece of music, you wouldn't want a note out of place — you wouldn't want something to strike a listener as 'false' or out of key. Stories are the same: **if your theme is your key, your piece should reverberate with that key throughout, using character, dialogue, images, statements, settings, language, words.**

Going over all this may or may not be a revelatory experience for you. But if you do all of this successfully, you will find that you have lit a beacon at the heart of your work. A curious thing will then happen. Over time, if you place this beacon in a position from where it can be seen by a few — especially if those few are already giving you Intermittent Attention — its light will draw in more and more attention.

You won't have to seek attention: it will come to you.



*"You won't have
to seek
attention: it
will come to
you."*

In effect, what you will have done is used one of the greatest secrets that there is. **You will have discovered for yourself that the most powerful level of attention is the seventh level.**

By journeying into your work to the level of Deep Attention yourself, you will have cast your own world in a whole new light. This doesn't have to be on the order of a religious experience, as mentioned before: it might just mean seeing underneath the superficial layer of something, recognising a flaw in something, spotting a trend, realising a deep truth, and so forth. **Once an author taps into Deep Attention in his or her work, that particular work gains more readers.**

Why? Well, mechanically what happens is that the author takes this newly ignited or refreshed light and allows it to spill through everything about the piece — the cover images, the blurb, the marketing posters, the positions in which the book is placed, and so on. All those channels then light up as if they were wires and the switch had just been turned on. Potential readers who had been walking by giving the piece Momentary Attention, as well as those who were standing nearby and giving it Intermittent Attention, are now drawn even closer.

More readers; more buyers; more people giving the piece their Focused Attention and being transformed by it in some way, small or large.

To reach out, go within.

To go down the Seven Levels of Attention, go up.

To grab the hearts of readers, grab your own.

The Seven Levels of Attention, as you may have realised, can be applied to more than selling books. Please contact me if you'd like to know more.



*“To reach
out, reach
within.”*

Meaning and Attention

In the course of this book, we have looked at Attention as a kind of commodity, and examined ways in which it can be directed. We have also come to see that Attention and Meaning are directly related and hopefully realised that Meaning of one kind or another is the thing that we are all seeking.

I broke down Meaning into four distinct types: sequential meaning, vertical meaning, contextual meaning and embrative meaning. These are just names, though. To understand what they mean, it's important that we don't lose track of what Meaning itself means. The word comes from Old English *mænan*, and is related to Dutch *meenen* and German *meinen*, from an Indo-European root shared by the word 'mind'. What it means in practise is that

when we look for meaning, we look for **connection**, a **pattern** of some kind, something which has **significance**.

Thus, using the sample of sequential meaning, what pulls our attention forward through a piece of text is a **suggested pattern**. A master author uses the many suggested patterns possible in a piece of writing to draw the reader on. Take for example this quote from Edgar Allan Poe:

It is by no means an irrational fancy that, in a future existence, we shall look upon what we think our present existence, as a dream.

The basic pattern here, as in most cases of sequential meaning, is the sentence which the reader expects to be structured and to finish properly — but Poe strings us along to the end of the sentence before the final word completes the pattern.

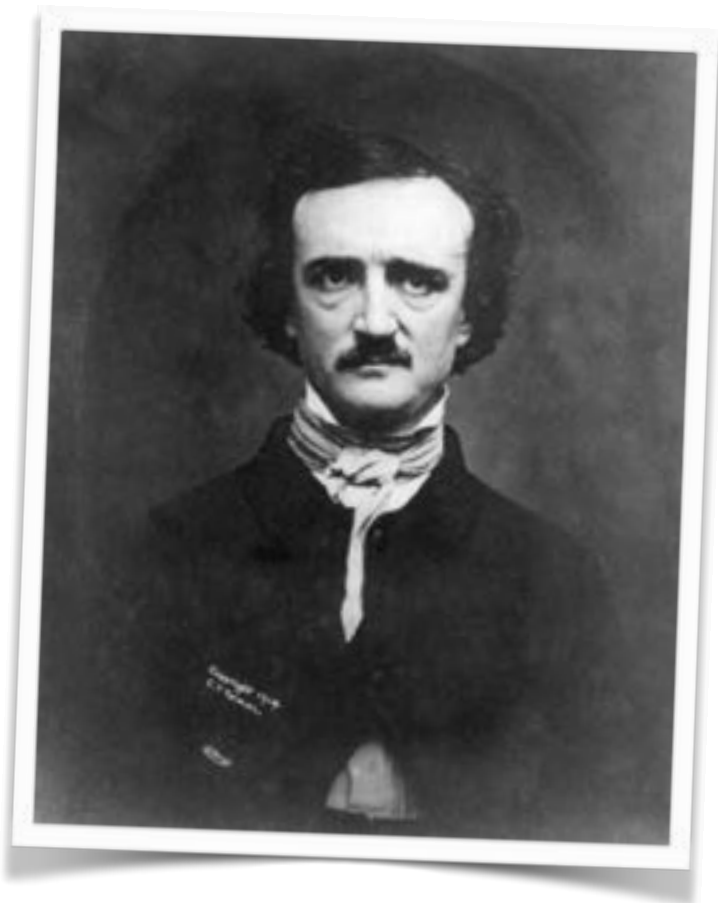
SEQUENTIAL MEANING



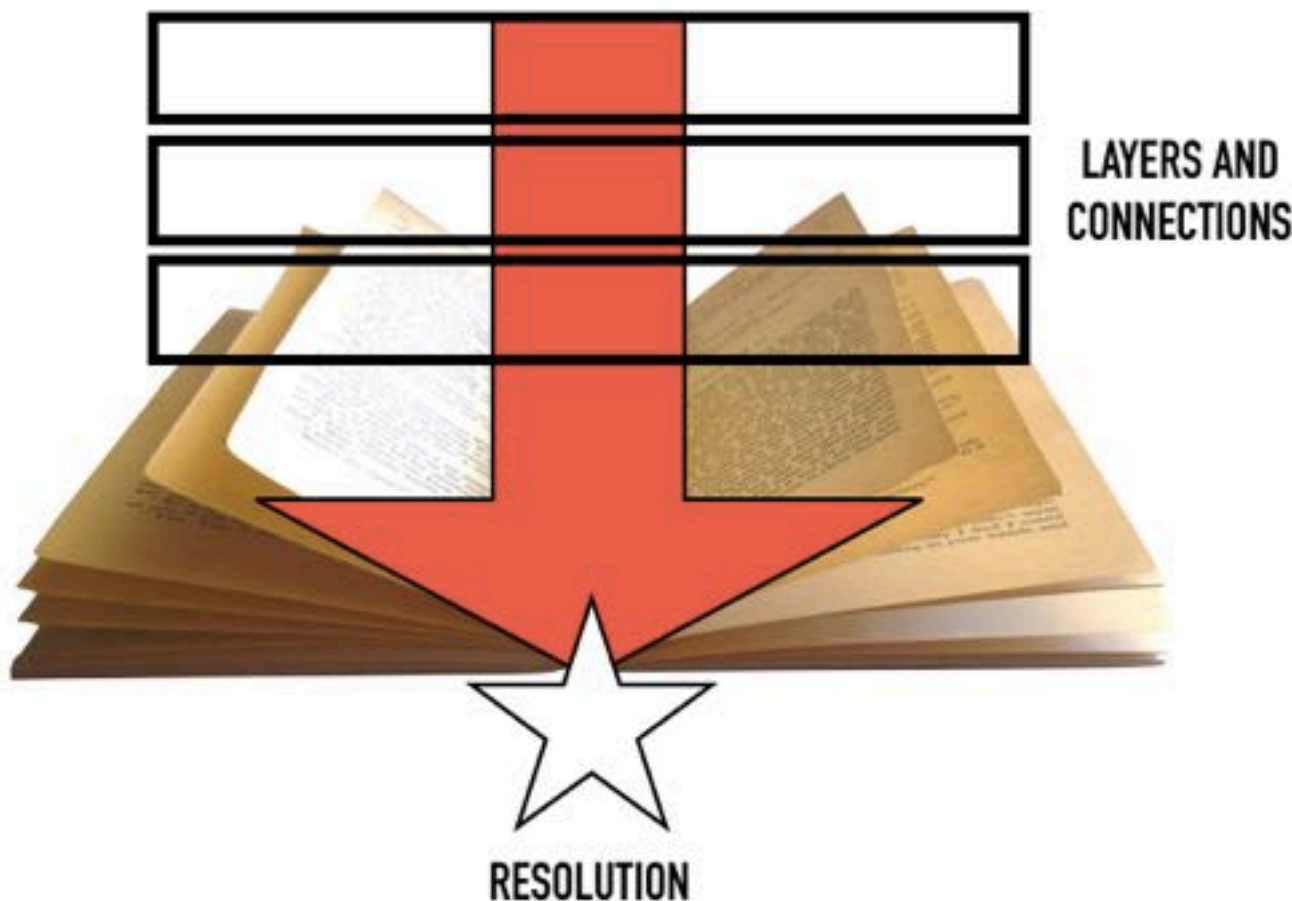
Vertical meaning draws readers into a text by suggesting patterns beneath the surface. Using Poe as an example again, take this quote:

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there, wondering, fearing, doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.

Darkness is commonly used to suggest vertical meaning — in other words, to invite the reader deeper into the text in order to fill in the 'blank' which darkness implicitly presents. Poe here magnifies that vacuum with the words 'wondering, fearing, doubting' and then hinting at a completed pattern designed to make the reader gasp a little.



VERTICAL MEANING



Contextual meaning, arguably, is the most important of the four types because it takes what is in the text and hurls it outward into the world of the reader. Great authors make use of this all the time, whether they are fully aware of it or not — if they did not do so, they would not be considered great authors because their works would be considered largely irrelevant or trivial. That's because contextual meaning suggests that what an author is saying on the page has something to do with the reader and his or her own life.

**Trivial fiction is all about the story;
great fiction is all about the reader.**

Using a simple example from Poe again, contextual meaning can either explicitly or implicitly involve the reader's own world:

Of puns it has been said that those who most dislike them are those who are least able to utter them.

The immediate reaction upon reading that line is for the reader to reflect upon whether he or she is able to utter puns. In other words, 'Does the quote involve me?' The reader may dislike puns, in which case

the meaning of the piece is weighed against the reader's own experience; the reader may like puns, and the same weighing takes place. Contextual meaning thus involves the reader.

This can be seen more subtly when an image or suggested pattern is used in a story which subliminally involves the reader. In this famous line from *A Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens, there is an indirect appeal to the reader:

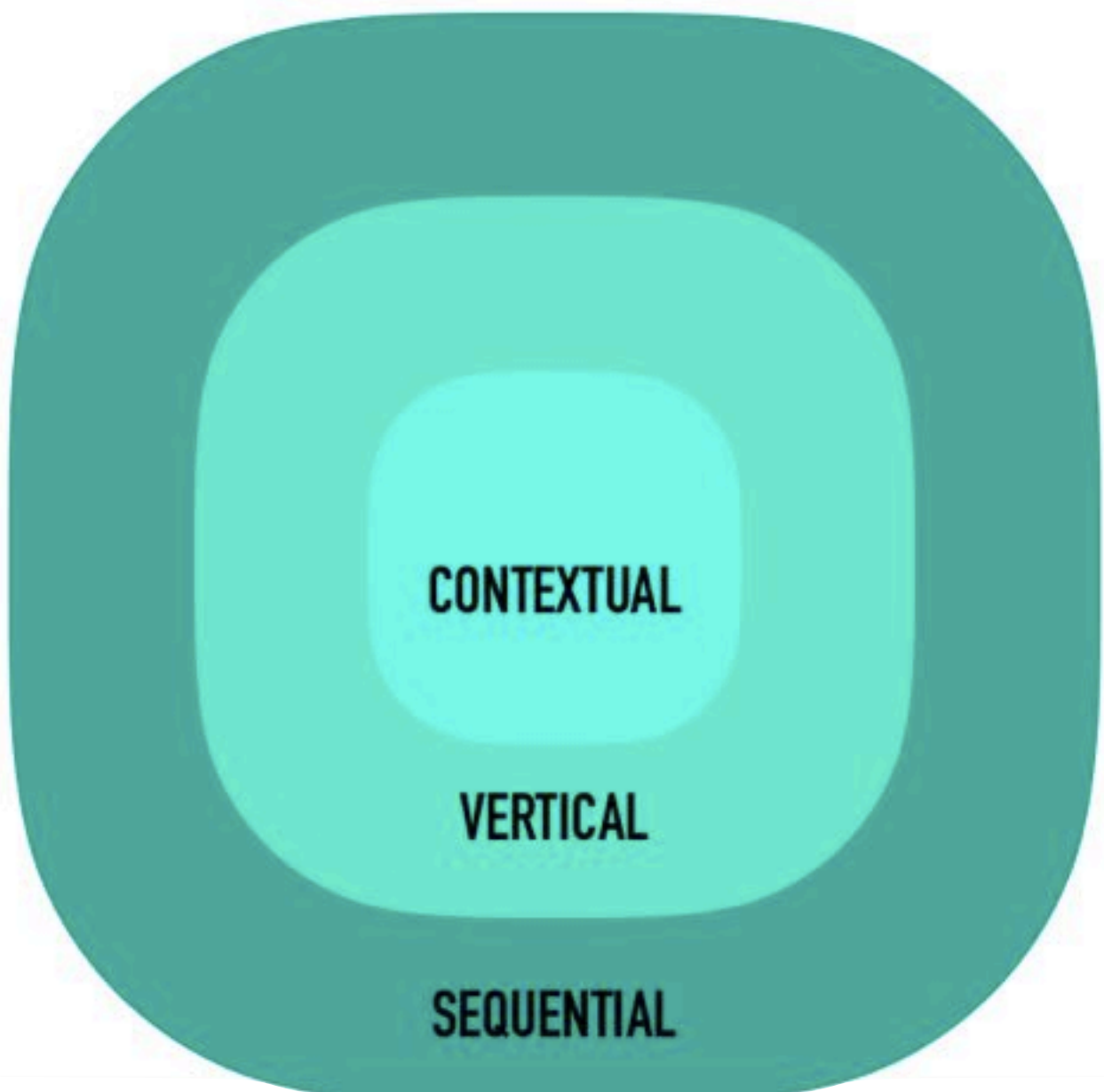
It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest I go to than I have ever known.

Somewhere in the background of the reader's thinking as he or she reads this line is a quiet calculation of the worth of the reader's own actions in life and their triviality (probably) in comparison to the sacrifice being made by Carton, who is here awaiting his death by guillotine. For the sake of love, Carton has intentionally swapped places with someone else and in this quote is pondering both his own self-sacrifice and the fate of France. Contextual meaning spills outward to the world of the reader in some way.



All of these types of meaning interact and add up to the final kind, embrative meaning, which produces **Deep Attention**. But, as I have said, they are all just names for things which are occurring in most people's minds when they read fiction: they are being **drawn along** by suggested patterns and purposefully placed omissions and gaps in those patterns; they are being **drawn in** by the same use of patterns; and they are **perceiving relevance** to themselves through the use of the incomplete and completed patterns.

EMBRATIVE MEANING



Look at this example from Jane Austen's *Emma* and see if you can spot how your attention is being directed in many ways by it:

He had never been an unhappy man; his own temper had secured him from that even in his first marriage; but his second must show him how delightful a well-judging and truly amiable woman could be, and must give him the pleasantest proof of its being a great deal better to choose than to be chosen, to excite gratitude than to feel it.

We are pulled forward by our curiosity as to why he had never been an unhappy man; we are drawn inward by the image of a 'well-judging and truly amiable woman';

we are involved in the passage through its assertion of a general truth, that it is 'a great deal better to choose than to be chosen, to excite gratitude than to feel it'. We reflect: 'Is it?' And we probably agree: 'Yes, it is'. Austen has guided our attention and then captured it.

The conclusion? The text embraces us, the meaning consolidates, we are won over.

Try examining a piece of your own fiction.

- How are you drawing readers forward?
- How are you pulling them inwards?
- How are you involving them?
- Is it all adding up to holding their attention overall?

How are you drawing readers forward?

How are you drawing them inward?

How are you involving them?

Is this all adding up to holding their attention overall?



Four elements, then, compose an effective piece of fiction, as we can see from the accompanying diagrams. Obviously, these elements overlap and interact — but in the hands of master authors, this all happens seamlessly, below (or above) our conscious awareness.

TYPES OF MEANING

Sequential

MOMENTUM

How are you drawing readers forward?

Vertical

MYSTERY

How are you drawing them inward?

Contextual

MORALITY

How are you involving them?

Embrasive

MEANING

Is this all adding up to holding their attention overall?



For much more about all of this — along with dozens of examples from some of the greatest literature ever made, as well as modern films, television series and more, the book *How Stories Really Work* is available from the website. If you have enjoyed this book, you will almost certainly be thrilled by it.

I give consultancies on everything in this book — if you're interested just email me:

grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

Also, see below for details of my course which takes all of this into the next stage.

Happy writing!



'I am the author of the best-selling book ***How Stories Really Work: Exploring the Physics of Fiction.***

'Never rated less than five stars in over three years, this unique book gives you the reasons WHY all the other writing advice works (when it does) and tells you the secrets used by master authors throughout history.'

-Grant P. Hudson

Learn:

- what a story **really** is
- what it is **actually doing** to and for you and other readers
- the **magnetic power** that attracts readers even before the introduction of any character
- what the thing called a 'character' **actually** is, and how to rapidly build a convincing one
- the things called 'plots', what they are and how they are actually made
- what 'protagonists' and 'antagonists' **really** are, and what the connection between them consists of

- the **four categories of the powerful force** that compels readers to turn pages
- the 'nuclear reactor' that drives all successful stories through to their conclusion
- how the four basic genres -Epic, Tragedy, Irony and Comedy- are composed and how they work to create different effects

'I'm reading through "How Stories Really Work." I've studied writing books for years but I've never seen anything like this! This book is REVOLUTIONARY. Everything is made so simple and precise that other methods of writing seem clumsy by comparison. It's not just a way of writing, but a way of seeing.'

-A. P. (Author)

More reviews for *How Stories Really Work: Exploring the Physics of Fiction*

By Julie C. Eger

27-Jan-2019

Story ideas come into my mind, usually as a first line that grabs my interest. I jot the idea in a notebook, along with a short note of where the idea came from or where I think it will lead. I have a dozen notebooks filled with story ideas. But my stories had no momentum, no end. It was just pretty prose. Norbert Blei, one of my mentor's, (God rest his soul) told me once, "You're good out of the gate but your cake falls flat 3/4 of the way around the track." Norb purposefully mixed those metaphors to identify where I was struggling. I knew he was right but I didn't know how to fix it. I kept searching for some kind of recipe that would add the right ingredient to get to a successful story-ending. That was back in 2012. In 2018 (maybe my lucky year?) I was introduced to Grant Hudson's book, *How Stories Really Work - Exploring the Physics of Fiction*. And just like that, everything changed. I felt like I was in Home Economics class where the teacher had us gather all the ingredients before we started making the cake. "One missing ingredient will ruin your recipe." I realized I'd only been gathering 'beginnings' to stories without giving much thought to the endings. Grant's book showed me how to think to get to the kind of endings I had been searching for. Ones that made the reader ponder. I admit I'm a slow learner but I have been able to use the strategies in Grant's book to find the endings that feel right in my stories. For me, reading *How Stories Really Work* really was a happy ending.

By Holly Peterson

22-May-2018

How Stories Really Work is a fascinating read and so helpful. You get to see, sort of Matrix style, what is really

going on that makes good stories draw you in, and how to create your own stories with power to hold reader attention and give them something wonderful. I definitely recommend it!

By Mia Warren-Brown

21-Mar-2018

Loved the book. Have used the principles in many a story. It all makes so much sense. If you want help in drawing readers in - this is the book to get

By Charles Freedom Long

December 17, 2018

5.0 out of 5 stars

One of only two books on writing I consider indispensable

This book, aimed for writers, will change the way you look at fiction. Hudson explores the idea of "vacuums" in fiction, what effect they have on the reader of a story, and how they are and can be created and used by great writers to create great literature.

He lays bare the vacuums—the needs underneath the attraction of characters and plots to a reader and explains—with examples from great writing—how "vacuums attract emotional commitment" from the reader, and how lack thereof produces dull, wearying, "author centered," ineffective writing, as opposed to "reader-centered" writing.

The book is brilliant, mechanical in a similar way to the way Jack Bickham deals with the interplay of scene and structure in "Scene and Structure." Both books have won a place on my shelf as profoundly important—indeed, indispensable writing aids. I cannot recommend them more highly.

By Dawn Taylor
February 21, 2018
5.0 out of 5 stars

Every Author Should Own This Book

This is a book every author should own. Grant P. Hudson does an outstanding job explaining story structure and the mechanics involved in creating a story or novel that readers will love. His examples are explained in an engaging manner so this book doesn't seem like reading a text book. I have already implemented many of his ideas in building a novel. This book contains great advice and I highly recommend it to all authors.

By Christina Steele
February 4, 2019
5.0 out of 5 stars

A True Breakthrough

I've read this book twice. Once, cursory in curiosity about a person who has beta read my work, published my work and is a consistent favored friend of mine on Facebook. It was a unique read. But this second time I read the book for me. As I studied the power of vacuums in the making of great literature and examined my own methodology and beliefs about the power of the written word I became convinced that Grant Hudson has created a new truth in literature and creative writing. The survey was particularly enlightening to my personal attributes and flaws in writing. It also shows the care and dedication Mr. Hudson has to the field he has studied for forty years and to the writers who has and will help on their journeys. This work of nonfiction helped me immensely. I see the fiction writing world with the clarity of a microscope and a telescope through the physics Grant Hudson has applied to the art of storytelling. I am changed for the better as a writer and I particularly love the science application. I highly recommend *How Stories Really Work*. Destined to be a classic.

CL Steele, Author & Poet

By Eddie C. Hartshorn
June 6, 2018
5.0 out of 5 stars

Do You Have a Story to Tell? This Book Will Show You How!

I have been writing off and on since the fifth grade. That was 54 years ago. I thought I knew what I was doing. After reading this book, I understand more about the what, why, when, who for, and the structure of doing each. Mr. Hudson has enlightened a great deal in this book. He has taken classics and broken them down into easy to understand five important steps. He speaks of vacuums and their need while creating vacuums of his own. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to write or has been writing a lifetime. One is never too old to learn more!

By Dr. Trekker
March 31, 2018
5.0 out of 5 stars

Read this if you're a writer

After reading this book, I'll never look at stories the same way. This step-by-step how-to book is full of wisdom about how classic stories are structured. You will see how to apply these principles to your own stories and novels, converting them to page-turners.

By Christopher J. Steine
May 26, 2018
5.0 out of 5 stars

Great for the academic readers out there.

I received this book as a gift so I am not sure how Amazon will treat this review but I felt it was important to review Grant's book. I know some folks might think this review has something to do with a gift but that is not true as you can tell by the star ratings others have provided. I probably won't be adding much to what has already been said but, Grant's book is an in-depth look at creating and arranging your story. He is academic in his approach and uses metaphors that are easy to understand and implement.

If you don't have this book, you might think about getting it.

By Steve Carr
October 24, 2017
5.0 out of 5 stars

An invaluable tool to understanding how to write fiction

I have had nearly 100 short stories published and thought I knew about writing. This book taught me new ways to look at my own writing as well as other writing. Grant Hudson doesn't recycle old ways to look at the writing process, he invents new ways for a writer to examine almost every aspect of writing fiction, and provides a new vocabulary for how to do it. Very highly recommended for anyone who writes or wants to write fiction.

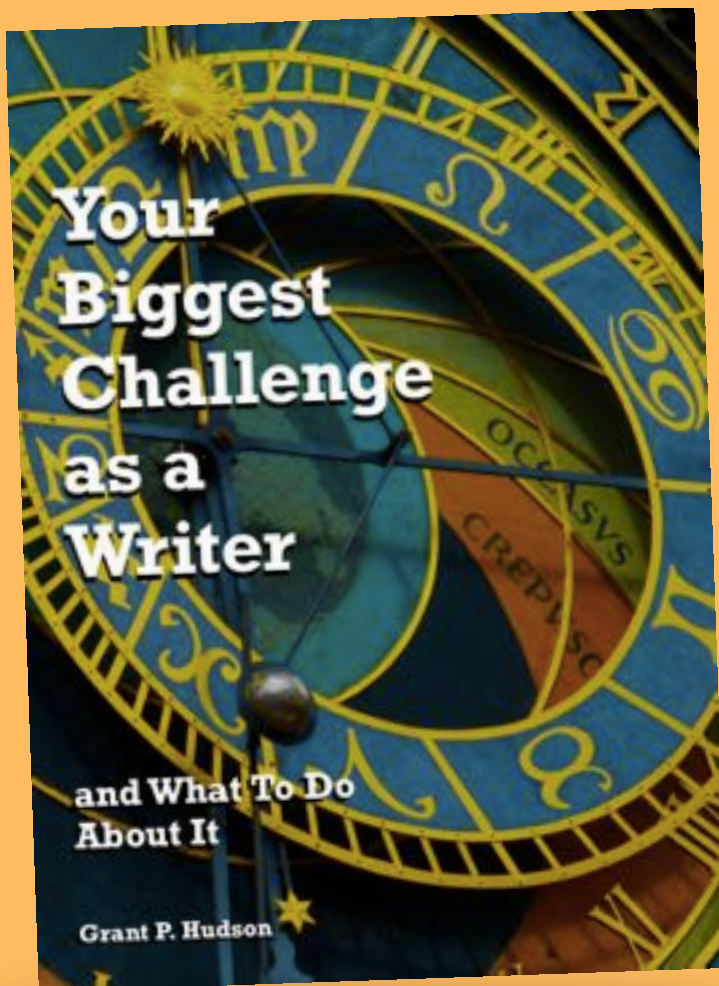
By Patt O'Neil
August 1, 2019
5.0 out of 5 stars

Mr. Hudson Takes Writing From an Art to a Science

If your story just doesn't seem to have a decent hook in the plot, or the characters seem flat, this book was written for you. Breaking down the common factors of all good stories, Grant Hudson, uses examples of modern and classic literature/films to show how good writing can be as much of a science as it is an art. There are times when it seems he is repeating himself, but he is demonstrating how his "formula" can be applied to every successful story, over and again. So, if you want to improve your writing skills, or just want to understand an author's message clearer, this is the book for you.



Available [here](#) in paperback and as a Kindle e-book



Haunted by your
twin enemies, Lack
of Time and
Procrastination...?

This 25,000 word
e-book shows you
the pathway to
freedom as a
writer...

...and it's **free**.

I recently did a large survey of writers, asking them what their biggest challenge was in relation to their writing.

A few answered that they were struggling with marketing, or with story quality or self doubt or even grammar. Each of these categories amounted to 5% or 10% of the total answers.

But by far the largest proportion of writers - over 60% - revealed that their main difficulty was related to two connected things:

Time and Procrastination.

These writers told me that they were frustrated because they either didn't have the time to write or, when they had it, found that it was swallowed up with

distractions and interruptions, most often self-generated.

This is big.

In fact, this is far more revealing than I think many of the authors who said it probably realise.

This free book blows apart these factors by giving you an understanding of what is going on, a grasp of why you procrastinate, an immediate programme to get more writing time AND a long-term programme to help you build your life around your writing.

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A close-up photograph of a fountain pen's nib writing on a piece of paper. The pen is dark, and the nib is silver with some gold-colored text. The paper has some faint, handwritten text visible in the background.

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