King recalls that "When, during the course of an interview for *The New Yorker*, I told the interviewer (Mark Singer) that I believed stories are found things, like fossils in the ground, he said that he didn't believe me. I replied that that was fine, as long as he believed that *I* believe it. And I do. Stories aren't souvenir tee-shirts or GameBoys. Stories are relics, part of an undiscovered pre-existing world. The writer's job is to use the tools in his or her toolbox to get as much of each one out of the ground intact as possible. Sometimes the fossil you uncover is small, a seashell. Sometimes it's enormous, a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* with all those gigantic ribs and grinning teeth. Either way, short story or thousand-page whopper of a novel, the techniques of excavation remain basically the same."[147]

When asked why he writes, King responds: "The answer to that is fairly simple—there was nothing else I was made to do. I was made to write stories and I love to write stories. That's why I do it. I really can't imagine doing anything else and I can't imagine not doing what I do."[148] He is also often asked why he writes horror and he answers with another question: "Why do you assume I have a choice?" He says writers write about their obsessions: "Louis L'Amour, the Western writer, and I might both stand at the edge of a small pond in Colorado, and we both might have an idea at exactly the same time. We might both feel the urge to sit down and try to work it out in words. His story might be about water rights in a dry season, my story would more likely be about some dreadful, hulking thing rising out of the still waters to carry off sheep...and horses...and finally people. Louis L'Amour's 'obsession' centers on the history of the American West; I tend more toward things that slither by starlight. He writes Westerns; I write fearsomes. We're both a little nuts."[149]

King often starts with a "what-if" scenario, such as what would happen if an alcoholic writer was stranded with his family in a haunted hotel (*The Shining*), or if one could see the outcome of future events (*The Dead Zone*), or if one could travel in time to alter the course of history (*11/22/63*).[150] He often places classic horror themes or scenarios in a modern context. He recalls that while writing *'Salem's Lot*, "I decided I wanted to try to use the book partially as a form of literary homage (as Peter Straub had done in *Ghost Story*, working in the tradition of such 'classical' ghost story writers as Henry James, M. R. James, and Nathaniel Hawthorne.) So my novel bears an intentional similarity to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and after a while it began to seem I was playing an interesting—to me, at least—game of literary racquet-ball: *'Salem's Lot* itself was the ball and *Dracula* was the wall I kept hitting it against, watching to see how and where it could bounce, so I could hit it again. As a matter of fact, it took some pretty interesting bounces, and I ascribe this mostly to the fact that, while my ball existed in the twentieth century, the wall was very much a product of the nineteenth."[151] Douglas E. Winter describes *Pet Sematary* as "a conscious retelling of W.W. Jacobs' "The Monkey's Paw."[152] Similarly, King's *Revival* is a modern riff on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.[153]

Joyce Carol Oates called King "both a storyteller and an inventor of startling images and metaphors, which linger long in the memory."[154] An example of King's imagery is seen in *The Body* when the narrator recalls a childhood clubhouse with a tin roof and rusty screen door: "No matter what time of day you looked out that screen door, it looked like sunset... When it rained, being inside the club was like being inside a Jamaican steel drum."[155] In his memoir *On Writing*, King writes "The use of simile and other figurative language is one of the chief delights of fiction—reading it and writing it, as well. When it's on target, a simile delights us in much the same way meeting an old friend in a crowd of strangers does. By comparing two seemingly unrelated objects—a restaurant bar and a cave, a mirror and a mirage—we are sometimes able to see an old thing in a new and vivid way. Even if the result is mere clarity instead of beauty, I think writer and reader are participating together in a kind of miracle. Maybe that's drawing it a little strong, but yeah—it's what I believe."[156]