

# The Magical Writer

## Session 3 — Working with Narrative Energy

Painters work with pigments and color. Sculptors work with stone and shape. Quilters work with cloth and pattern.

What is the “raw material” of writing?

Is it words? Should I read a lexicon to sharpen my skills? Or is it ideas? Maybe I should enroll in a philosophy program. And what about life experience at the School of Hard Knocks — I sure hope that counts for something!

All of these are important ways of calling forth and shaping our material. But what *is* that raw material?

When we write, we are working with energy.

Which by a happy coincidence is exactly what we do in ritual: calling forth and shaping flows of energy. As magical writers, we bring special skills to our art.

Anyone whose art unfolds in time — writers, musicians, gymnasts, protesters, ritualists — works with the flow of energy. We shape the rises and falls, the climaxes and resolutions, into a unique expression.

These flows can't be reduced to formulas, or we get bubblegum songs and treacly Hollywood snoozers. But we can study the flow of narrative energy in works we appreciate and apply the lessons to our own writing.

### Where Does It Come From?

One of my favorite artistic mistakes is trying to “source” this energy from within myself. After a few hours of writing (or speaking, singing, protesting, etc), I often feel depleted, lackluster, and uncreative. I am hardly being fed by my art!

Ritual work reminds me that much energy is available — some for the asking (via the elements, or certain deities and ancestors), while other energies require training, magical preparations, etc (as with other deities and ancestors, or with physically demanding practices).

Creative energy surrounds us — growing plants, vibrant children, fresh ideas, new songs and stories... Every new burst of energy is a reminder that creativity is blossoming around us. Our task is to open to its flow.

Magical skills are a great aid in this work. When I take time to ground myself and cast a circle, and spend a few moments invoking supportive energies (see back side of this handout), I work with more lightness and ease, and (sometimes at least) I'm less exhausted by the process.

Creating a more supportive writing space and invoking characters (see Session 2 handout) and are ways I open myself to the flow of creative energy around me.

*See page 2 for exercises*

## The Magical Writer

A Writing Intensive  
in the Reclaiming Tradition

With George Franklin and Guest Teachers

Want to write a novel, memoir, or other narrative? Want to jump-start your writing, regardless of the style? Let Reclaiming magic help.

We'll look at the craft of writing and the emotional blocks that keep us from reaching our full artistic potential.

We'll meet in sacred space, share writing and support over the web, and gain understanding and skill from working with others. Writing can be an isolating practice - we'll use magic to weave a web of support and encouragement.

With magical tools such as circle-casting, ancestor invocations, trances, and spell-work, we'll free our expressive gifts and strengthen our belief in ourselves as artists.

We will also work on writing that expresses our unique

voice, creating plot-structures, developing characters, and other aspects of the writers' craft. Each class includes directed writing time.

Class is suitable for those working on writing projects who want a supportive circle and new inspiration, and those looking to begin the process. Although you'll determine your own work-pace, be prepared to dedicate time to your writing, and to write for at least ten minutes each day.

For more information, contact George, <george@directaction.org>

*George Franklin is a Reclaiming teacher and co-editor of Reclaiming Quarterly. He has written several novels and published one (visit directaction.org), and helped edit work by writers such as Cynthia Lamb, T. Thorn Coyle, and Starhawk. Magic is a key part of his creative process.*

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*Magical Writing Ancestor — Germaine Necker, Madame de Staël. Writer and salon hostess in pre-revolutionary France, late 1700s.*

# The Magical Writer

## Exercises — Session 3

### Invoking Energy

Invoking energy is akin to invoking elements or deities, but rather than an entity, I call forth a flow of creative energy.

I begin by grounding and spend some extra time drawing up heat from the core of the Earth, letting it slowly flow up my spine and out my crown. I find working with the chakra energy centers helpful — see below.

### Invoking Specific Energy

Once I feel grounded, I cast a circle and invoke the elements — sometimes giving each element attention, other times using a short song.

Then I invoke qualities of energy that I want present in my work: focus, flow, humor, ease, truth.... I name them one at a time and breathe in their energy. Jotting the words on a Post-It helps reinforce these qualities as I work, and reminds me to thank the energies when I finish.

I like to materialize the energy I've called. If I invoke "ease," I set a timer and take regular breaks, make tea, etc. If I invoke "humor," I might listen to Lenny Bruce to get inspired.

Experiment with invoking energy and feeling its presence — and finding ways to keep it present as you work.

### Chakras — Energy Centers

The chakras, a concept from Eastern spiritual traditions, are energy centers of the body. I find it useful to work with the centers that run up the spine, giving each chakra a bit of attention as I ground, call energy, etc.

Wikipedia has a good intro article.

### Energy Maps\*

Adopting a device from the business pages, we can chart the rise and fall of energy, just like the Dow tracks stock prices.

Here's a simple rise-and-fall chart. If this were a movie, the first half would be like a Schwarzenegger action flick, but the second half would be pretty dull:



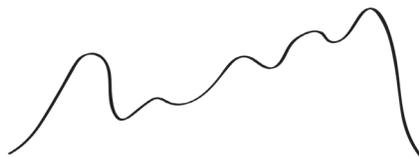
Let's stretch out the action, put the peak near the end, and shorten the denouement:



This still resembles an action movie. The excitement must rise and rise, since there's nothing else holding the viewer. But what about a bit of nuance — a few more rises and falls:



And finally, let's add a burst of energy right at the top, before we drop down and build back up (Beethoven liked this structure — *Casablanca* also uses it):



\* — a *Plot-Crafting* handout will go into more detail on this topic.

### Writing Exercises

#### Create an Energy Map

Using your intuition, draw an energy-chart for the opening scene(s) of a favorite popular movie. Hollywood films are easy to map — art films are more subtle.

Does the energy shoot up right away, or start low and rise? How long from the beginning to the first peak? What energy and action create this peak?

What devices does the film use to raise or maintain the energy? Action? Interpersonal tensions? Mystery?

At what point does the film begin to feed background information (exposition)? How much of the first ten minutes are consumed by exposition? How does the film do this? Does it get boring?

#### Writing Under Constraints

Introducing an artificial limitation into our writing (or music, dance, etc) is a way of opening other creative doors.

What if I refuse to use pronouns, or the word "the"? What if I couldn't start sentences with a noun-verb structure? What if I omit one letter, not using any words that include that letter?

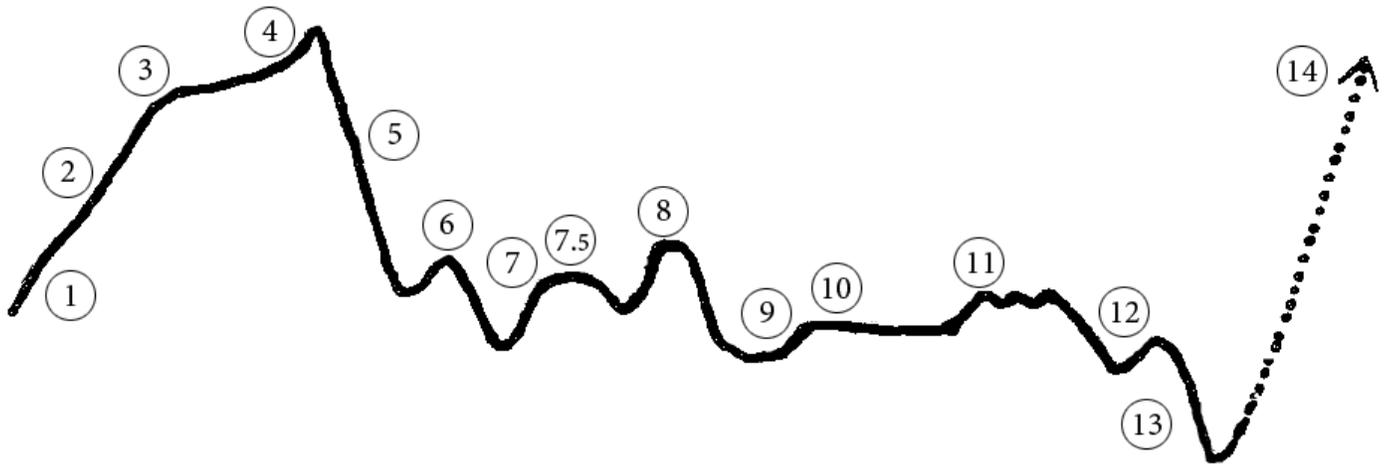
Invent a constraint and write within it. Experiment with different sorts of limitations. Afterward, journal about the experience.

#### Rant Redux

Revisit the rant exercise from Session 2. Try accessing different sorts of energy via a rant — complaint, plea, dismissal, rage at the injustice of the universe, etc.

What would your characters rant about? Can you scribe for them?

## Narrative Energy in Casablanca



The chart shows the flow of narrative energy during the first ten minutes of the action of *Casablanca*, beginning from the point the radio announcer speaks.

Note how the energy rises rapidly for a couple of minutes, up to the point that the suspect is shot in the street. After that, the tension falls off quickly, as the film begins feeding us background information (exposition).

Several small “bumps” are added to keep the energy from falling too quickly.

### KEY

- 1 Radio - “German couriers murdered, murderers heading to Casablanca”
- 2 Wide-screen of police roundup, melee
- 3 Close-up interrogation of a suspect
- 4 Suspect runs, cops shoot him
- 5 Blasé talk by rich diners -- *major retrenchment of energy*
- 6 Sleazy guy: “Be on guard - vultures everywhere”
- 7 Rich diner realizes his pocket has been picked -- *jump in tension*
- 7.5 Plane flies overhead, everyone watches -- “Maybe tomorrow we’ll be on that plane”
- 8 Germans arrive, Major Strasser -- Heil! -- *jump in tension*
- 9 “Rick” -- first mention -- implies he is in trouble with Germans -- *jump in tension*
- 10 Club, music -- *holds steady for a short while, but then would drop*
- 11 Shady dealings -- *keep tension afloat*
- 12 More info re Rick -- *keep tension afloat*
- 13 Rick appears first time / Ugarte enters / Conflict with banker -- *jump in tension*
- 14 Ugarte arrested