

The Magical Writer

Session 7 — Taking Writing Into the World

Can writing change the world? Apparently — since it's on account of my predecessors' writings that I was inspired to take up the practice myself. My writing might similarly inspire others to write — if only because they say, "I can do better than that!"

But in a more direct way, when I shape a new narrative or give voice to a new lyric or poem, I'm challenging and changing the way we see the world. Much of our experience of "the world" involves narratives about what life adds up to, what it means to succeed or fail, what is worth striving for...

These sorts of meanings are intimately bound up with the stories we tell ourselves about "how the world is."

When I craft a narrative, I am presenting a new way that the world might be experienced. Even if I write about the Xaxathanians on the planet Xaxathanathax, I am describing ways that sentient beings can interact. And unavoidably, my writing carries a moral message — some of these ways of being in the world are shown as better than others.

To write is to insist that the world — and our stories and meanings about it — are valuable. That they have meaning beyond the moment. That they are worth writing down.

A Vision of a New Culture

Within Reclaiming, writers have a special task. Besides sending well-crafted emails, I mean.

Reclaiming's mission statement — one of the few consensed expressions of our path — says that our aim is "to bring to birth a vision of a new culture."

All of Reclaiming, and many people and groups beyond, are participating in shaping this vision. But it's up to us to give it narrative expression, and to carry that vision into the wider world.

Beyond Isolation

As we prepare to take our writing into the world, it's more important than ever to step out of the usual isolation of our craft. From drafting to editing to publishing, writers can join together to make our work more accessible and to make the process more humane.

We can also take advantage of existing networks to share our writing — within Reclaiming alone we have several e-lists, a magazine, and multiple websites. Add other networks you are part of, and through grassroots outlets alone you can reach hundreds or even thousands of readers.

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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 spellwork, we'll free our expressive gifts and strengthen our belief in ourselves as artists.

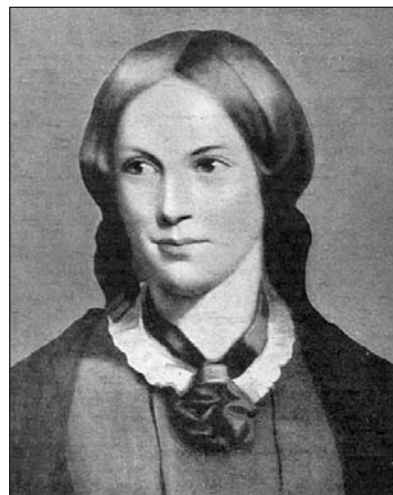
We will also work on writing that expresses our unique voice, creating plot-structures, developing characters, and other aspects of the writers' craft. Each class includes directed writing time.

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 — Charlotte Brontë.
Wrote and published in the early 1800s.*

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Exercises — Session 7

Into the World

Writers' Groups

A peer writing group is great for support and for constructive criticism. Over time we can develop connections with other writers who understand our goals and can help us pursue them.

Some groups meet in order to write together. Some read aloud. Others circulate writings and meet for feedback and encouragement. Still others work together on marketing, seeking agents, and the business of writing.

Two early tasks for a group are defining its purpose and reaching agreements about how feedback will be given and received. Learning to balance positive and critical observations are important parts of our collective work.

What about an online writing circle? Maybe. But I think it sacrifices energetic exchange compared to meeting in person. I'd also be wary of offering critical feedback without being present with the writer. Sensing energy is a big part of this work.

Sharing Writing – Sharing with other writers, with clear agreements about feedback, is very rewarding. Sharing writing with friends and family – whether or not you are writing about them – is seldom satisfying. If you need their input, interview them and share the transcript. If they want to see the fictionalized version, let them ask.

The web makes it possible to share short writing via elists, fansites, and news groups. The plus side is new and accessible avenues to reach readers.

The downside is the temptation to share under-edited material. Can you create a writers' group to help you decide when a piece is ready to publish?

Reading Aloud – Poets and lyricists are accustomed to this opportunity. Maybe we need prose slams.

Some writers' groups share work aloud. Before I read aloud, I practice with a recorder, often seeing ways to sharpen the prose, drop extra clauses, etc. When I read to others, I can sense whether I am holding their attention, whether humor works, or whether shocking material actually shocks.

Publishing Options

Today, publishing means anything from a hardbound volume to a post on an elist.

Still, most of us working on narratives have a dream of “publishing a book.” It's an exciting prospect, personally rewarding when it happens — and it is also just the beginning of a huge amount of marketing work.

A handful of writers actually make their living this way. Most strive to break even after their expenses. Some publish one book and swear they will never do it again.

Don't underestimate the possibilities of elists, fansites, etc. This may be an ideal audience for testing your writing.

If it's a book you want, a good guide to the terrain is *The Shortest Distance Between You and a Published Book*, which discusses the pros and cons of self-publishing, finding an agent, and marketing your own work directly to publishers. A great guide for discernment.

Writing Exercises

Marketing Exercises

Describe your book as a conjuncture of two well-known works: “It's like *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* meets *Whinnie-the-Pooh*.”

What are a few books that yours resembles? What one thing makes your book different than all the others?

Write a description of your book in one paragraph. Hone it to a single sentence.

Book Fairs

Attend a big-city book fair where publishers will have displays of current titles. Look at the sorts of books getting published — does it give you any ideas?

Look for companies publishing books similar to yours. Take the opportunity to ask questions about what direction the publisher is moving. If you see a book similar to yours, ask how it is selling, and what might have worked better. Keep your ears tuned in to what the publisher does *not* like.

Book fairs also include workshops and discussions that can help with the writing craft as well as inspire you with real-life stories of the writers' trade.

Narrative Playback

Read a passage of your writing aloud into a recorder. Play it back (use headphones to get better quality). What editing possibilities do you see? Are there places where the pacing feels rushed? Does the dialog sound real?