



Wrestling with angels, writing like a demon

All powerful writing is hypnotic — it is engendered in an altered (hypnotic) state and then engenders a similar state in its receivers. The more hypnotic the writing is in its genesis, the more likely it will alter, expand the awareness of the listener or reader.

Being fully present in the NOW is the writer's gateway into this altered state, where the writing seems to write itself, where the writer seems to be no more than a unique filter for a flow of material generated beyond the personality. When the writer is thus entranced, this state is altar-ed, serving as a mystical, spiritual foundation for the word made flesh, for incarnation into the world of time.

- Dr. Joseph Mancini, Jr. from [“Hypnosis, the Writer & Writing”](#)

The way I write stuff, for me, it's kind of like invocation in a magical sense. I'm trying to summon characters from the 'imaginal' world and allow them to speak through me, so in most cases that requires a kind of complete surrender to the spirit of the character that's close to a possession. Which means things can come as a surprise even to me as the writer.

- Grant Morrison from [“ALL STAR MORRISON III: Superman”](#) by Jeffrey Renaud

Writing, for me, has always had the qualities of a trance, a charm, a spell. It requires a suspension of disbelief on my part: the suspension of my disbelief in myself. It requires me to believe that what I have to say, and how I'm going to say it, will be meaningful and interesting to others. This is a fragile state, magical and mysterious, that can last for moments or months, in which every word matters and every thought or feeling might last forever, if only I'm quick enough to catch it.

At some point, the trance always ends; the charm fades; the spell is broken. My words, thoughts, and feelings seem ordinary again, and there's nothing left to write.

For the past couple of months, I've been writing a lot of poetry, something I haven't done in years. As in the past, it's taken me completely by surprise. I'd concluded long ago that my well was dry. I'd also forgotten how much work it can be to finish a piece once it's started.

The core of anything I write usually flies out of me quickly, without any direct intention on my part, and I prefer to stay as close as possible to whatever first emerges. "First thought, best thought" as the well-known Zen saying goes. But very few pieces emerge fully intact, coherent, and complete on the first pass. Some do; most don't. Even the ones that do usually require that I sit with them for a few days to make sure they're really done.

At the other end of the spectrum are the pieces that are not so easy. They might take hours or they might take days. They might wake me up at 4 AM with changes. I might think I'm done with them more than once, only to find new words coming and the words that already came moving around, trading positions, or morphing into something else entirely. Sometimes a piece will split into two pieces. Sometimes two pieces will merge into one. Anything can happen.

Sometimes I have to abandon a piece that's not working. I'm always reluctant to do so, but abandoned pieces will often reemerge later, either as direct reincarnations of themselves, or as components or elements of something completely new. Sometimes a word or a phrase or a few lines will sit around with me doing nothing for months or years, incomplete, waiting for the rest to come.

Eventually, everything either finishes or falls away from me for good. Most of the pieces that start do finish, generally within two to three days of first emergence. I seldom make any major changes after that. Each piece is a snapshot of a moment in time and feeling. It is what it is, and I have to respect it as it is.

Every piece I finish gives me something, and takes something in return. Every piece is a gift and a sacrifice. Every piece I write is a piece of me, and it takes a piece of me to write it. If you're gonna write like a demon, something's gotta burn. If you're gonna wrestle with angels, you've gotta pay the price. And it's gonna leave a mark.

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Image: [Writer's Trance](#) by Rick Belden.



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Rick Belden is a respected explorer and chronicler of the psychology and inner lives of men. His book, [*Iron Man Family Outing: Poems about Transition into a More Conscious Manhood*](#), is widely used in the United States and internationally by therapists, counselors, and men's groups as an aid in the exploration of masculine psychology and men's issues, and as a resource for men who grew up in dysfunctional, abusive, or neglectful family systems. His second book, [*Scapegoat's Cross: Poems about Finding and Reclaiming the Lost Man Within*](#), is currently awaiting publication. He lives in Austin, Texas.

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