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Writing 200

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Why I Write (Still)

I first started thinking about myself as a writer when I was in the fourth grade. I wasn't really thinking of my current self as a writer, more about my future self who would become an author and have the same meteoric success as J.K. Rowling, my idol at the time (still my idol now to be honest). As such, my first attempts at a novel, only reaching about a paragraph or so long, featured a magic school and a naïve young hero. As I grew older, my writing became better (presumably) and became centered on supporting arguments for English and History. This didn't really change when I went to college; it just became a more frustrating and demanding process, where I churned out paper after paper with the same amount of enjoyment as a printer. Over the years, the answer to why I write was too often "because I have, too." Even though I was writing more than ever, somewhere along the way the initial excitement I felt as a fourth grader was fading like an old photograph. Writing was work and only that. Ironically, rediscovering my motivation was largely the result of a class I took over the summer, where despite deadlines and grades, I started to write for myself again. Once I began to write about what I cared about, rather than what I was assigned, I was reminded of the desires that drove me to write other than for class still existed, the desire to explore and analyze who I am and where I fit in the greater scheme of things, the desire to share what makes me passionate, and the desire to engage others through those passions.

Comment [RM1]: Intriguing!

Comment [RM2]: This is really evocative. I'd love to see you elaborate on the idea. (Unpack it.) As a reader, I was sad that you didn't. (That's something that would take it from a commonplace—if evocative—statement to a really thoughtful elaboration of your feeling about that emotional place.)

Comment [RM3]: What summer?

Comment [RM4]: I'd like to see this idea explored a bit...that is, did you ignore what you were assigned? Or did you find a way for the assigned writing to matter? What is "assigned" and what is "what you care about?" These are really key differences (and similarities!) I think...

Comment [RM5]: That?

The problem with writing for others, mainly professors, is that writing can become not about creating something you think is great but **creating something the professor thinks is great.** The English class that made me swear off English classes certainly gave me that impression. An essay I had painstakingly labored on for weeks had been demoted to a B+ for no other discernable reason than the professor thought I hadn't defended Mr. Rochester from *Jane Eyre* enough (she had a crush on him.) My paper wasn't even about Mr. Rochester but I digress. Against my better judgment, the next semester I took another English class, a creative nonfiction course, to fulfill my Upper Level Writing Requirement. I entered it fully prepared to hate it with a fiery and vocal (outside of class) passion. However, unlike the classes I had taken before, I was encouraged to write about what made me passionate and the professor, never having experienced my life, was **mostly unbiased towards my points.** I wrote about how my mother's controlling behavior drove me crazy, and the eye-patch I was forced to wear as a child. For the first time in a long time, I began thinking like a writer again; even when I wasn't writing, my thoughts would shape themselves into sentences, into narration, raw material for my next piece of work. However, I was no longer a fourth grader, and rather than fully accepting my new motivation, I had to question it. [I like the additions in this paragraph!](#)

At first, my motivation had all the hallmarks of egoism. After all, it was not unlike a child's enthusiasm for show-and-tell, and best of all, every essay was my turn. However, after reflection, this kind of "egoism" is not the same kind that George Orwell describes as one of the reasons why people write. His version of "egoism" is equated with the "desire to seem clever, to be talked about" (Orwell). My "egoism" was the desire to understand myself, to understand the world as much as I could, and thereby understand my place within it; a predilection with self rather than an obsession. Writing is an attempt to carve complex ideas, full of images, smells,

Comment [RM6]: Or rather, something you THINK the professor WILL THINK is great, right? There's a difference, often...

Comment [RM7]: I'm interested in what this means...i.e. how a professor's bias (or not) affects your own sense of your writing...

Comment [RM8]: Nice! ☺

and sensations, into a silver of words; it makes that which is inherently transient and formless concrete. Putting myself through this process allowed me a broader, more distanced approach to my mind and my beliefs as I was forced to express and argue them. I once heard that there are very few people in the world who know who they are and that many of those few are writers; writers have to face reflections of themselves on the page almost every day; even if the more inexperienced ones are not adept enough to see themselves in a paper and ink mirror. It's an inescapable fact that everything I have written and will write, even that miserable *Jane Eyre* essay and especially that magical paragraph written in fourth grade, reveals my hand in some way because all I write is driven by my desires and my questions, my quest for understanding. Sometimes these desires are less than lofty (wanting a good grade or just to be done with *Jane Eyre*), I admit, but why I write is inextricably linked to my journey to understand and appreciate the world around me and the world within me.

If writing is all about an exploration of self, if why I write is all about me, why is it that I and many other writers feel compelled to publish work for a public of strangers? I'll be rude and answer my own question with a question: Does a piece of art have the same value in someone's attic that it has in a museum? My knee-jerk reaction is no. Once put out into the world, a piece can gain new meaning by the interpretations of people who view it and the artist receives a chance to share his or her labors, make them bigger than just his or her efforts. Of course, my fourth-grade labor of love, *Annabelle and the Unicorn*, should never see the light of day again. Even if it did somehow enter the public sphere and receive a reaction, it would probably be of derision. Yet, despite its ridiculousness, my little piece still represents an attempt to connect to an audience and to my hero, J.K. Rowling. Now, it is much easier to interact with an audience through the web. More and more, writing is not held static within a museum of print. Due to the internet, it is allowed to be fluid and high-speed, where many people can be reached and then can reach back with their own writing. The internet is,

Comment [RM9]: I'm deeply intrigued by this phrase, love how it sounds, but I'm not sure it makes sense, either...what is a "silver"....?

Comment [RM10]: So great!

Comment [JA11]: One of the earlier comments on this draft was that the body, the intro and the conclusion are in disjunction. The body was too cerebral compared to the more lively and personal introduction. Here I stole pieces from that original body to make my point but I also tried to add a bit of the personality from the introduction such that the body and the introduction flow better together. Is this more cerebral part, beginning with "Writing down thoughts and feelings . . ." made to flow better with the earlier parts by the references back to *Jane Eyre* and my fourth-grade piece of writing?

Shelley: YES, it is. Much more integrated!

Comment [RM12]: Font changes here...why?

Comment [JA13]: I realize the first part of this paragraph is about how writing benefits from being shared, leading to the point that I write so I can share. This seemed to fit in well with the internet's capacity for people to share but I'm not sure about how effective this transition is. It's kind of awkward where there isn't enough new stuff for a new paragraph but it isn't entirely in the same vein of the earlier stuff. Is this noticeable or do these two ideas flow together well?

Shelley: I actually think the ideas work nicely together—and don't choke your creativity by insisting that every paragraph has to look (even remotely) the same. So if you want to do something to this paragraph that ends up shortening it, so be it, as long as the connections to what came before and what comes after are clear.

as such, all about sharing, a huge digital game of show-and-tell anyone can play. In many ways, I'm still a fourth-grader, excited to take my turn. As such, the internet provides a new opportunity for readers and writers to accumulate meaning for works, for writers to get feedback, and for people to share what makes them passionate. That sharing capacity is why I write, and also why I sometimes write on the internet.

When I was dreaming about what kind of writer I would be, when I was much younger and maybe a little less naive, I did not imagine the writer I am now. Firstly, I have yet to make billions of dollars. Secondly, fourth-grade me was as of yet unfamiliar with extended self reflection and never considered the world might be different from the precepts that seemed to rule "Boy Meets World." Yet, there was that part of me that was passionate, wanted to share, and saw writing as a vehicle. Over the years, I've grown, changed, dropped my pen and picked it up again, and why I write has also undergone changes as well; yet, perhaps, development is a better term. My motivations have developed into a mixture of my old enthusiasm and my new curiosity, my desires to connect, to share, to explore and understand. These facets of my internal drive meld into why I write.

Comment [RM14]: I like that this turns up again. 😊

Comment [JA15]: With this conclusion, I admittedly lost stem and my main concerns are that it fits well within the rest of the paper. I tried to return it to the introduction, not just in content but in spirit and tone as well. Does this conclusion feel forced? Does it, as I hope, bring the essay full circle?

Shelley: I like the conclusion! (See my final margin note, though.)

Comment [RM16]: Better term that what?

Comment [RM17]: I wonder if you need this sentence?

Works Cited

Orwell, George. "George Orwell Why I Write." *George Orwell's Library*. N.p., 24 July 2004.

Web. 29 Jan. 2012. <http://orwell.ru/library/essays/wiw/english/e_wiw>.