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Writing 200

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Why I Write

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. As such, my first attempts at a novel featured a magic school and a naïve young hero and was only a paragraph or so long. 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 that couldn't be finished the night before. Over the years, the question of why I write was too often answered with "because I have, too." Even though my skills have improved, somewhere along the way the initial excitement I felt as a fourth grader, just having finished *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, was fading like an old photograph. Perhaps, this was the result of my not wanting to write because I wanted to, but because I had to. Writing became my job as a student. Finding my motivation again has been largely the result of being able to write for myself, again; it reminded me that the desires that formed my internal drive still exist, a desire to explore myself, my beliefs and identity, and the world, a desire to share and engage with other people.

Orwell describes one of the reasons why people write as "egoism," the "desire to seem clever, to be talked about" (Orwell). That is true. It is certainly why a lot of celebrity autobiographies are written. However, I think another kind of egoism can be at play when people

write; at least it is when I write. I can think at end on how I feel about a subject but only when I write, when I see my thoughts pinned down to words, suspended on the white of the page, do I really start to understand what I'm thinking. Writing forces a person to capture that which is formless and transient and pin it down to a page, carve a complex idea full of images, smells and feelings into a sliver of words. Speaking about writing this way makes the process sound subtractive, but for me and many others, the only way to preserve our thought processes is to write them down. When I write what I'm thinking of down, I get a broader, more distanced approach to my mind. I can see multiple "thoughts at once"; I can see words and critique them, which is easier to deal with than trying to critique an image or thought. 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. They have to mull over what they believe, why they believe it and how to convey it to another person. Then, they have to take ownership, place it on the page, and look at it. This is different from the kind of egoism Orwell talks about; it is still preoccupied with self, one's own identity and beliefs, but the reward is not someone else's approval but increased understanding of themselves, their life and the world around them, one subject at a time, whether personal, scientific, journalistic, or literary. I write so that I may understand, as a way of processing the world. A professor once told me that a lot of great writing centers around a question, even if it never finds an answer; it drives the work and as such the reader is taken along on the writer's journey.

If writing is about an exploration of self, why do people publish their works for a public of strangers? Once again, I refer back to Orwell and his reason of "egoism." To want to broadcast one's thoughts requires a certain amount of confidence, because not only do writers have to be confident in what they are writing but they also have to be confident that others will

Comment [JA1]: This is a large paragraph, which concerns me. Are details redundant. Do I talk too much on "exploration of self"? Does the topic shift enough such that I should make a new paragraph? Should I include more physical evidence and detail?

Comment [JA2]: Is this transition effective? Does it seem awkward? Does it make the shift from self to a discuss of sharing effectively? Is the argument in this paragraph, that I write to share, effective, cliché, sappy?

care about what they're writing. This at first was a scary prospect to me. In practice, it is not actually that hard as long as I find that kernel of the universal in my writing, which is always there, because most people aren't all that different. We all share common experiences. Speaking allows a kind of sharing but writing allows sharing with a whole breadth of people almost anywhere at any time. This has become especially more applicable with publishing on the internet. The internet is all about the urge to share, sometimes to a negative extent, and so is writing. As the internet shows, many people love to get together in groups and share their interests. I confess I am not immune to this urge.

Not mentioned here is the beauty in creating a sentence with a unique image or a catchy sound, not that it isn't part of why I write. Merely, when I happen upon successful sentences, they are usually not what motivate me to get started. Ultimately, why I write (at least when I'm not writing purely for school-related reasons) is related why I am human, weirdly enough. Like most humans, I am trying to figure out how I am and what I think, and connect with other people. Writing acts as a vehicle for these pursuits.

Comment [JA3]: I feel like I'm being cliché and stating the obvious, also I don't know if I should cite more evidence for some of the claims I make (we all share common experiences for example).