

Why I Write

I began writing because I was very shy, and writing made me braver. I also tended to think slowly and probably sounded a bit dim, but when I wrote I was smarter. My best and truest self, seemed to be the self I presented in writing. Even to myself - I kept diaries from the age of seven until I was thirty and the whole lot was stolen from the back of a friend's car.

I lost shyness when I moved to Scotland, but I still preferred writing – perhaps because I was still thinking slowly and liked the option to edit. You can never delete or re-word what has been spoken, but you can do both of these glorious acts when your speech becomes black marks on a page rather than sounds in the air.

And then I developed the habit of homesickness, and wrote long letters to my parents, siblings, friends, not to mention boys I wished to woo. This delicious melancholy and nostalgia became the emotional well I drew from while writing. I was chronically missing someone or someplace, and writing to them or about it. Making up stories came later, when I wanted to become Carson MacCullers and Eudora Welty and Virginia Woolf. The day I discovered *writing* stories offered the same exquisite escape as *reading* stories, I became a writer.

There is also my hoarding instinct. I don't like to lose or waste things – especially I don't want to lose moments of emotional intensity or beauty. Memories that might otherwise fade to nothing, I try to immortalise by imbedding in fiction. Andrew Greig once said he wrote to not lose things, and for me it is the same. Like taking photographs, writing can be a stance against time passing; against mortality.

Writing taps into my subconscious in a revelatory manner. It reveals myself to myself. Sometimes this is obvious – the *aha* moment, while writing, when a personal pattern suddenly emerges. Other times, it is pointed out to me by readers. Someone once said they really loved my theme of houses in my first novel. I had to think – had I intended that theme? Were houses important to the story? I looked around my own house and noticed for the first time the number of house images I had on the walls, and indeed, little houses scattered on shelves. And yes, the novel's main characters were a homeless man, and a woman who talked to her house.

Finally, and this harks back to the reasons of my youth, I need to write in order to think clearly. I daydream often and deeply. I miss entire conversations and important events; though my eyes are open, I'm elsewhere. My thoughts are messy, nebulous, often a jumbled-up escape into made up scenarios. Until I write them out, sometimes in lists, sometimes in fiction, my life (and the world) doesn't make much sense. Writing enables me to think properly about the world.

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