

Why I Write

Zena Edwards

I sit in a subdued corner of an English pub in Crystal Palace that strains under the weight of gentrification. The kitchen's gastro menu wafts by, the warm buzz of cider nuzzles my chest. Back pain subdues. Flotsam on a sunbeam gently taps the corner of my mouth up into a relaxed smile. Relaxed...

I attempt to think of the answer to this question of 'why I write'. I am so sure I have an answer somewhere...

on restless nights, disturbed mornings
a synaptic jump summons me to pen

in sublime silence
ink slides between paper fibres
constellations of human on a page

a soul on mission
to state a world
needing reminding
that it is Love

'I am in the business of narrative and storytelling that counters violent dehumanisation, that builds community. My medium for this rehumanisation is the arts – as a space for dialogue, for envisioning, re-imagining, focus.'
— Zena Edwards, circa 2012.

My artist mission statement still holds up.

Ten years dedicated to youth arts and activism programs, nurturing their inner child, their creative's will, their esteem of voice and human happiness of the next generations. Sacrifices were made – I, Initiate, am gathered back to the safe space created for calm when a child...

Childhood traumas, being bullied, always close to hitting a nerve and deadening a psychological limb completely. Teenage body disassociating (sports injury related back and shoulder pain, monthly hospitalisation with debilitating dysmenorrhea) and diet pills.

I write the wounds up

I write the wounds to heal, hope and conquer

to hear them

brought sleep

My twenties in a cortisol-overdosed state of shock that societal tropes believed me perpetually horny and angry – more bullying – hyper-sexualized or invisibilised.

it is open heart surgery

a long low whistle

to challenge growth, to evolve

My thirties experiencing double shock that I really was meant to be an writer, enduring artist poverty, near bankruptcy and the joys and creativity of one-meal-a-day menus.

exhausted

transported

home
loyal to nowhere, faithful to all
belonging to anywhere and not obliged to
for a few moments

My forties, childless and contemplating womanhood, thinking about technology and staying relevant as an artist. Two of my Writing Mothers passed this decade – Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison. Both gave me vision, a version of a life...

Decades of befriending words
intimately gifting me freedom,
self-acceptance, refuge, silence
from all the white noise and consumerist clatter –
racism, sexism, patriarchy,
learned and lost love.

it takes life to write
a path worn at the edges
warp and weft sturdy
worn
write to stay alive. It is your breath
I forgive myself
on the breadth of a page
For the lack of a perfectly looped 'o'
the blankness
this relief
no answering
to anyone

left to solitude
in tranquil quiet

I write
I am no sex or skin colour
I am everyone and have no name
an image of time caught frame by frame
to tread the roots of a golden vein
earthed and permanent
a forever spin and yarn

Zena Edwards

For 27 years, since graduating from Middlesex University, Zena has been a professional writer/poet performer, facilitator, creative project developer and vocalist. She studied storytelling and performance at The London International School for Performing Arts and is published in several anthologies including Margaret Busby's *New Daughters of Africa* (2019, Myriad), and *Dance the Guns to Silence* (2005, flipped eye publishing). Zena is a passionate advocate for environmental issues, decolonisation, race and power and has been mentoring young and emerging artists in professional artist development and creative campaigning since 2010. As a multidisciplinary collaborator, Zena has worked with internationally acclaimed choreographer and dancer Akram Khan (*Xenos*), visual artist Theaster Gates (*Soul Manufacturing Corporation*), radical filmmaker Fahim Alam (*Riots Reframed*), and The Last Poets.

A recording of this talk can be found on the WritersMosaic website at

writersmosaic.org.uk

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