

Why do I write?

Ben Kuffuor

I don't know.

If that response were adequate enough to complete this essay and unlock the payment to write it, I would leave it there.

Increasingly, authors are being encouraged to provide a response to this question that places them as a chief representative of their respective tribe. This is a very nice concept and makes for a neat profile piece but very rarely is one forced to pick up a pen because they feel like their race, gender or sexuality needs them to. Authors are often galvanised to embark on their journey for fairly selfish reasons. One may start writing to get out of their head or to avoid boredom or to become really famous and make a ton of money.

I was asked the very same question about why I write by our tutor and mentor, Jan Fleischer, when we first arrived at the National Film and Television School. As a young man I assumed that the right answer would have to be long-winded and profound in the hope of sounding as intelligent as possible. Luckily for me, he saw right through that and dismissed the answer immediately, which forced me to give thought to something that I had never given thought to before. Admittedly, I was too immature to truly understand what appeared on the surface to be a really simple question and I probably didn't have the answer for it until about two years ago. This is because I assumed that the answer stemmed from an intellectual place so I went deeper down a rabbit hole until it became abundantly clear. If the need to write lies so profoundly in you, it would be like questioning a four-year-old on their decision to play.

The reality is, I write because I have to. From as young as sixteen, I

would tear myself away from my friends and the television to write pages and pages that no-one would ever see. Not because I had been commissioned or because my agent needed them. There was absolutely no reason other than I had to. I can go long periods without writing and I don't feel an urgency to return to it. There are many things about the process that I hate – the isolation, the quest for perfection, and the repetition. Still, writing always finds a way to return to me in the form of an idea, or a belief system, a character or an observation.

After experiencing many lows in this industry, I suspect that the only thing that has kept me writing is the fact that I don't know why I do it. If I did know, I would've learnt how to control it and probably would've never picked up a pen again. Unfortunately for me, writing comes as natural as eating, so there's no longer any shame in not knowing why I do it or any need to understand why I do.

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Benjamin graduated from the National Film and Television School in 2011, and his first project following graduation was developed by Big Talk Productions for E4. Prior to his time at the NFTS, Benjamin's first short play was produced at the Theatre Royal Stratford East in 2007, and he participated in the Young Writers' Programme at the Royal Court Theatre in 2008. Benjamin has had attachments at both the Bush Theatre and the National Theatre. Benjamin is currently under commission at the Bush theatre, writing a shadow script for Kaos (Netflix) as well as developing original pieces for Kudos, Fearless Minds and The Forge. <https://theagency.co.uk/the-clients/benjamin-kuffuor>

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

writersmosaic.org.uk

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