

Why I Write

Wally Jiagoo

In spite of only having read one of his books, *Charlotte's Web* (1952), one of my favourite authors is E.B. White. A few weeks prior to the book's release, the PR department at Harper & Brothers expressed unease about the author's choice of protagonist, a barn spider. Worried that a spider might put off many readers and critics, they asked White to explain why he wrote *this* book.

In his response, he ruminated with great affection on his soft spot for animals, turning his attention to spiders in greater detail. He ended his note by writing: 'I haven't told you why I wrote the book, but I haven't told you why I sneeze either. A book is a sneeze.'

A sneeze. That has always stayed with me. If you're a consumer of the internet, your first instinct might be to Google 'why do we sneeze?' – then get

side-tracked and lost in the whys and hows. But to me, the most fascinating aspect of sneezing is this – we don't consciously decide to do it. Just like we don't decide to breathe. We just do, without thinking. It's an expression that requires no intellectual effort whatsoever.

I don't know why I write. I know that I don't write enough. And I know that I never stop thinking – about ideas that inspire me, or whimsies that tickle me, or themes that I can never dive deeply enough into. I never stop thinking about the unique characters that I've chanced upon in my life who entertain me, or the most outrageous and hilarious things I've overheard on the bus, or sometimes the most beautiful and poignant things I've heard in the most unlikely of places. I never stop thinking about these things, and I'm constantly trying to connect the dots to make something coherent ... a *story* ... as though I'm trying to order my brain. I don't know why I do this. It's an instinct.

As a boy I wrote for fun. I loved reading, which inevitably led to writing. I'd write detective stories I'd ripped off from an episode of the detective drama *Columbo* the evening before. Back then, everything I wrote was a sneeze. Now I write for a living, and I confess that I've let it get to me somewhat. I fret over my writing not being original, or interesting, or meaningful. The act of writing pains me, like going to the gym and putting those muscles under stress and tension.

I need constant reminding to keep this writing muscle active so the flow state becomes easier to enter, and the act of writing becomes less mechanical, more fluid. Like a dance.

Sometimes, I get so caught up in self-doubt, in envy and admiration at just how brilliant my writer contemporaries are that, in my conceitedness and timidity, I quit. *I'm never writing again.* But then, a few days later, an idea creeps into my mind that I can't stop thinking about...

I haven't told you why I write. But then, I haven't told you why I sneeze either.

Wally Jiagoo

Born and raised in London, Wally is a writer of Mauritian heritage. An alumni of Soho Theatre's Writers' Group, he's previously had work performed at Soho Theatre, Theatre Royal Stratford East, Trafalgar Studios, and The Albany Theatre. He's also an alumni of the prestigious Channel 4 Screenwriting Course, and BBC Writers Workshop.

Wally's pilot script *Rasheed/Rasheeda* won the BAFTA Rocliffe New Writing Prize for TV Drama in 2016.

For TV, Wally has written episodes for *Malory Towers*, *The Dumping Ground*, and *Phoenix Rise*.

His essay *Glass Windows & Glass Ceilings* is included in a collection of 'essays on the working class, by the working class' called *Know Your Place*, published by Dead Ink Books 2017.

A recording of this text can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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