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Why I Write. What I Write.

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Panel: Why I Write What I Write

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Why I Write. What I Write.
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This, by the way, is not a polite question.

Trying to answer it, I somehow automatically admit that I am a writer.

First of all, it's not modest.

Because being a writer is the best profession in the world.

This is how it comes out: Natalia Vorozhbit is a writer. Leo Tolstoy is also a writer.

Secondly, it's embarrassing.

Because anybody can call himself a writer. One can be writing nothing at all, but be collecting materials for a novel. "I am a writer. I am going to write a novel." How can one argue with this?

In other words, it's very easy to be a writer.

It's embarrassing to have such an easy and accessible profession.

But even if I put aside my pride and embarrassment—the most difficult thing is left. How to answer the question "why I write."

What to do?

To give a frank answer to a large audience of smart listeners is very difficult.

I can make up a beautiful lie about being concerned with the war in Chechnya, with the relations between Ukraine and Russia, or with the truth about Marilyn Monroe's death—and this is why I write. But it is not so. I am concerned with all of that. But this is not why I write.

It is easier to tell the truth—one doesn't need to make anything up. This is why I will try to answer honestly, without beautiful flourishes and philosophy.

In the Moscow Literary Institute which I attended there was a saying:

"if you can stand not to write, don't write."

I can stand not to write. So why do I do it?

I don't know how to speak well.

It's bothersome when people around you speak intelligently and interestingly, and you only know how to speak politely. This is why I write down what I fail to say. Sometimes it comes out okay, and I am not so bothered.

Hence, I write in order to prove that I am not stupid.

I write because people may give me compliments. When they praise me, there is a stimulus for me to write more.

Hence, I write to tickle my ego.

I write because I am tormented by memories. I need to analyze them, while also staying outside of them.

Hence, I write for therapeutic reasons.

Some people like what I write. This brings me pleasure.

Hence, I write for pleasure.

My high school teacher predicted for me a job as a factory worker and a prison term.

Hence, I write to get back at that teacher.

A bad film or an unsuccessful operation may forever ruin reputation of a film director or a doctor. But you don't have to show a bad play or novel to anybody, and thus you can escape the embarrassment.

Hence, I write because I am a coward.

I write because I know other people's secrets and want to spill the beans. The best way is to describe them in different words.

Hence, I write because I can't keep a secret.

I write because the last time someone wrote about my little home country was in the 19th century. It is very fashionable and promising to write about things that have not been written about for a while.

Hence, I write to appear promising.

More and more often I write because I don't like how other people write.

Hence, I write out of a desire to prove that I am better than others.

It's a pity that I don't write for big money. I hope it's temporary.

To sum up, my existence as a writer is founded on exclusively egotistic desires. I began to write not to change and improve the world, but in order to change and improve my own life. One can consider this the truth. One of the truths.

I am surprised at how I behave as I do this, and what happens to me as a result.

I produce forty pages of text. After some time, there are thirty-five more.

And then fifty, and so on. But while doing that I am afraid to consider them significant. I am afraid to create hopes connected to the creative process.

I live as though there were more important things to do. But time passes by, and every play of mine leaves me with fewer illusions. It is unlikely that I will become anybody else. I spend another year writing a new play. Instead of learning another profession more suited for making a living. A machine has already been started in my head, designed to collect materials.

I experience a need to confess.

When a director suggests I change the title of a play, I despair as if someone had tried to make me twenty years older. I have changed my life, have changed myself, but still haven't declared my choice.

My fears are connected to this.

The fear to take myself seriously. The fear to talk about myself seriously.

To publicly open my notebook and enter my observations. To discuss my creative plans.

Write down other people's jokes. I feel nauseated by this.

When people ask me what I do, I answer: I am a philologist, a journalist, or even better – a copy writer in the promotional sub-department, the marketing department.

I cowardly hide behind formal definitions. Questions send me into a panic.

My mother "helps" me very much in my problem. When she introduces me to somebody, she says: "Please meet my daughter Natasha, the great playwright."

And she hangs a poster with my name in the office where she works.

Worse than this is only the question "what are you writing about?" Usually, I lose the ability to speak.

I think my attitude is wrong. A writer should love the writer in himself.

I seem to be showing progress.

I almost don't speak English and this is why it's almost easy for me to pronounce the words in

the alien language: "I am a playwright."

Maybe the time will come when I will be able to write as easily about what really moves me: the post-Soviet youth of my contemporaries; the young age of my parents which will never come back; my grandfather who—when he died in 1990, screamed "tanks!" and hid under the blanket; the famine of 1933 that killed millions of people... I don't want to go on because this is the beginning of pathos and another truth.

Where am I headed with all this?

Once I become a writer my tortures will be over. Nobody will ask why I am writing. This will be a resolved question.

And to the question "what I write about" I will respond in the spirit of Leo Tolstoy. When he was asked what "Anna Karenina" was about, he said: "In order to answer I would have to re-read the book."

It's going to be so great! Leo Tolstoy is a writer. Natalya Vorozhbit is also a writer...