

As a recipient of the 2021-2022 Doctoral School Research Awards, I attended the 2022 Berlin International Literary Festival. The festival is an integral part of literary culture, allowing the public and authors to engage in a conversation between the imitations of life through art and how we perceive our world through language, culture, and constructs.

As my research centres around dual identity and self-perception in an ever-increasing multicultural world, seminars by Zadie Smith and Jamaica Kincaid were some of the critical artists I had the privilege of meeting. The talk that affected me the most was ‘Intimations’ by Zadie Smith. Zadie spoke extensively on the experience of a writer in lockdown; in a time of non-functionality, Smith uses the outside world’s distance as a reflection of who we are as a people and how we must perceive ourselves once forced to look into the lens. Like my own research, Zadie explored the themes, experiences, and nuances underpinning her novel. Dissecting her thoughts with the audience was an invaluable experience.

I contributed to the event by asking the closing question regarding her revelation of the mentality of modern people and their disconnection from reality in the age of the digital revolution. How does she deal with this disconnection now that the pandemic has ended, yet that aspect remains the same? She responded by the belief that moments such as the pandemic allowed the human to resurface and the “cyborg” to become suppressed...that underneath “they are still in there somewhere.”

Attending was an enriching experience that allowed me to engage and interact with members of the arts community and Zadie Smith herself. Speaking to fellow writers allowed me to consider the ways in which my research applies to lived experiences and understand first-hand the symbiotic relationship between the writer and reader. I hope this report inspires future recipients to access fulfilling and engaging experiences that enhance their Ph.D, as it has done for me.

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/fouAEJCu46g>

I ask her my question at 1:07:48

Ashley Williams-Leon – PhD English

Intimations: Zadie Smith in conversation with Daniel Kehlmann



Daniel Kehlmann und Zadie Smith [© Ali Ghandtschi,
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