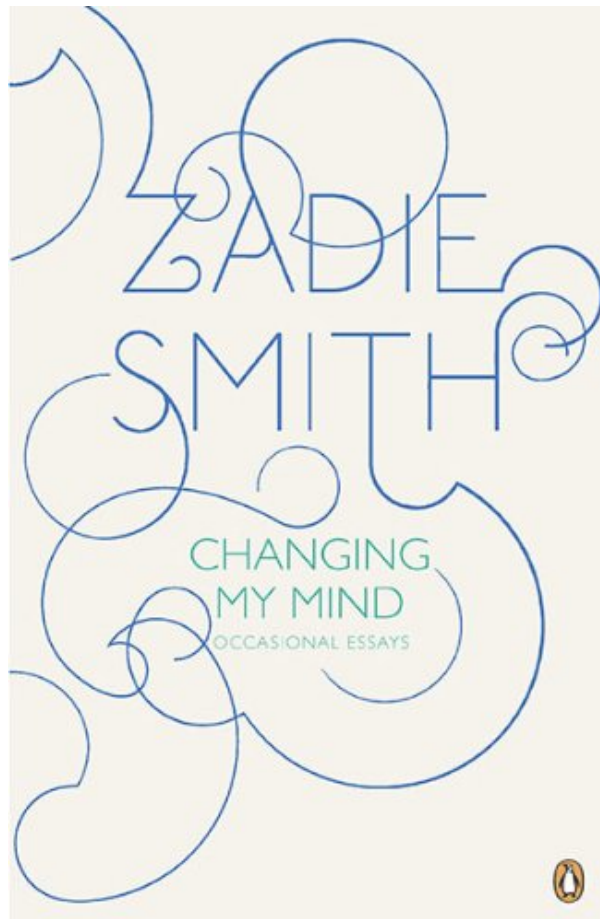
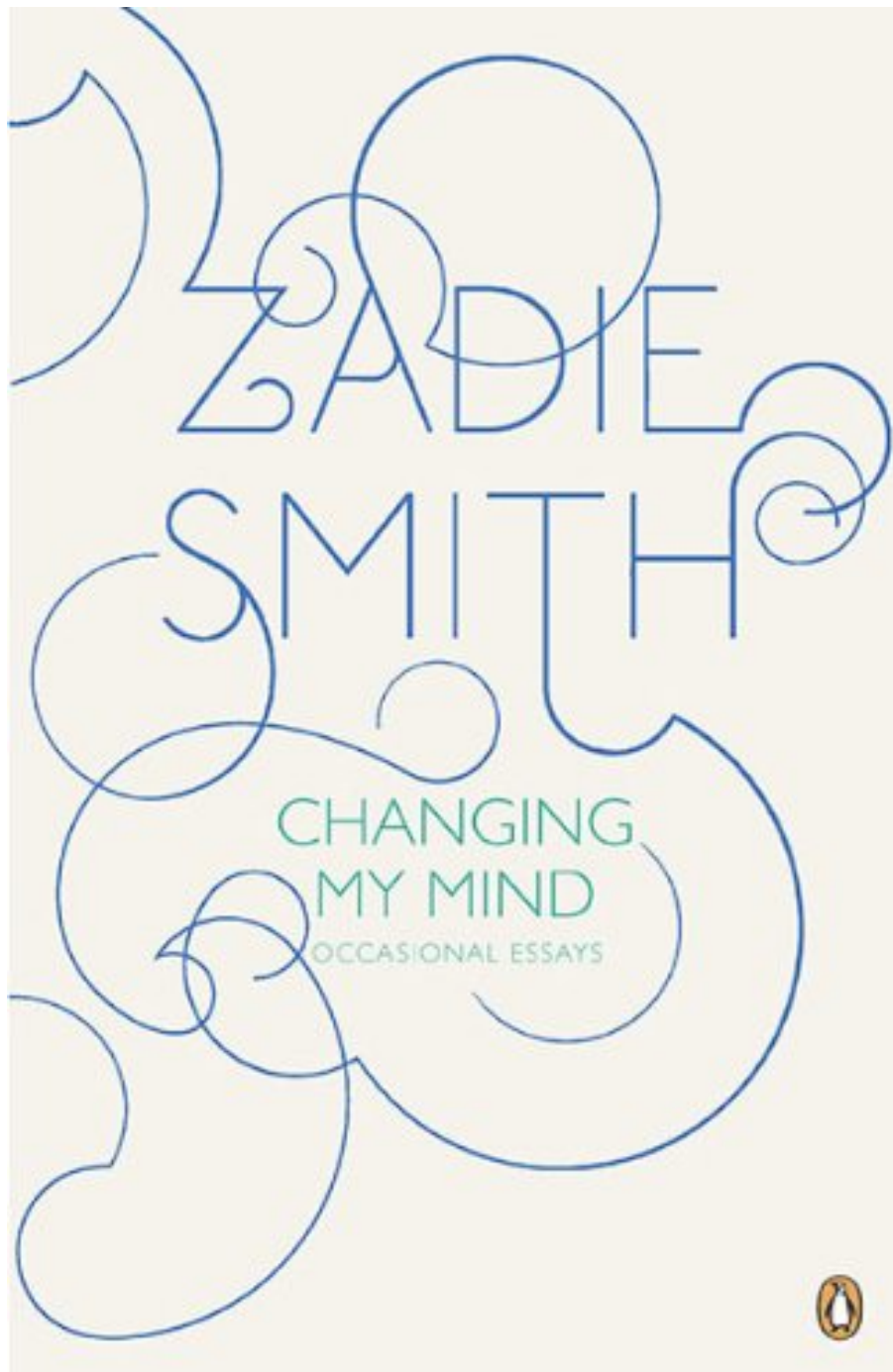


CHANGING MY MIND: OCCASIONAL ESSAYS BY ZADIE SMITH



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Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, November 2009: One of Zadie Smith's great gifts as a novelist is her openness: both to character and ideas in her stories, and to what a novel itself should be. That she's a novelist was clear as soon she broke through with *White Teeth* in her early twenties, but what kind she'll be (or will be next) seems open to change. Which all, along with her consistent intelligence, grace, and wit, makes her an ideal essayist too, especially for the sort of "occasional essays" collected for the first time in *Changing My Mind*. She can make the case equally for the cozy "middle way" of E.M. Forster and the most purposefully demanding of David Foster Wallace's stories, both as a reader and, you imagine, as a writer who is considering their methods for her own. The occasions in this book didn't only bring her to write about writers, though: she also investigates, among other subjects, Katherine Hepburn, Liberia, and Barack Obama (through the lens of *Pygmalion*), and, in the collection's finest piece, recalls her late father and their shared comedy snobbery. One wishes more occasions upon her. --Tom Nissley

About the Author

Zadie Smith was born in Northwest London in 1975 and still lives in the area. She is the author of *White Teeth*, *The Autograph Man*, *On Beauty*, *Changing My Mind*, *NW*, and most recently, *Swing Time*.

From AudioFile

In this eclectic collection of essays, Zadie Smith (*WHITE TEETH*, *ON BEAUTY*) explores a variety of literary masterworks, including Zora Neale Hurston's *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*, George Eliot's *MIDDLEMARCH*, and E.M. Forster's *HOWARDS END*. She offers a terrific essay on Barthes and Nabokov; but lest listeners think this is an audiobook solely for literature lovers, Smith also praises Barack Obama's artful use of language, profiles several Hollywood luminaries, and cogently tackles racism and feminism. Barbara Rosenblat's intelligent narration highlights Smith's focus on fluidity and change. She brings clarity to each section in the collection: "Reading," "Being," "Seeing," and "Feeling." Barbara Rosenblat could read a menu and keep her audience entranced, and with exceptional material like Smith's, she provides a high-quality listening experience. S.J.H. Winner of AudioFile Earphones Award © AudioFile 2009, Portland, Maine

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"[These essays] reflect a lively, unselfconscious, rigorous, erudite, and earnestly open mind that's busy refining its view of life, literature, and a great deal in between." --Los Angeles Times

Split into five sections--Reading, Being, Seeing, Feeling, and Remembering--Changing My Mind finds Zadie Smith casting an acute eye over material both personal and cultural. This engaging collection of essays, some published here for the first time, reveals Smith as a passionate and precise essayist, equally at home in the world of great books and bad movies, family and philosophy, British comedians and Italian divas. Whether writing on Katherine Hepburn, Kafka, Anna Magnani, or Zora Neale Hurston, she brings deft care to the art of criticism with a style both sympathetic and insightful. Changing My Mind is journalism at its most expansive, intelligent, and funny--a gift to readers and writers both.

Zadie Smith's newest novel, *Swing Time*, will be published by Penguin Press in November 2016.

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Most helpful customer reviews

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Readable and interesting journalistic essays

By alexliamw

I'm a big fan of Zadie Smith's novels, and thought she would be an interesting essayist. By and large my expectations were met. I really enjoyed parts of the book. I enjoyed her socio-political writing, in 'One Week in Liberia', her diary of a week spent in Liberia for Oxfam, and 'Speaking in Tongues', an essay on race and dialect. I also enjoyed her personal stories of her family and especially her father, in the 'Feeling' section of the book, especially 'Dead Man Laughing'. And I enjoyed her movie reviews as well as her account of Oscar weekend. The parts of the book I enjoyed less were those where she delves into literary theory, where her invocations of ideas from critical theory and philosophy feel extremely elliptical and vague, as well as not finding a distinctive or original voice of her own so clearly as in her other writing. The sweeping scope of the intellectual references may seem erudite to some, but their treatment is - perhaps inevitably in a collection of essays like this - rather superficial, and that frustrated me. For example, Smith brings up numerous times the postmodernist idea that language does not describe reality, without really doing anything to explain or motivate such a claim. The weaving together of (for example) Eliot and Spinoza feels a little studied and forced. Still, there is a lot to enjoy here, and even the sections on literature did inspire me to read some of her heroes; she communicates enthusiasm and passion for the literature she loves beautifully. Overall, I recommend this to fans of Smith as well as those who enjoy good journalistic writing of a middle-to-high-brow, non-specialist sort.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Highly readable, intelligent, and engaging essays

By P. J. Owen

Changing My Mind is a collection of essays from the novelist Zadie Smith. Anyone who has read her fiction knows that Ms Smith is an engaging, intelligent, and passionate writer, so it seems she should be a natural as an essayist. This collection proves that theory to be true.

The selections here cover a broad range of topics, from trips she took to Liberia and the Oscars (not at the same time) to three funny and touching essays about her family. But it is her writings on art that really shine. She shows great insight into the writings of Forster, Eliot, Barthes, Nabokov, and Kafka; in fact, I think the first seven essays are required reading for any aspiring writer. But she also brings a keen eye to cinema, with a wonderful essay about Katharine Hepburn and Greta Garbo, and even stand-up comedy in an essay about her younger brother's surprisingly (to her) successful foray into that field.

I read one essay each morning, and after the first one I woke up every day excited about reading the next. That is probably the best endorsement I can give this book. But Ms Smith has also inspired me to discover new works, like Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and re-discover some others. *Middlemarch* and *Everybody* is a sharp essay on the philosophy of the famous novel, and not only did it make me want to re-read it immediately, it also inspired me in my own writing. The essay entitled *Hepburn and Garbo* spurred me to run out and rent the *Philadelphia Story*. And the final piece, part eulogy and part reading guide, has inspired me to give David Foster Wallace's difficult fiction one more try.

After reading this book, I cannot wait for her next novel.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Wonderful collection to be read over time

By Gwen

I love a good essay collection and this definitely fits that description. I hadn't read anything of Zadie Smith's since the excellent but oh-so-long winded "White Teeth" and was excited when this arrived for me at my local library. These essays were written during the past decade and published mostly in British papers or given as lectures globally. As to be expected, some appeal more than others. My favorites are when Smith brings in her own biracialness. Her piece on Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God" asks the question "what does soulful mean?" and is extremely moving. I wanted to pull that book from my bookshelf and immediately reread it. (My to reread list grows longer). Her recollection of a Smith Family Christmas when she was 5 years old was incredibly funny and poignant. Of the presence of an uncle, she writes "Poor Denzil, off the plane from Jamaica into bitter England, and stuck in the most cultish, insular day in the nuclear-family calendar." I wanted to hear more about her time growing up in a half-English/half-Irish neighborhood, "one black family squished between two tribes at war." Maybe she will write more on that. Moving on, her lecture about her craft was better than anything I have read for aspiring writers. There were also other pieces that I started reading then passed on: for example critiques on Kafka, George Eliot and Forster (a bit too dry). Then again, I don't think this collection is best appreciated on a 3-week library loan. It is one to keep on hand to reread and perhaps read those that one didn't appreciate the first time around. Maybe I should get my own copy one day...

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