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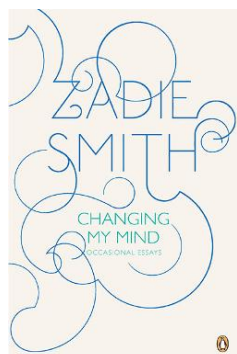
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Preview

Changing my mind : occasional essays (#0471VA0)

by Smith, Zadie

3 reviews & awards | 3 full-text reviews

Paperback — Penguin Books, c2009, p2010

Price: \$15.35

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Overview

From Follett

Includes bibliographical references and index.;Reading. Their eyes were watching god: What does soulful mean? -- E.M. Forster, middle manager -- Middlemarch and everybody -- Rereading Barthes and Nabokov -- F. Kafka, everyman -- Two directions for the novel --Being. That crafty feeling -- One week in Liberia -- Speaking in tongues -- Seeing. Hepburn and Garbo -- Notes on Visconti's Bellissima -- At the multiplex, 2006 -- Ten notes on Oscar weekend -- Feeling. Smith family Christmas -- Accidental hero -- Dead man laughing. Collects essays in which English novelist Zadie Smith offers her perspective on a variety of topics, such as philosophy, travel, politics, Italian cinema, the Oscars, writing, Katharine Hepburn, and President Obama.

From the Publisher

"[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.

Product Details

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Reviews & Awards

Booklist, 10/15/09

New York Times, 01/17/10

Library Journal, 10/01/09

Full-Text Reviews

Booklist (October 15, 2009 (Vol. 106, No. 4))

High-profile novelist Smith (*On Beauty*, 2005) has organized her sharp, funny, and agile essays into sections on reading, being, seeing, feeling, and remembering to create a strong and piquant collection. As the title implies, Smith's thinking evolves before our eyes as she articulates her responses to art and life. Her forthright essay on Zora Neale Hurston is brimming with confessions stemming from her struggle against politically oriented interpretation. Her shrewd take on E. M. Forster revolves around her keen analysis of his "admixture of banality and brilliance." Her excellent explication of *Middlemarch* offers a fresh look at George Eliot, and the crafting of novels. A calm and collected yet searing chronicle of a trip to war-battered Liberia is a standout, as is "Speaking in Tongues," in which Smith reflects on her own biracial heritage, identity, and voice as a path to understanding Barack Obama, a politician with the qualities of an artist. Cinematic dispatches, including praise for Katharine Hepburn, are followed by moving memories of her late father. Smith is a superb essayist of skill, candor, and caring.

Kirkus Reviews (September 1, 2009)

Rarely does a book that seems to promise so little deliver so much. Even the subtitle, *Occasional Essays*, of Zadie Smith's nonfiction collection *Changing My Mind*, carries a whiff of modest ambitions. This isn't, it seems to say, nearly as substantial as Smith's novels. Yet rather than the usual clean-out-the-closets collection—the miscellany of articles that fills the publication gap between big books—this volume, which includes previously published material, offers the sort of insight that will not only enlighten fans but should provide plenty of illumination for anyone who appreciates fiction and words and the interplay between writer and reader as much as Smith plainly does. The best of these essays are as concerned with the essence of reading well as writing well. And they are written so incisively, and with so much empathy and warm-hearted humor, that they show how reading has made Smith the writer that she is. Rather than a critic advancing an argument or an academic analyzing in code, she's a writer who understands the reader's perspective, a reader who understands the writer's. When she praises the "broad sympathetic sensibility" of E.M. Forster (who provided the template for her novel *On Beauty*), she could well be describing her own. Much of her writing on literature doesn't directly critique other writers, but critiques the critiques, as Smith sees *Middlemarch* through Henry James's eyes while inviting the reader to read (or re-read) George Eliot's classic through Smith's. Whether she's describing how she initially resisted the seminal influence of Zora Neale Hurston, perhaps the first of the great authors about whom Smith has changed her mind, or celebrating the late David Foster Wallace ("he was my favorite living writer") through a close reading of his *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, Smith shows a universalist's, omnivorous appetite for literature. The book's title implies more than arriving at a different verdict. As the author matures, becomes more educated and experienced, she reads with a mind that is different than it was. As reading fiction leads to writing it, she develops a more profound understanding of those different, symbiotic roles. "Reading has always been my passion, my pleasure, and I am constitutionally drawn to any thesis that gives power to readers..." she writes. "But when I became a writer, writing became my discipline, my practice, and I felt the need to believe in it as an intentional, directional act, an expression of individual consciousness." These essays aren't all about literature. The most moving one is pure memoir, linking the death of her father and her family's appreciation for comedy. (The weakest are the film reviews, some little more than capsules.) But even when delving into politics, Smith brings a novelist's attention to language, style and tone. If she'd never written a novel, this collection alone would make me eager to read more of her work.

Library Journal (October 1, 2009)

Smith (*White Teeth*; *On Beauty*) had a successful debut as a writer shortly after completing college; reading her essays, one understands why. Her examinations of a wide range of subjects confirm her writing talents with wit, candor, occasional self-deprecation, and insight. In this collection, Smith demonstrates her knack for recognizing and appreciating different points of view. Organized into five sections—"Reading," "Being," "Seeing," "Feeling," and "Remembering"—these essays, most of which were previously published, address an eclectic range of topics, including Italian cinema, visiting Liberia, Hollywood on Oscar night, writing advice, Katharine Hepburn, and President Obama, that will appeal to everyone. The collection features lectures on writing, movie reviews, and literary criticism such as examinations of Franz Kafka, Roland Barthes, Vladimir Nabokov, E.M. Forster, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*; Smith pays homage to the late David Foster Wallace and his writing genius. Her essays on her family, especially about her father and his wartime experiences, are candid and touching. Verdict Recommended

for readers of nonfiction, creative writing enthusiasts, and literary scholars. [See Prepub Alert, LJ 7/09.]-Erica Swenson Danowitz, Delaware Cty. Community Coll., Media, PA Copyright 2009 Reed Business Information.

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