

Author Zadie Smith finds common ground among cultures

March 02, 2016 12:30 PM Jamie Logan
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Award-winning author Zadie Smith addresses the audience at Tulane University as the Zale-Kimmerling Writer-in-Residence on Tuesday (March 1). (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Zadie Smith speaks to creative writing students in the Anna E. Many Lounge in the Caroline Richardson Building. Students asked how she named characters, about her editing and writing process, and what authors she likes to read. (Photo by Sally Asher)

Acclaimed author Zadie Smith wove a tale of sacrifice and survival as she stood before an enraptured audience in Kendall Cram Lecture Hall on the Tulane University uptown campus. Smith shared her most recent short story on Tuesday (March 1) as one of the 2016 Zale-Kimmerling Writers-in-Residence. This endowed program, coordinated by the Newcomb College Institute, brings talented female writers to campus each year to inspire readers and students.

In a discussion with Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé, assistant professor of English, Smith described the progression of her work. She explained that humor once helped her write about difficult topics, but her focus has shifted with time. “As you get older, life gets a lot less funny,” Smith said.

Nonetheless, she finds beauty in everyday scenes. “I get a lot out of the world,” she added.

From New York to West Africa, she is inspired by the places she has seen. “The local can be global,” she said, noting that she has found traces of her English hometown across America. “It’s everywhere,” she said.

Smith also conducted a question-and-answer session with English professor Peter Cooley’s creative writing students on Tuesday.

Smith has authored six books. Her first novel, *White Teeth*, a portrait of London told through three ethnically diverse families, won the Guardian First Book Award, the Whitbread First Novel Award, the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and two BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Awards. Her later publications, including *The Autograph Man*, *On Beauty*, *NW*, and *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*, also received much praise.

Her writing speaks to the power of similarities in cultures around the world. “There are things that fantastically recur over and over throughout history,” Smith said. With each piece, she seeks out the eternal. She dives into the melee of race, religion, pain, and pleasure without fear.

Zadie Smith is a professor at New York University, where she is working on a book of essays entitled *Feel Free*.

Jamie Logan is a junior majoring in English and classical studies with a minor in psychology at Tulane University.

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