

Insights from the National Book Festival, 2013

Here are the insights of some great writers I heard at the September, 2013 National Book Festival, in Washington DC. Where I use quote marks, I've taken a verbatim, or nearly-verbatim quote. Otherwise, you are seeing my paraphrase of a point the author made.

Don DeLillo

A questioner told DeLillo about sitting with his girlfriend as she read the final chapter of *Underworld*. On finishing, she said, "What the Hell was that?" DeLillo's response: "That's what I said!"

Amity Gaige

"Literature doesn't have to resolve anything. Raise or open the question, or the contradiction, don't try to answer them."

In literature, there aren't any bad guys or good guys. Let any character be more complex than that.

The unreliable narrator has much to offer in carrying a story.

"The writer is writing a love letter to the reader" a "message in a bottle."

"You can't be a writer with a closed heart or a closed mind."

"I'm always writing, always looking."

Brad Meltzer

A tiny detail, an observation, a fact from history, yields a "what if" and gives you a story.

"Governments don't lie, people lie. Figure out why they lie and you'll get a good story."

Ayana Mathis

"Transcend the borders of ourselves" via literature

Writing creates a bond with the reader, puts demands on us, gives us certain responsibilities.

"Radical empathy" will fuel the writer's work.

In writing fiction "you find your way into another human being and it is astounding what happens."

Khaled Hosseini

"Memory can be a cruel dictator"

"Books have a function and roles beyond what the author intended."

"We all see different things in a piece of writing."

The symbols and metaphors in his writing are most of the time happy accidents, not really planned. His writing is an act of discovery. "My books always surprise me."

Writing is "discovering each character at that moment when they are discovering what they are capable of doing and are not capable of doing."

On work on his next novel, he's "flinging stuff at the wall and seeing what sticks."